

Gov. Deal visits Valdosta State

BY DAVID S. RODOCK
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VALDOSTA — Gov. Nathan Deal received a warm welcome in South Georgia Wednesday morning from local leaders for his commitment to approve the state 2013 fiscal budget - with the inclusion of \$32 million for the Valdosta State University Health Sciences and Business Administration Building.

Local legislators and over 100 business leaders and citizens attended the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce "Breakfast with the Governor," which focused primarily on the recently-completed legislative session and giving thanks to the Governor and state legislators for their work.

Georgia House Representatives Amy Carter (R-175), Jason Shaw (R-176),

'I can tell you this man is not just about a title. He means it; he works very hard and it's all about making this state so much better and we're seeing it in action already after only two years.'

Amy Carter
State representative

Ellis Black (R-174) and State Senator Tim Golden (R-8) were also in attendance.

Although the fiscal budget of almost \$19.2 billion is historically the last piece of legislation signed by the governor after a session, local leaders appeared confident the VSU project would receive the necessary funding and required support from the governor.

Carter said Gov. Deal was one person in particu-

lar that needed to be thanked for the approval of a list of South Georgia requests.

"This gentleman to my right - I can say he's the greatest leader we've ever had in the state of Georgia, honestly," said Carter. "I can tell you this man is not just about a title. He means it; he works very hard and it's all about making this state so much better and we're seeing it in action



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Valdosta State University interim president Dr. Louis Levy, Ellis Black (R-174), State Senator Tim Golden (R-8), Gov. Nathan Deal, Amy Carter (R-176), Jason Shaw (R-175) and local business owner Rusty Griffin pose outside the VSU Nursing building. Deal is expected to approve the 2013 state fiscal budget which includes \$32 million towards the construction of the VSU Health Sciences and Business Administration Building.

DEAL

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Deal started off by commending the South Georgia state representatives' work ethic; he told a story about an employee at McDonald's who mistook him for Gov. Sonny Purdue and talked about a television series called "Revolution" which was filmed in the Georgia State Capital building.

After the breakfast, Deal would further emphasize his interest in bringing television and film companies to Georgia for production, but also the importance of using local talent.

He also addressed recent reductions in government spending.

"I believe what state government should be is small, lean and do the things you expect us to do and do them well and that means you can downsize in certain areas," said Deal.

Next, Deal spoke about the "unhealthy growth" in the criminal justice and penal system. According to Deal, one in 13 Georgia residents is under some form of correctional supervision and \$1.2 billion is spent each year to support the fourth largest prison population in the country, despite the fact that Georgia is only the ninth most populated state. Over \$10 million was granted for "accountability courts," which were created to reduce these prison populations for non-violent offenders. Deal wants the courts to find strategies to effectively deal with an offender's root difficulties to address obstacles preventing them from becoming a productive member of society. He also talked about the removal of the annual ad valorem automobile tax, or the birthday tax



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Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal meets with local citizens Wednesday morning at Valdosta State University.

which will go into effect in March 2013 and tax relief legislation passed to increase Georgia's competitiveness in manufacturing and agriculture against neighbor states.

After meeting with guests after breakfast, Deal walked across Patterson Street to speak with VSU nursing students about the importance of the Health Sciences and Business Administration Building and to commend them for their lobbying efforts last year.

"There are ways to encourage people to do things, but poor-mouthing has a part attached to it and you all really achieved a state of art in that regard," said Deal in reference to his September visit to Valdosta. During the visit, Deal said the air conditioning was broken, the mannequins had electrical shortages and students attended class in closets.

"About half of the practitioners are going to head right back to their homes," said VSU interim president Louis Levy. "But we hope

to keep more than our share in the region and to attract others from different regions. That's what you do with first-class facilities. I think the Governor realizes that what's good for South Georgia is also good for North Georgia and all parts of Georgia need to operate as a state. I'm convinced that's part of why we were funded."

Levy also said the new VSU facility will provide about 1,200 construction jobs and projections indicate about 300 new students will enroll in the nursing program.

The 140,000-square-foot HSBA building was first proposed within the university's 2007 master plan. It will serve as an advanced academic facility to educate health-care professionals and will house six health science programs: Nursing (including a dental-hygiene program with WGTC), communications disorders, athletic training, exercise physiology, social work and business health administration.