



# NEBA News

www.NEbusiness.org

September-October 2008

## NEBA Battles Tax Increase

Representatives of NEBA challenged the Leon County Commission to hold off a proposed 16 percent boost in the county tax rate, a raise that would severely impact businesses, rental properties and other non-home-stead holdings.

NEBA's opposition was at least partially rewarded with a reduction in the county's original proposal. Instead of boosting the tax rate from \$7.21 per \$1,000 of assessed value to \$8.88 per \$1,000, commissioners dropped back to \$7.99 per \$1,000.

NEBA had argued that the

county should delay expensive capital expenditures during this time of economic downturn and not dump a higher tax burden on local enterprises who are already experiencing business volume declines and higher operating costs.

However, a large contingent of social service proponents were at the meeting to support tax increases as assurance of county appropriations to their activities. Commissioners were clearly opposed to any reductions in money for such services.

Consequently, the county deferred \$5.2 million for a new Lake Jackson library and \$3.1 million in

parks and library expansions.

NEBA board members Peggy Munroe, Ted Thomas, Stephen Hogge Cora Ann Chapman and Jim Ashlock, accompanied by Ray Munroe, appeared before the commission Sept. 4 to speak against the tax increase. The commission voted 6-1 to initially adopt the increase as part of the county's \$268.4 million 2008-2009 budget. Only Commissioner Bill Proctor voted against it, complaining that minority participation in county contracts is too low.

A final hearing on the budget is scheduled Sept. 16.

## NEBA Hears Governor's Economic Policy Advisor

Clyde L. Diao, deputy policy coordinator for Governor Charlie Crist, presented an overview of Florida's economic condition at NEBA's Aug. 12 luncheon.

Diao explained that the economy has been impacted by the housing crisis, high energy prices and slowing employment growth. On housing, only 78,000 units were added in 2007-08 compared to 164,000 in 2006-

07, a drop of 86,000 units. Median price of homes dropped 16 percent. The housing slump is expected to continue through 2008-09 with the addition of only 59,500 units, a further decline of 24.4 percent. Recovery is expected to begin in the second half of 2009.

High gasoline prices brought sharp reductions in light truck registrations and a jump in light car registrations, a trend expected to continue.

Even population growth has slowed to almost a standstill. From

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## NEBA News

### Editors:

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The North East Business Association publishes NEBA News bi-monthly.

Articles of interest are welcome.

Publication of submitted materials is subject to review and space available.

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Send articles, letters, photos or suggestions to: NEBA News at the following email addresses: burns@leoncountyfl.gov or maureen@mediaoptionsinc.com. or FAX-850-893-4097.

For additional information phone Maureen Thompson at 850-668-0948 or Nancy Burns at 850-922-3331

## Be Ready- It's Hurricane Season

Hurricanes are one of nature's most serious and dangerous threats. The recent Atlantic hurricane seasons were the busiest on record with a total of 8 hurricanes and 2 tropical storms impacting Florida in a 13-month span. We have seen the devastating impact that violent storms like Hurricane can have on communities. Experts are predicting an active season this year. Weather experts say it's not a matter of IF another hurricane will hit the Capital Area region, but WHEN. That is why it is important to be prepared.

Just the flooding from

tropical storm Fay could be devastating to many in our community. Imagine if it had been a hurricane with the forceful winds.

The 2008 Hurricane Survival Guide for the Capital Area will provide you with the critical information you need to protect yourself, your family, and your property. You can also visit [www.cacarc.org](http://www.cacarc.org) for more information or <http://lcso.leonfl.org/PDF/2008hsg.pdf> for a 2008 survival guide.

**Source: Capital area 2008 Hurricane Survival Guide**

### **"ECONOMY" from front page**

an average of 1,000 people a day it has declined to about 118 people per day in 2008. This will continue until the economy should pick up in late 2009, with stronger growth in 2010.

