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**Investors give Dixie County groups \$200,000;
Promise \$800,000 more**



Beverly and Ed Pivacek own The Putnam Lodge and they hosted the event on Tuesday afternoon (Jan. 8) in the Shamrock area of Cross City.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 8, 2019 at 10:08 p.m.

CROSS CITY -- Four charitable organizations in Dixie County each accepted \$50,000 Tuesday afternoon (Jan. 8) as an investment firm started a five-year plan of donations that will total \$1 million in five years.



Representing Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings (from left) are Michael 'Mike' Ranson, Charles 'Charlie' Miller, Frank 'Bump' Faircloth and Robert 'Bob' McKagen.

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Beverly and Ed Pivacek, owners of the Putnam Lodge, 15487 U.S. Highway 19, in Cross City hosted the two-hour lunchtime event and provided a buffet style prime rib luncheon.

In addition to prime rib, diners enjoyed a fresh garden salad, garlic parsley mashed potatoes, demi-glazed gravy, a green bean medley, fig glazed boneless chicken thigh, garlic bread, and various choices for dessert.

Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings, an investment firm with ties to the timber industry in Dixie County, announced that it is making a \$1 million donation to be split between the Dixie Education Foundation, the Dixie County School District's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, Dixie County Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition.

The donation is being made from the proceeds of the sale of the Suwannee Lumber Mill and is evidence of Blue Wolf's commitment to responsible social business practices and a way to recognize the health of business operations depend heavily on the health of the communities in which they operate.

The donation will be distributed over five years with the hope of expanding educational opportunities, supporting the physical and spiritual health of youth, mitigating the impact of the drug abuse and developing a skilled and stable future workforce.



Frank 'Bump' Faircloth of Suwannee Lumber Co. speaks to the crowd as the program begins.

Representing Blue Wolf were Frank "Bump" Faircloth, Mike Ranson, Charlie Miller and Bob McKagen.

Faircloth said he considers the ability to be able to get together with everyone and enjoy the fellowship and joy of this occasion to be a blessing, as he knows the benefit to the community from this investment will be strong.

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All of the action Tuesday came after the July 10, 2018, sale by Blue Wolf Capital Partners (Blue Wolf), of the sale of Suwannee Lumber Co. and Caddo River Forest Products to Conifex Timber Inc., a publicly-traded lumber and sustainable forestry company operating in British Columbia, Canada.

In 2013, Blue Wolf purchased Suwannee Lumber Co. and helped it to become a thriving interest again. Suwannee Lumber Co. began in 1954 and has been a cornerstone of the business community in Dixie County since then.

Faircloth said Ranson and Miller spurred him along, and gave him ideas about how to help Dixie County. McKagen, a previous CEO of Suwannee Lumber Co., and Mark West, CEO of the mulch and soil company, were among the people recognized by Faircloth.

Faircloth mentioned that Blue Wolf continues to have an interest in the mulch and soil company. So, he added, the investment firm still has a presence in Dixie County, even though it sold the lumber mill.

Over 25 years ago, Faircloth said, he felt the company should do something to help the youth in Dixie County. And it did. It made contributions for years, including to the Dixie Education Foundation, the FCA, and to the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, Faircloth said, with donations to AVID coming later.

The group of leaders in these four organizations, Faircloth said, is second to none, and he is very confident that they will use these funds to help the young people in Dixie County.

The five-year \$1 million gift proposal is hoped to spur other business interests in small counties to see the investment into the hearts, minds and soul of young people will pay dividends far beyond just the monetary gains of a community whose children have been helped, by those children growing into adults who understand the value of being part of a positive environment.

Before inviting the representatives of the four groups to make their presentations about their organization, Faircloth spoke about the interconnectivity with Suwannee Lumber.

Faircloth was an excellent emcee for the event, and the stories he shared were colorful and funny.



AVID

(from left) DCHS Principal Paul Bennett, DCHS AVID students Idalis Vasquez and William Gonzalez, DCHS AVID Coordinator Marci-Michael Smith and AVID elective teacher Noah Raulerson.

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The first person to speak about their group accepting and using the donations was Dixie County High School Principal Paul Bennett.

Principal Bennett said his mentor in this regard is Diana Locke, Bennett's predecessor, when she was the principal at the old DCHS campus.

