

# OFFICES | More services slated to move in soon

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the citizens of southeast Lee County. In addition to city offices, the building on Lee Road 430 now houses satellite locations of the Lee County probate judge, revenue commissioner and soon, the sheriff's office.

Automobile tags, hunting and fishing licenses and business licenses can be purchased at one stop now, without leaving Smiths Station.

"Smiths Station is our own little city and there are a lot of us. It's good that we now have our own place," Wood said.

## Operated in trailer

Smiths Station Mayor LaPave Dellinger said the idea to have a large enough building to host a myriad of county services came shortly after incorporation 4½ years ago. The county always figured to be part of the equation.

"When we started looking for another area to expand, we started talking to the county," Dellinger said. "Whatever we did, we wanted to include the county in it. When this building became available, it was a prayer answered."

The Smiths Station city government moved into the 11,800-square-foot building in May 2005. The city bought the former Smiths Medical Center from East Alabama Medical Center for \$975,000 in December 2004.

The city has spent its first few years of existence operating out of a house trailer on land leased from the Smiths Water and Sewer Authority. It provided suitable space for council meetings, but little else. The mayor's office was also the break room and two city employees had to use one desk in another part of the building.

"It was very tight quarters," said City Clerk Jerry Bennett.

The space afforded by the new building has allowed the city to expand its staff and lease space to other agencies that serve the city and the greater community.

The building is also home to Small Wonders, a program that provides prenatal care for

Center. Once a week, Dr. Mike Williams of Auburn Cardiovascular sees patients in office space he leases at the center.

Dellinger said the city's mortgage limits the number of private entities to only 10 percent of the floor space. But there is no limit to governmental services. The Lee County Sheriff's Office, which currently works out of the Friendship Volunteer Fire Department station, has space allotted in the government center but has not yet moved in.

## Growing population

Bill English, the Lee County probate judge, said the need to locate a satellite office in Smiths Station was recognized years ago.

Two years ago, Revenue Commissioner Oline Price located a satellite office on Mullins Road. When the revenue office decided to move into the government center, English felt the timing was right to establish a satellite probate office in Smiths Station, too. It opened in January.

"The Census Bureau defined Smiths in the 2000 Census as a data parcel, since it was not incorporated at the time," English said. "The population of the census data parcel, called Smiths at the time, was within a thousand people of the population of Opelika. So we very much understand what a large percentage of the population of Lee County lives down in this area."

"The difference is Opelika has the commercial and industrial that Smiths doesn't have. But the people are there and, if anything, a larger community of all residential is probably where we should be serving."

The Smiths data parcel had a population of 21,756 in the 2000 Census, while Opelika ranked as the 23rd largest city in Alabama with 23,498 residents.

English said the county is viewed as three components when decisions on some services are examined — Auburn, Opelika and county, which includes Smiths Station, rural Lee County and some of the

RATHER THAN being simply where Smiths Station City Court... become more... for the citizens... to city offices, the building on Lee Road 430 houses satellite locations of the Lee County probate judge, revenue commissioner and soon, the sheriff's office.

one... in the Probate Court handles wills, options and commitments. With commitments are held in psychiatric wards at East Alabama Medical Center, so it is likely a large number of those will not be held in Smiths Station.

Convenience to Smiths Station residents and Phenix City lawyers who practice in Lee County is the motivation for the court sessions here. "I'm checking schedules to see which days are best," English said. The revenue commissioner operates a four-person operation in the Government Center. Price said the office does brisk business selling automobile and boat

English said the ability of residents and real estate agents to see deeds and property on a computer at the office is coming, but it has been slowed by software

you can do anything that you can do in the revenue commissioner's office in the courthouse here. It is a full-service office," she said. "You can pay your taxes. You can buy your car tags. You can buy your boat and boat

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Shelby... that satellite office." The revenue commissioner's office had been located in a little shopping center next to Terry's Grocery on Mullins Road from December 2003 until late 2005.

"It has picked up quite a bit lately," he said. "The weather is... getting... boats... Boat... licenses... up right... The Smiths... open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday, is especially convenient to county residents who live on Lake Harding.

English said that in the next month or so a session of Lee

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purchase of... purchase of... room and gave the people the ability to visit a variety of offices in one trip.

"Perception is reality, and I think people enjoy doing their government business in a government building, rather than

Lee County Government is setting-up more satellite offices.

Lee County Government cannot lease any additional space at their office.

Smiths Stations' population within 1,000 of Opelika's population.

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