

Rabun County Alliance

formerly West Rabun Property Owners ~ Est. 2001



Fall 2018 Newsletter

“Seeking Leadership and Accountability in Government”

RABUN COUNTY COALITION FOR GOOD GOVERNMENT (RCCGG)

NOTE: This article went to print before the City/County negotiations hit a dead end and a lawsuit was filed, making some of this article moot. Details of this failure may be found in the November 8 issue of The Clayton Tribune or on our website at www.rabuncountyalliance.com (click on “News,” and then “Blog”). Despite this development, please still consider supporting the RCCGG and expressing your thoughts to The Clayton Tribune as the article suggests.

RCA officials are excited to inform our members that a new and unique organization was formed earlier this year and as we have communicated with their officials and observed their activities, we are very pleased to report that the RCCGG and the RCA share many viewpoints regarding activities in Rabun County. At a time when national political parties are shooting arrows at each other, leaders of the County’s Republican, Democratic and Progressive parties have banded together with other concerned individuals to form the RCCGG in an attempt to resolve the water war and SDS/ SPLOST battles that have destroyed cooperation between Clayton and Rabun County.

The RCCGG has attended city and county meetings, sent position papers on the topics to both, and purchased ads in the Clayton Tribune criticizing the impasse between the city and county, all with the purpose of encouraging both to make achievement of new SDS (Service Delivery Strategy) agreement their top priorities. For those members who do not subscribe to the Tribune, failure to have achieved a mutually acceptable SDS agreement a few years ago deprived both the city and the county of state, federal and other grants which have deprived them of millions of grant dollars. The true victims of the failure stemming from the refusal of the city and county to compromise their intractable positions are the taxpayers in both. It is highly likely that the “need” for the 11.6% millage rate increase recently enacted by the county resulted largely from the loss of such grants.

In mid-October, the RCCGG held a public meeting and presented its assessment of and position regarding this ongoing battle between the administrations. Two very troubling items presented in this meeting were:

- There are 159 counties in Georgia. When this article was written, there were only two counties without SDS agreements: Rabun and Lincoln. Lincoln has been without an SDS for 3 months and was working hard to achieve one; in Rabun, the failure dates back to 2015. We understand the average time to resolve SDS issues is 3 months.
- As of mid-October, spending on attorneys and consultants to bolster arguments in the as-of-yet unproductive SDS negotiations was over \$104 thousand for Clayton and about \$30 thousand for the county.

Folks, we (you) are paying for the attorneys and consultants from each side to argue with each other, and we (you) are paying for county activities that could otherwise be funded by government grants. The RCCGG repeated a very appropriate plea originated by the Clayton Tribune: “WE NEED LEADERSHIP OR NEW LEADERS!”

Our Commissioners are sometimes hard of hearing but their attention perks up when they hear noise from voters. We encourage our members to add their names to the list of those supporting the RCCGG. At present, the RCCGG communicates with its supporters by sending updates and public meeting notices via their online newsletter. To be added to the list of recipients, simply send an email to rabungoodgov@gmail.com, write “Add to newsletter” in the subject line, and provide your name in the email message. By doing this, you will receive ongoing updates. Also, you might consider voicing your opinion regarding the city’s and county’s dereliction in a letter to the editor of the Clayton Tribune. The more noise the Commissioners hear, the harder they listen!

COMMUNITY CALENDAR: visit the Chamber of Commerce at gamountains.com for Rabun County events
visit georgiapowerlakes.com for helpful lake information from Georgia Power
visit lakerabun.org, lbca.net, and seedlake.org for the various Association events
Men’s Christian Fellowship meets every Friday, 8:00–9:30am (706-782-7425 for more info)

ALLIANCE LEADERSHIP	President Charlie Brundage	V.P. Environment Harold Taylor	V.P. Public Safety Chad K. Nichols	V.P. Fire Protection Justin Upchurch
	Chairman Alan Price	V.P. Health Care Dr. Guy Gober	V.P. Recycling J. P. Miles	Neighborhood Watch Stacye Morgan
	V.P. Editor Mike Walters	V.P. Membership Patricia Sheehan	V.P. Roads David Bacon	Website Mike Hammer

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While the sole focus of the RCCGG has been on the water war, SDS, and SPLOST, when resolution to those issues finally manifests, we plan to engage in a discussion to ascertain their interest in continuing to actively pursue “good government” in some of the arenas in which we have been working, such as creating a ridgeline/steep slope development ordinance, SPLOST (mis)administration, dropping Rabun County down the list of counties with the highest percentage of unpaved roads, etc.

