This publication is only a glimpse of the programs we are offering through our Cooperative Extension Program at Fort Valley State University. Our team of agents and specialists are dedicated to providing knowledge to inspire the lives of Georgians. Lives of women such as 65-year-old Louise Vinson who was once inactive until taking classes taught by an agent at a local senior center. The lives of boys and girls growing up in a rural area, where gang activity is increasing, are being touched by an Extension agent working closely with a local police chief.

Extension is reaching out to not only seniors and children, but farmers during these tumultuous economic times. Through various programs landowners are learning how to sustain their livestock and crop productions. The Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Co-op in southeast Georgia is one of many examples. This group is providing fresh grown produce to local school systems and major grocery stores.

I hope that you enjoy reading about just a few of the lives Extension touches through its range of programs as we continue to fulfill our mission of outreach to citizens across the state.
By Russell Boone Jr.,
public information editor/writer

Byron - Purchasing a home. For many those three words conjure up nightmares of negotiating a maze that includes loan rates, credit history, property taxes, realtors and home searches.

Some people look for assistance in this process, and homebuyer workshops, sponsored by Fort Valley State University’s Cooperative Extension Program, are available for assistance. Classes are offered throughout Georgia. In 2009, 22 participants spent a total of about $1.2 million on their homes. Several of the more affordable homes, under $50,000, were purchased either in rural areas or as foreclosures.

Twins Chaquasha and Chiquisha Tomlin attended a workshop in the summer of 2009 and used what they learned to purchase their first home in Byron about a month later. Renting had grown old, said the then 24 year olds.

“We were both tired of apartment living,” said Chaquasha, an admissions counselor at Fort Valley State. “We were living in Warner Robins and we wanted a change of scenery, but we did not want to move into another apartment, renting did not make sense. What we decided to do was to go ahead and start purchasing a home.”

< Chaquasha Tomlin
Georgians’ fears and frustrations of purchasing a home are curbed by homebuyer education workshops offered throughout the state.

Although they had already begun their search for a home, the sisters found out about an upcoming two-day homebuyer education workshop and signed up for the class that was three hours each day.

“It took us six hours to get our certificates,” said Chiquisha, a teacher at Northside High School in Warner Robins. “It was very, very informative. They showed us pictures, especially when it came down to the home inspection. In one picture there was this air duct supported by a broken chair. This is what you don’t want to see in your home owner’s inspection. When it came time for our home owner’s inspection we were there. The home owner’s workshop told us we could be present. We looked for odds and ends stuff, and things that did not look right we reported it.”

By attending the homebuyers’ workshop, they had an advantage when it came down to negotiating a price for their house.

“The homebuyers’ class also taught you not to sell yourself short,” said Chiquasha. “It taught you what to look for, what you think that price should be and not get cheated.”

The sisters agreed that the workshop eased a lot of the fears associated with home buying. “It was exactly on point, especially when it came to closing time. They told us at the workshop that we would be signing our name for at least an hour and a half it seemed. They gave us an example packet of what we were probably going to sign. What they showed us at the homebuyers’ workshop was exactly what we signed if not probably more,” Chiquasha said.

Out of all the information provided at the workshop, the main point that stuck in their minds was credit.

“Credit was a huge factor. Make sure you have good credit because it makes yourself more marketable,” Chiquisha said.

Growing up in a home also gave the siblings plenty of motivation to purchase their own place.

“We got picked on a lot when we were younger and growing up. A lot of kids we went to school with, black people did not live in houses or own them. They lived either in the projects or a mobile home. If you lived in a regular home, you were supposed to have a lot of money,” Chiquasha said.

But as it turned out, being wealthy enough to live in a home was not the case for the Tomlins, it was just an opportunistic move by the matriarch of the family.

“My grandma bought her home and she raised four kids in it. She financed it for 30 years and paid it off in 2003. She was a role model for me because as a single parent she was able to purchase a home with four kids for that length of time and she’s still there,” Chiquasha said.

The siblings highly recommend the workshop to anyone looking to purchase a home, especially those first-time buyers who may have cold feet.

