

“REAL SCOOP”

Retired Employees of the Consolidated City of Jacksonville



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

November—December 2011

Volume 61

Every year the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce sponsors a leadership trip to a major American City that has demonstrated progress in areas of interest to Jacksonville policy makers. The Chamber selected Houston as the site for the 2011 leadership trip which took place between September 27 and 29, 2011. The participants in such trips typically include many of the most influential members of the Jacksonville community. In view of the fact that the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce and groups such as the Civic Council would likely dominate the list of attendees, the REA decided to authorize myself and Eric Smith, the REA First Vice President, to participate in the Chamber's Houston trip. This decision was partially based upon the fact that the participants in this trip currently have great influence upon the development of policy within Mayor Brown's Administration. We viewed the Houston trip as an opportunity to interact with this group of influential individuals and to better position ourselves to serve as an advocate for the interests of the REA membership. While on the Houston trip, we met with representatives of Houston's retiree groups to exchange ideas on areas of mutual concern. We feel that the effort to participate in this trip was a worthwhile undertaking and effectively

served the goal of advancing the visibility of the REA. We developed many valuable contacts and relationships during the trip.

We recently witnessed the adoption of the City's FY 2012 Budget by the City Council. This very contentious exercise resulted in the elimination of hundreds of City positions and ushered in a great number of employee layoffs, including 48 police officers. The budget stress that was encountered during the process of adopting the FY 2012 City Budget was largely due to the continued weakness of the economy, particularly in the area of property taxes, sales taxes and state shared revenues. However, the largest element of the City's budget stress resulted from the City's policy decision to effectively authorize a \$30.7 million property tax cut for FY 2012 by electing to maintain the same millage rate in the face of declining taxable values for Jacksonville properties.

According to Schedule A of the City's Budget Ordinance, the Ad Valorem Taxes budgeted for the City's General Fund decreased from \$485,533,272 to \$454,805,549, or a decrease of \$30,727,723. This represents an effective property tax decrease of 6.33% for FY 2012. If

the City had wished to maintain the current level of Ad Valorem Tax revenue, it would have elected to increase the millage rate from 10.0353 mills to 10.7688, the so-called "roll back rate". The City alternatively declined to maintain the current level of revenue by adopting the same 10.0353 millage rate that was enacted on the previous year's higher Taxable Valuation for Jacksonville properties. This decision produced a \$30.7 million tax cut to Jacksonville residents and businesses. While this tax cut was a source of relief by Jacksonville taxpayers in a difficult economic environment, it was achieved by a reduction in

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the level of service and public safety to Jacksonville residents.

The prospect for the City FY 2013 Budget is currently bleak. A large increase in the City's pension contributions is scheduled to be implemented with the adoption of the FY 2013 Budget following an extended period of poor stock market returns and pressures from the State to revise various actuarial assumptions. In addition, the City is currently scheduled to ratchet-up the level of "pay-as-you-go" funding for capital outlay and maintenance out of next year's General Fund revenues by a material amount (as opposed to securing such needs through borrowing programs). The incorporation of only one of these major expense items in the FY 2013 will be difficult. The decision to simultaneously address both of these expense items within

the FY 2013 Budget will be extremely difficult. These budget difficulties will be greatly exacerbated in the event that the Property Appraiser delivers yet another weak Taxable Valuation report to the City in the spring of 2012. If these prospects are not bleak enough, the City policy makers are sending strong signals that it will not increase the millage rate to produce the same level of revenues in the face of continued decreases in the Tax Roll. Budget hawks from the Chamber of Commerce and the Civic Council are cheering this course of action. If all these looming issues come to pass, City employees will face a second round of even greater employee layoffs and wage concession demands in the coming months. City services and public safety will continue to suffer if this sequence of events unfolds as feared. On top of

these issues, the City will likely have to settle the Monaco case over the next year. The Monaco case is a class action lawsuit filed against the City in response to the City's past actions to improperly deny admission to over 1,300 City employees into the City's Pension Plans. The City's potential legal exposure could be massive.

