

By JOHN SPARKS

Sales tax returns for July 2008 are holding steady for the county as a whole, but Hawkins sales tax returns are down 15 percent from levels last July and trail year-to-year by nearly 10 percent.

Hawkins sales tax returns in July were \$15,110.88 or 15.62 percent below the figure a year ago when \$17,909.20 was returned to the city. Hawkins was joined by Quitman and Yantis in posting lower returns for the month. Sales taxes collected by merchants in unincorporated areas of the county such as Holly Lake were up a fraction of a percent, from \$239,802.15 in July 2007 compared with \$240,086.58 in July 2008.

For the year-to-date after seven months of returns, Hawkins is 9.69 percent below collections in the first seven months of 2007. The county as a whole is about even with last year's pace.

The sales tax funds are collected by local merchants, sent to the Texas Comptroller along with the state's six and-a-quarter cents tax on each dollar of retail purchase. Hawkins' local portion-one-and-one-half cents/dollar-is then returned two months later (May collections returned in July). Merchants in the unincorporated county areas collect a half-cent sales tax on each dollar sale with the local portion going into the county's general fund.

Hawkins returns of \$15,110.88 are distributed to the two budgets supported by the sales tax, with approximately \$10,073.92 deposited into the city's general fund and the remaining \$5,036.96, representing a half-cent sales tax, into the Hawkins Community Development Corporation budget.

Comparative figures for sales tax returns for the month of July (as collected in May) for each city and the county follow with commentary furnished by Gary McKinley, executive director of the Wood County Industrial Commission: