

# CHATHAM COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION

*A living experiment, a critical investment*

**Mission:** To provide the Youth of Chatham County with a vehicle to learn about government, participate in the process and to represent and articulate the needs of youth in this County.

**Vision:** The Chatham County Youth Commission seeks to prepare youth for a lifetime of public and community service regardless of the youth's present or future career aspirations.

**Philosophy:**

We believe that leaders are not necessarily born, but are definitely made. We see each of our young people as "walking possibilities," and that we as present leaders have the obligation to cultivate future leaders. We further believe that the synthesis of our personal example, theoretical instruction and practical application provides a fertile environment for young leaders to become adult leaders.

**Motto:** Vocalizing Our Views for a Prosperous Future!

**History:** In 1992, after a variety of governmental, business and community initiatives on behalf of youth, Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas, County Commissioner, District 8, realized her vision to have a formal organization in place that would directly involve youth in the governmental process as well as develop leadership skills. After securing the blessing of the Chatham County Commission, she enlisted the assistance of the County Manager, Russ Abolt, the Human Resources Director, the late Beverly M. Whitehead, and the then Employee Services Manager, Michael A. Kaigler. They developed the prototype of the Youth Commission and this initiative became a reality in March 1992. The benefits have been enormous, including increased self esteem, recognition from the community at large, increased personal community involvement and enhanced relationships between the County government and the schools that we serve.

The Youth Commission has blossomed and continues to develop into a formidable voice for youth in Chatham County.

**Commission Year:**

The Youth Commission operating year is from September to May, however, Youth Commission planning, activities and initiatives are year round.

**Membership:**

The Youth Commission continues to be a diverse group because of it's selection procedures. Each public and private high school principal/counselor is requested to send two students from freshman to rising junior to serve on the Youth Commission. These students should be academically eligible to participate in their school's extra-curricular and sports activities, and should have recognized leadership potential. They should also have the time to actively participate, during school and after school hours, in the Chatham County Youth Commission. Selected youth community-based organizations are also asked to select one young person of high school age to participate in the Youth Commission. Those selected that meet the membership criteria are invited to serve.

Parents and Guardians of Youth Commissioners are invited to serve on the *Chatham County Youth Commission's Parental Advisory Council*. This Council will meet at least once during a Youth Commission session to receive information about Youth Commission events and provide input into the scheduling of activities and functions.

**Administration:**

The Chatham County Youth Commission is administered by the Chatham County Human Resources Department, Employee Services Division. The Assistant Human Resources and Services Director, Employee Services and Training Manager, Van R. Johnson, II, serves as the Director of the Youth Commission and has staff support from Senior Advisor, Sandra Smalls, Human Resources Analyst; Takiyah Martin, Marilyn Rodriguez and Octavia Brown, Human Resources Technicians; Originally,

operating funds have come from the Human Resources Department, but due to the success of this program, the Chatham County Commission has provided increased funding to the Youth Commission for the several fiscal years as a line item in their annual budget. 2016-2017 funding is \$50,000. Funds for special projects have come from the Chatham County Commission, as well as community and business neighbors.

The Chatham County Youth Commission elects officers on a yearly basis. The officers consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Parliamentarian and three Executive Members.

**Methodology:**

The Youth Commission's methodology is divided as follows:

**1. *Understanding County Government***

Youth Commissioners learn the role of government, particularly County government plays in this community. Youth Commissioners meet and develop relationships with County Commissioners, the County Manager, County Officials and County Department Heads.

**2. *Understanding Community Issues***

Youth Commissioners visit local non-profit and community service organizations to see first hand the issues that are faced in this community. They participate in forums and round table discussions with service providers about the needs and concerns of this community.

**3. *Understanding Effective Communication***

Youth Commissioners learn about the communication process, and learn the results of effective communication as opposed to ineffective communication.

**4. *Understanding and Exercising Leadership***

Youth Commissioners discuss and practice characteristics of good leaders and exercise leadership through their continued participation on the Youth Commission. They sit in on Chatham County Commission meetings and respond to issues that affect youth. Their input is often sought out by Commissioners.

**5. *Appreciating Differences***

Youth Commissioners are taught to value the differences between people. Open and honest dialogue about differences and similarities is encouraged. Stereotypes are explored and frankly discussed. Exposure to different cultures, places and personalities is a hallmark of the Youth Commission. Whenever possible, Youth Commissioners are taken to cultural events.

**6. *Team Building***

Through various projects beginning with their annual retreat, Youth Commissioners learn to work and function as a team. The essential elements of a team are reviewed and practiced. They learn to respect leadership and to demonstrate leadership when necessary. They become a self-governing body through their participation.

**7. *Conflict Management***

Youth Commissioners become better citizens through their involvement. They learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable. They learn the art of persuasion and lobbying to resolve differences. They resolve conflicts by communication and compromise instead of violence and dissension.

**8. *Setting Goals and Effective Decision Making***

Goal management is an important element of the Chatham County Youth Commission. These practices become a part of the everyday practice of these young leaders. They progress from setting goals for the Youth Commission to setting effective goals for scholastic and personal development.

Effective decision making is also encouraged. Youth Commissioners learn to make and stand by a decision with only a limited amount of facts. It becomes necessary for them to see the “big picture” and the future impact of today’s decisions.

**9. *Fun***

Did we mention fun? Of course we did! We cannot forget that these young leaders are in the developmental prime of their lives and these memories will remain with them forever. Fun is a mandatory component in their learning process and the ability to have fun is a necessary requirement for participation in the Chatham County Youth Commission.



**CHATHAM COUNTY  
YOUTH COMMISSION  
OFFICIAL BY-LAWS**

**CHATHAM COUNTY**

**ARTICLE I - HISTORY**

In 1991, after a variety of governmental, business and community initiatives on behalf of youth, Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas, County Commissioner, District 8, realized her vision to have a formal organization in place that would directly involve youth in the governmental process as well as develop leadership skills. After securing the blessing of the Chatham County Commission, she enlisted the assistance of the County Manager, Russ Abolt, the Human Resources Director, the late Beverly M. Whitehead, and the then Employee Services Manager, Michael A. Kaigler. They developed the prototype of the Youth Commission and this initiative became a reality in September 1991. Employee Services and Training Manager, Van R. Johnson, II, assumed leadership of the organization in 1995. The benefits have been enormous, including increased self esteem, recognition from the community at large, increased personal community involvement and enhanced relationships between the County government and the schools that we serve. The Youth Commission has blossomed and continues to develop into a formidable voice for youth in Chatham County.

**ARTICLE II - PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Chatham County Youth Commission is to serve as the County's most comprehensive collaborative in addressing the needs and voicing the concerns of Youth in Chatham County. This purpose may be accomplished in the following ways:

- A. Observe, evaluate, and stay abreast of programs and services to Youth in Chatham County;
- B. Make recommendations to the Chatham County Commission and other agencies as to strengthening existing services and/or expanding services to meet unmet needs;
- C. Make feasibility and/or funding recommendations to the Chatham County Commission where requested and appropriate;

- D. Be responsive to concerns of Youth in Chatham County;
- E. Inform and suggest to the Chatham County Commission ways to make policy Youth oriented;
- F. Create a climate of public awareness and responsibility for meeting the needs of Chatham County Youth;
- G. Interact with Youth of other cities, counties, states and countries to develop new ideas for programs.
- H. Provide youth services and programming where necessary and appropriate.
- I. Submit to the Chatham County Commission, and make available to the general public, an annual report of the activities of the Commission.

### **ARTICLE III - CORE VALUES**

The Core Values of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***RESPECT, SUCCESS, INFLUENCE, INTEGRITY and LEADERSHIP.***

### **ARTICLE IV - AFFIRMATION STATEMENT**

The Affirmation Statement of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***"As Chatham County Youth Commissioners we shall, excel in our school, community and government, be responsible and respectful young adults, make a difference in our community, reach our full potential and be strong student leaders by providing safe and inviting opportunities for youth."***

### **ARTICLE V - MOTTO**

The motto of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***"Vocalizing our Views for a Prosperous Future."***

### **ARTICLE VI - POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

The Chatham County Youth Commission, as a non-partisan

creation of the Chatham County Commission, shall not be affiliated with any political party or engage in any political activity. This shall not prevent activities association with voter registration or lobbying on issues approved by the Chatham County Youth Commission.

## **ARTICLE VII - MEMBERSHIP**

The Chatham County Youth Commission shall be composed in the following manner:

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission shall have a maximum of fifty (50) members.
  - 1. The following public and private high schools shall be requested to name two representatives to the Youth Commission:
    - (1) Alfred E. Beach High School
    - (2) Benedictine Military School
    - (3) Calvary Baptist School
    - (4) Robert W. Groves High School
    - (5) Islands High School
    - (6) Habersham School
    - (7) Herschel V. Jenkins High School
    - (8) Sol C. Johnson High School
    - (9) Memorial Day School
    - (10) New Hampstead High School
    - (11) Providence Day School
    - (12) Savannah Arts Academy
    - (13) Savannah Christian
    - (14) Savannah Country Day
    - (15) Savannah High School
    - (16) St. Andrew's
    - (17) St. Vincent's Academy
    - (18) Windsor Forest High School
    - (19) Woodville-Tompkins High School
- A. High Schools may be added and deleted as deemed necessary.
- B. In order to ensure diversity, the following community organizations may be requested to name one or more representatives to the Youth Commission:



- (1) Housing Authority of Savannah
  - (2) Indian Association of Savannah
  - (3) Jewish Educational Alliance
  - (4) Latin American Services Organization
- C. It is understood that, despite best efforts, and because of varying reasons, some schools, at times, will have more representation on the Chatham County Youth Commission than others.
- D. Chatham County Youth Commissioners must:
- (1) Reside in Chatham County for the entire length of their membership.
  - (2) Be presently enrolled in high school, grades 10- 12;
  - (3) Must be academically eligible to participate in their school's sports and extra-curricular activities;
  - (4) Must be able to think critically and articulate thoughts and ideas;
  - (5) Must have the attitude fitting of such an office;
  - (6) In order to maintain membership, Youth Commissioners can have only three (3) un-excused or five (5) excused absences. Excused absences occur when a telephone call or email is placed to the Director or his/her designee 24 hours prior to the scheduled start time of the event. An un-excused absence occurs when notification is not made or made less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled start time of the event. Certain events are deemed mandatory events and should be attended.

#### **ARTICLE VIII - LEADERSHIP TEAM**

- A. The elected officers of the Youth Commission shall be a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, a Secretary, a Parliamentarian, and three Executive Members.

- B. Officers shall serve one year terms. No officer shall serve in the same office for more than two consecutive terms.
- C. A Director shall be appointed by the County Manager to develop, coordinate and implement Youth Commission activities and shall serve as the liaison between the Commission, County Manager and the Youth Commission.
- D. Advisors shall be Chatham County Human Resources Staff, Youth Commission Graduate Advisors & other personnel who shall provide assistance and direction when necessary.

#### **ARTICLE IX - COMMITTEES**

- A. There shall be standing committees called the Executive Committee, the Social Concerns Committee, Community Concerns Committee and the Educational Concerns Meeting. The Chairperson shall chair the Executive Committee and the Executive Members shall chair the other standing committees.
  - (1) The purpose of each committee is to bring before the Commission issues on which action needs to be considered, planned and initiated.
- B. The Executive Committee shall be a standing committee and shall consist of all elected officers and the chairs of each standing committee.

#### **ARTICLE X - AD-HOC COMMITTEES**

- A. The Chairperson of the Commission may appoint from time to time Ad-Hoc Committees as needs arise.

#### **ARTICLE XI - MEETINGS**

- A. The term of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be from September through June.
- B. The Commission shall meet according to a regular schedule with special meetings called by the Chairperson, Vice

Chairperson and any ten members of the Commission.

- C. For regular meetings, an agenda shall be published, attendance shall be taken and minutes shall be recorded and maintained.

## **ARTICLE XII - CANDIDACY**

The Candidacy Process for the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be as follows:

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission Candidacy Process shall occur annually from May to September.
- B. The Chatham County Youth Commission Candidacy Process shall consist of 5 segments:
  - 1. **RECRUITMENT** - In May of each year, the Chatham County Youth Commission shall announce and receive nominations from under-represented schools.
  - 2. **INTERVIEW** - Interviews shall be scheduled and conducted by Chatham County Youth Commissioners. Nominees must be approved by staff and Youth Commission in order to be declared a candidate.
  - 3. **CANDIDACY** - The formal candidacy process shall be from June to September annually. Candidates will be subjected to an intensive government and community engagement process which will include meetings, assignments, reading, research, community activities, field trips and peer interaction.
  - 4. **CONFIRMATION** - At the end of the candidacy process, candidate must be recommended by staff and approved by the majority of Chatham County Youth Commissioners in good standing.
  - 5. **SWEARING IN** - After being confirmed by the Chatham County Youth Commission staff and members, the candidate must be sworn in by the Chatham County

Commission Chair or his/her designee in order to be designated as a Chatham County Youth Commissioner.