We anticipate a continuation of the economic turmoil that has dominated our local news on a daily basis concerning the City's Budget woes. More cuts are on the way as the City works through its budget issues. Each round of budget cuts will be more painful than the last. At some point, our policy makers and City residents will need to decide upon what type of community they wish to have.

Tom Lumpkin

This newsletter will be published every two months for the benefit of the members of the Retired Employees Association of the Consolidated City of Jacksonville. It is your newsletter and you're welcome to submit items to the editor. We consider our membership our best source of news and information and invite your participation in this publication and in all the Association's activities. For inquiries and to give news articles, phone (904) 854-0777, mail to: Retired Employees Association, P.O. Box 37472, Jacksonville, FL 32236, or e-mail klooney@reajax.com.

Deadline for copy for the next issue is Dec. 22.

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TIMES UNION FAILS TO PUBLISH LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By Jack Caulkins

I have closely followed City finances and subjects involving the City's pension plans for several years. This interest led me to volunteer my time to participate in the 2009 Study of City Finances that was conducted by the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (the "JCCI"). During the JCCI study, the participants documented the existence and impact of the City's past practice of going on "pension holidays", whereby the City was able to pay \$0 into the General Employees Pension Plan for a three year period. This policy has weakened the City's pension plans and was criticized by the JCCI participants.

Given this background and first hand understanding of the subject of "pension holidays", I read with interest a recent article in the Florida Times Union which summarized some of the findings of Mayor Brown's Pension Transition Committee. This article reported that the Pension Transition Committee held the view that the City's so-called "pension holidays" are a myth. I was annoyed by this characterization and was motivated to write a letter to the Editor of the Times Union. I requested that my letter be published along-side the great number of letters that are regularly published by the newspaper that are critical of public employee pensions. Much to my surprise, my letter has never made it into print. In view of this situation, I have asked the publishers of the REAL Scoop to print my letter to the Editor of the Times Union so that at least some Jacksonville residents will become better educated on the subject. My letter to the Times Union is reproduced below:

On August 26th, Ron Littlepage wrote a story which reported upon various observations that were recently made by Mayor Alvin Brown's Transition Committee on Pensions. According to Littlepage, the Committee concluded that the City's so-called practice of going on "pension holidays" was a mere myth. Having participated in the 2009 JCCI Study on City Finances over a period of 9 months, I speak with considerable authority on the subject of the City's "pension holiday" practices. The independent JCCI process conclusively found that the City did indeed go on "pension holidays" for an extensive period of time and in fact made a \$0 contribution to the City Retirement System for a complete 3 year period. This fact is revealed for all to see on page 153 of the City's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 2010. The JCCI study strongly recommended that the City outlaw the pension holiday practice and strengthen its pension funding policies. If there is any myth being perpetrated upon the citizens of Jacksonville, it is the Mayor's Pension Transition Committee as the source for the mythical story-telling. Shame on Ron Littlepage for not calling out the Committee for their obvious attempt to re-write history.

From the City Retirement System Administrative Office

Effective October 17, 2011 the Retirement System Administrative Office relocated to the St. James Building (City Hall). The new address is 117 W. Duval Street, Suite 330, Jacksonville, FL 32202. The office is located on the northwest side of the building on the third floor (turn right as you exit the elevator). The phone number remains unchanged (255-7280). We look forward to serving you from our new location!

Phyllis Goodman says:

I can imagine you have a lot of questions about Medicare and the date changes for the Annual Enrollment Period for 2012.

You may also be wondering which plan is best for me, and can help save money. As your local, Wellcare Licensed Representative, I can help you. Wellcare has created Medicare Advantage Plans that are loaded with extra benefits you won't get from original Medicare.

