State Advisory Council Meets in Charlotte

By Brenda Gilbert (State Advisory member, South Central District)

The Queen City put its best foot forward when it hosted the State Advisory Council meeting February 2-4. Lynn Yokley, chair, presided as Robbie Furr, interim Extension director in Mecklenburg County, hosted and shared information about the county's Extension programs, including speakers and field trips. A unique situation exists in Mecklenburg County, where Cooperative Extension comes under the county Parks and Recreation program. The council enjoyed a field trip to the 4-H STEM after-school program at the Albemarle Road Recreation Center, which is on a public school campus, and a visit to a community garden at Reedy Creek Park.

The meeting was packed with informative presentations, including topics such as district initiatives on environmental issues, education for child-care providers and parents, and 4-H science fairs.

Sharon Rowland, Cooperative Extension’s executive director of development, explained how council members can assist with private resource development. Sylvia Churchwell, council member from Lee County, presented a session called Advocacy Savvy, to help Council members follow the correct protocol when contacting elected officials. And council member Ralph Warren shared an Excel spreadsheet he had created, listing all legislators and the areas they represent. The spreadsheet will be a valuable tool as council members make their contacts with legislators.

Dr. Bill Hunt, assistant professor and Extension specialist from N.C. State University, and Seth Nagy, Caldwell County agriculture agent, outline storm-water and wetlands initiatives at the February meeting.

Following a legislative update by Matt Peterson, director of Federal Research Affairs at N.C. State University, the council members were charged to advocate with their federal legislators on behalf of Extension funding from the Smith-Lever Act funds. All left Charlotte eager to do their parts as Extension advocates.

Working Together: Volunteers, Extension team up in Granville

By Mary Ann Lumpkins (State Advisory member, North Central District)

Good things happen when volunteers team up with county staff members and other volunteers from across North Carolina. An example of this is the working relationship that has developed between the Granville County Advisory Leadership Council, members of the State Advisory Council and the Granville County Cooperative Extension staff. This teamwork has led to some unique opportunities for the Extension volunteers.

Members of the Advisory Leadership Council have been active in working together with staff members, serving as advisers to the staff on hot topics in the county and assisting with programming. Each meeting has brought feedback on programming impacts and has created discussion on important issues to county residents, including alternative agriculture enterprises and strategies to help decrease the school dropout rate.

Volunteers work with staff to conduct large events such as the Aging with Gusto conference, co-sponsored by Cooperative Extension and the Office for Aging. The Advisory Leadership Council (Continued on page 3)
By this time next year, the United States will likely be experiencing a freeze on government spending or some other austere measure aimed at helping our ailing economy. Mounting debt and high unemployment represent twin pillars of financial strife which continue to haunt North Carolinians today. Budget reform is under way to give us a government that invests in what is needed and sacrifices what it is not. Such actions will likely mean that, come 2011, many government programs could look vastly different than they do now.

My goal is to ensure that Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T and in the rest of the state will be among those programs that federal lawmakers, as well as taxpayers, deem crucial. Cooperative Extension strives to make our audiences recession-proof, and when the ravages of this unstable economy cannot be held off, we work to give people new skills, new ways and new hope.

Yet, to ensure that we are visible on a broader level, we need to do what I describe as “re-up.” We have to revisit our brand – empowering people and providing solutions – and make sure that what we provide matches the needs of our audiences.

In our recently released *Solutions for North Carolina* are stories that illustrate how the Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T responds to people’s problems. Farmers seeking new markets and a return to the land, respectively, had their needs met by Cooperative Extension. Women striving for greater self-sufficiency in business and in managing family finances, along with teenagers planning for bright futures and for better management of their lives, were all assisted by Cooperative Extension.

Their successes are ours, and ensuring that we accurately assess their needs serves to keep us relevant to our residents and their needs.

*Relationships* with other agencies are also a strategy for our continued relevancy and success. Partnerships can help us solve issues in our state, such as obesity strategies with local health departments or federal collaborations with the U.S. Department of Energy to weatherize residents’ homes and realize energy savings.

We’ll be a different country in 2011. Cooperative Extension must renew its mission and reignite its approaches, and we must act in a way that is remarkable.

By working together on the right things at the right time and in the right way, we can and will make a difference in the lives of citizens of our state and our nation.
Alma Fisher, a Buncombe County partner, has been named an Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program Champion for her efforts to support the local EFNEP initiative. EFNEP is a nutrition education program of N.C. Cooperative Extension.

Fisher is human resource development instructor for ASPIRE (Assessing Strengths, Promoting Integrity, Retaining Employment) of Buncombe County. She was recognized during EFNEP’s 40th anniversary and Hunger Issues Forum, held in Raleigh in December.

