



Union County

Annual Report

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A Message from the County Manager

On behalf of the Union County Board of Commissioners, I am proud to present the accomplishments of the talented and hard-working employees of your County government. In 2005, we accomplished many objectives while facing several new challenges.

Please take a few moments to look through the County's achievements for 2005. The following report is by no means a complete picture of Union County's accomplishments, but rather a snapshot of key strategic objectives that help tell the story of the good things being done by your County government to improve the quality of life in Union County.

As we look to the future, the County will continue to provide the services and programs vital to our community. With strong leadership from the Board of Commissioners, solid financial management, and employees committed to serving our citizens, Union County will remain a great place to live and work.

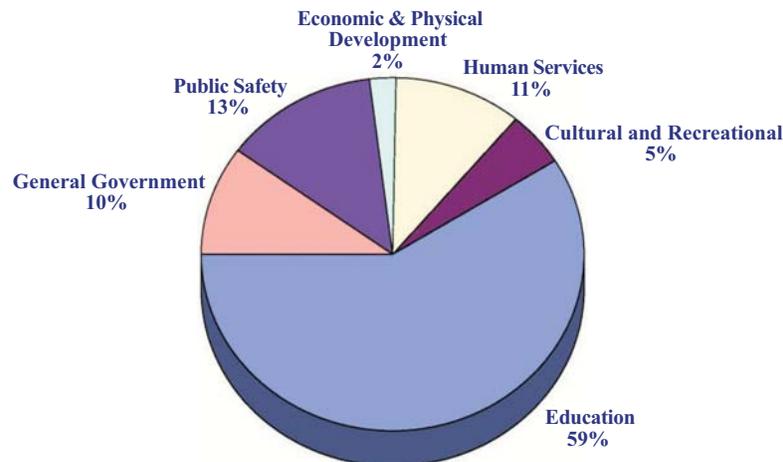
Mike Shalati

Union County Mission

Union County will respect, value and respond to the dynamic needs of our residents, businesses and visitors. Working in partnership with our communities, Union County will become the county of choice as people elect to live, work and do business in our safe, healthy and vital neighborhoods.

Union County Financial Highlights

Where Your County Property Taxes Are Spent



- General Government costs, representing services such as tax billing and collection, human resources and court facilities, are projected to be among the lowest in the Charlotte region and lower than NC counties of similar size.

County Receives Fiscal “Clean Bill of Health”

An independent audit firm provided Union County with an unqualified or clean opinion that the County’s financial statements are fairly presented in conformity with general accepted accounting principles. This opinion is the highest form of opinion that the external auditors can express on the presentation of the County’s financial statements.

County Refinances Debt Saving Taxpayers Millions

The County refinanced portions of its debt in 2005 and saved taxpayers and utility ratepayers more than \$5.6 million in future interest costs.



With moderately low long-term interest rates continuing to be available through most of 2005, the County continued its program of refinancing part of its outstanding debt that carried higher interest rates.

In June 2005, the County was able to reduce the effective interest rate on its 2001 and 2003 school, library and judicial center bonds from 4.64 percent to 4.11 percent saving \$3.9 million through the year 2025 or about \$197,000 per year. After completing the June transaction, the County achieved a lower interest rate on its 2003 water and sewer bonds reducing the effective interest rate from 4.61 percent to 4.21 percent saving \$1.7 million through the year 2029 or about \$71,000 per year.

County’s Credit Rating Improves

In May 2005, Standard & Poor’s (S&P), a premier international credit rating agency, announced its upgrade of the County’s general credit rating to AA from AA-.

S&P praised the County for financial policy decisions made by the County Commissioners and the County’s strong management practices. On the heels of S&P’s upgrade, Fitch Ratings, another credit rating agency, announced in June 2005 that it had revised the County’s rating outlook to “stable” from “negative” reflecting the favorable financial position of the County and the development of sound long-range financial planning.

