



SCOTLAND COUNTY MONTHLY

MARCH 2002

A newsletter for Scotland County employees

Boards agree to amendment on "school floor" legislation

An amendment to the "school floor" mandate, approved by the Scotland County Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education, will hopefully mean no new taxes for FY 2002-2003.

After more than nine months of negotiation, the two boards agreed to fund the schools at \$8,700,000 for the next fiscal year. That's \$200,000 less than what the schools received in FY 2001-2002 and \$1 million less than what the schools would have received for FY 2002-2003 had a compromise not been reached.

School funding in following years will increase by a percentage equal to that of the state's low-wealth counties, according to the agreement.

The agreement still requires legislation to be passed by the General Assembly during the short session, which begins May 28.

Local legislators said an amendment to the "floor" could be introduced in short session if there was no controversy and both governing bodies could agree to a compromise.

Property tax prepay plan option proposed for employees

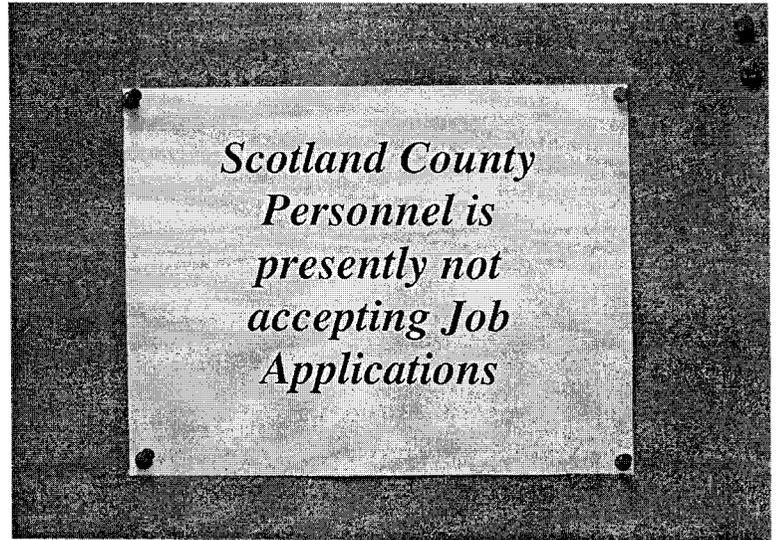
by **Kep Kepley, Tax Administrator**

The option for County employees to prepay their County property taxes through a payroll deduction is being proposed by the Tax and Finance offices.

For those employees who choose to take advantage of this option, a pro-rated amount of County tax will be deducted from their paychecks for each pay period of July through December. Deductions would include taxable real estate and personal property owned by the employee. The plan would not include tax on motor vehicles.

Having the tax payment spread out over a six-month period and avoiding a lump-sum payment in December is just one advantage this option offers.

see *Option, page 4*



This sign will be posted in the lobby of the County Annex at least through the remainder of this fiscal year .

Commissioners approve cuts in order to balance the FY 2001-2002 budget

The Scotland County Board of Commissioners approved more than \$1 million in cuts March 18 to assure a balanced budget for this fiscal year.

A freeze has been placed on all remaining vacant County positions, which accounts for \$46,120 of the \$1 million. Supervisors and staff looked at possible budget reductions and offered more than \$400,000 for consideration by the Commissioners.

An idea, developed by Landfill Supervisor Steve Edge, which calls for County and community service workers to do a job that would have been contracted, will save an estimated \$100,000. (*See related story on page 2*).

Reduced Medicaid estimates of \$125,000, based on the most current trend this year, and \$360,000 in the accounts receivable estimate, based upon the June 1 change of ownership of Scotland Home Health, makes up the remainder of the \$1 million-plus shortfall.

Action was taken by the Board to close the budget gap when Gov. Mike Easley announced in February that the State will withhold \$658,000 in reimbursement taxes from the County.

Gov. Easley is withholding \$209 million, owed to municipalities and counties, to help balance the State budget. That money is not expected to be returned to any counties and municipalities in the State.

Additionally, the more than \$350,000 in sales tax revenue, originally budgeted for this year, will not be realized, due in large part to the economic downturn following the events of September 11.

