

Minutes for April 2003 Meeting
of the Aiken County Republican Party
by Vicki L. Simons

The regular monthly meeting of the Aiken County Republican Party was held on Thursday, April 17, 2003, in the auditorium of the Aiken County Council Building. The following officers were present:

- * Chairman, David Nix,
- * Treasurer, Jan Carpenter, and
- * Secretary, Vicki Simons.

Chairman David Nix called the meeting to order and offered the invocation. No flag was available to pledge allegiance to.

Chairman David Nix:

- * Recognized the only elected official present, Jim Sutherland, Mayor of New Ellenton.
- * Said that the Treasurer's Report for the period March 1-31, 2003, showed a balance of \$2,277.64 and that dues are trickling in.
- * Asked if there were questions about the March 2003 meeting minutes, and hearing none asked for a motion to approve the set which had been mailed to Executive Committeemen. A motion was made and seconded. Those in the Executive Committee who were present voted unanimously to approve the minutes. Therefore, the reading of the minutes was dispensed with.
- * Recognized our guest speaker, Mike Hunt, the Republican nominee for Aiken County Sheriff, who had another engagement.

Mike Hunt said that it is a pleasure to be at the meeting and to be the Republican candidate for Sheriff. He appreciated the support of many present during the primary. He said he will continue to run a strong and positive campaign. He is not underestimating his opponent and will work to get out the vote. He thanked his campaign manager Robert Gossett and one of his staffers Greg West, both of whom were present. He said he won the primary by surrounding himself with good people, a practice that has paid off his entire career. He will work to serve the people the best he can.

Mike said that most sheriffs have a transition period of 2-3 months following a general election. He doesn't have that luxury. He thinks he will win the election. The swearing in of the new Sheriff will occur on May 15 at 1:00 p.m. The General Sessions Courtroom has been reserved so that the public can be involved. He is looking forward to building relationships with other departments, including the solicitor's office, state law enforcement division, and local FBI. Plans are in place to work agreements with narcotic enforcement and homicide investigation once he's in office.

Throughout his campaign, Mike said he had spoken about going to a new shift. This will increase cars on the road from 5 to 12 covering 1200 square miles. This move will increase protection to citizens, reduce response times, increase morale and cut down turnover. He said that turnover is at an all-time high. New shifts are put together by restructuring the department and reassigning some personnel. If elected and sworn in on May 15, the new shifts will be put into place starting at 6:00 a.m. on May 23. He wants to meet both short-term and long-term goals. He already has his new staff picked out.

Mike said that he's been working to meet with all the small town police chiefs. When the new radio system was adopted, no one asked the small towns. There are two sets of radios. By going to the new 800 system, the link with the state for emergencies was in place, but a system is needed to watch out for every citizen in Aiken County. Comments were raised by Jim Sutherland and Chairman Nix about the radio system. Mike responded to them. Whatever they do, Mike said, they need to be on the "same sheet of

music" with the small town police departments, having a dispatcher listening to both radios.

Chairman Nix asked a general question about job reassignments. Mike said that he had met with all but about 12 people in the Sheriff's Office. Some folks are being assigned back to uniformed patrol. Some people had no job description, just floating around with no supervision. Some people had rank over no one. The plan is to pull back to four basics: uniformed patrol, investigation division, communications center, and narcotics. He said crack cocaine drives all crime. By putting more cars on the road, the department will save a bunch of money by reassigning jobs.

Mike also addressed the situation with dispatch. Complaints in the past have been about rudeness and forgetting dispatches. He said that in the past, dispatchers were trained for 4 to 5 days and "thrown to the wolves." He plans to implement a training program where new hires will be trained in the classroom and with a dispatcher. Someone will evaluate the proposed dispatcher to see if the training was enough. Evaluators will not sign off on new dispatchers whom they feel are not ready. Some trainees will need a week or two more training in a specific area.

Andy Windham commented about the investigation lab and a grant. Mike said that a good portion of the money had come from a federal grant. Chairman Nix said that it was not an additional county tax burden. Mike said that the drug lab has a lot of potential. In the past, all drug cases used to go to SLED. SLED is backed up by as much as 6 months. The state department is in terrible financial shape. With a local drug lab, they've noticed a difference [decrease] in the backlog of cases. In the future, they'll be analyzing arson. The machine is already there, he said, and regional crime labs are a thing of the future.

Charles Duke asked about plans for school resource officers (SROs). Mike said that they will stay in place because they are mandated. Schools are not like they used to be. There must be a uniformed presence on school campuses. SROs are also a great intelligence tool. There are all types of activities at schools, not just drugs. Mike talked about two schools in Greenville County which have implemented "boot camps" to handle problem students who are neither expelled nor suspended. The program is run by SROs with parental approval. Students in the boot camps are required to keep up their studies and do tasks such as cleaning and repair. Results are that there has been a 60% reduction in first-time suspensions and an 80% reduction in school violence. Aiken County is getting ready to lose alternative schools, so there's no better reason to look at this program.

Diane Giddings commented about judges' intervention and the SAFE team, a minor version of Scared Straight. Mike said that Barbara Morgan will work with the boot camp program. The family court judges want the same thing we want, safe schools and for certain poor students not to disrupt classes.

Chairman Nix encouraged everyone to get out and vote for Mike Hunt on May 13. He predicted a win of 80% if we get out the vote.

Chairman Nix asked if there was other business. Seeing none, he welcomed a motion to adjourn, which was made, seconded and approved. The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes approved by: _____

on: _____

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____