

Reward offered in Pine Lake fire

BYLINE: Brenden Sager; Staff

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Even the announcement of a reward to help find the source of a weekend fire at the **Pine Lake** police station echoed past political tensions in the tiny DeKalb County community. Citizens for Justice, a political organization that played a central role in last year's **Pine Lake** traffic ticket controversy, announced a \$500 reward for help in finding the fire's cause.

Spokesman Karim Shahid said the group just wanted to be helpful, but his press conference and the reporters it drew to the police station surprised city officials, said Karon Fitzpatrick, assistant to **Pine Lake** Mayor Alfred Fowler.

"It would have been nice if they told us," she said.

The Saturday blaze rendered the police station unusable. A developer has donated space in the Rockbridge Plaza shopping center for a temporary police headquarters, Fitzpatrick said.

GBI spokesman John Bankhead said the fire was suspicious, and tests should determine whether it was arson. "We're putting a rush on it," he said.

After protests last year, **Pine Lake** cut its police force from 10 to four officers and slashed its ticket writing. The city is still trying to cope with the drop in ticket revenue. Its annual budget shrank from \$1.2 million two years ago to less than \$700,000 now.

Recently, homeowners in the nearby Sheppard's Crossing neighborhood have worried the city might try to solve its financial problems by annexing them.

Jerry White, chairman of Sheppard's Crossing homeowner's association, said three members of city government were invited to attend a May 28 meeting to discuss "questions and answers concerning annexation."

"It wasn't a very positive meeting for us," White said. That prompted the homeowners' group to circulate a petition opposing "any unwanted ordinance to annex Sheppard's Crossing Subdivision," White said.

The mayor replied with a statement saying "the city of **Pine Lake** does not have an annexation plan. . . . Clearly, this was not a secret meeting, nor was it a **Pine Lake** community meeting."

Map: Map shows location of **Pine Lake**. / Staff

Photo: Fire investigators (top photo) including Capt. Harold Raines (left), Jack Archie (center) and Police Chief Charles Tucker check out the police station. / RENEE HANNANS / Staff

Photo: Answers sought: Capt. Harold Raines, DeKalb County fire investigator, inspects damage inside the **Pine Lake** police station. Political tensions have surfaced with the surprise announcement of a reward to help find the cause of the Saturday blaze. /

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Photo: Meanwhile (photo at left), Karim L. Shahid (second from right) discusses the Citizens for Justice reward offer with Darryl Dorton (left), Douglas Coffey (second from left), and Eaustria Sabir. / RENEE HANNANS / Staff