Spring Clean Up!
April 27, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Free Day at the Landfill and Recycle Sites
All Fees Waived!



Landfill employee Bryant Higgins has been operating large equipment for more than 15 years.

Water District seeding plan means savings for County

When staff was asked to look for possible budget reductions to make up for a more than \$1 million shortfall in the FY 2001-2002 budget, Steve Edge went further than that and developed a plan that would save the County \$100,000.

The Landfill Supervisor proposed that trained Landfill and Public Buildings employees, along with community service workers, conduct the seeding and stabilization of the right-of-ways where the Water District II line will be installed.

The project originally was to be done by a contractor at an expense of about \$200,000. Once the necessary equipment and material is purchased, Edge estimated it would save the County \$100,000 to do the job. The project involves seeding and stabilizing approximately 90 miles of right-of-way incorporated in Phase I and Phase 2 of Water District II construction.

Edge has enlisted the expertise of landfill employee and heavy equipment operator Bryant Higgins for the project.

"When I hire Solid Waste staff, I specifically look for individuals who have varied skills and can perform more than one function," Edge explained.

Higgins, who holds a 'Class A' license, has been employed with the County just over two years. He has been a heavy equipment operator for 15 years, nine of those years spent in the agricultural sector.

see Seeding, page 4

Supervisors scrutinize every line item in search of possible budget reductions

County supervisors took a look at their budgets and came back with a total of \$449,494 to help make up for the more than \$1 million budget shortfall anticipated for the remainder of fiscal year 2001-2002. Here's where some supervisors cut the already budgeted funds and what it means for their departments.

Supervisor Hyder Massey cut the Public Buildings budget by \$30,000. "Part of that amount was money set aside for air conditioners," Massey said. "This means we won't be able to purchase any new air conditioners. If a unit goes down, we hope we'll be able to repair it."

Janitorial supplies also were cut back with only paper supplies on the purchase list from now until the end of the year. Massey also offered cuts in vehicle repair, uniform cleaning, travel and workshop attendance.

Public Buildings will be able to conduct routine maintenance and beautification responsibilities through the end of the fiscal year. Although the department will respond to a repair if it's an emergency, money for routine repairs or office modifications is no longer in the budget.

Director Jan Elliott reviewed the DSS budget and proposed \$127,000 in budget reductions from special services, detention, legal and postage. Because of high turnover in DSS, part of that sum came from lapsed salaries.

From now until the end of the year, Elliott said she'll be watching the budget closely and keeping her fingers crossed. For instance, if DSS has one juvenile detention case where a youth must be locked up for longer than four or five days, that \$127,000 figure could be seriously affected. The budget reduction also means DSS will not receive federal and state matching funds for the same amount.

The \$3,000 reduction in the Tax Office budget means no more travel for training purposes for the remainder of the fiscal year. According to Tax Administrator Kep Kepley, training tax staff for certification is required by law and in some cases, must be renewed every other year.

Teen Court, Restitution and Psychologicals in Juvenile Services was affected with the elimination of \$3,000, which would have benefited youth participants. In Cooperative Extension, a services expansion was planned using \$5,885 from a golf tournament fundraiser. The money went to the General Fund instead.

Notes from the County Manager

Greetings. "Thank you" is a phrase I will be saying repeatedly throughout the year. There are few other ways for me to express my sincere gratitude and indebtedness to County Supervisors and their staff.

Your support in these difficult economic times, as evidenced in your willingness to make deep, often painful budget reductions, has not gone unnoticed.

I cannot offer assurances that times will improve soon, because that is not the case. By all indications, Governor Easley is planning to withhold inventory reimbursement taxes next year in an attempt to correct the State's own budget woes. Counties and municipalities statewide are not optimistic that the funds will ever be restored.

In times like these, I am fortunate to be working with professionals of the highest calibre.



Scott Sauer

Citizens get around town, thanks to the SCATS route



Driver Debbie McRae greets her passengers with a smile.

"Has Barbara been on yet today?"

"No, ma'am. I think she'll get on around 1 p.m."

Conversations like this are the norm for people who take the Scotland County Area Transit System (SCATS) bus with driver Debbie McRae.

