

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION

Annual Report 2014-2015

*Proudly serving
the communities
of the Georgia
Mountains
Region since 1962*

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** Served Partial Year*





CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Once again, as chairman of this Regional Commission, I wish to express my great satisfaction and optimism as to the condition of our organization. We continue to lead all other commissions in the state in achievement and leadership and our membership and staff are equal to none and above all.

Our region is more or less 3,500 square miles of the most beautiful country God has created. Mountains, rivers, agriculture, and vistas are absolutely unrivaled. It is populated by over 600,000 residents in cities, towns, and county that are of strong fiber and make this country great and diverse. People are of similar needs, wants, and desires, which this Regional Commission strives to assist by our meager means. Though we may be separated by lines on a map, we realize that we have much in common. We also realize that we can advance, support, and achieve much more by working together and pooling our resources than by standing alone.



We offer our services to our members by way of economic development, planning, workforce development, information services, and other local assistance. This assistance is absolutely necessary and instrumental to many rural areas that otherwise would not have the resources to perform at the level of service demanded by today's citizenry. We not only perform, but excel to the point of national recognition. National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Innovation Awards for this year were as follows: King's Hawaiian Expansion Project – Nancy Smallwood; Aerial Photography and LiDAR Consortium Project – Faith Bryan; Training 2 Work Offender Job Training Program – Diana Eddins-Wiggin. This recognition is testimony to the proficient staff and leadership of our organization.

Staff and leadership is up to the regional challenge. Led by the very capable, W. Danny Lewis as Executive Director, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission's staff is the envy of the state. Our organization's staff is regularly called upon for leadership roles and direction at state level conferences, as well as state committee assignments. By National recognition, we have achieved our place in the county as a well-run and staffed operation that gives its members a first rate service for a value not exceeded in the private industry. Our staff is highly trained, experienced, and dedicated, to the point of pride in our products and services.

The 51 local governments representatives, both city and county, by popular election are not only the highest elected officials in our region, but are augmented by private business leaders as well. This board is the best the region has to offer. These Mayors, Chairmen, and business leaders guide policy and given direction to the Executive Director. The results of this voting board are evident in an enhanced ethic policy, open and transparent meetings, and attitude of integrity. This desire to unselfishly promote the region without personal political gain, is the true essence of our success. The board members of the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission recognizes that if the region prospers, we all prosper. It is evident that this board serves voluntarily with distinction.

Sam Norton, Chairman





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Staff photos were taken at The Links at Lake Toccoa in Toccoa, Stephens County. Photography courtesy of Al Bell.





Executive Director's Report



W. Danny Lewis
Executive Director

Greetings to everyone –

Isn't it wonderful to live, work, and play in the tourism part and prettiest part of this great state? It is our pleasure to serve the 51 cities, towns, and counties that make up the Georgia Mountains Region.

This year has been one that will be remembered for years to come. Some highlights from this year:

- Our new accounting software for the Finance Department has been installed and our staff trained.
- New auditors were employed and have completed our first audit under this contract.
- We offered a new project to our member communities. While everyone did not choose to participate within our region, 25 communities did join the project. The project area extended from Milledgeville to Cobb County, and the City of Atlanta. This \$1.6 million project was finished and delivered within budget and on time.
- We have seen a 93% effective rate in our grants submitted and approved.
- Workforce Development staff have set a record on participants served and goals accomplished.
- I am very pleased that the GMRC received three NADO Innovation Awards. Congrats to Faith Bryan, Diana Eddins-Wiggin, and Nancy Smallwood for submitting the nominations for awards.

What a great region to call home! Thanks to our state and federal elected officials, our city and county elected and appointed officials, and outstanding council, boards, committees, and staff. We are making a difference in the beautiful Georgia Mountains Region!

Sincerely,

W. Danny Lewis
Executive Director



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Helping Local Communities Compete in the Global Market



Pictured L to R: Nancy Smallwood, Economic Development Representative; Patrick Larson, Economic Development Representative; Heather Feldman, Director of Economic Development; and Meisa Pace, Grant Administrator

Economic Development Administration

The **City of Lavonia** (lead), **Franklin County**, and **Hart County** received Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant funding in the amount of \$694,865 for the Interstate 85 Northern Sewer Trunk Line Project.

