

# ESTHER'S TRUMPET



## SOUNDING OFF IN LOWNDES COUNTY, ALABAMA NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE BLACK BELT



September 25, 2009

### Lowndes County Once More Endures Shame and Embarrassment

There are folks in our community who settle disputes by calling the law. You know them, the ones who want law enforcement to settle neighborhood problems, or who want to take warrants out on people for revenge or hatefulness.

It's hard to counsel people not to do that when law enforcement is doing it to each other. You would think that grown men could settle disputes in a reasonable manner. How do we teach our kids not to try to solve problems with violence when adult men with an obvious testosterone problem cannot do it?

Ok, it's time to be real here. Everyone knows that a lot of black folks were upset when Sheriff Williams got appointed by Governor Riley. The county commission was mad because they were not consulted. Some black folks were mad because historically there had been such a battle to get a black person in as sheriff, they felt

they were headed backward. Still others were mad because they felt that Big John Williams was in line for the job and that he had been disrespected. There may have even been some angry Republicans, angered because Sheriff Williams is a Democrat.

But everybody claimed, following the appointment, that even though Sheriff Williams was not "their choice" that they would do what they could to support him.

They lied.

The first thing I saw was the County Commission slowing around passing necessary budgets, causing the Sheriff to have to take out a personal loan to feed prisoners. He didn't complain; I just saw it. Then there was the issue with EMA Director Walter Hill where Sheriff Williams lost his temper. Then, every time Sheriff Williams came before the Lowndes County Commission, he was cross examined on every detail of his office. Now I've been attending County Commission meetings for nearly 15 years, and I never saw any similar treatment

towards Sheriffs Hulett or Vaughner.

What really gripes me about this situation is the racial overtones. Those of us who live in Lowndes County want good law enforcement. We want fair law enforcement. We are tired of the relatives and friends of the powerful getting breaks from the law. We want the drug problem solved. But every time we start to make a little progress, the powerful, many of whom are secretly involved in the drugs, pull out the race card to divide us. It works every time. And both sides fall right into the debate.

What I cannot help but notice is that all these altercations are between men. It is true that those in power always seem to suffer from big ego and arrogance. They are so busy throwing their weight around that they have no time to search for middle ground. I think that more women in public office would have a calming effect. I cannot help but think of Lillian McGill, a really smart woman who was a force with the Lowndes Freedom Organization back in the day. When John Hulett stepped down as chair of the organization, she should

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have been next in line. But she was a woman. It did not happen.

People do not "deserve" jobs. They must earn them. People should be selected for their job skills, not the color of their skin. It is true that skin color does bring a certain sensitivity to some issues, and that is a valuable thing. But when skin color gets in the way of getting the job done, well, something needs to happen.

The powerful in Lowndes County use the same old tactics to destroy. First, they seek out a weakness; in Sheriff Williams' case it may be temper. Then they use any means necessary to exploit and push people into their weakness. Combined with their masterful use of gossip and innuendo, they can destroy a person in a few weeks. They get on talk shows and talk about things without having real

knowledge. They spread vicious rumors. It divides us as a community, and only with that division can the powerful keep their jobs.

When will we stop letting them use us to punish each other? Nobody seems to have the good of the people at heart, or they would get over their delicate little egos and act like leaders.



**September 24, 2009**

### **The Lowndes Signal**

#### **Letter to the Editor: Chickens Come Home to Roost**

The budget work session on September 23 for the Lowndes County Commission was radically different from the last few months of meetings where the Commission spent nearly \$120,000 on grant writers and economic developers.

It was clear on Wednesday evening that Lowndes County is broke. In fact, County Administrator Jackie Thomas told the Commission that the

upcoming budget is almost \$400,000 in the red. Because many department heads' salaries are set by law, and because Lowndes County Department heads have already slashed their budgets to the bone, we can count on layoffs or pay cuts for the workers.

Ms. Thomas was told to meet with department heads and tell them that their budgets must be cut by 9% to balance the 2010 Lowndes County budget. The decision was laid at the feet of the department heads. They will be forced to be the "bad guys" and either lay off people or cut their salaries.

Nobody suggested cutting out the \$75,000 the Commission gets in discretionary funds. Nobody suggested cutting out the county vehicles, and travel (remember Commissioner King spent at least \$12,000 last year going to the Inauguration and other meetings). And Jackie Thomas came right out and said during the meeting that it is the lawsuits that are throwing Lowndes County into the financial red. There was no look of satisfaction on the face of Dickson Farris, who had repeatedly warned that this crisis was on the horizon. And Charlie King, who has spent decades as a

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Lowndes County Commissioner, seemed to have no working knowledge of the budget. They have placed the sole responsibility of the money on Jackie Thomas, but they refused to listen to her when she told them the county did not have the money for all the consultants they've hired in the past year.

Seeing the formerly brash and arrogant commissioners scramble for answers might have been almost pleasant if I did not know that Lowndes County employees and citizens will ultimately pay the price for the Commission's financial irresponsibility. Over and over, certain commissioners and citizens have tried to warn them

about this impending crisis. As always, it is the people who will pay.

The Commission meets Monday, September 28 and has also scheduled a meeting for Tuesday, September 29. If you don't believe me, come see for yourself.

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