She greets all her passengers with a smile, and most have become regular SCATS travelers.

A former bus driver, McRae has been handling the 12.5-mile Red Line Route every Monday and Thursday since January 2001. The entire route, which takes about an hour, makes 24 stops, including Northside Shopping Center, Church and Main, Scotland Home Health, Winn Dixie, Wal-Mart, the Scotland County Complex, Scotland Crossing and Holly Square Shopping Centers and Medical Village Pharmacy.

For a \$1 fee, people can get on and off the bus and run as many errands as necessary during the course of the day's eight round-trip route schedule.

McRae said there are still many people who don't know about the SCATS service. "Many of my passengers find out about it through word of mouth, or they call the number on the side of the bus to find out what it's all about."

She added, "Now some of the stores are telling their customers about us. It's great because it's like having community helpers."

"My passengers tell me all the time how much they appreciate this service," said McRae. "They said they would like to see it run every day."

Most SCATS travelers are senior citizens and young women with children. One passenger, a senior citizen, said, "I depend on this, and I look forward to the days it runs because I can do all the things I need to do."

Before, the passenger said, she depended on her children, grandchildren and friends for transportation. "That wasn't always convenient for me or them."

McRae keeps a daily record of who gets on and off the bus, and she always reminds them to buckle their seatbelts. And McRae always shares familiar, parting words. "Have a good day. Be safe!"

Transportation service offers passengers mobility choices

Still in its infancy, the two-year-old Scotland County Areas Transit System (SCATS) has already elicited praise from the Department of Transportation by substantially increasing its service to its citizens.

"SCATS has gone from providing limited human service (agency-based) transportation to providing deviated fixed route services to the surrounding community," wrote Diane Lackey, a Program Transportation Consultant.

In a letter to the Board of Commissioners, Lackey praised the operation. "SCATS is aggressively and creatively meeting the needs of your community by implementing cost effective and efficient transit.

Word is still getting out about SCATS and what it offers in the way of services as more people begin to take notice of the white transportation vehicles sporting the SCATS name.

In 2001, the system served 39,744 riders compared with 32,630 in 2000. And 152,640 miles were covered compared to 120,602 in 2000.

Funded through fees, fares, state and federal grants, and local tax support, the SCATS fleet includes 7- and 14-seat passenger vans, a 24 passenger bus and two lift vans for people in wheelchairs.



Scotland County Area Transit System (SCATS) provides citizens with mobility choices and the opportunity to improve their quality of life.

A 14 passenger Criminal Justice van operates five nights a week, transporting clients from Scotland and Hoke counties. SCATS collects an average of \$1,000 a month from the Criminal Justice system to provide this service.

More than \$15,000 is allocated by Mental Health to cover the cost of transporting its clients to and from Shining Star Club House and Scotland Enterprises.

Work First clients, transported for the Department of Social Services, has brought SCATS nearly \$15,000 to cover the cost of transportation.

Patients who are Medicaid recipients in need of medical services not provided in local hospitals are transported by SCATS to regional hospitals.

Locally, SCATS transports patients to and from Laurinburg Dialysis five days a week.

Medicaid recipients are eligible for SCATS transportation to and from medical appointments at doctor's offices, clinics and hospitals. In 2001, SCATS received 12,935 requests for such transportation. Medicaid reimbursements for this service totaled \$72,780.

Information provided by EMS Director Roylin Hammond.

Introductions & transitions

Welcome to the following individuals who have joined Scotland County Departments since January 16, 2002: **Kinston Cummings**, Landfill; **Crystal Norton**, Register of Deeds; **Diana Locklear**, Sheriff; and **Janice Stuckey Boyd**, DSS.

