



# Hello Hamilton County

July 2008

E-News for Hamilton County citizens and employees

Quote of the month: ***“One person may supply the idea for a company, community, or nation, but what gives the idea its force is a community of dreams.”***

~ Andre Malraux

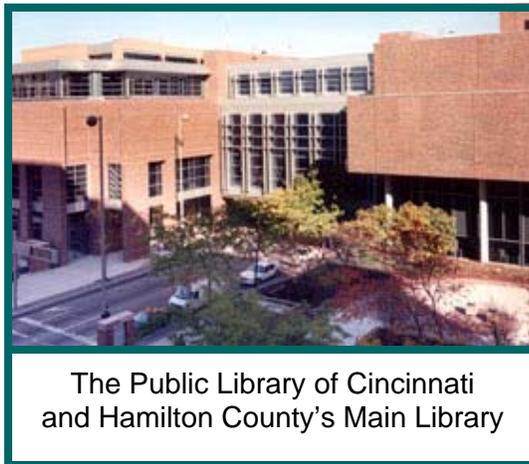
## Hamilton County Job and Family Services Clients Able to Drop Off Documents at Library Branches

It started as a conversation. It ended with an initiative to better serve agency customers.

As of Monday, June 2, Hamilton County Job and Family Services (JFS) customers can drop off verifications at any branch of The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County system.

“As a result of brainstorming customer service improvement ideas, Trey Daly (with Legal Aid) and others were discussing different ways for our clients to efficiently access the agency,” said Jim Ashmore, section chief over Performance Improvement. “The library idea came up and we met with library administrators. The library administration was very supportive of the concept and agreed to help us make it a reality.”

When clients drop off their verifications to the library clerks, the client will receive a copy of the receipt stating the library received the information, as well as their original documentation back. The library worker will then fax the information to the



The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County's Main Library

agency. Jeanne Kerth, administrative assistant in Performance Improvement, will clear and distribute the documents to the appropriate JFS staff member daily.

“The library staff has all been trained on what to do when a JFS client brings them documentation,” Ashmore said. “They’ve been very helpful throughout this process and we’ve gotten lots of feedback from them about the initiative. We tweaked a few things from their suggestions and we’re grateful for all of their help.”

For some agency clients, dropping off documentation to their

JFS worker is the only reason they need to come downtown. The library initiative saves them time and money.

“Many of our clients are not comfortable sending their documents through the mail, and I don’t blame them,” Ashmore said. “The library option is a nicer option for our clients. Since there are numerous locations throughout the County, they won’t

have to worry about missing school, work or training to get downtown to turn in their verifications.

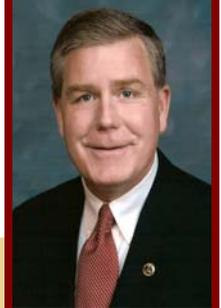
“And with gas prices so high, it saves them money from having to drive down here as well....not to mention parking,” he continued. “It should also make the lobby less congested, which benefits all. Overall, it’s a win-win situation for everyone.”

Employees can assist in this initiative by sharing the information with agency clients. A list of Hamilton County library branches is available at this link: <http://www.cincinnati.library.org/branches/>.



*Patrick's Perspective*

## Despite Challenging Budget Situation County Recognizes Employee Efforts



**Patrick  
Thompson,  
Hamilton County  
Administrator**

Hamilton County continues to face difficult times financially. Although County departments and agencies have done a good job staying within budget, revenues in areas such as property tax, sales tax, and real estate conveyance fees are projected to fall short of the levels anticipated in building the 2008 budget. A total revenue shortfall of approximately \$12 million is currently projected for this year. In the coming days, we will be asking all County departments to identify expenditure reductions to help offset this revenue shortfall. There is no doubt that this will be a difficult challenge to face. It is one that we must meet to keep the County fiscally stable.

All over the country, communities and individuals are coping with a tough financial reality in 2008, and Hamilton County is no different.

