

Mayors to use \$18,000 grant for economic development training

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — Mayors of several Black Belt towns, including four from Choctaw County, met last week at J&K Restaurant in Toxey to discuss how to spend an almost \$18,000 grant the group has been awarded.

The Black Belt Mayors' Initiative is made up of the chief municipal officials of several counties in the region, and

meets monthly to discuss ways in which they can help each other and their individual towns and communities.

Present for the Friday session were Lisman Mayor Thomas Jackson, Pennington Mayor Jack Fendley, Butler Mayor Ben Smith, Gilbertown Mayor Bobby Graham who hosted the event, as well as several mayors from other towns.

"If we put this money to good use, we will change the direction our towns are

headed," Graham told the group of the Rural Initiative Grant, which is funded and administered through a variety of state agencies, including the Department of Education and the Cooperative Extension Service.

"What it will do is to bring intensive economic development training to you and your people as well as allow you to attend training events in other areas," Kathryn Friday, Marengo County Extension

Agent-Coordinator told the group.

The mayors discussed several upcoming economic training events and decided on who would attend the various sessions.

Among the seminars is an intensive, two-week session spread over two months at Auburn University, as well as a week-long seminar at the popular Your Town Alabama workshop this summer.

Graham, Smith, and

Jackson will attend the Auburn seminar, but Smith said he would pay his own expenses so that funds would be available for Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Gibson to also attend.

In addition, a speaker from Auburn will also be contracted to come and present a number of local training sessions for mayors, council members, county commissioners, community leaders, and youth leaders.

■ Festival

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p.m. will be BNA Records star Rhett Akins, whose chart-topping hits include "Where Angels Live", "She Said Yes", "Don't Get Me Started", "That Ain't My Truck", "If Heaven Wasn't So Far Away", "I Love Women My Mama Can't Stand", and his newest single, "Kiss My Country Ass".

Advance tickets for the June 2nd Walker/Akins concert are \$25 each (all ages) and will go on sale April 28th at Regions Bank (Butler and Gilbertown), First United Security Bank (Butler, Gilbertown, Coffeeville and Thomasville locations), Gilbertown Town Hall, Bonita Lakes Mall in Meridian, First Community Bank (Millry and Chatom), The Village Shoppe, West Alabama Bank and Trust (Butler), Merchants Bank (Jackson), and online at www.ticketweb.com.

Other events planned

during the Festival include an encore performance of Smoke on The Mountain, presented by the Ballet and Theatre Arts Performing Companies, a bluegrass/gospel night, a night of traditional black gospel music performed by Choctaw County's African American churches, an evening of traditional Southern Gospel music at Heritage Church of God, an authors' book signing, car and truck show, performances by the Choctaw Indian Tribal Dancers from Philadelphia, Miss., a Miss Choctaw Co. Heritage Festival Pageant and many other activities for the entire family that will be presented in greater detail as the date gets closer.

Separate tickets are required for many of the other concert events, and prices and availability will be announced, as well as lists of those persons and groups who will be performing, as those details are finalized.

■ Meth

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Michael Hunt, Commander of Drug Task Force One, and DTF Agent Lem Dubose seized the lab which was located in an abandoned house.

Lolley said that the lab was not operating at the time of the seizure, but added that all of the necessary equipment was present to begin production.

"A tank containing what was believed to be anhydrous ammonia, as well as lithium batteries, empty Drano® cans, two-liter bottles containing 'sludge' used to generate the gases that produce the drug, and plastic tubing were all found at the site," Lolley said.

Dubose said the lab could have been made operational in a matter of minutes.

According to Hunt, 'meth' manufacturers look for remote, abandoned buildings in which to set up these labs so that they will not be caught with the lab on their own property. It is believed that

the person or persons responsible for this lab came to the location at times when the actual property owners were away at work.

"If you have such a structure on your property, I would advise you to keep a check on it," Hunt said. "If you find blister packs, lithium battery wrappers, Drano® cans, tubing, or propane cylinders at such a location, you should immediately leave the area because meth labs can be very dangerous."