The Economic Development Department ended another successful year with 13 approved grant and loan applications totaling \$3,422,882 in funding for member governments. The Department also administered 10 projects totaling \$4.7 million in federal and state funds during the last fiscal year. As a result of these projects, 780 jobs will be created for residents in the region. In addition, \$89.5 million in private investment was leveraged for these projects.

Appalachian Regional Commission

A total of \$868,350 in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funding was awarded to member governments for the following projects:

- **Camp Toccoa** at Currahee - Camp Toccoa Restoration Project
- **City of Cornelia** - Infrastructure Relocation
- **City of Dahlonega** - Broadband Extension
- **Franklin County** - I-85 Wastewater Collection System Upgrade
- **Gainesville - Hall 96 Roundtable, Inc.** - Lake Lanier Olympic Venue Restoration Project

CEDS ANNUAL UPDATE

In an effort to create a more streamlined approach, GMRC staff consolidated efforts and combined the 2015 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Regional Plan. The Annual Update identified the region's needs and priorities, which culminated key issues and strategies. The Annual Update includes the Five-Year Work Program of recommended action items to address key issues.



Community Development Block Grant—Employment Incentive Program Grant

A total of \$858,501 in Community Development Block Grant - Employment Incentive Program Grant funding was awarded to the following two communities:

White County - Road Improvements - Business Expansion

Hart County and **City of Hartwell** - Sewer Pre-Treatment Facility - Lake Foods

Recreational Trails Grants

Recreational Trails Grant funding from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in the amount of \$157,636 was awarded to the following two communities:

- **City of Maysville** - Maysville City Park Trail
- **Hart County** - Hart County Park Trail

Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)

The **City of Lavonia** was awarded \$218,530 in Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Funding from the AFG grant will be used to purchase new Self Contained Breathing Apparatuses (SCBA) and an air compressor for the Lavonia Fire Department.

Drug Free Communities Grant Awarded

Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council was awarded a \$125,000 grant for five years from the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, a department within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Community Development Block Grant

The **City of Cornelia** was awarded a \$500,000 Community Development Block (CDBG) for sewer improvements. This is the fifth CDBG grant award in six years.

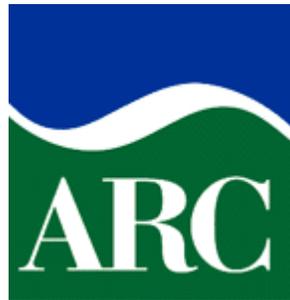


The GMRC received a 2015 National Association of Development Organization Innovation Award for the **City of Oakwood** and the **Gainesville and Hall County** Development Authority's Road Improvement Project to serve the King's Hawaiian facility. GMRC prepared three grant applications for road improvements. The three approved grants totaled \$1.6 million in funding. A total of 150 jobs were created and 167 jobs retained at a private investment of \$25.5 million.



Celebrating 50 Years of Regional Impact

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. Since its inception in 1965, the Georgia Mountains Region has received **\$66.5 million** in funding for projects.



The work of the Appalachian Regional Commission has served to strengthen the region's economy and improve living standards in the Appalachian counties.

ARC has funded numerous projects over the years that have created jobs, encouraged business development, supported tourism and agri-tourism development, increased education and job training opportunities, and improved telecommunications, infrastructure, and transportation in the Georgia Mountains Region.



In the last five years, ARC has invested \$6 million in funding and has leveraged \$7.8 million in local funds, created 1,089 jobs, retained 685 jobs, and has generated \$218 million in private investment for the region.



The U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration was created under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 to generate new jobs, to help protect existing jobs, and to stimulate commercial and industrial growth in economically distressed areas of the United States.



The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has invested approximately **\$31 million** in funding for projects in the Georgia Mountains Region. Funding from EDA has been able to leverage local funds to upgrade and expand water and sewer systems, construct transportation networks leading to significant job growth and private investment. EDA has supported technology-led economic development linking universities and industries in the region.



FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Financial

Human Resources

Administrative Support



Pictured L to R: Barbara Moseley, *Financial Assistant*; Nona Turk, *Billing Specialist*; Becky Sievers, *Finance Director*; Andrea Newsom, *HR Specialist/RLF Rep.*; Cheryl Smith, *Financial Assistant*

Financial Highlights

- The RC's total net position exceeded its liabilities by \$2,774,523 for the Fiscal Year.
- There was an increase in the RC's General Fund balance of \$298,026.
- The RC's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$1,547,855, an increase of \$298,026 from the prior year. Of this amount, \$1,489,329 (unassigned fund balance) may be used to meet the RC's ongoing obligations to the member local governments and creditors.

Revolving Loan Fund

GMRC continues to administer the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). In FY15, three new loans were approved at a combined \$215,000 for new and expanding businesses in the region. The GMRC RLF Program currently has 16 active loans totaling \$1.7 million.

During FY 2015, the GMRC Finance Department had four major changes:

- Replaced antiquated accounting software
- Implemented a modified Uniform Chart of Accounts
- Changed banks and reduced eight banking accounts to six accounts
- Retained new audit firm

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Administrative Services Department provides a wide array of support services of the internal day-to-day operations for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission. In addition to the day to day duties, the staff has assisted on several projects during FY15, such as the Aerial Photography and LiDAR, City of Toccoa's Cemetery Inventory, Franklin County I-85 Wastewater Improvements, and Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates just to mention a few. The staff also coordinates and schedules meetings for the Council, Boards, Committees, and other groups. Our main focus is to assist our cities and counties in any way possible.



Pictured L to R: Marissa Smith, *Administrative Secretary*; and Peggy Lovell, *Executive Assistant*



INFORMATION SERVICES

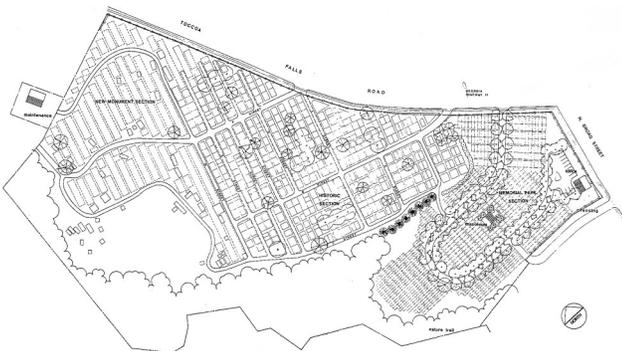
An Innovative Approach to Promoting Regionalism and Technology



Faith Bryan, Information Services Director

Toccoa Cemetery Project

The Historic Toccoa Cemetery was established in 1875 and lies on 26 acres off of Toccoa Falls Road and North Broad Street. The project scope includes the conversion of the cemetery record books and paper maps to digital and conducting an extensive inventory of visible headstones. Information recorded from the headstones include full name, date of birth, date of death, military information, etc. GMRC Staff use Global Positioning (GPS) mapping grade technology (+/- 3 feet accuracy) for field data collection and takes digital photographs of each headstone. These photographs are tied back to the map and spreadsheet information for future access in the city's files.

