

<p>Absolute Auction Without Minimum or Reserve Saturday, Nov. 8, 10:30 AM 14.97 Acres, w/House, Divided Into 2 Tracts 7269 W. Andrew Johnson Hwy Hamblen County, TN</p>	<p>Absolute Auction Without Minimum or Reserve Thursday, Nov. 13, 9:30 AM Valley Electric & Mechanical, Inc. 2308 Sycamore Drive Knoxville, TN</p>
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Candidates disagree on living wage

"Remember in November." That was the admonition **Bob Becker** of the Living Wage Campaign gave activists last year after City Council voted 7-2 to kill a "living wage" proposal for city workers.

He was referring to this year's city elections, in which voters have a choice on candidates for four Council positions and where they stand on this issue. Early voting ends Thursday with the general election on Tuesday.

Becker is running for Council to represent the 5th District. He's no longer with the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network, which worked on the living wage initiative.

Besides Becker, **Charles Thomas**, candidate for Council seat A, and **Mostafa Alsharif**, candidate for Council seat C, support the initiative, which would have boosted wages of the lowest-paid city workers to \$19,000 per year from \$17,500. Some 73 city workers would be affected for a cost of \$60,000 to \$80,000, depending on whose figures are used.

It's a high priority for Becker. His opponent, **Tim Wheeler**, said the living wage concept "is a wonderful concept," but at this time he's not for it.

"The finances of the city just cannot support an extra burden," Wheeler said.

While Thomas supports raising city employee pay to \$19,000, he does not support a possible outgrowth that would require businesses contracting with the city also to pay living wages.

"That would require a whole new study," Thomas said.

Thomas' opponent, **Joe Bailey**, opposes the living wage.

Bailey said the market should determine wages. He believes wages can be improved by coming up with business incentives to revitalize downtown, he said.

"Business needs to see a return on the dollar," he said. Alsharif said while he supports a living wage for city employees, "it's not an immediate thing that needs to be done right now." Balancing the budget and determining immediate priorities come first, he said.

Alsharif's opponent, **Marilyn Roddy**, said she supports initiatives to increase wages across the community but doesn't support "government-mandated artificial wage scales."

The "most exciting thing" for improving jobs and wages, Roddy said, is the Jobs Now! campaign, which seeks to create 35,000 jobs in East Tennessee during the next five years.

"We need to think regionally and cooperatively," she said.

In the Council seat B race, **Jean Teague** and **Chris Woodhull** also oppose the living wage campaign.

The total package offered city employees has to be looked at, Teague said. She gave as an example a utility worker making \$17,500 who has benefits, including health and pension that brings the package to \$22,000.

Woodhull said he has been conflicted on the issue because "I care about the poor." But his position is that, "with the free market system, wages are determined by the value of the job, not the people." Wealth needs to be created through entrepreneurship, he said. "We might need to examine whether salaries are competitive in the city," he said.

Associate Editor Georgiana Vines' column appears Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. She may be reached at 865-342-6343 or vines@knews.com.



GEORGIANA VINES
On Politics

Poll examines environment

Residents support more stringent air, water-quality laws, survey reveals

BY TOM HUMPHREY
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A strong majority of Tennesseans support stringent environmental laws, but they have no consensus in rating the performance of the state's two U.S. senators and Gov. Phil Bredesen in protecting air quality, a poll indicates.

Spokesmen for the four environmental activist organizations that commissioned the poll said the results show

efforts by President Bush's administration to weaken air- and water-quality protections are out of step with Tennesseans' thinking.

The poll message to state politicians is "don't jeopardize the good standing you have with your constituents" by following the Bush agenda, said Will Calloway, executive director of the Tennessee Environmental Council.

The telephone poll of 403 Tennesseans was conducted by the Human Dimensions Laboratory at the University of Tennessee's Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Resources from Sept. 15 through Sept. 24. The margin of

error was pegged at 5 percent.