RCA GOES DIGITAL

The RCA now has the capability to reach you via email on important matters that cannot wait until the quarterly Newsletter is delivered. You each should have already received two or three emails confirming your email address and updating you on important current matters. If you did not receive these emails, please let us know at rabuncountyalliance@gmail.com. The newsletter will continue to be mailed to you in the future for now.

If you did receive these emails from us, you are already subscribed and you do not need to subscribe again. Some members did not have or did not register an email address when they joined the RCA. If you have an email address but did not receive something from us, please send us your email address at rabuncountyalliance@gmail.com. If you have Earthlink or Mindspring as your email carrier you might not have received our emails either (we have some evidence of service provider communication conflicts). If so, please provide us with a secondary email address so that our emails might reach you in the future.

NEW LIMITED TIME FREE MEMBERSHIP (New Members Only)

We are offering a one-year free membership to new members if they register with the RCA by December 31, 2018. All persons need to do is sign up on our website at www.rabuncountyalliance.com. We need new members to increase our voice with Rabun County officials. You can help by inviting others to join in this way on a trial basis. Just send them to our website to join; no credit card is required.

TOURISM IN RABUN COUNTY

Editor's Note: As we are all aware, Rabun County is one of the most beautiful areas in the U.S. Our Chairman, Alan Price, is also a board member of the County's Tourism Development Authority (TDA), and we believe his article presenting the following information would be of interest to our members.

What if you planned to explore a place you had not been before and wanted to prepare for your adventure? In past times, you might consult guidebooks or maps of the area, speak with those who had been there, or even consult an encyclopedia. Today, however, we go to the Internet, a place where explorerabun.com excels (created and maintained by the TDA).

Tourism is a huge part of Rabun County's economy. It is only logical to host a world-class website that is a one-stop shop for learning about Rabun County, as well as current and future events. Why should you care? Let's consider some facts about the website:

- From July of 2017 to the end of May 2018, explorerabun.com had 114,824 users, 153,341 sessions, and 298,900-page views. Users were split about 55/45% male to female, with the largest user demographic in the 45-64 age group.

- International users came from over 8 different countries.
- Domestic users came from all 50 states but primarily from the Southeast.

These figures fail to tell the whole story, however. Your website contains a huge wealth of useful information, for Rabunites as well as visitors:

- Want to plan a weekend getaway? Tour our wineries? Enjoy the variety of Rabun through a “Grow-Eat-Cook” tour? Explore our waterfalls or lakes? Visit Tallulah Gorge or take a white-water adventure? Find out about current events or those planned for coming seasons? Receive our online E-newsletter? See a map of Rabun or download an online visitor's guide? Plan a wedding at a unique Rabun venue? Ask our Executive Director (Teka Earnhardt) a question or ask her assistance in planning a trip to Rabun? Then go to explorerabun.com!

Perhaps Rabun's greatest asset, beside our people, is our county's natural beauty. While some have “discovered” Rabun County on their own, most will come to visit because they learned about Rabun from social media or other public sources. Your TDA is tasked with telling Rabun's story to the wider world.

Chaired by Laura Gurley, your TDA is composed of a diverse group of Rabun professionals from a variety of professions. Our goal is simple – make Rabun County a great hospitality destination. TDA funding comes from a portion of Rabun's hotel-motel tax. We coordinate closely with your County Commissioners, and work with the Chamber of Commerce, Rabun County Development Authority, local cities, tourism partners, the NE Georgia Tourism Authority, and various hospitality organizations throughout Rabun County and the surrounding area to foster and expand tourism in Rabun.

Let's reference two recent examples of how the TDA expands tourism in Rabun:

1. Think back 14 months – we experienced the rarest of astronomical events, a total solar eclipse on the 21st of August 2017. Planning for how to host this event in Rabun began two years prior with a “Solar Eclipse Committee” formed by the TDA.

