Meeting Notes – Jan. 31, 2023

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, January 31 in the Fellowship Hall at First Baptist Church in LaFayette. The Club was proud to initiate its newest member, DeAnna Hand, a LaFayette native and executive director of the LaFayette Main Street project.

Laura Smith, manager of the Lanett Welcome Center on I-85, was invited to be our speaker by Rotarian Diane Sherriff. Ms. Smith will have been employed by the Alabama Tourism Department for 37 years, as of April 2023. She has been the center's manager for the past 10 years.

Ms. Smith shared with the group an Alabama State map and the Sweet Home Alabama Official Vacation Guide. Club members were encouraged to visit and vacation in Alabama. Not only does our state offer a wide variety of attractions but, financially, this is beneficial because it keeps our money in our state. Alabama offers everything from mountains to beaches and Ms. Smith offered several suggestions of places to visit, both well-known and lesser known.

The Tourism Department divides the state into four regions: North, Central South and Gulf Coast. There are a total of eight welcome centers, most of which are on the interstate; a few are not. The Lanett Welcome Center is the second largest and busiest, serving as many as 35,000 people per month. Grand Bay has the busiest welcome center. Theirs also serves a storm shelter. The welcome centers are gradually being renovated. The Department of Tourism owns the buildings and maintains the grounds.

When visitors stop at the welcome center, the staff is able to guide them to points of interest. The staff begins by finding out what part of the state the visitor is wanting or planning to visit or what their interests are. From there, the staff can make recommendations of specific attractions or areas to visit. The welcome center can even make reservations for them, within the state of Alabama. The Civil Rights Trail, the state parks, and the capital of Montgomery are popular destinations.

Diane Sherriff