Congratulations to the following individuals on their transitions: **Amy Ratley**, part-time to full-time, EMS; and **Kathy Medlin**, from the Sheriff's Department to Solid Waste Enforcement Officer.

the Birthday list for April

2 Glenn Chatham (Landfill); **4** Brandy Locklear (Jail); **5** Gwen Ikner (EMS); **6** Larry Quick (Jail); **8** Daphne Riggins (Home Health); **9** Coletha Lane (DSS); **11** Helen Darton (DSS); **12** Debbie Lawrence (DSS) and Betty Smith (Health); **14** Lakeisha Patterson and Ethena Locklear (DSS); **15** Melinda Salley (Health); **16** Pam Wood (DSS) and Erica Hall (Health); **19** Charles Ellerbe (Public Buildings) and Charles Osteen (Landfill); **20** Sandra McNeil (DSS); **21** Linda Bowyer (DSS) and Patricia Campbell (Jail); **22** Robert Britt (Sheriff) and Farrah Sheppard (Juvenile Counseling); **25** Sandra Miller (Jail); **27** Tina Hunt (Health) and Jan Elliott (DSS); **28** Sharon English (Cooperative Extension); **30** Audrey Britt (Home Health).

Proposed seeding project works as money-saver

continued from page 2

"He can operate any vehicle owned by the County," said Edge.

Between the Solid Waste and Public Buildings Departments, quite a few employees are capable of operating heavy equipment.

Both Edge and Public Buildings Supervisor Hyder Massey encourage cross-training employees.

"In the 10 years since I've been with the County, the abilities of my staff have continued to evolve," Edge said. "When County employees have the opportunity to take on projects such as this, it allows us to continue to grow and to learn."

Edge and County Engineer Jim Blackwell will supervise the seeding and stabilizing project.

Scotland County Monthly is published by the County Manager's Office to provide news and information to employees.

Comments, suggestions and story ideas are welcome. Contact 277-3191 or akurtzman@scotlandcounty.org.

Post Scripts



The first-ever Scotland Bluegrass Gathering brought 500 people to the John Blue House grounds March 24. The McFarland Road Bluegrass Band, left, was one of a half dozen musical performers featured.

Students from Wesleyan University in Connecticut spent part of their spring break scraping paint off the A.D. Gibson Store on the John Blue House property. The 15 students originally visited Scotland County to help build a Habitat for Humanity home. With the job completed ahead of schedule, and at the suggestion of Habitat Executive Director Tom Opsut, they were more than willing to volunteer some time working on the A.D. Gibson Store. ☘ Scotland Home Health has canceled its Patient Assistance Fund Dinner. ☘ Scotland County was recognized as a first responder to the September 11 attacks in the March 11 issue of *County News*, published by the National Association of Counties. Scotland was the only North Carolina county named in the first responder list. EMS employees **Gwen Ikner** and **Sheila Quick** and Mental Health social worker and counselor **Julie Sinclair-Dycus** traveled to New York two days after the attacks to provide disaster management assistance. ☘ Custodian **Bonnie Norton** was named Health Department Employee of the Month. The Health Department extends condolences to **Peggy Robinson** on the death of her father-in-law and to **Ola Lloyd** on the death of her grandmother. The Health Department sends best wishes to **Melanie Harding**, **Teresa Wilcox** and **Tina Hunt** as they take extended leave. Welcome to **Winnie Lail**, who will work at the Health Department on a temporary basis while two nurses are on extended leave. ☘ **Danny Sprouse**, **Teddy Locklear** and **Brian Lowry** are now registered with the National Environmental Health Association as Environmental Health Specialists/Registered Sanitarians. ☘ A free colortectal, prostate and testicular cancer screening will be held April 8 at Scotland Place. The screening is made available to 50 males 55 and older through a grant to the Health Department. ☘ More than 900 youth have registered with Parks and Recreation for the 2002 Baseball/Softball/Tee Ball programs. ☘ Congratulations to **Danny Sprouse**, whose work helped the Environmental Health Section of the Health Department achieve 100 percent compliance with mandated inspections of food and lodging establishments for FY 2000-2001. This level of compliance allowed the Inspections, Statistics and Fees program to award the agency an additional \$2,284.62.

Prepay property tax option considered

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Avoiding delinquency and therefore saving additional penalties and fees through garnishment of wages and/or bank attachments is another plus. The program also will act as an escrow account, similar to when a lending institution collects tax on a loan.

There will be an annual fee to participate in the program, which will vary depending on the number of staff participants. An employee interest survey has been enclosed with your paycheck. Please return the survey to payroll by April 15 indicating whether or not you are interested in participating.

Employees who already pay taxes through a lending institution need not consider this program as an option.