

ST. TAMMANY NEWS



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Add British flair to your meal

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Woman sentenced for stealing \$3M

Strain, Davis argue over jail funding

Sheriff asks for \$2 million, Parish President says no

By **Suzanne Le Breton**
St. Tammany News

Threats and mudslinging continue as St. Tammany Parish President Kevin Davis and Sheriff Jack Strain battle over who's responsible for funding the St. Tammany Parish Jail.

Strain has asked parish government to allocate \$2 million annually out of its

\$13.7 million general fund budget to help pay for the expenses of running the 1,200 bed facility.

Without that money, Strain said he couldn't continue operating the jail at full capacity.

Recently, because of lack of funding, Strain was forced to release 100 prisoners and lay off 30 officers who worked in the jail.

He said those numbers will only grow if he does not get the funding he needs from the parish.

Davis said the parish, which has slimmed down its own budget to match the economic times, does not have the money to put toward the jail.

Regardless, he stands by his opinion that the parish has done its part by turning

over the proceeds from a quarter-cent sales tax dedicated to jail maintenance and operations.

In a letter Davis sent to Strain Wednesday, the parish president states, "when the jail sales taxes was implemented it was intended to fund the parish's obligations for the jail solely with the tax."

"When the parish gov-

ernment agreed to present the jail sales tax to voters in 1998 it was intended that the tax would completely fulfill all parish obligations for jail funding and prisoner care once the remittance reached a sustainable level," he wrote.

Davis points out in his letter that the revenue derived from the tax has increased from \$4.1 million



DAVIS

STRAIN

in 1998/1999 to \$9.5 million in 2008/2009.

He said when looking at the sales tax collection after debt service, the increase is

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Keeping track



Fire District One Chief Larry Hess, left, and Information Technology Officer Bobby Worchel show the new Safescene radio transmitter "sticks" that will let fire supervisors know where their firefighters are located on a fire scene through the computer. (Staff Photo by Erik Sanzenbach)

New technology will help keep Fire District firefighters safe

By **Erik Sanzenbach**
St. Tammany News

Looking at it for the first time is not very impressive.

It's a plastic stick-like rectangle about six inches long with two screw holes at each end, and nothing else. But Fire District One Chief Larry Hess said the unassuming device would go a long way in keeping his firefighters safe at a fire.

The "sticks" as Informa-

tion Technology Officer Bobby Worchel calls them, are actually imbedded with a computer chip that is a radio transmitter. The radio signals are picked up by a wireless receiver in the battalion commander's truck and transmitted to a computer. From a color-coded display the chief can see exactly where his men are located around a fire scene, because each firefighter has a stick in a pocket of their fire gear.

There are also sticks located in every fire truck and vehicle that responds to the scene.

The sticks which have a range of 300 feet helps commanders at a fire scene manage personnel more efficiently. He can tell certain groups to go to the rear of a burning building, and others to stand by for other duties.

"It's not a GPS system," Worchel said. "It just tells the commander, 'they are

here.'"

If for example, firefighters get into trouble, like a wall collapses on them, and they send out a mayday, the commander will know exactly who is in there. In fact, the sticks are programmed to tell the commander the identity of the firefighter, the rank, blood type and next of kin.

As firefighters and fire apparatus show up on the

SEE **SAFE**, PAGE 5A

Council approves raise for Covington mayor

By **Debbie Glover**
St. Tammany News

Despite a year fraught with economic difficulties and a downturn in sales tax collections, the Covington City Council approved a 4 percent raise for Mayor Candace Watkins, who has not received a salary increase in three years.

The addition would increase her salary from \$66,144 to \$68,640, a raise she said she would not accept. She would be the only city employee to receive a raise for 2010.

The raise was passed by a vote of 5-1, with Councilman Marty Benoit voting against the raise and Councilman Clarence Romage absent from the meeting.

In a discussion about the mayor's salary, Councilwoman Frances Dunn said that no employee should make more than their boss. At present, City Administrator Beverly Gareip and Police Chief Richard Palmisano make more than the mayor. Councilman Matt Faust said that the council has approved raises in the past few years, but the mayor has vetoed them.

Other considerations include health insurance; a life insurance policy of \$50,000; long-term disability insurance; and use of a city-owned vehicle for personal and city use; workman's compensation insurance; unemployment insurance; Medicare insurance and Louisiana Municipal Employees Retirement plan as other full-time city employees. Premiums for insurance will be paid by the city except health insurance, which is paid partially by city and partially by the employee.

In addition, the council unanimously passed an ordinance adopting the annual operating and capital outlay budget and the five-year capital outlay

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WEATHER

HI 75 • LOW 52

» **TODAY'S FORECAST:** Sunny skies.

» **TO SHARE** your child's weather drawing, e-mail to stnnews@wickcommunications.com or mail to P.O. Box 90, Covington, LA 70434



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Firefighters, friends raise \$12,000 for injured Slidell cheerleader

By **Erik Sanzenbach**
St. Tammany News

The Stokes family got a big boost to help with their daughter's medical bills Saturday as firefighters with Fire District One along with the donation of an anonymous Good Samaritan were able to raise over \$12,000 with a boot shake in Slidell.

For the past year, Northshore High cheerleader Ashlee Stokes has been going through intense rehabilitation after she was severely injured in a collision with a drunk driver 18 months ago. The family has been struggling with medical costs for the past year, but thanks to the kindness of the Slidell community, Ashlee will be able to continue her rehabilitation. She still suffers from the effects of the wreck and is working with several health professionals to overcome severe brain injury.

Firefighters stood on all

four corners at the intersection of Gause Boulevard and Rue Rochelle Saturday morning, shaking their boots and asking passing motorists to help out Ashlee Stokes.

Besides the firefighters the Northshore High and Boyet Junior High cheerleader squads all braved the chilly weather to help get donations for Ashlee. The Northshore High Band also collected donations at their band festival, where, according to Fire District One officials, an anonymous donor contributed "several thousand dollars," to the cause.

"It was really great, and we want to thank everyone who helped," said Chief of Fire Prevention for Fire District One Neal Ricca.

Local businesses also helped out during the boot shake. Raising Cane's restaurant provided food for the firefighters, Signs Now donated the signs for the event, and the New



Tyrone Collins Jr., right, collects a donation from a passing motorist Saturday morning on Gause Boulevard during a boot shake fundraiser by Fire District One to raise money to help pay for the medical treatment of local teen and cheerleader Ashlee Stokes, who was injured by a drunk driver last year. (Staff Photo by Erik Sanzenbach)

Orleans Firemen's Credit Union stayed open late to help out with counting and processing of the donations.

But there is still another chance to help out Ashlee.

SEE **\$12,000**, PAGE 5A

GREAT DEAL! That's how Chris B. described the classified ad for an apartment for rent he placed in the St. Tammany News. "The response to the rental ad I ran was overwhelming. They drove me crazy! It was a good deal. I will definitely call again."

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