



Newton Citizen

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Covington, Georgia
50 Cents

Police struggle with growth

Georgia State Patrol Senior Trooper Scott Edmondson waits for speeders in his patrol car. Because of growth, the GSP has been assisting the Newton County Sheriff's Office.



Staff Photo: Sean Kim Smith

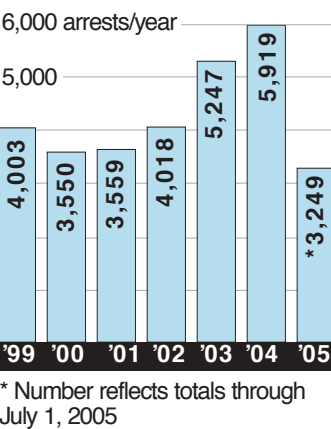
Editor's Note: Newton County is the fastest-growing county in Georgia, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This is part one of the seventh story in a series about how growth is affecting the county. Look for part two in Tuesday's Citizen.

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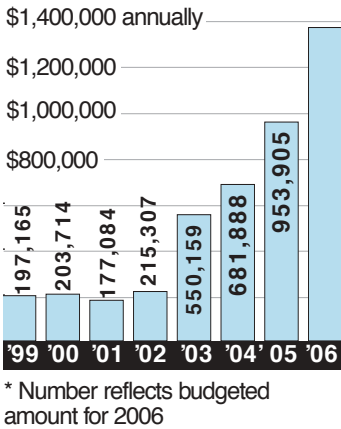
COVINGTON — More people flowing into Newton County every year translates into more crime, more traffic and more work all around for the law

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Newton County Number of Arrests



Newton County Inmates: Medical Costs



A leap in time



Staff Photo: Glin M. Severt

For a brief moment Sunday afternoon, it was 1978 all over again, as stuntman Corey Eubanks sailed 133 feet across the front of Seney Hall at Oxford College in a "General Lee" 1969 Dodge Charger. The jump was a re-enactment of the original jump featured in the opening credits of the "The Dukes of Hazzard" television show. The original jump took place on Nov. 11, 1978, and the car flew 81 feet. The stunt was being filmed as part of an episode of MTV's "Your Movie Show," which will focus on the origins of "The Dukes of Hazzard" July 27 during primetime. The MTV crew also spent time on the Square in Covington this weekend, filming interviews with locals who were here during filming of the original television show.

Two plead guilty in vehicular homicide cases

By **KIMBERLY MARTIN**
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COVINGTON — Two men accused in separate vehicular homicide incidents pleaded guilty to their charges Thursday in two emotional Newton County Superior Court hearings, Newton County Assistant District Attorney Melanie McCrorey said.

Johnny Roy Mathis, 43, of

1005 Ridge Ave., pleaded guilty to vehicular homicide and serious injury by vehicle, McCrorey said.

"He was almost three times the legal limit last Super Bowl Sunday when he



Johnny Mathis

hit a vehicle head on, permanently injuring the driver and killing the passenger, Tracie Payne," McCrorey said. Payne was a 31-year-old resident of Oxford. The wreck occurred on Mt. Zion Road.

Mathis received 15 years of probation with the first seven years to be served in confinement, McCrorey said.

"Tracie's mother gave an eloquent victim impact statement to

Judge (Horace) Johnson prior to sentencing," McCrorey said.

Alexander J. Gamadonis, 22, of 4189 Jackson Highway, pleaded guilty to DUI and vehicular homicide, McCrorey said. He was involved in a one-car accident over the summer of 2003 that killed his passenger.

"Gamadonis was sentenced to 15 years (of probation) to serve three (in confinement) in the death of his best friend," McCrorey said.

Children ejected from vehicle in single-car wreck

By **KIMBERLY MARTIN**
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COVINGTON — Charges are pending against a driver involved in a single-car accident July 3 in which two children were ejected from the vehicle, Georgia State Patrol Sgt. Frank Pfirman said.

