

# The Ouachita CITIZEN

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## Monroe elections in jeopardy

BY MICHAEL DEVAULT  
The Citizen

A planned election for the Monroe City Council may have to wait, after city officials learned they have missed a critical deadline to redraw the city's five council districts.

The terms of Monroe's five-member City Council end in June 2012. That means the city

would have to hold elections for those posts on March 24, 2012.

However, provisions in the city charter require that redistricting plans be submitted within one year following any Census and a minimum of six months prior to the next municipal election.

To date, the City Council has not approved a redistricting plan for the city council districts and

**First reported:**  
ouachitacitizen.com

is not expected to approve one before the end of November, less than the required six months prior to election day per the city charter.

City Council Chairman Jay Marx said he first learned Tuesday morning that Monroe may not be able to hold City

Council elections in March.

"Immediately I called (city attorney Nancy Summersgill and we started looking at it and talking about it," said Marx. "Where at first it looked like there was an easy solution, there is not."

Summersgill serves as city attorney for the City of Monroe. It is Summersgill's job to advise

the city on matters relating to the law.

Marx was quick to point out this was not the first time the city had dealt with a conflict between a Census count and a planned election for the City Council.

According to Marx, the situation arose in 1991 as well. However, Marx said no one associated with city government today was active in gov-

erning the city in 1991, so record of how the problem was addressed then will be hard to come by.

Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo said part of the problem this time around was that the city challenged the findings of the 2010 Census.

According to the pre-

Please see  
JEOPARDY / 14A



Photo by Kelley Photography

**WEST MONROE** tailback Steven Jones (5) runs in for a score last week against Ruston High School. The Rebels face three-time defending Florida state champions, the Cocoa High School Tigers, in a rare Saturday matchup. Kick-off is at 7 p.m. For more on area prep football — including important district games this weekend — see Page 1B.

## Back at work

*Sheriff-elect  
Jay Russell returns  
to post as OPSO  
chief deputy*

BY MICHAEL DEVAULT  
The Citizen

Jay Russell was back at his post as Ouachita Parish chief deputy Monday morning, less than 48 hours after outdistancing a crowded field of candidates to win the sheriff's race.

With more than half of the total vote, Russell won the sheriff's race outright in the Oct. 22 primary election and narrowly avoided a runoff with former West Monroe Police Chief Larry LaBorde, who ran second in the race.

Russell secured a little more than 52 percent of the vote in Saturday's

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WORK / 14A

### WEST MONROE

## City pursues industrial park expansion

An industrial park near the Ike Hamilton Expo Center in West Monroe could expand in the near future if the City of West Monroe buys a 40-acre tract adjacent to the park.

Eric Hale, who serves as economic development director for the city, says West Monroe has "had enough interest" from potential tenants of the park to justify moving forward with a wetlands study to determine whether the city should buy the 40 acres of land.

"Without some land we can offer to people, it's really tough to go out and bring in new companies and new jobs," Hale said.

The tract of land in question is owned by a local family and is similar to a 40-acre tract the city bought a couple of years ago to expand the industrial park.

That parcel of land was bought for roughly \$244,000. According to Hale, he expects the city to pay roughly the same price for the additional 40-acre tract if it pursues the transaction.

"This would be something fairly consistent with that purchase," Hale said.

**"Our intent is to make the land available to companies that bring jobs to the area or to existing companies that intend to expand employment from current levels. We have been successful in bringing new jobs to the area in the past using this strategy."**

**West Monroe Mayor Dave Norris**

Before the purchase can be transacted, West Monroe must first conduct the necessary environmental studies and determine whether the land would be suitable for use as an industrial site.

At a regular meeting of the Board of Aldermen held earlier this month, aldermen unanimously approved an ordinance to commission a wetlands findings report.

After that survey is completed, the city

will conduct an environmental impact study that is wider in scope.

If the land clears both of those hurdles, city officials will move forward on negotiations to buy the property. Hale declined to speculate on a timeframe to complete the deal.

"We're doing all the stuff we have to do before we do the purchase," Hale said.

West Monroe Mayor Dave Norris said West Monroe would use grant funding to improve infrastructure on the 40-acre tract near the Ike in anticipation of future development.

"The location of the property makes it very desirable for new or expanding businesses," Norris said.

According to Norris, the land is perfectly situated to entice future business expansion.

"Our intent is to make the land available to companies that bring jobs to the area or to existing companies that intend to expand employment from current levels," Norris said. "We have been successful in bringing new jobs to the area in the past using this strategy."

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## Flying. It's not just a guy thing.

Peggy Tucker of Waterproof, La. got her pilot's license last fall and was off to the races — the 35<sup>th</sup> annual Air Race Classic, an all-women transcontinental air race. She learned to fly here with us. Come spread your wings. Learn to fly!

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At the Monroe Regional Airport



# JEOPARDY From Page 1A

liminary findings of the 2010 Census, Monroe's population is 48,815.

"Once that was in, we immediately went about challenging those numbers," Mayo said.

The challenge was necessary because Monroe relies heavily on federal programs that are available to municipalities with populations greater than 50,000.

Challenging the Census took more than a month, Mayo said, and now the city may be left without the necessary time to approve new council districts for the March election.

Marx said city officials are unsure what happens next.

"That cannot be answered until we put everything together," said Marx.

There are a host of factors that will impact any solution to the city's elections dilemma.

Among the factors are requirements that the city submit its redistricting plan to the Louisiana Secretary of State, which must approve the districts before any elections can be held.

