

The Lincoln Journal



"To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

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Herbert Powell (right) was among the first to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine from Lincoln County Health Department Nurse Manager Hilary Daniel during the drive through vaccination clinic held at the health department on January 21.

Vaccination clinic runs smoothly; drivers asked not to arrive early

With the first drive through COVID-19 vaccination clinic under its belt, Lincoln County Health Department Nurse Manager Hilary Daniel was pleased to report that "all those who had appointments to be vaccinated, kept their appointments. We only had one snag last Thursday, which was people arriving too early for their scheduled appointment."

Daniel reiterated that "it is very important that you arrive on time, do not come early. You will be asked to leave the parking lot until your appointment time, as we are operating with very limited space. If you arrive five minutes late, you will be rescheduled."

COVID-19 vaccinations will be administered locally by the Lincoln County Health Department and vaccinations here will continue on Thursdays as long as time and vaccine doses are available. However, it is not available to everyone at this time and time is not available for everyday dis-

pensing, according to Daniel.

The State of Georgia is currently in Phase 1A+ of the vaccine rollout. That means that healthcare workers, long-term care facility workers and residents, law enforcement personnel, and adults over 65, regardless of health conditions, and their caregivers are eligible for the vaccine. Others will be included as future phases are rolled out but the time of that is unsure at present.

Those who qualify may call the health department at 706-359-3154 to schedule an appointment. "If you do not have an appointment, you will not be vaccinated," Daniel said.

"We are working with a very limited number of time slots, so appointments may be booked one-two weeks out," she said. "We are doing the best we can, and if no one answers the phone, please leave a message and we will return your call within five business days to get you scheduled."

Daniel also stated that at this time the health department is not offering a wait list for those who do not qualify for the first round of vaccines.

The LCHD is operating its vaccination clinic in a drive-through model, where scheduled appointments will arrive and park in the back parking lot of the health department. After arriving, registration and vaccination will take place inside the driver's vehicle. The entire process from start to finish will take approximately 30 minutes.

If you cannot make your appointment it is imperative that you call and cancel your appointment. "We do not want to waste a vaccine if you are unable to make it. Once an appointment is made, a dose is reserved for that person and the dose could go to waste if the appointment is not cancelled," Daniel stressed.

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Generous unemployment benefits keeping jobless Georgians at home

By DAVE WILLIAMS
Capital Beat News Service

Some Georgia employers are having a hard time filling job openings because generous unemployment benefits are encouraging them to stay home, state Commissioner of Labor Mark Butler said last Thursday.

Before \$600 weekly unemployment checks authorized by Congress during the early stage of the coronavirus pandemic ran out last year, unemployed Georgians receiving maximum state and federal benefits were bringing in \$50,180 per year, Butler told state lawmakers during a House Appropriations subcommittee meeting.

Even those receiving minimum state and federal benefits were taking home the equivalent of \$34,060 a year, he said.

At the same time, about 90 percent of Georgians receiving state unemployment benefits were earning \$30,000 or less before being laid off, Butler said.

"Companies are having to increase entry-level pay" to compete, he said.

Butler said generous unemployment benefits are also making it difficult for the labor department to hire the additional staff the agency needs to cope with the massive increase in unemployed

Georgians seeking benefits since COVID-19 shut down the state's economy last March and forced businesses to lay off workers.

The labor department has paid out nearly \$17.3 billion in state and federal unemployment benefits to more than 4.3 million jobless Georgians since the virus struck, more than during the last nine years combined.

"We've been working seven days a week pretty much since this started," Butler said.

Butler said the agency has brought back retirees to help with the increased claims workload, hired temporary workers, and re-directed current staff from other duties into handling claims. The number of employees working claims has more than doubled from 330 to about 700, he said.

Butler said some of the more recent economic numbers give him reason for optimism that an end is in sight.

Georgia has gained back 82 percent of the jobs lost since the pandemic first gained a foothold in Georgia last March, the labor department reported Thursday.

The state's unemployment rate fell by a slight 0.1 percent last month to 5.6 percent, while the number of jobs in December grew by 44,700 to 4.56 million. "December is yet another month

where we have seen job growth throughout the state," Butler said. "We more than doubled our job growth from November, which is very promising, considering how challenging of a year this has been."

First-time unemployment claims in Georgia were down last week after increasing significantly last month. Unemployed Georgians filed 35,912 initial claims last week, down 1,127 from the previous week.

However, that followed a 19 percent increase in initial unemployment claims filed last month compared to November.

During the week ending January 16, the job sector accounting for the most first-time unemployment claims in Georgia was accommodation and food services with 8,132 claims. The manufacturing job sector was next with 5,040 claims, followed by administrative and support services with 3,726.

More than half of the more than 170,000 jobs currently listed on EmployGeorgia advertise annual salaries above \$40,000.

Resources for reemployment assistance along with information on filing an unemployment claim can be found on the labor department's webpage at dol.georgia.gov.

