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Drawing attention

The cries of angry taxpayers drew Lexington television stations to Nicholas County again last week. Above, Mrs. Ernest Gray talks with WTVQ's Anita Ballard. Signatures are being collected on copies of the petition calling for resignations of the county judge/executive and three members of the fiscal court and a state audit of the county's books at Gray's Grocery. — Mercury photo.

County books open

State says regular audit is scheduled for this year

County Clerk Rose Scott said last week that county financial records are open for public inspection in her office, and an official from the state auditor's office said Monday that the state would be conducting its regular audit of the county's books sometime during this fiscal year.

Scott said that she has copies of recent audits and the quarterly financial statement (which shows the balance of each coded account) for this fiscal year ready for public inspection at her office.

She also said that she has invoices for each check that has been written, and that she is willing to give copies of those invoices to anyone who gives her a reasonable amount of time, and will pay the reproduction costs.

Scott said that she has not refused to let anyone see the financial statements, with the exception of an incident earlier this month involving Sheriff J.W. Ecton.

"I have to understand what people are asking to see," Scott said, before being able to make the documents available.

She said that the now much talked about incident with Ecton occurred when he came in and told her "something about a lady who called him and said her lawyer wanted a copy of the referendum."

Scott said that she didn't know exactly what it was that Ecton wanted, and she said that if the unnamed lady's lawyer wanted something, he could come in and get it.

Ecton said that he wanted to see a copy of the referendum and minutes of the court meetings before and following the election. He said that the county clerk told him he would "have to get a lawyer."

The Sheriff said that he did request a copy of the referendum for an unnamed lady's lawyer.

"The only thing I ask," Scott said Monday, "is that when someone comes in and wants to see something, I have to understand what they are talking about."

A state auditor told the **Mercury** Monday, that copies of the state audit of the county's books (identical to the one on display in the clerk's office) are available to local citizens by writing the office of the Auditor of Public Accounts in Frankfort.

Ronnie Mullins, Assistant Director of County Audits for the state, said in a telephone interview from his Frankfort office that his staff is currently auditing the Nicholas County books every year. He said that he "was not sure exactly when" the auditors would get around to the county, but that an audit would be conducted for each fiscal year.

Mullins said that copies of the auditor's report are available upon request by writing The Auditor of Public Accounts, Room 168, Capitol Annex, Frankfort, Ky. 40601. He said the copies are free of charge, unless too many requests are received during a given year.

Mullins said that the state audits involve "a very comprehensive look" into county finances. "Anything that involves county funds, we audit," he said.

Mullins did say that the auditors could dig even deeper into the county books if they receive "sufficient evidence" that there is some problem or impropriety in the statements.

A summary of the auditor's findings are published in **The Mercury** at the conclusion of each year's investigation.

Tax uprising expands focus to include county hospital

The local tax uprising that began in response to an imposed ambulance tax by the fiscal court, has added another local entity to its "hit list". The Nicholas County Hospital is now a target of disgruntled taxpayers.

A petition is being circulated in the county that reportedly calls for doing away with the facility, and several taxpayers have vowed not to pay the hospital's portion of their tax bills this year.

Bill Fryman, Route 2, Carlisle, told reporters at Myers Station last Wednesday that he was going to refuse to pay the hospital tax this year. "I'll offer to pay the rest of it," he said, "but I won't pay the hospital tax until I can see what's on the books."

"We pay tax on top of tax," he said, "and we're just struggling to make it. They can sell me out, but I'll not pay it (the hospital tax). I've paid it in the past, but I refuse to pay it anymore."

Several persons in the group at Myers said they were dissatisfied with the level of care, certain policies (in particular the requirement of a $400 deposit before admittance) and with the size of the hospital tax. The petition also claims reportedly that the referendum did not actually pass on the ballot.

"When they put it in they said it would be self supporting," Fryman said. "The tax is just too high."

Local hospital administrator Robert Hester said Monday "I feel like we are caught in the middle of this thing, I'm sorry if some people feel that way, but I think we are doing an excellent job."

Hester said that if you compare costs with surrounding hospitals, the local facility's charges look quite reasonable, and he pointed out that the bonded indebtedness for the hospital only goes to pay for the building and supplies.

"We don't even see that bond money," he said, "it goes straight to the county to pay off the scheduled bonded indebtedness."

Hester continued, "We're not fully tax supported, salaries and operating expenses" come out of hospital-generated revenues.

Hester also said that it looks even more promising that two new doctors will be coming into the county soon, and that a third could be here by next year. He said that he would make a full release when all the details had been finalized.

As for the deposit before admittance, Hester said that "Whenever possible, we like to have a $400 deposit on uninsured patients." He also said that the hospital likes to have a deposit on persons who are under-insured.

"We know that some insurance companies will only pay $30 or $40 a day. In that case we like to have a deposit."

Deputy Sheriff Ralph Brookshire said Monday that the Sheriff's office will not accept partial payment on tax bills. "We've got to settle the whole tax bill with the state, and they won't take no for an answer," he said.

Brookshire said that he had received inquiries from people who wanted to know if they could take the hospital tax off their payment, and that one lady had even mailed her tax bill in with that portion unpaid. "We mailed it back to her and she mailed another one

*See Tax uprising, page 12

Bill Fryman

Council won't commit until court has plan

A called meeting of the city council Monday night to discuss how much money the city could contribute to the establishment of an ambulance service in the county failed to produce any commitment by the city, as councilmen balked at the idea of earmarking funds for the service without a clear-cut plan from the fiscal court.

"I don't think we should get involved until the county decides what it is going to do," said councilman Tommy Vaughn at the beginning of the brief meeting.

