



**Raylan Tyre**, son of Wayne County residents Natalie and David Tyre, is the winner of a slice of watermelon in this contest entry from Natalie Tyre. The winner of The Press-Sentinel's 2018 Summer Photo Contest, Summer Showdown III, is Sept. 7 at 5 p.m. Pictures can be emailed as JPEG attachments to [drewdavis@thepress-sentinel.com](mailto:drewdavis@thepress-sentinel.com); left at—or mailed—to the newspaper offices, located at 252 W. Main, Jesup, GA 31545.

NATALIE TYRE / Special

## County's T-SPLOST use

# State requiring corrective action

**By Drew Davis**  
STAFF WRITER

The Wayne County government will be required to show how it will pay back dedicated transportation funds.

The county will have to work with the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts "to come up with a corrective-action plan," explained

Karen Judd, the communications manager for the Georgia Department of Transportation's TIA (Transportation Investment Act) division.

Judd added that she understood the county was already planning to repay the T-SPLOST (special purpose local option sales tax for transportation) revenues it

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## School millage same

**By Drew Davis**  
STAFF WRITER

Wayne County's school-tax rate will remain unchanged this year.

In a called meeting

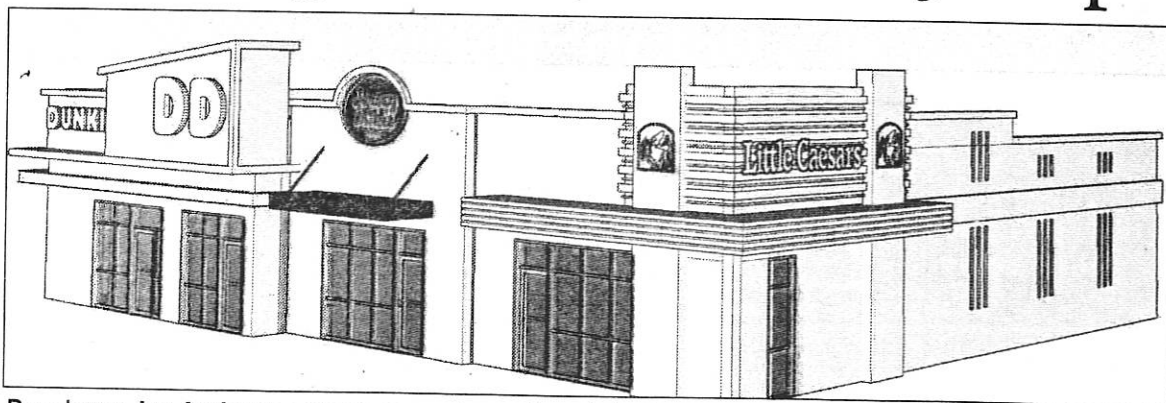
Tuesday, the Board of Education unanimously approved a motion made by Ray Davidson and seconded by Mitch Sutton to keep the school millage

□ See **SCHOOL**, Page 10A

# shops coming to downtown Jesup

**John Eden**  
STAFF WRITER

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Developer **Jay Andrews** plans to convert a portion of the former Walker Chevrolet lot into a plaza that will house Dunkin' Donuts, Jersey Mike's Subs and Little Caesar's Pizza.

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# COUNTY

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had received under the TIA program and had then "borrowed" to pay general-fund bills.

In presenting his plan for dealing with the county's current budget shortfall, Wayne County Commissioner Ralph Hickox revealed earlier this month that the county needed to "return" \$4.7 million to its TIA fund and \$1 million to its fund for paying general-obligation bonds for hospital construction.

When put on the spot by Randy Aspinwall at a public hearing Monday, County Administrator Ed Jeffords acknowledged that, under TIA, T-SPLOST funds are not supposed to be used for non-transportation purposes.

"It definitely does violate the spirit of the law," Judd told *The Press-Sentinel* Thursday.

According to Judd, county officials "will be held accountable for it" by having to show how the money will be repaid.

"We have received quite a few calls from local citizens in this case," Judd said, adding that it is "fantastic"

for citizens to hold their officials accountable.