“It is a very scary process. You’re going to get cold feet. I got cold feet because it is such a major purchase. But, I promise you, once you make that purchase, you close and you get those keys,” Chiquasha said. “That is the best feeling in the world, moving into something that is yours.”
Jeffersonville - Twiggs County, nestled in Middle Georgia, is one of the largest counties in this area, yet it has not lost its rural flavor. It hasn’t been overrun with urban sprawl or heavy traffic, so things tend to be relatively quiet. Yet, a big city problem began to fester within its school system several years ago - gang activity.

In an effort to make such activity an exception to the rule, Fort Valley State University is working with Twiggs county school system police Chief Levi Rozier to make such activity an exception and not the rule.

Through coordination with the Twiggs County Extension Office, students are participating in the FVSU is G.R.E.A.T. – Gang Resistance Education and Training - Twiggs County Day Camp. Sixty children participate in two-week sessions. It’s for the little boy whose father recently left the home, the child who doesn’t play outside for fear of being harmed or the little girl with low self-esteem.

“Just because you are from Twiggs County that doesn’t mean you are a bad person or that people look down on you. Our goal is to build them up,” said Terralon Chaney, the Twiggs County extension agent for Fort Valley State. Students have to deal with the perceptions of outsiders, Chaney said, who may view Twiggs County natives as individuals who remain poor or who do poorly in school.

In an effort to expose students, who haven’t traveled beyond county lines, to new activities, G.R.E.A.T. leaders take them on field trips. They’ve traveled to places such as the state capitol, the Martin Luther King Jr. museum, professional sports games and college campuses. Students said the visit to Fort Valley State encouraged them to do better in school.

Robert Cornelius, a sixth grader, said the program has helped him improve in his school work. Kacie Hatcher, another sixth grader, says the trips have influenced her to go to college and become a doctor. Charnisha Martin, a seventh grader, says she wants to be a pediatrician.

“My goal as an extension agent is to expose them. I think in so many ways they develop intellectually, socially and emotionally. This will help them to begin to think outside the box of Twiggs County,” Chaney said.

Rozier stressed that the key to a successful program is to reach the children at an early age. “Right now, we have little gang problems here. I contribute it to the fact that we start kids in the G.R.E.A.T. program at a young age,” Rozier said.

In addition to the summer program, there are activities during the school year. Beginning with fourth graders, Rozier has a six-week program during the school day that addresses such topics as bullying, self-esteem and social skills. Similar lessons are taught to sixth graders who attend classes for 13 weeks. There are also workshops that involve parent interaction.

“There was no outlet for our kids as far as any kind of program. I was already a certified G.R.E.A.T. officer from my previous assignment in Bibb County, so it was easy to start it here,” Rozier said. “I was appalled at the gang activity that was here. They purposely hired me because the gang population was high. I told them the best thing I know to do was to start the G.R.E.A.T. program here like the one I worked with in Bibb to try to offset it from the middle school perspective.”

Rozier said the collaboration with Fort Valley State has been successful thus far.
“There is no one that can do this by themselves,” Rozier said. “But Mrs. Chaney out of the extension office, said we could do some work together with Fort Valley. And, I’ll be honest with you, that relationship was the best we had this summer. The G.R.E.A.T. program has been here five years, and this summer was one that had its greatest impact by collaborating with the university.”

He added, “Fort Valley State has truly been dynamic with us. Our kids have been truly inspired by what they do over there. They showed our kids what they do in agriculture and they gave us some good information.”

According to Rozier, since the program has hit the Twiggs County campus in 2004, the high school graduation rate has improved tremendously.

Rozier, a Navy veteran, has been involved with children since 1996 when the Bibb County Campus Police hired him to become part of its management team.

“When that door opened to impact kids, it opened wide for me,” Rozier said. “I thank God everyday for the opportunity to do what I do.”
By Russell Boone Jr.,
public information editor/writer

Glennville - For many grocery stores fresh produce provides the backbone for its retail sales, so it is important for growers to provide good products that can enhance not only their reputation, but the grocer’s reputation as well.

