

# RICHMOND COUNTY GOVERNMENT

# COUNTY CLIPS

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## COUNTY GIVEN CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH

**D**uring the last Board of Commissioners meeting, Certified Public Accountant Alan Thompson briefed the board on Richmond County's recent audit. The County received an overall clean bill of financial health for the past fiscal year.

In order to ensure Richmond County Government remains fiscally sound during the recent downturn in the economy, Commissioners unanimously approved an immediate freeze in spending.

The decision to freeze funds was necessary, considering recent reports on the State budget, which is estimated to be out of balance by \$2.5 billion.

"State government officials have already called for a reduction in spending throughout North Carolina," Haynes said. "The local community college and school system have been asked for a return in state funds

this fiscal year.

"The concern is that with the state struggling to meet its budget, County governments will be asked to provide extra funding in areas like education and possibly even road construction."

Haynes' recommendation includes a suspension in all travel not associated with providing County services, and a freeze in positions currently vacant. This applies for positions funded at 50 percent or greater with County funds.

All capital purchases not currently under contract were also cancelled, and all purchases were suspended other than those necessary to operate an office.

"It's extremely important to cut costs even further so that Richmond County can weather any cuts in state appropriations," Haynes said.

## TAX DEADLINE DRAWING NEAR

**R**eal estate and personal property taxes are due in just a few weeks.

This past summer, more than 33,000 bills were mailed out by the Richmond County Tax Office for property taxes, which are past due on Jan. 6.

Employees at the Tax Office are trying to spread the word so that people can avoid any late fees or penalties.

Any resident unable to pay their taxes in full by Jan. 6 may make a payment arrangement with the Tax Office.

"The deadline to make a payment plan has been extended in order to accommodate residents, who have been affected by the recent economic downturn," said Ginny Braddock, who works in Tax Collections. "With so many people affected by recent layoffs, the County lengthened the payment period to May 15."

This means that owners, who are participating in a payment plan, will have until May 15 to pay their taxes in full, without worrying over late fees or penalties.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to make monthly payments on time, and to cover the interest incurred while on a plan. Failure to do so will void the agreement and begin the process of collection enforcement.

Once any bill starts to accrue interest, bank attachments are performed first, followed by wage garnishments, foreclosures and other remedies allowed by law.

*(Information on options for paying taxes can be found on page 2.)*

## QUICK STATS

- **\$8,000:** Amount of money awarded to Richmond County Aging Services by the Richmond Community Foundation to help with the Senior Christmas parties held in December. Thanks to this grant, close to 1,700 seniors received a bag of fruit; enjoyed all types of holiday entertainment and savored the holiday season.
- **459:** Number of Richmond County children who received Christmas gifts through the efforts of employees at the Department of Social Services. This number includes children currently being served by the department and those referred to the agency for special help this season.
- **10,154:** Total number of people who passed through the security station at the Richmond County Courthouse during the month of November. This number is equal to a quarter of the county's total population.

## HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Richmond County Government offices will be closed in observance of the following holidays.

- **New Year's Day:** Thursday, Jan. 1
- **Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.:** Monday, Jan. 19

## PERSONAL PROPERTY LISTING PERIOD BEGINS

All owners of personal property in Richmond County should receive a Personal Property Listing Form in the mail during the first few weeks of January.

Any person who purchased personal property in 2008 – such as untagged vehicles, boats, untagged utility trailers and mobile homes – should receive their Listing Form by Jan. 10.

If you have not received your form by this date, please call the Tax Office.

Property tax relief is available for elderly and permanently disabled persons. There is also a Circuit Breaker exemption, which is new for 2009. For more information on these exemptions, contact Dozene Rush at 410-1105.

The Listing Period for personal property begins on Jan. 2 and ends on Jan. 31. If

you need help with your listing, or if you have questions, please come to the Richmond County Courthouse from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or call the Tax Office at 997-8274.

### WAYS TO PAY

Pay your property taxes online by visiting Official Payment's Website, located at [www.officialpayments.com](http://www.officialpayments.com). Payments accepted include cards issued by American Express, Discover, MasterCard or VISA, or ATM pin-less debit cards with the VISA or MasterCard logo.

To pay by electronic check, visit [www.officialpayments.com/echeck](http://www.officialpayments.com/echeck).

To pay by phone, call 800-272-9829. When prompted, use the Richmond County Jurisdiction Code, which is 4400.

It is extremely important for residents to

provide their phone number when paying online or by phone and to retain the confirmation number they are given after paying.

Official Payments charges a convenience fee for processing the payment transaction. For those who opt to pay by electronic check, the fee is \$3 for each payment under \$10,000. Around three percent is charged by the vendor for processing credit cards. Customers will be informed of all charges and fees prior to authorizing payment.

The transaction fee is not charged by or paid to Richmond County Government. The convenience fee is assessed to cover operating costs and the costs associated with servicing thousands of credit card transactions.

## RICHMOND COUNTY ROUND-UP

### GOT PLANS FOR NEW YEAR'S?

Just days after purchasing Rockingham Speedway, Andy Hillenburg announced his plans for two races at the track within his first year of ownership.

True to his promise of bringing racing back to Richmond County, Hillenburg recently booked the Polar Bear 150, which is scheduled for Jan. 1.

Up to 99 cars will take the green flag at 1 p.m. on the first day of the new year.

Tickets for the event, featuring Frank Kimmel's Street Stock Series cars, may be purchased in an advance or on the day of the event by calling the Speedway at 205-8800, or visiting the Web site, [www.rockingham Speedway.com](http://www.rockingham Speedway.com).

### SAVE TIME PAYING WATER BILL

Avoid waiting in line to pay your wa-

ter bill by having it drafted from your checking account each month.

Customers who wish to take advantage of this convenience simply need to provide a voided check to Water Department staff, and sign a form authorizing this service.

Customers may also utilize the drop box located outside the Administrative Building. To use this service, please include the return portion of your bill in an envelope along with a check or money order.

The drop box can be used at any time, even during regular office hours.

### WEBSITE PROVIDES SAFETY TIPS

The Richmond County Sheriff's Office continues to provide residents with important information.

On the Web site, located at [www.richmondcountysheriff.net](http://www.richmondcountysheriff.net), citi-

zens can find everything from agency telephone numbers to a link called "OffenderWatch," which provides up-to-date information on sex offenders in the county.

Gun permit applications are also available online, as well as Cyber tips for parents and department contacts.

### SPREADING THE WORD

The Department of Social Services continues to spread the word about programs offered to help families through their Web site, located at [www.richmondcountyworkfirst.com](http://www.richmondcountyworkfirst.com).

The program emphasizes the importance of work and personal responsibility, while offering time-limited financial and employment-related resources to families.

To learn more about Work First and how to get involved, contact DSS at (910) 997-8480.