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** Updated With Amazing Video
Of Four Saxophone Players*

**14th Annual Dixie County Education-Business
Partnership Luncheon highlights progress**



Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas (left) welcomes guest speaker Frank 'Bump' Faircloth of Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings to the 14th Annual Dixie County Education-Business Partnership Luncheon. SEE [THE BUSINESS PAGE](#) for the whole story, photos and video

Photo by Jeff M. Hardison © March 9, 2019 at 11:19 a.m.

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Dixie County School Board Chairman Tim Alexander welcomes everyone to the event.

Dixie County School Board Chairman Tim Alexander welcomed everyone to the event and he thanked them for taking part of their day to participate in the recognition of the business community partnering with education in Dixie County. During this event, outstanding staff and teachers were recognized. The keynote speaker told some about the process of \$1 million being given to help the youth of Dixie County. And a quartet of saxophone players performed, as well as many people enjoying a barbecue chicken lunch -- and it all happened within one hour.

Chairman Alexander thanked the business partners not just for this school year, but for every year when they have helped the Dixie County School System. The funding, as well as the input from business leaders to School Board members are what helps this county's students gain the knowledge to succeed in their work endeavors after high school, as well as to have a foundation in education before they enter college.

Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas expanded on these thoughts, adding that the goal of this district is for every student to enjoy success.

The major impact of positive input and funding from business is greatly appreciated, Thomas intimated.

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Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas stands with the 2018-2019 Dixie County Superintendent's Council. They are Breanna Berry, Taryn Brown, Elicia Carter, Derrick Charboneau, Kenlee Stinson, Tyler Sutton, Jeremy Bright, Chase Johnson, Amie Jones, Unique Lake, Easton Locke and Austin Roberts. Members of this council are selected by teachers, administrators and students to provide the superintendent with a source of input from the students.



Pausing for a momentary photo opportunity before they started serving food are five of the six seniors in the Dixie County Superintendent's Council (from left) Elicia Carter, Breanna Berry, Kenlee Stinson, Taryn Brown and Derrick Charboneau.

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Thomas introduced the hosts, which include himself, Chairman Alexander, Vice Chairman Paul N. Gainey, and School Board members Crystal Bush, Lacey Corbin and Chuck Farmer. The lunch was sponsored by the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition.

Special guests were introduced by Superintendent Thomas. They were Frank 'Bump' Faircloth of Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. and a quartet of saxophone players Malachi Brown, William Malloy, Riggs Ross and Brandon Bird.

Malloy is the Dixie County High School Band Director. He told *HardisonInk.com* after the luncheon, that this year he has been having small ensembles of brass instruments, and saxophone players practicing separate from the whole band, and then working with the whole band.

During part of his introduction, Superintendent Thomas spoke about the Dixie County Education Foundation. It started 21 years ago with \$10,000.

For graduating seniors last year, the Foundation provided in excess of \$170,000 in scholarships, Thomas said.

The officers and board members of the Foundation are President Kathryn McInnis, Vice President Briar O'Steen, Secretary Charlotte Lord, Treasurer Christina Barber and board members Carol West, Michael O'Steen, Cindy Bellot, Jody Stephenson, Jane Boyd, Jessica Swails, Jean Driggers, Jaime NesSmith, Willmonteen Smith, Holly Houghton, John Cherry, Lee Daniels, Kenneth Baumer, Bobbie Lamar, Sammy Royal, Kenneth Baumer and George Edmonds.

Superintendent Thomas recognized Dixie County elected officials who were present, retired educators who were present, district department directors, and the principals of all the schools.

The 2018-2019 Dixie County Superintendent's Council were all recognized. There are six seniors and six juniors in this group.

The six seniors are Breanna Berry, Taryn Brown, Elicia Carter, Derrick Charboneau, Kenlee Stinson and Tyler Sutton. The six juniors are Jeremy Bright, Chase Johnson, Amie Jones, Unique Lake, Easton Locke and Austin Roberts.

The Rev. Mike Brown of First Baptist Church provided the invocation and blessing of the meal.

The 12 students who are members of the Superintendent's Council served the lunch of barbecue dinners and tea, which were catered by BubbaQue's. Meals were served buffet style as individuals went in line, similar to the manner in which students are provided their meals in schools.

The Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from each school were named by Superintendent of Schools Thomas and he asked each person to stand when introduced.

Billie Jo Beckham was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from Anderson Elementary School. Beckham was also the 2018-2019 Dixie Countywide School District Educational Staff Professionals of the Year.