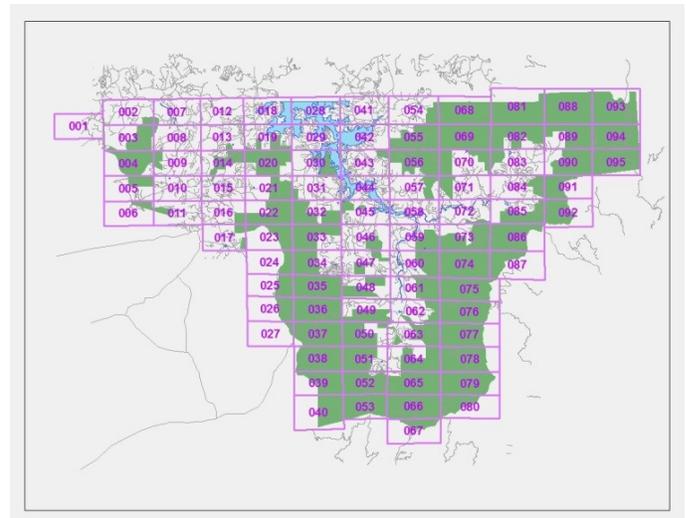


MASTER PLAN
CITY OF TOCCOA, GEORGIA
CITY CEMETERY



Towns County Parcel Project

The Towns County Tax Assessors Department had been operating off of outdated paper maps and had requested that GMRC staff assist them with updating these maps. GMRC began the process by acquiring and converting the AutoCAD data. By using the E911 road centerlines as a base, that had been acquired using Global Positioning System (GPS), we were able to georeference the AutoCAD information and properly place it within Towns County. The next step involved incorporating parcel splits and merges from 2009 through 2014 into the parcel dataset.



When the project is complete, Towns County will be able to overlay the parcel database on top of the 2015 Aerial Photography and other digital datasets. This will enable the Tax Assessors staff to view and locate properties accurately and efficiently providing the citizens of the County much needed information.

Annexation Map Updates

GMRC staff prepared Annexation Map Updates for the following two communities:

- City of Carnesville
- City of Demorest

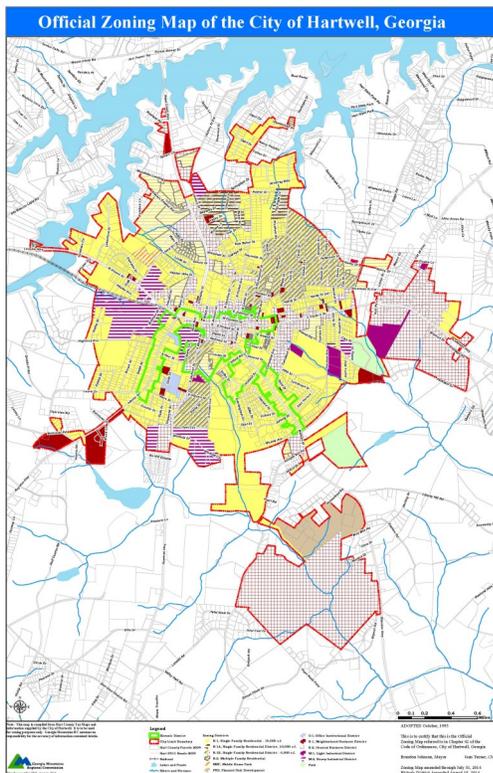


The GMRC received a 2015 NADO Innovation Award for the 2015 Aerial Photography and LiDAR project. The \$1.6 million project, was the largest single project that the GMRC had ever administered and the largest Aerial Photography and LiDAR Acquisition Project in the State of Georgia in 2015. GMRC staff was honored to present this project at the 2014 Georgia Association of Regional Commissions Annual Conference.

Zoning Map Updates

GMRC staff prepared Zoning Map Updates for the following five communities:

- **City of Clermont**
- **City of Dawsonville**
- **City of Hartwell**
- **City of Lavonia**
- **City of Maysville**



Aerial Photography & LiDAR Project

This project administered by GMRC and fully funded by the county and city participants, is a consortium effort for the purpose of acquiring Aerial Photography, Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) and Oblique Imagery. Project participants consisted of 23 counties and 3 cities, are located in 5 Regional Commission service areas, and covered over 6,500 square miles. By participating in this consortium effort, the cities and counties saved 40% of the cost over conducting the same type project on their own.



The acquisition phase for the orthoimagery and LiDAR was complete on April 1st, 2015. The contractor collected the data during prime leaf-off season to provide a clear picture of structures and features on the ground. The processing phase began shortly after acquisition was complete. LiDAR data was delivered within the month of June while the Orthoimagery processing continued. Final project deliverables were provided to the participants in October 2015 on time and within budget.



