

Working together to advance our region

Aiken | Allendale | Bamberg | Barnwell | Calhoun | Orangeburg

## Update from the Executive Director

Happy New Year!

I hope that y'all are keeping safe between winter weather and the omicron variant. Currently, our office remains open and fully staffed. However, for the safety of our staff, clients' and partners' access to the building is limited.

In this newsletter, we highlight our successful Toys for Tots and United Way campaigns, a visit from travel writers to the Thoroughbred Country tourism region, upcoming events and resources offered by the COG, and a photo of our hardworking finance team. Finance teams are the heart and soul of any organization, and I am very proud of how in the last year they have come together to provide excellent services to the organization and the clients and partners that we serve.

In addition, the Lower Savannah COG welcomes new employees to our Workforce division. Ms. Victoria Peralta, is our new SCWOS Coordinator taking over for Cristine Chandler who in November became the COG's Transit Manager (Congratulations Christine – we know that you will do a great job). Ms. Brittaney Lott is our new Business Services Representative. We welcome Ms. Peralta and Ms. Lott to the COG and wish both a long and fulfilling career with us.

The board of directors, management, and staff of the Lower Savannah COG wishes you a safe and prosperous new year!

Best wishes,

Bill

### Upcoming Committee Events

Visit [www.lscog.org/events](http://www.lscog.org/events) for details.

- Feb. 15 | Thoroughbred Country Advisory Meeting – Aiken County
- Feb. 17 | Lower Savannah Regional Aging Advisory Committee
- Feb. 21 | President's Day
- Mar. 10 | WDB Youth Committee Meeting
- Mar. 10 | LSCOG Executive Committee Meeting
- Mar. 15 | CHDO Open House Drop-In - Aiken
- Mar. 29 | WDB SC Works Committee Meeting

## Human Services

Human Services staff members Alanna Berrie and Hannah Stone completed a Powerful Tools for Caregivers class last fall. Powerful Tools for Caregivers is a six-week evidence-based program to provide caregivers with the tools needed to take care of themselves, by providing skills to help reduce stress, improve self-confidence, and communicate feelings better. Also, it provides information about local resources.

LSCOG thanks Allendale County for providing space in the Brandt Building to hold the class. Due to COVID-19, the number of participants was limited but the class ran smoothly and had great participation. Council staff are working to secure a date and location for another class to be held in the Spring of 2022.

## Transit Highlights

With the beginning of the new year, the Aging, Disability, Transportation Resource Center (ADTRC) of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments transferred all Dial-A-Ride (DAR) services including phone numbers to Aiken Senior Life Services.

Your new contact at Aiken Senior Life Services is Ms. Traci Trotter. Ms. Trotter will be assisting you in the new year with reservations, ticket sales, applications, renewals, and questions about the Best Friend Express fixed routes, etc. Please reach out to her with questions about DAR or the Best Friend Express by dialing 803-648-5447, extension 234.

(The LSCOG remains the administrator of the urban transit program.)

## Tourism

### Seeing Southern Explores the Region

On Sunday, November 28th, Thoroughbred Country welcomed author and photographer duo, Judy and Len Garrison of Seeing Southern. They attended Christmas in the Backcountry at the Living History Park, took a tour with Tailored Tours of Aiken, enjoyed lunch at Miller's Bread Basket, drank from the Healing Springs, and so much more.

Seeing Southern is an online magazine of first-hand accounts of places in the South, throughout the United States and around the world. Both are freelancers and members of the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW).



Above: Hannah Stone, HS Family Caregiver Specialist, is giving information to the class.

Below: The Powerful Tools for Caregivers class



## Additional Resources

The **SRSRA Retiree Resource Center** sponsored by the Savannah River Site Retiree Association is continuing to assist SRS retirees and their families with Medicare enrollments, SRS stipend benefits, and SRS claims for reimbursement with WageWorks, now called Health Equity. You can call the Retiree Resource Center's telephone message line and leave a message at **803.508.7065**, email them at [SRSRA@LSCOG.org](mailto:SRSRA@LSCOG.org) or drop claims materials in the document collection box in front of the LSCOG building.



