

Signs pointing to economic revival

By WILLIAM HOLLOMAN
Staff Writer

A noticeable economic recovery may be in motion.

Sales tax revenue reimbursements that are disbursed back to municipalities on a monthly basis indicate there is a recovery in progress here in Mount Olive.

And, officials say local merchants are expressing optimism too.

Town manager Charles Brown said monthly revenues for the month of March were up about \$4,000 over the previous monthly period.

He said March revenues totaled \$43,000 compared to \$39,000 sent back the previous month.

Two years ago Mount Olive annual sales tax reimbursements totaled \$600,000.

It dropped to \$500,000 the next year.

Brown said at the rate



LEADING A COMEBACK - Heroes Restaurant, a recent newcomer to the Mount Olive business scene, is thriving in the downtown business district and one of many local businesses seeing an increase in patronage. (staff photo by JOHN CATE)

sales taxes are coming back this year the town can expect a slight increase-\$525,000 this year.

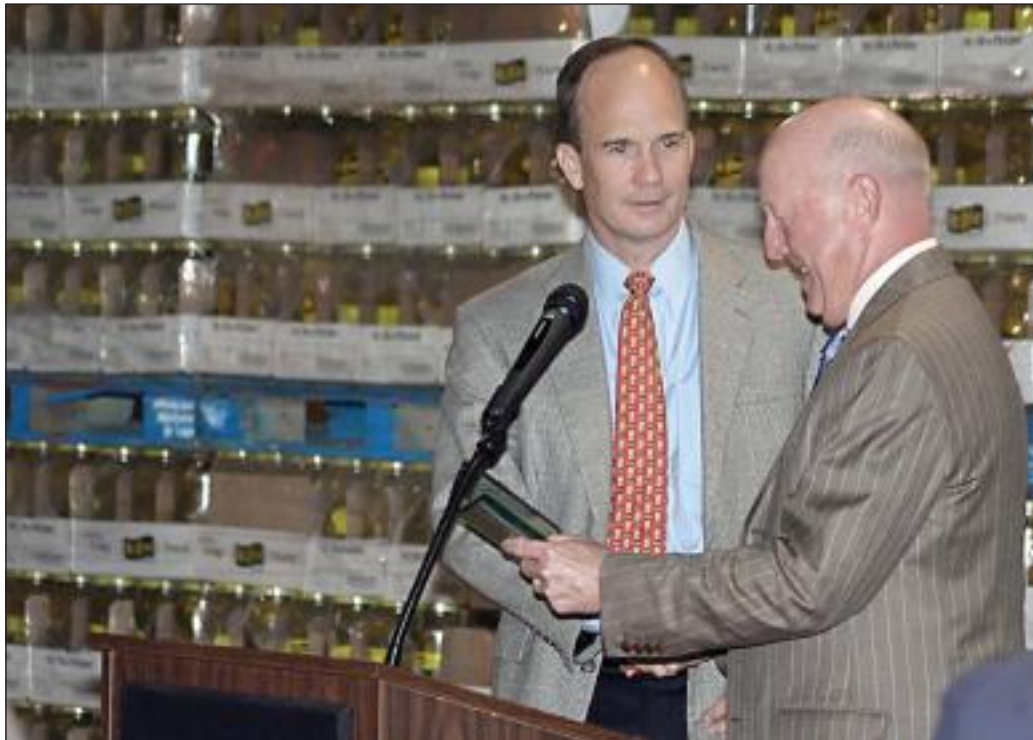
The town manager was asked of he feels these numbers indicate a recovery.

He responded in say-

ing, "I say this with a lot of caution- it seems to be. Our most recent sales tax return was better than we have seen in a while. I don't know if that if it is a one month bump or what, but

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Honor for Mt. Olive CEO



BRYAN RECEIVES AWARD - Mt. Olive Pickle Company CEO Bill Bryan (left) receives the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) Being a Difference Award last Wednesday, June 16. Mr. Bryan was nominated for the award by local businessman Barton Baldwin. Presenting the award is NASBA President David Costello. See page 14 for a full story on this event. (staff photo by BARRY MERRILL)

Town budget passes easily

By WILLIAM HOLLOMAN
Staff Writer

The Town of Mount Olive 2010-2011 fiscal year general fund budget of \$2.9 million was unanimously approved without issue during a special session of town commissioners on Monday night of this week.

The "no frills" operating budget provides no salary hikes for the second straight year, maintains the current property tax rate, and reflects a small monthly water/sewer rate hike.

The increased rates, \$1 to \$3 per month, depending on use, are effective on July 1 and will show up when customers receive their bill in early August.

The budget document has been described as a "keep on keeping on" budget, and becomes effective on July 1.

In other Monday night business, commissioners approved action that will tax video gaming operations, approved a no smoking policy for Westbrook

Park, and approved other action that provides for enforcement and fines to persons who violate an already existing state law that prohibits blowing grass or other yard waste into streets and blocking storm drains.

The video poker taxation also goes into effect on July 1, and involves one such business here.