Mayor Power told the council of the offer made to the court by Dick Cooksey of Blue Grass Medical Services at last Wednesday's called meeting and of Cooksey's request for a $15,000 subsidy to get the service off the ground the first year.

"I think they (the fiscal court) want to see how much money they can come up with before they decide what they are going to do," Power said. "I feel this is the city's responsibility as well as the county's," he said.

"How can we help if they don't know what they are trying to do or planning to do?" said councilman Clarence Cord. "What is it they want us to do?"

Councilman and Mayor-elect Frankie Hughes posed the question, "If they don't have the $15,000, why can't they borrow the money to get it going, then come over and sit down with us and ask us to help. I'm sure we'd help out once they got something started. You can't do anything without a plan."

Power then asked the councilmen if they would like to meet with the court at Wednesday morning's meeting. The council rejected that proposal, preferring to wait until the court had some type of plan. "We've been over there for two meetings already," said Cord, "and we haven't got anything accomplished."

Power then adjourned the meeting and told the councilmen, "you can come if you want (to the court meeting), if not, then don't."

Court hears EMS proposals

A called meeting of the Nicholas County Fiscal Court last Wednesday night before a packed meeting room at the courthouse heard two proposals for offering ambulance service to the county after local funeral homes go out of the business at midnight Dec. 31.

Dick Cooksey, of Bluegrass Medical Services, made an offer to run the service through his private ambulance business that currently operates in Lexington. Local Civil Defense Director Russ Bell told the court that he and several unnamed county residents were prepared to begin an all-volunteer service.

Cooksey said he could offer 24 hour service seven days a week, with one front line ambulance and a backup stationed in the county. He said he would have one full-time employee on duty at all times, and supplement that person with paid part-time employees.

Cooksey said that he would hire local people for the service, and that his business would cover insurance, workman's comp, and other employee-related expenses.

He asked for use of the armory for ambulance storage and office space. He also asked for use of the county's small claims apparatus to assist in collections, "if there are any problems." Cooksey said, "We haven't had to take anyone to court yet in Lexington." He said that he had several people who had worked out alternative and deferred payment plans.

The discussion then turned to subsidization. Cooksey said that the rates he charged per run would depend upon the amount of subsidy the county could provide.

He asked the court for a $15,000 subsidy for the first year. He said that money would be used to purchase and put into operation the two ambulances owned by the local funeral homes. He said he wanted to use those vehicles because the local EMT's "are more familiar with them."

With that $15,000 subsidy, Cooksey said he could guarantee service for a year, with rates that would run around $45-50 for a local call, and $95 for a run to Lexington. There would be no charge for oxygen, materials used or waiting time.

Cooksey said that the request for funds was a "one time subsidy, not $15,000 a year." However he did say that if he was losing money in the county, he would open his books to county citizens at the end of the year, and could ask for a subsidy in the future.

The question was raised by Louis Sauls, Route 4, Carlisle, as to who

*See Court hears, page 9

Dispatcher charged with DUI

Clarence E. Moss, Route 3, Carlisle, a radio dispatcher for the Carlisle Police Department, was arrested Friday night on the Gallows Hill Road by State Trooper Jim Curry and charged with operating a motor vehicle under the influence of intoxicants.

Curry said that the arrest came while he was on routine patrol and spotted a

*See Dispatcher, page 12

Tobacco markets open with a bang

Burley brings record prices during first week

Burley tobacco markets opened last week to record prices for the 1981-82 crop. Average prices at area markets are reported to be running around $180 per hundredweight, with a few top grades approaching the $185 mark.

As of last Friday, 97,866,000 pounds of burley had been sold on the Kentucky market, with an average of $179.88 for the week. Friday's sales averaged $180.94 on 24,193,000 pounds in the state.

Across the burley belt, there were 161,232,000 pounds sold last week, with the average price set at $179.50.

The heavy volume of trading has tobacco authorities expecting the bulk of the crop to be sold by Christmas, if the present pace holds up.

Early reports show little or no price differential in packaging, whether in bales, sheets or the traditional hand-tied "hands".

There had been some speculation that buyers would not be too eager to buy burley sold in sheets. Burley packaged in the 150-160 pound burlap sheets is not covered under the government-controlled price support program.

But good quality sheeted burley, graded and offered with butt ends of stems placed to the outside, brought between $180 and $183 per hundredweight on the Lexington market opening day.

Baled burley dominated the market in Central Kentucky last week, and no difference in price between it and hand-tied tobacco was found, according to marketing officials.

On opening day last Monday, grades of B3F sold for between $181 and $183 per hundredweight. The C4F grade ranged from $179 to $183 per hundredweight, with B4FR going for between $176 and $181 per hundredweight.

Support prices for the above grades are $177, $174, and $173 per hundredweight, respectively.

Most grades were bringing $5 to $6 over the support price on opening day, with the mixed grade of M5FR selling for $175, compared with its support price of $138.

Burley graded "NoG" averaged around $175 per hundredweight on opening day last Monday.

The amount of tobacco going to the pool under loan is still small across the burley belt, but officials say the pace is well ahead of last year. Joe McDaniel, president of the Burley Tobacco Growers Association, said last week that he believes pool receipts will increase after the needs of foreign purchasers

*See Burley, page 9

Leo Dennis was busy Monday morning tagging bales of burley and getting ready for the hustle and bustle of the week's tobacco auction at Enterprise-Four tobacco warehouse in Cynthiana. Sales at the Harrison County warehouse averaged $180.83 per hundredweight on opening day last Monday, and $181.45 last Tuesday.— Mercury photo.