Throughout these tough financial times, Hamilton County employees continue to do their best for our community. I recognize that financially, many employees are experiencing individually what we as a county are experiencing. Employees' costs

continue to rise, even as it hasn't been possible for the county to increase pay this year. Employees continue to get the work done — and done well — despite the challenges presented by the lower staffing levels due to previous layoffs and the hiring freeze.

We want to show our appreciation to employees. We've challenged ourselves to provide new incentives to employees that don't impact the bottom line, but do add value for employees.

One increased benefit we recently made available to employees under the Board of County Commissioners is doubling their personal holiday time off. Previously, employees earned four hours of personal holiday time annually. We implemented a policy change this year that doubles this amount — providing employees with 8 hours of personal holiday time annually.

Additionally, we're pleased to provide a new benefit this year to employees under the Board of County Commissioners. Employees now have the opportunity to earn addi-

tional time off and/or cash payment for not using sick leave. Employees can earn up to three days personal days annually — and cash in unused earned personal days, if preferred.

The Board of County Commissioners continue to work to provide additional benefits for employees. The Board is currently considering policies that would encourage departments to provide alternative work schedules for employees, to best accommodate employees' individual needs and to lower employees' costs related to working. The Board of County Commissioners will discuss policies related to flexible scheduling and telecommuting at our July staff meeting.

I appreciate the ideas that employees have shared for providing low-cost benefits during these challenging financial times. We will continue to consider and implement benefits that are affordable for the county and add value for employees. Keep up the good work.



## Photos Needed for the Ohio Statehouse Museum Photo Project



Your photos can be part of an new exhibition that will highlight the people of Ohio! The Ohio Statehouse Museum is creating a display of photos, and you're invited to submit yours for inclusion.

The photos should highlight individuals who have come to serve their fellow citizens and make a difference either as governors, legislators, business people, farmers, concerned citizens, athletes, action shots of people at work or play, and school children. The photos can be random people who are young, old, male, female, etc. Photos do NOT need to be the top historical figures of the county. The Ohio Statehouse is working hard to highlight the diversity throughout our great state.

Hamilton County gets to submit 25 photos for the exhibit. If you would like to submit digital photos for consideration, please get them to Hamilton County **by Friday, July 11th**.

### To submit photos, please:

- Provide the photographer's name and contact information.
- Provide the name and age of the person pictured in the photo.
- Provide a digital image. You can submit a disc or e-mail your photos.
  - To drop off a disc:
    - Label it "Attention: John Bruggen"
    - Drop it off between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday—Friday, at 138 E. Court Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202, Room 603
  - To e-mail photos:
    - E-mail John Bruggen at [john.bruggen@hamilton-co.org](mailto:john.bruggen@hamilton-co.org)

If you need more information about this project, please contact John Bruggen. You can use the e-mail address above or call 946-4316.

The photos will be displayed by the Ohio Statehouse Museum. For more information about the Ohio Statehouse Museum, please go to this link:

[http://www.ohiochannel.org/your\\_state/ohio\\_statehouse/education/ohio\\_statehouse\\_museum/index.cfm](http://www.ohiochannel.org/your_state/ohio_statehouse/education/ohio_statehouse_museum/index.cfm)



## Implementing Innovation: County Departments Go Green



**K.D. Rex and Karen Ambrosius  
are helping Hamilton County Go Green!**

Staff of the Hamilton County Regional Planning (RPC) and Rural Zoning Commissions (RZC), Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA), and Community Development (CD) who participated in the “Hamilton County Innovates” training session defined a “Need to Reduce Waste in County Buildings” as an issue that would go hand in hand with the County’s commitment to the *Go Green Challenge*. They’re addressing that need in a big way!

The *Go Green Challenge* ([www.hcdoes.org/gogreen.htm](http://www.hcdoes.org/gogreen.htm)) has as its mission to lead by example and “to encourage organizations, both large and small, to reduce their environmental impact.” Partners include Cincinnati’s Children’s Hospital Medical Center, The Christ Hospital, University of Cincinnati, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful, and Hamilton County Solid Waste Management District. The “Hamilton County Innovates” training program encourages all county employees to create value by implementing new ideas or targeting an area for improvement.

As of March 7, 2008 RPC, RZC, BZA, and CD are taking steps to make one solution a reality. After a staff meeting with guest speaker Michelle Balz of the Solid Waste Management District,

these four departments have committed to a recycling program that includes not only paper and aluminum cans, but glass, plastics, and batteries as well.

Bins for each of these items have been placed in a central location. Aluminum cans and paper are being placed in larger receptacles provided by the County and the rest – plastic, glass, and batteries - are being dropped off at nearby facilities by staff volunteers. We have also encouraged individuals to remove cubicle waste baskets for a more “centralized” waste basket near the bins, thereby requiring fewer plastic bags to be thrown away by cleaning staff.

Participation is outstanding! We hope that this small beginning will spread throughout other county departments so that we can reduce our environmental footprint. For specifics on creating a departmental program, contact Karen Ambrosius at [karen.ambrosius@hamilton-co.org](mailto:karen.ambrosius@hamilton-co.org).

For more information on general recycling please contact Michelle Balz, Program Specialist, HC Solid Waste Management District at [www.hamiltoncountycycles.org](http://www.hamiltoncountycycles.org).



## New Approaches for Child Support Get More Money in the Hands of Families



Hamilton County Job and Family Services Child Support Section Chief Deb Cunningham

Aggressive, new approaches allowed Hamilton County Job and Family Services' Child Support to collect a record \$264,000 in April from the bank accounts of people who were behind in their payments.

Section Chief Deb Cunningham said all enforcement technicians have made Financial Institution Data Match (FIDM) a priority each week. They have begun using Web-based tools to freeze and seize money in a wider variety of checking and savings accounts.

"Our staff has embraced new methods for getting more collections using FIDM," Cunningham said. "This will help us get more money into the hands of families as they pay for expenses such as food, medical care and education for their children."

Each week, the state Office of Child Support receives information regarding financial institution records for assets belonging to delinquent parents.. From that search, Child Support receives a weekly report of all financial assets of parents whose past-due Child Support meets tax offset requirements. In the past, techs checked the report only if a case was being reviewed for some other action. It came from a spreadsheet that was nearly two months old.

Cunningham says technicians have been encouraged to branch out from checking and savings accounts to areas such as money market accounts, IRAs, compound accounts, and certificates of deposit.

"Accounts that for most of us are considered to be extra money," Cunningham said. "Or at least not the money we use to live day-to-day."

When Cunningham suggested a Web-based tool that provides access to weekly reports, a team of frontline workers decided to give it a try. The team includes Ericka Steffee, Tiffany Miller, Catrina Jimmar, Emily Jackson, Richelle Richardson, Patrick Monk, Daniel Bleh, Amanda Northcutt, Angela Robinson and Christy Selkirk.

"They found it easier to read and use," Cunningham said. "April is just the first month that we are really seeing a big difference. I think it is just the beginning of what will have significant impact on collection of past-due support."

## Find Great Items and Bargains On the Hamilton County Surplus Auction!

Check out the Hamilton County Surplus Auction. You never know what you'll find! Items recently for sale included Chevy pickup trucks, a Ford Taurus that had been driven less than 50,000 miles, laptop computers, and roll-top refrigerators.

See what kind of items and bargains you can find using the county's online public auction! [www.hamiltoncountyohioauction.com](http://www.hamiltoncountyohioauction.com)





## Hamilton County Developing Innovative Employee Bike Commuting Program

How many Hamilton County employees ride their bike to work? We don't know right now. But over 300 of them were interested enough in the idea to answer a questionnaire sent out this spring.

The County—as part of a larger effort to reduce energy use and pollution—is planning to introduce a bike commuting program for its employees that will provide accommodations and incentives for riding to work. A project team is working with Regional Planning Commission, Human Resources, Facilities, and the Administrator's Office on the different parts of this program.