Bennett and Locke worked together to think of manners in which to help the DCHS AVID program with this donated funding.

Bennett said AVID helps students gain confidence for public speaking, as well as to provide organizational skills and other lessons to help students succeed after high school.

DCHS AVID students Idalis Vasquez and William Gonzalez each spoke about their experiences. They are both seniors at DCHS.

AVID is an acronym for Advancement Via Individual Determination, as Vasquez said in her speech.

Being an AVID student, Vasquez said, has helped her to become more outgoing and able to new experiences. Vasquez has seen positive change in herself as a result of these classes, she said, and she has noticed a similarly good impact on other students as well.

She thanked the investors for their gift, which promises to help many other students just as it has helped her.

Gonzalez said DCHS adopted the AVID program when he was a freshman. He was accepted as an AVID student during his sophomore year.

He shared with the crowd that there was a moment when he questioned why he would put more upon himself than the minimum mandatory in core classes, but having made the choice to apply himself through the AVID learning tools, the young man said he is happy to have made what he sees as the correct choice.

Bennett introduced DCHS AVID Coordinator Marci-Michael Smith and AVID elective teacher Noah Raulerson.

AVID Coordinator Smith said only 19 percent of college freshmen will complete a four-year college with a degree; however, 85 percent of the AVID students who start college complete the four-year course of study.

Among other things, the AVID program leaders plan to purchase educational supplies and test prep materials, fund student trips to technical schools and colleges, renew program accreditation, promote the program's benefits so as to enroll more students, recognize student successes and offer scholarships.

AVID aims to change lives by helping schools shift to a more equitable, student-centered approach and close the opportunity gap. Through this program, schools can prepare students of all income levels for college, careers, and life. Regardless of their life circumstances, AVID students learn to overcome obstacles and achieve success. They graduate and attend college at higher rates, but more importantly, they can think critically, collaborate, and set high expectations to confidently conquer the challenges that await them.

AVID teacher Raulerson said he thoroughly enjoys helping students through this program, which includes etiquette and manners lessons.

AVID Coordinator Smith said there are 75 AVID-elect students currently. Next year, Smith projected, there will be 125 AVID-elect students thanks to this donation.

Beyond the AVID-elect students, Smith said, this program benefits every student at DCHS, because teachers are trained through professional development connected with the program.

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Faircloth said that former DCHS Principal Locke would send students to potentially work at Suwannee Lumber Co. He added that he believes she sent the best students to the company, because many of them continue to work there or elsewhere in the timber industry.

FCA



Joe Mack Locke speaks on behalf of the Dixie County Chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Joe Mack Locke is the DCHS FCA advisor. Also, at the event on Tuesday was Steve Mchargue, area director of the North Florida FCA Eastern Zone, which includes seven counties.

Mchargue lives in Lee (Madison County).

Locke also is a youth pastor at Old Town Church of God. He is also the nephew of former Principal Locke. As he went off script, he told about the interrelationships of several people in the room that day, and so it is as Faircloth jokingly mentioned, it is better not to be too critical of anyone in Dixie County, because everyone is related.

Locke met Mchargue when DCHS's FCA advisor moved away and the Fields of Faith program needed an adult leader from the school. The student-run message about Jesus and Christianity. It happened on the football field, and it went well.

That event on a Wednesday night in October drew about 400 people, Locke said.

Locke said this gift from Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber is confirmation of him to be called as the FCA representative in Dixie County, because there are many other things that are pulling for his attention, including his study to earn a master's degree, and his two children, one of whom is a senior at DCHS this year.

Locke spoke then about the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and how it helps athletes learn about Jesus, which in turn is believed to help others.

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The Fellowship of Christian Athletics plans to use the funds in support of its mission to “touch millions of lives... one heart at a time” by bringing life coaches for school-based and community sports programs, exposing local youth to the encouragement of inspiring Christian guest speakers, attending sports camps, further developing the Diamonds of Devotion (Baseball) and Courts of Praise (Basketball) events and enhancing the annual Fields of Faith (Football) event.

Locke said the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition is trying to keep the children safe. The Dixie Education Foundation is giving the youths a future, he continued. The AVID program helps train students while they are in high school. The FCA, he concluded, goes after the hearts of the children – “We’re trying to save their souls.”

