A vibrant field of sunflowers in full bloom, with a dense forest of green trees in the background under a clear sky. The sunflowers have bright yellow petals and dark brown centers. The scene is captured from a low angle, making the flowers appear large and prominent.

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

2017—2018 Annual Report

Chairman



Dean Scarborough

Vice-Chairman



Sam Norton

Secretary



George Wangemann

Georgia Mountains

2017-2018 COUNCIL MEMBERS

BANKS COUNTY

Danny Maxwell - Banks County
Jerry Payne - Town of Homer
Leslie George - Private Sector

DAWSON COUNTY

Billy Thurmond – Dawson County
Mike Eason - City of Dawsonville
David Headley - Private Sector

FORSYTH COUNTY

Pete Amos - Forsyth County
Jason Evans - City of Cumming
Robert Long - Private Sector

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Thomas Bridges— Franklin County
Ralph Owens - City of Lavonia
Gerald Voyles - Private Sector

HABERSHAM COUNTY

Natalie Crawford— Habersham County
Audrey Turner - Town of Alto
Ken Schubring - Private Sector

HALL COUNTY

Richard Higgins—Hall County
George Wangemann - City of Gainesville
Deborah Mack - Private Sector

HART COUNTY

Ricky Carter - Hart County
Tray Hicks - City of Hartwell
William Chafin - Private Sector

LUMPKIN COUNTY

Chris Dockery - Lumpkin County
Sam Norton - City of Dahlonega
J.B. Jones - Private Sector

RABUN COUNTY

Greg James - Rabun County
Debbie Chisholm - City of Clayton
Douglas Wayne - Private Sector

STEPHENS COUNTY

Dean Scarborough - Stephens County
David Austin - City of Toccoa
Connie Tabor - Private Sector

TOWNS COUNTY

Cliff Bradshaw—Towns County
*Liz Ordiales - City of Hiawassee
*Andrea Gibby—City of Young Harris
David Stovall - Private Sector

UNION COUNTY

Lamar Paris - Union County
Jim Conley - City of Blairsville
Mitch Griggs - Private Sector

WHITE COUNTY

Travis Turner - White County
Annie Sutton - City of Cleveland
Bill Black - Private Sector

GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENTS

Rex Farmer
Will Wade
Angela Whidby

LT. GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENT

Vacant

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE'S APPOINTMENT

Vacant

**Served Partial Year*

Chairman's Letter



I am pleased to bring you the Chairman's message once again this year. If I could put a theme on our year, it would be "A Year of Self Improvement". Through the leadership of Executive Director Heather Feldman, many new polices and programs have been introduced to improve our organization. Our staff has embraced these changes which has allowed us to fine tune our efforts and better serve the 51 local governments that make up the Georgia Mountains Region. Just to mention a couple of these, one is a training program for newly elected officials in our region. This program enables first-time elected officials to learn about GMRC and the programs offered to help their communities. Another positive addition is a comprehensive strategic plan for the Council and Staff. This plan gives all of us direction, a clear understanding of our mission, and how we can fulfill it to its fullest capabilities.

The entire region seems to be experiencing the economic boom that is also occurring across the state and nation. Whether your community's focus is tourism, manufacturing, agriculture or services, GMRC staff can assist your local government in this growth in many positive ways.

Again this year, certain projects that were successfully completed by our staff were submitted for national Innovation Awards through the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). Three of our projects were selected for these awards. Congratulations to our staff and to the communities where these efforts were made! Furthermore, our staff was actively involved in two other projects which won NADO awards through the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions. I am very proud of our staff. It is nice to receive awards and be recognized nationally, but the main thing is that we are serving our communities and trying to make life better for the people in this region.

I see great opportunities on the horizon for the Georgia Mountains Region. Our area's natural beauty is continuing to attract tourists and good folks that want to live, work, and raise their families here.

