

Conyers, Georgia

Rockdale Citizen

SATURDAY/SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6/7, 2021



www.rockdalenewtoncitizen.com

\$1.00 ©2021 SCNI Vol. 67, No. 10

We're Expecting!
Conyers Cherry Blossom Festival

We've received news that we have been entrusted with a very special delivery...details to come!
MARCH 27-28, 2021

Presented By
ingles **CITIZENS**

Judge rules against payment claim for chairman, Probate Court judge

By Alice Queen
alice.queen@rockdalecitizen.com

COVINGTON — Senior Superior Court Judge David Sweat said Wednesday that a key element in the way Newton County has calculated salaries for constitutional officers and the chairman of the Board of Commissioners is correct.

Sweat heard arguments via livestream in a case that claimed the county had underpaid Chairman Marcello Banes and Probate Court Judge Melanie Bell by hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past four years. Newton County had filed a complaint for declaratory relief in the case after Bell and Banes brought a demand for payment in

September, stating that the county owed them each about \$180,000 in back pay.

Sweat found that the way attorney Stephanie Lindsey, representing Bell and Banes, calculated the salaries was in error because it included longevity bonuses and cost-of-living increases in determining the minimum base salary

of the highest paid constitutional officer in the county. That is the salary on which all other constitutional officers' and the chairman's salary are based.

In the case of Newton County, Lindsey argued that the highest minimum base salary was paid to

SEE CLAIM, A5

Gov. Kemp appoints Bills, Cuthpert to judgeships

From staff reports

ATLANTA — Gov. Brian P. Kemp on Monday announced the appointments of Nancy N. Bills to the Rockdale Judicial Circuit and Clarence Cuthpert Jr. as State Court judge of Rockdale County



Nancy Bills

Bills, who currently serves as State Court judge for Rockdale County, was appointed to fill the Superior Court judgeship vacated by the retirement in October of Chief Judge David Irwin. Bills holds a bachelor's degree and a law degree from the University of Georgia, graduating cum laude. She also was the assistant/chief assistant district Attorney for the Rockdale Judicial Circuit and an associate of Walker & Waldrop P.C.

In her spare time, Bills is the chairperson of the Rockdale County Task Force on Family Violence, a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation to raise public awareness and prevent domestic violence. She has served as president of the Council of State Court Judges, is a member of the Judicial Council, the Council of Accountability Court Judges, the State Bar of Georgia, and the Rockdale Bar Association. She and her husband Jeffrey have one daughter, Mary.

Rockdale Probate Court Judge Cuthpert will succeed Bills as State Court judge. Cuthpert holds a bachelor's degree from Savannah State University, a master's in public administration from Georgia Southern University, and a law degree from Nova Southeastern University. Previously, he worked as a managing partner for Cuthpert & Associates P.C., associate city attorney for the city of Atlanta, and associate attorney for Lester B. Johnson III, P.C.

Cuthpert lives in Conyers with his wife, Crystal, and they have one son.



Staff Photo: Alice Queen

Judicial Center to honor the late Judge Horace Johnson

Workmen were busy Wednesday installing the new name of the Newton County Judicial Center. The center was scheduled to be dedicated to the late Horace J. Johnson Jr. on Friday. Johnson, who served as a Superior Court judge in the Alcovy Circuit for more than 17 years, died unexpectedly last July. For more on the dedication service, visit www.rockdalenewtoncitizen.com or see Wednesday's print edition of the Citizen.

Agreement on a berm could move townhouse development forward

By Larry Stanford
larry.stanford@rockdalecitizen.com

CONYERS — If representatives of a proposed townhouse development and BJ's Warehouse Club can come to an agreement on a berm that will block noise from BJ's, Rockdale County may soon be getting a new residential neighborhood.

DRH Properties is seeking a change to the county's future land use map and a rezoning from limited industrial to high density residential for 14.93 acres at 2021 Old Covington Highway and Salem Industrial Boulevard. The developer hopes to build 140-153 townhomes on the property.

The proposal was initially approved in April 2020, but an error in the way it was advertised caused the approval to be overturned, and

the developer has brought it back before Rockdale County.

Planning staff recommended approval of the request with a list of conditions, but the Planning Commission recommended denial of the request because it is inconsistent with the land use plan.

While there were other relatively minor issues — two-car garages vs. one-car garages, etc. — discussed at the public hearing before the Rockdale County Board of Commissioners on Jan. 26, the issue with the most contention was a berm BJ's is requesting be built between its property and the townhouse development.

Universal Planning Development of Buford is acting as the agent for the property, and Eric Johansson of Universal stated that the property was called the Salem Industrial Park and that

DRH has owned the property for 30 years. In 2001 the front half of the original parcel was sold to the Rosen Group, which ground leases its site to BJ's on Dogwood Drive.

Johansson said the area they are in has become more residential in nature.

"We believe that a residential use of the townhouses would be a great transition and change from the existing commercial and industrial back to the established retail and commercial corridors of Rockdale County," he said.

But while the Rosen Group and BJ's state they don't have a problem with the townhouse development, they are concerned that truck traffic noise at the back of BJ's will be a deterrent to home buyers and are requesting that the

SEE AGREEMENT, A5

facebook.com/Rockdalecitizen

INSIDE

- Ask Amy..... A4
- Classified A7
- Comics A6
- Crossword B8
- Cryptoquip..... B8
- Local A2
- Lottery..... A4
- Nation A3
- Obituaries..... A5
- Perspectives B3
- Sports B2
- Weather..... A4

rockdalenewtoncitizen.com

Stay connected with the Rockdale Citizen online, where you can submit news tips, browse photo galleries and sign up to receive headlines digitally at rockdalenewtoncitizen.com/newsletter. Send us engagements, wedding, births or anniversaries under "Submit your news" on the home page.



©2021 SCNI \$1.00

We're Expecting!
Conyers Cherry Blossom Festival
MARCH 27-28, 2021

Surprise - We're Expecting
A Mysterious Egg arrived from overseas and we can't wait to find out what's inside! Look for more about the origin of the Mysterious Egg inside this issue.

Presented By:
ingles **40 Fabulous** **THE CITIZENS**