PLANNING

Helping Communities Shape Their Future



Pictured L to R: Caleb Davidson, *Regional Planner*; Joe Rothwell, *Regional Planner*; and Adam Hazell, *Planning Director*

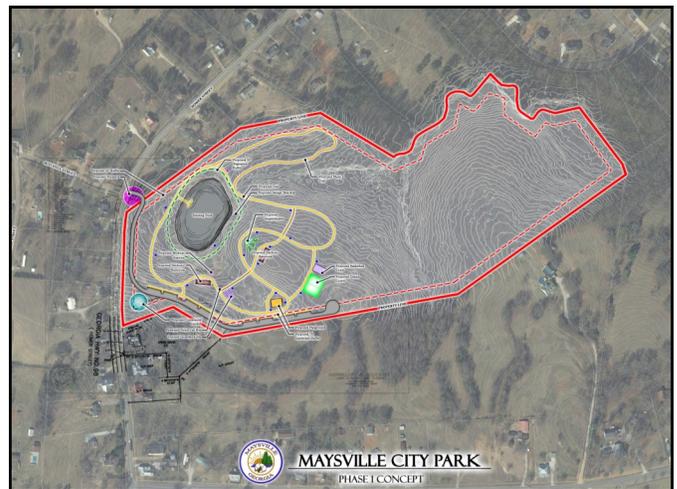
Dawsonville Cemetery Project

GMRC conducted an extensive inventory of more than 793 known burials within the 1.5 acre cemetery known as the Historic Dawsonville Cemetery. Assessments included data on the headstone type, the material it was made of, current condition and symbols found on many historic headstones. Information collected included whether they were a member of the military and other affiliations such as a physician, nurse, mason or a member of other notable social fraternal organizations. The presentation also included information on how to care for the headstones and appropriate fencing, seating and signage to be added during future cemetery beautification projects by the city.



Maysville Park Plan

The City of Maysville was able to acquire a 40+ acre property just north of City Hall for development as their first park. The GMRC provided a conceptual design plan for the park based on community input and local budget considerations. The plan helped the City formalize which ideas to take to the engineers, saving time and money, and was also used in the successful application for a \$100,000 grant for construction of the trail.



Fire Services Assessments

Continuing a new initiative, these studies develop long-range demand and need forecast for fire services to help counties plan budgets, personnel policies, and replacement schedules for major equipment and facilities. The GMRC worked with **Lumpkin County** during FY15 and will be doing more each year.

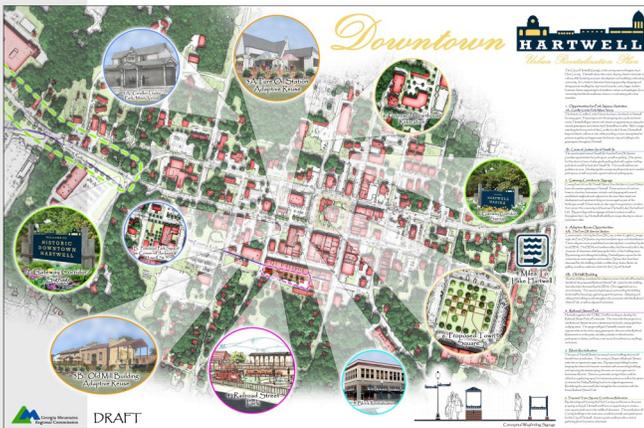
Regional Plan Reviews

The GMRC conducted 45 regional reviews for projects requiring state compliance, including local comprehensive plans, Developments of Regional Impact (DRI), environmental and cultural impact assessments (Section 106), and development along the Chattahoochee River corridor (Metropolitan River Protection Act – (MRPA)).



Downtown Redevelopment

Tourism is a major part of the region's economy, and many historic downtowns are part of the Appalachian culture contributing to this tourism. Communities wish to restore, revitalize or improve their urban cores to boost local economies and retain their identities against suburban expansion. Staff provided assistance to the **City of Hartwell**.



Demorest Woman's Club Economic Feasibility Study

The City of Demorest, Downtown Development Authority, and the Woman's Club commissioned the GMRC to prepare a study to explore options to improve the building so that it better serves the community. An assessment of the building was conducted to evaluate the building's physical condition and identify the most important repairs that would be needed for the building to continue to be utilized. Conceptual drawings were created to assist in visioning and space planning to determine how best to use the space.