Some growers are huge conglomerates while others are small family-owned operations based on a local co-op. One local co-op that has managed to get its produce on the market is the Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Co-op here in southeast Georgia. The co-op has been in business since 1998.

“Our specialty crops are crook necked squash, collard greens, mustard greens, turnips and purple hulled peas,” said Jessie Rhodes, president of the co-op.

Rhodes said the co-op usually grows crops on 40 to 80 acres, using the “double cropping” method. They grow one set of crops in the spring, cultivate them and use that same land to grow another set of crops in the fall.

“We started off with 25 farmers, but we are now down to six,” Rhodes said.

The other five farmers that comprise the co-op are Lonnie Johnson, Maurice Collins, David Richardson, Roosevelt Clark and Charles Henry. Coastal Georgia may be one of the few co-ops in the state comprised of mostly African-American farmers.

A few years ago Coastal Georgia established a relationship with Fort Valley State University’s Cooperative Extension Program.

“We went to the institution to find out how to get a grant,” Rhodes said. “They gave Stefan Price the authority to come and assists us,” Rhodes said, referring to the county extension agent in his area.

Price provided information on how the U.S. Department of Agriculture works and assisted the co-op in developing its website.

“He has been relentless in helping us with whatever endeavors we were trying to do,” Henry said. “He would attend some of our meeting on his own personal time to kind of give us an overview of what we want to try to do and where we should try to go. He has been a tremendous help.”

Both Rhodes and Henry feel that making the co-op more efficient is a continuous learning process.

“We’ve just now gotten to the point where we’re looking at a bigger market,” Henry said. “The opportunities that have opened up through Stefan with his support to help us meet these bigger clients, such as Walmart or Harveys, is by going to seminars with him. We ourselves are learning more as to how to get out there and market our operation and how business can grow here.”

Coastal Georgia delivers its produce to Harveys Supermarkets and Walmart stores across Southeast Georgia, which includes cities such as Savannah and Brunswick. They also supply numerous markets around the Savannah area. They also provide services to 12 schools within the area. Before the recession though, they were covering as many as five school districts. According to both Rhodes and Henry, the co-op has the capability to physically expand to meet increased demand should it occur.

“The best endorsement for the co-ops goods may come from Rhodes.

“I know our crops are healthy because I eat them. We don’t grow nothing we don’t eat ourselves”, Rhodes said.
A 12-year-old co-op provides produce for schools and stores such as Walmart and Harveys Supermarket.

Jessie Rhodes (left) and Charles Henry, Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Co-op members, stand on their farmland in Glenville, Ga.
Helping Seniors Stay Active

Chronic Disease Prevention and Maintaining Healthy Lifestyles

By ChaNae Bradley, public information specialist

**Fort Valley** - Louise Vinson didn't think the pain in her knee would alter her life, but it did. After working 12 years for a furniture store in her hometown of Dublin and as a cook for 11 years at a local restaurant, Vinson's knee couldn't take anymore.

"My jobs required a lot of bending and moving, so I had knee surgery, but I was still unable to do the work at work," Vinson said.

Vinson also suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure. At the age of 54, she had to quit her job on disability status.

"It was hard to adjust to not working because I was a very active person," Vinson said. For several years she sat at home with little or nothing to do except housework and church
activities. But to her surprise, she befriended a pastor who she married and followed to his hometown of Fort Valley. This mother of three said she was happy with her life, but she wanted something to do, somewhere to go and she desired to become more active. “I decided to visit the Fort Valley Senior Center. I wanted to meet people,” Vinson said.

Once attending the center she was intrigued by a health and nutrition class taught by Gail Adams, Fort Valley State University’s Peach County extension agent. “The class is a valuable experience. Gail helped me to realize that I could walk again. I can help myself live longer and live better,” Vinson said, excitedly.

She began preparing meals the way Adams told her to by limiting her salt intake and cooking with leaner meats such as ground turkey instead of ground beef. Vinson also began walking three times a week.