### **ARTICLE XIII - LEGACY PROGRAM**

Appreciating relationships that have developed between Chatham County and families of Youth Commissioners, Youth Commissioners who successfully complete the program, by graduating, will be allowed to recommend a sibling to go through the candidacy process. This privilege must be requested by the Youth Commission graduate prior to the recruitment period and the sibling must meet the qualifications as set forth in Article II, Section D and successfully complete the candidacy process as specified in Article VII.

### **ARTICLE XIV - DECORUM/SOCIAL NETWORKING**

Chatham County Youth Commissioners shall, at all times, conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the core values and goals of the organizations. Chatham County Youth Commissioners shall never place themselves in compromising positions or situations that will cast a negative image of Chatham County, the Chatham County Commission or the Chatham County Youth Commission.

- A. Chatham County Youth Commissioners, who have social networking accounts, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, shall ensure that their posts, pictures, music, blogs and associations be in good taste and representative of their membership in the Chatham County Youth Commission.

### **ARTICLE XV - AWARDS AND COMMENDATIONS**

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission may present the following awards annually:

- 1. **BEVERLY M. WHITEHEAD AWARD** - Named in honor of the Chatham County's First Human Resources Director, who passed away in 1988, but played an integral role in the

development of the Chatham County Youth Commission, this award is given annually to recognize people, organizations or businesses who have made significant contributions to youth through the Chatham County Youth Commission.

**2. BRANDON BROWN YOUTH COMMISSIONER OF THE YEAR AWARD** - Named in honor of the first Chatham County Youth Commissioner to pass away in 2004. This award is given annually to a current Youth Commissioner who, during the current term, has exemplified the highest levels of qualities befitting a Chatham County Youth Commissioner. Current officers are prohibited from being nominated or selected for this award.

#### **ARTICLE XVI - SUSPENSION AND REMOVAL**

- A. Any member may be immediately suspended or removed with or without notice for behavior that, in the opinion of the Founder, Director and staff, is not consistent with the values or intent of the Youth Commission. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to:
  - 1. Pregnancy/Fatherhood
  - 2. Arrest/Conviction
  - 3. Expulsion/Suspension from school
  - 4. Two consecutive nine week periods with a failing average or with a failed class
  - 5. An uncooperative or negative attitude
- B. Any member may be suspended or removed by the membership when the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and fifty percent plus one members are present and votes are cast in favor of suspension/removal.
- C. Any member may be reinstated by the membership when the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and fifty percent plus one members are present and votes are cast in favor of reinstatement with the approval of the Director.

#### **ARTICLE XVII - AMENDMENTS**

- A. These By-Laws may be amended at any meeting of the

Youth Commission at which fifty percent plus one members are present and the votes are cast in favor of an amendment.

REV.

9/99

1/00

4/11

9/14

9/15

10/17

**10/18**

# ***CHATHAM COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION***

## ***Sample Activities and Events***

***1997 - Present***

Yearly Chatham County Departmental and Facilities Tour

7<sup>th</sup> Annual Peach State Youth Peer Helpers Conference, Milledgeville, GA

1997 - 2008 March of Dimes WalkAmerica

World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil, 1997 - 2014

Earned Red Cross certification as AIDS awareness Teen Educators,  
January 1998

Visited various exhibits at the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum

Traveled to Atlanta as a guests of Governor Zell Miller, State Senator  
Diana Harvey Johnson and State Representative Dorothy Pelote, February  
1998

Sponsored Annual County-Wide Youth Rally, 1998-2017

Participated as dignitaries in the Savannah Martin Luther King Observance  
Day Parade 1998-2017

Traveled to Washington, DC as the guests of Senator Max Cleland,  
Representative Jack Kingston, 1999 - 2011

Attended the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference,  
1999-2016

Served as panelists for a "Critical Issues Affecting Youth" session of  
Leadership Savannah, 1999, 2001

Participated with the Partners for Community Health in the 1999 Observance of “Kick Butts Day”. Youth Commissioners worked “undercover” in over 80 stores to determine the number of stores in the community that would sell cigarettes to minors.

Sponsored the 1999 Back to School Jam at the Tybee Island Pavilion featuring national recording artists, Jagged Edge, Shae Jones, and Twisted Letters. Over 5,000 Chatham County youth attended this event.

Met with Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert during his visit to Savannah, GA.

Co-sponsored the 2000 SummerFest featuring Doug Banks of the Doug Banks Morning Show, national recording artists, Next and others.

Co-sponsored Doug Banks Morning Show in Savannah, September 2003.

Invited to Washington, DC to meet with Secretary of State Colin Powell. 2001

Hosted 2003 Savannah Mayoral Forum, October 2003.

Were guests on the Fox News Channel’s “Fox and Friends”, March 2004.

Registered 283 teen voters during the 2004 Rock the Vote Campaign.

Donated 479 books to the Chatham County Sheriff’s Department.

For additional information ~

Van R. Johnson, II, Director  
Manager, Talent Management  
Chatham County Human Resources Department  
(912) 652-7964



# Chatham County

**An international tourist town for a county seat, a major North American port and the extravagant beauty of its coastal environs create an extraordinary confluence of commerce and culture in today's Chatham County. Thanks to exceptional leadership, local government progress is also flourishing.**

By Deborah Dewberry, Editor

**S**urveying the truck-stop territory that skirts the well-traveled, four-lane I-16 between Macon and I-95, few first-time visitors to Georgia's coast would guess that this somewhat dreary stretch of interstate dead-ends into one of the most scenic, cosmopolitan and affluent counties in North America.

Indeed, Chatham County, throughout its 300-year colonial and U.S. history, has never been less than spectacular on many fronts and continues to thrive. Progress here is thanks in large part to experienced county leadership that relies on intergovernmental partnerships, solid planning and progressive initiatives to meet infrastructure demands, accommodate growth and solve problems in the community. Chatham County leaders have made stellar accomplishments in recent years - partnering with municipal governments, facilitating new, high-tech businesses and growing innovative programs for youth and the impoverished.

And to its further advantage, the jurisdiction possesses economic strongholds that insulate it from the vagaries of economic downturns, including:



**Historic Chippewa Square, on Bull Street near the 1889 courthouse, is one of 21 historic squares in America's "first planned city." Centering this square is a monument to the founder of Georgia, English General James Edward Oglethorpe.**

**(inset) The 1889 Chatham County Courthouse at 124 Bull Street houses administrative offices for the county.**



Here, members of the Chatham County Youth Commission attend the 2006 Annual Meeting in Savannah. With Youth Commissioners are (seated, from left) Chatham County Commissioners Helen Stone, Patrick Farrell, Chairman Pete Liakakis, Vice Chairman Priscilla Thomas, group founder and executive director, and current Director of the Youth Commission and its Chatham Youth Council extension of younger students countywide, Savannah City Councilman Van Johnson.

**The Port of Savannah.** The international port here is the fastest-growing port in the nation, the second-largest in the country in containers, the fourth-largest all-around in the nation in terms of volume and is comparable in size to the ports in New York and New Jersey. The port generates \$34 billion in revenue, including \$1.4 billion in state and local taxes and \$14 billion in income for the 276,000 employed in some capacity related to the port.

**Tourism.** The city of Savannah is an ever growing tourism landmark worth (as of 2006) some \$1.6 billion to the region and the state each year. In the past two years, commissioners, working with the Savannah Convention and Visitors Bureau, have further leveraged tourism to include sites of significance to African-American history, the cradle of which is in Georgia's coastal barrier islands.

**Fort Stewart and the Hunter Army Air Force Base.** The largest U.S. Army

installation east of the Mississippi, Ft. Stewart is located roughly half in Chatham and half in Liberty County and generates some \$1.4 billion for the state's economy.

**Educational institutions,** including Savannah State University, the renowned Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), Armstrong Atlantic State University, South University and Savannah Technical College, all of which generate some \$400 million yearly.

**Manufacturing.** Major industries here besides tourism include Gulfstream, the largest private jet manufacturer in the world, which moved its Research & Development headquarters into a new building near the Savannah Airport and will open three new facilities adjacent to that.

**The Creative Coast Initiative,** a nonprofit organization that attracts, nurtures and promotes "brain based"

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## Chatham County's Economic Advantages

- The Port of Savannah
- Tourism
- Fort Stewart and the Hunter Army Air Force Base
- Educational institutions
- Manufacturing
- The Creative Coast Initiative
- J.C. Lewis Cancer Center and the Memorial Cancer Center/Medical University



Leading the "team players" in Chatham County government are (from left) Chairman Pete Liakakis, Vice Chair Dr. Priscilla Thomas and County Manager, Russell E. Abolt.

businesses and has helped foster more than 350 knowledge-based enterprises in the Chatham County area, including software developers, programming companies, architectural and engineering firms and scientific research and development concerns.

**Two major medical centers devoted to cancer care:** the J.C. Lewis Cancer Center and the Memorial Cancer Center/Medical University. These have pumped an additional \$200 to \$300 million into the local economy and continue to attract top U.S. specialists in many medical disciplines.

### Experienced Leaders

The Chatham County Board of Commissioners is led by a local businessman and eight-year veteran of the Savannah City Council, Chairman Pete Liakakis, elected at-large in 2004; a longtime Chatham County Board of Education administrator (now retired), Vice Chair Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas, representing District 8; and seven other district commissioners: former chair of the Chatham County Development Commission Helen L. Stone, representing District 1; James J. Holmes, representing District 2; Patrick Shay, representing District 3; Patrick K. Farrell,

representing District 4; Harris Odell Jr., representing District 5; David M. Gellatly, representing District 6; and Dean Kicklighter, of District 7.

Chatham County operates under the Commission-Manager Plan of local government, with the Board of Commissioners setting policy, adopting laws, handling budget management, establishing tax rates and hearing zoning cases. Board-appointed County Manager Russell Abolt is chief administrative officer in charge of carrying out board-set policies and handling the county's day-to-day responsibilities. A U.S. Marine and Vietnam War veteran, Abolt has been on the job as county manager for 19 years.

It's fortuitous the team here has experience. Even with the jurisdiction's readily apparent economic success, challenges here are plentiful. As in much of the rest of the state, coping with growth is paramount, including the need to accommodate pressing infrastructure demands, officials say.

In Georgia, coastal growth is second only to growth in the metro Atlanta region, where several counties remain among the top five nationally in terms of population growth. Commissioners here, however, see the plusses to the

growth and, likely thanks to carefully cultivated partnerships between the county and its eight municipalities, appear ready to welcome the advantages growth can bring here.

"Our commission is progressive and works hard to do what's necessary for the sustainable growth of the county and the safety of citizens," Chairman Liakakis asserts. "Given the nature of things, overall we think the growth coming in will be quite beneficial. Certainly, it will benefit our tax base."

Liakakis adds that the county is now considered to be in the best financial shape it's seen in 40 years. With an AA+ bond rating, good financing terms are available to the jurisdiction, a far cry from the pre-2005 budget, which had overstated some \$5 million in revenue that "never even existed," according to the chairman. To solve the dilemma, commissioners increased the millage rate by 0.67. "We were able to turn it around financially, and since January 2005, we have addressed many deficiencies," Liakakis asserts. "The financial turnaround balanced the budget and allowed us to put about \$500,000 into county recreation.

"No money had been put into county recreation in years, and there were



**Pete Nichols, public information officer for Chatham County, accompanies Savannah City Councilman Van Johnson at a meeting of the high-school age Chatham County Youth Commission, of which Johnson is director. Johnson is also director of the Chatham Youth Council, an extension of the Youth Commission for fifth-grade students, countywide.**

a county-city coalition between the county and all its cities. I formed it so we could partner on grants, state and federal legislation and issues that are important to us all."

In years past, some of the smaller cities had felt left out or taken advantage of, Liakakis says, "as though they weren't getting everything they needed in order to satisfy their own goals. But now we have the best relationship, according to all the mayors, and any of the council members, including Savannah, that we've ever had between the county and the cities. I'm proud of that."

Vice Chairman Dr. Priscilla Thomas has also been an innovator and remains active in the county's remarkable programs for youth, promoting new tourism programs and others to benefit the economically disadvantaged. First elected to the Chatham County Commission in 1990, the veteran Chatham County School System administrator was appointed by former Governor Zell Miller to serve a seven-year term on the state Board of Education. In addition to founding the nationally recognized Chatham County Youth Commissioners Program in 1990, she remains involved in promoting tourism additions that

reflect the region's multi-cultural heritage.

"It's been a pleasure to serve on this commission, which I feel is the best Board of Commissioners we've ever had," Thomas asserts. "Chairman Liakakis has set the pace, demonstrating leadership while developing the Board of Commissioners as a real team. For the first time, we've gotten all city officials at the table together, with the county and also with the private sector. This is why we were so successful with our most recent Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) and with our Education SPLOST."

According to commissioners Stone and Farrell, also elected in 2004, additional progress has come in the past three years as the county undertook rewriting its Comprehensive Plan, putting it in synch with zoning laws. According to Stone, former chair of the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Planning Commission, ordinances not updated since the 1950s were brought up to date in the county's Tricentennial Plan.

