

Contact:
Valerie West, Exec. Assistant
Troup County Government
Phone 706-298-3666
vwest@troupcgo.org

Troup Government Center
100 Ridley Ave
LaGrange, Georgia 30240
troupcountyga.org

Troup County,
Georgia Government

Press Release

Mike Dobbs to retire in July after 41 years with Troup County government

LaGrange, GA, June 15, 2012:

Mike Dobbs was barely old enough to drive when he first came to work for Troup County. A junior at Troup High School where he was enrolled in the after-school work program, he was 16 when he started a part-time job at the county shop.

“Mike was a fine young boy, kind of quiet, not a little smart aleck like a lot of them were,” recalls Raymond Smith Sr., a local retired dairyman who supervised Dobbs on his first job with the County. “Every summer, we’d have a flock of those boys; most of them worked on the right-of-way, but Mike worked in the shop and did a little bit of everything.”

Nearly a half-century later, Dobbs will retire this summer as Troup County manager after serving in that role for eight years and with Troup County full-time for 41 years. His last day as county manager is July 22, which will be his 64th birthday. He will remain with the County as a consultant for one year, overseeing administration of SPLOST funds and other projects.

“Mike Dobbs has dedicated his entire career to public service and is practically a human dictionary when it comes to the facts about and the history of Troup County government,” said County Commission Chairman Ricky Wolfe. “For 41 years, he has demonstrated a professionalism and leadership that we have all admired and he’s been a role model to employees and citizens alike.”

Dobbs joined the Troup County staff in 1971 after working in the engineering departments of the City of LaGrange and the local Georgia Department of Transportation office. Hired to work in the Troup County Tax Assessor’s Office, he became the County’s first draftsman and was in charge of all mapping. In 1974, he moved to the Property Appraisal Department where he worked as an appraiser.

In 1977, Dobbs was instrumental in organizing Troup County’s first Building Inspection Department for which he served as building official. In 1978, he assumed responsibilities of the Zoning Department, was named Building and Zoning administrator, and helped write the County’s first building codes. Dobbs served on the board of the Building Officials Association of Georgia from 1980 to 1987, as president in 1982, and was named Building Official of the Year in 1983. With the University of Georgia’s Continuing Education Department, he helped create the Georgia Association of Zoning Administrators and served on its board four years, as president in 1984. He served as a director with the Georgia Council of Code Enforcement Personnel and as vice-president of the Georgia Plumbing Association in the 1980s, was named Optimist of the Year in 1987, and served as lieutenant governor for the state’s Optimists during that time.

In 1986, Dobbs was promoted as Troup County’s first assistant county manager while maintaining the position of building official. For the next two decades, he served as interim county manager three times, sometimes for up to a year. In 2004, he was named county manager.

The Board of Commissioners will soon name the incoming county manager. In the meantime, Dobbs shares his memories of more than four decades with Troup County government.

For Immediate Release



Question: When did you first come to work for Troup County and what did you do?

Dobbs: During high school, I worked at the county shop after school and summers during my junior and senior years. I worked in the shop with Raymond Smith Sr., Earl McCurry and, at that time, Charlie Whitaker was over all the roads. I did anything they asked me to do. I remember as Granger Park was being developed, the County did the grading work for that. At that time, the County would hire school boys for grass cutting details, but I was fortunate enough to be in the shop, and I enjoyed it. That was the good old days.

Question: What brought you to work full-time for Troup County?

Dobbs: The job came open in the tax assessor's office, so I started as the first Troup County draftsman in charge of mapping. As deeds would come in to transfer property and divide property or subdivisions, I would ink in the maps and make the changes. That was prior to computer-aided drawing. After that, I became an appraiser with Gene Hunt and Alma Wood in 1974.

Question: In 1977, you helped create the County's first Building Inspection Department. What are your memories from that time?

