THIS MUST BE THE PLACE.
LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By Cristin F. Brawner

Happy Holidays! Thank you for making time to read our 2019 Year in Review. It has been a busy year for the Mathews Center! This year alone we’ve driven over 24,000 miles, held more than 60 forums, and engaged over 3,000 Alabamians—all in pursuit of our mission to strengthen civic life in our state!

This year saw a number of firsts for the DMC, including our first-ever Spanish language forums and the launch of our new Innovators in Civic Education Teaching Fellows program. We wrapped up our three-year forum series, What’s Next, Alabama?, and launched a special forum series with Auburn University’s Draughon Center—Monuments, Memorials, & Memory: How Should We Remember the Past in Alabama?

These milestones would never be reached without all of you, our wonderful partners and supporters. That support was on display this summer at our sold out 2019 Civic Institute, where we welcomed 250 of our closest friends to reflect on the meaning of home and belonging in public life. This year, we at the Mathews Center found ourselves reflecting on the meaning of home.

No matter the program, we work with Alabamians in the places that shape them and, in turn, are shaped ourselves. This is why we’re serious about spending time on the road in Alabama’s 67 counties meeting people where they live, learn, and work. As you peruse this Year in Review, I invite you to reflect on the place you call home. We are inspired by you as you shape the future of your hometowns by working better together with your neighbors. We look forward to strengthening civic life together in 2020 and beyond!
We take pride in the fact that we are a truly statewide organization. We work in every stretch of Alabama, from the largest cities to the smallest towns and everywhere in between.

Each red dot you see on this map represents an event with DMC staff present—from deliberative forums to moderator development workshops and more—we’ve participated in over 150 events related to DMC programming this year. We rely on our incredible community partners across the state to create opportunities for building active citizenship and new ways of thinking about public life.
I grew up in the aftermath of the Second World War. We fought that war to save democracy. Democracy was not a contested value. It is today.

“...”

-Dr. David Mathews
Inside Out: Strategies for Resisting Disconnection & Crafting Civic Identity in Alabama Prisons

Dr. Mark Wilson, Director of the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities at Auburn University, moderated the Inside Out conversation with panelists Dena Dickerson of the Offender Alumni Association, Kyes Stevens of the Alabama Prison Arts & Education Project, and Tonya Jones of Women of the Word Ministries. The conversation explored the responsibility that we all share for welcoming the formerly incarcerated back into the fold of public life.

The Benefit of the Doubt: Preparing Ourselves for Authentic Engagement & Productive Disagreement

This panel explored the emotional life of dialogue and deliberation; questions of how to let down our individual and collective defenses in order to bring strangeness closer were at the forefront of the discussion. The panel was moderated by Dr. Hollie Cost, Mayor of the City of Montevallo and 2019 Jean O'Connor-Snyder Award recipient. Panel participants included Tiffany Gibson-Pitts, a member of the Opelika City Council, Jonathan Collen the Associate Dean of the Center for Student Success at Troy University, Kourtney Frye a graduate student at Troy University, Rebecca Cleveland the former program director of the Mathews Center, and Melissa Youngblood the Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Pupil Services for Shelby County Schools.

Building a Durable Life: The Impact of Social Infrastructure on Alabama's Public Health & Civic Life

This session highlighted what is possible when we view health not just as a result of research and medicine, but also as a product of dynamics hidden in plain sight. This panel was moderated by Danny Patterson the Coalsitions Coordinator of the Gulf States Health Policy Center. Panel participants included Kristen Riggs the Executive Director of the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship of Alabama, Carol Williams the Contract Prevention Director of Impact Montevallo, Zacor Carmichael and Nina Mendina from Project Horseshoe Farm, and Mary Moore the Board President of Sowing Seeds of Hope.

Geographical Imaginations: The Role of Recuperative Storytelling in Southern History & Identity

This packed-out session explored some of the groundbreaking work being done to resuscitate the stories of marginalized voices in Southern history, and examined the narrative structures of feeling that undergird our public and private identities. This breakout session's panel was moderated by Dr. John Giggie an Associate Professor of History and African American Studies and Director of the Summersell Center for the Study of the South at the University of Alabama. Panel participants included Dr. Hillary Green an Associate Professor of History at the University of Alabama's Department of Gender and Race Studies, Megan Sullivan the Director of Development for the Invisible Histories Project, Margaret Lawson a student in the Masters in Teacher Education Program at The University of Alabama, and Isabella Garrison an undergraduate student at the University of Alabama.