Florida's overall economy is expected to show a 6.8 percent rise in the second quarter and 4.5 percent in the first quarter when all figures are in, the result of the government's economic stimulus package. However, effects of this stimulus will wear off, producing a decline of economic growth in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter and a barely positive 0.9 percent growth in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

Diao's overall analysis shows a state economy impacted by the

same negative forces that have brought slowdown across the nation, primarily the collapse of housing and sharp rise in foreclosures. The inability to sell a home in another state is considered a large factor in whether retirees are able to move South to Florida. Construction spending as a result of housing demand and reconstruction from hurricanes are economic drivers of State revenue, with tourism not far behind. But he does anticipate things to hit bottom by the end of this decade with more encouraging developments in 2010.

Meantime, Floridians can expect tightening of the state budget and less money for the legislature to appropriate for traditional public services.

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# Perception vs. Reality: Communicating in a Crisis

In times of crisis, your reputation is the easiest thing to lose and the hardest thing to replace. So when preparing a crisis plan and running emergency drills, you should understandably be focused on logistical and operational response. And you should, of course, always be concerned with public safety issues, legal liabilities, insurance payouts and possible regulatory intervention.

But who has communications covered? Are they equipped to handle it? Have they made the right preparations? Do they have access to appropriate resources? Now is a good time to ask these questions rather than waiting for the next hurricane, fire, environmental spill or product tampering scandal. With the combination of cable news and the Internet added to the traditional print and broadcast media, organizations have never been under more scrutiny in times of stress.

The key to getting it right is preparation-half of the impact of your efforts to manage an evolving crisis comes from the work you do before you ever have a problem. The following tips should help guide your efforts to protect your reputation when catastrophe strikes:

\*Be proactive. Assume the worst-case planning position. Map out and anticipate everything that could possibly go wrong. Identify people and their alternates who will deal with the media, wherever in the world that a problem could arise. Design predrafted statements that

can easily be updated whenever it becomes necessary.

\*One voice, one message. In your practice drills, ensure that every one understands the process for dealing with the media and who is empowered to give statements. The same goes for internal communications with employees. You cannot have people giving ad hoc comments to reporters based on what may be faulty or only partially true information.

\*Candor and completeness. Within prudent legal counsel, never avoid responsibility, and always interpret responsibility broadly.

\*Be factual. You need to be sure of all of the relevant facts before making any statements, especially those that acknowledge the fault of the company. Never guess: Have systems for gathering and checking facts. The media will want to know what happened, why it happened and what you are going to do to make sure it does not happen again.

\*Identify key messages. Even in the stress of a high pressure situation, there will be one or two things that you really want to get across. Make sure to identify those messages and designate a trained spokesperson who can respond to and work with the media.

\*Regular updates. You will need to create systems and processes to collect information as the event unfolds. You will also need to test them beforehand. This is so that you can be in a position to issue regular updates not only to the media but also to employees, families, regulators and others who

have a stake in the outcome.

\*Know your allies. Build friends and third-party advocates before you need them. Identify the allies you would like to have if you were facing a crisis, people who might be willing to help and defend you. This might be media, but it might also include academics, analysts, industry associations or even competitors. Ask yourself, "Why would they support us?"

\*Do not try to manipulate the media. Resist the urge to be combative with the media. They are only doing their job. Ensure that your organization has an understanding of the media's purpose. It is their job to expose those accountable for what happened, but they can also be your pulpit to explain your position to all interested parties.

\*Avoid "No comment." "Never make this statement. No matter what your intentions or your situation may be, "no comment" will always sound defensive and evasive. And it means you are missing the opportunity to explain and communicate your key messages.

\*Crisis generates change. If something does go wrong on your watch, embrace the opportunity to learn, understand what happened, accept responsibility and make sure that it never takes place again in your organization. In fact, embrace the opportunity to set standards higher than anyone else in your industry.

*Mike Hatcliffe- Allbusiness.com*

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# Calendar

NEBA meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at Lucy Ho's- 1700 Halstead Blvd. from 1:00 p.m.- 2:00 p.m. Cost is \$9.00 per person

**September 9-** Randy Miller- Executive Vice President- Florida Retail Federation

**October 14-** Leon County chairs of McCain and Obama campaigns (tentative)

**November-** TBA

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