We experienced the eclipse on the campus of the RGNS and hosted over 10,000 visitors at the campus, with untold thousands elsewhere in Rabun. One of the greatest days for one of the greatest events in Rabun history has continued to benefit our country in untold ways. For example, the past 12 months, following the eclipse, have seen some of the greatest tourism gains in our history. The facts are inescapable - we are benefiting greatly from revisits from those who came to the eclipse.

2. Last month, 13 managers from state run Visitor's Centers around Georgia came to Rabun County as guests of the TDA. They spent 2 ½ days touring Rabun and experiencing the beauty and variety we have come to take for granted. To say they felt Rabun County was awesome would be a huge understatement. They were blown away with all we

have to offer. These folks will now return to various visitor's centers around the state with a renewed ability to send folks to Rabun County. Next spring, we'll host a second group of managers to complete the circle and ensure Rabun is front and center when they speak with visitors to Georgia.

We began with a question about why should you care? To restate the obvious, tourism is the #1 industry in Rabun County. Its benefits extend to tax relief, improvements in our quality of life, and the opportunity to host the great folks who visit our county. Why is this important to each of us? Beyond the benefits of tourism enjoyed by our local merchants, in 2016 tourism provided \$550.89 in tax relief to every household in Rabun County! We all have a stake in seeing that Rabun fosters tourism as tourism improves our quality of life, and lessens the tax burden on each and every Rabun family...and the TDA is all about tourism.

An old adage counsels *"those who live in a community are less likely than visitors to visit sites of local interest."* We take what we have for granted, while guests to our county come with fresh eyes seeking new experiences. Why not find a new way to explore and enjoy our incredible county by visiting explorerabun.com and become a "local tourist"? It is great to share Rabun in a new way with our guests and our local community. Go to explorerabun.com. Give some feedback after your visit. The header on the website says it best - *"Rabun County, The Natural Choice."* See you soon online and elsewhere in Rabun!

FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Rabun County Fire Services has responded to 1560 incidents as of 10/29/18. October has always proven to be one of our busiest months and this October hasn't let us down! We always have a lot of activities happening in October. First, the second week of October is Fire Prevention Week nationwide. We are always happy to go out and spread our message of fire prevention, but this month we really concentrate on it. As of the 29th, we have made over 540 contacts through school visits, station visits, and other public safety activities such as Public Safety Day at Home Depot.

Our message this year has been Look, Listen, and Learn. We encourage everyone to Look for things around your house that aren't fire safe, Listen for your smoke alarm to sound when you check it monthly, and Learn what to do when your smoke alarm does go off, such as how to exit your home safely and being sure to have a meeting place for everyone to go.

As the time is soon to change, please change your batteries in your smoke alarms when you set your clocks back. I encourage everyone when replacing your smoke alarm batteries to change to the 10-year sealed battery type. With this type you only have to check it monthly and make sure that it stays clean and free of dust - no batteries to change. Regardless of battery type, smoke alarms are only good for 10 years.

The second thing going on in October is our annual pump and ladder testing for our pumpers, tankers, and fireboats. We are mandated to do this annually. And the last thing that kept us busy in October was our live fire training at our training facility in Lakemont. Our dedicated volunteers and paid staff completed hands-on fire control evolutions in our training tower on two separate weeknights. Since my last submission, Fire Station #10

(Lakes) has opened and all the apparatus have moved from the old building beside Mountain Patrol to their beautiful new facility at 573 Seed Lake Rd. Fire Station #3 (Tallulah-Persimmon) is in progress and is looking great.

Rabun County Fire Services wishes you and yours a Happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas! As always, we are a phone call or email away if you have questions or comments. I can be reached at 706-782-2751 ext. 3 or at jupchurch@rabuncounty.ga.gov. Justin Upchurch

CONSIDER ATTENDING THE CITIZENS ACADEMY!

What does the Sheriff's Office do for the citizens of Rabun County?