Newton County Sheriff's Office Deputy Kelly Singley, who arrived first on the accident scene, said a 37-year-old

woman was driving the car and that her two passengers — a 4-year-old boy and an 11-year-old boy — were ejected. Singley stated in his incident report that the car, a Toyota MR2, was heading south on Ga. 36 and that the accident happened near the T&H One Stop store, located at 14625 Ga. 36.

"Due to weather conditions, the driver lost control of the vehicle, left the roadway and struck a culvert at the driveway of the new high school," Singley said.

"The children were taken to (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at) Egleston."

The driver was taken to Newton Medical Center, he said.

Pfirman said all three were injured and that the children were not wearing seat belts. He said improper child restraint charges are pending against the driver.

Egleston reported that the children were in stable condition on the day of the accident, Pfirman said.

"They won't give me a whole lot of information ... but I think they're probably doing OK," Pfirman said. "They were both talking and coherent."

Pfirman said the driver hydroplaned before crossing over the northbound lane of Ga. 36, hitting the culvert then flipping over. He said the car only had two seats and that both of the boys were in the front passenger seat.

"The older one was holding the younger one," he said.

City to hold impact fee work session

By **CRYSTAL TATUM**
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COVINGTON — The Covington City Council will meet to figure out where members will go from here with impact fees at a 6:30 p.m. work session tonight.

Last month, City Attorney Ed Crudup questioned the legality of the city entering into the county's impact fee program, which went into effect in March.

Crudup said that he doesn't believe the city can legally collect for the county.

"I understand the law to say that in order for you to collect the fees they must be imposed — just like a tax; for example, an ad valorem tax," Crudup said in a follow-up interview. "The only entity that can impose fees on development within the incorporated areas are the corporations themselves, that is, the municipal corporations — Newborn, Mansfield, Oxford, Covington and Porterdale."

The council will discuss the pros and cons of imposing its own fees or acting as collectors for the county, and will hear from Crudup, who has researched the matter further since last month's meeting, Mayor Sam Ramsey said.

"I'm very much in favor of going with the county and letting them administer (the fees)," Ramsey

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Man sentenced in sexual battery

By **KIMBERLY MARTIN**
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COVINGTON — An area man arrested in August 2002 on sexual battery and related charges finally concluded his nearly three-year journey through the Newton County judicial system Tuesday.

Alcovy Judicial District Superior Court Judge John Ott sentenced Samuel Lee Mosley, no age or address available, to 10 years of probation with the first year to be served in work release, Newton County Assistant District Attorney Melanie McCrorey said. McCrorey handled Mosley's sentencing hearing.

Mosley originally was charged with rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, aggravated battery Family Violence and sexual battery. The rape and kidnapping charges were dropped in late March when he entered guilty pleas on the other charges, she said.

Newton County Assistant District Attorney Layla Hinton, who handled Mosley's trial up to the sentencing hearing, said that Mosley's charges stemmed from an incident in which he allegedly picked up his girlfriend in a vehicle, battered her, drove her to a hotel and battered her further.

"In the midst the two were arguing, and he struck her several times," Hinton said. "This was witnessed by individuals at gas stations."

She said Mosley took the girlfriend to a hotel, where he committed a sexual offense against her and held her against her will.

Newton County District Attorney Ken Wynne said

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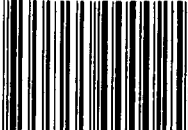
World 4A

WEATHER



Thunderstorms and showers likely. Windy. Highs in the low 80s.
More weather, 2A

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Bibb County trying to do better job collecting fines

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MACON — Bibb County officials are hoping more manpower will help them do a better job collecting fines for misdemeanor violations.

More than \$2 million in fines have gone uncollected by the county's state court system.

Court officials and county commissioners have been discussing ways to solve the problem, including adding staff.

State Court Judge Bill

Adams said he will ask commissioners about hiring another employee for the state court system to handle outstanding warrants and try to collect the fines, some of which date back to 1981.

The employee would help track down the more than 6,000 misdemeanor violators — people convicted of domestic violence, simple battery, traffic offenses, small thefts and the like — who don't contact their probation officer or pay their fines.