The FCA uses a mixture of coaches, camps and commentators, Locke said. Coaching provides local support, while camps provide new experiences and friends. They expose the campers to new things.

Locke said one student going to band camp outside of Dixie County saw a lighted building one night as they passed by in the bus travelling through Duval County. He asked what it was. He was told it is a mall, Locke said, because that freshman had never been out of Dixie County to see such a thing.

“Camps provide that outside world,” Locke said. “Commentators bring the outside world to Dixie. That’s what we’re planning to do.”

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition



Katrina VanAernam and several supporters of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition stand with the novelty-sized check presented to that group by BWSLC, Holdings.

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Kyle Roberts of the Dixie County unit of the Florida Department of Health is introduced by Katrina VanAernam. The Health Department is one of the many resources called upon by the DCADC.

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam spoke about this group as well as the Overcomes program.

In 2011, the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition came together as a community, she said.

The Community Coalition Alliance (CCA) helped from the start of the DCADC. At the event Tuesday, CCA Executive Director Kathleen Roberts joined VanAernam and other others as people were told about the DCADC.

The CCA provided training and resources at a professional level, VanAernam said.

VanAernam said that when Faircloth called her, she thought about the Recovery-Oriented System of Care (ROSC) which is a communitywide network of services developed to support the long-term recovery of individuals and families impacted by severe substance use.

As part of this process, the DCADC will engage in a community workgroup, working to bring a trained Recovery Peer Specialist to the area and supporting the recovery work already being done in the community by local organizations like Overcomers and AA.

The Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote and develop a positive and safe environment for the Dixie County youth, as well as young adults and adults, by educating on the dangers of alcohol and other drugs and by uniting people and services to assist in the prevention effort.

The Coalition has been serving Dixie since 2011 by implementing evidence-based prevention programs and campaigns in the community. Some of the programs include

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Friday Night Done Right drug and alcohol-free youth events, Know the Law classes taught in the schools, Environmental Scans, Responsible Vendor Trainings and Compliance Checks.

Other activities include tracking local drug use trends, connecting people to services and providing information outreach.

Dixie Education Foundation



President Kathryn McInnis of the Dixie Education Foundation Inc. shares with the audience the success the Foundation has had in helping Dixie County students learn more beyond high school.



Carol West (left) joins President Kathryn McInnis of the Dixie Education Foundation Inc. to speak about the Foundation's funding.

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President Kathryn McInis of the Dixie Education Foundation Inc. spoke about the success this foundation has had over the past several years.

This retired educator of the Dixie County School District, introduced Foundation Treasurer Christina Barber and Foundation Finance Director Carol West.

The Foundation completed its 20th year with more than \$1.8 million presented in scholarships to Dixie County students to attend colleges and trade schools (career technical programs), she said using their funds, the Dixie Education Foundation plans to better assist Dixie County High School graduates seeking career and technical certifications.

A majority of DCHS students do not seek or complete a college degree and would benefit from additional training before entering the workforce.

The Foundation plans include hiring a coordinator, gathering mentors, assisting with test prep, technical school and college site visits, publicity and promotion of programs, helping students investigate other schools and tools that will benefit them as they explore career options and working with District staff.

The Dixie Education Foundation is a non-profit, community-based organization whose purposes are exclusively educational and charitable, formed to secure and distribute contributions from individuals, corporations, governmental entities and foundations to provide assistance which will benefit Dixie County students. The primary focus is to assist with scholarships and to support other activities beneficial to Dixie County education and expand the educational opportunities of the youth.

Among the many esteemed visitors at this event, were Jeff Hendry and Diane Scholz from the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP). They were guests of Carol West.

The NFEDP includes a 15-county region that covers in excess of 9,100 square miles. The counties comprising the region include Baker, Bradford, Citrus, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union counties.

The NFEDP is a public/private, 501c(6) entity dedicated to facilitating economic development activity and high quality job growth, and securing capital investment in North Central Florida.

It is supported by local government and private sector/corporate partners, state and federal grants, and contracts for services.

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After the buffet banquet, and presentation by each of the four recipient organizations, checks were presented – both the actual kind and the large novelty checks for photo opportunities. There were several people taking pictures with cell phones and other devices, including cameras.