

■ Lawsuit

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Spears said in an affidavit filed with the complaint.

Sheriff James Lovette, who took office in January when former Sheriff Donald Lolley retired, told the *Sun* that he could not comment in detail on the lawsuit because the allegations involve his predecessor.

"If a person works more than 40 hours, I feel like they ought to be paid for that time, just like the law says," Lovette said. "I can't speak to what anybody did that was in this office before me, but if my staff puts overtime hours on their time sheets, they're going to get paid for it. That's just how I operate."

According to the complaint, Spears claims that he regularly worked overtime from May 2002 until May 2006 when he went on medical leave, but was not always compensated for the additional hours. "Defendants' failure to accurately pay overtime was willfully perpetrated," the lawsuit states. "Defendants have not acted in good faith nor with reasonable grounds to believe its actions and omissions were not a violation of the FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act)."

In addition, the complaint alleges, "Defendant uniformly denies overtime pay to its employees stating overtime is not in their budget," and further, that, "Defendants have been investigated and cited by the Department of Labor for similar violations in the past."

A jury trial has been requested. Spears' attorney Robert J. Camp, of the Cochran Law Firm, in Birmingham, did not immediately return the *Sun's* phone calls, but said in published reports that he will be asking for records from the county to determine the exact rate of

pay and number of hours that Spears worked.

At Tuesday's special-called meeting of the Choctaw Co. Commission, Probate Judge D'Wayne May said he learned of the lawsuit after seeing an article in the *Mobile Press-Register*.

May said he downloaded a copy of the complaint from the internet but as of April 27th, the county has still not been formally served with legal papers, he said.

On a motion by Commissioners Dandy Brown and Henry Lovette, the board voted unanimously to give May the authority to retain a law firm to handle the case on the county's behalf.

Brown said he doesn't understand why the County Commission was named as a defendant.

"I have been here 23 years, and each department head takes care of their overtime," he said. "I don't think we should be responsible for any other department's overtime."

May said that employees keep their time sheets which are then supposed to be reviewed by the head of the department who then sends the sheets to the county treasurer's office who makes out the payroll checks.

"Obviously, the Commission is the one that sets the budget, but the time sheets are the responsibility of the employees and the department heads," he said. "Since I have been here, if there is overtime turned in to the treasurer, that overtime is paid. We have discussed ways to reduce overtime but that in no way reflects that if time sheets are turned in with overtime hours that we won't pay it." Regardless of whether it is the Commission or the Sheriff's Department that ends up paying, in the end it will cost the taxpayers of the county, he said.

■ Thomas

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details that have to be worked out, according to an April 11th story published in the *Greene County Democrat* which quoted Elzora Fluker, Chairperson of the Greene Co. Board of Education.

Thomas was hired in the Choctaw Co. Public School System in the 1990's as an agribusiness teacher and basketball coach at Southern Choctaw High School. Later, he became interim assistant principal and basketball coach at CCHS before going into active duty military service in the Middle East.

Upon his return, he served as assistant principal at the new CCHS and was appointed principal On July 1, 2005 when then-principal Lee J. Edwards was transferred to a position in the Central Office.

Then, in a sudden move by the Choctaw Co. Board of Education, Thomas was placed on administrative leave with

pay on Feb. 18, 2006, pending the outcome of a formal hearing.

Then-Supt. of Education Randy Boggs and board members flatly refused to comment publicly on the action, and would say only that the decision was made as the result on an investigation which had been ongoing since the fall of 2005.

Just two weeks later, in a one-sentence letter dated March 2, 2006, Thomas tendered his resignation with the Choctaw Co. Board of Education, "for personal reasons," effective June 30, 2006 - the date that his contract as principal was set to expire.

Information from the school system's investigation was turned over to District Attorney Spencer Walker but no formal charges were ever filed. The specific reasons for Thomas' dismissal were never made public in consideration of Thomas' rights and what school officials said were confidentiality concerns.

