

ROAD TO INDY BEGINS

Wake Forest takes on Texas tonight in New Orleans, B1

SPORTS



Police investigate another home invasion, C1

REGION

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A conversation with 'Moo Moo', D1
ACCENT

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Weather

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5 MINUTE TIMES

NATION

Companies that hire unemployed workers will get a temporary payroll tax holiday under a bill that easily won congressional approval Wednesday in what Democrats hope is just the first of several election-year measures aimed at boosting hiring. A6



Thousands of volunteers offered a hand this week to fill and stack sandbags to place along the river and near endangered homes as the city of Fargo, N.D., faces the threat of a severe flood after the river's expected crest Sunday. But the heart of that volunteer corps are the city's youngest citizens. A3

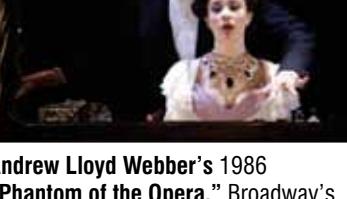
WORLD

A Pakistani court charged five young Americans on Wednesday with planning terrorist attacks and conspiring to wage war against nations allied with Pakistan, their defense lawyer said. A8

STATE

The Obama administration is highlighting what it's doing to boost jobs when Vice President Joe Biden visits a North Carolina company enjoying rapid sales of its light-producing semiconductor chips. B2

PEOPLE



Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 "Phantom of the Opera," Broadway's longest-running show and the most commercially successful musical in theater history, has spawned a sequel, "Love Never Dies," which opened in London last week to some of the wild-est mixed reviews in history. A2

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County: Revenue up, spending down

Manager rates current budget a 6 1/2 out of possible 10

By Robert Boyer
Times-News
rboyer@thetimesnews.com

Amid a troubling economy and waning revenue, there is some good news to be found two-thirds

into Alamance County's current budget year.

Despite a 24.3 percent drop in sales tax revenue through the first eight months of the county budget, overall revenues are higher than anticipated, and spending is running below projections, says County Manager Craig Honeycutt.

"With the year now 66 percent over, we are at 73 percent of revenue projections," Honeycutt said in

See REVENUE UP / Page A2

Loan for renovations nearly done

Times-News

The county is scheduled today to close on a \$5.9 million loan with RBC bank to help pay for the lion's share of its \$9.4 million plan to refurbish county properties.

Among other things, the financing deal with RBC bank will pay for more than \$3 million in renova-

tions to the old courthouse in Graham as part of a slew of second-phase "Group B" renovations that are part of the countywide Facilities Improvement Plan.

The loan will use \$3 million of federal Recovery Zone Economic Development Bond funding, which

See NEARLY DONE / Page A2

Cancellation of inmate labor program leaves void



Times-News

Ken Wells, an inmate at the Dan River Prison Work Farm in Yanceyville, collects sawhorses in the old Western Electric plant on Graham-Hopdale Road in November 2008. The sawhorses were used for the Hospice Flea Market, which can no longer take advantage of inmate labor.

Projects left in limbo

Flea market calls for volunteers to make up worker shortage

By Mike Wilder
Times-News
mwilder@thetimesnews.com

What do Elon's Beth Schmidt Park, the Alamance-Caswell Hospice Flea Market and canoe access points on the Haw River have in common?

Prison inmates have worked on all of them.

From the mid-1990s

Comment on this story

through 2009, work crews made

up of minimum security inmates

from the state's prison system

worked on projects all over North

Carolina. The crews did land-

scaping, made repairs, painted,

created trails and worked on streets.

The program ended in August 2009 because of the state's budget crisis. Using the inmates, the state had provided the labor for free to local governments, school systems and nonprofits.

Each crew was supervised by an officer, N.C. Department of

Correction spokesman Keith

Acree said. There were more than

100 crews in North Carolina, so

state legislators were able to

reduce expenses by eliminating

those positions when looking for

budget cuts last year.

The Dan River Prison Work

Farm in Yanceyville had the largest

number of inmate work crews

of any prison in the state. Fifteen

teams of eight men each worked on projects in nine counties.

George Solomon, the prison work farm's administrator, said the crews often worked in Alamance County.

Michael Fulcher, who supervised the work crew program at Dan River, said inmates would

come to Burlington to install the

canvas cover that turns the city's

swimming pool into an indoor

pool during the colder months.

Acree said there's been discussion among legislators about renewing the program, though he thinks the state's continued budget problems make that unlikely this year.

See LEFT IN LIMBO / Page A2

State prison numbers drop for first time since 1972

Rhode Island, Michigan report largest decline

By David Crary
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Spurred by budget crises, California and Michigan together reduced their prison populations by more than 7,500 last year, contributing to what a new report says is the first nationwide decline in the number of state inmates since 1972.

The overall drop was slight, according to the Pew Center on the States — just 0.4 percent — but its report suggests there could be a sustained downward trend because of keen interest by state policymakers in curtailing corrections costs.

"The political and policy environment has changed drastically," said Adam Gelb, director of the Pew Center's Public Safety

Performance Project.

According to official state data collected by the Pew Center, 1,403,091 people were under the jurisdiction of state prison authorities on Jan. 1, down by 5,739 from a year earlier. The report, being released Wednesday, said this was the first year-to-year drop in the state prison population since 1972, when there were about 174,000 prisoners.

Since then, the nationwide prison population has soared, in part because of stiff sentencing laws, giving the U.S. the world's highest incarceration rate.

With more inmates to handle, state corrections costs quadrupled over the past 20 years, according to the report. Many states are now in fiscal disarray, and legislators are looking afresh at ways to curb prison spending, but the Pew survey revealed a wide variation of responses.

In 23 states, the number of prisoners increased in 2009 — notably in

See PRISON NUMBERS / Page A2

COUNTDOWN TO

DAY 3

SPRING

As one of the worst winters in recent memory winds down, we're itching for the first day of spring on March 20. As the big day approaches, we're counting down with a few things we're looking forward to.

A GREENER WORLD

Maybe the reason we like snow, at least the first couple of times it falls, is that it provides bright brilliant color in an otherwise grey world.

The first morning after a snowfall, the sun shining on the sheet of white reminds us of the bright colors that Mother Nature has to offer. After a couple of days, of course, the snow is dirty and dingy, like everything else during the winter.

The sky is gray. The grass is brown and dead. What was once the color of life and will be again is the color of death for a few months.

Spring is like going from a black and white film to glorious Technicolor, as if the world has taken a happy pill right before our eyes.

There's a lot of talk these days about "green power." That term makes us think not of wind turbines but the stirring in our soul when our world comes back to life.

The green of spring gives us power to live.