Dobbs: I remember County Manager Jack Crook and Commissioner Frank Traylor taking me to the Homebuilders Association Meeting and introducing me to all the builders in Troup County. The builders welcomed me with open arms, simply for this reason: at that time we had builders skipping across into Troup County from Alabama and other counties, building houses incomplete. I remember one where plumbing underneath the house in the crawl space never was connected, so when that buyer opened the door and went in and bought that house, it appeared to be a completed house. We put in some pretty good tough regulations, adopted the building codes, and enforced them. It was the first time that had ever been done in the unincorporated area in Troup County.

During that time, a couple of inspectors were added. One in particular, I'll never forget—he was probably one of the *best* knowledgeable builders around: Robert Adams. He was a local builder and built houses galore all over LaGrange. He had retired from the building industry and became a building inspector and was just one of the finest people. He became a preacher and I remember going to his first trail sermon. He was like a second father to me and just a good, good man.

Question: Your first job with Troup County was in the mid-1960s working part-time while in high school. Since those early years, what are some of the improvements you have witnessed?

Dobbs: When I first started work at Troup County we didn't have a county manager system of government. The first county manager was Jack Crook who was very thrifty and put us in good financial condition by the time he retired. When I worked at the county shop after school and summers, I remember when we had an injury, like if someone got a pretty bad cut on their finger, our credit was so bad in Troup County that we could not be seen by the Clark-Holder Clinic. We would have to come by and pick up a check from the Commissioner's Office with the employee or inmate out there in the truck bleeding 'til we could get to the clinic. From that time to now, especially through Jack Crook's years, has led us to where we have reserve and good credit. Our bond ratings are the best you can have. We are now recognized by both Standard & Poor's and Moody's with excellent ratings.

I've seen many more positive changes, like when Troup County moved to Dallis Street from downtown. At that time, the courthouse was completely out of space. We were renting space in the old Colonial Hotel and we were fortunate enough to get the Church Street building where now the public defender and Extension Services are located. The county manager's office was in a small corner in the commissioner's office at the courthouse.

The implementation of an E-911 system for all of Troup County was a big thing. I remember myself and a committee of Walt Knight, Rick Torrance and Bill Christian visiting Hall County and other counties preparing for the opening of the Troup County 911 system, which was originally located on Broad Street on property given to us by C&S Bank. It used to be a place where they had a huge vault for their needs. In case of nuclear attack at that time, if you walked in that door there was a pull cord that would flush you with water to get the contamination off of you. Of course, we took that out and cut the water off, but the vault to this day still remains because the vault door was so large you couldn't get it out.

Also, I remember the green boxes for sanitation that sat on almost every corner of every road around Troup County. We had hundreds of them, and we had trucks that would dump them and haul the garbage to the landfill, and

that was a hauling logistics nightmare because people would let them run over. It was a mess, so we built the convenience centers that we have now around 1982 or '83.

Senior Centers have been constructed and now they're being added onto. Industrial parks have been developed to provide job opportunities and diversity for our citizens here to go to work. I've seen a new sheriff's facility and jail constructed, the Troup County Health Department relocated and enlarged, the new government center constructed in downtown LaGrange, Parks and Rec improvements throughout Troup County, road construction and improvements with bridges and intersections made safer, and fire department and equipment improvements.

Years ago, I drew up (blueprints for) the fire departments and most of them were the simplest of the simple metal buildings back then. It's a pleasure to see new things, like the upgrading of all our fire departments, especially the new LEED-certified fire station we just finished at Long Cane. It's really good to see the county set the example for others. Much of this was made possible by the citizens of Troup County who voted for SPLOST I, II, III and IV. So, I've seen things grow from the bare bones operation of what we had to what we have now.

Question: Some people might not realize that, as a draftsman, you've drawn up plans for not only County projects but other buildings in the community. How many sets of blueprints—and for what projects—have you drawn as part of your job with the County and in your off time?

Dobbs: When I drive by them, it's a lot. I drew up a courtroom over in the old Colonial Hotel. And I probably drew up plans for four different dormitories as we needed space down at the Correctional Institute, and we still use those today. I remember drawing plans for a lot of churches and for Pizza Villa, which remains one of my wife's and my favorite places to eat.

Question: Do I remember correctly that you never sought the position of county manager?

