

Read our lips — no new taxes

What would you think of a business that raises prices to its loyal current customers to provide services to new customers — at no cost at all? That business wouldn't stay in business long would it?

But that is exactly what has been going on for years in Lexington County. The county's loyal current customers — its homeowners — have been paying increased taxes to provide police and fire protection for new homeowners and to educate their children. The county council and the state legislature have done nothing about it.

If you buy a new home in Lexington County right after the first of the year, you can get away with NOT paying property taxes for as long as 23 months.

That should be a crime.

Now the county council is looking at bud-

get requests from its department heads for \$101.3 million for the next fiscal year.

That's \$16 million more than the county expects to take in, Chronicle Metro Editor Vicki Shealy reported last week.

The county expects to have \$85 million to spend in 2008 — up about \$9 million over the current year.

The biggest increase sought is in law enforcement. Sheriff Jimmy Metts wants an additional \$5.7 million. About \$2.8 million of that increase will pay for more road deputies and deputies for the western regional office.

The budget requests presented to County Council last week left council members shaking their heads. They must be wondering what some of their department heads have started smoking.

This is an old game. You always ask Santa

for more than you expect to get. Our county department heads don't need to play games.

Council Chairman Billy Derrick said he hopes the county can reduce these requests. Billy's got to do better than that.

He needs to pledge that the council will cut these budget requests down to size. A nice number would be the \$85 million they expect in revenue.

The recent property reassessment burned a lot of property owners.

We voted a penny sales tax on ourselves to keep our school property taxes from rising.

It's time for the county council to hold the line. Read our lips — no new taxes.

And its time our legislative delegation closed this tax loophole for new homeowners. Let them pay their fair share.

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LEXINGTON YESTERDAY

CLAUDETTE HOLLIDAY | cholliday@windstream.net

Love lost is town's gain

The de Pury family of Neuchatel is known throughout Switzerland. They are a family of much distinction, especially in Neuchatel.

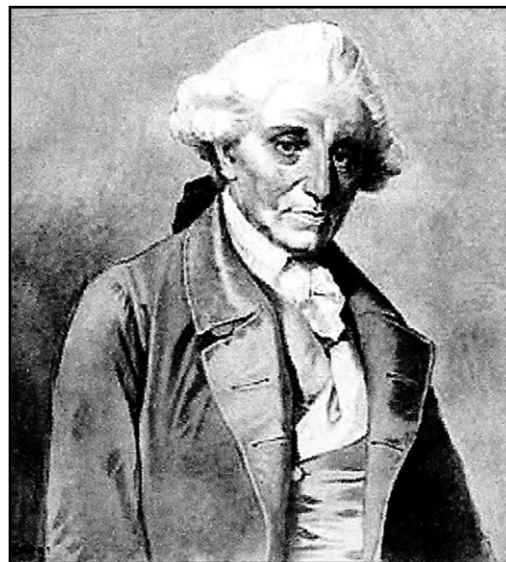
David de Pury, brother of Jean Pierre, left Neuchatel to go into the maritime trade at age seventeen. In 1730 David joined with the South Sea Company of London that traded in African, European, and American ports.

In London David met and fell in love with an Englishwoman, but the romance was never to come to the fruition of marriage because of a business failure. David remained a bachelor the rest of his life.

David de Pury's business interests took him to Lisbon, Portugal, in 1736. He acquired a huge fortune through trade in diamonds and rare woods of the Amazon forests. In an unfortunate turn of events after the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, David de Pury lost nearly all of his accumulated wealth, but successfully worked to rebuild it before the end of his life.

He was appointed banker to the King of Prussia, Frederic II, before he died in 1786 and he was given the title of Baron de Pury.

Because David never married and had no children he left more than 70 % of his fortune to the Town of Neuchatel and its 2000



David de Pury

citizens for the maintenance of religious and public buildings. He is credited with providing Neuchatel with a hospital, a school, and town hall. To this day de Pury family members offer their services in Neuchatel government.

A statue of David de Pury was erected in Neuchatel town square.

