

## "The Money Tree"

I was maybe six years old when I began to understand that it took money to have 'stuff'. My mother sometimes gave me a nickel so I could buy an RC Cola at the little country store just a ten-minute walk up our dirt road. I was a quick learner. If you had money, you could buy stuff. No money – no stuff. On Saturdays, we'd go to the grocery store and then to Mott's 'Five and Dime' in Abbeville. I'd ask Mother for money to buy a toy pistol so I could help *The Lone Ranger*. Her standard answer was, "son, money doesn't grow on trees." You would think that a family with our last name would surely have a money tree. When we got home, I asked Daddy if money grew on trees and, if it did, why didn't we have one. He renewed my faith... "sure it does...we have one in the side yard." In our 'side yard' was a Mimosa tree, the dreaded 'tree of shame'. We had no indoor bathroom – only an outhouse. From that Mimosa grew the branch over which Mother would string a water hose to give me my summer baths...out in broad daylight for all the world to see! The 'tree of shame' was about to become the 'tree of plenty'. It was OUR money tree...until I learned the next day that Mimosa leaves won't buy you an RC Cola...or 'nuthin' else'!

What does this have to do with county government? Alabama law requires that every county pass their 2023/24 budgets no later than September 30. Since COVID, budgets have become 'guestimates' – moving targets. What you spent one year is often not in the same zip code as what it may cost the next. I recently read an article written by Houston County Commission Chairman Brandon Shoupe. Brandon was addressing the rising cost of juvenile detention. Title 12 states that if a juvenile commits a crime in your county and is detained at a diversion center approved by the Alabama Department of Youth Services, the county in which the juvenile is arrested is responsible for payment to that facility. We are charged \$126.00 per day per juvenile for every day they are in the Southeast Alabama Youth Services Center in Dothan. We are mandated to pay the bill regardless of where the juvenile is from. For example, I remember a case where several juveniles from the Atlanta area were passing through Henry County on their way to the beach. They committed a crime in our county, were arrested and taken to the diversion center – where they stayed for almost two weeks. The cost to Henry County taxpayers was over \$5,000.00. During a recent four-month period (March through June of this year), we paid a total of \$48,631.36 to the detention center for juvenile housing. At that rate, we would spend almost \$150,000.00 on juvenile detention alone. We have no idea how much to budget for this expense. More importantly, this is money that could have been used for emergency medical services, law enforcement, county road improvements, jail renovation and dozens of other critical needs.

Last Thursday, we held a three-hour budget preparation session. It was attended by all five county commissioners, our financial staff and our department heads. We analyzed very closely every area of county government – line item by line item. We felt this would likely be a budget of 'needs' rather than one of 'wants.' We looked closely at our projected revenue. It became quickly apparent that we must approach this from a 'needs only' standpoint. We looked for expenses that we could either cut or eliminate. We left with a clear understanding of the financial challenges ahead. "If the revenue doesn't flow, then something must go." We finally managed to develop a balanced budget.

After the meeting, I stood for a minute in the parking lot behind the Herndon Administrative Building – there were no trees on county property. I walked across the street to the courthouse. There were several pecan trees and a few 'Pat Dye' oaks...but nowhere could I find the 'Henry County Money Tree'. We have much work to do.

### Thirty Day Review:

- If your last name begins with 'Q', 'S' or 'T', September is your month to renew tags.
- Probate activity for July: five wills probated, one administration, seven miscellaneous hearings, three final settlements, three guardianships, one involuntary commitment and two marriage certificates
- August 9 – ACCA/ICA board meeting in Montgomery
- August 10 – HCYLP board meeting in Headland
- August 10 – SEARP&DC Executive Committee meeting in Dothan
- August 11 – HCEDA board meeting – TriDelta Systems (Abbeville)
- August 17 – August Administrative meeting (2022/2023 amended budget review)
- August 17 – August Commission meeting
- August 18 – ADECA/SEID broadband expansion grant ZOOM call
- August 21-24 – ACCA annual convention - Perdido
- August 29 – HCYLP student/parent introductory meeting – Headland
- August 30 – HCYLP outing to Camp Butter and Egg – Troy
- August 31 – 2023/2024 budget preparation work session – Herndon Building
- September 4 – Labor Day holiday
- September 5 – SEARP&DC RPO meeting – Annex Building
- September 6 – Dothan Area Chamber breakfast (Sonny Brasfield, guest speaker)

### Upcoming Dates to Remember:

- September 7 – ADAH records assessment virtual meeting
- September 12 – Wallace College Foundation board meeting
- September 13 – E911 board meeting – Headland
- September 14/15 – ACCA board workshop – Dadeville
- September 19 – HCYLP Leadership Day – Troy University
- September 20 – ACCA Golf Bash – Calera
- September 21 – September Administrative meeting – Herndon Building – 10:00
- September 21 – September Commission meeting – Annex Building – 1:00
- September 22 – Wiregrass Leadership Alabama luncheon – Dothan
- September 25 – HCHR board meeting – Henry County Nursing Home
- September 26 – Election Security meeting – Herndon Building
- September 28 – SEARP&DC annual meeting – Enterprise Civic Center
- September 29 – Wiregrass Forum breakfast – Ozark
- October 4/5 – APJA Elections Conference - Tuscaloosa