A Public Enterprise: Civic Education & Community Collaboration in Workforce Development

A wonderfully dynamic discussion of active citizenship and civic education as they relate to workforce development. The Alabamians featured in this session are working in their communities to create programming that prepares the next generation for a successful career and for active citizenship. This panel was moderated by Meredith Smith an Education Special Project Manager with Alabama Public Television (APT). Panelists included Deborah Owens the Co-Founder and President of WeeCat Industries in Enterprise, Alabama, Joy Corin Smith the Director of Special Education for Enterprise City Schools, David Wolford the Superintendent of Chickasaw City Schools in Mobile County, James Crouch the Career Coach for Washington County Public Schools, and Jennifer Darby, Ashley Simpson and Kimberly Murray all teachers in Talladega County Schools.

Found in Translation: Engaging Communities Across Linguistic & Cultural Barriers

Moderated by Nisa Miranda the Director of the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, this panel also included Steve Harnedinger the Director of the Office of Deaf Services at the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Kim-Lien Tran a Community Health Worker for Boat People SOS, a nonprofit located in Bayou La Batre, Dolly Chavez the Spanish Language Interpreter and Translator for Shelby County Schools, and Lash Dobbs-Black the program supervisor for the English as a Second Language department of Shelby County Schools. These leaders have dedicated their lives and careers to building bridges between disparate people, places, and languages.
Montevallo Mayor Dr. Hollie Cost Named 2019 Jean O’Connor-Snyder Award Recipient

Jean O'Connor-Snyder Award Recipient
Montevallo Mayor Dr. Hollie Cost Named 2019

Delta Fellows will focus on the storied Blakeley region as they engage in immersive civic learning in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Dr. Kathy Cooke, Dean of the Honors College and Professor of History, Shannon Shelley-Trenham, Director of the Office of Community Engagement, and Dr. Kerr Jackson, Director of African American Studies, will lead the Delta Fellows as they engage in deliberative dialogue with local experts to capture oral narratives of the region’s myths, traditions, and histories.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA NEW COLLEGE
UA’s New College facilitates the Walker County Internship Program in partnership with the Walker Area Community Foundation (WACF). The Walker County experience is an “eight-week community-embedded service-learning internship” that brings students from diverse academic disciplines together for a summer during which they work with local organizations to address one of these specific issue areas identified by the WACF: strategic plan: health, education, or community development.

AUBURN UNIVERSITY’S LIVING DEMOCRACY
Each summer, a select cohort of students are chosen to participate in an immersive civic learning experience like no other. Each student chosen to be a Living Democracy intern is embedded for ten summer weeks in one of four host communities: Collinsville, Camden, Chatom, or Elba. The interns are there to serve the needs of the community, which provides housing accommodations and opportunities to collaborate with local citizens on myriad projects. Dr. Mark Wilson, Director of the Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities, along with Associate Professor of Journalism, Nan Fairley, recruit student interns who, by the end of their experience, more fully understand the real world nuances of community engagement and public life.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
The University of South Alabama will participate in the JOIP program for their first year, through the start of the Delta Fellows Internship Program. The first cohort of four Delta Fellows will focus on the storied Blakeley bluff region as they engage in immersive civic learning in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Dr. Kathy Cooke, Dean of the Honors College and Professor of History, Shannon Shelley-Trenham, Director of the Office of Community Engagement, and Dr. Kerr Jackson, Director of African American Studies, will lead the Delta Fellows as they engage in deliberative dialogue with local experts to capture oral narratives of the region’s myths, traditions, and histories.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTVALLO
UM’s newest JOIP intern will assist professor and Montevallo Mayor Dr. Hollie Cost in the facilitation of the Montevallo Junior City Council (MJCC) and Students’ Institute programming. Over the past seven years, the Students’ Institute has directly engaged more than 400 young Alabamians throughout a process of community field trips and place-based deliberative conversations, all aimed at developing civic skills and a penchant for active citizenship.