Marking the year 2033, 300 years since the founding of Savannah, the plan addresses growth and infrastructure needs through the third decade of

this century. County Manager Abolt adds, "Zoning here had been altered, modified and patchworked over the years such that it took lawyers a lot of time to update the ordinances to reflect the goals of the Tricentennial Plan, but now everything is synchronized. We continue to work with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to make sure updates to zoning are produced in a timely manner."

### **SPLOST Brings Improvements Countywide**

The successful SPLOST vote of last fall will begin ushering in some \$445.3 million for capital improvements early next year. The foremost, and first, improvement will be a \$100 million expansion to the county jail.

Soon after Liakakis entered office and got the county together with all its cities, he recommended that the jail be expanded as quickly as possible to alleviate overcrowding and circumvent a takeover by federal court, as had happened to certain other large metro jails in Georgia operating over capacity. The jail was built to last through 2024, but Liakakis said the building had more than 1,700 inmates at some points. "We couldn't continue to operate it that way," he said.

A \$100 million expansion to the facility will soon add upward of 784 beds, as well as supporting commissary and medical facilities. The project required countywide support, which Liakakis and the Board of Commissioners secured by recommending to the cities that the whole jurisdiction support and urge the public to approve the 2008 SPLOST in September 2006. True to the new protocol of mutual cooperation, the cities did their part to promote the measure, and county voters approved the 2008 SPLOST on Sept. 19.

"Plans were, when the SPLOST was approved, to secure interim financing and start building the jail right away. When the proceeds come in, in 2008, we will pay off a bond issue being used for immediate funding. To relieve the immediate jail overcrowding problem, the county financed a temporary

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...with the jurisdiction's utility department...  
...challenges... potential.

Addressing terrorism preparedness, Abolt states, "While the threat of terrorism superseded the former emphasis on Mother Nature - hurricanes - here, after Sept. 11, 2001, the real difference now is that we don't view emergency management as a seasonal concern anymore. We approach it year-round."

### Water Supply

Chatham County is situated atop the Floridan Aquifer, one of the largest and highest-quality groundwater supplies in the world. The county provides adequate drinking water to about 3,500 customers through a network of smaller water systems, acquired from private

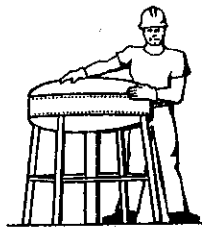
providers, and privately built wells, backed up by cooperative arrangements with city water systems.

Because of the region's reliance on the aquifer, saltwater encroachment is, and will remain, a huge concern. As the aquifer is increasingly drawn down, particularly during times of drought, water supply can be compromised. Desalination is a major, ongoing project here, Abolt says.

### Special Programs Involve Youth, the Poor

Vice Chairman Thomas's efforts toward minority inclusion in Savannah's tourism industry have included new tours that take visitors to the barrier islands, notably the anthropologically significant African-American settlements on these islands, direct descendants of the first slaves to arrive in North America. A similar initiative is the Yamacraw Art Project of recent years, which depicts the cultural contributions of Native Americans of that time. Thomas is now also working, on her own initiative, on a documentary of Fairlawn Baptist Church, an extension congregation of the First Bryan Church, believed to be the oldest African-American Christian congregation in North America.

As a lifelong educator, Thomas strives to give direction to the youth in her community. This was what inspired her in 1991 to found the Chatham County Youth Commission. Recognized by the National Association of Counties (NACo) and emulated by other counties nationally, the program has been expanded in the past couple of years. In addition to its 47 high school students, the program now includes an extension for fifth-graders countywide in the Chatham County Youth Council, the City of Savannah's adaptation of the program. The mayor and City Council adopted the program's motto to form the Youth Council, under the direction of Savannah City Councilman Van Johnson, who is also director of the Youth Commissioners, while Thomas remains executive director and founder. Under the expanded program, each high



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Youth commissioners are sworn in just like county commissioners, and the stringent application process to join is initiated by school counselors, who help select candidates and guide them through the application process. The program is now active in all Chatham County schools - public, private and independent - for young people in grades nine through 12. During

"Savannah Day" at the Capitol in mid-January, youth commissioners were on one of their characteristic field trips, where they interacted with the governor. Trips to the National Association of Counties (NACo) meetings also involve youth commissioners every year, as does the annual meeting of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia in Savannah. And the program really gets off the ground every summer with the "Summer Bonanza" that involves some 200 local youths in government-related workshops and academics while involving them in real community challenges. Recent activities, for instance, have included "cancer walks" and "diabetes drives," Thomas says.

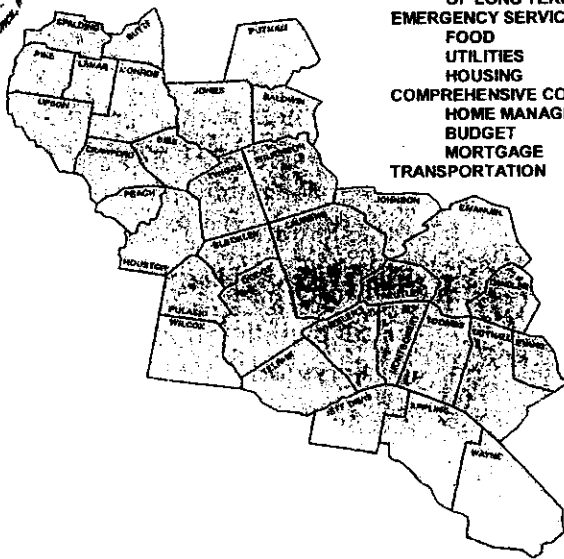
A unique recent program involved youth commissioners and Youth Commission members in a living-history program to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the 8th Air force Division, founded here, which lost 26,000 members in combat during World War II. The kids met veterans of "the greatest generation" and took part in a concurrent film festival. Affirms Abolt, a former Marine, the "hundreds of millions of dollars worth of capital improvements the county and its local governments have achieved pale in comparison to what the Chatham County Youth Commission has done."

Three revolving members of the Youth Commission represent the young people at every county commission meeting. "Commissioners have even taken their input and used it in some critical decision making," Abolt adds.

"We're so excited about what the Youth Commission has been able to achieve and that we've been able to provide this process," Thomas says. This year, she adds, the Summer Bonanza will take youth commissioners to space camp at the Kennedy Space Center, where they will spend a week with astronauts and do some actual "space travel" training. The Summer Bonanza is also undertaking a pilot project with Vanguard Distributors, a prominent African-American business in the county, to place 100 personal computers in the homes of young people who



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Executive Director  
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## Chatham County and Savannah have a more symbiotic relationship, in terms of service delivery and financial interdependence, than many large counties and their primary cities in the state, among those not formally consolidated.

wouldn't otherwise have access to a computer.

Next on their list in terms of goals? "We'd like an audience with the president," Thomas asserts.

### Award-Winning Anti-Poverty Initiative

Another star program of which Liakakis is most proud, and a recent winner of an ACCG *Georgia Trend* magazine 2007 Georgia County Excellence Award, is the "Step Up Savannah" anti-poverty initiative. The program began in July 2005 and involved the city of Savannah, the Chamber of Commerce, educational institutions and sponsors from the business sector. The poverty-reduction initiative, funded by the city of Savannah, the Anne E. Casey Foundation and Chatham County and operated by Project SAV and Step Up, is a unique initiative to break the cycle of systemic poverty by providing opportunities to economically disadvantaged citizens.

More than 70 organizations representing business, government, education, faith-based organizations and others in the community collaborate to address systemic poverty. Goals include developing an educated and skilled work force; improving access to quality jobs; supporting working families and helping them build assets; and building quality neighborhoods. Crucial to the program's success is the "education/work force" action team, headed up by Chamber of Commerce staff. The action team was developed around a concept of neighborhood-based adult education "skills centers" and, concurrently, educating employers about programs and services available to support the wages of the working poor (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit). In 2006, the team aggressively sought funding for the three skills centers and held employer workshops. The team also supported increased usage

of technical/career training in county high schools.

The results for participants are well-paying employment in the construction trades, warehousing jobs, and/or office entry positions, with an expanding list of client businesses. Participants also earn technical certificates of credit from Savannah Technical College and are guaranteed employment upon completion of the training courses.

### Growth in the Industrial Sector

Industry is likely to continue strong here. In addition to the major manufacturing contingent already in place, the Savannah Economic Development Authority, much like real estate developers, markets the county's industrial sites worldwide. The Authority is currently promoting the "industrial megasite" abandoned by Daimler-Chrysler Corp., which had plans to build a plant that would have brought some 5,000 jobs to the region.

The site is currently listed among the top 10 locations in the United States for an incoming industry, Liakakis points out. "It offers immediate access to rail, the Savannah International Airport, I-95 and I-16 and the Georgia Ports," he says. Rolls Royce reportedly has considered the site, but at press time it is still on the market.

Liakakis says the county frequently gets inquiries from industries wanting information on relocating here or from prospective new residents. Certainly, there is ample material to build on, starting with the outstanding opportunities offered by tourism here.

"Tourism here is through the roof," Thomas asserts. "Part of the marketing strategy, when Chatham was looking to get minority inclusion in some of the incoming development dollars, was that we worked very closely with the Savannah Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce to make tourism grow.

"Directors of our tour groups here have been very assertive and creative. We have tours not only of all the places of historic and cultural interest in Savannah and its environs, but out to the barrier islands." Adds Thomas, "The Yamacraw Art Project has grown into a huge program, depicting the cultural contributions of African Americans during the early part of the county's history."

### The Future

Commissioners and city officials who welcome the prospect of growth and continue to work creatively with it, combined with the county's sound financial shape, point to a future of even greater prosperity for Chatham County. The planning framework and the funding to sustain population growth and expand infrastructure is well in place, and everybody appears to be on board with the goals officials are setting.

The lack of competition between the county and its major city – and the inclusion of the smaller cities with SPLOST funding for projects of their own – bode well for all taxpaying citizens in the county. That the county and all its municipal governments got behind the 2008 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, the county's sixth successful SPLOST, to usher in \$445.3 million in capital improvements is testimony to the mutual commitment of all.

Transportation and its funding will remain critical, as will making all the planned capital improvements. Liakakis knows the importance of working with legislators to reach the community's transportation goals, however. During his interview with *Georgia County Government*, he took time out to lobby Congress via telephone on behalf of the anticipated bridge project for Skidaway Island. Meanwhile, keeping those county-city partnerships in place, Liakakis

Continued on page 42

## Leader aims to mimic program helping kids

- Dougherty County Commissioner John Hayes embraces a youth program that will promote civic involvement.

Carlton Fletcher

ALBANY — When it comes to getting young people involved in their community and its government, they do it right in Chatham County.

The Chatham County Youth Commission, championed in 1992 by then-County Commissioner Priscilla Thomas, has been adopted by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia as a model program to increase civic involvement and awareness by young people across the state. Officials involved in the Savannah program have helped start similar programs in Georgia's Fulton County, in Prince George's County, Md., and in Alachua County, Fla.

If County Commissioner John Hayes has his way, Dougherty County will soon be added to that list.

Hayes briefed fellow commissioners on the Chatham program during a Commission work session Monday morning and was asked to gather additional information on the ACCG's Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students.

"In doing research, I found that the ACCG program is modeled after the one in Chatham County," Hayes said. "They've had their program for a while, and they're doing it right."

"The young people are the future leaders of our community, and I think sometimes we tend to forget that. This program is a perfect opportunity to hear their growing pains and to engage them in their government. They learn, and they have a platform to articulate their needs."

Some of the alumni of the Chatham program have already begun to make their mark. Savannah City Councilman Van Johnson said former Youth Commissioners in the county have held elective office and have become doctors and lawyers.

"This program changed the whole paradigm of student involvement," Johnson said. "It became fun for our young people to be active again. And one of the greatest benefits is that now more of our students are staying in Savannah rather than heading for Atlanta or other places."

"There was a real disconnect with our youth; a chasm existed. Most of them were looking forward to becoming adults so they could leave. When they have meaningful input as students, they know they can continue to have input as adults."

Hayes said those factors were the impetus for his challenge to the Dougherty Commission to adapt a similar program.

"Every year, we lose a class of creative young people," he said. "When the (consolidation) charter matter came up recently, I hit the pavement and asked people what they thought about the issue. Invariably, the feedback I got was 'I don't know much about it.'"

"There is a great deal of uncertainty in the community. If nothing else comes out of this, our young people will get a lesson in government. Better educated students make better citizens."

Patrece Breen, Fulton County's Youth Commission Program Coordinator, said her "Little Politicians" have taken an active role in that county's government.

"Our purpose in starting the program was to get the voices of young people in Fulton County heard," Breen said. "We held a forum and came up with focus groups that explored the issues that most affect our youth. We had more than 3,000 students vote on these issues, then we took the top eight."

"Our Youth Commission will present these issues to our County Commission next week, and we expect them to



impact policy.”

Breen said the students are actually inducted into the Youth Commission by Fulton officials.

“This is a fierce group of kids,” she said. “There’s an election process; the kids choose the best representatives. They have bought into the fact that they can make a difference on issues that affect them.”

