

The Central View

Serving the Citizens of Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry & Richland Counties



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Midlands OneStop Named Best In State



Midlands OneStop Officials receive the 2005 Joe. A Young Award

On October 31st, 2005, the Midlands Development Board (MWDB), the work-force development area for the Central Midlands Council of Governments, was awarded the prestigious *Joe A. Young Award* by the South Carolina Workforce Investment Board.

The *Joe. A Young Award* recognizes outstanding achievement by a Workforce Development Board involved in meeting the work-force development needs of its region, and by meeting or exceeding the performance measures established by the United States Department of Labor.

This past year, the Midlands Workforce Development Board received an exemplary report from the US Department of Labor as it exceeded fifteen of its seventeen annual goals. The MWDB was also lauded for its implementation of the acclaimed WorkKeys Program and the subsequent accreditation of the MWDB as a Value Added Resource (VAR) by the American College Testing (ACT) Program in March 2005.

The Midlands Workforce Development Board identified WorkKeys as an invaluable workforce development tool in the fall of 2004. The *WorkKeys* program is

designed to successfully match employers with the right workers for the job by identifying critical skills through job profiling, workers' skills assessments and basic skills training. A common credential (the *JOBReady!* Card) was subsequently created to document workers' assessment scores and performances. The *JOBReady!* card with its gold, silver and bronze levels, provides a unique and portable record of the career readiness of each participant and has established a benchmark by which the skills and readiness of prospective employees can be gauged.

Implementation of the WorkKeys program has resulted in the hiring of new staff to market the initiative to the business community and perform the required job profiles and skills assessments and has already been responsible for a number of successful strategic partnerships.

The Joe A. Young Award is the third award in a little over a year for the MWDB following the Regional Innovator Award from the Southern Growth Policies Board in June 2004 and the SC Hispanic Leadership Council Award in September 2005, both of which were awarded for the Midlands Workforce Development Board's Hispanic outreach efforts.

Midlands Woman Receives Prestigious Aging Award

Jean Bridges, a Silver-Haired legislator from the Central Midlands region, was the recent recipient of the 2005 Jane Kennedy Excellence in Aging Award.

This award, which has been presented annually since 1977 by the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging, is named for a former Area Agency on Aging Director, who was also the godmother of the singer Jimmy Buffet, recognizes an individual who has made a positive impact on the quality of life of older adults. The award was presented to Ms. Bridges in Orange Beach, Alabama on November 14, 2005 at the annual training conference of the organization.

Ms. Bridges is a member of the Central Midlands Regional Aging Advisory Committee and was recently a delegate to the regional and state White House Conferences on Aging.

Ms. Bridges has been active for many years as a volunteer for AARP can often be heard addressing senior groups across the region on a number of issues relating to senior citizens. Ms. Bridges has served as a volunteer for many years at First Baptist Church with OASIS as well as at the Shepherd Center. Ms. Bridges also has first hand experience as a caregiver having served in that capacity for both her husband and her mother, giving her a special insight into the challenges faced every day by caregivers.



Jean Bridges (right) and Sharon Seago, of CMCOG pictured with the 2005 Jane Kennedy Award





Spotlight on: Environmental Planning

Announcements

Please join us in welcoming our newest Board members:

Craig Wall
Richland County

Sarah B. Watson
Richland County

Todd O'Dell
Batesburg-Leesville

Barry A. Walker
Irmo

Julie Merrill, CMCOG Aging Program Coordinator, was the recent recipient of one of three scholarships awarded by the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging (SE4A) at its annual conference in Orange Beach, Alabama, November 14th, 2005.

The SE4A awards scholarships annually to juniors, seniors or graduate students pursuing a career in gerontology or geriatrics.

Ms. Merrill, recently earned her Master of Social Work and is continuing her education in the graduate Gerontology certificate program at the University of South Carolina.

Central Midlands Council of Governments is currently developing an Open Spaces Plan for the Central Midlands region. This plan is based on the principle of linking together parks and other green spaces and aims to provide "green lungs" that would serve to improve air quality for area residents as well as promoting plant and wildlife diversity.

This plan is being developed in response to the rapid growth within the Central Midlands region; growth which has resulted in a reduction in air quality, due in part to the increasing number of vehicles traveling greater distances on our roads than ever before. The protection and linking of green spaces would help remove pol-

lutants from the air, allow better storm water runoff and would support a variety of plant and wildlife species.

