

THINKING, PLANNING, SPEAKING, ACTING TOGETHER REGIONALLY FOR SUCCESS



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COASTAL ALABAMA

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# Become an Envision Strategy Partner and Build, Connect, Move and Grow with Envision Coastal Alabama's 2007-2008 Leadership Team



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**Our mission through Envision Coastal Alabama is to facilitate cooperative action for a unified coastal region with a healthy environment, sustainable economic development, excellence in education and equity for all.**

**Since 1997, Envision's diverse and ever-growing number of volunteer community leaders have been working to chart a course for our shared vision of coastal Alabama now and in the future. Our efforts have grown and evolved with our needs and leadership. We have transformed our community's vision blueprint into a plan of action under four key focus areas – Environment, Economy, Education and Equity – with leaders for each. And we have worked together on specific initiatives that meet the needs of all four areas, achieving real, tangible results.**

**Recognizing the increasing numbers of individuals, organizations and activities working to achieve our vision and the value it returns back to them, we instituted a branding program that recognizes them as an "Envision Strategy Partner," or "Envision Strategy in Action." See inside a sampling of what these Partners are up to and how you can join us.**



## BUILDING Literacy In The Workforce

Jane Minette is proof-positive that big things come in small packages. This petite powerhouse with the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), as well as a volunteer on Envision's Employability Education Task Force, is showing area employers in a big way one answer to the question, "How do we build a skilled workforce?"

Challenge: The economy in Alabama is strong and opportunities for regional development are high, but a critical shortage of workers threatens our prosperity. Low literacy rates and lack of proficiency in the "soft skills," such as reading, reasoning, math, computer and English as a

Second Language (ESL) are a big challenge for employers and the optimal growth of our workforce. The Literacy Coalition of South Alabama, an Envision Strategy Partner, sounded the call to build a stronger workforce and Envision responded through its Employability Education Task Force, led by Anthony Kaiser and Jill Chenoweth, with Minette as one of its front line soldiers.

Solution: ABC's Minette saw an answer for builders through ESL improvement in a growing Hispanic population that is "respectful, punctual and works really hard," but may not speak or understand English. In their trade, that also means safety hazard with on-the-job injuries of Hispanic workers twice that of the average rate, according to OSHA. Recognizing that a one-language work site is safer and more efficient, Minette and her boss transformed a grant and her desk job into one that takes her to barns, construction site trailers and the tops of unfinished buildings, such as the new RSA Tower, to teach English to Hispanic workers. The program's success has ABC chapters from around the nation contacting Minette to teach her model and has spawned related programs in coastal Alabama, adaptable to any industry.



## CONNECTING the Dots for Affordable Housing

Ministers, regulators, bankers, hurricanes and Georgians is the answer to the question, "Who does it take to bring affordable housing to coastal Alabama?" DASH for the Gulf Coast – Dependable, Affordable, Sustainable Housing – a successful affordable housing initiative, has set up shop here in coastal Alabama. How did it all happen?

Challenge: The lack of affordable housing had long been seen as a critical issue by Envision's Equity Team Co-Chair Rev. John Whitfield, who worked to set up the Baldwin County Affordable Housing Task Force. After all, not only was there a workforce

shortage along the Gulf Coast, but no affordable place for workers to live once they arrived, a problem exacerbated by two extraordinary hurricane seasons.

Solution: With the momentum of the preceding effort as a strong foundation, Envision Housing Task Force Chair Laura Davis saw a unique opportunity to connect all the players when DASH of LaGrange, Georgia "knocked on our door" after the storm, bringing with them their successful model for revitalizing neighborhoods by building new and refurbishing older houses, providing financing, down payment assistance, debt counseling and social services. Accompanied by a crucial commitment of \$1 million over three years from NeighborWorks America to produce bankable buyers and borrowers, DASH has a goal of supplying 1,200 affordable homes in Baldwin and Mobile counties over the next 10 years, partnering with local developers and universities.

## Envision Strategy Partners In Action



### MOVING Outside the Lines

When Envision Strategy Partners Taylor Rider and Bob Williams shook hands recently on a hot summer's day outside the GM&O Building in downtown Mobile, it signified much more than a traditional warm Southern greeting: It was a milestone in Envision's years-long effort to create a regional transit system by crossing county political boundaries and linking their two transit systems.

Challenge: For years, Envision volunteers ranked regional public transit as a top critical issue across all four focus areas to achieve a better coastal Alabama. Not only does the lack of better transit options compromise our safety and environment,

it compromises our economic development and the equitable access and mobility of our citizens. One major roadblock was the inability of Rider's Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS) and Williams' The Wave Transit System in Mobile to cross county lines.

Solution: Through a series of forums, workshops and events supported by Congressman Jo Bonner, Envision brought together the diverse array of transit stakeholders – federal, state, and local – to examine and break through those roadblocks, and build the political will to keep coastal Alabamians and our economy moving across such boundaries.



### GROWING Smarter Through Smart Coast

If you still don't know what Smart Growth is, don't blame Charlene Lee, who, with partner Wendy Allen, turned her own personal passion for smart planning and development in coastal Alabama into a successful non-profit: Smart Coast. This Envision Strategy Partner is leading the way in coastal Alabama toward development that better protects our natural environment and quality of life.

Challenge: Population growth around our nation's coasts is exploding and coastal Alabama is no exception with Baldwin County recently listed as the fastest growing county in the state. Land use patterns since World War II have tended toward

low-density sprawl of single family homes that disturbs more green space, puts more cars on the road, and results in more stormwater runoff.

Solution: "Smart Growth" concepts champion the return to higher density, mixed use development with more walkable, livable communities. Boosted by the Mobile "Mayor's Smart Growth Initiative" and the aid of Envision to pull off the first area-wide conference on the subject, Smart Coast formed a non-profit, took what many still regarded as an esoteric term and transformed its practical components into working groups that are taking action and getting results. Smart Coast has held educational and planning forums on better "green building" design, mixed use development, transit, sustainable agriculture and long term recovery for communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina. The group is now getting down to brass tacks by promoting and educating elected leaders on Smart Code, a unified land development ordinance for planning and urban design that folds zoning, subdivision regulations, urban design and basic architectural standards into one compact document. With affordable housing and transportation as key smart growth components, Smart Coast has been working hand-in-hand with these initiatives by other Envision Strategy Partners.