Law enforcement is a critical component for our safety and security in Rabun County. We greatly appreciate all they do each and every day, and Sheriff Nichols has continued a tradition of providing excellent leadership of the Department. Different offices or divisions provide a variety of services to the public. But, have you ever wondered exactly what the Sheriff's Office does? Sheriff Chad Nichols wants us to know by hosting an upcoming Citizens Academy.

In speaking with Sheriff Nichols, he noted that the turnout for the first Citizens Academy earlier this year went well and he would like to host another one in early 2019. Some of the topics that would be covered are:

- What the Sheriff's office is mandated by law to do
- How a Deputy conducts an investigation
- How K-9 dogs are helpful in drug busts

Sheriff Nichols also stated that a tour of the courthouse and jail would also be a part of the Citizens Academy, along with speakers, such as a School Resource Officer who would discuss the important topic of school safety. If you are interested in attending a Citizens Academy or would like more information, contact the Sheriff's office at 706-782-3612. *Stacye Morgan and Sheriff Chad Nichols*

NEW SPLOST STILL UNDER DEVELOPMENT

We have certainly had frequent comments regarding our concerns with how County officials have designed and administered past SPLOSTs. The most recent SPLOST ends next year, and the new one that would immediately follow the expiration of the current one is still under development and has not yet been publicized. One good sign that has been communicated is that the City of Clayton and County officials have agreed on the amount of SPLOST collections that would be funded to the city. As you are surely aware, the County froze the city out of SPLOST payments in the SPLOST program that began in 2013 and ends next August. The failure of Clayton to receive money from that SPLOST was tied to the water war battle that apparently is no closer to resolution now than it was at the time the SPLOST apportionments were negotiated. It is encouraging that the two sides have demonstrated they *are* capable of reaching agreement, given that the Service Delivery Strategy battle has gone on for three years. Will they be able to take the next step? Stay tuned.



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🍁 Happy Thanksgiving 🍁

❄️ Merry Christmas ❄️ Happy New Year ❄️



From its first event held on November 6, 2010, the Rabun County Arena facility has become a popular venue, hosting over 40 weekend events in 2018, including rodeos, barrel races, livestock shows, dog trials, tractor pulls, concerts, animal health clinics, and more!



LAKE DRAWDOWN

The annual lake drawdown began on November 1, but this year, only Lake Burton will be drawn down; Lakes Seed and Rabun will remain at current levels. We were not given an explanation regarding why those lakes will not be drawn down. Lake Burton will reach full drawdown of 7 feet by December 31, and will remain at that level (adjusting for unpredictable amounts of rainfall) until February 1, 2019, when refilling will begin. Georgia Power indicates that Lake Burton will be within 5 feet of normal pool (elevation of 1,865 feet) by March 1, and will reach full pool by May 1. Please note that if you intend to take advantage of the drawdown to work on existing lake structures or seawalls, a construction application must be filed with and approved by Georgia Power before construction may begin (forms available at www.georgiapowerlakes.com).

ROADS REPORT

2018 has been as very wet year to date, and the amount of rain has changed somewhat the areas of focus of the County's Roads Department. Yearly average rainfall in the area is a bit over 70 inches, and as of August 1, the total rainfall was already 78 inches. There was a brief dry spell thereafter, but the rainfall has picked up again. Accordingly, the Roads Department has been dealing with mud slides, washed out sections, replacing culverts, cleaning ditches and clearing fallen trees and branches from roads. At the time of this report, the Department had nearly finished widening two miles of Sandy Ford Road and will soon be prepared to pave the road. Projects have included road striping on numerous roads, patching asphalt around the County, paving Big Basin Cove Road, Scotts Creek Road, the parking area at the Farmers Market and 2.4 miles of Devils Branch Road and 1.2 miles of low Gap Road. Currently the Department is focused on ensuring that sufficient salt and stones are stored in anticipation of snow and ice. *Synthesized from information provided by Scott Provan, County Roads Director*

RECYCLING REPORT

Information is being gathered regarding fiscal year activity in recycling in the County, but was not fully completed in time for this newsletter. We will provide a full report on tonnage and income to the County in our next newsletter. In the meantime, please continue to support the County's efforts to protect our environment and provide income to the County through your commitment to recycling all recyclable materials.