For further information call 904-444-2138 or 904-343-9620 or website: www.wellcarerep.com/31462

A. C. Thomas says:

Compared to Aetna our Supplement offers better coverage at half the price... Save Thousands per Year!

City improved benefits and reduced rates on Humana...a good change. However, our Advantage Plans offer larger Provider Networks and Lower Rates with some Copays Higher...thus better Retirement Option.

For further information call 904-730-3900 or website: www.HealthInsuranceThomas.com

The REA has had Phyllis Goodman and A. C. Thomas speak at our Membership Meetings in the past and we are passing along their contact information for you during this enrollment period.

He is Wonderful

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 (NKJV)

An unknown author exclaims with wonder and adoration: " Christ came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on divinity. He became a man that we might become the sons of God. In infancy He startled a king; in boyhood He puzzled the doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature. He walked upon the billows, hushed the sea to sleep, and healed the multitudes without medicine. He never wrote a book; yet the libraries of the world are filled with volumes that have been written about Him. He never penned a musical note; yet He is the theme of more lyrics than any other subject in the world. Great men have come and gone; yet He lives on. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, the grave could not hold Him. All others have failed in some way, but not Jesus. He is the reason for the season."

Center your Christmas in Christ

Leona J. Spann

Chaplain



Thanksgiving

TRADITIONS



Whitehouse Tradition: A Presidential Pardon

Each year since 1947, a turkey has been given to the President of the United States at a White House ceremony. Since then, presidents have been more likely to eat the turkey rather than give it a reprieve. An exception occurred in 1963, when President Kennedy, referring to the turkey given to him, said, "Let's just keep him." It wasn't until the first Thanksgiving of President George H.W. Bush, in 1989, that a turkey, and its alternate, was officially pardoned for the first time. An alternate is chosen just in case the first bird is unable to perform its duties.

For fifteen years through 2004, the turkeys were given to Kidwell Farm, a petting zoo at Frying Pan Park in Herndon, Virginia. The turkeys would receive a last minute pardon before arriving and were led to their new home at the Turkey Barn.

From 2005 through 2009, however, the turkeys were flown to Disneyland in California where they served as honorary grand marshals for Disneyland's Thanksgiving Day parade. After that, they spent the rest of their lives at a Disneyland ranch. A spot in sunny Disneyland seems preferable to a place called Frying Pan Park if you happen to be a turkey who just escaped from becoming the main course of someone's Thanksgiving feast.

Interestingly, the American public is allowed to vote for the turkey's names on the White House web site. 2003 lucky birds were Stars and Stripes; and 2004's were Biscuit and Gravy. In 2005 the turkey's spared were named Marshmallow and Yam. In 2006's the turkey's pardoned were named Flyer and Fryer. 2007 lucky birds were May and Flower. The 2008 winners were Pumpkin and Pecan and in 2009 they were named Courage and Carolina.

In 2010 President Obama gave two turkeys named Apple and Cider a last-minute reprieve. Obama made light of the event. "Let me say that it feels pretty good to stop a least one shellacking this November," he said, referring to the drubbing that Democrats took in the midterm elections, which Obama described as a "shellacking." The turkeys were on display during the holidays at George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, then they will live there in a livestock facility.

"COCOMARSH"

By Andy Sabol

Even when I was a little fellow about five or six years of age, I hated cold weather. In fact, when I was about six, I told my parents that when I grew up I was going to live where it was warm in the wintertime!

In western Pennsylvania we had long winters. It starting getting cold in October and we had freezes as late as the end of April! I guess that's why so many of my Boy Scout camping experiences happened during winter-type camps . Here's one more...

One of the main activities on any camping trip is "eating". At least it was for the Mohawk Patrol. Seems like we were always cooking, eating or cleaning up. It didn't seem too much like a chore in the winter-time. I guess it was because you got to hang around the fire where it was warm.

