Griner to lead Association 2012-14

With the symbolic Passing of the Gavel, Lynetta Usher Griner took the reigns as President of the Florida Forestry Association during the Annual Meeting’s September 6th President’s Dinner in Sandestin. Griner is a generational logger and landowner from Chiefland, and will be serving as the first female President of the Association in its 90-year history.

Griner said “The members that make up our Association are the movers and shakers in the future of Florida’s forests. From clean water to wildlife to thousands of products we use every day, our forests touch the lives of our society in amazing ways. No other renewable natural resource has a greater impact on our lives. No other Association fights for our opportunities to grow and use trees like the Florida Forestry Association. I am honored to be a part of this organization and humbled to serve as President.” Griner serves as the 42nd President of the Florida Forestry Association.

See inside pages for Annual Meeting Awards highlights!

The following were also elected to lead the Association as an officer for the next two years:

- President-elect: Mike Bell, Rayonier Inc., Fernandina Beach
- Vice President: Michael Dooner, Southern Forestry Consultants, Inc., Bainbridge, GA
- Secretary/Treasurer: Bob Cook, Great South Timber and Lumber, Lake City
- Executive Vice President: Alan Shelby, Florida Forestry Association, Tallahassee

Previous H-2B rule in effect until March 31, 2013!

The H-2B Visa program annually authorizes the temporary entry of seasonal foreign guestworkers filling specific employment niches which domestic workers are unwilling to fill. Among those niches is the hand-planting of tree seedlings following timber harvest, a task which U.S. contractors fill with H-2B guestworkers, once these contractors establish through legally mandated surveys that citizens and resident aliens are not available.

In its recent overhaul of the H-2B Visa program, the U.S. Department of Labor has imposed conditions upon reforestation contractors which make it impossible for them to operate. DOL’s new Wage Rule, governing wage establishment for guestworkers, while based on regional wage survey data, has adopted a wage index that places treeplanting guestworker wages artificially and uncompetitively high. In addition, DOL’s new Program Rule, governing other working conditions, ignores the operating realities of reforestation in demanding travel itineraries, a three-quarter work guarantee, and identification of inspected housing months in advance of the actual work.

Largely because of its seasonal nature, U.S. workers are not interested in this work, even at the artificially high wage rates the Department of Labor has established; however, labor interests have pressured a compliant DOL to press ahead, under the fiction that the new rules protect U.S. jobs and serve larger “social justice” goals. In actuality, in making reforestation unaffordable, the rules will discourage reforestation, leading to land conversion, depriving a major industry of its resource base, and thus threatening the employment of millions of U.S. workers.

The forest industry and other sectors affected are litigating both rules in federal court. Pending that litigation’s outcome, Congress recently enacted legislation to prevent the Department of Labor from enforcing the new Wage Rule through March 31, 2013. Meanwhile, a federal judge’s temporary injunction has also prohibited enforcement of the Program Rule until the litigation is settled, probably no sooner than spring 2013.

Forest Certification

Forest certification is becoming an important tool in balancing resource sustainability and economic viability, but there is growing confusion in the marketplace over certification standards and eco labels. According to a new report (see News Oct. 1, 2012 - Forest Certification Monopoly at http://www.theamericanconsumer.org) by the American Consumer Institute (ACI) Center for Citizen Research, confusion could be driving up prices by as much as 15-20% for consumers who are willing to pay more for sustainable wood and paper products but may not actually be getting something that is better for the environment. The ACI report titled – The Monopolization of Forest Certification: Do Disparate Standards Increase Consumer Costs and Undermine Sustainability? – reveals the consequences of a reliance on an FSC-only approach, with a vast majority of U.S. certified timber coming from other certification programs. Consumers would face price increases of 15-20%, domestic wood and paper markets could face tens of billions of dollars in losses, and the laudable environmental and sustainability goals the programs were established to achieve would be undermined by a certification monopoly.
Recognizing the “Best” of Florida

Recognizing outstanding individuals and organizations has long been a part of the Florida Forestry Association’s Annual Meeting. That tradition was carried on during the September 5-7, 90th Anniversary Annual Meeting celebration in Sandestin. Congratulations to all the winners, and following summarizes why these individuals were chosen in their field:

William O. “Bill” Cleckley – Audubon Sustainable Forestry Award Audubon

Florida presents its Sustainable Forestry Award each year at the Association’s Annual Meeting, honoring a forester for protecting the state’s water and wildlife. In presenting the award to Cleckley, George Willson, Audubon Board member, stated “Bill was chosen for his achievements in managing public forests, lakes, springs and wetlands in northwest Florida. He has done an excellent job of managing and restoring the District’s public lands, which are a resource for people and wildlife alike.” Cleckley is the NW FL Water Management District’s Director of Land Management and Acquisition.