Once again, I want to thank our dedicated council members for serving as a member of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission. Their commitment to participate and attend our monthly meetings and serve on our different committees contributes to the positive results we experience in our region. I also want to thank each of the council members for allowing me to continue to serve as GMRC Chairman. As we look to the new year with the council's leadership and support, with the direction of our Executive Director Heather Feldman, and with our professional staff to carry out our mission, I look for great things to continue for the Georgia Mountains Region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Scarborough".

Dean Scarborough,
Chairman

GMRC STAFF



In this issue:

- 5 Executive Director's Report
- 6 Economic Development
- 8 Information Services
- 10 Planning
- 13 Workforce Development
- 16 Finance & Administration
- 17 Outstanding Service Awards
- 18 2018 Year in Review

**This year's GMRC Staff portraits were taken at the beautiful Amicalola Falls Lodge in Dawsonville, GA.
Thank you Dawson County! Photo credit—John Seibel Photography*

Executive Director's Report



Our purpose is to enhance the lives of people living in the 13-county Georgia Mountains Region. Since our establishment in 1962, we have maintained a commitment to provide quality services to local governments in the Georgia Mountains Region. As I began my tenure as Executive Director, the GMRC was presented with an opportunity to refocus its mission and redefine the agency's value and relevance to the Georgia Mountains Region. Through a comprehensive strategic planning process, the GMRC was able to establish a defined mission, vision, values, and establish goals, objectives, and strategies for moving the agency forward, and in FY 2018, created the first ever Strategic Plan for the GMRC. This Strategic Plan will be used to guide decisions about resources and where staff efforts will be directed in the future, resulting in an overall action plan for the agency.

Our 13-county region and 700,000+ residents continue as one of the major manufacturing and economic hubs of our state. While each year brings new challenges, a spirit of cooperation provides a solid foundation for our continued success. The GMRC is not just a collection of 51 member governments, but also an idea of cooperation and collaboration driven by member support and built by staff of dedicated and knowledgeable professionals. We build and foster regional relationships, provide solutions for communities and fill gaps in staff and administrative resources. Our team also serves as a regional facilitator bringing diverse stakeholders to the table to address the most important issues facing the region, delivering holistic and collaborative planning.

In the last year, GMRC has made substantial progress towards capitalizing on these opportunities and positioning the agency to lead the Georgia Mountains Region toward better mobility, resource management, information technology, and community planning. Furthermore, our focus on work skills development through WorkSource ensures people in our region keep up with the ever-changing skill sets required by business and industry. Through our focus on economic development, we ensure our region is equipped to compete in the global economy.

While our programs are broad and widely carried, they all come back to serving the people of the Georgia Mountains Region. Whether it is general administration, finance and RLF funding, assistance with grants, planning, GIS, or workforce development, we want to be a key resource for getting the job done!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our council members, member governments, and partners, for your strong support and commitment in FY 2018. This collaboration has been crucial to the GMRC's success. Additionally, the GMRC is blessed with fantastically dedicated and talented staff, and I am very thankful to be surrounded by individuals who take such pride in all they do and put so much effort into every program we provide.

I am pleased to provide this Annual Report for the GMRC, covering our activities and accomplishments in FY 2018. I hope that you find it informative, and thank you for supporting the GMRC!!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heather J. Feldman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heather J. Feldman
Executive Director

Economic Development



Pictured L to R: Patrick Larson - Senior Project Manager; Gina Kessler - Grant Administrator; Laurin Yoder - Project Manager; and Daniel Martin - Director of Economic Development

The Economic Development Department ended another successful year with nine approved grant and loan applications totaling \$5,960,538 in funding for member governments. The Department also administered fifteen projects totaling \$7,375,374 in federal and state funds during the last fiscal year. As a result of these projects, 296 jobs will be created for residents in the region. In addition, \$688,000,000 in private investment was leveraged for these projects.

Recreational Trails Grant Program



The City of Dahlonega was approved for \$134,501 in Recreational Trails Grant (RTP) funding for Phase I of Yahoola Creek Trail. The RTP program is administered by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR).



