

'08 Sustainability Conference is grounded in new realities

By WAYNE RISHER

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Organizers of a sustainable development conference Friday in Hernando expect their message to resonate across North Mississippi, from the hill country's new Toyota plant to the Delta's Interstate 69 corridor.

Nearly 100 people — mayors, aldermen, planners, engineers — from Tupelo, Saltillo, Rolling Fork, Oxford and elsewhere, had signed up by late last week to attend the 2008 Sustainability Conference.

The conference, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday at the Hernando Performing Arts Center at Hernando High School, will feature experts discussing environmentally friendly development trends and practices.

Hernando Mayor Chip Johnson pointed out that green development is the theme of the latest trade magazines from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the municipal waste water industry.

"Everywhere you look, they're talking about recycling and sustainable development," he said. "It's the buzzword."

Shelly Johnstone, deputy planning director for Hernando, said 91 people had registered for the conference as of Friday, and she expected at least 125 to attend.

She said officials from Corinth, Brookhaven, Wiggins, Mound Bayou and other cities had signed up.

Advance registration, at \$25 a person, runs through Wednesday; walk-ins will be accepted.

The conference has been approved for contin-

uing education credits for members of the Mississippi Municipal League and American Institute of Certified Planners.

The conference is co-sponsored by the A.W. Bouchillon Institute for Community Planning, city of Hernando, Natural Resources Initiative of North Mississippi and Mississippi Forestry Commission.

It could be considered a warmup for a more intensive conference scheduled at the University of Mississippi, March 5-7. Organizers of "Strategic Conservation Planning Using a Green Infrastructure Approach" have sent a "save the date" flier to prospective participants.

Johnstone said the Hernando event is aimed at decision-makers. "We're trying to really gear this toward people who make decisions about how you use land: aldermen, mayors, land owners, architects, engineers," he said.

The conference has the potential to affect development in communities that will grow because of the Toyota plant near Tupelo.

Speakers will include Dodd Galbreath, executive director of the Institute for Sustainable Practice at Lipscomb University in Nashville; Roger Kuhns, a Ph.D ecologist and geologist working on the Hernando West planned community; Bob Barber, Hernando's planning director; and Joy Anderson, horticulture extension agent.

Officials from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality requested time to talk about air quality relating to development.

There will be an opening reception at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at DeSoto County Museum. For information, contact Johnstone at (662) 429-9092.

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