Dobbs: That's right. I wasn't interested in it because I liked having one foot in the building department and one foot in the commissioner's office, and I was able to do that for a lot of years as assistant county manager. I really enjoyed the building department. I looked at it like it's my product because I started that off and wanted to make sure it did well... and it's doing super. But, when they asked me in 2004, I knew the timing was right.

Question: What is the biggest challenge you encounter in your job each year?

Dobbs: Right now, the board of commissioners and staff are working on the FY'13 budget. Preparing Troup County's operating budget is always a challenge and this one is no exception. For the last 26 years since becoming assistant county manager, I've been intimately involved with the budget.

Question: What would you call the greatest challenge overall?

Dobbs: At one point, our relationships with the cities were like the relationships with our own departments used to be, where everything was territorial: "This is my shovel. You can't get my shovel to fix that. You go get your own shovel." It's so good to see quality working relationships among county departments and among the four governments now. I've been here when it wasn't that way, and that makes everything miserable and it stalls growth. But times are great now; it's just remarkable to see that.

Question: With your long tenure at the County, I'd imagine that your working relationships with the cities have helped smooth the path toward those improved relations.

Dobbs: I would love to think that maybe I've made a little difference in bringing it to this point because I've had a good relationship with Joel Wood in West Point, with Tom Hall and Jim Hanson in LaGrange, and with former Hogansville managers, like Wesley Duffey. As long as the managers can talk and agree, each manager can go back to their respective board and present opportunities to them. That's why, in my opinion, the county manager form of government is so successful.

Question: Prior to the county manager style, how was County administration conducted?

Dobbs: We had commissioners running the commissioner's office, and they did good jobs back then, but making it a little problematic was that each commissioner took a year's turn of being chairman. Hawley Smith was the first countywide elected chairman, and it's been that way ever since, so now the chairman is in that position for four years, and that consistency is a good thing.

Question: So you feel that the improved relationship between the four governments has been a work in progress?

Dobbs: I think so, but I will say that the last eight years or so has been remarkable, just by picking up the phone and talking to each other. We have joint retreats with the City of LaGrange now. Of course, one thing that might have forced the issue was Kia. The three cities, the county and the board of education had to agree on what was going to transpire with the coming of Kia, and we worked together well in bringing that about.

Question: What would you say about the commissioners you've worked with through the years?

Dobbs: I've been very fortunate to work for many excellent boards of commissioners. No one person can do anything by himself. It takes a team, and I'm extremely proud to say that Troup County's current board of commissioners is a team. No one has a selfish agenda.

Question: How is Troup County viewed as a leader throughout the state?

Dobbs: We were probably the first county to get all our employees on the county personnel system, including the employees who worked for constitutional officers, and that was used as a model across the state to ensure that all employees were treated equally as far as benefits, vacation time and sick leave. That was in the mid-'70s. And in 1976, we put all of our ordinances in one, big bound book—the Code of Troup County, Georgia—and gave department heads a copy so they could be easily reviewed instead of department heads having to search the minute books. We were used as an example on that across the state, and other counties followed suit.

We've always had a great relationship with the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and often we'll receive calls from other counties, especially in the past few years, who say they were referred to us by ACCG, and we're always happy to help any way we can. They've asked us things as simple as how our fire department hours work to something as major as our county budget policies, and the full range in-between.

Question: When the job was tough and thankless, what kept you going?

Dobbs: Years ago, I came across a man who was moving a house and didn't have a permit. I told him he needed a permit and, boy, he let me have it, right in front of his young son. About a year later, this same man came into my office, with his son, and said he wanted his son with him to hear when he apologized for unloading on me that day. It may sound like a little thing, but when those rare things happen, it truly makes a difference.

Question: Who has been a mentor to you?

Dobbs: Well, of course Jack Crook. He was the first county manager and remains a good friend. He came in and organized departments and brought everything up to manageable levels. He took some heat for that because people are always resistant to change, but it was change that had to happen and good things resulted from it.

Question: To what do you attribute your success?

