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Argument leads to murder

by **Al Summers**

alsummers@timescourier.com

A late Saturday evening argument resulted in one man being killed and another in jail with no bond.

According to Gilmer County Sheriff Stacy Nicholson, Donnie Land, 42, died of a gunshot wound after being shot by William "Billy" George McClurd at a residence on Hwy. 282 near the Gilmer County-Murray County line Saturday night, Sept. 20.

Land was airlifted to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga where he was later pronounced dead.

Nicholson told the *Times-Courier* Land had been visiting a residence on Hwy. 282 when McClurd, who had allegedly been drinking, showed up and an altercation occurred between the two men.

McClurd left the residence and walked to his house where he retrieved a gun, returned to the house where

Land was visiting, and shot him once in the chest.

Gilmer County deputies arrested McClurd in his residence after finding him hiding in one of the rooms. He was arrested without incident.

McClurd has been charged with murder and has been denied bond.

Along with Gilmer County detectives, an agent with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation also investigated the case.

Here she is ... Miss Apple Queen



Photo by Carolyn Lawrence

Holly Chastain receives the Apple Queen crown and title from 2006 Apple Queen, Kayla Davenport. See full story on page 1B.

Building destroyed by fire



Photo by Al Summers

Gilmer County Fire Chief Tony Pritchett (center in photo) inspects damage left by fire at the old bowling alley on Maddox Drive Saturday morning, September 20. Firefighters were able to save the back part of the building and the businesses located there. Units from Gilmer County, the City of Ellijay, Pickens County, Fannin County and Murray County assisted in fighting the intense blaze. Arson is suspected and the fire is being investigated by the Georgia Fire Marshal's office.

Voter registrar encourages early voting

by **Al Summers**

alsummers@timescourier.com

Gilmer County Voter Registrar Jim Fredrickson is encouraging registered voters to take advantage of the early voting period to cast their ballots for the Nov. 4 general election that, among other things, will determine a new president and vice president of the United States.

The early voting period began Monday, Sept. 22, and runs through Friday, Oct. 31.

Fredrickson told the *Times-Courier*, "We are expecting a heavy turnout and long lines on election day. Early voting is easy and can save a person a lot of time. I would encourage anyone who can come by our office and vote early to do so."

The registrar said there was misconception among some voters that the votes cast early were

not counted unless the race was close. "That is absolutely false. The early votes are counted just the same, in with their district, as the votes cast on election day. All votes cast are counted and are part of the total, regardless of when and where they are cast."

Fredrickson also said that a number of people who come into his office to request absentee ballots for themselves to go ahead and vote early. "It is a lot easier to tally electronically cast votes than it is to hand count hand-marked ballots."

According to a press release from Georgia Secretary of State Karen Handel, she said, "The Nov. 4 general election is quickly approaching, and my office is preparing for what will likely be a record turnout. As we prepare ballots and polling

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News Briefs

Talbot resigns

Dr. Jim Talbot recently announced his retirement from the Gilmer County Board of Education. His resignation will be effective as of October. Talbot's reason for resigning is due to his recent relocation into a different district, which would prohibit him from running for the district he currently serves. Talbot had initially believed he would remain through the remainder of the term, but upon learning of upcoming technological training, he thought it would be better served if he resigned prior to the training, to give the new BOE member, Michael Parks, a chance to learn the new procedures. When asked, Talbot is regretful that he cannot continue on with the BOE, but under his new circumstances, he simply was unable to continue representing the district to which he was elected.

Parks is running unopposed in the November election, but with Talbot's resignation, he will sit on the BOE sooner than anticipated. Despite the resignation, Parks would hold the seat in January 2009.

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County millage rate holds

by **Becky Antworth**

bantworth@timescourier.com

After the commissioners held three public hearings on the county's 2008 millage rate, chairman Jerry Farist and commissioners Ken Bailey and Mark Chastain officially set the rate at the advertised amount of 5.0 mills.

Though it is a millage decrease, down from 6.013 in 2007, it is a tax increase. Net taxes collected by the county will be \$267,643 higher than last year, though that amount could be less if parcels currently under appeal with tax assessors are resolved in the favor of the taxpayer.

Citizens at the public hearings expressed multiple concerns, chief among them was county spending and the revenue stream. Several who addressed the BOC implored commissioners to reduce spending and cut the budget, including cutting county jobs if necessary.

Commissioners, however, said county spending is not to blame for the deficit.

"If county revenues had come in as we'd planned," said commissioner Bailey, "there would not have been a tax increase."

Several county departments are short on revenue. SPLOST revenues from local sales tax are also down. The county is also unlikely to see the Georgia Homestead Exemption Credit for \$262,500, after Gov. Perdue announced credits would be revoked as part of the state's funding cuts.

Citizens called on commissioners for action, and asked for specifics on county cutbacks. Mike Forbes said the county is spending outside of its needs.

"Small towns should have a small-town feel," he said. "We don't need fancy courthouses or stadiums."

In response, in a rare moment of audience approval, Farist said he was in favor of postponing some county projects to curb

spending, and the audience erupted into applause. The excitement, however, was short-lived. Bailey said capital improvement projects, such as the courthouse, cannot legally be postponed, and he reminded, are not funded by property taxes.

As for specifics, in a memorandum last month the BOC asked county departments with elected officials to cut budgets by 35 percent for the remainder of 2008.

Departments will also be asked to cut 2009 budgets by 19 percent, according to Chastain. Budget meetings have yet to be scheduled, but are expected to take place within the next month, and are open to the public.

The only thing remaining to be cut from the county's budget, commissioners said, were county services, such as emergency response and paving and mowing roads.

Even with a millage rate of 5.0 and the increase in net taxes, the county budget will still have a

deficit at the end of the year of about \$3.7 million. Unused SPLOST funds from the landfill account will take care of about \$3.4 million of this. The remainder must be made up by a decrease in county expenditures, commissioners said, meaning departments must comply with budget cuts.

Departments, however, are skeptical of the feasibility of cuts, especially so late in the fiscal year. At the noon public hearing September 18, Sheriff Stacy Nicholson addressed the board and the audience, saying a decrease of 35 percent in August was impossible.

"I would have to send more than half my people to the house," he said, which would be an unsafe level of service for citizens.

Citizens also continued to express dissatisfaction over this year's property assessments and again inquired whether 2007

See **Millage** page 4A