

ACE Spotlight: Celebrating Haleyville 20 Years Later

By Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM

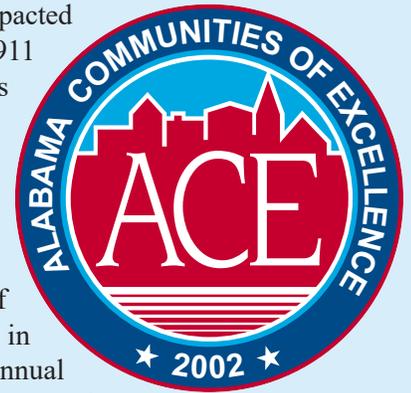
The Alabama League of Municipalities is elated to have recently acquired the responsibility of overseeing the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program. ACE was established in 2002 and is focused on providing municipalities with community development programs and tools needed to ensure their long-term success, especially targeting those that fall within the population range of 2,000 to 18,000. Through a comprehensive, three-phased approach, ACE uses the collective expertise of its partner organizations – ranging from state agencies and associations to banks, utilities, universities and others – to foster unique community development programs. Most communities that are selected earn the ACE community designation within two to three years, depending on how quickly they complete each phase – assessment, leadership development and strategic planning, and implementation and comprehensive planning.

In honor of ACE becoming an official program of the League, we are thrilled to start highlighting an ACE community every quarter in our magazine. To begin this series, we reached out to Haleyville Mayor Ken Sunseri to see how the program impacted his city since they were selected as part of the inaugural class in 2003. Haleyville is located in the northwest corner of Winston County. It may only have a population of a little more than

4,300, but its history has impacted the entire nation. The first 911 call in the United States was made at Haleyville City Hall on February 16, 1968. Today, 55 years later, over 400 million calls are made each year for emergency services. The citizens of Haleyville take great pride in their history and host an annual 911 festival every June to recognize first responders.

The city started out as a railroad community then transitioned to manufacturing and is now home to several major companies including: Exxel Outdoors, Masonite, Kith Kitchens, Universal Forest Products, Bassett Outdoor Furniture, Rowe Machinery and Fontaine Trailers. Mayor Sunseri has a unique perspective on the ACE program because he was the ACE local coordinator when the city was selected for ACE in 2003. He has continued to build upon that foundation since becoming mayor in 2008 with the help of Melinda Weaver, the current ACE local coordinator, the city council and the community.

Mayor Sunseri said, “The success that we have achieved



in our community is a direct result of our ACE participation. The planning for our community has relied on the structure we learned during our ACE training.”



Haleyville has completed four strategic plans since graduating from ACE in 2005 and is in the process of developing their fifth, with community participation, to guide the city with specific goals. One of the four pillars of ACE focuses on developing leaders. The mayor told us they have had numerous youth and adult leadership programs over the years that have provided a basis for sustained growth and that they still utilize the technical and personnel resources that ACE has afforded them.



Mayor Sunseri continued, “The ACE program is a valuable asset for small communities. The program identifies opportunities for citizens to participate in a sustainable program for community development. The Alabama Community of Excellence program provides the necessary tools for economic development and community growth.”

We are glad to hear that ACE has made a lasting impact in this historic town. In recent years, through grant writing and strategic planning, the city of Haleyville has constructed a \$17 million National Guard Armory; a sports complex with four baseball/softball fields and a walking track around it; water slides at the city pool; and a pocket park in downtown to provide movie nights, school events and live musical entertainment. These additions along with Freedom Fiber broadband are setting the city up for future growth.

Mary Jackson, our education and ACE coordinator, said, “As a former city clerk, I have seen firsthand the positive impact the ACE program can have on a community that is willing to invest its time in developing a comprehensive plan. I am so proud to see Haleyville thriving and making strategic decisions to enhance the quality of life for the community’s future.”



To date, 43 municipalities have earned the ACE designation and four others are currently going through the process. If you are an ACE community that needs assistance with updating your strategic plan, reach out to Mary Jackson at mjackson@almonline.org. Learn more about the ACE program at www.alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org. ■



Ken Sunseri, the mayor of Haleyville, was elected in November of 2008. He served as an Infantry Platoon Leader with the First Infantry Division in Vietnam and retired from combined military service as a Colonel. He was the 2004 Haleyville Civitan’s Citizen of the Year recipient. He served as the local coordinator for Haleyville through the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program, where he was named the 2005 Outstanding ACE Volunteer. He was also awarded the 2011 Haleyville High School Alumni Association Service and Dedication Award. He has held numerous board positions and received many awards, including the 2015 Outstanding ACE Mayor Award. In 2017, he was named the Alabama Resource, Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) Council Member of the Year.