VOICES OF LEXINGTON COUNTY

OUR READERS WRITE

Arts center a gift to future generations

As the Lexington Arts Center Project moves forward, I think it's important to look at the project and its related economic impact in the larger perspective. As one who has been in the arts world my whole career in several cities throughout the country, I believe I am qualified to offer some observations that will generate greater understanding and support for the project.

First, let's look at the direct economic impact new arts centers have had on local communities regardless of location. Close to home the Newberry Opera House is a prime example of the arts and an arts center revitalizing a community and attracting new business. In 2003 the City of Columbia had a "mayor's task force on the arts" to determine the need for new cultural facilities. A major finding was that the region needed a 1,200 seat theatre (Koger is 2,300, Township is 3,000, smaller facilities rarely exceed 400) to handle the organization needs for audience development. Found on the www.lexington-artscenter.com website, Columbia Mayor Bob Coble has gone on the record endorsing the proposed Lexington project as good for business in the Midlands.

Second, an arts center project like any significant infrastructure project (an athletic stadium, a library, a shopping mall) does not just pop up overnight. Once site selection is complete and property obtained, the actual architectural and engineering plans, utility and other municipal support facilities, and then the actual construction takes several years. As I have observed, planners involved with the Lexington Arts Center project have taken their task seriously and are diligently developing a "smart plan" — one that will allow the final product to succeed

based on sound research and fiscal responsibility. Given the rate of growth in the Town and County, population and business growth all point to new audiences wanting cultural amenities. One only has to look at Innovista and the planned \$150 million plus capital investment planned for Columbia to realize that the "knowledge based economy" is very real and is coming to South Carolina and the Midlands. And this economy and its workforce, according to Richard Florida's Creative Class thesis, is exactly the audience and patron base to support the arts.

Third, let's take a look at the "hydrogen economy" side of this growing industry. The three center points are ICAR in the Upstate, Innovista and USC in the Midlands, and the Savannah River Site in Barnwell. With basic research occurring at ICAR and SRS, the more commercial application technologies will have a base in the Midlands. What community is ideally located between Innovista and SRS and that has the potential for business and job development with land and talent? And where will these workers live?

Fourth, an Arts Center is not something you build for yourself. You build it for your children and grandchildren and their children. It is a once in a generation opportunity to claim the high ground in community development. What better way to showcase a community's commitment to its future than a major cultural center that will attract the regional and national attention that makes one happy to say "I live in Lexington."

Finally, the Lexington Arts Center project needs community and political support to move forward now.

Andrew Witt, Executive Director
Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington

VOICES OF LEXINGTON COUNTY

OUR READERS WRITE

'No' on arts center

I am not in favor of a Performing Arts Center until Lexington has something to draw people here. We need more good restaurants. And we need shops on Main Street instead of more Lawyers' Offices. Highway 1 is a joke what with all the apartments going up. We need a visionary running this town. The trees and cement on Main Street are in the way of traffic. And we do not need to spend money on up-dating Christmas Decorations.

At least we don't have to go through Lexington to get to a lot of good restaurants.

Carole Clark, Lexington

Upset with response

I am upset with the poor Lexington County services provided recently, or shall I say lack of service. I had a dangerous animal of a neighbor in my yard. I reported it to animal control and was told that they would not send an officer out even though I told them the pit bull was aggressive and coming after me and my wife in the yard. The operator informed me if I felt threatened and the animal was on my property that I had every right to take it down. She also informed me that I needed to report to the sheriff's department if I discharged a firearm.

The situation was bad enough after the conversation that the animal would not let us off the front porch without barking and lunging at us. I called the Sheriff's department about it and they said there was nothing that they could do. The dispatcher transferred me back to animal control. The Operator told me they would send an officer out. Minutes later I received a call from the animal control officer telling me that if he came out that citations would be issued and I would have to go to court.

The officer said he would be there within a half hour and for me to keep an eye on the dog. He called back a few minutes later saying he called the owner. The owner said he went to the store and did not realize his dogs were loose. The officer said that if I was willing to show up to court he would be there Monday to issue a citation.

