

## **Commissioner Q & A January 21 2015**

### **Senior Property Tax Exemptions - part 3**

**Q. I have paid property taxes all my life and since I do not have any kids in school, why should I still have to pay property taxes for schools?**

A. Some senior citizen had to pay property taxes for you and me to go to school and we all have to pay for the kids of other parents. Having an educated society is what helps prevents crime, and what makes our quality of life in our communities so much better.

**Q. Why do some counties have a senior property tax exemptions and others do not?**

A. The exemption began with only counties with a large industrial and commercial tax base having any type of exemption. This is because the industry could absorb the higher property taxes to make up for those who no longer paid. However, when smaller counties started trying the same thing, it put a tremendous tax burden on the younger families who had little income and certainly little savings. For example, in Lumpkin Co. today, their property taxes are 60% higher than ours because the taxes paid by the seniors were exempted and everyone else had to pick up the bill.

**Q. What percent of emergency service calls are for seniors?**

A. It is hard to have exact numbers, but the Union General Ambulance Service estimates that about 80% of their ambulance calls are for seniors. Likewise, the Fire Dept had 65% of its total call volume of 2041 calls for medical assistance, with about 80% of those involving seniors. This is not a complaint by anyone but just a fact of life. As we get older, our health needs increase and someone has to pay for it.

**Q. Doesn't Union County have some of the best medical facilities around this area?**

A. We are very blessed that Union General Hospital and Nursing Home are two exceptional facilities with very qualified doctors and medical staff, available for the entire county. Interestingly, this is one reason that so many retired people feel comfortable moving to Union County. But our other main assets and attractions are our school system, our recreation program, golf course and facilities and the awe inspiring beauty of our mountains, lakes, and streams. Very few if any rural counties can compare to Union County for the quality of life, the services and facilities available to everyone, excellent public safety personnel and equipment, and outdoor recreation opportunities offered here. We want this to continue.

**Q. How are property tax exemptions given?**

A. They are usually introduced as local legislation through the Legislature which has to figure out what options to use. Then the general public has to vote on the exemption in an election, usually in November of a given year, and any changes would take place the following year.

**Q. Why would changing the property tax system be an issue now when it has never been an issue in the history of Union County?**

A. Normally, political pressure of some type is applied or political favor can also be sought. Sometimes it may just be because someone wants to help a certain group because they think they see a need. I do not disagree with being sympathetic for those in need, but once you start the tax exemption process, you never know where it will end and who will be left out and most of all, who will determine what is fair.