

**State of the County Address**  
**County of Bladen**  
**February 2, 2009**

Bladen County Citizens:

It is my privilege and honor this evening to report to you on the state of Bladen County. County government plays an important role in the lives of our citizens, and I hope this address will serve as an opportunity to better educate our citizens about the positive role county government plays in our lives. Bladen County provides essential services such as public health and social services, solid waste, law enforcement and emergency medical services. Bladen County provides funding to build and maintain schools and to offer educational opportunities, not only in our public schools, but also at Bladen Community College. Bladen County provides land-use planning and economic development services, as well as libraries, recreation programs and services for senior adults. These many important services are provided for the protection and benefit of our citizens.

2008 has been a very productive year for Bladen County, with the completion of important projects and initiatives. The Board of Commissioners, County staff, and the many citizens who serve on advisory boards and in other capacities, have worked together to achieve these accomplishments. We are also continuing to work together to build on a framework for the future that will provide enhanced services and a better quality of life for the citizens of this great county.

I would like to take a moment to highlight the following accomplishments from 2008:

- **Hospital Affiliation:** The Bladen County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a lease of Bladen County Hospital by Cape Fear Valley Health System. This lease and operating agreement, which became effective on June 1, culminated a formal, comprehensive search for a first-class healthcare organization, such as Cape Fear Valley Health System, to affiliate with Bladen County Hospital.
- **Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting:** The Bladen County Finance Office received this award for the first time, based on the preparation of the County's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. This certificate is a reflection of Bladen County's culture of strong financial management and reporting.
- **Excellence in Innovation in Economic Development Award:** Bladen's Bloomin' Agri-Industrial, Inc. was selected to receive this prestigious award by the U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration, based on the creation of an economic development program that harnesses innovation and public-private partnerships to capitalize on regional assets in a rural area. This is one of only 7 awards for Excellence in Economic Development presented nationally each year.
- **Solid Waste Convenience Center Project:** There are now seventeen staffed convenience centers fully operational in Bladen County and the last remaining

open box dumpsters for public use have been removed. This project represents great progress in the collection and management of solid waste.

- **Solid Waste Transportation and Disposal Agreements:** The Board of Commissioners approved 10-Year Transportation and Disposal Agreements for the delivery and disposal of solid waste at the Waste Industries Landfill in Sampson County. Both agreements resulted in substantial cost savings for these services.
- **Comprehensive Recycling Program:** Bladen County has partnered with Bryant's Recycling to provide collection containers for recyclables at the County's convenience centers. This program will provide multiple benefits, including: an environmentally responsible service desired by many citizens, reduced disposal costs with every recyclable product removed from the waste stream and better stewardship of the environment by burying less waste in the landfill.
- **Guaranteed Energy Savings Project:** Bladen County has partnered with Energy Systems Group to implement a number of energy conservation measures throughout the County's buildings and to provide facility upgrades such as HVAC improvements, lighting, and water conservation measures. The annual savings associated with the energy conservation measures is guaranteed to equal or exceed the cost of the annual debt service associated with this \$1.3 million project.
- **2008 Elections Process:** The Board of Elections, Elections Director and Staff are to be commended for the level of professionalism and service provided during the 2008 Primary and General Election. A record number of voters participated, with more than 10,000 casting ballots during the Early Voting process.
- **Animal Shelter Expansion:** This North Carolina Department of Agriculture approved facility, which includes sixty additional pens, enables staff to better manage the growing animal population and to expand the adoption program, which relies heavily on a group of dedicated volunteers.
- **Library Exhibition Grant:** Bladen County Library received notification of a grant award to host the exhibition *Pride & Passion: The African American Experience in Baseball* scheduled to visit Bladen County in 2012. Library staff member Shamella Cromartie successfully prepared the award winning grant application and traveled to Cooperstown, NY for training at the Baseball Hall of Fame.
- **Enhanced Emergency Medical Dispatch:** The Bladen County 911 Center received a grant from the Duke Endowment to upgrade its Emergency Medical Dispatch program from a flip card system to a computer system, which has enhanced service and quality of pre-hospital care in medical emergencies.
- **Storm Ready County Designation:** Thanks to the efforts of Bladen County Emergency Management, the National Weather Service has designated Bladen County as a Storm Ready County.
- **Dental Services for Children:** The Bladen County Health Department partnered with the Columbus County Health Department to bring its Dental Van to Bladen County Schools. The van was stationed at Bladenboro Primary School, and, sixty-one children in need of dental services received care.

