

“Five Questions”

One of the true blessings of this job has been my twelve-year association with ACCA (Association of County Commissions of Alabama). ACCA is recognized as one of the strongest lobbying groups in the state. It's led by Sonny Brasfield, possibly the most effective leader I've ever known. I had the privilege of serving on its board of directors for nine years and was honored to serve as the association's president in 2019-2020. Sonny is a fellow graduate of the University of Alabama, a journalism major who wrote the January 27, 1983 front-page article of the Montgomery Advertiser's account of the death of Coach Paul Bryant (Coach Bryant had died suddenly the day before. I still have the original article.) Sonny has become a very special friend and has taught me more about public service and leadership than anyone I've ever known. Two weeks ago, Karen and I attended our final ACCA Convention at Perdido Resort in Orange Beach. Before the convention, Sonny posed five questions to each of the three former ACCA presidents who are retiring this year. As I approach the end of my tenure in county government, I'd like to share them with you in this month's column.

(1) Can you remember why you decided to run for President of the Association?

I guess there are two men to “blame.” Immediately after I was elected in 2012, Henry County Engineer Chris Champion explained to me and the new Commissioners the importance of being involved – really involved – in the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. Chris is now not only our County Engineer but also our Chief Operating Officer. A few years later, Mark Culver, then-Chair of the Houston County Commission, our neighbors to the south, asked me to seek election to the ACCA Board of Directors to represent District 11. A year later, he encouraged me to consider running for an ACCA office. Both these men have served our Association well, and it has been a pleasure to work shoulder-to-shoulder with them.

(2) What stands out the most about your year as ACCA President?

The thing I'll remember most about that year was a five-letter word: “COVID.” This was a time of change and continuous adjustment for everyone in our county, our state and our country. We never knew what the next day would bring or how we would be able to continue our mission of service. But, fortunately for all 67 counties, our state Association took the lead in a fight against what had become an almost invisible enemy. In many ways, that year changed the manner in which we conducted business, served our citizens or even the way we spent time with our families. It significantly changed the way we operated in Henry County.

(3) Over the years, county government has changed. Can you point out a couple of important changes during your time on the County Commission?

I think those of us at the local level have become more effective listeners and have a better understanding of the importance of communication with our citizens. I've learned that when we resist the urge to talk and just take the time to listen, most issues will often diffuse themselves. People want to know that someone is willing to listen to what they have to say. When I was elected, I promised to write a monthly column in our local newspaper as a way of keeping citizens informed about what we were doing in county government. I titled it "From the Courthouse to Your House" and, in it, I've tried to address a different topic each month.

(4) What do you think you will miss the most about county government?

Without a doubt, it will be the relationships that have been developed within Henry County, throughout the Wiregrass region and across the state. I've made lifelong friends through my involvement with ACCA, as well as through the Alabama Probate Judges Association. I'll miss being in a position to help folks in some small way. I'll miss being involved in the legislative process. I'll miss building teams to help administer accurate and fair elections. I'll miss presiding over adoption hearings. Foster parents and adoptive parents are unsung heroes in our society. And, maybe most of all, I'll miss being around my staff, our department heads and local and state elected officials on a daily basis.

(5) Finally, what do you plan to do with all the "free" time you'll have after you leave office in January?

I'm not sure, but I do know I'll stay active. I'd like to do some volunteer work, possibly some adjunct teaching at the local community college, and maybe even dust off a set of golf clubs that have been in hibernation for 10 years. I'll be available to help with a smooth transition to the next administration. And I'm open to venturing into a new career – one with more flexible hours. And I'm sure we'll travel more. I think we'd enjoy a Mississippi River cruise and maybe a trip to Normandy. Karen has always said that she'd go anywhere in the world with me as long as I would have her home by dark (maybe that part will now change). And our world will continue to revolve around 11 grandchildren – from Morganton, NC, to Mount Laurel, AL; from Senoia, GA to just down the road in Dothan. They are our heart and always will be. The Lord has blessed us both with good health and a wonderful family, and we plan to serve Him by continuing to serve others.

30 Day Review:

- Probate cases in July: two wills probated, two administrations, one final settlement, five miscellaneous hearings, five guardianships, three involuntary commitments, two name changes and twelve marriage certificates recorded.
- If your last name begins with 'Q', 'S', or 'T', September is your month to renew your tags.
- Aug. 13 – SEARP&DC nominating committee meeting
- Aug. 14 – HCEDA board meeting – Headland
- Aug. 14 – met with area elected officials at Southeast Alabama Youth Services – Dothan
- Aug. 15 – August commission meetings
- Aug. 20-23 – ACCA 96th Annual Convention – Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach
- Aug. 26 – HCHR board meeting
- Aug. 26 – jail review meeting with JMR+H Architects
- Aug. 27 – SARCOA ribbon cutting – Dothan
- Aug. 27 – Henry County Youth Leadership student/parent reception – Headland
- Aug. 28 – Henry County Youth Leadership student ice-breaker – Camp Butter & Egg – Troy
- Sept. 3 – called meeting of the Henry County Commission to discuss jail project
- Sept. 4 – Henry County E911 board meeting – Headland
- Sept 5 – CRS site visit to the Henry County jail
- Sept 10 – Wallace College Foundation Board meeting – Wallace College
- Sept. 11 – Henry County Commission work session
- Sept. 11-13 – Alabama Probate Judges Association Fall Conference - Tuscaloosa

Dates to Remember:

- Sept. 17 – initial 'Leadership Henry' outing
- Sept. 18 – participant on the Wiregrass Estate Planning Council Probate Judges panel
- Sept. 19 – September Administrative meeting – 9:00 – Herndon Building
- Sept. 19 – September Commission meeting – 11:00 – Annex Building
- Sept. 21 – Celebrate Recovery Mental Health Program – 9:00 – Abbeville Methodist Church
- Sept. 27 – Wiregrass Forum breakfast – 7:30 – Hoppergrass Restaurant – Ozark
- Sept. 27 – Liberty Church Fish Fry for jail personnel – Henry County jail parking lot