The GMRC was pleased to secure a \$2,225,177 grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission's Southern Automotive and Aviation Workforce fund to assist in funding water infrastructure improvements which will support Georgia Renewable Power (GRP) in Franklin, Madison, and Elbert Counties. This project was a collaborative effort in partnership with the North-east Georgia Regional Commission.



Banks County	Economic Development Blueprint Plan	\$50,000.00
City of Hartwell	Depot Street Improvements	\$304,360.00
City of Cleveland	Water Infrastructure Improvements	\$274,534.00
Hart County IBA	Sewer Improvements	\$456,168.00
Franklin County, Madison County, and City of Elberton	Water Infrastructure Improvements	\$2,225,177.00
Total ARC Funding		\$3,310,239.00



BANKS COUNTY DIANA FOOD PROJECT

The Economic Development Department is pleased to be the recipient of a NADO Innovation Award for the Diana Food project in **Banks County**. This innovative project would not be possible without the partnership and collaboration of regional, local, and business leaders. This project included federal funding support from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). Funding was awarded directly to the City of Commerce (lead applicant) and **Banks County** (co-applicant). Including Diana Food's Investment of \$50 million, the approximate total project cost is \$57,414,785.



Community Outreach Efforts

The Economic Development Department is committed to community outreach and providing information about various community and economic development programs. This year the department hosted several workshops related to new grant and loan programs, downtown development, regionalism and entrepreneurship.



CEDS

GMRC staff prepared the Annual Update for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The Annual Update identifies the region's needs and priorities, documents strategies to address these key issues, and includes a Five-Year Work Program of recommended action items.



The **Hart County** Industrial Building Authority received \$500,000 in OneGeorgia EDGE grant funding to support Nestle Purina.

Community Development Block Grants

Dawson County received \$750,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for expansion and renovations to the County Senior Center.



The **Gainesville-Hall County** Development Authority was awarded \$1,000,000 in OneGeorgia Equity funding to support terminal renovations and the expansion of Lee-Gilmer Memorial Airport.

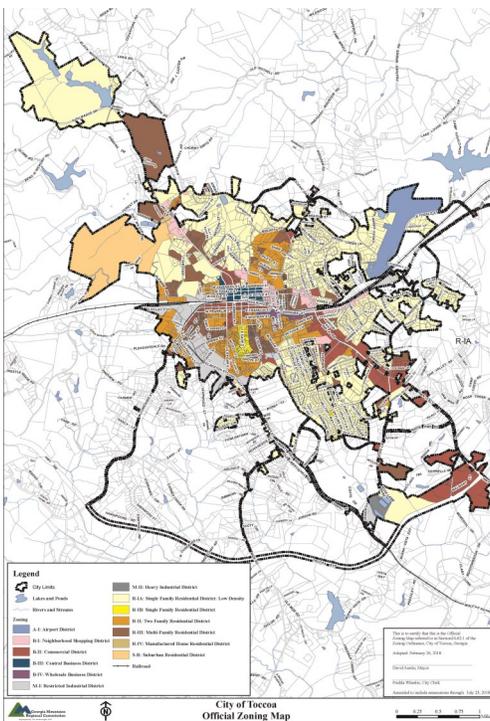


Information Services



*Pictured L to R: **Brandon Carlock**, GIS Technician and **Faith Bryan**, Information Services Director*

Toccoa Zoning Map

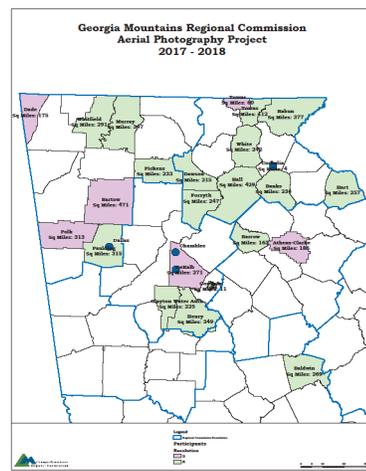


Using the most recent **Stephens County** tax parcel information, GMRC staff created the zoning classifications and city limit boundary for the **City of Toccoa**. The zoning and boundary information had not been updated since 2008. We worked closely with **Toccoa's** Planning Department to make sure the map was complete and accurate. The map was re-adopted in February of 2018.

Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) / Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS)

In preparation for the decennial census to take place in 2020, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs contracted with Regional Commissions to perform the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) and the Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS) for local governments. The LUCA process is the only opportunity offered to tribal, state, and local governments to review and comment on the U.S. Census Bureau's residential address list for their jurisdiction prior to the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau relies on a complete and accurate address list to reach every living quarters and associated population for inclusion in the census. GMRC staff processed thirty-seven (37) local governments' LUCA addresses for the region and submitted one local government under the state submission.

The Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS) is also important to the decennial census since it provides vital information to the Census Bureau regarding municipal boundary corrections and annexations. GMRC staff assisted the following municipalities: **Dawsonville, Hartwell, Maysville, Carnesville, Cleveland, and Lavonia**.



2018 Aerial Photography Project

This project was administered by GMRC and fully funded by the county and city participants. The project is a consortium effort for the purpose of acquiring aerial photography during leaf off season of 2018 (January through March). The project included 21 counties and five cities spread throughout five Regional Commissions.

USGS 3DEP LiDAR Project



USGS 3DEP LiDAR Flight 2019

In conjunction with the State of Georgia’s Geospatial Information Officer, a grant was written and awarded to acquire and process Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) derived high-resolution elevation data to be collected over an area of approximately 25,017 square miles encompassing 67 counties located in the northern and coastal areas of the state. The total commercial value of the award is approximately \$5.6 million, of which Georgia partners contributed \$1.5 million. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in Georgia and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division provided the two most significant contributions. GMRC participants matched the federal grant with \$135,105 in local funding.

Up to date and highly accurate elevation data supports key activities across the state such as: economic development, infrastructure and construction management, agriculture and precision farming, forest resources management, flood risk management, and coastal zone development and management. In the future, this elevation data will be a critical input to develop a statewide Building Information Model that will enhance public safety and emergency response services, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, and potentially saving lives.

Other Notable Projects:



Mt. Hope Cemetery Update (Dahlonega)

City of Dawsonville	Water and Sewer System Updates; Voting Districts
City of Lavonia	Water and Sewer System Updates
Towns County	Parcels and Soils Data
MAP 21	Dawson County and Hall County Traffic Control Devices
Zoning Map Updates	Hartwell, Lavonia, Young Harris, Carnesville, Dawsonville, and Homer

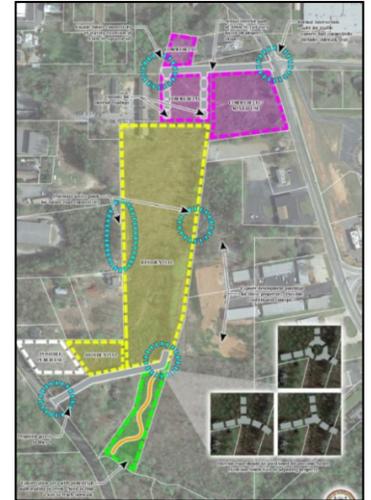
Planning



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

The Planning Department serves our region and our local governments through the pursuit of coordinated community development. The intent is to provide local leaders and decision makers with more and better information that can aid them in planning projects and policies that will move them closer to the desired vision for their community. This is done through efforts that focus on one or more of four general objectives:

- Wise management of resources
- Smart investments in utilities, facilities
- Effective strategies for managing land use
- Supporting desired economic development



*Pictured:
Conceptual Development Plan for
Dawsonville.*

GDOT Support



The Planning Department provides ongoing support to the Georgia Department of Transportation in the fields of information collection and analysis. During FY 18, the emphasis was on development of a GIS database for trails within the region, continued support of the Safe Routes to Schools program, and further work regarding the implementation of the U.S. Bike Route System in Georgia. FY 2018 also saw work on a pedestrian accessibility assessments for most of the Forsyth County middle and elementary schools.

