



Calumet Township Tempo

Official publication of Calumet Township, Lake County, Indiana
Main Office: 610 Connecticut Street, Gary, Indiana 46402

Mary Elgin, Trustee

Fall/Winter, 2009

2010 Budget Passed Elgin budget gets township board nod



Unanimously in favor: Trustee Mary Elgin, right, thanking board members Ron Matlock, secretary; Alex Cherry, chairman, and Clorius Lay for passing the budget.

Some things take time to be done properly. So it was no surprise the Calumet Township Board took almost a month to analyze and approve the 2010 budget at a public meeting on Tuesday, October 20. The budget had been presented by Trustee Mary Elgin at a public hearing on Tuesday, September 22.

“Mr. Chairman and members of the board, it took a lot of hard work to craft the 2010 budget,” explained Elgin. “There is no whim and fancy associated with this budget,

just detailed analysis of what the township can afford given these trying times, without imposing heavier taxes on already hard-pressed property owners.”

Following tradition, Elgin then directed Curtis Whittaker, township financial consultant, to give the details.

“As the trustee said, these are tough economic times. But we should bear in mind the situation we face is not of our making. All local government units in Lake County face the same problems.”

(Continued on Page 7)

Township Board Approves Financial Requests

Calumet Township, like most local government units in Lake County, is feeling the financial pinch of late funding from the county because of delayed property tax payments. With that in

mind, the Calumet Township Board met Wednesday, December 9, and approved a number of resolutions from Trustee Mary Elgin dealing with financial matters, 2010 holidays and minor adjust-

ments to the eligibility standards for township assistance.

The board appropriated \$350,000 for Emergency Medical Service personal services covering 2009, subject to Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF) approval. Another annual ritual was granting the trustee the right to roll over payment of funds owed the Indiana Bond Bank and the township

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CALUMET TOWNSHIP
Lake County, Indiana



MISSION STATEMENT

Calumet Township is committed to providing professional, compassionate service to help residents in time of dire economic emergency. The township will utilize social services, job training and employment assistance to help clients in the transition from societal dependence to economic independence.

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Alex Cherry, Chairman
 Ron Matlock Secretary
 Clorius Lay, Member

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From me to you

Mary Elgin, Trustee

***“We’ve been through a tough 2009.
 Let’s hope 2010 will be better.”***

Most elected leaders, from President Barack Obama down, are surely breathing sighs of relief as we come to the end of 2009.

What started so gloriously with President Obama’s inauguration quickly spun out of control as the financial mess of the previous administration plummeted the nation into deep recession. Quick action by the president and Congress averted a real disaster, but we are still not wholly out of the woods.

As usual, Calumet Township is taking a huge hit as Gary, the region’s largest city and an integral part of the township, is facing monumental financial problems. While Griffith is not as badly off, it has also not been spared. As a matter of fact, our township is seeing more professionals and middle class families applying for assistance.

The problem is real and must be addressed. But how does a township battered by recession and uncertain tax payments cope? Unlike the federal government, we cannot just borrow or print more money. Even the state is facing serious financial problems, evidenced by the \$300 million cutback in education funds and the willingness to forgo rebuilding the endangered Cline Avenue Bridge. Where is all this leading?

The truth is ... no one knows for certain.

But anticipating this scenario sometime back, I worked closely with our financial team to get our house in order. Even though misunderstood by township boards in the past, I directed establishment of a rainy day fund which is seeing us through the current crisis. I also got out from under the onerous leasing of the southside office, consolidated operations at our new main office, and pared back the number of employees. Those were some of the tough decisions and actions that helped us survive and, I hope, might be sufficient to see us through these hard times. If not, I will have to consider other ways to get us through. I hope it doesn’t come to that.

Of course, there are other perennial problems that keep cropping up like moles. No matter how much you keep whacking them, they just pop up again. The main one is township elimination. This year I’ve been meeting with fellow township trustees and regional legislators to get a jump on the issue. If it crops up again we’ll be equipped to handle the situation in a concerted fashion rather than individually. After all, as the old saying goes, there’s strength in numbers.

To the people of Calumet Township and all employees, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous 2010.

Tax Caps “Shaft” Homeowners

According to analysis by the Post-Tribune, northwestern Indiana’s leading newspaper: “Property tax caps will take some \$70 million from the budgets of local governments in Lake County, but homeowners will see just \$2.9 million of that in savings—with businesses and landlords reaping 20 times more.”