Lolley is a former Choctaw Co. Sheriff who retired from that office in January of this year. He was employed by District Attorney Spencer Walker after the DA received a grant to combat the use and production of methamphetamine.

Authorities said that persons who suspect that a meth lab is located on their property, or at any other location they are aware of, may contact Lolley at 251-275-3146 or the Drug Task Force at 251-246-7400. Informants do NOT have to give their names.

What to watch for: Public asked to be on lookout for activity that could indicate the presence of a "meth" lab

By Tommy Campbell
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GILBERTOWN — Users know it as "speed", "meth", "chalk", "Christina", or "Tina". In its smokeable form, it's called "ice", "crystal", "crack", and "glass".

But by whatever name it's known, unlawful, addictive, and deadly methamphetamine is in Choctaw, Clarke and Washington counties.

Several of the illegal production labs have been found locally over the past few years, and law officers say that it is fast becoming one of the most prevalent drugs that they have to deal with.

Because the dangers associated with meth labs are not confined to only those who "cook" or abuse the substance, authorities are asking for the public's help in locating these illegal and dangerous operations.

Since the drug is relatively easy and inexpensive to produce using a variety of common ingredients that can be found at most grocery stores, hardware dealers, farm supply outlets, and discount stores, it is difficult for law enforcement agencies and, in many cases, even next-door neighbors to detect. Meth labs can be located in attics, abandoned barns, RV's, garages, boats, sheds, trailers, vans ... in other words, in most any place that you could imagine.

Studies have proven that 'meth' has an immediate detrimental effect on the central nervous system, and also leads to irreversible brain damage, permanently impaired coordination, memory and vision loss, and sexual impotence.

The drug has more toxic effects on a user's system than heroin, cocaine, or alcohol. But, innocent, unsuspecting neighbors — or persons living in the same household as the meth cooks — are also at extreme risk because materials used in the production process are extremely flammable and highly explosive.

Anhydrous ammonia, for example, is widely used as a liquid chemical fertilizer in many gardens and large commercial farms. But that is also the same material — in its solid form — which was used in the 1990's to blow up the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The dope makers often take the toxic "left-overs" from the manufacturing process and dump them where the poisonous waste leaks into and contaminates water supplies. Operators of clandestine meth labs often use bagged "kitty litter" to absorb the liquid waste and the foul stench that it creates.

And while there is nothing unlawful about the purchase of any of the items listed in the accompanying story for legitimate purposes, suspicions should be raised and merchants should be on high alert anytime a customer comes in and buys any of the items in combination or in large quantities.

Store clerks should remain calm and, if possible and without arousing suspicion, call authorities before the customer leaves, or immediately afterward.

Clerks should note a description of the person, a name and address if possible, and a tag number, a description of the vehicle the person is driving, and the direction of travel.

Meth can be produced with utensils and supplies that are easily contained in a large suitcase, but labs are more often found set up inside homes or mobile homes in kitchens, bathrooms, and closets, or outdoors in barns, storage sheds, hunting camps and even RV's.

If you suspect that a meth lab is located in your community, call the Choctaw E-911 Dispatch Center, DA Investigator Donald Lolley at 251-275-3146 or the Drug Task Force at 251-246-7400. You do NOT have to give your name.

Signs of a possible "meth" lab:

- Unusual, strong odors (like cat urine, ether, ammonia, fingernail polish remover, acetone or other chemicals). If you detect any of these odors, leave the area and contact law enforcement. If you can smell it, you may have already been exposed to hazardous materials.

- Residences with windows blacked out, boarded up or with curtains or blinds continually closed.

- Renters who pay their landlords in cash. (Most drug dealers trade exclusively in cash.)

- Lots of traffic, people coming

and going at unusual times. There may be little traffic during the day, but at night the activity increases dramatically.

- Excessive trash, including large amounts of antifreeze jugs, lantern fuel cans, red chemically stained coffee filters, drain cleaner and duct tape.