Environmental Planning

Managing natural resources is critical to this region and many local governments due to the agricultural interests throughout and the high volume of industry tied to the area's mountains, rivers, and overall scenic beauty.



In FY18, the GMRC continued to work with local governments and the three regional water planning councils as each implements their portion of the Georgia State Water Plan. Furthermore, the GMRC also continued various projects and assistance with the development of and/or implementation of Watershed Management Plans (WMPs) needed to restore the compliance of impaired waters.

Community Development

Planning begins at the local level, and the primary vehicle for local governments to design and coordinate growth strategies is through their comprehensive plan. As both a state authorized agency and an extension of our member governments, the GMRC Planning Department works to assist our communities in developing, maintaining, and implementing their required Comprehensive Plans. During FY18, the GMRC worked on eight plan updates for thirteen communities.

As part of our state duties, the GMRC conducts regional reviews for local plans and projects. These may include environmental and cultural assessments, development assessments along the Chattahoochee River, or more. These reviews ensure compliance with state and federal regulations as well as prevent conflicting land uses or overtaxing of local resources and infrastructure.

Reviews	
Local Comprehensive Plans	8
Developments of Regional Impact	4
Metropolitan River Protection Act	6
State Intergovernmental Reviews	2
Natural Resource (Sec. 106)	10

Professional Education

Staff from the GMRC helped coordinate the 2018 Spring Conference for the Georgia Planning Association in **Gainesville** which was attended by more than 170 people. This included organizing mobile tours to Healan's Mill, Jaemor Farms, and the Lake Lanier Olympic Venue. Staff also presented a workshop featuring GMRC's fire department assessments.

The Planning Department also began hosting Lunch-and-Learn forums. Designed to provide informational learning opportunities for local planners, these will invite outside experts to bring insight and perspective to growing issues in the region. The first event focused on tiny houses and local zoning laws, while a second discussed Complete Streets road design policies and pedestrian accessibility issues.



Workforce Development



Georgia Mountains



Connecting Talent with Opportunity
A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter network

This has been an active year for WorkSource Georgia Mountains. WorkSource has seen success through Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs throughout the 13-county region. We are identifying many resources to partner with customers and training providers through the One-Stop system. As part of our outreach to the 13 counties, we have an active social media presence. Facebook has helped us share customer success stories along with MTU and Overview session schedules with information on job postings and community events throughout the region.

Intake received 1,994 visits for services to the office during FY 2018. In addition, they also received 452 applications for adult services.

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

BUSINESS SERVICES

On-the-Job Training

The On-the-Job (OJT) training program continues to grow. In FY18, ten participants were matched with companies in our region in positions ranging from Diesel Technicians to Production Supervisors to Dental Assistants. OJT provides wage reimbursements to employers to help compensate for the costs associated with training a new employee while also being a good fit for the job seeker who is not able or not wanting to attend school full-time but is looking for a way to “earn while they learn”.



Rapid Response

Rapid Response Services are designed to respond to business and existing employee needs prior to a plant closing or company relocation. 368 dislocated workers were able to learn about services and programs in the region that may assist or interest them during this employment transition period. When possible, area employers are also included to help those who are being laid off find employment quickly.

Incumbent Worker Training

A total of 38 participants from five different companies benefited from the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) program this year. IWT provides a way for business to upscale their current workforce allowing the company to grow and meet demand while also providing the employee with the possibility for higher wages and promotion opportunities.