- **Paramedic Service:** Bladen County received approval from the State Office of Emergency Medical Services to operate at the Paramedic level for Emergency Medical Services. State approval was based on Bladen County's successful Paramedic Service Pilot Program, which began in March 2008.
- **Pet Wellness and Hurricane Preparedness Expo:** Bladen County Cooperative Extension and the Bladen County Animal Response Team (CART) hosted a Pet Wellness event. The purpose of the event was to promote pet safety practices. It included reduced costs for rabies vaccinations and microchip implants. Extension and CART also hosted the second annual Hurricane Preparedness Expo to educate citizens about the importance of developing a plan and being prepared before hurricane season arrives.
- **DSS "Job Coach" Grant:** The Department of Social Services Work First Family Assistance Unit was awarded \$159,712.00 in grant funding for the development of a Job Coach/Job Developer pilot program to help clients maintain success in the workplace. Due to the success of this pilot program, Bladen County was recognized by the State for its Work First "Best Practices". Bladen County's model will be provided to all counties in the state to assist in the development of Work First initiatives.

There are also a number of important projects or initiatives to be addressed in 2009, including:

- **GIS Orthophoto Project:** Bladen County joined with six neighboring counties to update its orthophotography. This collaborative project provides economy of scale, enabling participating counties to obtain a more competitive price. Bladen County was awarded a grant to fund a portion of the project cost, with the remaining cost being funded by 911 fees. The orthophotography should be received in early 2009.
- **Enhanced-911 System Upgrade:** Bladen County will be installing a new telephone processing system in the 911 Center. This new Patriot/Sentinel system will allow telecommunicators to process voice over internet protocol (VOIP) emergency calls and text messages. This system will also enable Bladen County to join other counties in a satellite based alternate Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) to provide continuity of service in the event that Bladen County's 911 Center is unable to function.
- **Emergency Medical Services Facility:** Bladen County EMS will relocate to a new facility tentatively planned for the Elizabethtown Airport Industrial Park. This facility is needed to accommodate the increased number of employees and equipment associated with the significant growth in service demand in recent years.
- **Southeast Project Safe Neighborhood:** The Bladen County Sheriff's Office is partnering with the Columbus County Sheriff's Office on this new grant funded initiative. The goal of this project is to reduce violent crime by fighting gun violence and increasing prosecution of gun violators. This project will work closely with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

- **Financial Software Conversion:** Bladen County will soon be transitioning from in-house software to a commercial software application for Finance and Human Resources functions.
- **Water District Phase IIIA:** The Bladen County Water District has been awarded a low interest loan of approximately \$5.4 million from the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development for the construction of two new wells, one elevated storage tank, and 44 miles of water lines serving approximately 310 potential customers. This expansion will serve residents south of the Cape Fear River, primarily in the Council community and outside of the Bladenboro community.
- **Parks and Recreation Master Plan:** Bladen County has partnered with East Carolina University for the development of a Master Plan for the Bladen County Parks and Recreation Department. This plan, which is nearing completion, should provide short-term and long-term direction for recreation programs in the county.
- **VIPER Communications Project:** Bladen County is transitioning to a VIPER communications system. This \$2.1 million project includes the replacement of radio systems for all public safety agencies in the county. The UHF radio system is being reconfigured to ensure countywide paging capability and all radio equipment and dispatch consoles in the 911 Center are being replaced. This project, which will provide interoperable communications with agencies throughout the state, is scheduled to be completed and online in mid-February.

2008 has been a year of significant accomplishments - thanks to the dedication and hard work of many people. We are fortunate to have a great team of outstanding individuals including elected officials, staff and citizens who work so well together for the betterment of Bladen County.

In looking forward to 2009, we recognize that declining economic conditions will pose real challenges in developing the upcoming budget for Bladen County. However, as we continue our commitment to work strategically and cooperatively, and as we continue to follow our vision of “**providing customer focused county services efficiently and responsibly**”, our challenges can be transformed into opportunities and great accomplishments will be made in 2009.

Sincerely,

Billy Ray Pait, Chairperson  
Bladen County Board of Commissioners