### Medication Assistance Program

The **Medication Assistance Program (MAP)** is operating by phone two days per week with concentration on the current client's refills for medications. They can be reached at 803-508-7066.

### Medicare Part D Open Enrollment 2022

From October 15 - December 7, 2021, State Health Insurance Program staff assisted 254 clients from the Lower Savannah Region to review their coverage for 2022. During this time each year, Medicare beneficiaries can review and change their Medicare Part D or Medicare Advantage Plan coverage for the new year.

Our SHIP staff person is here to offer trusted, un-biased, one on one counseling and assistance so that the client can make the best decision for him or herself. During this time, our SHIP staff served 254 beneficiaries and saved them a combined \$81,224. For more information and assistance, please contact Nikki Cannon at (803) 508-7053.

## Planning, Community and Economic Development (PCED)

LSCOG will be updating its Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan this year. Please take time to complete our survey by using the QR code or link below. Your response will be used to get a better understanding of the region's transportation needs.



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/P3LVM3C>



Current Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Annual Needs Assessment surveys are available: [www.lscog.org](http://www.lscog.org)

Homelessness Task Force – late Spring 2022

We will be putting together a regional taskforce with members and partners from our six (6) counties. We need collaborative partners! Let us know the folks who might be interested in your communities.

March 15 – Open House Drop-In from 10:00 – 12:00 in Aiken for the completed single-family home project with CHDO – Second Baptist on Abbeville Street. Contact Yolonda Buchanan for more information at (803) 508-7099.

Currently, Dr. Von Nessen and his team are analyzing the data they received through the surveys sent out from Fall of 2021 through early Winter 2021. We are looking forward to the final **Labor Market Needs, Recovery and Resiliency – Economic Analysis of the LSCOG Six-County Region** in April/May 2022.

Just a reminder... April is Fair Housing Month



## Workforce Development and SC Works Centers

The Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG) and Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) have been engaged to increase apprenticeships across our six - county region. Apprenticeships are the brass ring of workforce development. They are registered through the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) and combining classroom instruction with On-the-Job Training (OJT) to cement the relationship with local employers. Through this collaboration, we have been able to place 28 Apprentices with SRNS through our Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. Additionally, apprenticeship outcomes result in higher-than-average wages, as well as 3 to 5 years of increased longevity on the job, as compared to traditional employment programs. As we move forward, we hope to utilize this apprenticeship model to the wider employer community within the region.

For more information, please contact Andre Anderson at (803) 508-7072.



## The Giving Spirit



The LSCOG participated in the Toys for Tots this holiday season. Many donations were generously given, and we were able to donate **two overstuffed boxes** to the United States Marine Corps toy drive in early December 2021.



Ms. Sally Sharpe (WD Procurement & SC Works System Supervisor) is placing donated toys in one of the bins.



Staff members came together again to donate **\$3,477 to the United Way** for 2022.

## Meet the Staff

This is a new addition to our newsletter, meet the LSCOG staff that keeps everything running smoothly. This month we meet our Finance staff.



**Finance Staff:** (Clockwise from back left) Ashley Baker (PCED Finance Coordinator), Frances Owens (Finance Director), Megan Helmig (WD Finance Manager), Kelley Hayes (Finance Clerk), and Dorothy Faust (ADTRC Finance Clerk)



Ms. Christine Chandler accepted a new role as the **Transit Manager** with ADTRC.



Ms. Victoria Peralta is our newest staff member with the LSCOG. She is the new **Workforce Database Coordinator**.



Ms. Brittany Lott is one of our newest staff member with LSCOG. She is the new **Business Services Representative**.



Council of Governments

PO Box 850 | Aiken, SC 29802

2748 Wagener Road | Aiken, SC 29801

P 803.649.7981 | F 803.649.2248



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[www.TBredCountry.org](http://www.TBredCountry.org)  
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