The first phase of the project, an inventory of the natural, recreational and cultural resources within the Central Midlands region, has already been completed. The next phase of the plan will involve the creation of a regional green infrastructure plan identifying federal, state, county and local lands, as well as other valuable open spaces not currently publicly owned or protected, that could be used to create potential green infrastructure links to complement future development throughout Richland, Lexington, Newberry and Fairfield counties. The identification of potential linkages between public lands

and unprotected open spaces will eventually be combined into one regional map that can be used to create a vision for a regional network of linked open spaces. The final version of the Green Infrastructure Plan should be completed by the summer of 2006.



Open Spaces act as "Green Lungs" for a Community

Central Midlands Region Receives \$989,000 in CDBG funds

Christmas came early to two Central Midlands communities when the SC Department of Commerce announced the latest recipients of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

In another highly competitive funding round, the City of Newberry and the Town of Winnsboro received \$500,000 and \$489,420 respectively in grant funds to perform streetscaping and other beautification activities in their commercial centers. The City of Newberry will use its grant funds in

conjunction with TEA-21 and local funds to perform streetscaping activities in an area bounded by Harrington,



McKibben and Harrington Streets near the Opera House in Downtown Newberry

Wilson, Johnstone and Nance streets. The Town of Winnsboro will use its CDBG funds in combination with local funds to undertake Phase V of its downtown streetscaping project. This project will improve the appearance and function of the 200 block of South Congress Street and is the final phase in the Winnsboro's Downtown master plan.

Application requests for the next CDBG funding round are due March 12th, with applications due by April 12th, 2006. For more information, contact Robin Cooley, 376-5390.

CMCOG Staff Assist With Medicare Part D Enrollment

Beginning January 1, 2006, new Medicare prescription drug plans became available to all Medicare recipients. These new drug plans represent the most significant change to the Medicare Program in years.

On December 9th, 2005, Carol Abrahamsen and Ben Mauldin of CMCOG attended a visit from Dr. Mark B. McClellan of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMC) to Generations of Chapin, to assist Medicare beneficiaries with their enrollment in the new Medicare Part D plans.

To date, more than 24 million people

nationwide have enrolled in the more than 40 available plans, including more than 1.6 million who enrolled online.

Due to the vast number and variety of plans available and a looming May 2006 enrollment deadline, quality guidance in plan selection is critical. CMCOG aging staff have held a series of workshops and presentations fairs, providing outreach to more than 4,000 Medicare beneficiaries since late 2005. More than 600 phone calls for assistance with Medicare Part D were also received.



Dr. Mark McClellan assists with Medicare prescription drug plan enrollment at Generations of Chapin

Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Plan Nears Completion

After almost of a year of detailed and intense study, two major transportation planning studies are in the closing stages.

Central Midlands COG is currently putting the finishing touches to a regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Plan. The purpose of the plan is to examine bicycle and pedestrian related concerns and identify what actions can be taken to develop best practices, policies, strategies and tangible bicycle and pedestrian projects, in order to encourage and advance bicycling and walking as viable modes of transportation in the Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS) region.

This latest study of bicycle and pedestrian needs in the region has taken a more comprehensive approach than previous studies, by identifying attainable strategies

and goals as well as considering how these two important modes of transportation might be incorporated into the Columbia Area Long Range Transportation Plan.

Components addressed in the latest plan include Bike and Pedestrian Strategies, which covers planning, guidelines and regulations; funding sources; data collection and coordination; education, enforcement and encouragement; and promotion and update of the plan.

Through a series of public workshops, twenty-five (25) early action specific projects have already been identified as being ready to implement. The first projects identified in this new plan could be completed within two years of its adoption.

The final Bike and Pedestrian Pathways Plan is scheduled to be completed by February 2006, with its

subsequent adoption by local governments and incorporation into the COATS long range transportation plan expected by late spring.

As the Central Midlands region grows, CMCOG planning staff is working diligently to promote bicycling and walking as viable modes of transportation in the Central Midlands Region.



As the region grows, bike & pedestrian facilities will become more important

CMCOG would like to recognize its outgoing Board Members:

Bruce Carter,
Richland County

Marshall Hoefer,
Richland County

Gary Holmes,
Batesburg-Leesville

Paul Younginer, Irmo

Central Midlands COG would like to express its gratitude for their years of service to the Central Midlands region.