Sen. Greg Evers – Outstanding Legislator (Senate)

Raised in Santa Rosa County, Evers is a farmer and small businessman who brings his experience and common sense approach to the Legislature. First elected to the House in 2001, and subsequently elected to the State Senate in 2010, from day one, Senator Evers established himself as a leader. He has always been a vocal defender of private property rights, and sponsored the Association’s truck weight increase for four years until it finally passed in 2010. Evers has proven to be an aggressive and vocal supporter leading the charge no matter the issue, especially if it stands to benefit forestry or agriculture in Florida.

Rep. Jimmy Patronis – Outstanding Legislator (House)

A lifelong resident of Bay County, Patronis works as a partner in the family business alongside his father, uncle and brothers at Captain Anderson’s Restaurant & Market. Elected to the House in 2006, Patronis has established himself as a leader and fiscal conservative, and with his common sense business approach, was appointed Chairman of the Government Operations Subcommittee. Patronis is an aggressive supporter of private property rights and less government. Most recently he passed a sweeping measure streamlining the regulatory process and reforming the environmental permitting process.

Harry Pickett – Logger of the Year

Pickett Logging, Inc. was founded in 1997, when Harry made the decision to venture out on his own after working in his uncle’s logging company for 20 years. His family tree boasts a history of loggers, beginning with his great-grandfather who logged timber with ox and cars. Comprised of great employees, including family members, today, Pickett Logging, Inc. purchases their own timber, and hauls to numerous mills. The company has a reputation for excellent job performance and is involved in community activism promoting the logging profession.

Benjamin & Judi Wyche – Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year

A small business owner in Madison County, Ben Wyche has owned and managed their 330 acre Tree Farm, “Rollingcoaster Hill”, since inheriting it from his father over 10 years ago. Certified as a Tree Farm in 2003, the management plan reflects multiple-use objectives that include timber production, wildlife, soil and water conservation, recreation and aesthetics. The primary objective is high quality longleaf timber providing financial returns on his investment and the production of pinestraw. Both Ben and Judi are actively involved in the management regimes on the property, performing more than 80% of the work themselves.

Tree Farm Tour on November 8th

Please plan to attend a tour of the Tree Farm of Benjamin “Guign” and Judi Wyche, the 2012 Florida Tree Farmers of the Year! The tour is scheduled for November 8th, from 9:00 am to approximately 1:00 pm (Eastern Time). The Wyche Tree Farm is located in Madison County, east of Madison. Lunch will be provided, but guests must RSVP by Friday, October 26th, to Phil Gornicki at 850.222.5646 or phil@forestfla.org. Directions will be provided upon RSVP.
Over $30,000 raised for Shands Kids!

The Tommy Usher Log-A-Load for Kids Golf Classic raised more than $30,000 at its September 20th event, for the Children’s Miracle Network at Shands Hospital for Children at UF. The tournament, co-sponsored by Farm Credit and the Florida Forestry Association, brought out 120 golfers, who enjoyed beautiful weather, a round of golf, good food and fellowship, and all for a great cause! Farm Credit provided lunch, featuring their famous “FC Chicken” and “FC Pork Butts” with all the trimmings. Everyone staying for the evening awards and raffle drawing enjoyed hamburgers, hotdogs and sausage dogs, courtesy of Florida Cattlemen’s Association and Bo & Emily Hobby of Williston. Of special note, Abigail, the 2012 CMN feature child, was on hand to help get the afternoon golfers on their way, and is the granddaughter of the event’s Low Gross Team player, Roger Pickert. Many sponsors made this tournament possible, including Jacksonville businesses Dee Dot Timberlands, donating the winner prizes, and N. G. Wade Investment Company, who donated a set of $2,500 golf clubs for the raffle prize.

Suwannee County approves Klausner sawmill contract

The Suwannee County Board of County Commissioners voted 3-1 recently, to approve the contract between the County and Klausner Lumber One, LLC, for a state-of-the-art sawmill that may be built in western Suwannee County near the US 90 West and I-10 interchange. The County is reportedly still waiting for the contract to be signed by Klausner. Without a signed contract, the company is not obligated to build in Suwannee County and can still negotiate with other interests. At a recent meeting, the Suwannee County Commissioners voted to award all bids for the project based on the contingency that Klausner signs the contract. The county is set to start clearing, grading and compacting the land by the county must be complete by March 30, 2013. The future mill anticipates cutting 375 million board feet annually.

Forest Festival on October 27th in Perry!

Don’t miss the 57th Annual Florida Forest Festival, beginning with the King Tree Parade starting at 10 am in downtown Perry, followed by an afternoon filled with fun and entertainment at the Forest Capital Museum State Park. This event boasts the “World’s Largest Free Fish Fry” being served beginning at noon. The Saturday events will include live lumberjack shows, entertainment, arts and crafts, food vendors, heritage displays, antique car show, equipment demonstrations and much, much more! The Forest Capital Museum State Park is located south of Perry on U.S. 19. For more information, call 850.584.5366. This event is free!