Of the more than 6,000 cities, counties and school districts in the nation, fewer than 10 percent have a higher credit rating than Union County. The upgraded rating is truly exciting news for Union taxpayers and means that future funding for the County’s large public school construction projects can be secured at a much lower interest rate.

Union County is a Great Place to Work

Union County was recognized by the Employment Security Commission and the state of North Carolina as the best public sector employer from Winston-Salem to South Carolina.

Technology Improvements Benefit County Customers

Advancements in technology have improved County efficiency and communication with its citizens:

- The Personnel Department introduced an on-line application process in 2005 that makes it easier and more convenient for job seekers to apply for employment with Union County.
- The Inspections Department implemented the second-phase of its software project that enables inspectors to enter and submit inspection results real-time through an Internet connection using Nextel phones.
- The Health Department and Parks and Recreation began accepting credit and debit card payments. The Health Department collected nearly \$5,000 and Parks and Recreation collected \$19,265 in card payments during 2005.



County Departments Handle Record Numbers

- The Union County Board of Elections experienced a 300 percent increase in No Excuse (Early) Voting from November 2002 to November 2005.
- The Tax Assessor’s Property Appraisal Division appraised more than 3,000 new dwellings with more than 9 million square feet - a record high.



Union West Regional Library

- The public libraries were busy in 2005 as more than 8,500 new library cards were issued. Approximately 92,200 library users visited the libraries more than 598,000 times, borrowed 801,000 items and used the library’s electronic resources more than 214,000 times. Hundreds of thousands of children, teens and adults attended 3,459 programs presented by library staff.
- Veterans Services made an average of 51 personal contacts each day with veterans and transported 74 veterans each month to Veterans Affairs medical centers in North Carolina.

Programs and Services Support Citizens

- Union County introduced a prescription discount card for County residents to help them cope with the high price of prescription drugs. Data for the first three months of the program reveals that residents saved an average of \$8.91 per prescription.
- Union County implemented a Resident Homeowner Assistance Program, a program that provides financial assistance to low-income homeowners in Union County who meet certain income and asset requirements. In the program's first year, 154 homeowners applied for assistance. Eligible homeowners received \$50 in February.
- Social Services implemented the Multiple Response System as an alternative approach to protecting children. The system builds on partnerships with families and is family-centered and strengths-based. The number of children in the foster care backlog - in DSS for more than one year - decreased by 18 percent over the course of the year.
- Social Services' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program helped 103 families file tax returns. Thirty of those families qualified for the Earned Income Tax Credit, and tax refunds totaled more than \$200,000.
- Union County donated two County-owned vehicles to the Crisis Assistance Ministry's Cars for Workers Program. The intent of the program is to provide applicants dependable transportation to work in order to be self-sufficient.



- Union County Transportation provided 68,023 trips to citizens for medical appointments, jobs and school in 2005.
- Union County Senior Nutrition's two full-time, five part-time and 285 volunteers served 62,271 hot lunches to senior citizens in Union County and 18,192 supplemental meals (Ensure Plus) to critically or chronically ill seniors.
- Registered nurses from the Union County Health Department visited an average of 45 new mothers each month in their homes through the Newborn/Postpartum Home Visiting Program.
- The Health Department's Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP) served 149 women, which represented 120 percent of their goal. Referrals from BCCCP included 27 breast referrals, five biopsies, three breast cancers with surgery and one cervical cancer surgery.
- Union County improved communication with the Latino community by hiring Spanish-speaking employees in the Health Department, Social Services, Register of Deeds and Transportation and Nutrition Department.

- Union County Sheriff Deputies saved the life of a heart attack victim at the Union County Judicial Center by using CPR and an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) accessible at many public facilities in the County. This was the 19th person saved by an AED in a public setting in the United States.
- Union County adopted a new Water and Sewer Self-Help Program to assist communities in need of water and sewer services. Under the new policy, the County pays a proportionate amount of the cost of extending water and sewer services to qualifying communities.
- The Union County Board of Commissioners and Monroe City Council approved a comprehensive, long-range Water and Wastewater Agreement between the City of Monroe and Union County. The City of Monroe will provide wastewater treatment services to Union County and Union County will provide water supply to Monroe.