Beckham has worked as the school secretary there for two and a half years now, Thomas said. She has served as a substitute teacher for 10 years and has been an ESE paraprofessional for three years.

Lisa Buck was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from Old Town Elementary School.

Buck started as a substitute at OTES in 1991, Thomas said. She became a paraprofessional in 2013.

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Macaele Wood was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from Ruth Raines Middle School.

Wood "... has provided exemplary service to the students and the staff at Ruth Raines Middle School for over 21 years," Thomas said. The superintendent said she brings joy to the school every day.

Shannon Free was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from Dixie County High School.

Free has been the friendly face greeting people at the old DCHS and now the new DCHS for the past five years, Thomas said. She exemplified the positive culture and climate at DCHS, he said.

Denice Stroup was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from the Transportation Department.

Stroup has been driving a school bus for the school district since 2003, Thomas said. She goes over and beyond her duties to assure student safety on the bus, Thomas said. She knows every student and their parents. She has also served as a driver trainer.

Jennie VanElla was the 2018-2019 Educational Staff Professionals of the Year from the District Office.

VanElla worked in the district for four years driving a bus, and the past six years in support services, Thomas said. She is a hardworking, focused employee who work consistently is of high quality, Thomas said.

The Dixie County Teachers of the Year were each introduced by students from their schools. All of the learners from grade 1 through grade 12 were well spoken. For a first grader to stand on a platform to be able to reach the microphone on a podium, and to provide a speech in front of a room filled with principals, teachers and other adults is a significant accomplishment, which is reflexive of work by educators in this county.

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Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas adjusts the microphone for Old Town Elementary School first grader Jeffrey Stoner.

https://youtu.be/fX_6hFvuJ3E

In this video, Old Town Elementary School first grader Jeffrey Stoner reads his speech about why Kaycee Bush is this year's Teacher of the Year from that school.

Anderson Elementary School 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year Lynn Cannon was introduced by fourth grader Naomie Cave.

The young girl told the audience that her teacher has 20 years of experience, having taught students in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, fourth, fifth and sixth grades, as well as being a tutor for third graders, and a reading coach.

Cave said the AES Teacher of the Year has taught in Dixie, Okaloosa, Charlotte, Hardee, Jackson and Union counties. Cannon has earned the Teacher of the Year award in Dixie County before.

Old Town Elementary School 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year Kaycee Bush was introduced by first grader Jeffrey Stoner.

"I think Miss Kaycee is the best teacher in the world," the first grader said.

Bush has been a teacher at OTEs for nine years, Stoner said. The first grader mentioned that his teacher's gifts of candy and juices is appreciated.

"My classmates said that Miss Kaycee loves us so much that she keeps us smart and on track," Stoner said.

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Stoner added that the most important thing his teacher does for him and his colleagues is to assure that learning is fun for them. The boy said OTES Principal Karen Tillis has said the school is blessed to have Bush as a teacher there, and that principal wishes every student in every school could enjoy having a teacher with a heart for students like Bush's.

Ruth Rains Middle School 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year Tyler Eastridge was introduced by seventh grader Landon Rollison.

Rollison said Eastridge, his civics teacher, was selected as the RRMS Teacher of the Year for many reasons. Among those reasons are the Eastridge makes civics fun and interesting, by going beyond the textbooks, Rollison said.

Eastridge has taught Rollison and his classmates how to make legislative bills, and vote on approval of those bills. This insight was applied by those students in their student government to have a say in how RRMS is run, Rollison said. This civics teacher has worked with Dixie County Supervisor of Elections Starlet Cannon to let them vote by using actual voting machines to elect student leaders, Rollison said, helping all students learn about the process of elections for a representative government.

Eastridge worked with Dixie County Judge Jennifer J. Johnson to have a mock trial, where students served as attorneys and on the jury, Rollison said. While civics may not be seen as exciting as science by some students, Rollison said, Eastridge's service as a civics teacher shows why he was chosen as Ruth Rains Middle School 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year.

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Dixie County 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year Tucker Duclos stands for a few seconds as he is recognized during the 14th Annual Dixie County Education-Business Partnership Luncheon.

Dixie County High School 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year (and Countywide Teacher of the Year) Tucker Duclos was introduced by 12th grader Calista Amrell.

Amrell said teacher Duclos has demonstrated himself as an exemplary teacher – someone who cares about the students as individuals, taking time to know what each person requires to learn and to better themselves.

