



# with Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day on Economic Development Academy Experience

Two years ago, the Alabama League of Municipalities launched our Economic Development Academy (EDA) to educate and engage municipal officials on the essential elements and phases of economic development while highlighting their vital role in economic initiatives and projects within their communities. This program is led by Bryan Parker, our director of governmental affairs, and Neal Wade, former director of the Alabama Development Office. We are proud to partner with the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) to provide this training. Thirty municipalities graduated from our first class, and we currently have 10 more cities and towns participating in this year's class. Due to a high demand for further learning, we have established an advanced second year course for previous participants.



Beginning with this issue of our magazine, we are going to start spotlighting one EDA class participant each quarter. We are excited to kick off this series beginning with the city of Thomasville, which is located in Clarke County.

Thomasville is a graduate of our first EDA class and is currently participating in the advanced class. Thomasville was established in November of 1888 and presently has a population of more than 6,000. Mayor Sheldon Day became the mayor of Thomasville in 1996 after serving on the city council from 1991 to 1995. He said the city is at the center of Alabama's vast timber industry, and it draws commerce from a 30-mile radius to its shopping hub. The city boasts a vibrant arts program, a fantastic year-round parks and recreation program, one of the largest splash pads in Alabama and is truly a destination place for families to visit.

## Why did you apply to EDA?

We wanted our entire economic development team and our elected leaders to go through the course to assist each member of our team in understanding the many facets of a comprehensive and healthy economic development program. We felt this would greatly enhance our ability to have our elected leaders and our economic development professionals on the same page and enable us to maximize our ability to attract new and expanding businesses and industries to our rural region.



## Who all participated from your city?

Mayor Sheldon Day, Economic Development Assistant Alex Woodard, Councilman Reid Smith, Councilman Bill Davis, Councilman Roy Madison and our Clarke County Economic Developer Roselyn Sales.

## Were you surprised by the results of the community economic vitality survey?

It was everything we hoped for and more. Naturally, I have been in office a long time and have been fortunate to attract many businesses and industries to our city. However, we have several new councilmembers and others who have not been exposed to the full realm of economic development tools and training that helps them fully understand the procedures and best practices of economic development.

## What did your approved project consist of?

Our approved project consisted of revamping our city of Thomasville Planning Commission process by setting up and appointing a new commission and bringing in the University of Alabama's rural development team to assist us in setting goals and best practices for the new commission. We also agreed once that was done we would move on to beginning the development of a new comprehensive plan. We are now in that phase and making great progress!

## How has EDA impacted your decision-making process for the city when it comes to recruiting new business and retaining old businesses?

The EDA has assisted us in getting everyone on the same page by giving our entire team



*Left to right: Councilman Reid Smith, Mayor Sheldon Day, Economic Development Assistant Alex Woodard, Councilman Bill Davis, Councilman Roy Madison*



the knowledge and training needed to implement best practices. Since attending EDA, our little city has seen a huge increase in economic development activity. We are putting our EDA training to work, and we will soon make several announcements of new businesses coming to Thomasville.

## What did you enjoy the most about the EDA?

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I enjoyed the retail recruitment portion as well as refreshing my knowledge of all the other tools available to communities by state and federal sources to assist us in our economic development efforts.



## What were some skills that you learned or topics you were able to get help with?

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Amendment 772 usage as well as other legal aspects and best practices in the offering of incentives, including when to do so and when not.

## What advice do you have for cities that are interested in applying?

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I strongly suggest you apply for the program. Make sure you include those on your city council or economic development team that may be skeptical of whether your current economic development program is effective. The EDA gives all of you and your team a litmus test and offers a great opportunity for everyone on your team to come away on the same page and with a focus on how to maximize the potential of your economic development team going forward.



## What are your city's future plans when it comes to economic development?

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Pedal to the metal! We have many new business projects we are working on now as well as working closely with our existing businesses to create new opportunities to grow a very vibrant and healthy economy for Thomasville. ■