She also pointed out, though, that the state regularly audits funds collected under TIA and would have eventually caught this use of the county's T-SPLOST funds.

When contacted about the state findings Thursday, Jeffords said, "We're turning this thing around. ... The corrective action would be that we're going to do what we said we're going to do."

Many different factors led to the need for use of the T-SPLOST funds, he pointed out.

He also noted that the use of T-SPLOST funds to keep the general fund liquid occurred before he became county administrator last October.

"I have not used the funds ... since I've been on board," he said. "... During my tenure, we've not commingled any funds."

During the public discussions of county finances in recent weeks, no one has suggested that any of the T-SPLOST funds or hospital-bond funds have been diverted for personal use.

The current shortfall is not the first time the county has had to "borrow" money from dedicated funds. Several years ago, when tax bills were sent out late, the county used SPLOST (special purpose local option sales tax) funds to repay a note at the end of the year before borrowing money again. In response to an inquiry from *The Press-Sentinel*, a representative of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia confirmed that such a use was in a legal "gray area."

The county commissioners were scheduled to meet Friday afternoon to discuss further a specific budgetary plan for them to approve before voting on the final millage. Results of that meeting were not available by press time.

The county will have its final hearing on the proposed five-mill county tax increase Monday at 6:30 p.m. in the commissioners' meeting room. A final vote is scheduled at a called meeting at 7 p.m. in the same location.

missioner Denise Griffis, the owner of a \$100,000 house would be paying an additional \$175 per year with the five-mill increase.

Wayne County tax bills will go out after the Georgia Department of Revenue approves the county's tax digest, which is submitted after the county-wide millage is set.

with Johnson that the proximity (a few hundred yards) of Watson's house to where Floyd's widow, Beth, lives could create a problem. Brown followed up by asking Roberts whether it would still be a problem if Watson moved prior to the trial.

"I would hope not," answered Roberts.

Joe Cunningham, who is retired from the Georgia State Patrol, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office and the National Guard, lives across a creek from Watson. He's known the Watson family for the 48 years that he's lived there.

Like Watson, he has a concealed-carry permit. Brown asked whether a concealed-carry permit allowed Watson to have a gun locked up in his vehicle on school premises, and Cunningham said "yes."

Johnson then asked whether Cunningham knew that Watson had to have the authority in writing by the school board to have a gun in his vehicle. Cunningham said he was not aware of that policy.

"You might want to look into that," Johnson replied.

Cunningham agreed with Brown that an ankle monitor could show Watson's location at all times, though Johnson asked him to clarify whether the monitor did anything to physically keep him from going where he wasn't supposed to go.

"If I had an ankle monitor," Johnson added. "I could go anywhere in the county I wanted, right?" Cunningham agreed.

Cunningham told Brown he used to carry his own pistol with him everywhere he went, even when cutting grass, "because of things going on in the community." After Johnson objected to the comment because of hearsay, Brown rephrased his question. Cunningham clarified that he quit carrying his gun while cutting grass after Floyd was killed.

Mickey Tomberlin, pastor of House of Worship, referred to Watson as "just a laid-back, good guy."

Johnson followed up: "The fact that he shot somebody multiple times means he might do something you wouldn't expect. ... Would you

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# SCHOOL

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at 18 mills.

County residents' property-tax bills consist of school-system taxes and county-government taxes.

The County Board of Commissioners will be voting Monday on a tentative county-government millage of 17.923 mills—up five mills—for a total millage of 35.923 mills.

While county-government taxes would be up

38.7 percent, the total bill (with the flat school millage) would be up only 16.2 percent.

A property-owner's taxes are the product of the property's assessed value (40 percent of the fair market value) and the millage (expressed in tenths of a dollar), minus any applicable exemptions (such as the homestead exemption).

According to Tax Com-

tube found in Vaughn's home belonged to Schell, who had asthma and used a nebu-

Assistant District Attorney John B. Johnson said that he didn't think the voicemail

# SHELL

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on eight counts, including false statements, malice murder, felony murder, false