

“Report Card”

I was an average student through high school and college...just a solid A/B guy. I was never the betting favorite to be class valedictorian. I remember from my short tenure as a teacher that posting grades to report cards was generally objective in nature...a simple act of averaging the numbers and posting the score. There's nothing very subjective about it. On the other hand, grading a job performance is almost purely subjective.

My first year in office (2013) was a time of learning – trying to understand the intricacies of commission leadership and the legal work involved with probate court. But I knew going in that goals needed to be set. Exactly one year in, on January 16, 2014, the monthly column in *The Abbeville Herald* listed ten goals we had set for our county. This week, on the 10th anniversary of that column, we take a subjective look back.

GOAL # 1: to improve our county roads in an efficient manner. **ASSESSMENT:** this goal is the most subjective of the ten. There was not enough money in 2014 to properly maintain our roads – there still isn't today and likely never will be. The cost of road maintenance has doubled in those ten years – and it's likely to double again in the next ten. But, all things considered, I think we've made substantial progress. Since 2012, we've resurfaced 146 miles of county roads (about 30% of the 520 miles of paved roads in Henry County.) The total investment has been about twenty million dollars (\$20,521,390.14.) The cost of resurfacing a road is based primarily on the type application used - but, to use general numbers, the average cost per mile was over \$140,000.00. We did the best we could with what we had. **Grade: B.**

GOAL # 2: to enter into a 'safety training and funding' contract with Farley Nuclear Plant. **ASSESSMENT:** this was a priority of former EMA Director Ronnie Dollar. Plant Farley and Homeland Security now fund about 40% of the total EMA budget. Matt Hatcher is working hard to try increase the amount of the supplement. **GRADE: A.**

GOAL #3: to place a school resource officer (SRO) in each end of the county. **ASSESSMENT:** Henry County School Superintendent Lori Beasley and Sheriff Eric Blankenship joined forces with our county commission to ensure that we had an SRO at each of the five Henry County school campuses. That has been done. **GRADE: A+.**

GOAL #4: to cut county expenses without sacrificing services to our citizens. **ASSESSMENT:** I commend our department heads for the excellent service they provide. I decided during my first week in office to personally sign every check – this would enable me to have a better understanding of ways we could keep our expenses in line. Our staff is very committed to doing just that – particularly during a time of rampant inflation. **GRADE: B.**

GOAL #5: to become more involved on the state level to help gain exposure for Henry County. **ASSESSMENT:** Henry County has not always been overly active in the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) or the Alabama Probate Judges Association (APJA). We are now recognized as one of the most active small counties in the state. Chris Champion recently completed a term as president of the National Association of County Engineers, Chad Sowell is a past president of the Alabama E911 Association and I was honored to serve as the president of ACAA in 2019/2020. We continue to make our voice heard in Montgomery. **GRADE: A.**

GOAL #6: to complete the ACCA mandated personal 50-hour training course as well as the 70-hour graduate program as quickly as possible. **ASSESSMENT:** both were completed in the first 24 months. **GRADE: A.**

GOAL #7: to help make Henry County as clean as possible. **ASSESSMENT:** we started well. Under the leadership of former sheriff, Will Maddox, we collected over 1,000 bags of roadside litter in the first year. Other than our family participating in the 'Adopt A Mile' program for two years, I have dropped the ball in this area. **GRADE: D.**

GOAL #8: to set up 'Out in the District' town hall meetings. **ASSESSMENT:** I asked all five commissioners and each department head join me in visits to each of the five commission districts. The purpose of the five meetings was to seek input from our citizens and give them an opportunity to ask questions. Every county commissioner and most department heads were at each of the five meetings. **GRADE: A.**

GOAL #9: to recognize and express our appreciation to every living former Henry County Commissioner. **ASSESSMENT:** it took a little more than a year but in 2013 and 2014, we invited and honored a former county commissioner at a county commission meeting. Each came back as they were invited and all seemed appreciative of the recognition. Being elected to serve is one thing...but serving with a servant's heart is the difference between an average commissioner and a great one. GRADE: A.

GOAL #10: to establish some type county-wide leadership program. **ASSESSMENT:** with assistance from Chad Sowell, we developed the first ever 'Henry County Adult Leadership Academy'. It was a five-month program. Each month we took eight to ten adults to observe and learn about various areas of county government. That first year was very successful but there wasn't enough participation to keep it going. Apathy is often our greatest enemy. I'm hopeful the next administration will try something similar. The very next year we developed the Henry County Youth Leadership Program. Now in its ninth year, it gets stronger every year and is one of the highlights of my eleven years of service. You never go wrong when making a positive investment in young people. Adult program: GRADE: B. Youth Leadership program: GRADE: A+. Overall: GRADE: A-.

It's interesting to note that some of the issues that demand our attention today were not even on the original list ten years ago – things like mental illness and animal control. Those challenges have been added to the list. It's also interesting to revisit the goals you've set and measure the progress made. Some worked out well, others not so well. Through the years you realize that you generally learn more from defeats than victories (ask Coach Saban). But you never stop trying to improve. Here's hoping for many more wins than losses in 2024. Happy New Year!

30 Day Review:

- Probate cases for November: seven wills probated, four administrations, three final settlements, seven miscellaneous hearings, four guardianships, two name changes and ten marriage certificates recorded.
- Dec. 13/15 – met with staffs of Senators Tuberville and Britt as well as Congressman Moore in their DC offices in an effort to get funding assistance for the Henry County Jail renovation/expansion project
- Dec. 19 – Judge Peterson & I hosted the Henry Co. Youth Leadership class for Law & Government Day.
- Dec. 20 – virtual meeting of the SEARP&DC Executive Committee
- Dec. 21 – December commission meetings
- Dec. 21 – attended reception for Congressman Barry Moore – Ravenwood
- Dec. 25/26 – Christmas holidays
- Jan. 1 – New Years Day holiday
- Jan. 2 and Jan. 4 – met with companies to evaluate conditions of flooring in the courthouse
- Jan. 10 – Wiregrass elected official's luncheon – Troy
- Jan. 11 – Dothan Chamber Breakfast with Mayor Saliba and Chairman Shoupe
- Jan. 11 – I.A.C. board meeting – Montgomery
- Jan. 11 – I was honored to speak at the Headland Lions Club meeting.

Dates to Remember:

- Jan. 13 – participant in the M.L. King Day program at Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church
- Jan. 15 – M.L. King/R.E. Lee birthday holiday
- Jan. 17 – E911 board meeting – Headland
- Jan. 18 – January Administrative meeting – 9:00 – Herndon Building
- Jan. 18 – January Commission meeting – 11:00 – Annex Building
- Jan. 25 – ACCA district meeting – New Brockton