

COUNTY: looks to another tight fiscal year

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who are noted as more "fiscally responsible" or "conservative", and operate with a higher fund balance could see some cuts if the state decides to make the minimum the law.

Thompson said that the NCACC has been talking to legislators and plans to clarify that operating at an 8 percent fund balance level is "not a statutory requirement but a bare minimum needed to prevent a county or city from receiving a Local Government Commission letter warning of fiscal problems."

County Manager David Dear agrees. At 8 percent "they start getting very nervous," Dear said.

He adds that he too has spoken with local state legislators and they have not expressed favor of passing any budget woes onto the shoulders of the county.

Cleveland County operates with a fund balance level of about 18 percent, according to Dear. Eight percent would equate to about \$6.5 million.

If Cleveland County would be forced to operate at 8 percent, "(it) would be disastrous," Dear said. "It would force us to raise property taxes."

No one wants to do that, he added. NCACC says that the "8 percent minimum level of fund balance represents namely one month of county expenditures".

"That's our operating capital and that's how we make it day to day," Dear said.

Although it is still uncertain how tight the purse strings will be for the county next fiscal year, he added, "We need to keep our funding levels as close to last year's as we possibly can."

Dear said that they may be looking to cut small items from the budget where they can, while avoiding big cuts, and they do not anticipate any salary increases next year. The county is helping provide funding for new projects like the new Shelby Middle School, the new LeGrand Center (which will be utilized by the county, Cleveland Community

College, and Cleveland County Schools for a conference center, new workforce development training classes, and the early college high school) and has several other economic development projects in the works that could equate to more jobs and growth in its tax base.

A cut in funding could stall efforts. "It would cripple the county. It would put us in a position where we would be very vulnerable," said commissioner Jason Falls.

"If we hit a bump in the road, we'll be in a mess," said commissioner Ronnie Hawkins.

"Based on the 8 percent, the Governor's Office calculates that North Carolina counties need only \$799 million of their \$2 billion in available fund balance to meet this 'statutory' fund balance requirement," according to Thompson. "It is very disconcerting that county insolvency is being suggested as the silver bullet to manage that state's budget crisis."

"We understand that the Governor is really going after local governments for money to balance the budget," Dear said. "But local legislators aren't in favor" of putting the squeeze on the counties. "Most county governments are struggling just like the state," he added.

Grant money for building schools is already lined up on the chopping block for counties, Falls said. "If they take that money away then we're going to have to pay for that somehow."

"I personally believe the state needs to be more fiscally responsible than to take money from the counties who are fiscally responsible, who have bigger fund balances and have larger than the 8 percent allowed," Hawkins said.

"They need to be responsible for what they're responsible for (just like we are)," Dear added. "I think we've done a good job on our end."

WISH: and faith, bring joy to two young men



Gabriel Thomas, left, and Ethan Phifer at the recent Hoppers concert.

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drome, a rare genetic disease, he has faced a whirlwind of challenges.

He wasn't supposed to make it to the age of 8, but he did. A sweet sixteen birthday probably wasn't going to happen, doctors said, but it did. His family was told to definitely not count on a 20th birthday, but Ethan's still here. He'll be 21 in May.

Living with his grandparents June and Robert Phifer just a "hop, skip and a jump" away from the Family Worship Center in Kings Mountain, Ethan was thrilled to see the Hoppers in concert so close to home. He's one of their biggest fans. According to his calculations, he's attended more than 100 concerts.

But then, why wouldn't he? They helped save his life.

Symptoms of DiGeorge syndrome vary greatly between individuals but commonly include a history of recurrent infection, heart defects and characteristic facial features.

Ethan's eyes embody the crystal clear color of a deep blue sea reflected by white sand - deep and full of life. His heart is aging faster than his body.

At about eight years old,

June said that he was facing death's door. He wasn't gaining weight. He was, however, enjoying the lyrical messages of his favorite Gospel band, the Hoppers.

June took him to one of their concerts. It was dedicated to Ethan. They brought him on stage for his favorite song, "Shoutin' Time". Mid-song, Connie Hopper stopped the singing and requested congregational prayer for Ethan's health.

"She said she knew God was telling her to do something," June said. "Everyone joined hands and prayed."

"Two weeks later he started putting on weight," she added.

He made it past that first "expiration date".

"At 20 years old, he wasn't supposed to be here," June said, but she gives all the glory to God—the "Great Physician". "This is one of God's true miracles."

In Sept. 2009, Ethan's wish to see the Hoppers in concert at the National Quartet Convention in Louisville, Ken., was granted through The Wishing Well Foundation USA, Inc. The group's single goal is to bring joy to children with life-threatening illnesses by providing them with their fondest wish in life.

"Ethan has a special connection with the Hoppers and wants to go wherever they are appearing, thus his great desire to attend the National Quartet Convention where he had the pleasure of seeing and hearing them several times throughout the week," according to an article in the December 2009 edition of the "Singing News".

Another wish was granted when they came to perform in his hometown, even in his neighborhood. He admires the Hoppers, not just for their musical talents, but also for their faith. He shares the faith. He's known the struggles.

In the words of the Gospel song, "Amazing Grace," "Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home."

"If you're going to do something you've got to do it right," Thomas said before the concert.

And if you're out to beat the odds, the Phifers would recommend you pray for a miracle. They're out there.

Thomas is the son of Richard and Lisa Thomas of Grover.

BBQ COOKOFF: kicks off April 15

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Three vendors are scheduled to be at the event selling BBQ, BBQ ribs, BBQ sandwiches, funnel cakes, and roasted corn. Local Boy Scouts will also be selling hotdogs and hamburgers. Kings Mountain's own favored singer/songwriter Scoot Pittman will perform

live Friday night from 7-10 p.m. Other talented local bands are scheduled to perform Saturday night.

Kids can enjoy rides from Miracle Amusement and all ages can jump into the fun with the 1st Annual BBQ Cook-Off Cornhole Tournament on Saturday at 10 a.m. Entry fee is \$25 and registra-

tion will be held at 9 a.m. on Saturday. All proceeds will benefit the Cleveland County Red Cross. First prize is \$100 plus trophies for first - fourth places.

For more information contact Ricky Stroup at 704-477-3179 or Kings Mountain Fire Department at 704-734-0555.

BESSEMER CITY: signs as city's new water customer

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for the first 500,000 gallons and \$1.89 for each 1,000 gallons thereafter.

Bessemer City currently uses 1.3 million gallons of water daily and under the contract is guaranteed 2 million gallons per day beginning in July.

Corry said that, should the new customer require consumption of 3.5 million gallons of water per day, an interbasin transfer permit would be required. He explained details of the contract during a presentation at city council's regular meeting.

Kings Mountain has the capacity to treat 8 million gallons of water daily.

Kings Mountain also sells water to neighboring Grover which uses 600,000 gallons of water daily.

By vote of 6-0, city council adopted a resolution amending the City of Kings Mountain water rate schedule to add a special municipal rate and authorized the mayor to enter in to a contract for the purchase of water by the city of Bessemer City. Councilman Dean Spears was out of town.

HOW TO REACH US
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