Kathleen Tonore, GCAPS Program Coordinator for ACCG, said state pilot programs were in various stages of readiness in Oconee, Bibb, Wilkinson and Cobb counties. Dougherty is the first South Georgia county to express interest in the program.

“I applaud the Dougherty County Board of Commissioners for recognizing the need for a civic awareness program in the community,” Tonore said. “I look forward to working with them on their program.”

Hayes said he’s already gotten a preliminary buy-in from Superintendent Sally Whatley with the Dougherty County School system and with Albany State University President Everett J. Freeman.

“I’ve talked with a number of parents as well, and they’re excited about the possibilities,” Hayes said. “This is basically a 9-month program that runs with the school year from September to May. I’d like to have our program in place by the time the current school year ends so that the kids could hit the ground running next year.

“We have a good group of commissioners, and I think this is a program they’ll unanimously support. I hope the community will embrace it as well, and we’ll get corporate support. We’re not talking about throwing a lot of money into a program; we’re talking about making an investment in this community’s future.”

Dougherty Commission Chairman Jeff Sinyard said he looks forward to hearing additional information about the program, but he noted that youth involvement was a critical element.

“We’re going to evaluate carefully, but any time you have a program that gets young people involved in a positive way, well, that’s something that’s invaluable to a community,” Sinyard said. “We’ll certainly look at this program, look at what resources are needed, look at the benefits and look at the costs. Then we’ll make a prudent decision.”

Hayes said he hopes to address the issue again at the Commission’s next work session Monday morning.

Note: For information on the Chatham Youth Commission program, visit the Web site [www.chathamyouth.com](http://www.chathamyouth.com).

## LOCAL

# County's youth commission program celebrates 13 years

*Soiree at Telfair Museum planned for Thursday.*

**By Morgan Winsor**

912.652.0381

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Van Johnson calls them "super-youths."

"They are youths with an 'S' on their chests," said Johnson, an alderman on the Savannah City Council.

Johnson is boasting about the Chatham County Youth Commission, which on Thursday will celebrate the organization's 13th anniversary at the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The county-funded program was established so that youths could have a voice in their communities, said Johnson, director

of the organization.

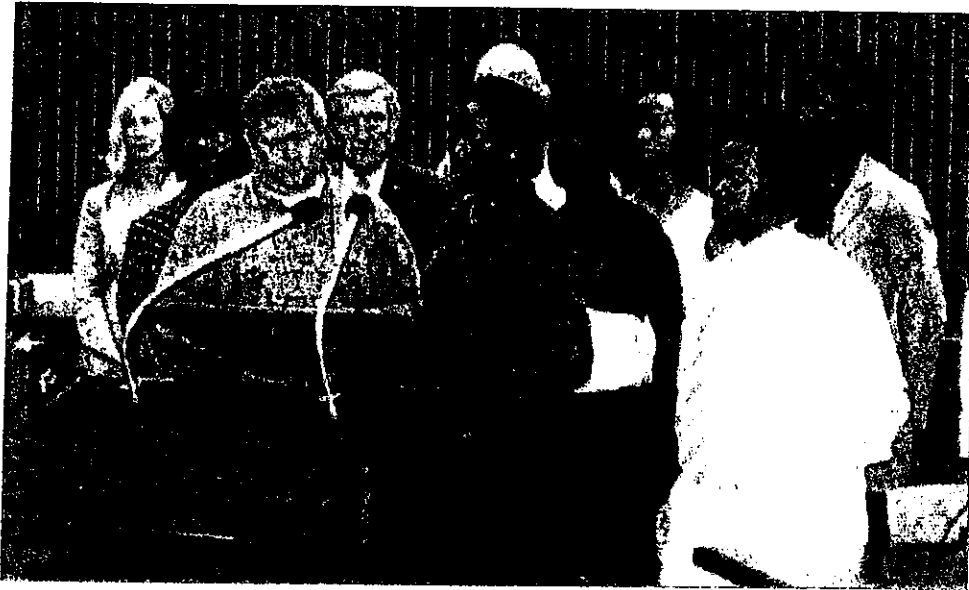
Created in March 1992 by County Commissioner Priscilla Thomas, over 300 people have graduated from the program. Former students are expected to speak to the 38 current members during the celebration.

Part of the organization's curriculum includes learning about government, participating in the process and representing the needs of youth in the county.

"This community has wrapped its arms around the program," Johnson said.

The anniversary is from 6-8:30 p.m. at Telfair Museum, 121 Barnard St. For more information call Johnson at (912) 652-7966.

# Chatham County Youth Commission Donates to American Red Cross



**Chantel Flowers presents check on behalf of the Youth Commission**

by Van Johnson, II  
Savannah, GA - After learning of the devastation of the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the Chatham County Youth Commission wanted to do something to spark community

and youth support.

On Wednesday, September 7, 2005 the Chatham County Commission Chambers, the Chatham County Youth Commission donated \$500.00 to the American Red Cross, who is

spearheading local relief efforts to the devastated areas.

These funds were generated from special events and from donations from Youth Commissioners.

"We call on all youth organizations, clubs, schools and sports teams to raise all the money they can to make sure that the youth of these states have the basic things they need to make during this very difficult time" said Chantel Flowers, Chairperson.

"It is so good that these young people have found it not robbery to give of themselves in such a manner," said Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas, Youth Commission Founder and Chatham County Commissioner.

"These are not refugees, these are Americans" said Van R. Johnson, II, Youth Commission Director and Savannah City Alderman. "As Savannah is a coastal city, we could not have survived if this category five hurricane hit us."

For more information about the Youth Commission, go to [www.ChathamYouth.com](http://www.ChathamYouth.com)



*Chatham County Youth Commission members pose in Savannah with Georgia Speaker of the House, Rep. Glenn Richardson, Deputy Director to the President and White House Intergovernmental Affairs Director Ruben Barrales, ACCG Immediate Past President Jim Ham of Monroe County, ACCG Second Vice President O.D. Netter of Ben Hill County, and Chatham County Commission Chairman Pete Liakakis. Inset: Program founder and Director, Chatham County Vice Chairman Dr. Priscilla Thomas with Ruben Barrales.*

## The Chatham County Youth Commission Spotlighted as National Model Program

Local government officials and the youth in their communities haven't always enjoyed a close-knit, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship. However, the students and adult counterparts involved in the Chatham County Youth Commission program have been working hard to foster just that kind of relationship in their community for the past 13 years.

Today, they are well on their way to sharing their successes and vision to communities around the state, region, nation and maybe even beyond.

Each year since 1992, 35 to 40 high school students are selected to participate in a program where public officials act as advisors and mentors, but the young people choose the agenda and run the show. Some of their many activities include attending and participating in county commission meetings; conducting workshops, campaigns and rallies on topics of their choice; performing community service and raising money for charities; and, in general,

representing the views and interests of young people while at home and traveling to national and state government conferences.

"We have gotten requests from all over the country to help government representatives set up something similar," said Priscilla D. Thomas, Ph.D., vice chairman of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners and executive director and founder of the Youth Commission. "We've even gotten requests for information as far away as Ontario and India."

Thomas and her colleagues are especially excited that organizations such as the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National League of Cities, the Georgia Municipal Association and ACCG are helping them get the word out.

"We are telling folks that we have something that works – a youth-driven, leadership-in-government organization – that they can duplicate in their towns," said Van R. Johnson, II, the director of the youth commission. "These groups are

## ACCG's support and future youth initiative

Youth programs such as the Chatham County Youth Commission and Summer Bonanza will be integral to an effort the association will roll out in late 2005, the ACCG Youth Leadership Initiative. This program will center around a guidebook giving local leaders information on programs, case studies and specific youth-related activities for elected officials, including mentoring, shadowing, research, and policy development youth outreach opportunities.

The initiative will include a program on the importance of civics education in middle and high school, with suggestions for counties to assist. "We are not attempting to change school curriculum," said Ross King, ACCG Deputy Director. "We want youth to appreciate local government and the role it plays by walking them through types of services counties deliver daily. We are striving for a better-informed public ....and we want to help neutralize negative press about government and encourage youth to think about public policy careers, in addition to careers in the private sector. That is very exciting." The initiative has secured Holland & Knight as a sponsor. The next step is to draw in experts such as Dr. Priscilla Thomas for an advisory board and to talk about materials and goals before the formal release of the guidebook and the overall program.

Educating and getting youth involved in their communities is of the utmost importance, agrees ACCG Executive Director Jerry Griffin. "One of the most serious issues we face as a nation is citizens' lack of understanding of the responsibilities of governments that represent our republic. People have to be involved and very little is being taught about civic responsibility. Programs such as the one in Chatham County are doing a tremendous job bringing to young people, and others, an understanding of our governmental system and focusing on how things are done and what needs to be done in the future." Mentoring young people can make a lot of difference, Griffin adds. He credits his own 8th grade government teacher for making civic responsibility "very exciting" to him.□

communicating with local officials in different areas. It is a multi-tiered approach."

Other future tiers may include more formal efforts such as how-to workshops and guides prepared by other organizations. For example, NACo is considering the possibility of including a workshop during one of its conferences next summer in Chicago that would provide some in-depth detail on establishing a youth commission, as well as a written guide that could be available at the workshop.

"Counties need a prototype or guide to help make it easier with some rules and regulations and all the things that have to be considered," said Jacqueline Byers, director of research for NACo in Washington D.C. "For instance, what role are the young people going to play? It should be a valid role and not just ceremonial for it to work." Byers said NACo has always been impressed with the youth commission since it started attending the organization's annual national conference in D.C. about seven years ago. "Our members look forward to having them here, where they attend workshops and ask some hard questions. They are smart, vibrant, and engaged in the program. We are very proud of them."

It is during this annual trip to Washington D.C. and surrounding cities such as Philadelphia and New York, that members of the youth commission have

had opportunities to meet and dialogue with national officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, and most recently, Sen. John McCain.

In fact, the students are such as novelty during their annual trek to the center of national government activities, it has allowed them to capture some local and national media attention. This March, the youth commission was spotlighted on the CBS Morning Show and the Fox and Friends Show during their trip. In addition, a reporter from a local television station shadowed them during the journey, while radio stations conducted interviews with the students and their sponsors while they were on the bus, Thomas said.

Thomas hopes to someday allow the youth commissioners the opportunity to dialogue with the President of the United States, and has requested some form of representation on the National Council of Youth.

### Activities and applications

In the meantime, the commission's efforts in their community are continuing unabated. During the past year, the youth have continued with a campaign called "Rock the Vote," registering 150 students to vote. They have conducted workshops on transit issues and career choices with the Association for Transit, educational issues with the superintendent of schools, domestic violence, women's history, as well as the influence of hip hop on the young urban community. Plus, they raised money for the March of Dimes, the Tsunami relief efforts, and coordinated a Thanksgiving food drive.

"We teach them how to be corporate neighbors and to be a part of the community," said Johnson.

Johnson, a Savannah councilman, said the city has used the county model to create the City of Savannah Youth Council for middle schools students. With 55 to more than 100 students at a time, the program is larger but not quite as intense as the youth commission, he said.

Johnson said he other program sponsors/mentors can provide forms and information and visit with interested local governments, but that the program should be adapted to fit with the individual community. "We want commissioners across the country to take the principles and apply them in a way that works best for their community and their political and educational climate."

A prime example of this application is seen in the five-year-old Fulton County Youth Agenda that began with the help of Chatham County officials. Beginning with community projects, the program currently strives to serve as a voice for youth by hosting focus groups and meetings to determine the top issues. A list of the top eight topics is presented to the adult county commissioners, and then the youth select one to focus on during the year.

A few years ago, the topic was driver's education and the group was part of an effort campaigning to put it back in the school system, which helped to create the Joshua Law that makes driver's education mandatory, said Melinda Pruitt, division manager for the Office of Children and Youth with the Fulton County Human Services Department. Other topics include profiling in schools, over-the-counter medication, teen pregnancy and the current focus on jobs.

"We are trying to work on ways to get them better jobs that will serve as introductions to long-term careers versus just fast food positions," Pruitt said. The youth are also working on a website that will provide information on what types of activities, programs, services, and events are available in the county.

These young people are selected after a tough interview process to contribute to their community and serve as liaisons to county commissioners. They participate in the government process directly by presenting their issues and possible solutions at commission meetings. "Every county should have a way to hear what their youth is thinking and saying," she said. "They know what their issues are and they have some great ideas on what to do about them. We are continually amazed with the results."

#### Summer supplement

Although often overshadowed by the older, outspoken youth commissioners, Thomas is also proud of the younger participants in the summer program she started around the same time. Called Summer Bonanza Partnership Inc., the program accepts about 200 children between the ages of seven and 12 in order to impart community knowledge, career skills and ideals such as self-pride, learning discipline, and good citizenship.

"This was developed to target those disadvantaged kids that are falling through the cracks," Thomas said, who added that school attendance and grades are tracked. "Many of these kids were failing or getting Cs at best. Now, 95.5% are on the honor roll or high honor roll."