SPRING HILL COLLEGE
Troy’s Real Talk on Race project, continuing into its second year, focuses on how communities and institutions can address issues of race through deliberative dialogue and dedicated community engagement. Jonathan Collins, Associate Dean of the Center for Student Success, and Lauren Cochran, Coordinator of Civic Engagement at Troy, will work with interns to create space for deliberation on their respective campuses.

SOUTHERN UNION STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE (SUSCC)
SUSCC will participate as a JOIP program for their second year, administering the Southern Union Community Engagement Internship Program (SUCEIP). Coordinated by the Valley Campus Director, Robin Brown, and the Wadley Campus English Professor, Dr. Pam Henn, four SUSCC students will enroll in two courses—Directed Studies in Leadership and Writing for Mass Media—to prepare for an immersive summer civic engagement experience in Chambers and Clay counties.

ALABAMA A&M UNIVERSITY (AAMU)
AAMU, under the leadership of Monica Clarke, Coordinator of Service Learning, continues their JOIP program for a third year. Three AAMU students will continue to build relationships with their university neighbor, the Edmundton Heights Community. This year the interns will focus on opportunities for economic development, partnering with the Community Development Corporation and the Neighborhood Association to coordinate community workshops in technology, job skills training, and financial literacy. The JOIP will also host community roundtable discussions throughout the academic year to engage their community more deliberatively.
Phillip Box can remember the uneasy combination of emotions that he felt when he woke up early on Christmas morning of 2015 in Elba. “We knew that there was a high chance of a flood risk,” Box recalled. “Right after we began to unwrap presents. I got a call that the water was rising, and we needed to prepare.” Box played a significant role in the disaster relief efforts, using his diverse background as a church leader, a county official and, most of all, a concerned citizen to jump in and help.

In 2019, as we drive through Elba, he points out areas that received severe damage in the 2015 flood, notably in the region that sits at the intersection of WhiteStar Creek and the Pea River. The areas, now more than three and half years removed from the flooding, are still in need of help. Some of the homes have been left behind, overgrown with plant life and abandoned. Other homes in this neighborhood have been repaired, with the damaged portions repaired. However, there are still water lines on some homes, showing how fresh the scars of the flood are.

The mix of homes left behind and homes that are hanging on reflect one common trait: trying to move on from 2015.

It should have been a day of positivity: one where Elba could celebrate and finally feeling safe from floodwaters due to the levee improvements. However, the flood highlighted a new problem that has a less obvious solution, one that is still hypothetical. The code enforcement officer for Elba, provided more information about the areas most affected by the flood.

“The issue we ran into in 2015, and afterward, is that the old solution was to put a fresh coat of paint on it and just move along,” Worthington said. “In reality, they need substantial structural change to protect them from a repeat of 2015.”

One possible solution I asked Worthington about was a proposal I had heard about during my summer in the community: a total buyback of the houses in the affected areas once FEMA funding is fulfilled. Buyout offers will come, hopefully, sooner rather than later, and no matter how many home owners take the offers, there could be a significant loss in population. There is a lack of affordable homes for these individuals to relocate within Elba. Some of them may move away to somewhere with more housing options.

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Once back home, she dedicated many years engaging with the Chatom community. Her love for people led to many roles at Chatom Baptist Church, including but not limited to teaching Sunday School for women, working with the junior choir, and helping with play productions. She also played piano, becoming the designated pianist at many weddings and funerals. She said, “I did just about everything at church. The only reason I didn’t preach was that no one asked me.”

Schell’s involvement in church led her to contribute to many great things to the community, strengthening bonds with old friends and connect with new people. Childhood friend Carrie Mills said, “Lou and I go way back. She is a very talented and precious woman. I enjoy having her as my friend.” For Schell, there have been a host of friendships she has made her time in Chatom special. She cherishes her late friend and church organist, Regina Thornton, whom she worked with for 48 years.