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■ Calendar

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for small businesses and start-up businesses, EMS (Ambulance) Building, Butler, 4 p.m. Contact the Chamber of Commerce for more details.

PLANNED ELDERCARE will be at the Gilberttown Sr. Citizens Center for diabetic and arthritis needs at 10:30 a.m. Also, voting will be held on the Silver-Haired Legislature, 8:30 a.m. until noon.

Thursday, May 3rd
NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER, 6 p.m., Gilberttown and Butler.

Thursday, May 3rd - Sat., May 5th
NEW HOPE RELAY FOR LIFE
TEAM Yard Sale, home of Mary Ann Clark (Needham Road, near the VFD.)

Saturday, May 5th
CEMETERY CLEANING, Pleasant Hill Cemetery, CR 25. Please remove all old flowers before this date so that the cemetery can be cleaned for the annual memorial (May 20th).

REUNION for all former employees (1950-2003) of Choctaw Manufacturing at Silas, noon - 2 p.m. buffet lunch at Mary's Café (U.S. 84 west, Silas), \$10 per person. Contact Mary Taylor at 251-542-9746 or Jackie Utsey at 251-542-9539 for more information.

CONFERENCE, Shiloh C.M.E. Church, Cromwell 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Theme: "Daughters of the King," Answering God's Call. Spiritual message, musical performances, and door prizes.

FISH FRY, South Marengo Rescue Squad Hall on Ala. Hwy. 10, \$7 per plate.

Sunday, May 6th
MEN'S AND WOMEN'S DAY, New Rock Baptist Church, Millry, 2 p.m. Rev. Hal Hayes, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fruitdale, guest speaker. Dr. Johnnie Heartfield, host pastor.

YOUTH DAY PROGRAM, Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church, Bladon Springs, 3 p.m. The guest speaker will be Rev. Steven Pickens, his choir and congregation of the New Area Missionary Baptist Church in Mobile.

NOAH TAYLOR FAMILY REUNION, 11 a.m. - until, Fire Station Gilberttown. For more information call Sharon Casey at 251-843-2377.

Mon., May 7th - Fri., May 11th
YOUTH REVIVAL, New Rock Baptist

■ WIRED

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A particular goal of the initiative is to build what the group terms an 'Enterprise-Ready Region' - an area whose workforce is trained in skills necessary to draw new jobs and industry to the area. Part of that training includes the implementation of programs through the local community colleges to give citizens training in technical skills that are much-needed by the industries that might consider locating in the region.

"Jones County Community College and Alabama Southern, in cooperation with six other community colleges are part of this initiative," explained Williams. "The community colleges are the right places to put this together because that is where the training will come from to get the workforce trained."

According to Williams, the initiative is part of a nationwide effort on behalf of the Department of Labor to grow communities into highly productive regions with skilled workers and thriving businesses.

It is an effort that is sorely needed in the Black Belt, in particular.

According to data put together by WAEM officials, many of the problems most prevalent in the region are poverty, lack of education, low-wage jobs, and an unskilled workforce.

The WAEM Region has more people living in poverty than the national average. In fact, three out of every four counties in the region are labeled as persistent poverty counties, compared to one of every eight counties in the nation as a whole.

When it comes to jobs, the region is lagging far behind the rest of the country. Only one county within the region - Tuscaloosa County - has shown a substantial increase in the percentage of jobs brought to the area in recent years.

Hand in hand with the poverty level and lack of jobs is the incidence of low education. The WAEM Region has fewer workers with college degrees than does the rest of the country, and most of the jobs within the region are low-wage jobs.

Church, Millry, 7:30 p.m. nightly. Rev. Bartee, pastor of Altar Baptist Church, Shubuta, MS, will be the guest speaker. Dr. Johnnie Heartfield, host pastor.

Wednesday, May 9th
CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKSHOP, geared to everyone in the service industry, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. at Ala. Southern Community College. Registration fee \$59. For more information contact the Chamber of Commerce at 205-459-3459.

