



Rev. Tim Tatum, pastor of Long Branch Church of God, comments during a public meeting held Monday night to discuss the prospect of locating a prison in Jenkins County. (Staff photo by Deborah Bennett)

Prison could mean jobs

By Deborah Bennett
Millen News Editor

"Jobs for Jenkins" is the slogan uniting local efforts to secure the construction of a 1,000 bed prison in Jenkins County by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA).

A large crowd gathered Monday night at the Jenkins County High School gymnasium for a public meeting hosted by the Jenkins County Commission, Millen City Council, Jenkins County Development Authority and Millen-Jenkins County Chamber of Commerce, to learn more about the proposed prison project, the impact it could have on the community and the process by which the state will decide its location.

In welcoming remarks, Chairman James Henry encouraged those present "to listen with an open mind and make a decision based on the facts."

He then turned the program over to representatives with the CCA and the Wheeler County prison operated by the CCA.

Louise Grant, CCA vice-president of communications, Nashville, outlined three areas that the prison would impact locally: careers, taxes and community partnership.

She noted that the facility would employ not only security personnel but also personnel in other areas such as administration, human resources, teaching, maintenance, safety, chaplains, counseling and medical. Initially, the facility would create approximately 200 jobs. Should it be expanded to a 2,500 bed facility, the number of jobs created would increase to 500. Most of the jobs would be entry level positions that would be hired locally with the CCA providing training, she said.

Ms. Grant reported that the CCA operates facilities in 19 states with one opening in Nevada next year that will bring the total 20 states. The corporation employs approximately 17,000 persons, manages 80,000 inmates and has been named as one of "America's Best Big Companies" by *Forbes* magazine.

"You are hiring on with a company that has a national reputation," she commented.

In the area of taxes, Ms. Grant predicted that the CCA would pay \$500,000 annually in property taxes to local governments and \$800,000 utilities. This would give local governments much needed revenue for things such as schools, keeping property taxes low and helping build roads and parks, she said.

The importance the CCA places on community involvement and support was noted by Ralph Kemp, warden of the Wheeler County prison in Alamo. Mr. Kemp noted that prisoners at that facility had built a police station, fire station, installed irrigation systems, constructed a walking track and were currently assisting with the construction of a recreation department. He also pointed out the positive impact of the prison's use of the local hospital, stating that the hospital would have been forced to close.

During a question and answer session, Mayor King Rocker reported that a large portion of the \$3.4-\$3.6 million needed by the city and county to provide infrastructure to the facility, which will be located in the Pine Avenue area, was available through grants and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax revenue. The city and county would provide to provide 10-15 percent of the required funds, he said.

Chairman Henry responded to a question concerning the impact the facility would have on the local landfill. He noted that the landfill was designated as a "construction and demolition" facility. All garbage, therefore, was transported to a site in South Carolina.

"This means it will not impact the landfill substantially at all," he said.

Local resident Edward Wilson spoke about his recent tour of the Wheeler County facility stating that he was "sitting on the fence" before the visit, but was now supporting the local effort to secure a prison for Jenkins County.

"I think it would be a pleasure and an honor if we can get this prison here," he said.

When a concerned citizen inquired as to the worse case scenario that could be expected regarding safety, Warden Kemp noted that during the 11 years the prison had operated in Wheeler County, only one serious incident had occurred.

"We have had no attempted escapes and no escapes," he said.

"We would not be in business if governments did not trust us to operate secure facilities," Ms. Grant added.

In his remarks, Commissioner Tommy Lane commended the CCA for not having asked for tax abatements during initial negotiations with the city and county on the project.

"I just want to commend them. We've never had a company do that," he said.

A decision on the project is expected from the state within the next several weeks. Local citizens were encouraged to contact state representatives to secure their support for Jenkins County and to sign cards of support at the meeting that will be delivered to the Governor by local leaders sometime this week.

JCHS named regional Governor's Cup winner

By Deborah Bennett
Millen News Editor
Governor Sonny Perdue and State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox announced

last week that Jenkins County High School (JCHS) is the regional Class 3A winner in the Governor's Cup program. As a regional winner, JCHS

received a regional champion trophy and a \$1,000 grant. Regional winners are recognized for having the largest numerical improvement in SAT scores among schools in their Georgia High School Association (GHSA) region.

Gov. Perdue initiated the statewide competition in 2003 as part of an overall effort to raise Georgia's SAT scores. The "Governor's Cup" is awarded annually to the school in each class with the highest average SAT score improvement over the past three years. The award is based on high school athletic regions and classifications assigned by the Georgia High School Association (GHSA).

"Our students have stepped up to the challenge and

worked hard to raise SAT scores," said Gov. Perdue. "These schools now have the opportunity for the next year. This is a tough competition to win, and I am proud of the tremendous improvement these schools have achieved in SAT scores."

