



The Choctaw Sun
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News/Events

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■ SCHS

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Brook High School — that are polar opposites in terms of student demographics. With Fairfield predominantly white and Mountain Brook predominantly black, the two schools united to perform the performance in celebration of the "Year of Alabama Arts".

As part of the celebration, selected Pilot Schools were honored for their commitment to the development of comprehensive arts education programs that will potentially include every student, staff member, and administrator on their campuses. The Pilot Schools will have parent and community involvement in arts education, develop partnerships with higher education, arts organizations, and youth development agencies in order to bring about a well-round arts education program.

According to McBride, the school hopes to use the grant to fund arts programs that include an emphasis on drama.

"I was very impressed

with the program put on by those students from Mountain Brook and Fairfield," McBride told the *Sun*. "We have some students here who are just as talented, and we hope to be able to bring that out through drama classes."

An Alabama Black Belt Arts Education Initiative Advisory Committee — made up of arts educators, administrators, previous Arts Pilot program participants, and members of the Governor's Black Belt Action Commission and Community Foundation — will mentor and advise SCHS and the other Pilot Schools in implementing their programs.

In addition, Initiative partners will provide professional development, support, and guidance for the Pilot Schools. Partners include Alabama Alliance for Arts Education, Alabama Institute for Education in the Arts, Alabama State Council on the Arts, and VSA arts (formerly Very Special



Photo courtesy Alabama Department of Education
SCHS principal Betty McBride, right, is pictured receiving the resolution naming her school as an Alabama Black Belt Arts Initiative Pilot School for 2006-07. The presentation was given by Governor Bob Riley, along with state Board of Education representative for this district, Ella Bell.

Arts) of Alabama.

Other Pilot Schools for this year are South Highlands Middle School in Bullock County, Martin Middle School in Dallas County, Demopolis High School, Akron Community School East in Hale County, Lowndes Middle School; George Wash-

ington Carver Elementary School in Macon County, Amelia Love Johnson High School in Marengo County, Uniontown Elementary School; Gordo Elementary School in Pickens County, Byrd Elementary School in Selma, and Camden School of Arts and Technology.

■ Plan

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that historic route in Alabama that offered slaves an escape route to the north. Some parts of that trail will closely parallel the old Burlington-Northern railroad bed that ran from Hamilton, in northwest Alabama, to near Mobile in the south.

"You need to connect the historical and cultural aspects of the town with all of your diverse recreational and commercial assets," she said.

In the group's opinion, one of the things that stood head and shoulders above the town's recreational offerings is its Ballet and Theater Arts School and associated Performing Companies.

"That, to us, was one of those 'WOW!' moments, when we realized the caliber of those programs and where some of the graduates have gone," she said. "We see an opportunity to turn this into an anchor 'destination' for tourists."

In fact, she said, the BTAS/BTAPC production of "A Prophet Without Honor", a play about the life and times of Bob Sims, of the infamous Sims War of the 1800's — could be Gilberttown's answer to Monroeville's "To Kill A Mockingbird".

"Do not overlook the possibilities there," she said. "People from Vermont to California come every year to Monroeville to see that play and, properly promoted, they would come here as well."

Which also brings up the need for a small motel — designed to look like an old, rustic inn — and additional 'beds and breakfasts'.

The group focused also on how to better serve the town's existing retail businesses.

"We looked for pockets of opportunity for growth, because you have some thriving businesses already," she said. "Tourism and growth overall, however, demands several things, and two of the most important when it comes to retail shops are easy accessibility and picturesque charm."

As a result, the group recommended the renovation of current multi-level sidewalks in the downtown area to make them handicapped-accessible, the planting of trees and flowers, and the installation of decorative signs — in keeping with the town's historic past — that would

point the way to attractions, businesses and professional offices.

Also, utilizing the "rail/trail" concept along the old railroad bed could tie together the town from the Museum on the north end to the new softball complex on the south side.

People in the "over 55" age group are also a good resource, she said.

"They are looking for small towns just like Gilberttown for their retirement years," she said. "They like the pace, the friendliness, the safety, but they are also looking for amenities such as the Ballet School, a community with a newspaper, a place that has a library, is close to a college, and has good medical care services, and they want to live close-in to these opportunities and services."

