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POLL SHOWS VOTERS SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CROSS CO.
60 percent of those polled would vote for countywide measure if election were held today

WYNNE – Cross County voters favorably support measures to fund economic growth in their county, according to the results from a recent Opinion Research Associates, Inc., (ORA) poll.

The independent poll, privately funded by a group of concerned Cross County citizens revealed that of the 401 registered county voters interviewed by ORA, 60 percent would support a countywide sales tax initiative for economic growth if an election were held today. The poll also showed a broad base of support from various sectors of gender, age, race, levels of income and education.

The total sample of 401 registered voters has a margin of error of plus or minus five percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that 95 percent of all random samples of this size will produce results that can be expected to vary, as a result of random variation, by no more than five percentage points from the true population parameters.

“This is great news for the future of Cross County,” said Norris Cruthirds, president of the Cross County Economic Development Corp. (CCEDC). “It shows that support for economic growth continues 10 years after county voters passed the first tax levy in the state of Arkansas to fund such activities.”

In 1999, Cross County voters passed a 1-cent sales tax that lasted three years to fund the operations and functions of a countywide economic development organization – the

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Cross County Economic Development Corp. The organization has operated eight years without additional funding as revenue collections ceased in 2002. In March of this year, a similar countywide measure was defeated by a margin of 135 votes, something Cruthirds and others have said was the result of miscommunication and an overall belief that the measure would pass without a lot of grassroots action.

“The results of this poll show that support for economic growth exists,” said Aaron Stewart, executive director of the CCEDC. “We simply failed to properly inform the public and voters of the good things that we did and plan to do in Cross County from an economic growth standpoint.”

Sixty-one percent of the voters polled by ORA also said that the local economy has remained stable or has improved during the last 10 years, which is additionally supported by the fact that Cross County’s average annual unemployment rate for 2008 was 6.7 percent, its lowest average since 2002. That improvement came during one of the worst recessions in decades and followed a pair of 2007 expansions at two Cross County companies – Mueller Industries and Addison Shoe Co. The CCEDC has worked with those companies, along with several others, throughout its history in efforts to help them grow and expand the county’s workforce.

“Cross County has worked hard to help its local companies expand, in addition to our attempts to attract new companies,” said Stewart. “While new groundbreaking ceremonies seem to grab the biggest headlines, it is often our existing companies and their expansions that add the most jobs to our local economy. Studies show that 70 percent or more of new jobs in a given area are created by existing businesses.”

The Technology Center for the Delta, a former K-Mart building that was purchased and renovated to become the home of several important Cross County entities, was one of the key reasons those polled said that the initial tax initiative was a success and an example of why they should support a new measure. Seventy-four percent of the voters polled said they were pleased that tax revenues supported the Tech Center, which provides educational opportunities, job training and a place for community events through the housing of East Arkansas Community College’s Wynne campus, the Arkansas Workforce Center, the Cross County Chamber and EDC, and a multipurpose exhibition hall.

Forty-four percent of the voters interviewed were also pleased with the fact that the CCEDC was able to leverage \$5.2 million in grant funds using the revenues from the 1999 measure.

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“We have done our best to use the taxpayers’ money wisely,” said Cruthirds. “And based on the poll results, county voters believe in our mission. It is now our job to inform them of what we have accomplished, why we must continue to move forward and how we can improve our county in the years to come.”

Those polled were also solidly in favor of a countywide measure as opposed to a Wynne-only city tax. Seventy-seven percent of respondents preferred a Cross County measure.

ORA conducted its 401 interviews of registered Cross County voters by telephone. Telephone numbers were selected at random and respondents were screened so interviewers could speak only with a registered voter. The interviews were conducted June 10-17 from ORA’s central facility in Little Rock.

Voters from throughout Cross County were polled with 55 percent of those polled representing residents outside the city of Wynne. Forty-five percent of the residents polled live in the City of Wynne. Thirty-five percent were from rural Cross County, while the city of Parkin represented 10 percent of the polling population. Cherry Valley and Hickory Ridge voters represented five percent of those polled, respectively.