

Car clips power pole; driver sent by helicopter to Mobile hospital

MELVIN – The driver of this vehicle apparently ran off CR 14 near Melvin early Monday and clipped a power pole, overturning in the ditch and sending live power lines crashing to the pavement. Members of the Gilbertown Police Department, Gilbertown Vol. Fire Department, Gilbertown Jaws of Life®, and a Choctaw EMS Ambulance responded to the scene about five miles west of Gilbertown shortly after midnight on March 5th. Once linemen from Black Warrior EMC had killed power to the sizzling lines, firemen used the Jaws tool to extract the driver. The driver was transported by ambulance to the airport in Chatom where they were to transfer the injured person to a LifeFlight helicopter. The name, address and condition of the driver was not available at presstime.

Choctaw Sun photo by
Tommy Campbell



Commission offers position to Wilcox County's engineer

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – The current county engineer for Wilcox County will become the new engineer for Choctaw County, if he accepts the position.

At Monday's meeting of the Co. Commission, the board – on a recommendation by Probate Judge D'Wayne May – voted 3-0 to employ William Garry Grantham, a licensed, professional engineer who was served in Wilcox County since 2001.

May said the county has had only four applications for the position, and recommended that Grantham be hired on a two-year contract at a salary of \$85,000 per year (plus fringe benefits) with a "30-day out" clause for both parties.

May said that if Grantham accepts the offer, attorney Lee McPhearson will draw up a contract that is "as equitable to Choctaw County as it is the engineer."

The motion by Commissioners Henry Lovette and Clyde Dixon passed 3-0. Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin was absent from the March 5th meeting because he is in Washington for the annual meeting of the National Association of Counties.

May said the state determines the minimum rate of pay for engineers on a "stepped scale" that is based on training and experience.

"The state will pay 70% of his salary," May said, or about \$55,072, with the county being responsible for the remaining 30%, or about \$29,928, plus all fringe benefits and matching payroll taxes.

The amount for those fringe benefits – which include health and life insurance, matching amounts for state retirement, FICA, and Workman's Compensation – comes to approximately \$19,891.

May said there has been a lot of comments made by the public regarding what the county pays an engineer.

"Compared to an \$8.25-an-hour employee, once you figure the benefit package in, you come up with quite a package," he said. But the

fact is, he said, the county cannot do without an engineer.

"If we ever expect to get these 1950's-era roads patched and repaved, we have got to have someone in here working with the state DOT to get some funds in here to rebuild the roads and stop patching, patching, patching," he said.

Treasurer Alice Carol Smith said that – with fringe benefits and matching payroll amounts added in – an employee who makes \$8.25 an hour actually has a job that is worth more than \$19 an hour.

"We are not taking the full brunt of this salary, the state is paying most of it," May said.

May said the \$85,000 is the lowest amount that any of the four applicants said they would accept, and one even said he would not move to Choctaw County is the salary was \$105,000.

The county has been without an engineer since Oct. 1st of last year, and paperwork and state and federal projects are suffering as a result, May said.

"This paperwork must be done by a certified, licensed engineer," he said. "We are in a position to where our back is to the wall."

Commissioner Dixon said that he and Commissioner Lovette are in "dire need" of repaving some roads.

"There's money floating around out there but we can't touch it without an engineer," Dixon said.

Some county roads have already failed two state inspections, and if they fail a third time the county stands to lose thousands of dollars in state/federal funding for those roads.

"We have some roads that are within two points of passing, and traffic striping would help them pass," he said. "It's bittersweet, because that striping won't help driving surface, but if they fail again in September we're going to lose Federal Aid System funds."

May said the county cannot afford to lose any more state or federal money.

"Then, a bad situation becomes a dire situation," he said. "If we are going to have a long range plan to bring Choctaw County into the 21st

century, we have to have a long range plan and find an engineer and stick with him."

Treasurer Alice Carol Smith said that some definite long-range plans need to be made and soon.

Smith said that the engineer's office and the county shop operates from revenues from a seven-cents per-gallon gasoline tax which brings in about \$720,000 per year, with any "left over" amounts going to the districts.

The county now operates fully under the old-styled district system, but at one time were under a modified unit system, she said.

Each commissioner now has to take care of all paved and dirt roads in his district, Smith added.

"The districts pretty much operate solely off of 3-R money," she said, which is a state fund that stands for Restoration, Resurfacing and Rehabilitation.

The annual budget for all four districts combined is only \$1.6 million, or about \$387,000 each, she said.

About \$200,000 of "left over" funds from the seven-cent gasoline tax goes to the districts, but they are still operating on a precarious shoestring.

Smith said the only way she could balance the FY2007 budget was by using \$257,000 in unreserved funds that were left over from an assortment of projects.

"But when its gone, its gone," she said. "The districts will not be able to operate on \$1.6 million. It takes half of that amount just for salaries."

Commissioner Dandy Brown said he is glad for that knowledge to be made public.

