

WALKER COUNTY COMMISSION

Baker: County has power to stop bingo

By ED HOWELL
Eagle Senior Writer

District Attorney Charles Baker indicated Monday the Walker County Commission has the ability to stop electronic bingo by going the direction taken by the city of Jasper.

Baker told commissioners he may seek a declaratory judgment to determine in court if electronic bingo is legal in Walker County.

He and bingo charities showed up at Monday's commission meeting. Baker said he had just heard about the meeting that morning. It was not clear what they expected to happen, but county attorney Hank Wiley later said all the commission was prepared to act on that day was to amend its business license.

Baker encouraged the commission to have a publicized hearing to get input from all areas of the county on the bingo issue.

"This is a controversial issue in which good men and women disagree on. It's my belief that you have the power in your hands to make this bingo operation legal or illegal. For example, if you voted that bingo must be voted on 5-by-5 paper cards, as I understand the amendment gives in Jasper, then there wouldn't be anymore (electronic) bingo in Walker County," Baker said.

Baker urged the commission to be cautious in getting opin-

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Charles Baker

Charities praise benefits of electronic bingo revenue

By ED HOWELL
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While forces gear up against electronic bingo in Walker County, representatives of charities lined up this week to tell the county commission that the money they're getting from the controversial game of chance is going to good use.

Monday's commission meeting was the first since District Attorney Charles Baker said last week he might seek a declaratory judgment on the legality of electronic bingo in the next month. Meanwhile, State Sen. Charles Bishop is pushing a bill to eliminate electronic bingo out of enabling legislation, and local ministers have said they will join

the battle to ban the mushrooming, computerized version of the old game in the county.

Bodie Cupps, representing Little Vine Cemetery, told county commissioners he plays bingo at Walker County Charity Bingo and doesn't consider himself a big gambler. He said he has encountered customers from not only Walker but also from Lamar, Madison, Marion, Morgan, Tuscaloosa, Bibb, Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, Cullman, Fayette, Calhoun, Etowah and Franklin counties.

"It's been pretty enlightening to me to see people, especially professional people, drive in from Huntsville and Decatur and Gadsden and

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A Double Springs woman called Love's sister about a week later and said she saw Love with a man in the Black Pond community, Stephenson said.

Treasa Love

"They had apparently broken down on the side of the road and the woman had stopped to help," Stephenson said.

Love last seen wearing a pink, short-sleeved blouse and blue jeans. She's 5-foot-8 and weighs about 155 pounds. She has bright green eyes and long brown hair with a red tint.

Anyone with any information about Love is asked to call the Jasper Police Department at 205-221-2121 or the Winston County Sheriff's Office at 205-489-2115.

Baker

From A1

ions, and making any decisions, adding he was sure hundreds of other people had probably not heard about the meeting that morning.

He said he has serious doubts over a bill proposed by state Sen. Charles Bishop, R-Arley, to change the enabling legislation to ban electronic bingo.

"I have serious doubts that you can amend a constitutional amendment simply by passing a bill. You can't make gambling legal by passing a legislative act. It has to be by constitutional amendment," Baker said.

Wiley, who also expressed doubts about Bishop's bill, said he did not think the county could shut down a business that is lawfully permitted under the laws now in place. He indicated the county could not go the route the city of Jasper took to ban the machines, as the county must go by a constitutional amendment and enabling legisla-

tion.

"The Legislature giveth, so the Legislature have to taketh away," Wiley said.

Jasper Mayor Sonny Posey later Monday defended the action his city took to ban electronic bingo machines. The only bingo games allowed in the city are on paper cards.

"Bingo machines-slash-slot machines are not legal within the city limits," Posey said. "The amendment says nothing about bingo machines or slot machines. Our police chief is in charge. It's not going to happen here if we can help it. It will be after the judge says to do it."

Bishop, who is expected to announce soon state Rep. Tommy Sherer, D-Jasper, is sponsoring his bill in the House, said again Monday the bill would be effective ending electronic bingo. He said he has had a number of lawyers to look at the wording.

Quilt

From A1

they've hurt through the loss of their son. This is just a small thing we could do to show them how important

family."

Home of the Brave Quilts is a national organization that makes replica U.S. Civil War Soldiers' Commission

though the terror movement was believed to have virtually no presence in the Basra area.

reported.