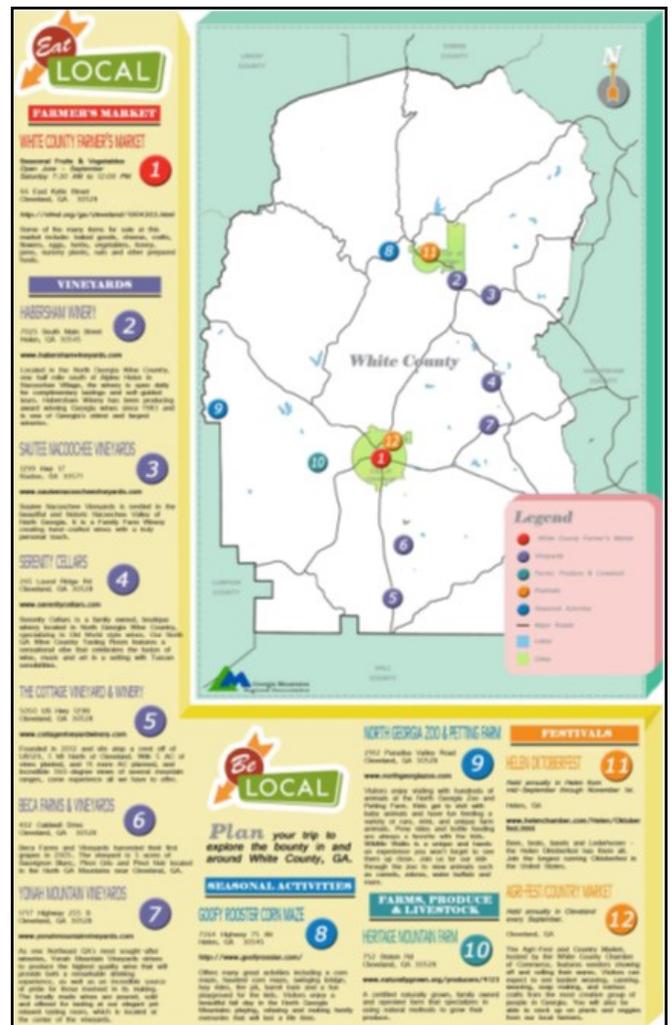


Local Food Planning

In response to various Local Foods initiatives, the GMRC updated inventories of local farmer's markets, public farms, and other agri-tourism assets. The GMRC is working with these and other stakeholders to increase communication between local growers and consumers. For FY15, the GMRC developed a promotional poster and brochure template about publicly accessible local growers. This material is being distributed to markets, schools and other large consumers in the region, as well as made available through local chambers of commerce.

In FY 2015, the following three counties were completed:

- **Habersham County**
- **Towns County**
- **White County**



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Improving the Skills of the Region's Workforce to Drive Economic Growth



Pictured L to R: Front Row: Danielle Avelar, Ebony Tucker, Diane Jackson, Niki Duncan, Josette Jeanis, Wanda Payne, Diana Eddins-Wiggin, Nona Turk, and Jessica Williams; **Middle Row:** John Phillips and Keith Krauth; **Back Row:** Micah Thomas, Ginger Little, Samantha Bolling, Dawn Bruce, Whitney Williams, Cheryl Smith, and Dan Thornton.

Mobile Training Units

GMWD Mobile Training Units provided services and training for both Adults and Youth combining computer and internet access for job search and career development. During FY15, approximately 2,600 people visited the Mobile Training Vehicles for individualized services. Over 3,900 different actions have been tracked on board the Mobile Units. This includes 1,042 on-line job searches, 606 online job applications placed, 676 resumes' developed/critiqued, 36 individuals assisted with skills testing, 316 career assessment surveys, and 880 people received information on the WIOA program and the services provided by Georgia Mountains Workforce Development.



This has been a pivotal year for the Georgia Mountains Workforce Development Department (GMWD). Preparation for the change from the **Workforce Investment Act** to the **Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act** was instrumental in all our programs throughout the year. GMWD now has an active social media presence. The Facebook page is updated with the latest MTU and Overview session schedules along with information on job postings and community events throughout the region.