In most American cities, riding a bicycle is usually viewed as a sport or recreation activity and not as transportation. This attitude ignores the huge potential for using bicycles for commuting, running errands, transporting people and stuff wherever needed, and doing it all without burning gasoline or creating pollution.

People in cities around the world (and a few here in America) do see this potential and travel by bicycle whenever they can. They are healthier and their communities are better places to live because of it. With gasoline costing four bucks or more a gallon, they also have more money in their pocket.

The project team is discovering many existing resources that simply need to be tied together to support bike commuting. The Alms & Doepke Building and some other county facilities have locker rooms that can be shared, the downtown YWCA offers “shower only” memberships at a reduced rate, and the County Administra-

tion Building has a few different options for securely storing bicycles.

The intent is to start a pilot project located downtown, then spread the program throughout all County locations. Eventually, Hamilton County can be a model for other large employers and organizations throughout the city interested in promoting bike commuting.

For more information, contact Andy Dobson at 946-4466 or [andy.dobson@hamilton-co.org](mailto:andy.dobson@hamilton-co.org).

### Facts about Biking and Driving:

- The average person loses 13 lbs. their first year of commuting by bike.
- Just 3 hours of bicycling per week can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by 50%.
- Each U.S. rush-hour auto commuter spends an average of 50 hours a year stuck in traffic.
- The U.S. could save 462 million gallons of gasoline a year by increasing cycling from 1% to 1.5% of all trips.
- 60% of the pollution created by automobile emissions happens in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices can work effectively.
- 24% of all trips are made within a mile of the home, 40% of all trips are made within two miles of the home, and 50% of the working population commutes five miles or less to work.

*Source: 1 World, 2 Wheels, a Trek Commitment*



## Hamilton County's 2008 Employees of the Year Award Recipients

In April, Hamilton County announced the names of Hamilton County's Employees of the Year. These employees represent the best of the best! You can read about the employees and their achievements in the next few editions of "Hello Hamilton County."

This month, we highlight the winner of the Innovation Award, Dan Taphorn, and the winner of the Customer Service Excellence Award, Susan Schumacher.

### Employee of the Year: Customer Service Excellence Award Susan Schumacher, Department of Environmental Services



Susan Schumacher has a reputation for providing outstanding customer service in her role as the Solid Waste Assistant in the Hamilton County Environmental Services / Solid Waste Management District.

Schumacher consistently goes above and beyond her job duties. For example, she initiated a practice in which the Solid Waste District's three hotlines ring to her phone during regular business hours before going to a recorded message. Schumacher likes the idea that customers can talk with a person, rather than listen to a recording. In 2007 alone, Schumacher answered 3,200 phone calls to the Solid Waste District's three hotlines.

Schumacher also worked with the County's Communications Department to expand the capabilities of the Household Hazardous Waste Program, improving public access to it and giving callers more options and opportunities to gather information from the recording during non-business hours.

Finally, she also chose to learn how to update and add information to the District's website, so the public could always access the most current information. These are just a few of many examples of Schumacher's outstanding commitment to customer service.

Schumacher was nominated for the Employee of the Year

award by Sarah Dowers, Public Affairs Coordinator.

Schumacher says, "I was humbled by the fact that my co-workers nominated me and that I had been selected." She says what she likes best about working for the Department of Environmental Services is the diversity of work and the people. Working for the Solid Waste Management District provides me opportunities to branch out and learn different things that may not be directly in my job description. I use these opportunities to provide better customer service not just to outside customers but internal as well."



## Employee of the Year: Innovation Award Daniel Taphorn, Soil and Water Conservation District



Daniel Taphorn's innovative solution to a situation in Springfield Township has made a huge difference for residents of one subdivision — and has earned him the Innovation Award!