While homeowners save a paltry \$2.9 million with the tax caps, rental properties save a bulky \$26 million and big businesses save a whopping \$41 million.

“That is a shocking indictment of the power of Big Business,” said Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin. “But I am not surprised at all. As a matter of fact I warned about this discrepancy back in the Summer of 2004 when U.S. Steel and Scott King, the former mayor of Gary, were trying to force a tax cap on local government entities in Gary.

“Now the reassessment formula of

one percent for homeowners, two percent for rentals, and three percent for businesses is wreaking havoc with all local budgets.”

Now other political leaders have adopted Elgin’s position. Again as reported by the Post-Tribune, Lake County Council Board President Larry Blanchard said that although he’s a Republican, even he believes tax rates are tilted too far in favor of businesses.

Another person who is not surprised is Calumet Township Assessor Booker Blumenberg. He was warning about such a pitfall for over five years to no avail. He even ended up taking U.S. Steel all the way to the Indiana Supreme Court, where he lost on a technicality allowing the company to dump former tax obligations unto homeowners..

Nevertheless, Elgin and Blumenberg have been proven right in the long run as local governments scramble to draft budgets in a fog of



Sounding a warning: Blumenberg decrying U.S. Steel tax breaks.

tax collection uncertainty.

On the other hand, there are those who feel Lake County brought the whole mess upon itself for refusing Governor Mitch Daniels’ admonition to enact a one-percent county income tax or face the consequences.

“They may say whatever they want,” said Elgin. “All I know is that at a time when the federal government is literally throwing billions at all sorts of companies, local governments who are expected to provide services are the ones feeling the squeeze.”

Dressing Kids Right for School



A uniform line, please: Township clients lining up to receive school uniform vouchers.

We see them going to school in crisp uniforms. We see them laughing, horse playing, just being kids in their crisp uniforms. We see them staring from the school bus windows, then alighting in their crisp uniforms.

We smile, admiring how neat they look, inwardly congratulating their parents on how well their kids look.

But have we ever wondered how the children are so adorned in the first place? Or do we just assume those crisp uniforms are almost a natural part of the wearers, something akin to their limbs?

The truth is a substantial number of Gary Community School Corporation families are unable to afford the expense of providing uniforms for their children. That is where Calumet Township comes in.

This year Calumet Township supplied almost \$120,000 in school uniform vouchers to 621 needy families.

“The school board established a policy of mandatory school uniforms a few years ago. It was an egalitarian policy meant to equalize all students so that there wouldn’t be problems caused by some brand-conscious kids wearing

flashy clothes and those who couldn’t afford them,” explained Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin.

According to Elgin, who sits on the school corporation’s truancy committee, wearing uniforms not only negates the *fashionista* playing field, but instills a sense of pride in the schools and provides an incremental academic boost.

“They are just kids and the fewer distractions they have to deal with, such as who’s wearing name-brand clothing, the more they are able to concentrate on their studies,” said Elgin. “We’re glad to help kids dress right for school.”

Battling Breast Cancer



Every nickle bit helps: Adina Williams selling dessert to Mary Felton as Samantha Pendleton waits to buy.

Displaying commitment from the heart, Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin and the township staff joined the nation in observing Breast Cancer Month in October. Activities included

a bake sale to raise funds plus a mandatory rally for all employees held at 3:00 p.m., October 9, at the main township office.

The rally featured a heartbreaking

speakerphone conversation with township employee Marva McKinney who suffers from breast cancer. McKinney told her colleagues she appreciated their prayers and support. "I'm truly glad to be with you, even if only by a telephone line," she said.

Elgin thanked McKinney for her courage in making her illness public, hoping it will help others. She said she became aware of the disease when her late mother contracted it and has been involved in breast cancer activities ever since.

According to Adina Williams, chairperson of the rally committee, \$1,200.00 was raised through selling 110 Tee shirts and baked goods. That exceeded the goal of \$1,000.00 and was \$900.00 more than raised last year.

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists breast cancer as the seventh highest cause of deaths among women in the U.S. In 2005, the latest year with such statistics, 41,116 women (and 375 men) died of the disease, compared to 329,238 who died of heart related diseases. The CDC also reports Indiana, at 96.4 to 113.7 per 100,000, is among the states with lower incidence of the disease, and has a death ratio of 22.6 to 23.6 deaths.



Somber, in light of the facts: Trustee Mary Elgin (second from left) joins township staff at breast cancer rally.

