

Project outlines public salaries

BY DAVE BOUCHER
KENTUCKY NEW ERA

People generally do not like to talk about how much money they make.

That could explain why it took several weeks for the Kentucky New Era to obtain information about the salaries paid to local public officials working in Christian County. In almost every case locally, that information is not readily available. Most agencies do not list employee salaries on their websites, and a citizen who calls or walks into a public office to ask for the information often has to file an open records request. In some cases, they will be asked to explain why they want the information.

But the public — which pays the taxes that fund the salaries — has the right to know how its money is being spent, said Al Cross, director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky.

"Too often in rural places, people look upon public office as a private possession," Cross said.

Public officials can feel like a request to know their salary is an invasion of privacy, a feeling that stems, in part, from the culture of rural communities, Cross said. While there are some who are "nosy," Cross said making this type of information more accessible to the public creates the accountability people deserve.

Although most open records requests — a request filed with a public agency to see information — are not filed by reporters, Cross said many people do not understand what information they are entitled to see.

"Most people don't have a clue they can go down to any public office and file a

QuickInfo:

Top 10 salaries in Christian County (national political representatives not included)

- \$178,517 — Brady Link, superintendent of Christian County Public Schools
- \$170,823 — David Ptaszek, executive director of the Pennyroyal Center
- \$135,063 — Jim Selbe, president of Hopkinsville Community College
- \$134,243 — Austin Carroll, general manager of Hopkinsville Electric
- \$124,618 — John Atkins, Christian Circuit Court judge
- \$124,618 — Andrew Self, Christian Circuit Court judge
- \$124,618 — Jason Fleming, Christian Circuit Court judge
- \$114,725 — Len Hale, general manager of the Hopkinsville Water Environment Authority
- \$112,668 — Arnold Lynch, Christian District Court judge
- \$112,668 — James Adams, Christian District Court judge.

request," Cross said.

Any agency that receives at least 25 percent of its funding from public sources is subject to a request, according to the Kentucky Open Records Law. There are exemptions that allow an agency not to comply, including "unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" and classified information. Salaries are not exempt.

After submitting almost 20 open records requests over the past three months, the Kentucky New Era was able to obtain the salary information for more than 200 public employees who work in Christian County.

When contacted, most agencies asked what the inquiries were for, and

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some were hesitant to provide the information because they said coworkers don't know how much they make and it could cause tension. Many provided the information after emphasizing their pay had not increased in recent years while others simply turned over the information saying they would have turned over the records without a formal request.

Apart from U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, who makes \$193,400 per year, the local public employee with the highest salary is Superintendent Brady Link. Link's \$178,517 salary is more than U.S. Sen. Rand Paul or Rep. Ed Whitfield, who make \$174,000.

Leadership positions at the county level received very similar salaries during the 2010-11 fiscal year: Judge-Executive Steve Tribble, County Clerk Mike Kem, Sheriff Livy Leavell and Jailer Brad Boyd all made \$99,312, as part of the salary schedule designed by the Department for Local Govern-

ment. County Attorney Mike Foster makes \$44,139, Treasurer Walter Cummings makes \$62,035, and each magistrate makes \$17,973. (County attorneys, unlike most other elected county officials, have the option of also earning income in private practice.)

At the city level, Hopkinsville Mayor Dan Kemp earned \$66,208, compared to \$34,257 for Oak Grove Mayor Dan Potter, \$4,800 for Crofton Mayor Daniel Lucy and no salary for Lafayette Mayor Ellin Francis. Community and Development Services Director Steve Bourne makes \$93,012, Hopkinsville City Administrative Officer Glenn Abee earns \$84,801, and both Fire Chief Fagan Pace and Police Chief Guy Howie make \$71,570.

For the entire list of compiled salaries, go to the New Era's website, www.kentuckynewera.com.

Former New Era college intern Logan Todd contributed to this report.

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