

Viewpoint

The Jasper Newsboy

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Our Viewpoint Editorials

Voters, officeholders need two '07 qualities

EACH YEAR presents new challenges in business and governing entities. 2007 will bring more than the normal change and accompanying challenges in Jasper County government.

There will be a dearth of experience on commissioners court with the retirement of the county judge and two commissioners, a majority of the court. Gone will be a 12-year veteran county judge, Joe Folk, and Precinct 4 Commissioner Mack Rose (20 years) and Precinct 2 Commissioner Rod Barger (8 years as commissioner and 12 years as justice of the peace).

Remaining Precinct 1 commissioner Charles Shofner, Jr. is in the middle of his second term as is Precinct 3 commissioner Willie Stark. Jan. 1 County Judge-elect Mark Allen and Precinct 2 Commissioner Roy Parker and Precinct 4 Commissioner Vance Moss will join them on the court.

Other new faces in the courthouse will be Criminal District Attorney Steve Hollis and County Treasurer Renee' Kelley.

Some major and ongoing problems hang over the commissioners court from Day One. A shrinking tax base will continue to present a budgeting challenge for the court. A timber industry, currently in a downward cycle, is further hampered by the vast destruction of trees by Hurricane Rita last year. The county's largest industry, the MeadWestvaco paperboard mill, continues to be affected by market conditions and also offers legal challenges each year to the property valuation.

There are other problems left by Rita's

destruction - debris causing ongoing drainage problems countywide among others - plus some lingering damage from last fall's flooding.

Commissioners face funding problems for operation of the county sheriff's department in lieu of growing demands from some areas for increased law enforcement presence and the budgetary shortfalls with regard to operation of the new county jail.

A new county treasurer, Kelley, is drawn into this malaise as she faces challenges in the investment and management of county funds.

A whole different set of problems confronts new DA Hollis - a perceived lack of prosecution of cases over a four-year period being the most prominent.

While that merely scratches the surface of the myriad of challenges facing a largely inexperienced commissioners court as well as other offices, it raises the specter of high public expectations.

Newly elected officials deserve a learning curve allowance from the public.

However, not all is gloomy. The county is growing, mostly with retirees it appears, but there is some promise of job growth. Voters at every level need to encourage not only county government, but the city level as well, to aggressively pursue business and industrial growth to spread the tax burden.

These conditions in Jasper County call for both patience and perseverance by elected officials and residents

Commentary One person's viewpoint

Law enforcement issues will intensify in 2007

LAW ENFORCEMENT issues in Jasper County figure to intensify in 2007. The biggest public concern is what is considered a lack of law enforcement presence, particularly in the eyes of residents in the northernmost and southernmost reaches of the county.

Over the past couple of years, the din of vocal complaints about officer presence has become louder and more constant.

Those complaints are justified because in some areas there has been an increase in certain types of criminal activity, most of it fueled by drug addicts and their suppliers.

There have been some opportunities for at least partial relief of those situations, but residents in those two areas have rejected those ideas. Part of the reason for the rejections have been the lack of a solid plan to increase law enforcement presence without adding some significant tax burden to affected residents.

A proposal for incorporation of Buna and the implementation of some taxing structure, mostly perceived as a retail sales tax, was soundly defeated. Incorporation proponents saw the issue as a way to create a police force to protect Buna from crimes committed by illicit drug users and pushers.

In the summer of 2005, commissioners court held hearings aimed at eliminating two each of the six justice of the peace and constable positions, Precincts 5 (north) and 6 (south, Evadale). However, a comprehensive possibility to place more deputies in each area was not properly linked to the elimination of the positions and residents of both areas predictably made enough noise that commissioners dropped the idea of eliminating the elected law enforcement positions.

While the elimination of those two precincts would have given the county a cost savings of approximately \$500,000,

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there appeared to be no dialogue between commissioners and the sheriff's department to see how much of that savings could've been applied to actually putting more deputies in each of the affected areas. Thus, they had no viable "sales pitch" to residents of either area to give up elected officials in exchange for county-employed deputies assigned to round-the-clock patrol.

This business of a lack of law enforcement presence will most certainly be an issue in the 2008 Jasper County Sheriff's election.

While it is too early to say with any certainty who the candidates will be, the local grapevine indicates current Sheriff Ronnie McBride will seek a second term. Beyond that, it is a guessing game as to any other candidate.

Anyone who wears the sheriff's badge in this county is going to be subject to criticism such as the lack of law enforcement presence.

A major part of that problem is a lack of funds to hire additional personnel to have a 24-hour presence in all sections of the county. The budget is set by the Jasper County Commissioners Court.

What Jasper County residents will have to determine is how much of the problem they can attribute to the sheriff and how much of the turkey should be hung on commissioners court.

Of course, if there is no contested race, it will be a moot point but with all the elevated concerns about law enforcement presence and perhaps some other issues, it seems almost a certainty that there will be other candidates in the race.