In addition to sometimes attending commission meetings and state and national government conferences with the youth commissioners, program participants learn about politics by talking with representatives at each level

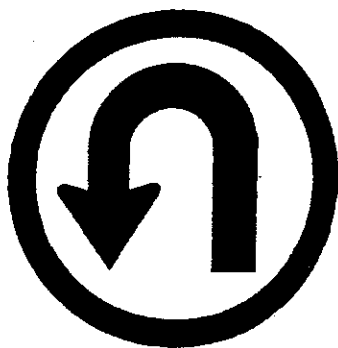
and activities such as a mock courtroom. The Saturday program also includes field trips to places such as parks, museums and the Kennedy Space Center, where they met an astronaut. Speakers are also provided on topics ranging from childhood obesity to truancy and delinquency.

Furthermore, supplemental school curriculum is provided in areas such as math, reading, science and computer skills. "I set up the curriculum to meet the areas where they are having trouble. The emphasis is on education, but we also try to teach concepts such as morals and self esteem. Overall, they are taught to strive for excellence in whatever they do in a positive way," she said. "It also keeps them off the streets."

The program has numerous partners and sponsors in the community that include St. Joseph's/Candler Health Systems, several banks and numerous community organizations. The program also has earned state and national recognition from organizations such as the National Council for Negro Women, which honored Summer Bonanza as one of the top five outstanding youth groups nationwide. "We are just now coming into our own and I'm grateful for the attention," Thomas said.

In all, more than 2,200 children have participated in Summer Bonanza. Some stay in the program as they get older as junior volunteers, while others continue by joining the youth commission. □

—Melora Grattan



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# Nation's Cities

WEEKLY



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## Congress Passes Compromise on Internet Tax Ban

by Nicole Young

A compromise version of the Internet Tax Non Discrimination Act (S.150) passed the lame-duck Congress last week. The bill, which is expected to be signed by the President, reinstates the expired moratorium on taxes on Internet access such as taxes on cable modem and high-speed DSL connections to the Internet. It is virtually identical to the hard-fought compromise version of S.150 that passed the Senate by a 93 to 3 vote last April.

The action is a victory for cities and towns. It would impose the moratorium until November 2007, rather than indefinitely; continue to allow states that have existing taxes on Internet access to collect those taxes; and preserve key elements of local government's taxing authority.

see page 8, column 1

## eBay, NLC Announce Agreement to End Use of Racially Derogatory Words on eBay Website

by Sherry Conway Appel

The National League of Cities joined with representatives from eBay Inc. to announce a landmark agreement limiting the use of racially derogatory words on eBay's website. eBay also agreed to strengthen its policy statements expressing opposition to listings that promote hate, violence or racial intolerance, and has modified its policies to conform to this agreement.

The agreement was announced at a news conference at the National Press Club last week in Washington, D.C.

According to eBay, hundreds of African-American memorabilia, including images, art, books and music are listed on its site. Many of these items have become very collectible, with Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Ossie Davis and others having extensive collections. The new policy will ensure that only historic pieces will be available through the search terms Black Americana or African American.

The agreement states:

- When selling Black Americana,



Marian Tasco, president of NLC's National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials (NBC-LEO), speaks at a press conference announcing NLC's agreement with eBay limiting the use of racially derogatory words on eBay's website. Behind her, left to right, is NLC President Charles Lyons; Henry Gomez of eBay; NBC-LEO Past President Cynthia McCollum and Pat Dando, vice mayor of San Jose, Calif., where eBay has its headquarters.

eBay will prohibit sellers from using racially offensive words in the title or description of their listings for such items.

Any listings that contain such descriptions will not be permitted.

see page 8, column 1

## NLC Promotes Youth Participation in Local Government

by Rebecca Makar

From coast to coast, NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) is leading exciting activities to further youth participation efforts.

These activities include a leadership academy for young people together with adults, a regional conference and site visits.

The predominant theme is the importance of adults and youth truly respecting each other and working together in partnership. Although implementation is hard work, cities and towns around the country are finding success.

### Leadership Academy

NLC's first-ever leadership academy to promote youth participation included two-person teams from 15 cities. Each



Two-person teams of youth and adults from 15 cities participated in NLC's first-ever leadership academy to promote youth participation in San Jose, Calif.

team was composed of one youth aged 15-18 and one local elected official or city staff.

The cities were Boston, Mass.; Caldwell, Idaho; Edmond, Okla.;

see page 6, column 1

• Congress meets for lame-duck session, page 2.

• NLC prepares to launch upgraded website, page 3.

• Youth get involved in election day, page 3.

• Who will follow in the footsteps of today's young elected leaders?, page 4.

• Leadership Training Institute seminar looks at powerful leaders, page 5.

• Former NLC federal relations director George Gross dies at age 70, page 5.

## Youth Participation, from page 1

Gaiveston, Texas; Newport News, Va.; Portsmouth, Va.; Rexburg, Idaho; Rock Hill, S.C.; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Jose, Calif.; Santa Clarita, Calif.; Savannah, Ga.; Spokane, Wash.; Tampa, Fla.; and Tucson, Ariz.

The selected participants had a unique opportunity to share successes and learn from others in this in-depth training. The leadership academy featured peer learning and expert presentations on strengthening youth participation in cities and towns.

Both adult and youth participants gained from discussing what young people need from adults. Adults can

- be an ally by being reliable and completely on their side.
- encourage an environment that is safe from blame or judgment.
- tell the truth and share information openly and in clear, direct language.
- promote community by providing information about their and others cultural, ethnic and gender struggles and achievements.
- be a partner who is willing to share the power and work with them.
- celebrate their successes.

All participants created action plans with time frames and benchmarks to measure progress.

Many of the youth councils — whether newly formed or not — emphasized a desire for greater interaction with city council members and addressed this in their plans. For example, Santa Clarita, Calif. will begin to invite elected officials, the school superintendent and other city leaders to future youth council meetings so they can hear from the youth firsthand.

Inspired by the training, Edmond, Okla., and Rexburg, Idaho, are now planning their first youth summits. Caldwell, Idaho, is borrowing the 'Silence the Violence' theme from Newport News in planning a youth town hall event.

Echoing a common theme, Tucson's Fran Embrey Senechal said, "Our next step is to begin utilizing what we already have in place and improve on it."

### Regional Conference

NLC's recent one-day regional conference in San Jose, Calif., promoted youth participation in municipal government and civic affairs to 100 youth (15-18 years old) and adults from California and six other states.

San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales opened the conference with remarks about building effective relationships between youth and the police. Then, trainers from the Youth Leadership Institute led the audience in acting out both helpful and inappropriate roles in youth-adult partnerships.

In a workshop on developing and sustaining youth councils, the audience heard from youth and adults representing the youth commissions in El Dorado County, Calif., and San Francisco.

According to these presenters, these are the criteria for being a successful youth commissioner:

- engaged in the community
- civic-minded
- committed to public service
- able to work as a team member and partner
- passionate about issues facing young people and their community
- time, time, time



Attendees at NLC's regional conference on youth participation in San Jose, Calif., participate in high-energy activity to promote community building.

Youth commission representatives from Spokane, Wash., and Marin County, Calif., shared strategies on getting out the youth vote and raising young voters' consciousness of issues in the community.

By holding town halls with elected officials and those running for public office, youth can ask questions that are important to them and be a part of the political process even before they may be old enough to vote. Working with the schools, either to increase attendance at the forums or to administer the sample ballots for a youth vote, is a crucial partnership for both cities.

Youth service was the focus of the workshop presented by youth and adults from Lakewood, Wash., and San Jose, Calif. They suggested working with 'natural sponsors' for each project, such as Lowe's or Home Depot for a construction or landscaping project. Another important planning step is identifying project leaders, both youth and adults, who will see the project to completion.

"This ... helped me learn that we [youth] really can inspire other youth," said Jacob Thatcher, a high school sophomore from Rexburg, Idaho. "We can do something for our community."

### Site Visits

A recent site visit to Salt Lake City, Utah, focused not only on enhancing two kinds of partnership opportunities and but also on offering persuasion training.

To stimulate partnerships within the city, the YouthCity Government (YCG) program reached out to school officials.

Participants learned that the superintendent or a school principal might not always be the right person to approach. One newly appointed vice principal at the meeting — responsible for ongoing relationships with the student body — had not been aware of YCG or the student participants from his school.

In an example of external partnership, representatives from 12 cities across northern Utah met together to learn from each other and to explore future partnerships. They shared ideas and energy and began to develop plans for a regional conference in which networking and joint planning would be the themes.

Since the site visit's overall goal was reaching out, the Salt Lake City youth asked for training on persuasion and marketing. They focused on letters to the editor, presentations to various community groups and getting media coverage.

Three basic strategies used in persuasion are appeal to reason, appeal to audience emotion and appeal to audience needs.

To communicate effectively, know the audience, determine your purpose, organize your message, deliver the message and arrive at closure.

An upcoming visit to Fall River, Mass., will highlight the city's plan for youth being developed through youth and adult discussions, trainings and summits.

NLC staff will assist in increasing youth involvement and participation in activities such as sports and clubs and in empowering students to affect their school environment, develop pride in their school and develop an inclusive setting for all students.

**Details:** These activities are part of the YEF Institute's MetLife Foundation Youth-City Connection project. For further information on youth involvement, download NLC's action kit for municipal leaders, "Promoting Youth Participation," in the publications section of [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef). To receive a printed copy, leave a detailed message at 202-626-3014 or send an e-mail to [iyef@nlc.org](mailto:iyef@nlc.org).

The Youth Leadership Institute, which assisted with training in the above meetings, will share additional information at [www.yli.org](http://www.yli.org).

## What Youth Say Will Work in Getting Youth Involved

- Beneficial activities that the youth will understand right away will help them to succeed in their own lives
- Free stuff (food, t-shirts, pens, etc)
- Fun (not boring)
- Movement — keep us moving during the meeting time
- No monotones or annoying voices!
- Challenge me
- Expect something from me
- Respectful approach
- Travel
- Interaction
- Empowering
- Honesty
- Student-run

"Interact with us; do not run us," said Ashley Johnson, a Savannah, Ga., high school senior, in presenting this list of brainstorming ideas during the Leadership Academy. "Give us something we can rise up to, so we can be challenged and meet your expectations. Have us aim high."



# The Chatham County Youth Commission

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CHATHAM COUNTY  
MANAGER'S OFFICE

From its inception in 1992, the Chatham County Youth Commission has been a youth leadership program unique in Georgia, and the nation. The members of the Commission — high school students with a demonstrative interest in learning about, and participating in, local government — constantly impress their adult commissioner counterparts, as well as anyone they encounter during local activities and on the road.

Yes, this is a group that travels to observe government, and has made regular field trips to Washington, D.C. When they attend the various conferences and conventions, they have an informed voice and have astounded people with their questions, said Priscilla D. Thomas, Ph.D., vice chairman of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners and executive director and founder of the Youth Commission, which she formed in 1992.

"They have gone beyond the county commission room and local issues to expressing themselves on a wide variety of issues on the state and national level, such as events in Iraq," Thomas asserted.

***The school-age members of this nationally unique youth leadership program astound working politicians with their perceptive views, many accomplishments, and knowledge. Looks like tomorrow's leaders are on top of things.***

In addition to attending local county commission meetings and various community activities to represent the interests and opinions of youth, the 35 to 40 students chosen each year from Chatham's public and private schools to participate in the leadership program have been traveling to Washington D.C. for the annual

National Association of Counties (NACo) conference. For the past five years, they have been the only youth group at the conference, where they interact with county commissioners from all over the country.

"Every year we go to the conference, we are besieged by questions on how the youth commission works and how people can set one up in their own community," said Pete Nichols, who handles public information for the county and acts as one of the group's many advisors and mentors.

Not only do the youth gain valuable experience from attending the conference activities, the capital city venue allows them to gain special insight into the political process. For instance, the student commissioners have been given a civics lesson on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives by their state representative, as well as toured renowned museums and military bases. But, one of the biggest highlights from the annual trip was meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell about three years ago.

"It was scheduled to be a meet-and-greet — a standard 15-minute meeting," recalled Nichols. "But, he was so engaged with them that he asked them to come up to the top two floors of the state department, where his work office and diplomatic rooms are housed. The meeting ended up lasting about an hour and a half."

On the state government level, the youth commissioners have met with the Governor and Lt. Governor in Atlanta. "The Lt. Governor called them the premier youth organization in the state while speaking from the floor of the State Senate. You can't get much better than that," said Van R. Johnson, II, the director of the youth commission.

Working in the community prioritized. However, it is within the local community that contributions of the Youth Commission really shine. According to Johnson, the most recent group of 37 students, ranging in age from 14 to 18, raised nearly \$2,000 for charities such as the March of Dimes and community centers.

In addition, they donated around 500 books to the sheriff's department as reading material for inmates,

*Youth commissioners travel to observe government - here they visit Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue in the rotunda of the state capitol.*



discussed changes in the proposed Hope Scholarship amendments with their legislative delegation during a town hall meeting, and spearheaded a voter registration drive for all the area high schools to spark interest in the upcoming election.

This year's commission also hosted a mayoral forum in November with all the candidates that showcased the students' ability to grasp issues and ask intelligent questions. "Everyone was impressed with the questions they asked," Johnson said. "The questions were plain, but piercing, and the candidates couldn't give the pat, political answers that they practiced."