Thursday, May 10th
ANNUAL CHURCH/CEMETERY CLEANING, Camp Springs Methodist Protestant Church. Please help by removing old flowers. For more information call Dottie Hearn or Nancy Whatley at 205-398-3342.

Friday, May 11th
CHOCTAW CO. RELAY FOR LIFE county-wide event, old Vanity Fair property, Butler. Late afternoon through the night.

Saturday, May 12th
10TH ANNUAL CHOCTAW CO.-UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA GOLF SCRAMBLE, Country Club. Registration 11 a.m., lunch at noon, and tee-off at 1 p.m. Proceeds benefit UA-Choctaw Co. Chapter Alumni Scholarship Fund. For more information contact Nena Beth Morris at 205-459-3739.

FOOD DRIVE, sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Sunday, May 13th
MEMORIAL SERVICE, Camp Springs Methodist Protestant Church, 10:45 a.m. Rev. Ben Gerald will be the speaker. Lunch will be served afterward.

Wednesday, May 16th
PEOPLE AGAINST A LITTERED STATE (PALS) will make a presentation on Litter Control at the Chamber of Commerce office, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. Guest speaker, Spencer Ryan.

Saturday, May 19th
OLD TOWN SILAS MOW DOWN, 10 a.m. until. Lawn mower races, singing, Choctaw Co. Cruizers Car & Truck Show, 18-foot slide for the kids, much more! Arts and crafts and food vendor space available (\$20 and \$25). Registration for races from 11 a.m. - noon in front of Town Hall, entry fee \$50 (8-22 HP), races begin at 1:30 p.m. Bring lawn chairs. For more information call Town Hall at 251-542-9505.

In fact, two-thirds of the counties within the region have a 'low education' workforce - with an average of 64.9% of counties within the region reporting that 25% or more of residents age 25-64 have neither a high school diploma or GED. That number compares to only 19.8% of counties throughout the United States.

However, the WAEM Region does have some assets to build on. Although most are working low-wage jobs, the majority of workers within the region are staying in the area to work. Only 12% commute outside the region. Some of the rural counties are also showing more signs of growth in entrepreneurship than once predicted.

Other economic assets are the presence of the poultry, paper, and other industries that already exist in the region, as well as land and climate assets that could be advantageous to potential industries.

The three-year grant will allow the region to first identify these key assets of the communities, and then to build upon them. In order to build on the assets, the WIRED initiative will implement a combination of efforts from governmental leadership to youth development in K-12 to the promotion of entrepreneurship to the development of a skilled workforce.

According to Williams, the colleges represented at last week's meeting are committed to workforce development even beyond the grant.

In the coming weeks, members of the roundtable will be meeting in other areas within the grant region to further plans for the initiative. A meeting was held on Tuesday, April 24, at Meridian Community College, with a May 14th meeting scheduled for the Monroeville campus of ASCC.

(ED. NOTE: Over the next few weeks, the Sun will investigate the overall economic status of the region as overviewed by the WIRED initiative, including poverty levels, job market, and existing and potential industries, as well as the educational dynamics that affect the current and future economic conditions of the area and the county.)

NOTICE

The Choctaw County Board of Education will receive sealed bids for items below:

- Bleachers Old Choctaw County High Football Field
- Lights, Poles, and Panel Boxes Old Choctaw County High Football Field
- Four Foot Chain Link Fence and Poles Old Choctaw County High Football Field

Bid sheets are available at the Choctaw County Board of Education. You may contact Mr. Randy Boggs or Bobby James at (205) 459-3015 to view surplus items. Please mark envelopes in the lower left hand corner **Surplus Items Bid**. Sealed bids will be accepted until 10:00 a.m. Thursday, May 10, 2007.

Submit Bids To:
Choctaw County Board of Education
Attn: Beverly Skinner
107 Tom Orr Drive
Butler, AL 36904

The Board reserves the right to reject any/all bids and waive technicalities.