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County faces major revenue shortfall

Employees to face 10% cut in hours

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

Facing a massive budget shortfall, county officials furloughed all employees, cutting their work hours by one day per two week pay period through June 30.

Also cut was \$413,000 from the county's school budget.

Shrinking sales tax revenues and program cost overruns forced the measure as Chowan's commissioners sought to trim \$970,000 from the remainder of this fiscal year.

Breaking the news

The announcement was made in a stormy meeting of the county commission Monday night that saw bitter complaints from EMS

technicians who said the cutbacks could hurt public safety.

County Manager Peter Rascoe said a 30 percent reduction in sales tax revenues brought on by the national recession was the main culprit in the shortfall.

He said that until this week, the commissioners had been working on balancing next year's budget,

County employees react to budget cuts

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something they must do before June 1. But all that came to a halt when a trend of falling tax receipts became obvious.

With their cash reserves below state-mandated levels, the commissioners had no room to absorb the

drop in tax receipts and no means to raise revenue over the remaining four months of the fiscal year.

Where the cuts are

That left only cuts in programs and spending. In addition to cutting \$141,000 in employee hours, county programs feeling the pinch are:

■ \$413,000 from the school system budget.

■ \$100,000 cut from school technology money.

■ \$67,000 cut from the social services department.

■ \$47,000 in full and part time layoffs.

■ \$40,000 from the school capital reserve fund.

■ \$30,000 cut from recreation department programs.

Other reductions came in the form of reduced county See **BUDGET**, Page A2 >



Local volunteers watch clips from the show Extreme Makeover: Home Edition Friday as part of the presentation for the show making over an area family's home. The mystery home selection will take place Friday. Above right, lead builder John Norris talks to volunteers for the home project during the rally at Edenton United Methodist Church.

photos by BRETT A. CLARK/THE DAILY ADVANCE

Hundreds sign up for 'Makeover'

By Rebecca Bunch
The Chowan Herald

Even in hard times, people still care about helping others.

That was clear from the number of people who showed up to donate their time so one family from our region could look forward to better housing.

About 350 people packed the Family Life Center at the Edenton United Methodist Church Friday morning to volunteer for duty on the ABC reality show, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."

The show's production team announced Monday they planned to spend a week completely rebuilding a home for one area family.

In an enthusiastic welcome, Edenton Mayor Roland Vaughan declared, "I'm sure this is going to be a rip-roaring success."

Conrad Ricketts, co-executive

producer of the show, pointed out that the work at the site would run a total of 106 hours over the seven-day period.

But the experience is worth it, he said.

"Volunteers think they're coming to change somebody else's life and they end up changing their own," Ricketts told the group.

Participants were treated to comments from those connected with "Makeover," between clips from past episodes of the show.

Chowan County residents have volunteered for everything from making sure meals are served to helping organize volunteers.

John Norris, owner of Edenton Builders Inc., whose company has been tapped to work with the Extreme Makeover crew, said he remains mystified about how the show's produc-

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Citizens and first responders question cut in working hours

"God knows this is hard, but be assured that if that call comes in, it's going to be answered."

— commissioner Jimmy Allgood

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

Among the cuts announced during Monday's county commission meeting was a controversial reduction in working hours for the county's first responders.

All county workers will

have their hours cut by two days each month, chopping the payroll by 10 percent.

But cuts to the county's sheriff's department and emergency medical services got an immediate public reaction.

The reductions brought a storm of protests by citizens and EMS technicians who warned the cuts might cause delays in emergency services.

Some EMS personnel rose to express concerns they might be forced to return to their station at the end of a shift even if an emergency occurred near their current location.

County Manager Peter Rascoe assured commissioners he had met with EMS director Angela Toppin and had been assured that there was no reason



Toppin



Allgood



Rascoe

by EMS technicians and citizens, Rascoe said, "This is a management issue. We will continue

to make this work."

Commissioner Jimmy Allgood said the county will not let money get between a citizen and emergency medical care.

"I know every one of them (EMS technicians) will answer that call at 7 a.m.," he said.

"We have the best group of employees of any county around."

"God knows this is hard, but be assured that if that call comes in, it's going to be answered."

why technicians could not meet all emergency calls.

But Toppin rose to dispute the statement. She said she had not told Rascoe her department could guarantee that emergency calls would be made on time with the resources she was being left with.

"What do we do?" she said. "What do we do?"

"I stand by my statement," Rascoe said, "that I have no indication that any call will go unanswered."

After a flurry of public comment and questions

Town gets clean audit for '07-'08

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

The town of Edenton has received a clean audit from its accountant for the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

"The town's finances are in good shape," auditor Jim Winston of Winston, Williams, Creech, Evans and Company told the town council during its Feb. 23 meeting.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said the audit was recently approved by the state Local Government Commission.

Highlights included

■ In the General Fund, revenues exceed expenditures by \$195,667

■ That the town's fund balance increased from \$1,339,742 to \$1,535,409

■ The town's unrestrict-

ed reserve (fund balance) improved from 20.23% to 24.5%.

The N.C. Local Government Commission requires at least an 8% unrestricted reserve, Winston reported.

He also reminded councilors that "municipalities of Edenton's size with electric systems have an average fund balance of around 36 percent," Knighton said.

"You continue to make good progress towards your goal of increasing the reserves. Ideally, I want you to be at 40 percent," Winston told the council

Looking at funds

According to Winston's findings, the town's three proprietary funds — electric, water and sewer, and the Northeastern Regional Airport — all had revenues

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