

NO STATE BAILOUT: Payback for ticketing scam leaves Pine Lake in a pickle

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Poor **Pine Lake**. No longer free to rip off unsuspecting motorists along a tiny stretch in DeKalb County, the town now wants to rip off state taxpayers. Here's a better idea: Surrender your city charter, **Pine Lake**. Join the subdivisions that surround you that are five times your size. **Pine Lake**'s eye-popping revenue-generating was unearthed when two brave protesters, Darryl Dorton and Douglas Coffey, hoisted picket signs to protest the grotesque rate of ticketing along a 1,500-foot stretch of Rockbridge Road in DeKalb County.

Turns out the little "city" of 815 was living high off motorists heading through **Pine Lake**'s three city blocks. The city had planned to rack up some \$800,000 in ticket fines, enough to fund a 10-officer police force, a leaf blower so residents wouldn't have to rake, and expensive Christmas decorations on the lake. An Atlanta Journal survey found that **Pine Lake** was the most prolific ticket writer in the state, collecting three-quarters of its \$1.1 million budget from motorists.

City officials apparently thought they could sustain their highway robbery indefinitely: they refurbished a beach house, bought a dump truck, new patrol cars, two drug dogs (one was later sold by the town for \$7,000) and a \$116,000 bungalow to house the police department.

How'd they do it? With road trolls biting the backside of as many motorists as possible.

Residents kicked in relatively little to fund their array of amenities. Passersby -- it takes about 30 seconds to pass by -- were kicking in a buck for every 10 cents in property taxes. Never mind that most of those motorists happened to be black, the residents of **Pine Lake** mostly white.

Dorton and Coffey tired of the constant police harassment -- many nearby residents had been pulled over repeatedly -- and hit the picket line. They informed motorists their cases could be transferred to DeKalb County, which immediately affected **Pine Lake**'s pocketbook.

Finally, shamed by pickets and unneighborly confiscations, the town's new mayor reluctantly made changes. Mayor Al Fowler slashed the ticketing gang from 10 to four. The loose-talking police chief quit. Next to go was a town magistrate who routinely levied \$500 fines for expired paper tags and blown taillights. Fowler also announced patrol cars would no longer lay in wait on the side of the road, and would make only rolling stops.

The result: The gravy train whistle no longer blows. While the city confiscated \$112,000 in ticket fines in the first two months of '99, it barely raised \$16,000 in August and September.

No longer free to rob legally, **Pine Lake** officials now want residents from Helen to Hahira to bail them out.

No way. The state needs to shut down petty fiefdoms with no reason to exist other than to tax and fine, not prop them up.

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