Taphorn currently serves as an Urban Conservationist for the Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District. He is in charge of the Hamilton County Earthwork Regulations that oversees erosion, sediment control and hillside stability in the unincorporated areas of the County. Taphorn is highly respected for his work, knowledge, and attitude by those in the development community and landowners.

Often, the solutions to the situations Taphorn handles are more costly than the worth of the buildings and property involved. One such example was Lux Lane in Springfield Township.

The Lux Lane Subdivision was built in the mid-1960s, before existing regulations were put into place. Shortly after moving in, the residents on the north side of Lux Lane started experiencing problems. Uncontrolled fill along the north side of Lux Lane and the stream running through these properties at the base of the fill created slope stability issues early on. The developer's so-

lution was to pipe the stream and re-grade the slope. This provided a short term fix, but did not effectively resolve the problems.

The District had responded to numerous inquiries for assistance in addressing the failing slope for many years, but had no means to provide financial assistance. In 2002, Taphorn met with Commissioner Todd Portune and several of the residents to evaluate the worsening situation and discuss a possible solution. Taphorn's solution was innovative! He recommended working with a contractor to see if they would be willing to assist the property owners and, in return, have a disposal site for clean hard fill. After several on-site meetings with representatives of Barrett Paving and Adleta Construction and Jack Distler of Lux Lane, they agreed to partner with the residents. That wasn't the end of Taphorn's involvement, though.

Taphorn was instrumental in keeping the project moving forward. Not only did he guide the involved parties in how to obtain local, state, and federal permits for this project he also had to obtain temporary and permanent easements from the Board of County Commissioners, Springfield Township and all of the property owners on Lux Lane involved in the

project.

Taphorn's involvement in the issue has created a great example of how innovative thinking and public, private, and corporate collaboration can lead to a positive outcome. This project saved 11 homes from being condemned and cost the residents nothing!

Taphorn was nominated by Holly Utrata-Halcomb, Administrator – Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District.

When asked how he feels about receiving the award, Taphorn said, "The homeowners of Lux Lane and Barrett Paving were the driving forces behind the landslide stabilization project; without their determination and persistence the project probably would not have come together. I am lucky that my supervisor Holly Utrata Halcomb, the Districts Board of Supervisors and Commissioner Portune were so supportive and allowed me the flexibility to work on this project. I am glad that my idea was able to help stabilize the homes on Lux Lane at no cost to the homeowners and enabled Barrett Paving a place to dispose of clean hard fill."

**Continued on p. 9.**



***Taphorn, continued from p. 8.***

Taphorn also shared what he likes best about working for Hamilton County. "I like the challenges of working in an urban county. Hamilton County has some of the most erodible soils

in the state. I enjoy working with the dedicated staff at Soil & Water and all of the partner agencies within the county. There are a lot of hard working and knowledgeable employees that work for Hamilton County. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity

to learn so much from them. I like working in the community where I grew up, and knowing that we can have a positive effect on Hamilton County's future through our efforts."

## A Caring Family is Needed!



**Robert**  
**Born October 3, 1993**

Robert is very tactile and loves doing things with his hands. Fishing is his favorite pastime, and he's quite good at it – often catching fish when he goes out for a day on the water. The lake is the best place in the world, according to Robert.

This eager young man also likes making crafts in Art class, or playing with remote control cars. To Robert, there's nothing better than playing outside on a summer day, concluding with a flavored Iced tea in the evening!

If he has to play inside, he doesn't mind passing the time with a few racing themed video games, or by watching a wrestling match on TV.

Robert would thrive with a busy family who will encourage him to make the most of his talents.

**To learn more about Robert and others available for adoption,  
Please call 513-632-6366 or visit [www.hcadopt.org](http://www.hcadopt.org).**



## Please post "Hello Hamilton County," so everyone can see what's going on!

Hello Hamilton County is published twice each month. It is designed to inform citizens and employees about news and events related to Hamilton County government and our community in general. You can find current and archived editions on the County's website. If you have questions, suggestions, or article submissions, please contact Laura Maus or Eric Stuckey.

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