

Pine Lake may need some fine-tuning to settle all issues

BYLINE: Bill Torpy; Staff

DATE: June 6, 1999

PUBLICATION: The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

EDITION: Home; The Atlanta Journal Constitution

SECTION: Local News

PAGE: D5

Pine Lake, which has been roundly criticized as a ticket trap, last week announced it would try to be kinder and gentler -- but still firm -- in how it deals with driving infractions. But the changes -- a new judge, a smaller Police Department and less reliance on ticket revenue -- have not put to rest issues swirling around the tiny DeKalb County city. Protesters who have set up a daily vigil there promise to picket until state lawmakers pull the city's charter or until police stop patrolling the 1,500-foot section of Rockbridge Road that generates most of the city's revenue. But a group of **Pine Lake** supporters said they'll lobby lawmakers to enact tougher penalties for tag and insurance scofflaws.

"The scary thing is the noncompliance in insurance and tags," said Bruce Bartow, who owns 13 homes in **Pine Lake** and has renovated others. "This is a serious matter. If they back off, it shows that criminals can operate with impunity in DeKalb County. **Pine Lake** wasn't 100 percent right. But it wasn't 100 percent wrong, either." **Pine Lake** got 76 percent of last year's \$1.1 million budget from ticket fines -- or more than \$1,000 for each of its 815 residents. City officials said they will eliminate two officer positions through attrition -- leaving a force of five, plus the chief -- and will try to cut the budget up to 40 percent.

Former Municipal Judge Alan Mullinax, who stepped down "to help give **Pine Lake** a new start," said car dealers are often lax in sending car buyers' paperwork to the state within the time allotted by law. He said drivers should get 60 days to display a new tag, not 30, and dealerships should be held accountable. Mullinax insists **Pine Lake** did not target black motorists or levy heavier fines against them, as the protesters have charged. Almost 90 percent of the tickets in **Pine Lake** go to black motorists. A spot check of traffic by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution suggested about 80 percent of the drivers on Rockbridge were black. And a Journal-Constitution/WSB-TV investigation found little difference in fines issued to blacks and whites. Mullinax, who is white, will be replaced by Rhathelia Stroud, who is black. She is a Decatur lawyer who serves as assistant judge in Decatur Municipal Court. Stroud declined to be interviewed Friday, saying she wanted to "get acclimated."

Pine Lake replaces its judge, cuts fines

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

BYLINE: Gita M. Smith David Milliron; Staff

DATE: June 4, 1999

PUBLICATION: The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution **EDITION:** Home; The