That brings up the need to open up additional property as close in as possible to downtown for new housing developments, she said.

"It would help not only your business community but the overall strengths of your town," she added.

She also said that in the years to come, studies show that economic growth and development is much more likely to occur along the U.S. Hwy. 84 corridor — that runs through Choctaw County from east to west just seven miles south of Gilberttown — than the I-20/59 corridor some 40-50 miles to the north.

"You may not realize this, but you are sitting in the driver's seat," she said, showing a drawing of southwest Alabama where experts believe that development will occur. "You are in many ways better positioned for industrial growth than Butler is."

The plan recommends the renovation of existing, empty buildings for occupancy by new businesses, sprucing up the storefronts of existing buildings along Ala. 17 through the middle of town to show off their historic character, building a youth center, moving the railroad caboose to the Museum grounds to create a more visual 'trail' through town that includes the existing historic oil derrick, opening up Water Street to connect with Ala. 17, seeking out new opportunities for assisted-living facilities in the area, and building a new senior citizens activity center.

"You also need to think about campsites because RV camping is huge in the United States," she said.

"Just because you make it beautiful doesn't mean 'they will come,'" she said. "But on the other hand, if it isn't beautiful 'they won't come back,' either. Your town's overall plan and design must be functional and maintainable."

Designers fanned out during their June visit, armed with notebooks, cameras, and drawing pads, to record what is good about the town and what could be updated or changed to make it more attractive and "user friendly" to the home folks as well as tourists.

The group keyed in both the existing strengths that should be maintained and nourished, and the obvious weaknesses that need to be corrected.

They took into account the town's history, culture, churches, schools, social organizations, business community and natural resources.

Morgan said the overall goal was to come up with reasons to not only retain the people who are here now but to encourage children to return and retirees to move to the area.

Many elements of the design plan are, obviously, long-range, and may take years to accomplish. Others, however, could be started immediately with a small budget and a group of dedicated volunteers, she said.

"What we want you to do is to think, 'what if?'" Morgan said. "What would happen if ...?" and let's see what we can do for Gilberttown."

"You have presented us with some big ideas, but I think a lot of them are very 'do-able'," Mayor Bobby Graham said. "It will have to be a step-by-step process and one that everyone in the community needs to be a part of."

Obviously, he said, not every part of the recommended plan will work for the town, and Morgan agreed.

"You will have to take what works for you and let the community make it their dream, their goal," Morgan said.

Graham said that since the group's visit in June, the town has made some progress on its proposed sewer system, and has received a grant for the renovation of the park

behind Alabama Southern Community College.

"A sewer and more lodging are two of our biggest needs," he agreed.

Morgan also suggested that the town council may want to consider some rudimentary zoning ordinances as a way to set down some basic guidelines for future development in the town. Some annexation may also be necessary in years to come if the town intends to grow and prosper, she said.

"You need to decide what you want and design your rules, your plan, to fit those goals," she said.

In the near future, about 5,000 full-color, fold-out brochures depicting the plan which was presented Tuesday evening will be sent back to the town for distribution to area residents. In addition, *The Choctaw Sun* will publish a double-page, full-color rendition of the main plan as soon as that information is provided to this newspaper.

The large, full-color architectural drawings will also be sent back for display at Town Hall, local churches or businesses, and at other locations where they can be viewed by the general public.

Those in attendance agreed that some aspects of the plan may not be feasible for the town, but said that a lot of the recommendations could be implemented right away if enough people get involved and are willing to make it happen.

"I'm excited," Mayor Graham said. "This is a great start and we can take it and make of it whatever we want. We just need the people's involvement and input."

Also in attendance Tuesday evening was Randy Shoults, Community Arts Literature and Design Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts, in Montgomery; Larry Watts, also a member of the design team; Town Clerk Alice Carlisle; Lisman Mayor Thomas Jackson; Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Gibson; EMA Director Bill Gibson; Bobby and Kathy Johnson; and Rev. Doug Chapman, pastor of the Gilberttown Assembly of God Church.