ADULT/DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM

Transition Programs

The goal of the Transition Welding and Transition Culinary programs is to allow participants to earn a skill with which they can make a living wage upon release and help lower recidivism rates. WorkSource, in partnership with the Hall County Correctional Institution, Arrendale State Prison, Goodwill of Northeast Georgia, Lanier Technical College, and North Georgia Technical College, has offered occupational and job skills training to 64 soon-to-be released incarcerated individuals this year.



Occupational Skills Training

WorkSource Georgia Mountains (WSGM) serves adults and dislocated workers in the region who have been laid off, are unemployed, or underemployed. All participants train in a Growth and Demand Occupation for the Georgia Mountains Region and are working toward earning a certificate, diploma, or degree at a participating college or technical school, GED, or other professional licenses. 518 participants received services from WorkSource this year. Services may include the cost of tuition, books, and supplies along with supportive services such as a gas and childcare reimbursements while attending classes and job search support once training is completed.

All potential participants attend an Overview session before applying for WorkSource assistance. This year 1,251 potential participants attend an Overview to learn about the benefits and eligibility requirements of WIOA services before filling out an application.

Mobile Career Coaches

The Career Coaches visited 56 unique locations this year, ranging from libraries to food banks to high schools to correctional facilities - and served 1,687 individuals all over the Georgia Mountains region. Visitors to the Career Coach received assistance with job searches, online applications, resume assistance and more from our Career Coach Instructors. The Career Coaches also assisted several area businesses on site during hiring and Rapid Response events.

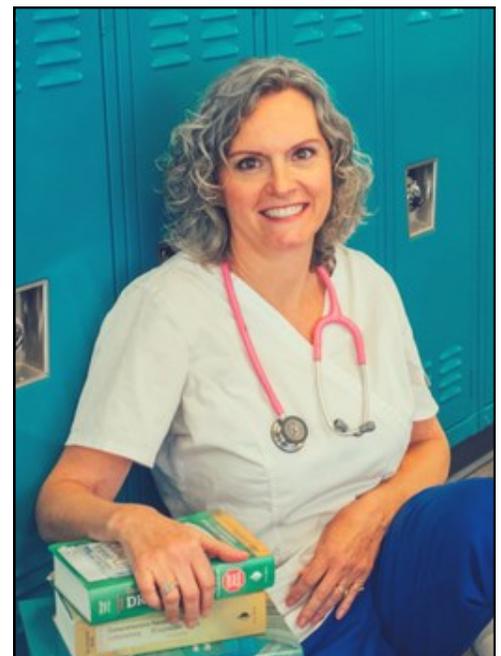
Picture of Success

"I was a farmer but had wanted to be a nurse my whole life. I never thought I could achieve it, but at the age of 48 I started school. Three years later, and I am graduating!"

I learned about WIOA funding from some of my classmates, and I am so happy I applied for the grant. In the past I was the breadwinner in our family, so losing my income was hard. Without WIOA I would not have been able to stay in school.

If you are thinking about applying, do it! School is hard enough without having financial strains!"

-Elaine Fleeman, ASN



2018 YOUTH SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Shift Program

The Youth Services began a new program, the SHIFT program, which works with teens and young adults who have a criminal background. It is also connected to the Transition to Success Program housed in the Regional Youth Detention Center. The SHIFT program allows GED training on more of an individual basis and incorporates work skills training, life skills training, and hands on work experience to teens and young adults who need a 'second chance'. This program also offers mentoring, counseling, and occupational skills training assistance. This year the program assisted 16 youth and young adults through the SHIFT program, eight of which were able to complete their GED or high school diploma, and two who transitioned into post-secondary education.



GED Career Pathways Program

The GED Career Pathways program, in partnership with North Georgia Technical College, Lanier Technical College, and Athens Technical College, increased this year bringing the total participants entering this service to 255. This program provides GED training, work skills development, paid internships and work experience, as well as short term certifications. This year approximately 40 participants transitioned to post-secondary education and 80 participants completed their GED through this program.