Thomas also recalled the mayoral forum with a parental sense of satisfaction. "I just sat back in amazement because they had done their homework and asked so many poignant questions on issues such as security and healthcare. It made me so proud I called them 'my children.'"

Thomas has good reason to boast about the commission. Most of the program's participants have logged much more than their required five hours of community service, some reaching between 120 and 160 hours during the past year. Moreover, the vast majority of the 300 to 400 students that have participated in the program in the last 12 years have attended a college, military academy or vocational school, while maintaining their scholarships and remaining active in the community.

This year's commission includes 14 graduates going on to higher education at schools across the country. One such student is Rebecca Childs, the outgoing chairperson, who will be attending the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where she plans to major in business administration and minor in urban studies.

Like all Youth Commission participants, Childs had to have a minimum grade point average of 2.5, leadership potential and the ability to devote time to the meetings, activities and trips involved in serving on the commission. Each public and private high

school in the county can recommend two students annually for the commission. Childs was selected when she was a junior by her school, the Savannah Country Day School.

Childs said she didn't realize the group's impact until she became involved. "We were able to experience the different sides and perspectives to life and problems that exist in our community," she said. "We have a saying that 'once a youth commissioner, always a youth commissioner,' and we really take it to heart."

In fact, Childs said she has been so affected by her involvement in the commission that she plans to establish youth development centers in urban areas throughout the country. "The commission has allowed me to go out into the community and impact the lives of youth, who often just need a positive voice and reinforcement in their lives. It has also helped me realize that helping young people is what I want to do in my future endeavors."

**Youth Commissioners 'rock the vote'.** Childs said the commission's greatest accomplishment during the past year was the voter registration drive called "Rock the Vote," because they were able to reach 300 students when a lot of groups can't sign up 50 young people.

"It was incredible to reach that number of youth and prepare them for their ability to vote; because even if you aren't involved in politics in any other way, you can be involved by voting."

In addition to working with students from all types of schools, backgrounds and viewpoints, Childs said she enjoyed the mentoring aspect of the program. "The adults, like Mr. Johnson, take us under their wings and teach us about life in general. They push for positive change in each of us as individuals, which makes this group special." Apparently, the students weren't the only ones being pushed. Johnson said it was this "bunch of big-headed kids" that urged him to run

against a three-term incumbent in January to become the city councilman for the First District of the City of Savannah. Johnson said the students empowered him and some even volunteered on his campaign. It's this kind of empowerment that is one of the commission's biggest benefits for the students, Johnson said. "It helps us to empower our kids to save their own generation because we don't speak the same language anymore."

"To bridge this gap, we found that when adults communicate and are willing to really listen to them, the youth will listen and respond back."

For Nichols, some of the biggest benefits lie in learning about how a self-governing system works. They see

the diversity in themselves as well as the adult commissioners, who they learn are somebody just like their neighbor. They also learn to have an impact on their local government by merely speaking their mind while acting as a youth commission representative during the regular county commission meetings, Nichols said.

"There have been instances where a youth commissioner has voiced an opinion or asked a question that swings the vote on an issue. It's impressive to watch." Nichols looks forward to the day when one of the youth commissioners ends up on the Chatham County Commission. So far, one former youth commissioner is serving on the school board in Savannah.

**Other counties catching on.** After providing information to county personnel throughout Georgia and the nation on their group, the youth commission may no longer be unique. Organizers see the expansion as a positive step. Thomas said she eventually would like to see enough youth commissions established that they can gather them all together somewhere for an annual conference to see how the youth of America feel and think. Johnson added, "In the long run, we want to make sure that every county in Georgia has a youth commission and not a commission on youth. There is a big difference. They will advise the powers to be on policies, practices and strategies that affect youth. So, we want Georgia, the U.S. and then the world, involved."

Short-term goals include securing more partners to work with the youth and sponsor more trips. In addition to Washington D.C., the students have visited New York City and seen the progress after the 9/11 terrorist attack. Thomas said that the youth commission is a way to help keep young people away from crime and involved in public service. "Young people will have to step up to the plate and keep things moving in a positive way," she said. "It's my hope that after I am gone, the youth of Chatham County will always have a place at the table, be it local, state or national."

— Melora Grattan

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## REG FOOTBALL



## Georgia Tech eats Maryland

How Jackets shed their personal in a 35-22 win the Terps. Page 1B

## week me

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now history and more. You can write a letter to go to Savannahnow.com and "Happy Holidays!"



opher Barnwell, 9 grade Elementary

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A LEARNING ODYSSEY  
Vision 2010

# Different backgrounds, shared visions

A student forum discusses several solutions to a multitude of school problems.

By Jenel Few  
Savannah Morning News

There were private school girls in plaid, pleated skirts next to students wearing mandatory public school ID tags, stack-heel boots and bell-bottom jeans. They looked like they came from totally different worlds.

But whether hip and dread-locked or print and pony-tailed, they were serious about their opinions and agreed there will have to be some serious changes before

Chatham County's public schools reach their full potential.

"Nothing can just make an instant, complete 180-degree turnaround," said Johnson High School senior Lynn Vassar. "It will take time."

The 27 students engaged in the Wednesday evening discussion were all

members of the Chatham County Youth Commission. They were participating in a Savannah Morning News-sponsored meeting as part of Vision 2010: A Learning Odyssey, designed to help develop a community vision for Chatham County public schools.

They were a diverse group of 16- to 18-year-olds — from a Savannah Runaway Home representative to a member of the Indian Association Youth Group. But they were all

see VISIONS, page 6A



Above: Savannah Arts Academy student Aminata Traore, left, shares an opinion while Savannah Christian Preparatory School students Lydia Williams, center, and Katie George listen in during a youth forum for Vision 2010: A Learning Odyssey on Wednesday.

Left: Jenkins High School student Shradha Subramaniam contributes to Wednesday's Learning Odyssey discussion.

Photos by Scott Bryant/  
Savannah Morning News



An election was held at a ballot box for the tabulation of votes at an election conference.

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# Clinton honors America's missing

## NACo issues environmental purchasing guide

The National Association of Counties (NACo), Washington, D.C., has created a guide to help local governments develop environmentally responsible purchasing practices. "The Environmental Purchasing Starter Kit: A Guide to Greening Government

Through Powerful Purchasing Decisions" contains an overview of purchasing opportunities; four case studies; a resource list; a sample environmental purchasing resolution; and a model press release.

The kit, developed with support

from EPA's Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances, is free to NACo members and costs \$10 for non-members. To order, contact Naomi Friedman, (202) 942-4262, [nfriedma@naco.org](mailto:nfriedma@naco.org); or visit [www.naco.org/programs/enviro/purchase.cfm](http://www.naco.org/programs/enviro/purchase.cfm). ☆

## Youths take local government into their own hands

In April 1999, a Chatham County, Ga., teenager sidled into a convenience store and attempted to buy cigarettes. Across the county, many of his peers did the same thing; and, while none of them made a purchase, all of them walked away with valuable information.

Working "undercover" as part of the Chatham County Youth Commission, the high school students were participating in a study on youth tobacco use. The study was conducted by Partners for Community Health, a division of the Chatham County Health Department.

In a single day, Youth Commission members went into more than 80 local establishments — stores, restaurants, bowling alleys, etc. — that sell cigarettes. They attempted to purchase cigarettes, either from a clerk or from a cigarette machine. If the clerk agreed to sell the cigarettes or ignored the student at the machine, the student claimed a lack of funds and left.

Statistics on the number of establishments willing to let minors purchase cigarettes were compiled and reported by the Youth Commission at a press conference and at a county commission meeting. The Youth Commission withheld the names of violators in order to encourage voluntary compliance with the law.

The Youth Commission was formed in 1992 by Priscilla Thomas, a former elementary school principal and current commissioner for Chatham County. She wanted to create an organization that would allow youth "not only to learn, but to be an active participant in government," she says.

High school sophomores and juniors can join the commission; students may remain members until they graduate high school, according to senior advisor Van Johnson, also Chatham County employee services/training manager. He says that parents are invited to join a Parental Advisory Council that meets at least once a year to learn about the commission and to offer input.

Forty-three high school students now serve on the commission. They include two representatives from each local



The Chatham County Youth Commission meets twice a month, and each member attends at least one county commission meeting every year.

public and private school, one representative from each local housing project and one representative from key community youth groups, such as the Indian Association Youth Group, the Jewish Educational Alliance and the Savannah Runaway Home.

The Youth Commission meets twice a month, and each student attends one county commission meeting each year. Youth Commission members also learn about their community through speakers, projects and field trips.

In 1999, the Commission's activities included visiting the Greenbriar Children's Center, an emergency shelter and orphanage; serving as panelists for a "Critical Issues Affecting Youth" session of Leadership Savannah, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce; traveling to Washington, D.C., as guests of Georgia Senator Max Cleland, Georgia Representative Jack Kingston and the National Association of Counties; and sponsoring a county-wide youth rally. In addition, Youth Commissioners sponsored a Back to School Jam concert attended by 5,000 local youths.

The Chatham County Youth Commission's activities have inspired Fulton County, Ga., to start a similar organization. Representatives from Fulton County visited Chatham County to learn about the program; they plan to inaugurate their own group early in 2000, according to Johnson. ☆

# Our Government



Scott Bryant/Savannah Morning News

## Where are they now?

Past Chatham County Youth Commission members share their memories.

### BRIANNE DRAFFIN

#### Class of 2000

**Remembered for:** Busting stores for selling cigarettes to underage customers  
**Quote:** "Being that involved was very empowering."

Even as a freshman at St. Andrews School, Brianne Draffin knew she'd pursue a career in international affairs. Maybe she'd work at the State Department, or some non-governmental agency.

Recognizing that ambition, her history teacher and guidance counselor nominated her for the Chatham County Youth Commission.

"I hadn't necessarily defined my opinion on a lot of issues, and youth commission got me actively thinking about them," she said. "I would say the youth commission was the single largest influence that I had in high school."

In 1999, Draffin and her fellow commissioners blanketed the area, visiting 80 different stores in an attempt to buy cigarettes. Many of the stores offered the sale without asking for identification.

They presented their findings to

the county commission, which has the authority to grant business licenses.

"Being that involved was very empowering," Draffin said. "I feel a true test of a politician is if they will listen to someone that is too young to vote. That really shows how much they care."

Draffin, now 20, interned with the office of U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Savannah for three years, and is now a junior in Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, D.C.

She'll soon spend a semester abroad at the University of Salamanca in Spain.



### BONITA TAYLOR

#### Class of 2000

**Remembered for:** A great deal of public speaking skills.

**Quote:** "The best thing I picked up was communication skills. I had to speak in front of a lot of people. It's something that I have to use every day here."

Bonita Taylor has been through combat training, and has eaten small animals to survive. She's participated in mock military deployments, while at the same time managing the business management.





# *Fostering leaders for tomorrow*

## **The Chatham County Youth Commission**

*The Chatham County Youth Commission fosters young leaders by involving them in local government. The benefits ripple throughout the community, and bode well for its future.*

In 1992, following the success of several government, business and community youth initiatives, Chatham County Commissioner Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas felt the climate was right to realize her longstanding vision for a formal organization to directly involve youth in local governmental and help develop their leadership skills.

The Chatham County Youth Commission is the result of that vision. The successful program is administered by the county's Human Resources Office, with Employee Services and Training Manager Van R. Johnson, II, serving as an advisor, along with Wanda Meir, Connie Roberts and Debra Allen. Volunteers also assist in running the program, which is funded by money from the Chatham County Human Resources departmental budget and with private donations that include proceeds from a May, 1999, performance of the famed Count Basie Orchestra.

Participants in Chatham County Youth Commission programs have experienced the benefits of bolstered self-esteem, community recognition, higher level community involvement and they have also helped enhance relationships between the county government and schools.

ACCG President and Candler County Chairman George W. "Bubba" Bird, an activist for youth in his own community, agrees that this program targets youth at just the right age "to spur interest in public service when they are still open minded and have so much energy."

Bird also speculates that there may be a secondary advantage to getting teenagers involved in local government. "If a child is involved in the community and familiar with current issues, that information and enthusiasm can easily be transferred to the parents," he says, "who may have previously been apathetic about local government."

Another leader in local youth initiatives, Commissioner Joe Murray Rivers, is one of the program's ardent supporters. "They're an awesome group of young people," he affirms.

### **Who are the youth commissioners?**

Each public and private high school in the county is requested to select two students from freshman through rising junior classes for the youth commission, based on recognized leadership potential, grade point average (a minimum of 2.5 is required), and time available to devote to active participation. Each community-based youth organization is also asked to select one teenager meeting the criteria.

Youth commissioners, ages 14 to 18, come from diverse

backgrounds and locations and represent a good cross-section of the county. Most get involved because they have opinions and ideas regarding local government issues, but never felt they would be heard otherwise, and several have developed political aspirations as a result of their involvement.

