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County honors judge advocate for referendum

by By Joel Martin Senior writer
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It was an honor to be honored at Tuesday's Troup County Commission meeting.

The commission recognized Troup Juvenile Court Judge Michael Key for his induction as president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Key, who has been on the bench for 21 years, was inducted July 20 during the council's 73rd annual conference in San Diego. He is past president of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges.

Also honored were Scott Turk, the county's special services manager, and Patrick Crews, senior vice president of

LaGrange Banking Co., for their efforts in support of a redevelopment powers referendum that was approved July 20 by voters in LaGrange, Hogansville and the unincorporated area. West Point approved the referendum last year.

Under Georgia's redevelopment powers law, local governments with voter approval can create tax allocation districts as an incentive for retail and housing development that might not otherwise happen.

Eligible projects would pay existing taxes on the property, but could use the extra tax revenue generated by the development for a bond issue that would pay for infrastructure and other capital costs. Once the bonds have been retired in 20 or 30 years, the local governments would get the full tax benefit.

Turk and Crews were presented with a certificate of commendation and civic leader award, respectively, for helping voters make an informed choice in the referendum.

"Troup County got overwhelming support for the redevelopment powers tool," said commission Chairman Ricky Wolfe. "We've very excited about it helping us. I want to stress that it's only a tool, but we've already received significant interest as one of the few TAD-friendly counties in Georgia."

The chairman said Turk, Crews and Page Estes, president of the LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce, helped "break down the referendum in layman's terms. It was very difficult and (they) did an excellent job."

Crews has been a longtime community leader and “this is another example of Patrick’s exemplary service to this community,” Wolfe said. “He ... personifies a citizen stepping forward when his community needs him.”

Turk, who displayed “outstanding service and devotion above and beyond the call of duty,” said the redevelopment tool may help produce jobs and economic activity.

“Troup County is at a tipping point in its growth and evolution as a community,” he said. “This can make all the difference in tipping it to the side of positive growth.”

Also at Tuesday’s meeting was West Georgia Health System President Jerry Fulks , whom Wolfe asked what were the major impediments to attracting physicians to LaGrange.

“Shopping opportunity shortages is one concern,” Fulks said.

Wolfe said the question and answer had not been rehearsed. He had argued that more retail stores was a major reason for supporting the referendum.

Wolfe was especially delighted to recognize Key because “he’s a Dunson Mill boy just like me and that makes it pretty special.”

“I’m really touched by this,” Key said, standing before a large gathering at the commission meeting. “This is harder than it was in San Diego.”

Key, 60, who also was honored at a reception after the meeting, said the board has always supported children and he’s proud to be from Troup County.

He thanked Juvenile Court Administrator Brenda Royster and the other staff members, along with the Department of Family and Children Services and CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates), who look out for the needs of children in the court system.

“We’ve got so much more to do,” Key said. “We’ve got to keep working at it.”

Wolfe said Key has been “totally dedicated to the children of Troup County and this appointment is a culmination of many years of that

dedication.”

Key was sworn in by Georgia Supreme Court Justice Harris Hines, chairman of the court’s committee on justice for children.

In other matters Tuesday, the commission appointed Kristi Hacker to fill a term that expires Dec. 31, 2011, on the Troup County Board of Zoning Appeals & Planning Commission, and Andy Brubaker to fill a term that expires Dec. 31, 2012, on the Troup County Library Board.

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