Also, the U.S. Department of Justice gets first pass over any approved city council districts to ensure no residents of the city are disenfranchised.

A Justice Department review can take up to 60 days.

Monroe public relations director Rod Washington said other municipalities have requested accelerated consideration in the past.

"It wouldn't be anything new to ask them to expedite our paperwork," Washington said.

Marx said he expected to have "a final answer" by Monday.

Until then, Marx said he would be working with Summersgill to wrangle all of the necessary information, from state law to opinions issued by the Louisiana Attorney General.

If the municipal elections are not held in March, state law dictates that the city must wait until the next general election.

"If we cannot have it in March, the first time we could hold it would be when there is another regular election, which is Nov. 6," Marx said.

The City Council terms are set to expire in June. According to Washington, state law allows for the possibility that the current City Council could continue serving until new City Council members are elected.

Louisiana Revised Statute 44:2 permits public officers will remain in office until a successor can be elected.

"Basically, their next term would be shortened," Washington said.



**CLAIBORNE CHRISTIAN** School in West Monroe held a pumpkin decorating contest this week. Shown is Beck Payne, left, and Lee Taylor, head of school, right. Shown below is a random selection of four submissions.

Citizen photos  
By Heather Rogers



# WORK

From Page 1A

election, compared to 21 percent for LaBorde.

"It took a lot of people, a lot of hard work and a lot of conviction to make it happen," Russell said.

Russell will assume the reigns of the parish's largest law enforcement agency on July 1, 2012. Until that time, though, Russell said he expects everything to be "business as usual" at the Sheriff's Office.

"I do know the department very well, the programs and the budget," Russell said. "I don't think there's going to be a huge difference in what I'm doing right now and when I'll be sworn in as sheriff."

Russell has served as chief deputy since 2008 when Toney, who was elected in 2007, appointed him to the post. He has served in that capacity for almost four years, but took a leave of absence earlier this year to campaign for sheriff.

Toney chose not to seek re-election this year. With campaigning out of the way, Russell said it was time to get back to work.

"I'm catching up on paperwork and personnel issues that needed han-

dling," Russell said. "We're looking at the budget again and staying on top of those things, the regular, every-day stuff."

Though Russell declined to say who he will name to serve as chief deputy when he takes over as sheriff next July, he made one thing clear.

"I have no doubt the new chief deputy will come from within the department," Russell said. Russell also said he had not made any decisions about the chief deputy post.

"We have many qualified men and women who can fill my job here as chief deputy," Russell said.

In Saturday's voting, 33,478 voters cast ballots in the Ouachita Parish Sheriff's race. That represents about 33 percent of the more than 100,000 registered voters in Ouachita, according to the Louisiana Secretary of State's office.

Russell garnered 17,455 votes to secure 52.14 percent of the total vote.

LaBorde garnered 7,158 votes, or 21.38 percent.

Retired Louisiana

State Trooper Cam Douglas was not far behind LaBorde. Douglas ran third with 21.05 percent of the vote, or 7,046 votes.

The remaining two candidates in the race, retired Monroe Chief of Police Ron Schleuter and West Monroe businessman Joe Brady, finished in single digits.

Schleuter received 1,316 votes, or 3.9 percent of the vote. Brady earned 503 votes to come it at 1.5 percent of the vote.

Russell attributed his victory to an informed and motivated electorate.

"We had several issues out there that people took notice of," Russell said.

One issue that played a central part in the election was the budget at Ouachita Correctional Center.

Through Web videos, news releases and television commercials, LaBorde implied part of the OCC budget problems were due to the work release program operated by the Sheriff's Office.

According to Russell, another significant issue in the race was a prop-

erty tax millage the Ouachita Parish Police Jury proposed to fund operations at OCC.

LaBorde tried to tie that tax to the Sheriff's Office by "deceiving the public on that," Russell said.

"To me, it was not an election issue," Russell said. "They made it an election issue because of the tax that was put on the ballot."

Russell said the Sheriff's Office has been working with the Police Jury, the 4th Judicial District Attorney's office and 4th Judicial District Court judges for more than a year to streamline the criminal justice system in Ouachita to relieve some of the budgetary problems at OCC. That work has included reducing the number of pretrial detainees housed at OCC and reducing personnel costs.

"Those steps were not taken because of the election," Russell said. "They were made more than a year ago, before any of us had decided to run for sheriff."

That message resonated with voters, according to Russell.

"I think people understood that part of it, that it was a totally different issue than an election issue," Russell said.

Because of the work the Sheriff's Office has done in the past few years, OCC will post a surplus of more than \$200,000 this year, according to Russell.

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# AUCTION

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Dear Friends,

Over the past few years, I've had occasion to hear many derogatory remarks about the honesty and morals of Monroe City Government. When I was associated with the city, these remarks distressed me because, until the last twelve months, I felt that any instance of fraud and corruption were isolated at the lowest levels of city government. I will speak more of this later.

Today, I ask that all citizens of this area recognize that the City of Monroe, together with the businesses located within the city limits, is the primary economic engine of Northeast Louisiana. I ask you today to consider that fact and to do whatever you can to change the culture of Monroe City Government. When you see or hear something amiss, don't just shrug and say, "Well, business as usual." Point it out to honest elected officials of both state and local government including the Office of the Louisiana Legislative Auditor.

Only by demanding the change we deserve will we receive it. West Ouachita, East Ouachita, North Monroe, South Monroe, and, indeed, all of Northeast Louisiana are so interconnected that rot in one area will inevitably affect the whole.

Sincerely,  
*Mike*  
J. Michael Rhymes