As instructor for ASPIRE, Fisher teaches important life skills to students of Asheville-Buncombe Technical College, and EFNEP is one of the experiential teaching encounters that she feels is an integral link in the chain of information that her students need to achieve life-sustaining success. In the past four years alone, EFNEP has worked with 180 ASPIRE students, and since 1995, Fisher has included EFNEP in the college’s GED and Adult Basic Skills courses. She also volunteers for 4-H and is currently EFNEP’s representative on the Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Advisory Council.

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South Central District Conference news

By Sylvia Churchwell
(State Advisory member, South Central District)

The South Central Extension Advisory Conference was held January 29 at the Southeastern Agricultural Center in Lumberton. The conference was attended by 96 advisory leaders and approximately 40 Cooperative Extension staff members.

After welcoming remarks from Advisory leaders and Lumberton Mayor Ray Pennington, attendees were invited to attend selected show-cases of excellence, including topics such as Advisory 101, Robeson County High School beef quality assurance training, the Sandhills local food system project, addressing a community need in Cabarrus County, using localized cable television as a marketing tool, beginning back-yard beekeeping, basic food preservation made easy, and connecting producers and consumers.

At the completion of the breakout sessions, participants enjoyed lunch while being entertained by Dr. Gary Moore, director of graduate studies in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at N.C. State. Moore delivered historical remarks about “CES—Who Are We, How Did We Get Here and Where Are We Going?”

Dr. Ray McKinnie of N.C. A&T and Dr. Marshall Stewart of N.C. State also shared administrative updates from both universities and the continuing plans of 4-H and FCS Celebrations.
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on Joyner, State Advisory Council, West Central District, was born as a “military brat” at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Fla., but he has called North Carolina home since his father retired from the military in 1969 and settled in the eastern part of the state. Joyner graduated from N. C. State University in 1980 with a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology. After graduation, he worked for many years at NCSU as a research technician in the Department of Botany (now Plant Biology) studying the effects of air pollutants on plant ecosystems.

Joyner’s entire professional career has involved plant research and ecology. He has had a lifelong passion for gardening and horticulture, including an intense interest in heirloom gardening with the goal of preserving rare and unusual varieties of fruits and vegetables. His interest in heirloom vegetables and fruits led to the creation of his small mountain farm, orchard and nursery business known as Big Horse Creek Farm in 1985. Its specialty is the collection and propagation of antique and heirloom apple trees.

Joyner created and designed the Web site www.BigHorseCreekFarm.com, through which the farm has sold thousands of apple trees nationwide since 1999. His business has received regional and nationwide recognition for its work in preserving heritage apple varieties. In addition, he and his wife, Suzanne, have created much interest in their energy-independent homestead where they fulfill all of their energy requirements through the power of the wind and sun.

Joyner became involved with Cooperative Extension about 12 years ago, when Jim Carrey was the Ashe County Extension director. Carrey’s successor Julie Landry and Joyner developed a strong working relationship that continues to this day. Through Landry’s leadership, Joyner became more deeply involved with Extension, first as a member of the Ashe County Extension Advisory Council, then as Council Chairman for four years. He and his wife credit much of their business success to the guidance and support of Landry and the staff of the Ashe County Cooperative Extension office.

Joyner currently serves as a member of the Ashe County Farmers Market board of directors and is a volunteer with several local and regional environmental groups, including the Nature Conservancy and the National Committee of the New River. He formerly served as a board member with the Ashe County Habitat for Humanity and is now working with the Habitat construction committee.

The Joyners reside in Ashe County with their dog, Boo, seven cats and dozens of chickens. We thank him for all he does for the State Advisory Council and the citizens of North Carolina, especially in the upper West Central District.

North Central District director’s challenge

By Dr. Joan Wright (State Advisory member, North Central District)

Jim Cowden, new director of the North Central District, asked the district’s State Advisory Council representatives to present two parts of the “Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership” curriculum at the December district meeting. The parts he selected were “Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers” and “Telling the Extension Story.”

In preparation for the meeting, counties were asked to identify their elected officials at county, state and federal levels. As part of the program, North Central SAC members Steva Allgood, V. Mac Baldwin, Mary Ann Lumpkins, Ralph Warren and Joan Wright issued a challenge to the Extension Advisory Leadership councils in all 17 North Central counties to use the information they had gathered to plan and implement communication with policy-makers in at least one level of government in the year 2010.

Communication activities can be as simple as inviting county commissioners to Cooperative Extension events in the county to hosting a visit from state or federal elected officials (which may be a multi-county effort). If there is a timely issue that involves legislative action, counties were reminded that careful planning is especially important to assure focus and effective use of legislator time.

The expectation is that each county’s Advisory Leadership Council will make its own plan, perhaps collaborating with other counties in its cluster, and send a brief progress report to the district director by the end of May. This then will be shared with N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University Cooperative Extension administration.