

# COUNTY CLIPS

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## BOARD WORKING TO LOWER TAX RATE

Over the past few weeks, Richmond County Government has been busy preparing the budget for the new fiscal year, which begins on July 1. The Richmond County Board of Commissioners, as well as County Manager Jim Haynes, are aware of concerns expressed by many taxpayers concerning the recent tax revaluation.

A number of meetings have taken place to listen to each person's appeal. One thing the Board would like for people to remember is that when values increase, the tax rate usually decreases. The County does not seek to profit from taxes, only to collect what is needed to provide all the proper and state-mandated services.

The County is limited to the property tax and a few other lesser sources of income, but the State of North Carolina requires the County to accomplish many

programs and activities. While the County is expected to see some relief in the upcoming year on Medicaid programs, there is a chance that the County may be required to participate in the cost of transportation projects.

During the mid-month May meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved a resolution opposing N.C. House Bill 1513, which allows counties to participate in the cost of those projects.

The Board is expected to approve the budget for the next fiscal year during the month of June. The construction of the new Judicial Center has caused a tightening of the budget and an increase in the current year's tax rate.

However, the Board is working to bring the rate down to between 80 and 85 cents per \$100, beginning July 1.

Taxpayers who opt to pay

early can also save a little. The Board unanimously voted to allow for a 1 percent discount for early payment of property taxes.

Owners who pay their taxes during the month of August will get a discount for simply paying early. Discounts apply to property taxes due for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2008.

In order to make it easier for citizens to pay taxes, Richmond County now offers people the option of paying my credit card or electronic check. Taxpayers can utilize the services offered through Official Payments, which enables consumers to pay their taxes via the Internet or over the telephone. Citizens may call 1-800-2PAY-TAX (1-800-272-9829) or visit their Website at [www.officialpayments.com](http://www.officialpayments.com) for more information.

A nominal convenience fee is charged by Official Payments for this service.

## Quick Stats

- **18,427:** Number of books, videos and periodicals that were circulated in Richmond County libraries from January 1 to March 31 of this year.
- **2,700:** Number of voters who cast their ballots early in this year's Primary Election.
- **14,847:** Number of people who utilized public computers with Internet access at Richmond County's three libraries during the first three months of the year.
- **24:** Number of dilapidated structures removed by owners in Richmond County from January, 2006 to May, 2008. Twenty-two additional structures have been removed by the County.
- **22,345:** Number of Richmond County residents who have a library card.
- **47,000:** More than 47,000 people in Richmond County called 9-1-1 last year alone. That equals out to around one call per resident per year.

## 41 Percent

Voter turnout in Richmond County for the May 6 Primary Election was among the highest in the state at 41 percent. This number speaks volumes for voters in Richmond County, said Board of Elections Director Connie Kelly.

## SHERIFF'S OFFICE TAKES ON A NEW LOOK

**W**hile many citizens may understand the role members of the Sheriff's Office play in safeguarding the rights and freedoms of Richmond County's citizens, they may not realize the department is also working hard to save taxpayers' money.

Evidence of this can be found today as deputies replace their brown uniforms with gray trousers and black shirts. Another change scheduled to take place includes replacing deputies' brown cars with black ones.

While this may seem like simple modifications, each change will save the County money, said Sheriff Dale Furr.

"We did this for economic reasons," Furr said. "We're trying to save money."

The Richmond County Sheriff's Department was the only one in the state

still wearing brown uniforms, Furr said. Unfortunately, this resulted in higher prices for the department. In addition to those added costs, the department also had to pay an extra \$600 for each car to be painted brown.

"Because we were the only department in the state still wearing brown uniforms, we had to deal with a lot of price gouging," he said.

Captain Robbie Taylor and Furr organized an effort to put the department in new uniforms.

"What we came up with seems to be between a tactical and dress uniform," Furr said. "It's still dressy enough to wear to funerals, but tactical enough to wear on the street."

It will take several years to see how much the department will save, but in the long run, taxpayers will benefit, Furr said.

Along with cost issues, deputies would also have to wait months before getting new uniforms, since they were in short supply.

What many deputies may appreciate the most, though, are the new high-top boots, which will provide better support for those who spend a great amount of time on their feet.

"We feel like overall this will be a lot safer," Furr said. "We didn't just go out and buy a new uniform. The planning went on for around a year to make sure we were making a cost effective choice that would also be safe for deputies."

It seems fitting that during this year's "Law Enforcement Appreciation Week," officers unveiled their new vehicles and uniforms. While it's evident they work every day to keep residents safe, it's important to recognize they also work to save taxpayers' money.

## THE WORD ON WATER

**W**ork continues on the Southeast Water Expansion Project. As noted in last month's issue of "County Clips," the main loop is complete from the Airport Road Water Tank to Hwy. 74 Business at Hwy. 381.

Work is now beginning on Old Gibson Road from the intersection of Oak Ridge Church Road toward the McGirt Road intersection at Hwy. 38. Employees will continue to install lines on McGirt Road back to Oak Ridge Church Road to complete this loop.

Please contact the Richmond County Water Department at 997-8258 or 997-8202 for information on how to apply for a tap into the system. The current tap fee for a 3/4 inch meter is \$500.

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