Building Projects

Union County dedicated two new state-of-the art facilities in 2005 and broke ground on a third building:



The \$15.9 million Union County Judicial Center opened to the public in May. The 102,000 square foot building houses eight courtrooms, offices for Superior and District Court, Clerk of Court, the District Attorney, Guardian Ad Litem and the Community Service Work Program.

The Agricultural Services and Conference Center on Presson Rd. opened in November. The \$6.2 million Ag Center accommodates the needs of the Union County's agricultural and business communities by providing office space for federal, state and local agricultural agencies and meeting and banquet space for as many as 1,000 people.



Ground was broken and construction began on the \$1.7 million animal shelter on Presson Rd. near the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office took control of Animal Services in 2005 and will operate the new shelter scheduled to open in late summer 2006.



Parks and Recreation added 36 concrete picnic sites at Cane Creek Park. The picnic sites have 18 feet seat walls and are located throughout the park. Each picnic site is designed to accommodate up to 12 guests.



County Employees Honored for Their Service

- Union County GIS Technician Sou Moua received a Ketner Employee Productivity Award from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners for his knowledge and implementation of Adobe Acrobat software in the County's Tax and Register of Deeds offices that reduces the amount of redundant work by employees, eliminates the chance of misplaced deeds and saves printer and paper supplies.
- Tom Ward, former environmental health director for Union County Health Department, received the 2005 J.M. Jarrett Award presented by the North Carolina Public Health Association. Jarrett award recipients are selected based on their contributions to the improvement of the environment. Ward also received the Order of the Longleaf Pine from Gov. Mike Easley.
- Reed Cranford of the Union County Environmental Health Department was awarded the 2005 Environmental Health Specialist Rookie of the Year for performing duties above and beyond the usual employment requirements of the environmental health specialist.
- Roy Young, director of Union County Social Services was named DSS Director of the Year by the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services.
- Gloria Haney, volunteer services coordinator for the Department of Social Services, was honored by the *Charlotte Observer* for her work with programs such as the Christmas Bureau and the department's Volunteer Income Tax Program. She was also recognized in 2005 as the Volunteer Administrator of the Year by the North Carolina Association of Volunteer Administrators.



County Departments Receive Awards

- The Health Department received the Innovative Nutrition Education Award from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services for the development and implementation of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Toddler Nutrition Class. This class for overweight and obese children ages 2-5 focuses on healthy eating and exercise.
- The Centralina Council of Governments presented the Union County Public Library with a Region of Excellence Award in the category of Excellence in Local Government Efficiency and Effectiveness for its services and programs designed for the county's Latino community. This is the ninth award the library has won in the past two years.

Managing Growth in Union County

Several facility expansions and ordinances were introduced in 2005 to help manage Union County's rapid growth.

- Union County completed a 9 million gallon expansion at the Catawba Water Treatment Plant, doubling capacity.
- Union County began expanding the capacity at the Twelve-Mile Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant from 2.5 million gallons per day to 6 million gallons per day.
- Union County and its 14 municipalities began work on an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance to help the County better accommodate the impact associated with growth.
- Union County provided funds in the amount of \$72 million to construct two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school which opened in August 2005.



Union County Employees Improve Job Skills

- Union County 9-1-1 telecommunicators completed the Emergency Medical Dispatch certification course offered by the National Association of Emergency Medical Dispatch. Telecommunicators can now provide instructions in CPR, clearing airways and childbirth delivery to a caller until EMS arrives on the scene.
- The Health Department's communicable disease nurse and public health administrator attended Weapons of Mass Destruction training in Anniston, AL.