Presence of the following items in quantity could also indicate the existence of a meth lab:

- Glass bottles or jars
- Alcohol
- Ether
- Benzene
- Toluene (paint thinner)
- Freon®
- Acetone
- Chloroform
- Camp stove fuel (such as Coleman®, etc.)
- Starting fluid (in aerosol cans)
- Anhydrous ammonia (found in agricultural fertilizers)
- HEET®
- White gasoline
- Phenyl-2-propane
- Phenylacetone
- Phenylpropanolamine
- Iodine crystals
- Red phosphorous (used in fireworks and matchbook strike pads)
- Black iodine
- Lye (Red Devil Lye®)
- Drano® or other forms of drain cleaners
- Hydriodic acid (used in disinfectants)
- Hydrogen chloride gas
- Muriatic or hydrochloric acid
- Battery acid (sulfuric acid)
- Epsom salts
- Batteries (Lithium)
- Sodium metal
- Wooden matches
- Propane cylinders
- Hot plates
- Pseudoephedrine (sinus decongestant, found in many over-the-counter cold medications)
- Ephedrine (found in some diet aids)
- Bronchodilators
- Energy boosters
- Rock salt
- Diet pills
- Denatured alcohol
- Coffeepots, glass flasks
- Coffee filters
- Bed sheets for straining
- Rubber gloves
- Respirator masks
- Foam coolers
- Duck tape
- Kitty litter

■ Calendar

From page 2-A

will be at Mt. Mariah Baptist Church, Melvin, 6:30 p.m. Alpha promotes abstinence and educates young people about the consequences of promiscuous behavior through the S.A.F.E. (Sex And Family Education) program from a Biblical perspective. There will be presenters for boys and girls, grades 6-12, and for parents. All area churches and youth groups are welcome.

Thursday, April 26th
CRAWFISH BOIL,

sponsored by The University of West Alabama's Choctaw Co. Alumni Chapter, 6:30 p.m., Utsey camp house near Butler. All UWA alumni and friends are invited to attend. Proceeds will help fund scholarships for Choctaw Co. students to attend UWA. For more information contact Gayle McPhearson at 205-459-2618 or the UWA Alumni Office at 205-652-3552.

Friday, April 27th
SOCIAL SECURITY representative will be at the Civic Center in Butler at 10 a.m.
NEW HOPE RELAY

FOR LIFE TEAM will be bagging groceries for tips at Piggly Wiggly in Gilbertown.

Saturday, April 28th
BEAUTY PAGEANT, Southern Choctaw Elementary, 6 p.m. SCHS gym. Admission \$5. Fundraiser for the PTO.

DIXIE YOUTH TOURNAMENT, sponsored by Regions Bank. Teams from Butler, Gilbertown, Livingston and other towns will be participating.
69th BIRTHDAY & LATE RETIREMENT PARTY for former Butler Policeman and Choctaw Co. Sheriff's Deputy Dean

Roberts, 2 p.m., at his residence next door to Calvary Baptist Church, Butler. Friends and family members are welcome to attend.

SCRAPBOOKING MEMORIES Ladies Conference, Calvary Baptist Church, 9:30 a.m. — 2 p.m., 113 Pickens Avenue, Butler. Contact Stephanie Bonner at bonner2696@yahoo.com.
SIP-N-SEE, South Choctaw Academy's Art

Show. SCA Honors Choirs under the direction of Mrs. Phyllis Fulcher will perform. The event begins at 4 p.m. and the Choirs will perform at 5:30 p.m.

SING-SATION, 6 p.m., Millry Church of the Nazarene.

JADE COMMUNITY CLUB will be selling barbecue chicken plates for \$5 at Oscar Gray Park behind the old CCHS football field,

10:30 a.m. until. Plates consist of chicken or pulled pork, baked beans, bread, and cake with a choice of potato salad or cole slaw. Sandwiches, \$3; whole chicken, \$10; and pig feet and pig tails, for \$1.50. Barbecue by Dandy Brown and George Rackley. For more information call 205-459-3324, 205-499-2400, 459-4521, or 251-362-6602.

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