Sun Country Calendar

There is no charge to list an upcoming non-profit or charitable event for your church, school, civic group, fire department, etc. Meetings of governmental entities may also be included. Send your announcement as far in advance as possible. Events will be publicized for up to four (4) weeks in advance.

Saturday, Jan. 20th
CHOCTAW CO. GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY meets at the Public Library, 124 N. Academy Avenue, Butler, at 10 a.m.

Sunday, Jan. 21st
SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE SUNDAY in many local churches.

Wed., Jan. 24th - Thurs., Jan. 25th
40 DAYS HOLY CONVOCATION REVIVAL, Church of God Pentecostal, 7:30 p.m. Guest speaker, Min. Michael Ruffin.

Friday, Jan. 26 - Monday, Jan. 30
SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN, presented by Ballet and Theater Arts Performing Companies. Curtain times on Friday, Saturday and Monday, 8 p.m., with a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday. Tickets are \$10 and are now on sale at local banks and businesses. Call (251) 843-5138 for more information or reservations.

Saturday, Jan. 27th
THE VALLEY VIEW BOYS praise and worship group in concert at First Baptist Church of Butler. For more information call 205-459-2266.
GILFIELD DISTRICT ASSOCIATION winter board meeting, 10 a.m., St. John the Baptist Church, Halsell. Rev. Jasper Irby, President, Dea. Richard Jones, Secretary.

Sat., Jan. 27th - Sun., Jan. 28th
CHOIR CELEBRATION, New Mt. Mariah Baptist Church, Nanafalia, 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, 2 p.m. on Sunday. All churches, soloists, and groups are invited to attend and perform. Rev. Alphonso Bowen is the Pastor; Sis. Evie Thomas is the Choir President.

Sunday, Jan. 28th
PASTOR'S AIDE TEA, Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church, 4 p.m. Guest speaker, Pastor Robert L. Jackson.

Tues., Jan. 30th and Wed., Jan. 31st
SCHOOL BUS DRIVER RECERTIFICATION CLASS, Tuesday at Choctaw Co. High School, Wednesday at Southern Choctaw High School. Times: 9 a.m., until 1 p.m. each day.

Wed., Jan. 31st - Fri., Feb. 2nd
40 DAYS HOLY CONVOCATION REVIVAL, Church of God Pentecostal, 7:30 p.m. Guest speaker, Min. Chris Holcombe.

Saturday, Feb. 3rd
40 DAYS HOLY CONVOCATION REVIVAL, Church of God Pentecostal, 7:30 p.m. Guest speaker, Eld. George Moore.

Sun., Feb. 4th - Wed., Feb.
REVIVAL, Mosley Bridge Congregational Methodist Church. Lunch will be served following the Sunday morning service. Sunday evening service will begin at 6 p.m. and at 7 p.m. Monday through Wednesday. Evening meals will be served in the fellowship hall each night at 6 p.m. before worship services. Bro. Hal Dagg is the guest speaker.

Saturday, Feb. 10th
U.S. SEN. RICHARD SHELBY will host a county visit at 7:30 a.m. at Lindsey's Café in Butler. The public is invited to attend.

Saturday, Feb. 10th
NEW HOPE VFD will be having a Boston Butt sale at the New Hope VFD from 10 a.m. — until. The Boston Butts are \$20 each.

Tuesday, Feb. 13th
CHOCTAW CO. BOARD OF EDUCATION meeting, 5:30 p.m., Choctaw Co. Elementary School.

Saturday, Feb. 17th
WILD GAME SUPPER, featuring guest speaker Rich Wingo, former linebacker with the Green Bay Packers, 6 p.m., Gilberttown Baptist Church Fellowship Hall. No admission fee but you must have a ticket so that the proper number of meals can be prepared. Contact Richie Abston at 251-843-2575.

August 17th - 19th
CHOCTAW CO. PICNIC AND REUNION WEEKEND, Atlanta, Georgia.

Look for an expanded **PUBLIC RECORDS** listing in next Friday's *Sun* ...
land deeds, mineral leases, marriage licenses issued, jail log,
civil lawsuits filed, and corporate records filed.

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