Duclos never settles for anything less than his students' best efforts, Amrell said. This teacher genuinely cares about the education of the students in Dixie County, his student said, as those students will enjoy benefits from learning.

Duclos' work in Dixie County, Amrell said, "... illustrates his care for students, reverence for education and devotion for promoting success – both within and beyond the classroom," Amrell said.

Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Thomas added to the student's information about Dixie County District 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year Duclos.

This teacher, Thomas said, graduated from Lincoln High School, in Lincoln, Rhode Island, and Emmanuel College, in Boston, Massachusetts. Duclos has been a teacher at

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DCHS for two years now, Thomas said.

“He establishes professionalism, competence and high expectations in his classroom,” Thomas said. “This teacher excels in class procedures and his classroom is often modeled in our school district for new and beginning teachers.”

Teacher Duclos’ rigorous curriculum, Superintendent Thomas said, is designed to equip students with the 21st century skills required for students to have success in college and in the workplace.

This teacher, Thomas added, understands the challenges faced by at-risk students to succeed academically, and he excels in earning their trust to accept those tasks and to flourish as they overcome obstacles.

“This is a dedicated teacher,” Thomas said. “He devotes countless hours preparing for his classes.”

Thomas went on to say Duclos integrates activities during class that engage the students in learning. Duclos provides hands-on tasks to his students, Thomas said, and student collaboration to supplement learning and understanding of concepts.

This invaluable commitment to education, Thomas said, is what earned Duclos the title as Dixie County 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year.



Frank 'Bump' Faircloth speaks about the \$1 million award spread over five years from Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings to educational interests in Dixie County.

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Frank 'Bump' Faircloth holds the 2019 Dixie County Business Partner of the Year plaque award to Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings. This award is presented in recognition of this business' support to the Dixie County Schools.

Superintendent Thomas introduced Bump Faircloth, who was speaking on behalf of a business interest that has been a significant part of the economic engine of Dixie County for in excess of 60 years – Suwannee Lumber.

This company has built a strong foundation by having skilled workers. This company has a commitment to positive environmental, social and government principals that help create value in the company's investment in the community, Thomas said.

This company helps the children, families and friends in Dixie County, Thomas said.

The first set of five sets of \$50,000 annual awards to each to four groups – the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition (DCADC), the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), the Dixie County Education Foundation (DCEF) and the Dixie County High School Advancement by Individual Determination (AVID) program has been completed, Thomas said.

The \$200,000 worth of awards over five years equals \$1 million that Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings is awarding to Dixie County.

The board of Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings chose to give these donations after being prompted by Faircloth.

As he introduced Faircloth, Thomas spoke about the man.

Faircloth is a graduate of the University of Florida, where he majored in accounting and industrial management. Faircloth earned Reserve Officer Training Corps honors at

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UF, and served full-time active duty from 1967 to 1973 serving as a first lieutenant in the Judge Advocate General Corps.

He founded Faircloth Ford in Perry, Thomas said as he introduced the keynote speaker of the day.

“He (Faircloth) was recognized by Henry Ford as the youngest Ford dealer in the United States at the age of 26,” Thomas said.

Faircloth was also the CEO and owner of Sportcraft Boats, Big Bend Equipment and a set of convenience stores.

In 1991, Faircloth became the CEO of Suwannee Lumber Co., Thomas said, where he remained until 2013 when Blue Wolf bought that company. Faircloth remained as CEO and Board Chairman of Suwannee Lumber.

In July of 2018, Suwannee Lumber was sold to Conifex Timber Inc. (TSX:CFF), which was part of the acquisition by that Canadian company, which also bought the Caddo River sawmill in Glenwood Arkansas.

Blue Wolf Suwannee Lumber Co. Holdings owns four mulch companies, land and other assets, Thomas said as he introduced Faircloth.

During Thomas’ 25 years in Dixie County education, Faircloth has donated to the county’s sports programs, education programs, and always has been “a huge part of our community.”

Faircloth said Dixie County and its youth are near and dear to his heart.

“I saw a lot of need to help people,” Faircloth said, “and every year out at Suwannee we would say ‘You know, there’s more work to be done. We can do more for the community.’”

Faircloth shared with listeners that his family lineage includes many educators, and this may be part of the reason he feels driven to help young people learn and thrive.

One of Faircloth’s grandfathers was a judge and teacher. Two uncles were teachers and principals.