Fun in the Sun

Over 800 Calumet Township residents (and a smattering from surrounding areas) revelled at the biennial township picnic sponsored by Trustee Mary Elgin. The mid-summer event, held at Buffington Park opposite the main township office, featured lots of eats, entertainment and fun for the kids, including a portable water slide, funhouse and dunk-the-clown.

"I'm glad that so many people look forward to the picnic," said Trustee Elgin, while passing out gifts to senior citizens. "Best of all, the event is paid for by private donations and doesn't cost taxpayers a dime."



Can't wait for that tasty stuff: lining up to get some lip-smackin' foods served by volunteering township workers.

Importance of the 2010 Cen\$u\$



Census sense: Venus Cobb explaining census operation and goals.

sus, shortchanging the city by as much as \$4,000 per uncounted person.

The Census Bureau states over \$300 billion in federal funds and an even higher amount in state funds are available to communities based on the census. Census data also determine the number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives. The data also determines allocation of federal funds for community services such as school lunch programs, senior citizen centers, plus construction of highways and hospitals.

Darlene Bondurant, Jobs Search Works supervisor, is the township liaison with the census Bureau.

“I’m doing my best to make sure people are aware of the census and giving practice tests to clients in order to help them pass the bureau’s exam for census jobs,” said Bondurant. “I’m really thrilled to be a part of this.”

Mention the decennial census and most people think about counting heads and electoral redistricting. While both are true, the census is about more, much more. That is why Calumet Township has joined with the U.S. Census Bureau to ensure next year’s national tally is on target, at least in the township.

“Our township will face a financial loss if every resident isn’t counted,” Trustee Mary Elgin informed a census rally of employees and clients at the township’s main office on October 8. “We need to make sure everyone is counted so the federal government

doesn’t shortchange us when federal dollars are being doled out.

That sentiment was confirmed by Venus Cobb, a Census Bureau team leader, who addressed the gathering.

The U.S. population is well over 300 million now,” said Cobb. “But the count for Gary is all over the map. While there is evidence we’ve lost population, it is imperative that every resident of the city be counted because a lot of federal dollars are dispersed based on population.”

According to Cobb 50 percent of Garyites didn’t respond to the last cen-

Census Timeline

- Fall, 2009**
- Recruit workers
- Feb. - Mar., 2010**
- Questionnaires distributed
- April 1, 2010**
- Census Day
- May - July, 2010**
- Non-respondents verification
- December, 2010**
- Report delivered to President
- March 2011**
- Redistricting data sent to states

Stymied by the Stimulus



Unstimulated: Calumet Township employees Carolyn Jordan, John Gunn, James Hudson and Ella Marie Lewis listen disappointedly to problems faced by minorities seeking to access stimulus funds.

Minorities, especially African-Americans are not getting their fair share of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act’s (ARRA) stimulus dollars.

That was the gist of a disheartening message at a Purdue University

Indiana Black Legislative Caucus Symposium.

“Minority firms, as usual, are being left off the stimulus gravy train,” Harry Alford, National Black Chamber of Commerce president, told the gathering at the Hammond campus in Sep-

tember. “We must compile data from states and counties to see how much money is being funneled down and why we aren’t getting our fair share.”

He told of qualified black firms that were deliberately being shunted aside in favor of similar white firms.

“Whether by design or otherwise, it’s a shame,” said 2nd District State Rep. Earl Harris. He vowed to mobilize the caucus to try to rectify the deplorable situation.

“I agree with State Rep. Harris,” said Ella Marie Lewis who, along with John Gunn, Carolyn Jordan and James Hudson, attended the symposium. “We came here to learn what we could about accessing stimulus funds, but so far it’s all been negative. I’m really disappointed.”

“Still, there might be a glimmer of hope somewhere for us. I’ll contact U.S. Rep Pete Visclosky to see if there are any dollars the township qualifies for,” said Jordan.

Searching for a **JOB** in Tough Times



Takin' the first step: *Jobs fair attendees fill out application forms*

It's been over a year since the federal government's Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) bailed out the banks and other financial institutions. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) is meant to provide the stimulus jump-starting the economy.

That's all well and good at the macro level, but try telling that to the over 400 people who turned out to try

their luck at snaring a job at the Calumet Township Jobs Fair held September 9, at the Gary career Center.

"In a tough economy we always see more people coming out," observed Alex Wheeler, Jr., Calumet Township Job Search Works deputy. "What is unusual is that we're starting to see some professionals. These are job seekers who would otherwise be at their computers looking for jobs. Their attendance is a sign of their desperation."

