

Walker County Messenger

LaFayette, Ga.

Vol. 128, No. 35

FOUNDED IN 1877 — WALKER COUNTY'S OLDEST CONTINUOUS BUSINESS

Three sections, 34 pages ■ 75 cents

Taxing times at tax time

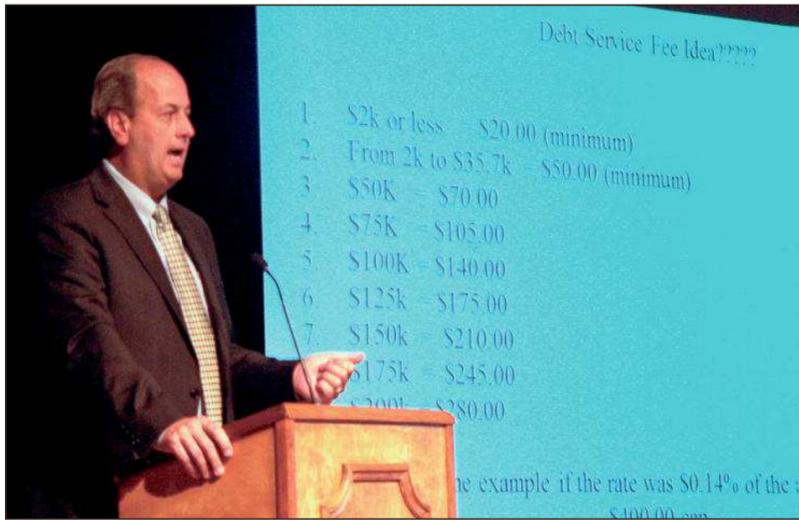
Commissioner creates district to pay down Erlanger debt, raises property taxes for operations and revamps fire protection fee

By Mike O'Neal
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Walker County taxpayers will dig deeper into purses and wallets to pay for county services and operations in the upcoming fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

Faced with debts of roughly \$70 million and projections that expenses would exceed revenue by nearly \$8 million in the coming year, Commissioner Shannon Whitfield has set property tax rates that are 2 mills higher than currently in force.

In addition, the annual fire service fee will change from a flat rate of \$130 per parcel of property to billings based on 10 cents per square footage of habitable dwellings, with a maximum charge of \$400 and a minimum of \$90. This shift in



Commissioner Shannon Whitfield during one of five public hearings about the upcoming budget, gives a presentation outlining how a 0.14 percent annual "fee" could retire debts owed Erlanger hospital. (Messenger photo/Mike O'Neal)

funding will require emergency services — fire and medical — to operate solely with revenue from this fee. In years past, fire and emergency services

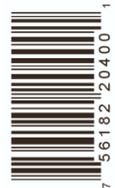
had access to all the county's general fund. Customers of Walker County Water and Sewerage Authority saw an increase in utility bills earlier

this year, and voters are being asked in November to approve a 1 percent special sales tax to pay for paving and improving county roads.

But an overall property tax hike and, for many, a higher bill for emergency service protection is not all that individuals and commercial property owners can expect within the next 30 days.

In order to pay a court-ordered judgment of nearly \$10 million to Chattanooga-based Erlanger hospital, Whitfield on Thursday, Aug. 24, issued the following statement: "Walker County Sole Commissioner Shannon Whitfield called for the formation of a special district to generate funds to pay down the county's debt owed to Erlanger Health System. Whitfield created and established the Walker County Public Health Facilities and Services District during

Taxes, page A8



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Gordon Lee cross country runners set new school records.

Sports/B9

Walker County Messenger

Cornerstone and CHI Memorial partnership is a healthy union

One of nation's largest health care providers to manage local hospital

By Mike O'Neal
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Sometimes great things come in tiny packets.

That was perhaps the case about three weeks ago when a brief news release announced that Chattanooga-based CHI Memorial had signed an agreement to manage Cornerstone Medical Center in Fort Oglethorpe.

"They recognized us as a premier provider," Larry Schumacher, CEO of CHI Memorial and senior VP of operations CHI Southeast Division said when the contract was announced. "We have been asked to bring life to this hospital."

Schumacher said revitalization of the former Hutcheson hospital will be a collaborative process with Cornerstone and its parent company, ValorBridge. And while it might be the first such partnership for the CHI Memorial, this is not unique to the overall Catholic Health Initiative's national health care system.

"We have many management arrangements with smaller hospitals around the country," he said. "When there is a need, when there is a gap in services, we try to become



The Fort Oglethorpe campus of Cornerstone Medical Center, the former Hutcheson hospital, is being managed by Chattanooga-based CHI Memorial. (Messenger photo/Mike O'Neal)

involved to either close the gap or improve the health care in a region."

Management of the North Georgia hospital is not CHI Memorial's first foray into areas once served by Hutcheson Medical Center.

"Since Hutcheson transitioned we have brought many of the prior HMC ambulatory care facilities into our group," Schumacher said.

The Chattanooga-based hospital has assumed operations at former Hutcheson clinical facilities

in Trenton, Chickamauga, LaFayette and the former Hutcheson on the Parkway facility in Ringgold.

Those clinics were not part of the federal bankruptcy court-ordered sale of Hutcheson assets, the sale that had ValorBridge purchase the Fort Oglethorpe hospital in the summer of 2016. ValorBridge's purchase began after ApolloMD, one of its branches that provided emergency room staffing at Hutcheson, entered into a management agreement to

keep Hutcheson's emergency room open when that bankrupt hospital closed. Cornerstone Medical Center was formed as the first bricks-and-mortar facility owned by ApolloMD.

Jessica Long, who has been Cornerstone's president and CEO since day one, will continue in that post though now as an employee of CHI Memorial.

"I'm really proud of what we've accomplished as Cornerstone," Long said following the announcement."

Long said the management agreement with the one of the area's largest hospitals and with one of the nation's largest hospital networks — CHI, based in Colorado, has \$23 billion in assets, annual operating revenues of \$15.9 billion and about 90,000 employees (including roughly 4,300 physicians and advance practice clinicians — should be a boon to Northwest Georgia.

"This is another way to explore how we can best achieve the goals of ValorBridge to assure health care was provided in this community," she said. "This continues that mission. It is an evolutionary process."

Hospital, page A12



Larry Schumacher



Jessica Long

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Ridgeland runs away and hides from Pepperell.

Sports/B2

Hurricane Harvey relief: Salvation Army kitchens and crews go to flooded areas



Salvation Army of Chattanooga news release

The Salvation Army of Chattanooga has been called upon to help serve in the relief efforts of Hurricane Harvey. The Chattanooga Salvation Army is part of the Kentucky-Tennessee Division, which is sending 6 mobile kitchen units capable of feeding up to 1500 people a day from each unit. Division wide, The Salvation Army will be sending 15 Salvation Army officers as well.

Memphis will be the staging ground for all officers and mobile kitchen units from the Kentucky/Tennessee Division. Chattanooga Officers will roll out this evening to meet the rest of the Divisional

Officers and units in Memphis where they will all roll out on Tuesday. This will be the first wave of deployments.

"We need help from our community to support the relief efforts. First and foremost we need folks to pray. The next best way to support us is to give financially," states Major Robert Lyle, Chattanooga Salvation Army Area Commander who is one of the local officers being deployed.

Donations can be made online to helpsalvationarmy.org, by phone to 1-800-SAL-ARMY, by mail to The Salvation Army PO BOX 1959 Atlanta, GA 30301. Please designate 'Hurricane Harvey' on all checks. To receive a donation link via text please text STORM to 51555.



Heritage's Cole Wilcox named to USA 18U National Team.

Sports/B1