"Once you start banging

on their door ... that's very powerful," said Greg Guest, the court's chief probation officer.

Adams made the same request for a new employee in 2003, but, amid budget concerns, the position was never funded. At the time, there was some discussion about contracting the work out to a private company, but Guest said he'd rather see the job stay in-house, where officials have arrest powers. The court also could attempt to garnish violators' wages or condemn

their property — but that's often more trouble than it's worth because of the required court filings, Guest said.

Officials say that the local sheriff's department is stretched too thin in the area of manpower and that is why a new employee to help handle the collection of fines is needed.

Bibb County Commission Chairman Charles Bishop said he won't second-guess the court's decision and "it's up to (Adams)" whether to add a new employee.

Sentenced

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Mosley's sentence was part of the plea negotiation and was based upon the relative strength of the evidence in the case. Hinton said the victim had input into the plea deal and approved of it.

"We always take into consideration the victim's wishes, and we wanted her to avoid the ordeal of having a trial," Hinton said.

Fee

•From Page 1A

said. "I don't mind telling you where I'm coming from. But that's a council decision."

The work session will take place in the conference room at City Hall, located on Emory Street.

The council will convene again at 7:30 p.m. for its regular meeting.

At that meeting, the council is expected to adopt a rollback millage rate of 8.518. The council is also expected to vote on several city ordinance amendments,

including one that would limit condominiums, townhouses, duplexes and apartment complexes to the R-4 zoning district. Another would reduce the minimum lot sizes for the R-3 and R-4 districts from 12,000 square feet to 8,000 square feet.

Police

•From Page 1A

enforcement officers of the Newton County Sheriff's Office and the Covington Police Department.

Newton County Sheriff Joe Nichols, who has served for 38 years in Newton County law enforcement, has witnessed much of the county's growth explosion first-hand in his nearly four decades behind the badge.

In 1976, Nichols said, it cost a little more than \$1 million to operate the entire Sheriff's Office. Now, 30 years later, the budget tops \$14.4 million for fiscal year 2006, which began July 1.

With the growth, Nichols said he has seen a proportionate increase in drug and violent crimes. Violent crimes — crimes against people — have not increased as rapidly as crimes against property, he said.

With Newton's recent building boom, Nichols said burglars are increasingly looting construction sites and making off with high-dollar building goods such as heavy equipment and machinery, generators, tools, building materials, house fixtures and appliances.

Many of the looters do not call Newton County home, though, he said. Many recent burglary arrests have involved people from neighboring metro counties such as DeKalb, involving burglars who make their entrances and exits via I-20 under the cloak of night.

"We have long been a target of opportunistic thefts," he said. "Most of the folks that we lock up come in from other metro counties — it's been like that for years and years."

Traffic issues

Speaking of I-20, the Interstate is just one Newton County road that's remained the same for decades, while the number of people driving on it, and other routes, has grown exponentially.

"There's not that many new roads," Nichols said, "but there are plenty more cars."

Inevitably, this translates into more traffic tickets and more auto accidents, Nichols and Covington Police Chief Stacey Cotton said.

Nichols said he has recently had to bring the Georgia State Patrol in to help with about 30 percent of the NCSO's traffic accident investigations, in addition to lending a hand on basic traffic enforcement.

"A lot of our traffic enforcement is delegated to the GSP in high-accident areas and in areas with high numbers of speeders," Nichols said. "It frees our deputies up for other duties."

Cotton said increased traffic is the No. 1 growth-

related challenge he has had to deal with in the city for the past few years.

"Traffic congestion leads to people being impatient, which leads to people speeding on secondary roads," Cotton said. "People are taking more cut-throughs and short cuts and are running more red lights."

Eighteen years ago, Cotton said the department's main issue was to stay in neighborhoods and be seen. Now, traffic is tops.

"Then, only one patrol car was equipped with radar," Cotton said. "Now all the cars are."

