

Rogers Named Chair

Historic Dixie Theater Restoration to Begin

Bill Rogers, Jr. has been appointed chairman of the newly-incorporated, not-for-profit entity called the Emanuel Coalition for Cultural & Economic Development. This group's principal objective is the redevelopment of the Historic Dixie Theater in Swainsboro into the Barbara & Tobe Karrh Community Arts Center.

"I am very excited about the possibilities of renovating the Historic Dixie Theater," said Rogers. "The idea that once again, we could have a first-class, beautiful, fully-operational theater in downtown Swainsboro is a dream come true."

Once completed, the center will serve as a central location to stimulate the creative economy by providing a home for arts and culture in Emanuel County accessible to all, while preserving a cultural and architectural landmark in downtown Swainsboro.

"Our plan is to offer first-run movies at discounted prices, plays, and various musicals and other entertainment for all citizens," said Rogers. "The economic benefits alone are worth the effort to save this historic and unique building."

The Dixie Theater, which was built and operated by W. M. Karrh, opened in 1934. The theater closed in the late 1960s, due largely to the increase in popularity of home television. It was then used as a thriving retail space called Dolores & Woody's for many years. The building was donated to the City of Swainsboro in 2014 by Karrh's grandsons, Jim and Bill, for redevelopment into a community arts center. After accepting the property, the City of Swainsboro initiated the project by developing a renovation plan and physically securing the property through the installation of a new roof and other support structures. It also completed a "phase one sensitive demolition" which removed modifications to the building, revealing the skeleton of the original Dixie Theater.

"The Karrh family is to be commended for their generous gift of the property to the City of Swainsboro," said Rogers. "Personally, I would like to thank Swainsboro City Council, Mayor Charles Schwabe, City Administrator Al Lawson, and Downtown Development Director Lynn Brinson for their vision, support, and direction on this project." He added that a large group of volunteers will be working diligently to see the completion of the project, which is estimated to be between 18 and 24 months.

Rogers is the former owner and publisher of *The Forest-Blade* and former president & CEO of Swainsboro-Emanuel County Chamber of Commerce. He currently serves on the Emanuel County Board of Education, representing District 6. He is an active member of the Swainsboro Exchange Club, and serves on the Board of Grantors of Mill Creek Foundation and East Georgia State College Foundation. He has also served for three years as chairman of the Pine Tree Festival Committee and is a former Green Jacket recipient. Active in his church, Swainsboro First United Methodist, he and his wife, Kay, have two daughters and two grandchildren.

The ECCED's executive board is comprised of Bill Rogers, Jr., project chair; Daisy Reeves, project vice-chair; Lynn Brinson, project manager; Swainsboro Mayor Charles Schwabe, Swainsboro City Administrator Al Lawson, Emanuel County Administrator Guy Singletary, Swainsboro-Emanuel County Chamber of Commerce CEO Ken Warnock, Swainsboro-Emanuel County Joint Development Authority President Jack Bareford, Emanuel Arts Council Executive Director Jacquie Brasher, Jim Karrh, Gloria Mason, Dess Smith, and Syvetta Young.

Everyone is invited to follow the theater's progress by visiting www.historicdixietheater.com; or call City Hall at 478-237-7025 for more information.