Currently there are about 50 participants, and as of this past summer, 98 percent of the program's graduates were enrolled in colleges or vocational schools, or had entered the military. Officers – a president, vice-president, secretary, parliamentarian, and two executive members – are elected annually, allowing young people an opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

### **Ambassadors for their peers**

Chatham County Youth Commission members serve as ambassadors for their peers by representing their interests during Chatham County Commission meetings. Commissioners often seek the youths' input on issues that affect young people, such as library funding, provision of school resource officers in public schools, and how to handle county-licensed businesses that sell cigarettes to minors.

Through an annual tour of Chatham County departments and facilities and one-on-one interaction, youth commissioners meet and develop relationships with county commissioners, the county manager and other officials and department heads. Commissioners often work closely with the youth commissioners from their districts on special projects, write letters of recommendation for college and serve as mentors.

Another major component of the program is community service. Through visits, forums and round table discussions with local nonprofit and community service organizations, youth commissioners get a glimpse of the real needs and concerns of the community, and gain an understanding of the interdependence of the public, nonprofit and private sectors. Through these experiences, says Johnson, youth commissioners "learn that when societal problems are pervasive, everyone pays for it indirectly, so it is imperative that the root causes are identified and attacked."

During the last two years, youth commissioners have visited with victims of domestic violence and learned to recognize the signs of abuse, participated in the March of Dimes' WalkAmerica program, the World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil, have earned Red Cross certification as AIDS awareness teen educators, and attended the Seventh Annual Peach State Youth Peer Helpers Conference in Milledgeville. They also





Photo by Russ Perry

About 50 teens nominated by area high schools and civic groups take their oath of office to join the Chatham County Youth Commission.

## Getting involved

Teens take positions on county commission group

By Edward Fulford

A new crop of teens were sworn in to serve on the Youth Commission at the last meeting of the Chatham County Commission.

The brainchild of Commissioner Priscilla Thomas, the Youth Commission provides a formal organization through which county youth can get involved with government and develop leadership skills.

"We try to prepare youth for a lifetime of public and community service, regardless of the youth's present or future career goals," said Youth Commission senior adviser Van Johnson II.

Johnson said the Youth Commission allows those involved to learn about the government process, participate and voice the needs of youth in Chatham County.

"The benefits have been enormous," he said. "You can see increased self-esteem, an increased assertiveness, recognition from the community at large, increased personal community involvement, and enhanced relationships among Chatham County, the schools and

community-based organizations in the county."

Johnson said the youth who serve on the commission are picked by the schools or community groups in which they're involved.

Each public and private high school is requested to send two students, while each community-based organization may send one person of high school age.

The Indian Association, Keystone Club, Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Jewish Educational Alliance and Savannah Runaway Home are some of the organizations with youth representatives.

There are about 50 teens on the commission. During the next year, each will attend at least one county commission meeting, as well as taking part in other activities.

Johnson said there are several activity areas including understanding county government and community issues, learning effective communication, leadership, appreciating differences, team-building, conflict management, goal-setting and having fun.

He said aside from their dealings with the county commission, the youth "visit non-profit and county service organizations to see first-hand the issues that we face in this community."

The program is administered by Johnson, the county's employee ser-

vices manager, and other members of the county human resources department, on their own time.

Johnson said Thomas and other advisers work on the curriculum in conjunction with the youth commissioners.

Lauren Dunant, named to the commission by Calvary Baptist, said she thinks it's important to show the community a positive image of teens.

"I think it's a good thing to be involved in the community, and as a student, I think it's a good representation of youth," she said. "Most people view youth today as arrogant, but with this, it shows people in the community that we're willing to volunteer and take a stand for what we believe in."

Another first-year Youth Commissioner, Brandon Brown, said he was curious about county government.

"I just wanted insight into different aspects of civic activities," said Brown, who was appointed to the commission by GLAPP. "I felt that youth today don't have a real strong voice and any advantage we have, you should take to try to change things to help us in the long run."

Brown said he may one day run for a seat on the county commission, but he has no certain political hopes yet.

Such is not the case for Brannie Draffin, a second-year Youth

Commissioner who will serve as the organization's secretary this year.

Draffin, appointed by St. Andrew's School, said she anticipates a career in politics.

"I want to go into international relations," she said. "This has helped me for that, because I really didn't have any political aspirations until I got into the Youth Commission. This has really opened my eyes about a lot of things and really shaped where I'm going in life."

Draffin described the Youth Commission as a great asset for young people.

"We really feel like we have a say in the government, and we're able to talk to the commissioner," she said. "They're very accessible to us and we're greatly appreciative of that."

Draffin said those who serve on the Youth Commission this year will be focusing on the issues of education and youth violence.

She said Chatham County's Youth Commission is being used as a model for similar efforts in different states around the country.

Draffin said last year, the commissioners visited the headquarters of the National Association of Counties in Washington, D.C. She said an article detailing the visit in the NACU newsletter inspired commissions in Gainesville, Fla.; Fulton County and counties in Texas and New Jersey to form youth commissions.

# ***Fostering leaders for tomorrow***

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In 1992, following the success of several government, business and community youth initiatives, Chatham County Commissioner Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas felt the climate was right to realize her longstanding vision for a formal organization to directly involve youth in local governmental and help develop their leadership skills.

The Chatham County Youth Commission is the result of that vision. The successful program is administered by the county's Human Resources Office, with Employee Services and Training Manager Van R. Johnson, II, serving as an advisor, along with Wanda Meir, Connie Roberts and Debra Allen. Volunteers also assist in running the program, which is funded by money from the Chatham County Human Resources departmental budget and with private donations that include proceeds from a May, 1999, performance of the famed Count Basie Orchestra.

Participants in Chatham County Youth Commission programs have experienced the benefits of bolstered self-esteem, community recognition, higher level community involvement and they have also helped enhance relationships between the county government and schools.

ACCG President and Candler County Chairman George W. "Bubba" Bird, an activist for youth in his own community, agrees that this program targets youth at just the right age "to spur interest in public service when they are still open minded and have so much energy."

Bird also speculates that there may be a secondary advantage to getting teenagers involved in local government. "If a child is involved in the community and familiar with current issues, that information and enthusiasm can easily be transferred to the parents," he says, "who may have previously been apathetic about local government."

Another leader in local youth initiatives, Commissioner Joe Murray Rivers, is one of the program's ardent supporters. "They're an awesome group of young people," he affirms.

### **Who are the youth commissioners?**

Each public and private high school in the county is requested to select two students from freshman through rising junior classes for the youth commission, based on recognized leadership potential, grade point average (a minimum of 2.5 is required), and time available to devote to active participation. Each community-based youth organization is also asked to select one teenager meeting the criteria.

Youth commissioners, ages 14 to 18, come from diverse

backgrounds and locations and represent a good cross-section of the county. Most get involved because they have opinions and ideas regarding local government issues, but never felt they would be heard otherwise, and several have developed political aspirations as a result of their involvement.

Currently there are about 50 participants, and as of this past summer, 98 percent of the program's graduates were enrolled in colleges or vocational schools, or had entered the military. Officers — a president, vice-president, secretary, parliamentarian, and two executive members — are elected annually, allowing young people an opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

### **Ambassadors for their peers**

Chatham County Youth Commission members serve as ambassadors for their peers by representing their interests during Chatham County Commission meetings. Commissioners often seek the youths' input on issues that affect young people, such as library funding, provision of school resource officers in public schools, and how to handle county-licensed businesses that sell cigarettes to minors.

Through an annual tour of Chatham County departments and facilities and one-on-one interaction, youth commissioners meet and develop relationships with county commissioners, the county manager and other officials and department heads. Commissioners often work closely with the youth commissioners from their districts on special projects, write letters of recommendation for college and serve as mentors.

Another major component of the program is community service. Through visits, forums and round table discussions with local nonprofit and community service organizations, youth commissioners get a glimpse of the real needs and concerns of the community, and gain an understanding of the interdependence of the public, nonprofit and private sectors. Through these experiences, says Johnson, youth commissioners "learn that when societal problems are pervasive, everyone pays for it indirectly, so it is imperative that the root causes are identified and attacked."

During the last two years, youth commissioners have visited with victims of domestic violence and learned to recognize the signs of abuse, participated in the March of Dimes' WalkAmerica program, the World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil, have earned Red Cross certification as AIDS awareness teen educators, and attended the Seventh Annual Peach State Youth Peer Helpers Conference in Milledgeville. They also

helped the Partners for Community Health implement the organization's 1999 "Kick Butts Day," by working "under-cover" in over 80 stores to determine which would sell cigarettes to minors.

Adults know that a large part of personal and professional success is an ability to understand a broad range of personalities and viewpoints. For this reason, open, honest dialogue about the differences and similarities between people is encouraged. Youth commissioners are taken to cultural events such as exhibits at the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum and exposed to different places and personalities whenever possible.

Through various activities, youth commissioners learn skills that many adults are still learning – resolving conflicts

with communication and compromise, the art of persuasion and lobbying, setting effective goals for scholastic and personal development. Through decision-making exercises, students make and stand by decisions based on limited facts – (See *YOUTH*, page 18)



*Chatham County Commissioners Billy Hair (middle) with Joe Murray Rivers and Priscilla Thomas, honor CCYC member Bonita Taylor, recently appointed to attend West Point by U.S. Sen. Paul Coverdell and the U.S. Air Force Academy, by Rep. Jack Kingston.*



*Left: in July 1999, at the invitation of Senator Max Cleland, U.S. Representative Jack Kingston and the National Association of Counties (NACo), Chatham County youth commissioners visited Washington, D.C.*

something many adults, especially elected officials, are required to do on a regular basis. This allows them to see the "big picture" and the future impact of today's decisions.

#### **'Critical youth issues' panelists**

And people in Chatham County and beyond are taking notice. During the 1999 Leadership Savannah conference, youth commissioners served as panelists for a "Critical Issues Affecting Youth" session, and in 1998, they traveled to Atlanta as guests of then-governor Zell Miller, State Senator Diana Harvey Johnson, and State Representative Dorothy Pelote.

But the high point of the youth commission's existence came in July 1999, when, at the invitation of Senator Max Cleland, U.S. Representative Jack Kingston and the National Association of Counties (NACo), youth commissioners visited Washington, D.C. There, they visited the Supreme Court, the Holocaust Museum, the White House, the FBI and NACo offices – and also visited their congressional delegation on Capitol Hill.

The Chatham County Youth Commission intends to serve as an example for communities nationwide that are interested in similar programs. As more Youth Commissions are organized, says Johnson, "it is our vision that Georgia will lead the way in introducing this concept to county governments all over the country. We hope to begin state, regional, and eventually, national Youth Commission summits that will address the collective concerns and agenda of the youth of America."

To that end, the Chatham County Youth Commission has already inspired Fulton County, Georgia, as well as counties in Florida, Texas and New Jersey, to establish their own youth commissions. And after 1999, a year of prominent press for teenagers – not all of it good – it is refreshing indeed to see a program emphasizing the many positive things youth offers. □

- Valerie Barry

# Chatham County Youth Commission Announces Graduates and Award Winners



Members of Chatham County Youth Commission graduating Class of 2008

y: **Van R. Johnson, II**  
*outh Commission Director*

On Friday, June 27, 2008, during the Chatham County Commission Meeting, the Chatham County Youth Commission presented their 2008 graduates, the recipients of the 2008 Beverly M. Whitehead Award and the recipient of the Brandon Brown Youth Commissioner of the Year Award. Singing the cadence from the Kipling poem.

"If", Alderman Van R. Johnson, II, Director of the Chatham County Youth Commission told the graduates, "If you can be leader at home, in your community and in school - you would have created a new definition of cool and you would have graduated from Youth Commission school!"

The graduates, their high schools and designated colleges are: Anthony Williams, Jenkins High School, Morehouse College;

Jennifer Morse, Jenkins High School, Georgia State University; Stephanie Chu, Savannah Country Day, Emory University; Mark Stevenson, Savannah Christian, Auburn University; Wesley Stone, Benedictine Military, College of Charleston; Jameya Barnwell, St. Vincent's Academy, Shaw University; Morgan

See Youth Commission, page 12

## Youth Commission... *Continued from page 1*



**Youth Commission 2008 graduates cut celebration cake.**

Gusby, Jenkins High School. Hampton University; Clint Middleton, Jenkins High School, Morehouse College; Alexis Proctor, St. Vincent's Academy, Savannah State; Telicia Thomas, St. Vincent's Academy, Armstrong Atlantic; and Aysha Washington. Windsor

Forest, Mercer University.

The Youth Commission also presented the 2008 Beverly M. Whitehead Award, in memory of the former Chatham County Human Resources Director. This award is presented to individuals, businesses and agencies in the community who

have demonstrated excellence and commitment to youth in this community.

The recipients were Mayor Otis S. Johnson, Dr. Walter Evans, and Mr. Gene Slivka.

The Youth Commission also presented the 2008 Brandon Brown Youth Commissioner of the Year Award to Youth Commissioner Erica Green.

The Chatham County Youth Commission was founded in 1992 by Commissioner Priscilla D. Thomas and is replicated in Fulton County (Atlanta), GA, Prince George's County, MD, Alachua County (Gainesville), FL, Cass County (Fargo), ND, and the Savannah Youth Council.