Dr. Joseph Kirkland, JCHS principal, commented, "It is an honor to be recognized by the Governor for improvements we have made in our SAT scores. Teachers are working very hard to implement higher-order thinking skills using a more rigorous and relevant curriculum. This award is evidence that Jenkins County High School is successfully preparing its students for both college and life."



From left, Dr. Joseph Kirkland, Jenkins County High School principal, accepts trophy and \$1,000 check from Melissa Williams, Jenkins County School Superintendent, and Carroll Gay, Jenkins County Board of Education chairman (Staff photo by Deborah Bennett)

Commissioners will not impose fire protection fee

By Deborah Bennett
Millen News Editor

Jenkins County property owners will soon receive their 2009 tax notices in the mail, but those notices will not include a fire protection fee. During the Tuesday, Oct. 6, meeting, of the Jenkins County Commissioners, Chairman James Henry recommended an alternative course of action to deal with a previous request from volunteer fire departments seeking financial assistance from the county.

Chairman Henry reported that funding for the approximately \$50,000 needed by the fire departments was available from another source, and he recommended taking that route due to time limitations in getting the tax bills out to property owners.

The possibility of imposing a fire protection fee in the future was not ruled out.

Chairman Henry suggested that each fire station be approximately funded annually, that if not fully used, could be carried over into the next fiscal year. These funds could be used as matching local funds for grants the departments might be seeking.

After discussion of the matter, the commissioners approved allocation of the funds to the fire departments in January 2010.

In a related matter, Chairman Henry reported that he was working closely with representatives from the volunteer fire departments to develop a volunteer firefighters' contract

which the entire commission would review when prepared by the county attorney. Once approved by the commissioners, the agreement would be sent to the volunteer fire departments for their review and approval.

In other action, a request from the Jenkins County Tax Commissioner for employee overtime was approved with instructions for the tax commissioner to proceed in the most economical manner and to consider the employment of part-time personnel in the future rather than seeking overtime compensation.

Angie Cooper, Georgia Department of Transportation area engineer, presented the commissioner with a new Local

Governmental Services and Resources Manual.

She reported that the DOT was waiting for approval of environmental documents relating to replacement of the Herndon Bridges and that funding for the project was not scheduled until 2014. Chairman Henry noted that the commissioners were asking for reconsideration of the funding schedule with hopes of receiving stimulus funds.

Cooper said that completion of paving work on U.S. Highway 25, south of the Ogeechee River Bridges, should be completed by Christmas with both lanes of the Savannah River Parkway open to travel. Work would then concentrate on construction taking place through the City of Millen.

City to use \$500,000 grant for sewer improvements

By Deborah Bennett
Millen News Editor

Residents of several areas of the City of Millen will soon see improvements to the city's sewer system. During the Tuesday, Oct. 6, meeting of Millen City Council, City Manager Lamar Faircloth informed the group that he was in receipt of a previously awarded \$500,000 Community Development

Block Grant. The grant will be used for sewer improvements in the "Knox Homes" and Old Sylvan Road areas of the city. Manager Faircloth reported that Tracy Herrington had been appointed as the city's Code Enforcement Officer. Previously the city's Code Enforcement Officer which demanded a lot of his time. The

appointment of Herrington, a certified police officer, to this position would eliminate this situation, Manager Faircloth said.

Other actions taken by council included the following:

- Approved the destruction of incident reports dated from 1965 to 1989, noting that the law only required those reports to be kept for five years;

- Approved request from Millen Better Hometown to set the time and date for the Harvest of Fun Festival for 6-8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 31;

- Approved updated Bond Forfeiture Schedule; and

- Approved an Intergovernmental Agreement with Screven County for the humane disposal of stray animals.



Homecoming Queen

Shelby Burke, daughter of Butch and Kelly Burke, was crowned Jenkins County High School's Homecoming Queen during halftime activities at Friday night's football game. (Photo contributed)



Food Lion bids for BI-LO stores

By Deborah Bennett
Millen News Editor

The local BI-LO store may soon get a new name. Delhaize Group, the Belgian parent company of Food Lion, announced last week that it has entered into a non-binding Letter of Intent with BI-LO, LLC, to purchase a substantial majority of BI-LO's assets for a price of \$425 million.

On March 23, BI-LO and some of its affiliates filed voluntary petitions for relief under Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Code in the United States Bankruptcy Court in South Carolina. The announcement of the purchase by Delhaize Group was made in context of bankruptcy proceedings, and the non-binding offer is subject to Bankruptcy Court approval. Delhaize has said it will integrate the BI-LO stores into its Food Lion chain if the deal is approved.

The BI-LO chain operates 214 stores in South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia and employs approximately 15,500 workers. Food Lion has more than 1,300 stores in 11 states with 74,000 employees.