NCSO deputies, including Paul Gunter, drive patrol cars equipped with laptop computers that also serve as electronic street maps of Newton County. Gunter said he has been with the Sheriff's Office for about four years and previously worked for the CPD.

Gunter said new roads show up in Newton County all the time, but they are all residential and have their own share of traffic problems in no time. He said the streets, especially those in subdivisions, have problems with speeding and people using the streets as cut-throughs.

"We add four to 12 streets a week into the computer, which makes it easier to find new streets," Gunter said. "Each deputy has about 26 to 30 square miles we each have to handle, so it's good to know how to get (to each location) as quickly as possible."

Shifting demographics

Some shifts in Newton County crime patterns may have just as much to do with economic and societal change as it does with growth, Nichols said. Such patterns also are not unique to Newton, he said.

Nichols said he feels the economic downturn of the past few years has contributed to the increase in property theft and that more two-income families have prompted the rise in home break-ins.

"With more homes that have both a husband and wife working, those homes are more attractive to burglars," he said.

With shifting family profiles also comes shifting family and societal dynamics, Nichols said.

Newton County currently ranks sixth in the state in number of TPOs issued and served, he said, with a whopping 431 in 2004 and, so far, 146 in 2005, up from a mere 19 in 1999.

According to the Cobb County District Attorney's Web site, a TPO is a legal document issued by a court to help victims obtain protection from persons abusing, harassing, or stalking them.

"Last year we served four

times the number that Chatham County did," he said. Chatham County is home to the city of Savannah on Georgia's east coast.

Another area of crime that has grown in Newton County, Nichols said, is sex crimes, including sexual predators and child molesters. However, he said he attributes the rise not just to growth, but to an increase in reporting of such incidents. "This may show some success," he said. "Kids are being told it's all right to tell."

Inside the city of Covington, where there is a larger concentration of businesses,

Cotton said he has seen an increase in identification theft and fraud cases. He said he blames the increase not necessarily on people from out of town but on a rise in the population in general.

However, Newton is not alone in its trends as far as suburban Atlanta counties are concerned, Nichols said.

"Our statistics mirror Fayette and Carroll counties — our demographics are a lot like theirs ... I'd be devastated if I thought we were alone," Nichols said. "Any of our statistics will reflect some growth in the population."

DEATHS, FUNERALS

Gannon

William J. Gannon, age 52, died July 9, 2005, at his home with his family by his side. He was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2002, and his death resulted from complications of that illness.



Mr. Gannon was born in Columbus, Ga., to Edward J. Gannon and the late Martha White Gannon. He was a 1971 graduate of Kendrick High School, received a bachelor's degree from Columbus State University in Education and History and was awarded a master's degree in Human Resources from Troy State University in 1980. He began his business career in Columbus with Swift Textile.

After earning his master's degree, Mr. Gannon worked a human resource manager for several firms before accepting a position in Bainbridge, Ga., with Amoco in 1989. Mr. Gannon's career took him to Chicago, Ill., Houston, Texas, Augusta, Ga., and finally to Covington, Ga., where he was appointed Regional Human Resource Manager with Pactiv. Mr. Gannon retired from Toys R' Us due to his advancing illness in 2003. He was a member of the Newton County Chamber of Commerce, where he was very involved in the Leadership Newton Program. He served on the board of directors for the Covington Y.M.C.A. He also was a member of several professional organizations.

Mr. Gannon served on, and previously chaired, the local chapter of the Literacy Volunteers of America. Mr. Gannon loved golf and annually attended the Masters Tournament. He enjoyed membership at the Honey Creek County Club and Golf Community. He was a member of the Honey Creek Homeowners Association and served as president of the association for several terms. He was an avid University of Georgia fan and purchased a red Corvette in honor of his beloved Bulldogs.

He is survived by his loving wife of 31 years, Martha Jane (Ingram) Gannon; sons, Joshua Barrett and Jonathan Hight Gannon, both of Conyers; father and stepmother, Edward J. and Betty Gannon of Phenix City, Ala.; sister, Katherine and Lt. Col. Tom Kee of Columbus, Ga.; stepbrothers, Dana and Steven Simmons of Georgia. He is also survived by many beloved aunts, uncles, cousins, other family members and friends.

