

“Challenges and Celebrations”

(Part Two: Celebrations)

Last month, we looked at some of the challenges facing Henry County government over the next few years. Now, with only 37 days remaining until we turn the gavel over to a new administration, we look back at some of the celebrations during the past twelve years.

If I were pressed to name just one, it would be the generosity of the David and Maribeth Herndon family through their charitable donation of The Herndon Building to the Henry County Commission. This freed up needed space in the courthouse while putting the probate and commission offices in a much better position to serve our citizens. Others that come to mind: *the opening five years ago of Abbeville Fiber, a \$50M investment that represents the single largest industrial development project in Henry County history; *at one time we had three separately funded E911 locations. It took over two years but we finally consolidated them into one central location in Headland, saving money for each entity; *we now budget \$288,000.00 annually to help the municipal fire and rescue departments better serve our rural citizens; *we increased our sheriff department’s budget substantially to ensure that Henry County continues to have one of the lowest crime rates in the state; *we used an ADECA grant to renovate the 72 year-old Annex Building - again freeing up more space in the courthouse; *new generators were installed in the courthouse, annex building and road and bridge departments; *we were able to establish probate and revenue satellite offices in Headland to better serve citizens on Tuesdays and Thursdays; *we are using A.R.P.A. (COVID) funds to soon begin completely renovating and expanding our 60 year-old jail; we instituted a single-employee garbage collection system to improve safety while saving on labor costs and liability insurance expense; *an automated customer routing system was installed in the probate office – cutting customer wait time from an average of 15 minutes to two minutes; *we established the Henry County Youth Leadership Program (H.C.Y.L.P.) in 2015 – it is now one of the best in the state; *Rhonda Harrison led the charge to develop ‘Leadership Henry’, an adult version of H.C.Y.L.P; *the Henry County Economic Development Authority (H.C.E.D.A) was re-established two years ago and is now financially self-supporting; *Henry County leaders are even more involved in the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. At least three local officials have served as the state-wide president of their organization. (Chris Champion has also served as the national president of NACE (National Association of County Engineers); *we have resurfaced 155 miles of Henry County roads using \$21,129,290 in local, state and federal funding (we could do so much more except for a lack of funding; *in an effort to retain our good employees, salaries for entry level Henry County employees have been increased from less than \$9.00/hour in 2012 to just over \$14.00/hour this year...we have also given a cost of living raise to all employees every year since 2012; *we are still awaiting final word on federal funding assistance to help us with the jail renovation and expansion but, other than a possible bond issue on that project, we are in a much improved financial position than we were twelve years ago. In January, 2013, the combined balance of all departments was \$4.48M. The balance as of October 30, 2024 was \$8.89M (this does not include the \$2.54M we set aside for the jail project); *we’ve written a column (‘From the Courthouse to Your House’) in *The Abbeville Herald* every month since February, 2013; *our goal from day one was to wake up each morning with the goal of improving Henry County in some way. I promised two things to both probate judge candidates several months ago: (1) we would leave them with the best staffs possible (we have definitely done that) and (2) that I will be available if they should need my help in any way - before, during and after the transition. I am truly optimistic about the future on Henry County.

30 Day Review:

- Probate cases in November: four wills probated, two administrations, three final settlements, five miscellaneous hearings, three guardianships, three involuntary mental commitments, one name change and twelve marriage certificates recorded
- December is a quiet month for tags...only new purchases (and customers who have forgotten to renew their tags at the normal time.)
- Nov. 26 – City of Headland Thanksgiving lunch
- Nov. 28/29 – Thanksgiving holidays
- Dec. 2 – Camp SAYLA property meeting
- Dec. 3 – Wallace College board meeting
- Dec. 3 – Swearing in ceremony to seat Tim McCraney on the Headland City Council
- Dec. 4 – Henry County Jail project review with architects and contractor
- Dec. 4 – HCYLP ‘Power of Youth’ program – Coffee County
- Dec. 4 – Lighting of City of Abbeville Christmas tree
- Dec. 5 – HudsonAlpha breakfast
- Dec. 5 – Henry Co. schools ‘Business Etiquette Luncheon – Great Southern Conference Center
- Dec. 6 – Headland Christmas lighting and Christmas parade
- Dec. 6 – Wiregrass Forum breakfast – Ozark
- Dec. 10/11 – ACCA new county commissioners’ training – Montgomery
- Dec. 11 – ACCA board meeting – Montgomery
- Dec. 11/12 – ACCA Legislative Conference – Montgomery

Dates to Remember:

- Dec. 13 – 100-year time capsule burial ceremony – 9:30 – Courthouse lawn
- Dec. 13 – Abbeville Airport dedication – 11:00 – Abbeville Municipal Airport
- Dec. 15 – Probate Judge retirement program – Abbeville Methodist Church – 2:00
- Dec. 17 – SEARP&DC board meeting – Dothan
- Dec. 18 – Cybersecurity meeting (Henry County department heads) – Herndon Building
- Dec. 19 – December administrative meeting – Herndon Building – 9:00 AM
- Dec. 19 – December commission meeting – Annex Building – 11:00 AM
- Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve Candlelight ‘Come and Go’ Communion Service – Abbeville Methodist Church (4:00-6:00) – Christmas Eve Communion Service (6:00)
- Dec. 24/25 – Christmas holidays – Merry Christmas!
- Jan. 1 – New Year’s Day holiday – Happy New Year!