For more information on the Chatham County Youth Commission, visit their website at [www.ChathamYouth.com](http://www.ChathamYouth.com)

# CHATHAM COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION

2006 - 2007 ~ A "WHY NOT?" YEAR!

## ***What We Sponsored/Co-sponsored/Participated In:***

Jam Fest with E-93  
Chatham County Youth Commission/State Farm Insurance Drive Safe Program  
Savannah Chatham Public Schools/Youth Commission Back to School Rally  
Annual Retreat @ the Girl Scout Camp, Rose Dhu Island  
Savannah Riverboat Back to School Cruise  
Back to School Party - Savannah Civic Center  
DreamFest with Amerigroup Community Care @ Daffin Park  
Pool Party with E-93 @ Aquatic Center  
10<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Rally @ Daffin Park  
Community Summit with Youth Futures Authority  
14<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion/Holiday Social @ Jepson Center for the Arts  
2006 National Night Out  
Savannah Morning News/WTOC Forums for School Board Elections  
Anti-Gang Summit  
Battle of the Bands  
Book Drive - Moses Jackson Center  
Savannah Youth Council Retreat @ Savannah Civic Center  
World Aids Day  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade  
65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mighty Eighth Air Force  
Universoul Circus  
Black Heritage Festival  
Student Support for Darfur  
Voter Registration Drives  
Daffin Park 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Bash  
School Social Workers Association of Georgia, Inc. @ Hyatt  
READ IT LOUD! Savannah  
March in Celebration of Savannah's Family

## ***here We Went:***

### **2007 Savannah Day In Atlanta**

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library  
Georgia State Capitol  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Center

### **2007 Annual Trip**

National Association of Counties Annual Legislative Conference  
Spy Museum in DC  
National Air and Space Museum, DC  
Madison Square Garden - Knicks Game, NY  
Ground Zero - New York, NY  
NBC Today Show  
Historic Apollo Theater  
Prince George's County  
United States Capitol

Backus Children's Hospital  
City of Savannah Town Hall Meeting  
National League of Cities Conference - Reno, Nevada  
National League of Cities Conference - Washington, DC

***Who We Welcomed to Savannah:***

Councilmember Marilynn Bland  
Dr. Billings

***Who We Supported:***

Wesley Community Centers Love Walk

***What We Accomplished:***

Setup on [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)  
Prince George's County Youth Commission

***Who We Met (Or saw in person):***

Judge Glenda Hatchett  
Senator Regina Thomas  
Lil Mo  
Stephanie Edwards  
Governor Sonny Perdue  
Congressman John Barrow  
Congressman Jack Kingston  
Apollo Theater Historian \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Michael Berkow

We shall never forget \_\_\_\_\_  
Brandon L. Brown "B Brown" (1982-2004)



**CHATHAM COUNTY  
YOUTH COMMISSION  
OFFICIAL BY-LAWS**

**CCYC**  
CHATHAM COUNTY  
YOUTH COMMISSION

**ARTICLE I - HISTORY**

In 1992, after a variety of governmental, business and community initiatives on behalf of youth, Dr. Priscilla D. Thomas, County Commissioner, District 8, realized her vision to have a formal organization in place that would directly involve youth in the governmental process as well as develop leadership skills. After securing the blessing of the Chatham County Commission, she enlisted the assistance of the County Manager, Russ Abolt, the Human Resources Director, the late Beverly M. Whitehead, and the then Employee Services Manager, Michael A. Kaigler. They developed the prototype of the Youth Commission and this initiative became a reality in March 1992. Employee Services and Training Manager, Van R. Johnson, II, assumed leadership of the organization in 1995. The benefits have been enormous, including increased self esteem, recognition from the community at large, increased personal community involvement and enhanced relationships between the County government and the schools that we serve. The Youth Commission has blossomed and continues to develop into a formidable voice for youth in Chatham County.

**ARTICLE II - PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Chatham County Youth Commission is to serve as the County's most comprehensive collaborative in addressing the needs and voicing the concerns of Youth in Chatham County. This purpose may be accomplished in the following ways:

- A. Observe, evaluate, and stay abreast of programs and services to Youth in Chatham County;
- B. Make recommendations to the Chatham County Commission and other agencies as to strengthening existing services and/or expanding services to meet unmet needs;
- C. Make feasibility and/or funding recommendations to the Chatham County Commission where requested and appropriate;



- D. Be responsive to concerns of Youth in Chatham County;
- E. Inform and suggest to the Chatham County Commission ways to make policy Youth oriented;
- F. Create a climate of public awareness and responsibility for meeting the needs of Chatham County Youth;
- G. Interact with Youth of other cities, counties, states and countries to develop new ideas for programs.
- H. Provide youth services and programming where necessary and appropriate.
- I. Submit to the Chatham County Commission, and make available to the general public, an annual report of the activities of the Commission.

### **ARTICLE III - CORE VALUES**

The Core Values of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***RESPECT, SUCCESS, INFLUENCE, INTEGRITY and LEADERSHIP.***

### **ARTICLE IV - AFFIRMATION STATEMENT**

The Affirmation Statement of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***"As Chatham County Youth Commissioners we shall, excel in our school, community and government, be responsible and respectful young adults, make a difference in our community, reach our full potential and be strong student leaders by providing safe and inviting opportunities for youth."***

### **ARTICLE V - MOTTO**

The motto of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be: ***"Vocalizing our Views for a Prosperous Future."***

### **ARTICLE VI - POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

The Chatham County Youth Commission, as a non-partisan creation of the Chatham County Commission, shall not be

affiliated with any political party or engage in any political activity. This shall not prevent activities association with voter registration or lobbying on issues approved by the Chatham County Youth Commission.

## **ARTICLE VII - MEMBERSHIP**

The Chatham County Youth Commission shall be composed in the following manner:

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission shall have a maximum of fifty (50) members.
- 1. The following public and private high schools shall be requested to name two representatives to the Youth Commission:
  - (1) Alfred E. Beach High School
  - (2) Benedictine Military School
  - (3) Bible Baptist School
  - (4) Calvary Baptist School
  - (5) Early College
  - (6) Robert W. Groves High School
  - (7) Islands High School
  - (8) Herschel V. Jenkins High School
  - (9) Sol C. Johnson High School
  - (10) Memorial Day School
  - (11) Providence Day School
  - (12) Savannah Arts Academy
  - (13) Savannah Christian
  - (14) Savannah Country Day
  - (15) Savannah High School
    - A. Liberal Arts
    - B. Criminal Justice
  - (16) St. Andrew's
  - (17) St. Vincent's Academy
  - (18) Windsor Forest High School
  - (19) Woodville-Tompkins High School
- A. High Schools may be added and deleted as deemed necessary.
- B. In order to ensure diversity, the following community organizations may be requested to name one or more representatives to the Youth Commission:

- (1) Housing Authority of Savannah
  - (2) Indian Association of Savannah
  - (3) Jewish Educational Alliance
  - (4) Latin American Services Organization
- C. It is understood that, despite best efforts, and because of varying reasons, some schools, at times, will have more representation on the Chatham County Youth Commission than others.
- D. Chatham County Youth Commissioners must:
- (1) Reside in Chatham County for the entire length of their membership.
  - (2) Be presently enrolled in high school, grades 10- 12;
  - (3) Must be academically eligible to participate in their school's sports and extra-curricular activities;
  - (4) Must be able to think critically and articulate thoughts and ideas;
  - (5) Must have the attitude fitting of such an office;
  - (6) In order to maintain membership, Youth Commissioners can have only three (3) un-excused or five (5) excused absences. Excused absences occur when a telephone call or email is placed to the Director or his/her designee 24 hours prior to the scheduled start time of the event. An un-excused absence occurs when notification is not made or made less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled start time of the event. Certain events are deemed mandatory events and should be attended.

#### **ARTICLE VIII - LEADERSHIP TEAM**

- A. The elected officers of the Youth Commission shall be a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, a Secretary, a Parliamentarian, and three Executive Members.

- B. Officers shall serve one year terms. No officer shall serve in the same office for more than two consecutive terms.
- C. A Director shall be appointed by the County Manager to develop, coordinate and implement Youth Commission activities and shall serve as the liaison between the Commission, County Manager and the Youth Commission.
- D. Advisors shall be Chatham County Human Resources and Services Staff and Youth Commission Graduate Advisors who shall provide assistance and direction when necessary.

#### **ARTICLE IX - COMMITTEES**

- A. There shall be standing committees called the Executive Committee, the Social Concerns Committee, Community Concerns Committee and the Educational Concerns Meeting. The Chairperson shall chair the Executive Committee and the Executive Members shall chair the other standing committees.
  - (1) The purpose of each committee is to bring before the Commission issues on which action needs to be considered, planned and initiated.
- B. The Executive Committee shall be a standing committee and shall consist of all elected officers and the chairs of each standing committee.

#### **ARTICLE X - AD-HOC COMMITTEES**

- A. The Chairperson of the Commission may appoint from time to time Ad-Hoc Committees as needs arise.

#### **ARTICLE XI - MEETINGS**

- A. The term of the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be from September through June.
- B. The Commission shall meet according to a regular schedule

with special meetings called by the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and any ten members of the Commission.

- C. For regular meetings, an agenda shall be published, attendance shall be taken and minutes shall be recorded and maintained.

## **ARTICLE XII - CANDIDACY**

The Candidacy Process for the Chatham County Youth Commission shall be as follows:

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission Candidacy Process shall occur annually from May to September.
- B. The Chatham County Youth Commission Candidacy Process shall consist of 5 segments:

1. **RECRUITMENT** - In May of each year, the Chatham County Youth Commission shall announce and receive nominations from under-represented schools.

2. **INTERVIEW** - Interviews shall be scheduled and conducted by Chatham County Youth Commissioners. Nominees must be approved by staff and Youth Commission in order to be declared a candidate.

3. **CANDIDACY** - The formal candidacy process shall be from June to September annually. Candidates will be subjected to an intensive government and community engagement process which will include meetings, assignments, reading, research, community activities, field trips and peer interaction.

4. **CONFIRMATION** - At the end of the candidacy process, candidate must be recommended by staff and approved by the majority of Chatham County Youth Commissioners in good standing.

5. **SWEARING IN** - After being confirmed by the Chatham County Youth Commission staff and members, the candidate must be sworn in by the Chatham County

Commission Chair or his/her designee in order to be designated as a Chatham County Youth Commissioner.

### **ARTICLE XIII - LEGACY PROGRAM**

Appreciating relationships that have developed between Chatham County and families of Youth Commissioners, Youth Commissioners who successfully complete the program, by graduating, will be allowed to recommend a sibling to go through the candidacy process. This privilege must be requested by the Youth Commission graduate prior to the recruitment period and the sibling must meet the qualifications as set forth in Article II, Section D and successfully complete the candidacy process as specified in Article VII.

### **ARTICLE XIV - DECORUM/SOCIAL NETWORKING**

Chatham County Youth Commissioners shall, at all times, conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the core values and goals of the organizations. Chatham County Youth Commissioners shall never place themselves in compromising positions or situations that will cast a negative image of Chatham County, the Chatham County Commission or the Chatham County Youth Commission.

- A. Chatham County Youth Commissioners, who have social networking accounts, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, shall ensure that their posts, pictures, music, blogs and associations be in good taste and representative of their membership in the Chatham County Youth Commission.

### **ARTICLE XV - AWARDS AND COMMENDATIONS**

- A. The Chatham County Youth Commission may present the following awards annually:
  - 1. **BEVERLY M. WHITEHEAD AWARD** - Named in honor of the Chatham County's First Human Resources Director, who passed away in 1988, but played an integral role in the development of the Chatham County Youth Commission, this award is given annually to recognize people, organizations or businesses who have made significant

contributions to youth through the Chatham County Youth Commission.

**2. BRANDON BROWN YOUTH COMMISSIONER OF THE YEAR AWARD** - Named in honor of the first Chatham County Youth Commission to pass away in 2004. This award is given annually to a current Youth Commissioner who, during the current term, has exemplified the highest levels of qualities befitting a Chatham County Youth Commissioner. Current officers are prohibited from being nominated or selected for this award.

#### **ARTICLE XVI - SUSPENSION AND REMOVAL**

- A. Any member may be immediately suspended or removed with or without notice for behavior that, in the opinion of the Founder, Director and staff, is not consistent with the values or intent of the Youth Commission. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to:
  - 1. Pregnancy/Fatherhood
  - 2. Arrest/Conviction
  - 3. Expulsion/Suspension from school
  - 4. Two consecutive nine week periods with a failing average or with a failed class
  - 5. An uncooperative or negative attitude
- B. Any member may be suspended or removed by the membership when the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and fifty percent plus one members are present and votes are cast in favor of suspension/removal.
- C. Any member may be reinstated by the membership when the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and fifty percent plus one members are present and votes are cast in favor of reinstatement with the approval of the Director.

#### **ARTICLE XVII - AMENDMENTS**

- A. These By-Laws may be amended at any meeting of the Youth Commission at which fifty percent plus one members are present and the votes are cast in favor of an amendment.

REV. 9/99  
1/00  
**REVISED 4/11**



# CHATHAM COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES



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