The family will receive friends and family in Conyers at Horis A. Ward Funeral Home, Rockdale Chapel, from 5-8 p.m. today. A funeral service will be held at 2 p.m. on Tuesday at Ward's Rockdale Chapel. A second service with burial will take place at 11 a.m. Wednesday at Mt. Zion Methodist Church in Glenn, Ga. Contributions may be made to Mt. Zion Methodist Church in memory of Mr. Gannon, c/o Hollis Crockett, Treasurer, Glenn Road, Franklin, GA 30217.

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Lovin

Craig Lovin, age 17, of Greensboro, Ga., died Thursday, July 7, 2005. Born in Clarke County on Jan. 12, 1988, he was the son of Bruce and Vicki Lovin of Greensboro. He was a student at Greene County High School, where he was a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, treasurer of FFA and lettered in football, baseball and basketball. Along with school sports, he loved hunting, fishing and all outdoor activities.

Craig was a member of Bethesda Baptist Church of Union Point. In addition to his parents, he is survived by a sister, Katie Lovin, and a brother, Cody Lovin, of the home maternal grandparents, Tom and Linda Smith of Athens, Ga.; paternal grandparents, Henry and Jean Lovin of Conyers, Ga.; aunts and uncles, Danny and Becky Moore of Conyers, Mark and Sherri Smith of Gainesville, Ga., Don and Donna Sorrells of Pendergrass, Ga., and Steve and Paula Loyd of Cumming, Ga.; several cousins, other relatives and friends.

Funeral services were held Sunday, July 10, at Bethesda Baptist Church in Union Point with Rev. Jim Olds, Rev. Dave Sandridge and Rev. Jim Martin officiating. Interment was at the church cemetery. Serving as pallbearers were Dan Fowler, Bo Fowler, Tyler Moore, Hunter Sheffield, Cole Sumner, Garrett Usry, Shaun McCommons, John Calvin Kinser, Blake Cook and Josh Clifton. Honorary pallbearers were Bethesda Baptist Church Youth and Greene County High School Football Team.

The family requests memorials be made to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Georgia, 2625 Cumberland Parkway, Suite 205, Atlanta, Ga. 30339, McCommons Funeral Home, Greensboro, 706-453-2626, is in charge of the arrangements. Visit www.mccommonsfuneralhome.com to sign the online guest register.

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Merritt

Mrs. Sarah B. Merritt of Conyers died July 9, 2005. She is survived by two daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Frank (Cheryl) Cline of Tocca, Mr. and Mrs. James (Lynnet) Coursey of Conyers; sons, Mr. and Mrs. Ray (Beverly) Crossley of Sugar Hill and Mr. Davis Crossley of Monroe; 10 grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at 4 p.m. today at Scot H. Ward Funeral Services — Harry White Chapel with Rev. Lenn Barnard and Rev. Ken Stephens officiating. Interment will follow at Lithonia City Cemetery. Scot H. Ward Funeral Service — Harry White Chapel, 1299 Milstead Ave., Conyers, 770-483-7216.

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Smith

Mrs. Bobbie G. Smith of Conyers, died July 9, 2005. She is survived by her husband, Gene Smith of Conyers; in-laws, Tommy and Barbara Smith of High Point, N.C., Anne S. Williams of Pensacola, Fla.; four nieces; three nephews; and one cousin.

Mrs. Smith recently celebrated 36 years of marriage. She retired after 30 years with Southern Bell, was a faithful member of Haven Fellowship Church, Faith Sunday School Class and chairperson of the Congregational Care Team of the church.

Funeral services will be at 2 p.m. today, July 11, at Harry White Chapel. Entombment will be at Longwood Cemetery. Rev. Steve Powers will officiate. In lieu of flowers, contributions to Haven fellowship Baptist Church Building Fund. Scot Ward Funeral Service, Harry White Chapel, 770-483-7216, is in charge of the arrangements.

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