"A lot of citizens don't know," he said. "We're doing the best we can but you can't get blood out of a turnip. This should be an eye-opener to the citizens of the county."

Judge May said he thinks that if the citizens see the county is operating in a fiscally responsible manner, and were to take a close look at the facts and figures, he believes the people would support a new ad valorem (property) tax earmarked exclusively for road and bridge rehabilitation.

Sun Country Calendar

There is no charge to list an upcoming non-profit or charitable event for your church, school, civic group, fire department, etc. Meetings of governmental entities may also be included. Send your announcement as far in advance as possible. Calendar items may be mailed, faxed, emailed, delivered in person to our offices in Butler or Gilbertown, or left in our drop box at The Country Corner in Butler.

Through June 30th

JOSHUA VICTORY ASSEMBLY is taking applications for basketball and volleyball. If you and your children want to sign up – which will run from March 1 to June 30 at the Drop Inn Center, come by between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, or all day Tuesday and Wednesday. Ages 6 years to adults. For more information contact Pastor Thomas L. Jackson at 24290 Highway 10, 205-654-2254, 205-654-2624 or 205-654-2222.

Tuesday, March 6th

CLEAN SWEEP meeting, to organize a countywide clean-up day for Choctaw County, 7 p.m., Gilbertown Town Hall. All fire departments, teachers, churches, civic groups, elected officials, and concerned citizens are urged to be present. The CLEAN SWEEP DAY is planned for Sat., March 31st. For more information call Tommy Campbell at 251-843-6397.

Wed., March 7th – Sat., March 10th

MUSICAL CHOIR WORKSHOP, Gooden Hill Missionary Baptist Church, 6 p.m. nightly. The Workshop will climax with a concert on Saturday, March 10 at 6 p.m. The workshop presenter will be Kenneth Braxton, Minister of Music First Missionary Baptist Church, Biloxi, MS. Registration is \$10 for adults and \$5 for youth ages 5-18. For more information contact Essie Landrum (334) 736-4288 or Victor Johnson (205) 398-3037. Rev. Bobby Johnson, Pastor.

Thursday, March 8th

SILENT AUCTION AND GUMBO/POTATO SOUP SOCIAL GATHERING, A Secret Safe Place for Newborns 2nd Annual Fundraiser Auction, Gumbo Gathering. Sponsored by District Attorney Spencer B. Walker, Chatom Community Center, 6-8 p.m. Children are welcome. Call 251-847-2070 or 251-275-3144 to reserve tickets, or pick them up at First United Security Bank in Gilbertown. All donations of items for auction will be appreciated. Auction items will include trips, gift certificates, home decor and much more.

Friday, March 9th

CHOCTAW CO. ASSOCIATION OF VOL FIRE DEPARTMENTS, Butler Fire Hall, annual meeting to elect officers, 7 p.m.

Saturday, March 10th

CHOCTAW BOWHUNTERS, Relay For Life Bow Tournament, Gilbertown Bow Range, 10 a.m. All proceeds will go to Relay For Life. A \$15 entry fee is required for all entries. For more information or questions contact Janet Downey at 205-673-2253.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 11th. Remember to set your clocks, watches and other timed appliances FORWARD one hour before going to bed on Saturday evening, March 10th.

Sunday, March 11th

PASTOR KENNEDY GRAY'S 29th ANNIVERSARY, Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church, 2 p.m. Rev. Obadiah Clemons of Lauderdale, MS will be the guest speaker.

WOMEN AND MEN DAY, St. John C.M.E. Church, Mt. Sterling, 2 p.m. Guest speaker: Rev. Shirley Pearson.

YOUTH DAY PROGRAM, 1:30 p.m., Evangel Tabernacle Worship Center, Ala. 69 North, Coffeeville. The guest speaker will be Minister Shelia McGrew, Bishop Lesley Powe, Pastor.

GRAND OPENING, Joshua Victory Assembly Sports Center, 24290 Ala. Hwy. 10 east, Lavaca, 2-4 p.m. Pastor Thomas Lee Jackson. For more information call 205-654-2254.

Monday, March 12th

THE CHOCTAW CO. DEPT. OF HUMAN RESOURCES Board of Directors will meet at noon in the Board Room of the county office located at 1003 S. Mulberry Avenue.

Tuesday, March 13th

CHOCTAW CO. RETIRED TEACHERS meeting, 10 a.m., Rush Medical Clinic in Gilbertown.

CHOCTAW CO. BOARD OF EDUCATION meeting, 5:30 p.m., Southern Choctaw Elementary School, Gilbertown.



Cleaning up 'round the Square

BUTLER – Several volunteers were hard at work Saturday morning pruning trees and cleaning up around the small "sidewalk" planters that front the north, south and east sides of the Courthouse. Mayor Ben Smith said that this Saturday (March 10) will be a day for planting bulbs and other flowers around town. Pictured at work are John A. Boney, Dr. Leanne McDonald, Gayle McPhearson, Debbie Bell, Robin Smith, and Ann Winslow.

Choctaw Sun photos by
Tommy Campbell