The poll reported that 30.1 percent of surveyed Tennesseans say Bush has done a "poor" job in protecting air quality, while 14.3 percent gave him a "good" or "excellent" mark.

Substantially fewer people gave "poor" ratings to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Sen. Lamar Alexander and Bredesen. But in each case at least a fourth of those surveyed said they do not know how the three perform in protecting air quality.

Frist was rated as doing a "good" or "excellent" job by 19.4 percent of those surveyed, while Alexander was given similar ratings by 18.9 percent and Bre-

desen by 15.4 percent.

Complete poll results are available at www.cleantennessee.org.

The four groups sponsoring the poll were the National Parks Conservation Association, the Tennessee Environmental Council, American Rivers and the Tennessee Clean Water Network.

Representatives of the four groups, appearing at news conferences in Knoxville and Nashville, focused much of their commentary on the state's two senators. Alexander was generally praised for distancing himself from Bush on environmental issues in some cases

See POLL on B7



A crew from J.W. Wallace Construction Co. works to weatherize the home of Etolia Littlejohn in East Knoxville. A.J. Byers, left, routes out for the hinge on her new door while Lewis Robinson, center, and Bob Baker, right, trim away old caulking around the windows before resealing them.

MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL

CAC program warms houses, cuts costs

BY CLIFF HIGHTOWER
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When Jean Rymer moved into her manufactured home last February, it was so cold that she constantly had to wear her flannel housecoat and her flannel pajamas.

"It was real cold when I first moved in here," the 71-year-old Powell resident said. "And the windows were sweating and leaking."

She needed to weatherize her home, but Rymer, who retired from Regas Restaurant after 33 years of service, couldn't do it on her own.

So a friend of her daughter told her about the weatherization assistance program provided by the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee Energy and Housing Services.

At the end of September, CAC weatherized her house at no cost to Rymer. And she says it already has worked.

"I've already saved," she said. Her September electric bill went down from \$95.25 to \$52.62, and her electric usage went down from more than 1,600 kilowatts in September to a little more than 800 kilowatts in October.

"We won't know how much she has saved until 12 months from now," said Cecilia Waters, director of CAC Energy and Housing Services. "But I gave her some homework to do."

The assistance program is a federally

funded initiative to make homes more energy efficient while also cutting utility bills for low-income residents. The main beneficiaries of the program are the elderly, handicapped and those with small children.

But it's open to anyone who qualifies. "It's to benefit the low-income homeowner or renter," Waters said.

The qualifications for applicants in Knox County, Waters said, is they must be a Knoxville or Knox County resident and their income cannot exceed 125 percent of the Office of Management and Budget poverty guidelines, which is set by the federal government.

The money that funds the program comes from the federal government, Waters said. But the money is given to the state that then allocates it to individual programs.

In Tennessee, there are 19 nonprofit organizations that help allocate the money to applicants. In East Tennessee, besides CAC, the Mid-East Community Action Committee, the Blount County Community Action Committee and the East Tennessee Human Resource Agency help distribute the money.

"It's an established network that's been doing this for 20 years," said Steven Meinbresse, director of community programs for the Department of Human Services.

Meinbresse said there has been growing support for the program over the last three years. This year, \$8.3 million was

allocated to Tennessee.

Around \$512,000 was allocated to Knoxville-Knox County CAC.

With this money, Waters said CAC would perform approximately 186 jobs this year, last year around 208 homes were weatherized. She said each time a house is weatherized; it costs CAC approximately \$4,000.

"A lot of times you go to a house and it doesn't need much," said Aaron Cate, weatherization inspector for CAC. "Sometimes you go and it takes every penny you've got."

The idea, though, is to provide relief to people who cannot afford a high electric bill due to an unsealed home.

"Hopefully, with weatherization, it will help decrease the cost," Waters said.