Dobbs: My wife Ellen—in September, we'll be married for 38 years—deserves the major credit for my being able to do the job for Troup County. Her support, encouragement and love have boosted me through any task I've undertaken. I truly have been blessed to have her as my wife. And the same thing is true with my mom and daddy, Julian and Martha Dobbs. I was brought up in a good, loving family. In fact, my dad will celebrate his 91st birthday this month.

Question: Do you have a motto or code by which you live?

Dobbs: My motto would be "treat people like you would like to be treated."

I think maybe I've had a blueprint for life. You've got to start somewhere and, if you're going to succeed, you have to work up to things, and maybe that's what I've done. My blueprint for life would be to try to make a positive difference in some way. Enjoy life and your family every day.

And remember, it's a beautiful world that God has made.



Pictured: Mike Dobbs (center) with Troup County commissioners starting from top left: Buck Davis, Ken Smith, Richard C. Wolfe, and Richard English

What others say about Mike Dobbs

Richard English, Troup County commissioner since 1979: “In all these years Mike’s been here, since he was assistant county manager, we had one thing that we didn’t agree on, but I won’t go into that. He’s been a good manager, always looking out for the finances, and that is the critical thing when it comes to county government—the budget. He’s very conscientious, easy-going, and well-liked by everybody. I hate to see him go, but I know everybody gets to that point.”

Hawley Smith, former Troup Commission chairman: “Mike served Troup County for many years as the assistant to County Manager Jack Crook when I was privileged to serve as chairman of the board of commissioners. In his capacity as Jack’s assistant, he gained valuable experience which he used wisely when elevated to the position of county manager and he served Troup County with distinction.”

Tom Hall, LaGrange city manager: “I’ve known and worked with Mike for most of the last 27 years and I’ve always had the highest respect for him and have enjoyed our working relationship. He’s a tremendous public administrator and I’m sure he will be greatly missed by the county. During Mike’s tenure as county manager, relationships between the city and county have greatly improved and I credit him a lot for that. The working relationships between our sister-governments are as good as they’ve ever been and I hope that continues because that serves all the citizens better.”

Valerie West, Troup County executive assistant: “Mike is probably the most calm and diplomatic person I have ever worked ‘with.’ I emphasize ‘with’ because no job is too small for Mike; he will make copies and coffee and even helps clean up after meetings. He never shows anger toward people, even when they are wrong or really upset about things. He is always courteous and patiently works to sort through tough issues, with employees and citizens alike. His historical knowledge of Troup County government is unmatched, and I personally think he should write a memoir. He is just a fine person, professionally and personally, and you will not find a more compassionate man.”

Raymond Smith, county resident/Dobb’s first supervisor: “Through the years, in all the positions he’s been in with the County, Mike’s done a fine job. He’s honest, and that’s a big thing.”

Tod Tentler, Troup County assistant county manager: “I’ve had the opportunity to work with Mike very closely for the last five years and I am amazed at his wealth of knowledge of the history of Troup County government and how well he knows so many people. We are really going to miss his knowledge not only about the county or county government but about the people who live here.”

Ricky Wolfe, Troup County Commission chairman: “Mike is a very humble man who shuns personal recognition. He has worked for so many years with so many people, and various types of people, including different managers, commissioners, employees and residents. To have the demeanor, the grace, and the style to work effectively with that many people, who all have different agendas and motivations, is one heck of an accomplishment.”

Ellen Dobbs, wife of 37 years: “He’s a good man. That says it all, doesn’t it? Someone once called Mike ‘a prince of a man,’ and he is. If he thought he could give you his last breath, he would.

About Troup County, Georgia

Troup County is a great place to live, work and play. Situated with great transportation access on I-85 between Atlanta and Montgomery with Columbus just down I-185, the area is ideal for regional business. Kia Motors thought so and opened its first North American plant here. The County has implemented smart growth development guidelines and is also working to attract ‘green industry.’ Three beautiful towns – Hogansville, West Point and LaGrange, the county seat - offer great hometowns for families. The 26,000-square-mile West Point Lake and beautiful parks round out an idyllic lifestyle for Troup County residents and our welcomed guests.