Norman reports on finances, progress in annual State of the County address

Lincoln County Commission Chairman Walker Norman gave his annual "State of the County" address prior to the Commissioner's regularly meeting on Thursday, January 14, with Commissioners and those in the audience following CDC guidelines of social distancing. Norman advised those in attendance that due to the issues the county is currently facing regarding COVID-19, meetings would be conducted in the same manner until further notice.

Norman began by welcoming a new member to the board, Commissioner Stan Tankersley. "As you begin this awesome responsibility as a county commissioner," he told Tankersley, "I want you to know that this board, the clerk, county attorney, and our eight department heads, as well as myself, look forward to working with you and stand ready to help you any way we can. I realize that after several days of training ... you are ready, willing, and able to begin your duties as a county commissioner representing District Four."

Norman said it had been a privilege and honor to serve the people of Lincoln County as chairman since the time he was first elected in 1981. "I have enjoyed working with each commissioner these past few years and I look forward to continuing to work with each of them in the future, as we undertake the business of those we serve." He continued by recognizing the constitutional officers, department heads, and employees for their leadership and dedicated service to the citizens of Lincoln County. "I would also like to commend the men and women who provide our citizens with safety and protection, whether you are in law enforcement, emergency medical services, firefighter/rescue, or 911 dispatchers, I want you to know, we back the blue," he said.

Norman's address provided detailed accounts of the county's business and accomplishments for 2020.

Finance Director Ernie Doss provided year-end fund balances for all 2020 funds including the General Fund, \$2,950,633; Payroll Fund, \$72,452; Emergency Fund, \$295,920; Drug Education Fund, \$32,790; E-911 Fund, \$134,790; SPLOST Fund, \$571,362; Solid Waste

Fund, \$627,051; T-SPLOST Fund, \$657,017; Water Fund, \$172,174; and Water Reserve Fund, \$224,716.

"As we begin our new year of 2021, I'm proud to announce that the County's finances are in excellent shape," Norman said, adding, "I'm glad to report to you that the Lincoln County general fund budget is \$6,876,638, which is less than what it was last year at \$7,257,000."

The Department of Public Works, under the direction of Roby Seymour, performed 1035 building inspections and issued 604 building permits, totaling \$14,539,880, which included 43 new residential permits, representing \$9,724,332. The county saw an increase in new housing which was up from 37 reported in 2019. The average house built in Lincoln County in 2020 was valued at \$226,147.

The Water and Wastewater division began construction of an approximately \$2 million project funded by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which included the expansion of county water into the Montego Point, Cherokee Country Club, Thomson Highway, and Lewis Family Road areas. The project consists of 16,900 linear feet of water lines, four new wells that will provide additional water supply to the county's water system, and approximately 500 new touch read meters to replace the old meters that are hand read.

In 2020, the county also applied to the USDA and Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) for \$4 million to expand the water system from Loco to Woodlawn, down Salem Church Road into Hidden Harbor and Forrest Lake Estates. The project will consist of 32,000 linear feet of water lines, which will provide safe drinking water and fire protection to those areas.

Commissioners also hired a consultant in 2020 to work with them to find grants to expand the county wastewater system down the Augusta Highway, from

Blackjack to Trulock Road and Deerfield Estates subdivision; Overlook Road, Price Road to Cherokee Country Club subdivision; Ashmore-Barden Road to Cherokee Creek to Cherokee Retreat subdivision; and Plantation Point Road into Plantation Point subdivision. The estimated cost of this project is approximately \$13 million.

"It is the county's position that with this addition of wastewater, we can experience tremendous growth in this part of the county. We will keep you all informed as this process continues," Norman said.

Additionally, Norman highlighted the accomplishments of the Office of Emergency Services (OES), under Director Casey Broom including:

- OES responded to 1,357 total calls for service, including 54 fire/rescue calls, and cared for 150 COVID-19 patients.

- The E-911 center received 25,034 incoming calls and 6,282 outgoing calls.

- Personnel completed a state approved EMT class with six graduates from its staff.

- The OES was present at the high school and other athletic events, other local events, and festivals in order to support the community.

- Received a \$2,178 non-competitive grant from the Georgia Trauma Commission to help offset the cost of medical supplies.

- Received a USDA 35 percent grant/65 percent loan for a new ambulance remount and a new power lift stretcher, in the amount of \$100,000.

- OES was approved for a USDA grant/loan in the amount of \$113,288, for three state-of-the-art Tempest Cardiac Monitors for the ambulances.

- Application was also made in November for a \$181,898 USDA grant/loan for the purchase of a new ambulance, a power lift stretcher, as well as a new patrol car for the sheriff's office. This

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Johnson accepts certificate

Elijah Clark State Park Ranger Annie Johnson accepted the U.S. Flag Certificate presented to the park by the Little River Chapter, Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution for its exemplary patriotism in its displaying of the flag of the United States of America on Friday, January 22.