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Willis Webb

In Jasper County

Sounds of Christmas...



Newsboy photo/Jimmy Galvan

THE ROWE INTERMEDIATE 6th grade band performed a Christmas concert Thursday, Dec. 7 at the Jasper High School auditorium. Rowe's band was followed by the Jasper Junior High band and then the high school finished off the program.

Your Viewpoint Letters to the Editor

Circuit Riders help H.E.R.O.

By JOANIE KOCHANEK
H.E.R.O. Program
Adult Protective Services
Jasper

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Circuit Riders Christian Motorcycle Ministry, who recently held a rally to collect donations of clothing, bedding, personal care items, canned goods, adult diapers and other needed items for the H.E.R.O. Volunteer Program.

The HERO (Helping the Elderly Realize Opportunities) Program was founded in 1994, to organize community volunteer projects and fundraisers for the benefit of the elderly and disabled members of our local communities. Due to a lack of community resources and limited governmental funding, the needs of these people cannot always be met.

This wonderful Christian ministry not only planned, organized and collected over a truckload of donations, but also delivered it all to the local Adult Protective Services Office for distribution. With warm clothing and perhaps an extra blanket, the needy will be made much more comfortable. Many people will benefit from these gifts, and we are most appreciative.

Circuit Riders, I thank you for your caring ministry and giving spirit.

Letters to editor criteria outlined

Letters to the editor of The Jasper Newsboy must meet the following criteria:

- Should be of general or specific interest to the readership of The Jasper Newsboy
- Should be limited to about 300 words
- Must contain a valid signature, a valid mailing address and valid day and evening telephone numbers where the writer may

be reached

- Names of persons writing letters will not be withheld
- Unsigned letters will not be published
- Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates are considered political advertising and should be taken to the advertising department

• Letters containing personal attacks on individuals, public figures or elected officials will be edited or sent back to the writer. Criticism of how a public figure or elected official votes or on actions taken with regard to performance of his/her job are acceptable as long as the comments are not personally derisive

• Letters of complaint about private businesses will be forwarded to the business in question and will not be published

• Thank you letters with long lists of names are considered advertising and should go to the advertising department

• Deadline for letters is 10 a.m. Monday for inclusion in the following Wednesday's edition

• Letters may be edited for length, libel, grammar, clarity and newspaper style, without changing the meaning and intent of the letter

• To ensure diversity and variety of viewpoints, letter writers are limited to one letter each 30 days

• The Newsboy will not publish poetry, anonymous letters, "open" or "third party" letters written to someone else, letters that constitute advertisements, letters concerning private legal disputes or conflicts between individuals, letters that are part of organized writing campaigns and letters that include previously published material

Mail letters to:

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The Your Viewpoint columns are primarily for Newsboy readers and subscribers in the four-county Jasper Retail Trade Area of Jasper, Newton, Sabine and Tyler counties. First consideration will be given to letters from those residents.

Guest Commentary One person's viewpoint

Hussein is a real swinger

Perhaps the best joke ever made by a condemned prisoner is credited to St. Thomas More. Sick and feeble after months in prison, he stumbled and fell on the steps to the scaffold, and reportedly said "See me safely up, captain; as for my coming down, I'll shift for myself."

What will Saddam Hussein say to the world as he faces his long-overdue end, perhaps within a few weeks?

Will can't-get-over-it-former-president Jimmy Carter accompany Saddam on the scaffold while anticipating a book and movie deal, and maybe another Nobel Peace Prize?

Yes, Saddam Hussein is coming to the end of his rope. Really. The man who is responsible for more Muslim deaths - often by direct order - than any other individual in history is going to a relatively easy end himself. He invaded Iran in the 1970s, was recognized by our Democratically-controlled Congress in the 1980s as a terrorist insider, and then invaded Kuwait in the 1990s. He dropped poison gas on thousands of Marsh Arabs simply because he

didn't like them, built a system of death camps for his own people, including a special one for children, photographed his personal enemies being pushed off high buildings and highway overpasses to their deaths and had those he really, really, really didn't like fed into industrial shredders. Feet first.

Have you noticed in video from Iraq that there are very few middle-aged men to be seen? That's because a generation of Iraqis died young in Saddam's wars, coups, purges, firing squads, death camps, scientific experiments, torture chambers, rape-rooms, hangings, beatings, beheadings, throat-cuttings, mass poisonings, forced suicides and whatever else the fevered imagination this son of his mother could dream up.

And those were Saddam's own people. The Kuwaitis, Kurds, Arabs, Iranians and others who suffered under him could tell us more.

What will happen in Iraq now is up to the Iraqis. Like the Russians, they can play at being victims only up to a point. They have caused much suffering among other nations, and the other nations have not punished them. Instead, many nations have given them much wealth and precious

See Mack Hall, Page 5A



Mack Hall