CMCOG Launches New Website & Blog

CMCOG recently unveiled its new look website. The site, www.centralmidlands.org, now has a more contemporary look and feel and is designed to be more user-friendly than previous versions. However the site still contains many of its previous features and still provides a wealth of information about the Central Midlands region.

The site includes a redesigned Press



Release section, as well as links to the main search engine **SC Webseek.com** and the informative **SC Midlands Info.com**

The newest feature of the redesigned site is the **CM Blog**, which is designed as a new online public participation tool which can be used to receive and display public comments pertaining to a variety of CMCOG activities.

News In Brief

CMCOG is pleased to announce that Becky Hall, currently undertaking her internship with CMCOG in its Family Caregiver Support Program, was the recent recipient of a scholarship from the South Carolina Gerontological Society.

The scholarship award, one of only two awarded state-wide, was made to Ms. Hall, who is working towards her Master of Social Work, at the SC Gerontological Association's January meeting in Columbia.

Ombudsman Program Records Busy Year

In its tenth year of operation, the Central Midlands Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which investigates incidences of abuse, neglect and exploitation of residents of nursing homes, had its busiest year ever, receiving 1,914 complaints and logging 1,598 new cases; an increase in case volume of 9.7% from 2004.

In 2005, staff conducted 171 onsite case investigations and 61 "friendly" visits to residential care facilities and more than 1,100 phone consultations and follow

up calls were logged. Thirteen training sessions were also held to educate staff of long term care facilities.

Staff also developed a new guide for residents and families in care facilities, entitled "Navigating Through The System," and also set up a volunteer Ombudsman Program to train individuals to serve as a liaisons between residents, their families, care staff and the staff of the Ombudsman Program. To date, 6 volunteers have been recruited. Volunteers must undergo thirty hours training and a

written test before becoming certified.



Ombudsman staff meet with Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer in recognition of their work investigating abuse and neglect in care facilities



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Town of Batesburg-Leesville
City of Cayce
City of Columbia
City of Forest Acres
Town of Irmo
Town of Lexington
City of Newberry
Town of Springdale
City of West Columbia
Town of Winnsboro

*Articles contributed
by CMCOG staff*

A Word From The Chairman

I would like to start by wishing everyone a Happy and prosperous 2006 and by giving a brief update on a number of projects with which CMCOG will be occupied in the coming months.

The last few months have seen significant progress made on a number of key projects within the Central Midlands region.

The Central Midlands Commuter Rail Study is now well underway, with much of the data collection completed along the 3 identified commuter rail corridors. Some preliminary analysis of development trends around proposed station locations has also been undertaken. Upon completion of this plan later this summer, we should have a good idea of how we need to craft our development along the proposed corridors to make commuter rail a viable option for the future.

Work is also nearing completion on a regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Plan as well as on the Columbia Avenue Corridor Study. This plan, which links land use and transportation planning, will provide design alternatives as well as land development guidelines along this 2 mile stretch of highway prior



**CMCOG Chairman R. David
Brown, Fairfield County**

to improvements being made, to ensure that it continues to function well within both the local and regional roadway system.

The coming months should also, after several years of ground work, see the foundation of the Central Midlands Mitigation Bank as well as the completion of our first regional Green Infrastructure Plan. Staff has also begun work on the next update to the Columbia Area Long Range Transportation Plan. This plan, updated every four years, will project and prioritize improvements to the transportation system in the Columbia area between its base year of 2005 and the horizon year of 2035. To this end, two new regional

reports, designed to assist in the development of this long range transportation plan, were recently completed; a population projections report and a mid-decade development trends report.

Internally within the operation of the COG, we have created a new Regional Planning & Development Committee which will advise the CMCOG Board on a variety of planning, economic and community development issues. The new committee will make recommendations on plans and projects and provide guidance to programs not currently addressed by the COG committee structure, such as CDBG, economic development, the Mitigation Bank, and other planning areas we provide such as comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances.

Efforts are also continuously being made to improve the overall image and visibility of the agency. Recent endeavors include a new website and the stellar efforts being undertaken by CMCOG aging staff as they handle hundreds of calls in their efforts to help our region's seniors as they grapple with the complexities of the new Medicare Part D program.

A new year, as always, brings new challenges. CMCOG is ready to meet them head on.