This has been going on before this incident and I have told the owner I did not want his dogs in my yard. He told me to hit his dog and tell him to go home. Which is one thing I refuse to do. He needs to be a responsible pet owner and abide by the leash laws set by the county. After the incident, the dog was still on the loose and has not been kept confined.

My wife talked with another neighbor that morning and they have a four-year-old girl who has seen her dog attacked by the same pit bull prior to our incident.

Her mother reported it to animal control and nothing was done. When the officer came out, the four-year-old's mother went and reported that they had to shoot the dog with a BB gun several times so they could get off their porch. She also reported that a few weeks ago her elderly aunt who is another neighbor was bit by the same dog and blood was drawn. But nothing but a citation and a warning was given this day.

What is it going to take for something logical to be done about this dog — the little girl getting mauled, the elderly woman getting hurt or taking the chance of getting sued for shooting the dog and trying to prove that a dead dog is vicious? It seems to me that if someone intends to own dogs with a dangerous nature they should have to have some kind of county governed permit, and the county check to see if there will be suitable confinement areas for these dogs prior to the permit being issued. I am not saying it should be illegal to own dogs of such a nature, but we need to make sure the owners of such animals are willing to do their part to keep people that live around them safe.

The sad part of this is the owners couldn't even prove their dogs have been vaccinated for the simplest thing called rabies. I feel a dog having that many complaints against it should have been taken for an evaluation by trained professionals.

We all pay taxes for this service that is not usable when needed evidently.

Brian Upchurch, Gaston



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THE EDITOR TALKS WITH YOU

Gambling man

A lot of people are betting Sam Zell can't save a great newspaper from failing.

I'm betting Sam can because he:

- Knows how to make money.
- Has a track record of success. He's worth an estimated \$4.5 billion. Forbes ranks him the 52nd richest American.
- Sam has made his fortune investing in losers and turning them into winners.
- Sam loves newspapers and is passionate about whatever he does.

What qualifies Sam Zell to run the country's second largest newspaper publishing company in terms of circulation?

Samuel "Sam" Zell, 65, was born in Chicago to Jewish immigrant parents who escaped Poland before the Nazi invasion.

Even as a teenager, young Zell showed an entrepreneurial flair. He would buy Playboy magazines in downtown Chicago and resell them to his buddies in the suburbs for a 200% markup.

He made his first success in real estate as a student at the University of Michigan. After managing the building where he lived for free rent, he managed other properties, ultimately incorporating an apartment-management business and then selling it.

After earning his law degree at Michigan, he teamed with a fraternity brother, Robert Lurie, to buy distressed properties from developers who were bogged down by high interest rates. He and Lurie founded the country's biggest apartment and commercial office company. He recently sold one of his companies for \$39 billion.

Those who know him say he is a 5'4" bearded, blunt-spoken entrepreneur. He speaks to business groups internationally and is an avid skier and racquetball and paintball player. He formed Zell's Angels, a group of wealthy motorcyclists who go on his trips around the world. He admits driving 145 mph on the Argentine pampas.

This month the Tribune Company accepted his offer to buy the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Baltimore Sun, 23 TV stations and other assets. Zell announced he will take the company private. That will eliminate shareholder pressure to show short-term financial gains.

Until the shareholders approve the sale, two other billionaires, Ron Burkle and Eli Broad, may submit a higher bid. In that case, Zell would be paid a \$25 million buy-out fee — all for having the nerve to make an \$8.2 billion offer but only risk \$315 million of his own money.

Zell is actually acquiring 40% of the company and has proposed letting the Tribune's employees share the profits — and the risks — with him. He wants to install an employee stock ownership plan as a way to lower taxes on the sale. Critics have called him a predatory investor. Zell calls himself "a professional opportunist"

"I was never really driven by accumulation," he said. "I was much more driven by achievement."

For Jerry Bellune's new book, "Lead People, Manage Things", see www.JerryBellune.com

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