One of his uncles – John Broward Culpepper (Dec. 8, 1907-April 7, 1990) -- became chairman of the Board of Regents for the State of Florida, Faircloth said.

Records show Culpepper was principal at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School in Gainesville from 1935-1938; Principal at Leesburg High School from 1940-1941; Principal at Leon High School in Tallahassee from 1941-1944. He was Dean of Men at Florida State University from 1947-1954. In 1954, he became the first Chancellor of State University System of Florida, serving until 1968.

Also noted in records is that the University of West Florida, University of South Florida and Florida Atlantic University were created by Culpepper. He was designated a Great Floridian by the Florida Department of State in the Great Floridians 2000 Program. A plaque attesting to the honor is located at Leon High School in Tallahassee.

Faircloth continued speaking about teachers in his family. His mother was a teacher for 42 years, he said, including being his teacher when he was in second grade.

One of Faircloth’s aunts, Gladys Moore, has an elementary school named in her honor.

The speaker said he wanted to be concise on Friday afternoon, because the January presentation at the Putnam Lodge, had been planned to be 30 minutes but it lasted 98 minutes.

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To see the previous *HardisonInk.com* story about the awarding of \$1 million to Dixie County youth, please click [HERE](#).

The \$1 million award to four groups over five years involved a yearlong process, Faircloth said. When Suwannee Lumber was sold to Blue Wolf, because private equity investors are different than some of the folks in Dixie County, Faircloth said.

Metropolitan New York City people live in a different culture, Faircloth said, in contrast with people in rural Cross City.

Suwannee Lumber was the first successful company bought by Blue Wolf, Faircloth said, because they like to buy distressed companies that they can improve.

Suwannee Lumber had some environmental issues, Faircloth said, "... and to spend \$15 million in something that was not going to result in something that employs people always concerned me."

All of the environmental issues have been remediated now, he said, and everyone is grateful for that.

Private equity investors obtain money from universities, pension funds and they pool money. Today, Blue Wolf has grown to have \$1.2 billion in assets, Faircloth said.

Some of those investors had not seen a "family culture" where business owners "pray at meetings."

They allowed prayers at quarterly meetings, Faircloth said, because without that, it would be a deal-breaker. Faircloth helped them understand that religion is a part of the lumber business.

Churches have sent grief counselors to Suwannee Lumber, he said. Over the years, this was a practice that continued at the business to help workers with issues at home, such as divorce.

When this practice proved to be an effective method to help employees work better, the investors saw it as something to consider.

By the fifth year of Blue Wolf owning Suwannee Lumber (2013-2018), when it was ready for the sale to Conifex Timber Inc., Faircloth told the Blue Wolf Board of Directors that he felt, even with all that Suwannee Lumber had done already to help Dixie County, it had not been enough.

"I thought if I asked for \$50,000," Faircloth said, "I might get \$25,000."

He gathered information to show the Blue Wolf leaders. After a year, everyone working on the gift determined the best method for the most efficient method and with proper accountability.

"I was thinking fifty (thousand dollars) at the most," Faircloth said. "So, I laid it all on the table."

More discussion led to speaking about DCEF, AVID, DCADC and the FCA.

"The FCA was not as easy to sell as one might think," Faircloth said, "because of the word 'Christian' in it. There's one Muslim on the Board up there. And that was a chore."

Nevertheless, the Blue Wolf Board told Faircloth that this donation is to the people of Dixie County, and if he feels the Dixie County Fellowship of Christian Athletes deserve the help, then so be it.

At that point, one director said "Why don't we go to \$200,000."

Faircloth said when that was said, he could have fallen on the floor from being so overwhelmed.

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And then another director, Faircloth said, proposed giving \$1 million to those four Dixie County interests over a five-year span with \$200,000 being given annually.

“And I said,” Faircloth said, “praise the Lord. It’s unbelievable.”

Faircloth said the leaders of those four groups are trustworthy people who will be good stewards of the funds entrusted to them for the good of the community’s children.

Faircloth intimated that Blue Wolf’s potential to help Dixie County even more in the future, beyond the already-pledged future donations can be on the horizon.



Concluding the program was a quartet of saxophone players (seen here, from left) Malachi Brown, William Malloy, Riggs Ross and Brandon Bird. Malloy is the Dixie County High School Band Director. They performed an ensemble of songs by the band *Queen*, which were among those in the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which can be seen and heard in the video below.

<https://youtu.be/GVwYrmQdAXo>