

Center for Better South seeks to improve area's quality of life

More attention, discussions needed to remedy poverty and health issues along Southern Crescent, expert says

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FLORENCE, S.C. — With high unemployment, poor health and high rates of poverty, the South often carries a poor reputation, but Andy Brack with the Center for a Better South sees a way to improve not only the South's image but its quality of life as well.



Andy Brack, president of Center for a Better South, speaks to Florence West Rotary about the Southern Crescent on Thursday at Florence Country Club.

By studying maps on a variety of demographics and social indicators, Brack has pinpointed not only the unique area with these problems — an area he calls the Southern Crescent — but has shown its ties to where slavery was predominant in the South.

“One hundred and fifty years in this part of the country is long enough,” Brack told a group of Florence West Rotarians on Thursday. “We need to start paying attention, and I don't mean more government money pouring in.”

Brack believes that by pooling smart people together, his group can do three important things to improve the problems of the South: work to tell people about the problems that exist, work with nonprofits and foundations to fund research and studies and work with the White House to get a special study commission appointed to

recommend federal and state policies to raise the standard of living.

The Southern Crescent starts in Arkansas and sweeps down into the Deep South and back up along the east coast all the way to Virginia. In maps showing everything from economic figures and safety concerns to health and education, Brack showed the areas in the crescent frequently show similar problems.

Brack said that while 70 to 75 percent of people in the crescent have a perfectly good quality of life, there are still 25 percent of people that don't have the opportunities others have.

“I think this is an important thing that everybody — regardless of your political party, regardless of your socio-economic wealth — should care about,” Brack said. “Number one, as Southerners, we don't take the easy way out. Number two, I think there are some economic justice issues here that a lot of you have a good quality of life, but we have to remember that there are 20 to 30 percent of people in rural counties that don't have a good quality of life.

“There is also a moral component to this in that we are a wealthy country and we need to do a little more to leave this place better than we found it. Quite frankly, if we start taking care of all of these areas that drag us down, the South will improve its image.”

WANT TO KNOW MORE? The Center for a Better South began in 2005 when it partnered with the Center for American Progress. To learn more about the center's work or to get involved, visit www.southerncrest.org.