She loves the group of ladies from Sunday school who collaborate to drive people to the doctor, cook meals for families, support anyone in need, encourage young people and do other work for the church. She also enjoys spending time with her card playing groups, including a group of retired teachers and another group of widows who keep each other company on Saturdays.

For Schell, her community is one of the best places ever. She is proud of the town’s people and organizations such as the library, nursing home, and school. She explained that growing up in a community like Chatom provides people with support because everyone cares for one another.

One way that support came in Schell’s own life was when friends and family rallied around her when she decided to take an 18-month trip around the country. Years before, Schell came across a book called ‘America’ by Charles Kuralt, a news correspondent for CBS, who worked with for 48 years. He was a member of events around town.

When Schell turned 77, she reread the book and began thinking about taking the trip and visiting Kuralt’s favorite places. Before long she talked it over with her son, who would become her traveling companion for the first half of the trip. She then told her four supportive children that she would be going and spending their inheritance with plans to spend a month in places Kuralt mentioned in his book.

She traveled to Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, New York, Vermont, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Alaska, and New Mexico. Each stop of the way, she was supported by the people who loved her. After she returned home, Schell decided to co-write and publish her own book, with her sister and traveling companion Jamie Gass about the adventures, “Revisiting America.”

While in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, she had the opportunity to meet the photographer for Kuralt’s book cover. He took her picture in the exact same spot as he had taken Kuralt’s. The connections continued when Mary Lou Teel, who worked with Kuralt as a writer and producer, got the idea of celebrating his birthday by filming and interviewing Schell for a segment that aired on CBS Sunday Morning.

Her journey and book continue to inspire those around her. Friend Renee Mills Mead said, “My husband, Patrick, and I were so excited to have Ms. Lou’s book, ‘Revisiting America,’ as the first book on our shelf in our new home. We had our own personal copy with a note from Ms. Lou on the inside. Since receiving her book, we have taken it on all our road trips these past few years.”

Schell’s trip started on Jan. 1, 2011, and ended on Nov. 22, almost a year later. When she returned to Chatom, the community welcomed her home with signs and hugs. One thing she kept saying about her experience was that “people made the difference.” Sometimes, she revisits the places from her trip across America. She recently returned from a brief journey back to Boothbay Harbor.

After such a phenomenal experience, Schell hoped to take things when she returned to Chatom and did not assume all the responsibilities she originally had. She has remained supportive of people in her community by going to church, joining groups for card games, and being part of events around town.

As she turned 86 this summer, Schell gave credit to God for the support. “The Lord takes care of old ladies and crazies, and I’m in both categories.”

Keep it going by giving to the JOIP Fund today. Your gift helps place interns in communities for immersive civic experiences. Scan below for more!
Learning by Belonging: Active Citizenship & Place-Based Education

By Gabrielle Lamplugh, DMC Education Director

"They are a product of their upbringing." We’ve all heard this phrase at some point, typically to allude to why people do something seen as problematic or flawed. Less often do we use this phrase to recognize all of the positive ways that our upbringings influence us: our values, our interests, our ambitions.

For one, I know that my love of literature and writing was sparked by my parents’ frequent bedtime recitations of Robert Frost and Robert Louis Stevenson. I am still instantly reminded of Autumn Fires” from The Children’s Garden of Verses every time I smell a fall brush burn. And my hard-to-tamp desire to sell it all and start a goat farm was likely influenced by the herd of animals my four siblings and I kept around growing up: four dogs, three tortoises, a turtle, a cat, endless entomological specimens, about twenty fish, and a shark.

We are very much the product of our upbringing and where we come from. We can all think of ways that our hometowns, home countries, and family cultures have influenced who we are. Even the people that came before us influence our collective sense of who “we” are. The things we hold valuable, what we invest in, and what we are willing to sacrifice for are the result of generations of formative experiences.

As Thomas Merton eloquently wrote, “The things that we love tell us what we are. A person is known, then, by his end. He is also known by his beginning.”

So then, how should we begin? Through the DMC’s educational programs, we strive to begin with place. More specifically, place-based education. The philosophy of place-based education is pretty simple: the land we live on is a teaching tool in itself. Whether studying science, literature, theatre, or math, there are ways to connect natural resources, local history, storytelling and culture to our curriculum. However, when it comes to civics education, I think the gift of place proves to be an indispensable tool. If our beginnings influence our ends, if we want young people to be thoughtful, active citizens in adulthood, our curriculum must be designed around getting young people engaged in their “place” now.

