



State of the County Address County of Bladen February 7, 2011

Bladen County Citizens:

I am pleased to report to you on the state of Bladen County. County government plays an important role in the lives of our citizens and 2010 has been a productive year for Bladen County with the completion of important projects and initiatives.

I would like to take a moment to offer a special thanks to Commissioner Billy Ray Pait for the fine job he did chairing this Board for the past two years. In the two months that I have served as Chairman, I have developed an even greater appreciation for the responsibility associated with this position.

The Board of Commissioners, County staff and the many citizens who serve on advisory boards, and in other capacities, have worked together to achieve a number of accomplishments during the past year.

The Bladen County Revenue Department now offers an online option for payment of property taxes. This service enhancement utilizes technology to provide much greater convenience for our citizens.

Bladen County Emergency Medical Services relocated in December to a new facility in the Elizabethtown Airport Industrial Park. This newly constructed building was funded with federal stimulus dollars and provides much needed additional space for the EMS operation. This facility is also equipped to serve as an alternate 911 Communications Center in the event that the Central Communications Center in the Courthouse would need to be temporarily relocated.

Bladen County Solid Waste continued its outstanding recycling efforts and received a first place award from the North Carolina Pesticide Board for being a leader in the recycling of pesticide containers. The award included a \$2,000.00 cash prize to further enhance recycling efforts in Bladen County.

The Bladen County Water District completed a major expansion project known as Phase III-A. This approximately \$4.8 million project included two new production wells, an elevated storage tank, and forty-six miles of water lines located primarily in the Council and Bladenboro communities. The Water District has also been awarded approximately \$7 million from USDA Rural Development for the development of the District's upcoming expansion project, Phase III-B. This project will provide an estimated thirty-five miles of water lines on the north side of the Cape Fear River, primarily in the Ammon, Hickory Grove and Murphy town communities.

The Board of Commissioners demonstrated its continued commitment toward education this past year with a \$500,000.00 increase in the Current Expense appropriation to Bladen County Schools. The Board also authorized a referendum regarding a proposed .25% Sales Tax increase which would have generated an estimated \$350,000.00 per year to be dedicated for Bladen County Schools. However, this initiative was not approved by the voters in November.

The Bladen County Board of Elections and staff continued the tradition of providing a very professional elections process in 2010. Three very active elections were conducted during the year, including a Primary, Run-off, and General election. Bladen County is fortunate to have a culture of professionalism in this important County service.

The Bladen County Building Inspections staff performed inspections for 38 new houses and 151 mobile homes, in addition to commercial and other projects throughout the county. The Department collected \$152,486.30 in permit fees for projects with a total construction value of \$24,225,706.00. We are fortunate to have a professional staff of three inspectors, each of whom holds unlimited certification in all trades.

Bladen County Public Library experienced a significant increase in traffic during the past year. The door count at the three Library facilities increased by 12.8% and program attendance increased 23.9% over 2009. Additionally, the Library's goal for 2010 was to increase public use of computers by 5%, while the actual increase was 135%! The Library staff has also been productive in obtaining grant funding for special projects. A \$5,000.00 grant was received from the North Carolina Arts Council to bring author Tananarive Due to the 2010 Beast Fest in Bladenboro. And, a \$1,000.00 grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council funded a five session *Let's Talk About It* book discussion.

Bladen County and Cape Fear Valley Health System are now in the third year of the Lease Agreement of Bladen County Hospital and this continues to be a positive relationship for both organizations. Cape Fear Valley has made much needed facility improvements and technology upgrades at Bladen County Hospital. Also, a Hospitalist program has recently been implemented in an effort to provide an increased level of patient care and to enable primary care physicians to focus more on their practices. We are currently in discussion and negotiation with Cape Fear Valley Health System regarding a new agreement that will hopefully lead to a new Hospital facility in Bladen County in the not too distant future.

The Bladen County Economic Development Commission continues to work diligently with new and expanding industries. Governor Purdue was the keynote speaker at a groundbreaking ceremony held in August for DuPont Corporation's new PVF Unit. This project expansion includes twenty new jobs, an investment of approximately \$60 million, and helps to increase DuPont's important presence in Bladen County.

During this past year, more than one hundred Bladen County citizens worked together on a planning process related to Golden LEAF's Community Assistance Initiative. Citizens determined priorities in areas related to Education, Job Creation and Space Utilization. These citizens are to be commended for the time and effort they put forth for the benefit of our county. Ultimately, in October, Golden LEAF allocated over \$2 million for the following projects:

- Bladenboro Spec Building Upfit \$239,160.00
- Cape Fear Farmers Market in Elizabethtown \$400,475.00
- Economic and Workforce Development Training \$215,000.00
- Equipment Leasing and Financing for Small Businesses \$175,000.00
- Facility Needs for Bladenboro Historical Society, Inc. \$273,700.00
- Bladen County Schools Technology Project \$800,000.00

The Board of Commissioners is committed to providing ethical leadership to our citizens. During the past year, county commissioners and employees participated in Ethics training in an effort to become more conscious of potential ethical concerns and to make wise decisions in the conduct of County business.

2010 has been a productive year - thanks to the dedication and hard work of many individuals. We are fortunate to have a great team of elected officials, staff and volunteer citizens who work so well together for the betterment of Bladen County.

In looking ahead, budget challenges are expected to be increasingly difficult this year at the federal and state levels, which can largely impact an already difficult budget situation at the County level. Difficult decisions may be required. However, we will continue to aggressively pursue economic development projects and continue to work cooperatively **“to provide customer focused County services efficiently and responsibly.”**

Sincerely,

Charles Ray Peterson, Chairman
Bladen County Board of Commissioners