Program Highlights

- ⇒ The Credit Recovery program assists eligible youth and young adults who have withdrawn from or dropped out of high school and would like to go back to school to complete their high school diplomas. This year the Youth Services assisted 25 youth in the Credit Recovery program.
- ⇒ This year approximately 170 youth participants were assisted through the Youth Services Occupational Skills Program. There were 87 participants who received a diploma, certification, or other credential.
- ⇒ The Youth Services Staff also hosted "Mapping Your Future" workshops throughout the region, including participation in job/career fairs. Staff hosted over 30 workshops with well over 400 youth participating. The workshops are designed for 8th - 12th grades and cover topics including resume writing, dressing for success, career planning, and more.
- ⇒ The partnership with Project Search, in connection with the Hall County School System and Vocational Rehabilitation Services, assisted seven interns with 90% completion rate and 80% employment rate as of June 30, 2018. This partnership assisted participants with disabilities to acquire work skills and allows hands on work training in rotations throughout Northeast Georgia Medical Center.

Youth Conference

The 2nd annual youth conference was held this year for the Georgia Mountains area with 81 in attendance. This annual event is designed to educate "at risk" young adult participants, ages 16-24 with topics including, character building, healthy relationships (professional and personal), financial literacy, and work readiness. Not only are participants invited to this event, but it is also used as a recruitment tool to inform those who may be eligible for services and support available in career and employment development. Also included in the conference are testimonials from participants and motivational speakers.



Finance & Administration

The Finance Department is a team committed to assisting our employees, revolving loan fund clients, and communities with sincerity, loyalty, respect, and honor. The Finance Department's responsibilities include audits, budget, day-to-day accounting practices, supportive services, revolving loan fund maintenance, and Human Resources.

With regard to Human Resources, the team manages personnel recruitment, policy development, benefit administration, wellness, training, and payroll administration. The GMRC has received the Wellness Grant for the past nine years. In Fiscal Year 18, GMRC received the Safety Grant for the second year in a row. Both grants are from the Local Government Risk Management Services, Inc.



Pictured L to R: Barbara Moseley - Finance Assistant; Nona Turk - Finance Assistant; Cheryl Smith - Finance Assistant; and Andrea Newsom - Finance Director

Revolving Loan Fund (RLF)

The GMRC's Revolving Loan Fund is available to businesses of all sizes and varieties. Borrowers are eligible for financing only when credit is not otherwise available. Since inception the program has loaned out a total of \$5.2 million to 56 businesses throughout the Georgia Mountains Region. Those investments have translated to just over 558 jobs being retained or created. The GMRC RLF Program currently has fifteen active loans totaling close to \$954,000.



In FY 2018, the GMRC received numerous inquiries into the RLF Program. The GMRC RLF works toward strengthening entrepreneurial firms as well as small, home-based or new businesses. We support industries in the region such as construction, daycare, racetrack, restaurants, property management, accounting, venue services, and veterinary services. We look forward to continuing the loan program and the success it has brought and will continue to bring to new & expanding businesses as well as the jobs created within the GMRC Region.



Pictured L to R: Karen Clark - Administrative Secretary and Peggy Lovell, Executive Assistant

Financial Highlights

- ⇒ GMRC's total assets exceeded its liabilities by \$3,219,429 for the fiscal year reported.
- ⇒ There was a \$316,713 increase in the GMRC's fund balance in the General Fund.
- ⇒ As of June 30, 2018, GMRC's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$2,483,804, an increase of \$316,713 from the prior year. Of this amount, \$1,387,154 (unassigned fund balance) may be used to meet the GMRC's ongoing obligations to the member local governments.

Council Member of the Year



Jim Conley

Employee of the Year



Diana Eddins-Wiggin



Chairman's Award



Peggy Lovell

Appointed Official of the Year



Margaret Ayers

Elected Official of the Year



Ricky Carter



Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

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Gainesville, GA 30503



Karen Clark, Editor

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