Another good thing about cooking at a winter camp is... the food always seemed to taste better! And smell better too. Bacon and eggs and coffee on a snowy morning! Fried chicken or roast lamb or stew when it just started getting dark in the early evening!

But one of the very best! One of the absolute supreme! The top of the whole shebang was... hot Cocomarsh and fresh-made gingerbread and butter while sitting around the campfire late at night! I can't tell you the number of times Chuck would say, "If I baked some gingerbread, would you guys eat it"? And while the gingerbread baked in the reflector ovens, the Cocomarsh was being prepared!

If, just once more, I could have that sweet taste in my mouth! I have looked for years but I guess Cocomarsh is not longer available. It was a liquid chocolate with built-in marshmallow flavor. You just heated up some water (or better, Milk) stirred in the Cocomarsh and...heaven! Winter did not seem too bad after all. The hot gingerbread with the butter melting down over the sides didn't hurt either!...makes me warm, just to remember!

Gingerbread Recipe

Ingredients:

6 tablespoons butter
 1/3 cup light brown sugar,
 firmly packed
 1/2 cup molasses
 2 large eggs
 1 3/4 cups sifted flour
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
 1/2 cup buttermilk
 Granulated sugar or cinnamon-sugar mixture



Preparation:

Grease and flour a 9-inch square baking pan. Heat oven to 350 degrees.

Cream butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy; beat in molasses. Beat in eggs, one at a time. Sift together flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, clove and ground ginger. Add sifted dry ingredients alternately with the buttermilk, beating after each addition. Spread gingerbread batter in the prepared baking pan and sprinkle top lightly with granulated sugar or a cinnamon sugar mixture. Bake the gingerbread for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the gingerbread springs back when lightly touched with a finger. Serve gingerbread warm with butter or cooled with whipped cream, lemon sauce or a vanilla desert sauce.



**ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY
RETIRED EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2011
MOROCCO SHRINE AUDITORIUM
3800 ST. JOHNS BLUFF ROAD, SOUTH**



**\$9.00 PER PERSON
DOORS OPEN 4:00 P.M.
DINNER 5:30 P.M.**

The Holiday Season is just around the corner and it is time for our Annual Christmas Party. As noted above, the dinner will be held at the Morocco Shrine Auditorium and will be a buffet catered by Jo Rewis. As provided by our Bylaws, after dinner, we will have a short meeting to include installation of officers and distribution of door prizes.

RESERVATIONS: Cost is \$9.00 per person. Complete the reservation form at the bottom; attach a check made payable to the Retired Employees Association for the number of tickets requested (limit of two) and mail to: Retired Employees Association, P. O. Box 37472, Jacksonville, Florida 32236-7472. Request for tickets **MUST** be **POSTMARKED** by **DECEMBER 2, 2011**. **Tickets will be mailed to you prior to the party.** If you find it necessary to cancel your reservations, please call the office at 854-0777. If no one is available, please leave a message. Once reservations have been given to the caterer, there can be **NO** refunds.

SANTA SURPRISE: Tickets will be sold at the door for \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00. You can buy as many tickets as you wish. At the close of the sale of tickets, the money will be counted; and split four ways.

DONATION REQUEST: We will be collecting non-perishable food items and/or new toys to be donated to local non-profit organizations.

Number of Tickets @ \$9.00 each _____ (Limit of 2 including Member)

Name of Member _____

Name of Spouse or Guest _____

Return this reservation form as soon as possible with your check payable to: RETIRED EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, P.O. BOX 37472, JACKSONVILLE, FL 32236-7472. Request for tickets must be postmarked by December 2, 2011.

Signed: _____ Phone Number _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed _____ E-Mail Address _____

Retired Employees of the
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Web*

reajax.com

DATES TO REMEMBER:

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11—VETERAN'S DAY

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24—

Thanksgiving

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7—PEARL HARBOR DAY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10—REA CHRISTMAS PARTY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21—WINTER BEGINS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25—

