

## **Pine Lake replaces its judge, cuts fines**

DeKalb County city hopes to lose its image as a traffic ticket trap, police chief says.

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**Pine Lake** replaced its Municipal Court judge and announced other changes Thursday in hopes of shedding its reputation as the most profitable traffic ticket operation in Georgia. Decatur lawyer Rhathelia Stroud was hired by the city to replace Judge Alan Mullinax, who resigned Thursday. City officials said they did not ask for Mullinax's resignation. He had served as **Pine Lake's** Municipal Court judge since 1982.

**Pine Lake**, located in DeKalb County, also announced Thursday it plans to cut its city budget by as much as 40 percent, eliminate two police officer positions through attrition and reduce traffic fines so they are \$10 less than the average for the county's eight municipal police departments. "I think these changes will go a long way to change our image," said Mac McGlamery, the city's police chief and director of administration. "There will be other changes forthcoming for a new and improved **Pine Lake**." McGlamery declined to elaborate, but said, "We're still working out some options, but there will be a lot of changes in policies and procedures for the city."

The quiet town of 815 is far and away Georgia's per-capita traffic ticket champion, according to a recent Atlanta Journal-Constitution/WSB investigation. Since 1989, **Pine Lake** has taken in more than half its municipal revenue from tickets. Last year the city pulled in more than \$1,000 in ticket fines for every resident in town, amounting to 76 percent of the municipal budget. Almost all of the tickets have been written on Rockbridge Road. Most go to nonresidents who are overwhelmingly black, leading to an ongoing picket by protesters who claim racial discrimination by police in the majority-white city.

Stroud, the city's new Municipal Court judge, formerly was with the firm of Mitchell Graham & Stroud in Decatur. The 40-year-old Decatur resident was admitted to the Georgia Bar in 1992 and is a graduate of Georgia State University and the University of Georgia. She will continue to serve as an assistant judge of the Decatur Municipal Court, McGlamery said. "Ms. Stroud was one of several candidates interviewed, and she was found to have outstanding qualifications," McGlamery said. "We in **Pine Lake** are very happy that she has accepted this position." The police chief said the fact that Stroud is African-American was not a factor in her selection. "I told you that she was awesome. She has a lot of experience, and we felt unanimous that she would do a good job. The fact that she's black didn't have anything to do with it at all."

Some area residents reacted to Mullinax's resignation and Stroud's appointment with little enthusiasm. Darryl Dorton, one of the pickets and a critic of the Police Department, said little will change until the police chief also leaves. Dorton and other protesters have been picketing on

Rockbridge Road near Allgood Road for 12 weeks. "We will continue protesting until the state repeals the city charter or until the city agrees to pull police off Rockbridge Road or restructures its operating budget so as to stop using police for revenue," he said.

Dan Covington, a Stone Mountain resident and critic of the **Pine Lake** administration, said the change of judges will bring a temporary change, at best. "Changing a judge and mayor won't do it because, after the publicity dies down, they'll be back to business as usual," he said. "The state needs to reclaim that three-tenths of a mile of Rockbridge Road that those police are patrolling. "Though Douglas Coffey of Stone Mountain hasn't been stopped by **Pine Lake** police for an infraction, he joined the protest group, Citizens for Justice, after he learned of the "injustices being perpetrated there." "The judge was just one link in the system. That town needs a complete overhauling," Coffey said.

As to the state reclaiming the road, state Rep. Arnold Ragas (D-DeKalb County) said the best thing state lawmakers can do "is to monitor the progress now that some changes have been made." "I went to their town meetings where we heard complaint after complaint after complaint," Ragas said. "Maybe in the year 2000 legislative session, if things haven't gotten better, we can look at de-annexing Rockbridge Road." McGlamery said the city will be changing its court schedule from one night a week to every other week. "We just don't have that many cases anymore, because we're not writing as many tickets," he said. "Not with just four street officers." However, one change the city won't be making is to pull back patrols on its 1,500-foot stretch of Rockbridge Road. "Absolutely not, that's not up for negotiation," McGlamery said. "That's a part of the city of **Pine Lake**, and no, we're not going to stop enforcing the law."

Photo: Mac McGlamery  
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