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BAKER CORRECTIONAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Meeting marred by some miscues

MIKE ANDERSON
PRESS STAFF

A bitterly contested race for Baker County sheriff last year seems to have tainted the first meeting of the Baker Correctional Development Corporation with new Sheriff Scotty Rhoden last week.

Although the meeting ended on a positive note the afternoon of January 11, eight days after Sheriff Rhoden's first day on the job, it got off to a rocky start after BCDC president Todd Knabb asked secretary/bookkeeper Lynn Taylor why the board had no printed minutes from previous meetings.

"I could not get to my computer. I'm pretty much locked out," Mrs. Taylor replied.

That's also why she was unable to print the board's agenda and had to provide a handwritten one instead, said Mrs. Taylor, who retired from the sheriff's office December 31 and began working full time for the BCDC two days later doing essentially the same duties she had before.

About that time board member Josie Davis pulled out a one-page document, which contained dated incidents outlined by Mrs. Taylor, and then directed the following comment to Sheriff Rhoden:

"It appears there's been some kind of retribution by somebody in your organization toward BCDC board members and, maybe, Lynn herself," Mr. Davis said.

He then proceeded to read the following document prepared by Mrs. Taylor:

"1/3/17 - Tried to remote in to desktop (office computer) to do housing report for billing. Access had been turned off. I sent

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New town homes planned in city

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Downing: County looked past race

First black county head delivers MLK Day keynote

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The annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration at Heritage Park Monday focused on themes about race, faith and perseverance and featured a keynote speech from the first black, female county manager in Baker County, as well as testimony from a black man who found his faith while serving a 32-year prison sentence in Raiford.

Two dance groups performed for a few hundred people gathered in the park, who also enjoyed lunch after the program.

Mrs. Downing, a California native who moved to Baker County last summer from Texas after being hired by the county commission, spoke about the portion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic *I Have a Dream* speech that resonates with her — the part about being judged not by the color of your skin but the content of your character.

"Your county commissioners did something very inspiring when they hired me," she said. "They judged me by my qualifications, resume, character and not the color of my skin."



Orlando dancers Kalei Nash (r) and Aysha Miller.



Purchase these photos and more from the event at www.bakercountypress.com
From left: Kenzie Downing, Charles Jackson and Eraina Hamilton sing the Black National Anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing."



Stephen Williams sings a solo.

And while she wasn't the board's top choice, she said that's just fine.

"Our road to equality is never a straight line or a road without bumps and pot holes. It doesn't matter how I got here, it matters that the first guy was eliminated and they went to the number two guy, or gal, in this case," she explained. "The board discussed and debated and finally voted to hire me, their first female African-American county manager."

But to be judged by your character and not your race, Mrs. Downing stressed the need for displaying good character in the community by working hard, being honest and obeying the law.

"Whenever we leave the house, our quality of character is on display. Let's be sure we show the positive content of our character at all times," she urged.

She was preceded at the podium by James White, who was sentenced to life for first-degree murder in



LuAnne Williams emcees the program.



County manager Downing during her keynote.

Jacksonville. He was released roughly three decades later in 2013, during which time he converted to Christianity.

"In other words, they told me there was no more hope for your life," Mr. White told the crowd. He described Florida State Prison in Raiford as a place not designed for help or hope, but one designed to

destroy you.

But early in his incarceration, he said he heard God speaking to him, first as he walked the yard smoking marijuana. Thinking he was hallucinating, Mr. White ignored the voice. That is, until it happened again.

He said God spoke to him, telling him to call his mother. And that conversation led him to Bible study and service to God during his 32 years in prison.

"I could tell you then and I can tell you now I knew that the king of kings, the lord of lords, was calling my name," Mr. White testified. "I could not say it was a coincidence any more. I could not say I was going to do it on my own any more. Because then I realized that God is real."

Inspirational songs were performed during the program as well by Stephen Williams and Gwendolyn Moment while the two dance groups consisted of sisters Jazen and Sakiya Merriex and the Fantashique Apprentice Dance Company's Legacy Elite Performance Team from Orlando: Makayla Collins, Kalei Nash, Janiyah New-

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FDEP: Sludge application is withdrawn

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The Florida Department of Environmental Protection in Jacksonville announced last week that the permit application for using sewage sludge, or biosolids, as fertilizer at a Sanderson property off Turner Cemetery Road has been withdrawn.

News of the application sparked

fear and accusations among neighboring residents regarding the potential risks posed by land application of Class B biosolids as sought in the permit application and whether it was used at the property, known as Register Ranch and owned by Terrell Register, without a permit in recent months.

FDEP officials said this week that since the permit application from Renewable Resources, LLC of Jacksonville and its chief operating officer

Marla Buchanan was withdrawn they no longer have authority to investigate whether illegal disposal of biosolids took place at the 280-acre tract.

FDEP Jacksonville district ombudsmen Russell Simpson said the matter was turned over to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for additional investigation.

Still, residents living around the property want to know what has

been applied on the cattle ranch previously and led to nuisance odors and flies going back some six months, which got particularly bad during the Christmas holiday.

More than 1300 dry tons of biosolids material has been dumped in Baker County at two other sites in recent years, one in Glen St. Mary and another in Sanderson. The waste originates at wastewater treatment plants in Macclenny and elsewhere in the region.

This week we asked our readers...

Do you have a living will or advance directives for medical providers?

72% No

28% Yes

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