Meeting Notes – Oct. 29, 2024

The LaFayette Rotary Club met for its weekly meeting on Oct. 29, 2024. Rotarian Allen Tucker invited as our guest speaker Valerie Gray, pictured at the left. Valerie retired as an economic developer from the Chambers County Development Authority at the end of August 2023, after serving 25 years as its executive director. She currently serves on several boards, including the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) where she is currently the vice-chairperson, Farmers and Merchants Bank, East Alabama Health, and Chattahoochee Hospice. Valerie gave a brief update regarding the ACCS. There are 24 colleges in the system. Board members were given a report that every college but one saw an increase in enrollment. When she questioned which college had not grown, she was told it was Ingram State, the state prison college! She also reported that Southern Union State Community College now has more than 5,000 students enrolled.

Since retiring, Valerie has formed a consulting agency, Valor Strategies, with another retired economic developer. They currently represent CDG Engineering in Andalusia, AL. They have offered a proposal to an Alabama county that is without an economic developer. If accepted, her firm will represent the county 20-24 hours per week. Valerie did something similar for Randolph Co. while working for the CCDA.

She is also advising property owners in Cusseta, AL, regarding the possible development of a quarry there. A permit for the quarry to engage in aggregate mining operations was filed in August and uploaded to the ADEM (Alabama Department of Environmental Management) website in mid-October. The permit would allow for blasting to occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the first three years. The permit also addresses the second phase of the operation, the loading and transportation. The proposed site is in the center of Cusseta. There are five -six property owners whose property would be adjacent to or within 500 feet of the proposed site. The quarry proposes employing twenty people from Chambers County. Citizens have asked for her help in navigating the process of opposing the building of the quarry. Mrs. Gray said that the public comment period will likely open after January 1, 2025. She is encouraging concerned citizens to begin a letter-writing campaign to ADEM, which will hopefully trigger a public hearing. Chambers County apparently sits on a vein of granite. Operating a quarry can impact water resources, which can then impact farmers and small businesses. There are several perspectives from which to oppose the building of a quarry: legal, environmental, animal, homeowner, and scientific. Mrs. Gray believes ADEM is most interested in the scientific perspective.

Diane Sherriff