Besides the weatherization program, CAC Energy and Housing Services also offers a low-income home energy assistance program that provides a one-time utility bill pay assistance for winter heating or emergency heating.

Those who need it, like Rymer, appreciate the assistance.

"It's a lot better since I got my windows," she said. "You can tell I'm tickled, can't you?"

For information on the assistance programs, contact CAC Energy and Housing Services at 865-637-6700.

Cliff Hightower may be reached at 865-342-6305.

County reveals cost of hepatitis outbreak

Eatery says it will repay full amount of \$80,000

BY KRISTI L. NELSON
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Knox County has released a breakdown of the costs it incurred as a result of a hepatitis A outbreak last month, and O'Charley's Inc. will repay the county for the full amount — more than \$80,000.

"Weeks ago, O'Charley's said they were willing to help pay for the cost associated with this situation," said Knox County spokesman Mike Cohen. "We are especially appreciative of the fact that, given a (public health) investigation showed that nothing O'Charley's did or did not do caused the outbreak ... the company still wanted to repay Knox County for the expense it incurred."

The county's total — \$81,432.64 — includes salaries of county personnel, supplies and other bills but doesn't include the cost of the immune globulin serum injections given to restaurant employees and patrons who were exposed.

The state of Tennessee picked up the tab for the serum — about \$110,000 — and said it wouldn't ask for reimbursement from the Nashville-based owners of the Turkey Creek O'Charley's, where the outbreak is thought to have started. More than 5,000 doses of the serum were given.

See HEPATITIS on B7

OUTBREAK BREAKDOWN

Breakdown of costs incurred by Knox County in last month's hepatitis A outbreak:

- **Clinical staff:** \$47,616.52
- **Administrative/other staff:** \$15,103.32
- **Patient-specific supplies:** \$6,288.20
- **Environmental staff:** \$5,421.98
- **Phone bank staff:** \$4,944.59
- **Food:** \$1,180.99
- **General supplies:** \$519.35
- **Communication-related:** \$200
- **Transportation:** \$157.69
- TOTAL:** \$81,432.64

Source: Knox County

ELECTION 2003

Early-voter turnout slim for City Council races

BY MICHAEL SILENCE
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Despite four contested City Council races, voter turnout is on pace to be 10 percent or less of registered city voters.

It is so light, Mayor Victor Ashe said, "These people elected on Nov. 4 will have little mandate with such an anemic turnout."

But Administrator of Elections Greg Mackay predicted a pickup in turnout as early voting enters its final two days. Traditionally, turnout does pick up during the

closing days.

Still, his total turnout prediction is less than 15 percent of the registered city voters.

Ashe is predicting a turnout of 10,000 or fewer, but Mackay said he's sticking with his projection of 12,000 to 13,000. There are about 97,000 registered voters in the city.

At stake are almost half the seats on City Council. Four new faces are assured on the nine-member body because incumbents are term limited from seek-

ing re-election.

Early voting is averaging 250 ballots a day. If that pace holds then about 3,500 people will have voted during the 14-day period.

In the last couple of years early voting has made up about 40 percent of the total vote. If that holds this cycle fewer than 10,000 will vote.

Ashe and others have attributed the low turnout to lack of marquee races, including the mayor's race that was concluded in September.

That has prompted him to renew a push he initiated last year to change the city elections cycle to even numbered years to coincide with state and federal elections.

Traditionally, the races that draw the most voters are president, governor and sheriff.

Ashe's effort last year to change the cycle failed to pass City Council or the Election Commission.

Michael Silence can be reached at 865-342-6310.

EARLY VOTING

■ **Dates:** Last two days — today and Thursday

■ **Open:** 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

■ **Polling locations:**

Bearden High School, 8352 Kingston Pike

Knoxville Expo Center, 5441 Clinton Highway

Knoxville Center Mall, Knox County Clerk's Office, 3100 Knoxville Center Drive

Old County Courthouse, first floor lobby, 300 Main St.