

Voters to get sales tax referendum

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

Voters will decide in a November referendum if a sales tax increase is the best way to pad the county's coffers. Chowan County commissioners unanimously voted Monday night to add the referendum to this year's ballot.

The move calls for increasing the local sales tax from 7.75 cents to 8 cents, which could generate an additional \$150,000 annually.

"This is something that the people need to decide," said Commissioner Keith Nixon. "I don't even know if it'll pass." Nearly a year and a half ago, voters then rejected a similar

sales tax increase.

One businessman told the board an increase would hurt local businesses that have to compete with nearby Virginia where the sales tax is lower.

"I understand the county needs revenue," Henry White said. "I don't believe this is the way. You may lose business owners if you raise taxes."

White added that the loss of business could offset any increase the tax generated. He also said business owners in surrounding counties that have raised the sales tax have discovered loss business.

But, commissioners said it's a matter for the voters and a way to ease the tax revenue burden from property owners.

The sales tax would impact everyone that conducts business in the county, including visitors.

"My personal opinion is that a sales tax is the most fair tax," Commissioner Emmett Winborne first said in a board meeting last week. He reiterated that opinion Monday night.



Diane Daniels catches her breath after jumping in with County Manager Peter Rascoe during Saturday's Polar Plunge.

STAFF PHOTOS BY BRETT A. CLARK

Chowan hosts third Polar Plunge

Event raised \$7.5K for Special Olympics

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

EDENTON — The waters of Edenton Bay were pounded by a barrage of cannonballs Saturday but there wasn't a Civil War re-enactor in sight.

Instead, 60 jumpers, most of them stripped down to bare skin and swimsuits, were doing the damage — one leap into the cold, frigid water at a time.

The event was the 3rd annual Polar Plunge, Chowan County's fundraiser for Special Olympics.

Bundled in jackets and



Jean Bunch jumps in the water dressed as a pirate, Saturday during the Polar Plunge at the waterfront in Edenton.

warmed by coffee and hot chocolate, hundreds of spectators looked on as the plungers took turns leaping into the bay.

"I know it's cold, but it wouldn't be the Polar Plunge if it wasn't," said Linda Hobbs, event co-chairwoman.

The water temperature

was 43 degrees — just a couple of degrees colder than the temperature onshore. Even so, some plungers preferred not to know how cold the water was.

"After the first year of the event, jumpers said they didn't need to know that," said Robbie Laughton, Edenton-Chowan Parks and Recreation director.

This year's Polar Plunge raised \$7,514 for Special Olympics, slightly down from last year's \$10,000 total when the weather was milder and the economy still hopeful.

"Even more important than the money is the awareness," Hobbs said. "We want people to know that we have

See PLUNGE, 2A

County ignores DSS pleas

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

County leaders pared down the size of Chowan's Department of Social Services after a narrow decision to privatize its Child Support Enforcement despite calls that the move would be more costly.

In a 4-3 vote and against the pleas of DSS Director Cliff Hardison, the Board of Commissioners opted to contract with Young Williams, Child Support Services.

"My personal opinion is that privatization is more efficient," Commissioner Keny Goodwin said.

But, Hardison said privatization would cost the county more annually.

"We have determined that to take child support out of the county budget would cost the county \$34,255 more," Hardison said.

He also told the commissioners if given another year, he could improve the department's efficiency and further reduce costs while increasing child support collections. He went as far as to guarantee results.

"Our director is saying he could do it cheaper and all he's asking for is a year; that's worth thinking about," Commissioner Jimmy Alligood said.

But, the board majority preferred less government and an opportunity to create economic development.

"Anytime I can reduce the size of



Hardison



K. Goodwin

See DSS, 2A

Leaders working to hold tax rate

Reduced services are expected

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

County commissioners adopted three budget recommendations aimed at keeping the same tax rate with adjusted services, returning full time employees to a 40-hour work week, and designating land transfer tax proceeds for the schools.

As County Manager Peter Rascoe prepares to draft a budget for the next fiscal year, the Chowan County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved three finance committee recommendations as a guide. Although the first approved recommendation includes staying at the current property tax rate of 68 and 1/2 cents per \$100 valuation, the goal might not be possible.

"It's clear to me what revenues that I have to work with," said Rascoe at Thursday morning's board meeting. "There are some substantial changes that will have to be made to balance revenue to expenses."

There was confusion

among some commissioners that the vote meant there could be no tax increase.

"I just want to make sure that we're not shooting ourselves in the foot by cutting something out that might mean a 3 cents tax increase," said Commissioner Jimmy Alligood.

Commissioner Keith Nixon suggested that he preferred any tax increase be deferred at least another year, since the county continues to be saddled with high unemployment and a lingering recession.

But, a final decision on whether a tax increase is necessary will come later when Rascoe returns with

his budget draft that will likely include a reduced level of services.

Commissioners decided, however, that the next fiscal year would not include a continuation of county employee furloughs. The board approved returning employees to a 40-hour work week. All non-public safety employees have been working at 37 and 1/2 hour work weeks since the last fiscal year.

Despite the county's continued financial woes, there have been signs of improvement. Revenue from sales tax has been better than forecast, albeit still down overall due

See TAX RATE, 2A

Shooting won't deter candidacy

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

A Chowan County deputy said Monday his self-inflicted hand shooting will not deter his candidacy for sheriff.

Days after deputy Tim Brabble accidentally shot himself in the hand while cleaning a .357-caliber Glock handgun, the candidate for sheriff vows to resume his campaign.



Brabble

"I don't think it's going to affect me at all," Brabble said. "I'm not making any excuses."

Brabble, 45, filed to challenge his boss Feb. 19. Five days later the Republican accidentally shot himself in the hand while cleaning a personal weapon in his home. Brabble called the Feb. 24 shooting "human error" on his part.

"For whatever reason, I didn't take the (bullet) out of the chamber before breaking the gun down," Brabble said. "It wasn't the gun's fault. I simply skipped that step."

See BRABBLE, 2A



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