

**Next year's Port budget is passed and it's time to tighten the belt**

By Chris Keuss, Executive Director, the Port of Edmonds

Tune in anytime these days and someone will be talking about deficits, shortfalls and business slowdowns. The word “budget” is sure to show up, too. We have just completed our 2009 operating budget at the Port of Edmonds and, to be sure, cuts had to be made. Fortunately, thanks to a lot of hard work by the Port Commission and staff, the cutbacks aren't too harsh.

Here at the Port—as with most enterprises, public and private—the largest expense is people: salaries and benefits. We are already operating just about as lean as we can. Our employees are, without exception, highly trained, loyal and highly motivated. The Commissioners and I recognized that to further reduce what is already a minimal staff would cause way more harm than good. To shut down an entire division would reduce income or increase expense far beyond any savings that might be realized.

We did find one way to pare our personnel expense, however. During certain times of the year we operate with a number of seasonal and part-time employees. These are normally college students and others that don't want or need a fulltime job, nor is there a large investment in their training. To save money we have found ways to eliminate some of these positions.

For the most part, this will not have a noticeable effect on the level of service people have come to expect at the Port of Edmonds. For example, the Port's renowned flower and landscaping program. While we never seriously considered eliminating this signature program, we decided to temporarily halt the winter program. We will still have the trees, shrubs and year-round plantings, but the flowers that normally grace our planters and beds during the winter months will be missing. This not only saves the cost of the plants, etc., but it allows us to pare the expense of one seasonal worker. Come springtime we will be planting earlier with longer lasting varieties that will be colorful well into autumn.

Another area where we will be able to save money is in our preventive maintenance program. Here, rather than ignoring scheduled maintenance, we have found ways to defer some items until better times. This has to be watched very carefully, however. Wait too long and equipment breaks or fails. Usually, the resultant cost to fix or replace it will be way higher than the preventive maintenance cost would have been. Still, where things can be delayed without creating such problems, expense can be saved.

Other, smaller cuts have been made in a variety of areas of the Port's operations. The annual "Port Reporter"—which for years has been mailed to every home and business in the Port District—has been dropped for 2009. The Commission remains fully committed to an informed citizenry, so—for the foreseeable future—we will keep you up to date through this column, the Port website and other new technologies, each of which is far less costly than paying for printing and postage.

If you are interested in obtaining greater detail, the full Port operating budget is available at [www.portofedmonds.org](http://www.portofedmonds.org). All of us at the Port of Edmonds will continue to serve our publics to the best of our ability in 2009. Hopefully any changes you might notice will be minor.

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