“I put on my pedometer and I just walk. After my knee surgery I didn’t think I would be walking like this,” said Vinson, who is now 65 years old.

In addition to health and nutrition activities, Vinson also participates in quilting, cooking and bingo. She also enjoys playing bowling and tennis on the Nintendo Wii, a home videogame system.

“My doctor has noticed a difference in my health. My blood pressure is down and my diabetes is under control,” Vinson said.

Adams, who teaches two classes a month, emphasizes to her seniors that it’s never too late to make changes in your health. “Louise tells me about the recipes she’s tried in her home, things she said she never thought to buy or eat, but her blood pressure is lower because she’s cut back on salt,” said Adams, who has impacted more than 500 seniors in the past 22 years at the center.

A disabled woman found herself inactive until visiting a senior center where nutrition and exercise classes are available.

All the seniors at the center have some form of illness, Adams said, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes. “I show them how these issues will affect their bodies, and they try very hard to do better,” Adams said. ImoJean Mobley, the center’s site manager, said Adams’ programs help participants gain a better understanding of what their doctors tell them referring to diet and nutrition.

“Gail shows them proper portion size, which is helpful because many of the seniors live alone and they aren’t use to cooking for one person, and they tend to make more food and eat more food,” Mobley said.

Programs such as the one taught by Adams keeps seniors aware and active, Mobley said. Now Vinson, who has been going to the center for seven years, has a more positive outlook on life and her health. “I’m not getting older, I’m just getting better,” Vinson said, with a chuckle. “Coming here gives me strength. I can do more than just sit. I like to stay busy, and since I’m motivated I can motivate others.”
FVSU’s Life on the Farm program teaches Georgia’s youths the basics of food production.
The program allows students to be introduced to animals and plants they’ve heard about but have never seen.

“Life on the Farm is designed to acquaint young people with various aspects of agriculture concerning animals and plants,” said Dr. Will Getz, Fort Valley State’s agriculture and natural resources extension program leader. Getz said it also serves as a good recruitment tool for FVSU’s College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology programs.

The basic objectives of the program, he said, are to provide information about the many agricultural occupations, to encourage an appreciation for the farm as a primary source of healthy and safe food, to develop an awareness and understanding of our dependence on farmers and their work, and to increase people’s knowledge of farm animals and crops.
Improving the Quality of Life in Middle Georgia through Computer Literacy

Hundreds of individuals looking for employment have been empowered by learning technology skills offered through the FVSU Mobile Information Technology Center. Participants are taught how to conduct job searches using the Internet, write resumes, and use basic computer programs. Various non-profit and government organizations have partnered with this program to provide training.

Organic Fruits and Vegetables for the Home

Through its organic demonstration site, the Agriculture and Natural Resources program is helping landowners develop production enterprises to help them expand or diversify their income. This program is also educating consumers about organic methods and how they are applied.

Dress for Success

First impressions do matter. This program enhances individuals’ personal appearances, particularly for low-income women seeking employment during these tumultuous economic times. Through workshops and one-on-one consultations, participants develop positive self-images and effective wardrobe communication skills.

Financial Literacy Education

Many families and individuals are experiencing a financial crisis because of inadequate savings, consumer debt, and poor planning for potential major life events. Through workshops and publications, members of the community are learning how to reduce debt, save money, avoid bankruptcy and manage credit.

Aquaculture Production Systems

FVSU’s unique Georgia Center for Aquaculture Development educates Georgians on how to create and maintain agriculture production systems for seafood produced in controlled environments. Teachers also use tours of the center’s fish production systems as a way to engage their students in math and science.

Landowner Initiative for Forestry Education (LIFE) Program

Program participants are taking advantage of increased profits and maximized resources. Small and limited-resource farmers and landowners, according to research, are often unaware of, or have been denied access to, opportunities such as this, which can help sustain and increase land productivity in the area of forest management.

Strengthening the Family

In a household of turmoil, parents and children can find solace by using methods taught by this program that provides family coping strategies, positive development techniques, and basic life-skill practices.
Your Program Assistant or County Agent

(See Contact Information on page 13)