Fears about security in Basra have been mounting since the British army left its

the streets during the day-time.

In Baghdad, at least 15 people were killed or found

unity meeting in the provincial capital, Baqouba. At least 37 people were wounded, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

Charities

Tuscaloosa. I'm not real smart, but when people come in like from other counties that's revenue coming into this county," Cupps said.

"The charity I've got qualified is near and dear to me," he said. "The thing that intrigued me about the Walker County Charity Bingo is that it is run as a co-op. It's run by the charities."

Cupps said from what he has seen security is more than adequate at Walker County Charity Bingo, including occasions when large payouts are made.

Lane Reno, director of the Walker County Humane Society, said bingo funds helped make up for \$7,200 cut the County Commission made in its annual allocation to the animal shelter.

"Because of bingo, since it started, we've received better than \$23,000," Reno said. "We were counting on the County Commission money. Now, we're trying not to count on this. We're trying to save it, because you never know, but we hope it goes on, legally of course."

Reno said it does worry her to see so

many bingo halls suddenly spring up.

"I don't see how there can be that many charities. It can't be possible," she said.

Chris Nesmith said the Lupton Youth Athletic group and a similar group his wife represents in Carbon Hill have made close to \$10,000 each from electronic bingo. The money bought new lighting, equipment and fields.

"It's really helped us a lot to keep us from aggravating the community through fundraisers," Nesmith said.

Roger Treglown said the Smith Lake Civic Association has used its bingo funds to build a storage building for boats used in its annual lake cleanup, as well as for maintaining the boats. Other facilities and electrical service have been upgraded, and an endowment project has been started to continue the group's projects.

Attorney Bob Wilson Jr., whose law firm represents a number of non-profits involved with charity bingo, spoke for the state commander and local post of the

Veterans of Foreign Wars. Thousands of dollars from the VFW's local charity bingo operation have gone to assist the widows and orphans of overseas veterans, he said.

Director Lou Vick said the ARC of Walker County has been able to serve disabled citizens without a waiting list thanks to bingo money.

"We'd like to see some pretty firm regulations and some rules to govern the ones that are opening up, because we feel if it is regulated well then people will accept it," he said.

Gene McDaniel of the Nauvoo Historical Society said his group has also benefited from bingo.

"Bingo is everywhere," he said. "Gambling is everywhere. Nobody makes you go into a gambling hall to gamble, I guess I've personally spent less than \$100 in my life gambling. It looks like a waste of time to me, but if you're going to do it, I'd like to have some of it."

Posey

From A1

transferred a portion of what Walker Baptist Medical Center would have paid in sales and use tax to business license fees. That was at the request of the hospital, which has reported deficits.

"If you add back in what we shifted from sales tax to business licenses, we nearly got our projection there," Posey said.

Business license revenue showed marked improvement this year, said Posey.

Posey went through a list of projects under way. He said the first phase of the downtown revitalization project has been completed.

"We've got new lights that have been installed about

The city is applying for Phase 2, which

may take a year to 18 months. He said it has taken a while to complete the process because of government regulations.

Posey said the Town Creek project near Maddox Middle School will include "cleaning the sides and give some new shape for the banks."

Structures to retain more

area project is almost complete. It includes new ball-fields, but the city is rejecting requests for use at least until spring to give more time for the fields to grow in well, especially after this year's drought.

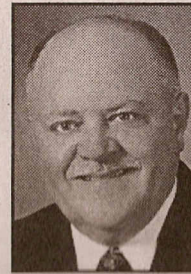
Crews are working this week on a new North Jasper Park on a 16-acre parcel in the north end of town, south of Brakefield Dairy Road, surrounded by Coral Boulevard, El Dorado Drive and North Highland Boulevard.

"The park will be lit with automatic turnoffs. In the neighborhood, we feel like by 9 or 10 o'clock that those lights are out. It also has a children's playground area. There will be

north of Highway 78. That section of town has not had a park area, but now we have one," he said.

An Airport Road widening project should be under way by spring, Posey said. The state has already performed survey work for the \$2.8 million project, of which the city will pay \$250,000. U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt has obtained \$1.8 million of those funds. The three-lane road will stretch to Highway 25, although it will be short of the full length needed.

"Right now we think we can get it to Ridgewood," Posey said, adding Airport Road the busiest street in the city. Jerry Redmill, formerly



Mayor Sonny Posey