Intake received 1,794 visits for services to the office during FY 2015. In addition, they also received 530 applications for adult services.

Adult & Dislocated Worker

GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served 520 individuals in FY 2015. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. WIA funding allowed these individuals to attend a technical school or college for up to 24 months to receive specialized training to enter today's competitive job force in a Growth and Demand field in the Georgia Mountains area. A few highlights from the year:

- GMWD worked in cooperation with Lanier Technical College to began a roundtable session with Hall County manufactures to start a listening session so that training services would more closely coordinate with manufacturing needs.
- Assisted Eaton Aerospace with Incumbent Worker Training expenses associated with new and upgraded skills in Blue Print Reading and Soft Skills Training for 150 full-time employees.
- Over 1,200 potential applicants attended overview sessions held throughout our 13 counties. Overview sessions are designed to provide applicants with all the information needed to apply for training through GMWD.



- Rapid Response provided assistance to 177 existing workers prior to job loss due to plant closing or relocation.



- Over 1,200 potential applicants attended overview sessions held throughout our 13 counties. Overview sessions are designed to provide applicants with all the information needed to apply for training through GMWD.

On-The-Job Training (OJT)

GMWD met with 13 employers ranging from manufacturing and graphics companies to assisted living facilities in seven counties to discuss how the On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) could assist in meeting their employment needs. Two adults were placed in new careers with two employers through the OJT Program. They received training in positions as Conveyor Technicians and Machine Operators.



The GMRC received a 2015 Innovation Award for the Training2Work (T2W) Offender Job Training Program. In coordination with the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division and Goodwill of North Georgia, the T2W program is part of Governor Nathan Deal's administration's plan to help former inmates become productive members of society once released. The program provided training to 11 female participants from the Arrendale State Prison.

Youth Services

The GMWD received 150 new applications and during the year served 356 youth in the Youth Program during FY 2015. A great success realized by the youth department this year in a new program at the Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center where five "Out of School Youth" received their GED's. 127 Students received follow up training after completing their WIA Program. Highlights from the year:

- 39 of 40 youth completed the Summer Work Experience showing a 97.5% completion rate. Several youth toured King's Hawaiian Bakery in **Oakwood** to learn about manufacturing processes.



- Provided tutoring assistance to 54 students in **Franklin County, Habersham County, Hall County, Towns County, and Union County.**
- Students from **Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, and Union Counties** participated in the Youth Employment Apprenticeship Resource (Y.E.A.R.) Program.
- 21 students participated in the Credit Recovery Assistance Program in the following counties: **Habersham, Hall, Rabun, Stephens, and White.**
- Life Skills Training averaged 20 students monthly in the following counties: **Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Lumpkin, Stephens, White, Union,** and the **Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center.**



2014 Outstanding Service Awards



Wanda Payne
Employee of the Year



Dean Scarborough
Elected Official of the Year



Bill Chafin
Board Member of the Year



Charlie Auvermann
Appointed Official of the Year



CHAIRMAN'S AWARD



Congressman Doug Collins

CONGRATS!!!!

A Hall County native, Congressman Doug Collins was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2012 and took office in January 2013 representing the ninth district in Georgia.

Prior to his election to the U.S. House of Representatives, Doug Collins served in the Georgia State House of Representatives serving the 27th District from 2007 - 2013. Collins also serves in the Air Force Reserves and served a combat tour in 2008 in Iraq.

In the current 114th Congress, Doug is a member of both the House Committee on the Judiciary and is Vice-Chair of its Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property and the Internet, working to encourage innovation and copyright protection. A member of the House Committee on Rules, Doug helps to manage every piece of House legislation.

Doug and his wife have three children and reside in Hall County.

Congrats to our new GMRC Officers!!



Pictured L to R: George Wangemann, Secretary; Dean Scarborough, Chairman; and James Grogan, Vice-Chairman



2015 Year in Review





Georgia Mountains Regional Commission
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Heather Feldman, *Editor*

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