His comment was buttressed by Sherif Cobb, partnership assistant with the U.S. Census Bureau.

"I've been pretty busy all morning," she stated. "There's a big interest in Census jobs, even though they're not long-term jobs."

As if on cue, Brit Bristow, a Gary resident stopped by the Census booth.

"I was in accounting and lost my job. I haven't worked for years. I'm interested in anything but particularly

in a Census position, even a temporary one because it will generate some income," he said.

Among those attending was Cecil Bradshaw II, who chatted with Willie Moore, Job Search Works assistant deputy.

Bradshaw, who is taking a three-year course in criminal justice at Purdue University in Hammond, said he's hoping to land a job with the State Police. But, just to be sure of maybe getting something, he put in resumes with other companies, including B&W Security, which supplies some security services to the township.

Twenty-three companies, including BP Pipelines, Costco, Horseshoe casino, United Water, attended the jobs fair.

"It's a good selection of companies here," said Moore, surveying the huge room. "But nowadays companies can be very selective in whom they hire."



High hopes: *Brit Bristow (right) seeks information from Census Bureau's Sherif Cobb.*



Higher hopes: *Cecil Bradshaw II (left) discussing job training opportunities with Willie Moore, Job Search Works supervisor.*

(Continued from Page 1)

Financial Requests

Rainy Day Fund, if property tax funds are not received by year's end. Such rollovers are not unusual and are repaid immediately upon receiving funds from the county. The board also authorized the trustee to request township participation in interim temporary loans from the bond bank to fund the township through the first half of 2010. According to Curtis Whittaker, CPA, financial consultant to the township, government

units are only allowed to borrow 80 percent of 2010 estimated revenues.

"These are not unusual budgetary measures," said Whittaker in response to a question from board chairman Alex Cherry. "The trustee is merely seeking permission to join other governmental units in requesting participation in the bond bank's compilation of statewide loans. This provides any funds necessary at the lowest possible interest rate."

Fifteen standard holidays were approved for 2010, plus minor revisions

to the township emergency assistance eligibility standards, which provide 82 percent of federal government standards.

Elgin thanked the board for approving her requests and mentioned the "difficult economic times" are generating clients who had hitherto not sought township assistance. She attributed it to the depth of the recession.

"I hope we pull out of this soon or we'll be hard-pressed to help those in need," she said.

(Continued from Page 1)

Budget Passed

What is important is how we go about trying to solve the problems. In that light, our township is fortunate to have visionary leadership at the top plus a competent finance staff. Because of those factors, we are weathering the storm much better than others.”

According to Whittaker the township worked closely with the Department of Local Government Finance in preparing the budget. Even so, because of tax caps mandated by the Indiana General Assembly, the township will suffer a \$5.7 million cut in its 2010 and 2011 levies. Since the annual budget

is approximately \$15 million, that means a one-third cut in each of the next two years.

Such drastic cuts must be measured against the continuing national economic problems that are exacerbating

local economies.

Whittaker explained the township levy, which sets the tax rate, has been frozen for the past four years. Combined with the uncertain tax collection rate, the township is forced to draw up “estimated” budgets, hoping the General Assembly will grant additional revenue, even though that’s a remote possibility.

Nevertheless, judicious financial pruning by the trustee has resulted in a budget that has been cut from \$15,593 million in 2009, to \$15,323 million in 2010; a \$270,000 reduction.

Chairman Cherry graciously commended the trustee on her diligence and with consent from his colleagues decided not to act on the budget thence, but to do so at the October 20 meeting.



Impassively impressive: Whittaker explaining township finances.

Taking on The Times

Biff! **Bam!** **POW!**

Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin recently took umbrage with The Times over an article by Jeff Burton published Sunday, November 15.

She didn’t object to the gist of the article, as to the fact it explored a budding crisis but didn’t see fit to contact Calumet Township, largest of Lake County’s 11 township, plus the one suffering a decades-long depression.

“The demographics have drastically changed,” the article quoted Frank Mrvan, North Township trustee. “It’s people who have been consistently working their whole lives.”

Elgin commended the paper for recognizing the gravity of the situation but chided it for appearing to slight Calumet Township.

To his credit, William E. Nangle, The Times executive editor, swiftly replied, thanking Elgin for her letter and publishing it Friday, November 20, under the heading “Calumet Township deserves mention among similar region bodies”.

