

Growth gives county \$43.5 million more for the second year of its \$884.4 million biennial budget

During 2006 Clark County will be adding 9 deputy sheriff officers, 13 custodial officers, three building inspectors, an indigent defense coordinator, and three administrative positions, all as a result in increases in revenues and grants for specific programs.

Betty Sue Morris, chair of the board of commissioners, stated: "The ability to add staff was due to growth-driven increases in revenues. Because more people are moving to the county, tax revenues were higher than forecasted. The county is currently in a solid financial position. We are pleased that our efficiencies and current revenues are allowing us to enhance come of the direct services that the county provides its citizens."

The county also increased its funding for mental health, substance abuse treatment and developmental disabilities support.

In all, the commissioners added \$43.5 to the now \$884.4 million biennial budget.

Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and Nautilus create East Chamber Forum

The East Chamber Forum has been created by the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and will be hosted by Nautilus Inc. The new forum is designed to build business relationships, increase the vitality of the local business community and boost the bottom line, reports chamber president **John McKibbin**.

Morning meetings, open to public attendance, will be held on the second Friday of each month, the first of which will be at 7:30 a.m. Friday, Jan. 13, in Nautilus world headquarters, 16400 SE Nautilus Drive. Breakfast, which will be provided by Nautilus's executive caterer, is \$10.

Ron Arp, executive vice president of corporate communications for Nautilus, says the company is hosting the breakfast meetings because it is committed to building business vitality throughout the region and especially in the company's own backyard.

Substantial business development is underway in east Vancouver, according to Arp: "We intend to help lay the groundwork for a bright future."

Clark Public Utilities' commissioners approve budgets for 2006

Apart from two newspaper reporters, no one from the public was in attendance this morning when Clark Public Utilities' commissioners approved budgets for 2006.

Rates will not increase under the budgets for the utility's electric, water and wastewater customers.

Commissioner **Byron Hanke** said 2006 would be the third consecutive year without an electric rate increase for residential customers. The last electric rate increase was in April 2003. Business customers had a small rate increase in October of 2005. Rates for water and wastewater service also are not expected to change.

"There is a small chance of an electric rate increase in the second half of 2006, if purchased power costs increase and natural gas prices remain high," Hanke said.

The only service increase adopted by the commissioners for 2006 is an increase in the monthly fee for the utility's guaranteed hot water service, from \$2.40 per month to \$2.95 a month.

Clark's general manager/CEO **Wayne Nelson** cautioned, Though, that 2006 natural gas prices could have an impact on the cost of generating power at the utility's River Road Generating Plant, and that the cost of electricity bought from Bonneville Power Administration, expected to be modified in October, would also have an impact on the cost of power. Nelson, however, did not suggest that Clark's retail rates might be affected.

The utility last year set aside \$5 million in what it calls a rate stability fund. That fund remains intact in the 2006 budget.

The single largest part of the electric utility budget, 74 percent, is for the cost of power sold to customers. In 2006, power costs are expected to be about \$251 million, up from \$228 in 2005. The increase is due to higher prices for the natural gas used to produce electricity at the River Road Generating Plant.

The utility will have 358 employees for the electric, water and wastewater systems, an increase of six from the current level. With 325 electric system employees, Clark remains the most efficient public utility district in the state of Washington. "The average Clark employee serves 586 customers, a common industry measurement," Hanke said. Most Washington utilities average 300 customers per employee or less.

The utility anticipates that growth in the county to continue during 2006 at a rate of 2.3 percent, bringing in as many as 4,000 new families. The total number of utility customers is expected to climb to about 180,000.

Washington job growth continued in November

The total number of jobs in Washington increased in November, although the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was unchanged at 5.6 percent, according to the state Employment Security Department.

In Clark County, employment grew by 2,600 jobs to a total of 189,000, out of a total workforce of 201,000. The workforce, however, grew by 3,200 to a total of 201,000 employable persons.

The unadjusted unemployment rate in Clark County in November stood at 5.9 percent, compared to 5.7 percent in October and 6.4 percent in November 2005.

Calendar

C-TRAN board of directors meet in regular session at 5:15 p.m. today in administrative offices at 2425 NE 65th Avenue. The board will consider an agreement with the East Vancouver Open Air Market to allow the market to operate in the Fisher's Landing Transit Center on weekends between March and October each year. The board is also expected to approve the transit agency's 2006 operating and capital budgets. ✍

Tuesday on the air

Clark County Close Up (12/4)—5 p.m. CVTV
Community Tree Lighting Ceremony (11/25)—5:30 P.M. CVTV
Tree Planting Demonstration (12/3)—6 p.m. CVTV
Vancouver Planning Commission (live)—7 p.m. CVTV

Tuesday headlines at home and from around the world:

[New Edge Networks acquired by EarthLink--Vancouver Business Journal, **Shane Cleveland Gregoire** to ask legislature for earl childhood education agency--Columbian, **Kathie Durbin**](#)
[Pension perk passed by legislature eight years ago may cost state billions of dollars--Seattle Times, **Andrew Garber**](#)
[Fed ups interest rates again--USA TODAY, **Barbara Hagenbaugh**](#)
[Anti-library crowd talks porn to trustees--Columbian, **Margaret Ellis**](#)
[Retiring Bob Moser optimistic about Port of Vancouver future--Columbian, **Julia Anderson**](#)
[Local E.coli cases reported as a result of drinking unpasteurized milk from Cowlitz County dairy--Columbian, **Tom Vogt**](#)
[Average weekly wages reported going up in Clark County but not as fast as they are elsewhere--Columbian, **Julia Anderson**](#)
[Camas-Washougal commissioners decide to go ahead with study of Grove Field improvements--Columbian, **Gretchen Fehrenbacher**](#)
[C-TRAN to continue to use downtown transit center base for another year--Oregonian, **Allan Brettman**](#)

Town Tabloids and the weather

Jack Martin Robinson arrived at the **Erik Robinson** and **Erin Middlewood** home just after midnight, December 1, weighing 8 pounds, 3 ounces, and standing 1 foot, 9 inches tall. ✍ **Jim Sanders** predicting 2011 a good year. ✍ **Mat McCudden** slow to find fault. ✍ **Bob Moser** gets retirement watch. ✍ **Tuesday**, mostly sunny, 40. **Wednesday**, more sun after fog, 42. **Thursday**, mostly sunny, some dry clouds, 40.