Delinquent properties spike

More than 500 homes, parcels



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Auctioneer Larry Meares motions to a winning bid during Monday's Delinquent Tax Sale at the Oconee County Council Chamber. More than 500 properties were auctioned.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Reflecting dire economic times, the number of properties listed for auction at the Oconee County Delinquent Tax Sale increased by almost 55 percent over the 2009 sale.

An overflow crowd jammed the Oconee County Council Chamber for Monday's sale.

An auctioneer called out for bids on more than 500 properties. There were 328 properties on the list a year ago.

Delinquent Tax Office Director Linda Shugart said she would have a final tally on the sale, including proceeds, later in the week.

Shugart said property owners redeemed about a dozen of the 521 properties originally listed for sale after they paid taxes owed, assessments, penalties and costs prior the start of the 10 a.m. auction.

Shugart likely oversaw the last delinquent tax sale in Oconee. She was named the new County Assessor in July and is running both offices until a new Delinquent Tax Office director is named.

Last year, 173 of the 328 properties auctioned went to the highest bidder. The 2009 sale collected $668,796.

The 55 percent spike in the number of properties for sale underscores the poor state of the local economy. Individuals and developers who could not pay their property taxes on time are represented on the list.

Property owners have one year from the date of the sale to redeem their properties by paying their back taxes with interest and any applicable fees.

An organization called Relief Effort for Senior Taxes (REST) has been trying to keep elderly property owners in their homes by helping to pay their taxes.

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55 percent

auctioned Monday

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Pastor Tim Whited of Salem United Methodist Church manages REST funds. He agreed to run the program after Oconee County Council member Wayne McCall followed through on his pledge to give his council pay to help struggling property taxpayers.

Whited has said that REST has received donations from people that have been helped by the organization.

Donations to REST may be made by calling Whited at (864) 944-1726 or by writing to REST, c/o Salem United Methodist Church, PO Box 42, Salem, SC 29676.