Elgin thanked Nangle for his quick response and courtesy in promptly addressing her concern.

November 16, 2009

William Nangle
Executive Editor: The Times
601 W. 45th Avenue
Munster, IN 46321

Dear Mr. Nangle:

It was timely, and a great public service for The Times to publish the news item “Trustees witness new face of need” on Sunday, November 15. However, I was rather disappointed you chose to show the plight of numerous townships all adjoining Calumet Township, even going so far as to note Bloom Township in Illinois, but not ours.

The omission seemed to indicate The Times has a heyday with news mocking Gary when it comes to escalating crime, shortcomings of the school system and sundry other problems. Yet, when you could have pointed out Calumet Township shares the plight of the others, you took a pass. For your information, our township is the largest in the region and serves Gary, our region’s largest city, Griffith and unincorporated areas in between.

As you are no doubt aware, Gary has been in the throes of economic depression for decades. Unemployment is high, economic development nonexistent and municipal services much curtailed. However, even with such crushing problems there are still hard-working families striving for the vaunted American dream. Now even they are feeling the brunt of the relentless pressures of the feeble national economy. I believe you did such good folks a disservice by omitting them from what was, their glaring omission aside, a worthwhile news item.

The Times was quick to toot its horn about being a part of a consortium to help Gary. Thank you. But sometimes little things such as treating the city as if it were truly part of the region and not in isolation encumbered with negatives, could go a long way in helping your readers understand what this city and township have been going through so long.

I’d be happy to discuss our township’s plight, provide statistics and explain how we are coping in this wrenching economic time faced by all.

Sincerely,
Mary, Elgin, Trustee

forging common ties



Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin (center facing camera) pow-wowed with regional fellow trustees in November. They met at the township office to discuss legislative strategy should Gov. Mitch Daniels seek township elimination during the 2010 legislative session. It was one in a series of regular meetings being rotated amongst the townships.



perf benefits add up

Most township staff meetings are staid affairs where the trustee thanks everyone for their hard work, brings them up to date on policy changes, introduces new employees, hands out awards and introduces a guest speaker. Boring.

The December staff meeting, however, was anything but boring. James Neddeff, a Public Employees Retirement Fund (PERF) retirement services counselor, sparked a lot of interest with a savvy discourse on retirement benefits. He gave examples of folks who had lost out on benefits because they didn't understand how PERF works, explained vesting requirements, investment options, employer/employee contributions and sundry other helpful things.

The level of interest he sparked was evident by the number of questions he received and fielded satisfactorily.

Green and Clean

In December, 2009, 193 nations met in Copenhagen, Denmark, under auspices of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change. The international gabfest was to forge a binding protocol alleviating global warming. Even the magical abilities of President Barack Obama failed to pull the rabbit out of the hat. But in spite of the international community's abject failure, Calumet Township has embarked on a "green" mission showing how one small community can lead the way.

Trustee Mary Elgin has instituted a "Go Green" paper recycling program. Participants call it "recyclemania" and are living up to the name as they maniacally track down newspaper hoards far and wide. The program has a mission of "providing a cost effective recycling program to educate, promote and encourage an environmentally conscious workplace".

The statement continues: "It is the goal of the program to educate staff



about our daily impacts on Earth and to provide the tools to take positive actions to protect and sustain our world". Wow!

By mid-December, the program had collected almost 20 tons of paper for the Abitibi Bowater Corporation, which pays five dollars per ton. ABC has collection bins at two township locations where the public may drop off paper. The impressive tonnage was achieved through interdepartment com-

petition to see which could collect the most paper. Winners are feted to an in-house pizza party. Mmmmm!

The program is being led by Steven Hunter, IS&T deputy; Kenneth Chapman, main office building manager and Carole Sponaugle, finance administrative assistant.

"We're the leading "green" governmental entity," said Sponaugle. "The program builds *esprit de corps*, puts money in township coffers and helps our planet."

destined to succeed

Getting township clients motivated to climb the stairway to economic independence is a challenge. Contracting with True Destiny, a motivational firm owned by Pat Boyd and Denise Oliver is a building block in that stairway.

The firm provides motivational seminars consisting of 12 two-hour

classes to female clients showing how they may acquire hard-driving, professional personalities to meet challenges of the world.

"After treating the mind, body and spirit of our students, many of them go on to succeed," said True Destiny CEO Denise Oliver.



Inspiring success: Pat Boyd and Denise Oliver inspiring clients to march into the future.