The privilege license fee soon to be effective requires an annual license fee of \$2,500 per business and another \$500 per computer unit in each business.

The no smoking ban at Westbrook Park was implemented due to big concerns about a possible fire from burning cigarettes in the area of Kids World.

Smokers now are limited to picnic shelter areas only, and there are six of them in the town's park.

The new ordinance will be enforced by police, and violators will be fined \$100 per offense.

The ordinance now in effect prohibits persons from being responsible for any



PLANNING BOARD CHANGES - Mount Olive Planning Board chair Dr. Gena Knode discusses a change in the board's membership make-up during a public hearing before town commissioners on Monday night of this week. In the background are: (from left) town attorney Carroll Turner, and commissioners Hosea Manley, George Fulghum and Kenny Talton. (staff photo by WILLIAM HOLLOMAN)

type of yard waste clogging up storm drains in town.

The board unanimously adopted the ordinance on Monday night, and directed the town's code enforcement officer to enforce it.

Violators will be fined \$150 for the offense, and if the violation has not been corrected within three days the fine is \$150 per day.

The new regulation resulted because of both residents and commercial operators blowing cut grass trimmings into the town's streets, ultimately clogging up storm drains and causing flooding issues.

The board also approved action that changes the make-up of the town's planning board.

The board membership numbers were officially changed from 10 to seven regular members, and three alternates.

A local regulation amendment requiring new business operators coming into town to use screens to remove business dumpsters from public view was tabled for further review.

Duplin Co. settles on budget, but no pay raise

By JILL BAKER
Correspondent

After a long and sometimes contentious debate over the past month, the Duplin County Board of Commissioners passed an operating budget for the upcoming 2010-11 fiscal year during their meeting Monday night.

Unfortunately for the employees of the county, one of the provisions of the new budget that they were looking forward to was taken out prior to the vote.

The Commissioners voted against a two percent, across the board salary increase for Duplin county employees. They agreed to adopt a policy to create a fair evaluation system to grant merit pay system for the following year, after a lengthy debate on the issue of employee salaries.

Commissioner Frances Parks shared her concern about merit pay vs. annual salary increases for all employees, stating that "(the) fairest raise is based on merit.... we need to work with managers and department heads to implement a system... goal to develop a evaluation tool for all employees."

Commissioner David Fussell, who joined Parks in advocating a merit pay system, made a motion for the Commissioners to budget \$250,000 for merit pay for next year's budget. The motion was not passed, following discussion that a policy first needed to be implemented on merit pay before money should be budgeted.

Commissioner opinions were spilt on merit pay or the proposed two percent salary increase for everyone.

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Clarice Sherard

SWHS' Sherard to play college volleyball

Wake Technical Community College volleyball head coach George Tsai announced that Clarice Sherard of Dudley is one of five new recruits for the 2010 season. Sherard was a varsity player at Southern Wayne High School, and also played for the Wave club volleyball team. She joins Brittany Brown of Wilmington, Emily Ellington of Henderson, Maria Muna of Fayetteville and Brandy Driver of

Louisburg in signing national letters of intent to play at Wake Tech.

"Clarice can hit quick, and has good height and reach - she's a great blocker," says Coach Tsai. "She'll be a great asset to our team."

Last year, the Wake Tech's women's volleyball team finished third in the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA), Division 1, Region X with a record of 12-9. The team finished

its inaugural 2008 season in fourth place with a 6-9 record. The new recruits will join five returning players on the team. Tryouts for other interested players will be held August 2-3 at the North Raleigh Christian Academy in Raleigh.

The women's volleyball team kicks off its 2010 season on Aug. 27, when it competes against Davidson Community College at Davidson.

Town gets go-ahead to spend extra \$140K on depot

By WILLIAM HOLLOMAN
Staff Writer

North Carolina Department of Commerce Community Assistance Division officials have authorized the use of \$140,000 that was left over when the interior renovation of the old train depot bid came in unexpectedly low.

The state grant to the Town of Mount Olive had totaled \$434,500,

and when the bid was awarded and other engineering and design expenses were approved the remaining money turned out to be a blessing.

Town manager Charles Brown said he immediately asked state authorities if that money could be used for additional insulation expenses and for outside area landscaping, and sprucing up work, in-

cluding beautification efforts to an adjoining parking lot.

He said state approval came, but the funds must be used by no later than June 30.

The \$181,000 contract for the depot interior overhauling went to Dixie Contractors of Wallace.

Brown said he feels that getting that contractor to do additional work will be no problem at all.

Brown said he is pleased with the state cooperation that allows expanding the scope of the overall project.

"I am confident that we can have those additional funds obligated and under contract by the 30th of June," said the town manager.

He said the only thing it will most likely involve is a change order with the contractor.

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SPECIAL HONOR FOR COUPLE

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THE CHILDREN OF ONE LOCAL COUPLE are surprised by a special gift in their honor from their two adult children.

SC TOPS S. WAYNE

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SPRING CREEK'S Junior Legion team holds off Southern Wayne for a 10-7 win.