We cannot expect young people to grow up and love their community if they are not shown what there is to love. We cannot expect them to become leaders if they don’t meet the leaders currently around them. We cannot expect them to preserve their place’s history if they do not know it. And we cannot expect them to cultivate civic fortitude if they haven’t seen it at work. Put simply, we are the product of our upbringing. If our upbringing, including our education, doesn’t emphasize the assets of the place we call home, we are unlikely to grow up to value it, invest in it, or protect it.

Young people’s sense of place informs their civic action. Their knowledge of and involvement in their community from a young age determines how likely they are to stay connected with it as they get older. If we want students to have a lifelong commitment to their communities, we need to be intentional about incorporating those communities into their formative learning experiences.

As we approach the holidays and Alabama’s 200th birthday, I’ve been reflecting on the ways the DMC has been able to emphasize the gift of place through programming this past year, as well as how we can continue to grow place-based programming in years to come. From asset mapping workshops with youth, to our Bicentennial supported educator workshops to new projects with historians throughout the state, we’ve been fortunate to spend a year immersed in the people, places, and cultures that make up Alabama.

In the coming year we look forward to continuing our youth programming, connecting more widely with educators, and partnering with new historical sites and scholars to create a growing collection of issue guides focused on the rich, difficult, and diverse histories in our state.

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other’s lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

Wendell Berry
**MILESTONES**

**DMC Names Inaugural “Innovators In Civic Education” Teaching Fellows**

2019 saw our first cohort of Innovators in Civic Education Teaching Fellows. These educators were selected for the fellowship based upon their dedication to developing and implementing skills-focused and inquiry-led social studies curriculum. Thanks to the generous support of the Alabama Bicentennial, these educators had the opportunity to learn about the C3 Framework from Dr. Lauren Colley, immerse themselves in the history of Reconstruction with Dr. Ruth Truss and Susan Dubose, Ed.D., and dive into the pedagogy of deliberation with DMC staff. Meet our fabulous fellows below.

**Jerry Darrell Strickland**

Green Acres Middle Birmingham City Schools

“Thomas Jefferson said that education was the “only sure reliance for the preservation” of our country’s ideals. A civic education, touching on our republican style of governance, is a reflection of that sentiment.”

**Justine Hamilton**

MLK Jr. Elementary Tuscaloosa City Schools

“We are all citizens! The skills that we acquire from civic education are a part of our daily lives. Civic education not only teaches us how to be diligent citizens, but it helps us become flexible, informed, empathetic and reflective individuals in society.”

**Lee Pastor**

Montevallo High Shelby County Schools

“I am passionate about equipping students with not only the knowledge but the skills & experiences they need to become active and productive citizens. Civic education is a basic component in achieving this goal.”

**Staff Updates from the DMC**

In 2019 we bid a fond farewell to Rebecca Cleveland, DMC Program Director, as she leaves to begin graduate school at the University of Iowa’s Speech-Language Pathology Master’s program. Cleveland served the Mathews Center for over four years, during which she oversaw the development and administration of the DMC’s largest and longest-running program, the Jean O’Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP). Her penchant for event planning, program evaluation, and her prolific note-taking ability were her superpowers, and of course we will sorely miss her brilliant wit, sense of humor, and devotion to community. We wish her all the best in the next step of her journey, and are grateful to have worked with such an incredible Alabamian!

**“A BRAVE AND STARTLING TRUTH”**

(Excerpt) By Dr. Maya Angelou

When we come to it

We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace
We, this people on this mote of matter
In whose mouths abide cankerous words
Which challenge our very existence
Yet out of those same mouths
Come songs of such exquisite sweetness
That the heart falters in its labor
And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet
Whose hands can strike with such abandon
That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible tenderness
That the haughty neck is happy to bow
And the proud back is glad to bend
Out of such chaos, of such contradiction
We learn that we are neither devils nor divines

When we come to it

We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

When we come to it

We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous,
the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.