Economic Impact of ALWS on Cleveland County??

The 2023 rendition of the American Legion World Series held at the multi-million-dollar Shelby High School Baseball Field has come and gone from Cleveland County, NC. Once again, as always and from the very beginning of the Shelby ALWS games; NO team from Cleveland County, surrounding areas or even the whole of North Carolina has ever played in any of these games. So, one has to wonder just how much of an economic impact Cleveland County has realized from this event. Also, whether or not the Cleveland County Taxpayers have actually benefited. Profit OR loss? These are all valid questions as the ALWS Baseball, Inc. headed up by former CC Commissioner Eddie Holbrook, well documented as always seeking a personal profit from his public service, refuses to open his ALWS Baseball, Inc. financial statements up for public inspection. Even though Cleveland County Commissioners have (poorly) invested approximately $10,000,000 (Ten Million Dollars) into the ALWS games with little to no benefit to the general public to show for such a huge investment with no accountability.

The Cleveland County Economic Development Partnerships have, to all public accounts, always have Cleveland County Taxpayers putting up the funding and their so-called partners raking in any profits. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs and property tax revenue are all on the tips of the CC Commissioner’s tongues as they issue incentives and other gratuities to just about anybody enrolled in the Cleveland County Country Clubs and other prestigious groups in Cleveland County.(And now the Chinese as in Project Sunrise, but that is from another article. So, let’s take on some related items, one by one.

The Wednesday, August 23, 2023 issue of the Shelby Star tells the story about the FATZ Café in Shelby and elsewhere, all closing their doors suddenly on August 8th. Just as the ALWS

was about to hit town. Since the FATZ Café in Shelby is only about a half mile from the ALWS playing field, it would be safe to figure that the FATZ bookkeepers put little to no credibility to the notion that the ALWS would bring any significant travel and tourism spending into Shelby and Cleveland County. FATZ has been here in Shelby for many years and had every indication whether or not the ALWS benefited their business. FATZ chose to close when it did with no consideration to the ALWS business, if there was any measurable ALWS business to consider in the first place.

On the other hand, for the past 10+ years in Shelby, some would say that the ALWS, Baseball, Inc. had a Sterling record of a successful Economic Development project. They claim that 120,000 (20,000 more than the population of Cleveland County) attend the ALWS games. They would claim that ALWS, Baseball, Inc.'s average employee wages are over $60,000 annual salary ($30 per hour). Way above the Cleveland County, NC and probably the National average pay. They would even say that a Business Survey indicated that the ALWS brings in many, many millions of dollars into the economy of Cleveland County.

But such statements put out by the Cleveland County Commissioners are all lies and deceptions. First, the Fire Safety Codes (and seating) for the Shelby High School Baseball Stadium allow only 6,500 spectators. Multiply that by 15 games and the total is 97,500. In reality, most ticket sales are for the whole series, which means that often one spectator would be counted 15 times. Also, teams losing early in the series would tend to pack up and head for home. Or go site-seeing somewhere else. There are not enough attractions in Shelby and Cleveland County to justify losing team members and their families to stick around Shelby and Cleveland County for the additional 4-5 days remaining for the other remaining teams to finish out the Series. Such accounting is just a deception. Better described as an out and out lie.

As for the $60,000 ALWS Baseball, Inc average annual employee

wage. That number is entirely correct. However, the ALWS, Baseball, Inc. has only one paid employee, Eddie Holbrook's Step-Daughter. Everybody else helping out at the ALWS is an unpaid volunteer. Except for some food vendors, etc. who are NOT paid ALWS, Baseball, Inc employees.

As for any business survey that projects millions in Economic Impact on CC, Robert A has been searching for that for years, but the Commissioners haven't provided it to Robert A for his inspection. As well as other things. Robert A believes seeing is believing. No see means no believe to Robert A. Also, Robert A was taught in Cleveland County Schools that government agencies and government agencies are NOT to be TRUSTED. That ALL of our government oversight and at all levels is based on CHECKS and BALANCES, not Trust. That is the American WAY and Robert A, as a CITIZEN and as an elected Cleveland County Commissioner would continue to operate on that very same principle.

Folks, Robert A is NOT the only person in Cleveland County that likes baseball but hates lies, deceptions and wasting taxdollars. The newly forming Mountaineers for a Better Community in Kings Mountain (betterkm.org) has also developed some concerns about the American Legion World Series and whether or not taxpayers are getting what they are paying for. The following paragraph is from the betterkm's most recent (August 15, 2023) BLOG article titled:

City Council Recap – August 10, 2023 paragraph 5, states:
(Note Underlining and bolds are added by Robert A for clarity.)
Another item of interest was a request from the American Legion World Series for additional funding. **The City has historically given tens of thousands of dollars to this event each year – without any accountability and while receiving nothing in return.** The new City Manager has questioned the value that we, as residents of KM, receive from this use of our tax dollars, **and it has been**

revealed that we have received none of the promised benefits over the years. Years of abuse at the hands of the County are coming home to roost, and soon the County will need to face a realization – that Kings Mountain is poised to be the primary economic driver in the region with the Casino and coming lithium mine. Our relationship with the County has struggled over the past years as long-term Council members try to ignore reality and avoid ruffling feathers. We hope that our next round of leadership to be elected this Fall can work to build better relationships with entities in the County in ways that give back to our City.

Folks, the lessons regarding the American Legion World Series bring supported by over $10 Millions in Cleveland County Taxpayer dollars are just as clear to Robert A and the Kings Mountain folks as it was to FATZ Café. The unaccountable American Legion World Series Baseball, Inc. headed by Eddie Holbrook has been nothing but a bad and losing investment for Cleveland County taxpayers. FATZ accountants had ZERO confidence in ALWS's business. Kings Mountain citizens have finally seen the light about the worth of investing anything more in the ALWS. Robert A has ALWAYS questioned the worth of this project that takes much more money out of Cleveland County taxpayers' hands instead of bringing real money into Cleveland County.

Wake up Cleveland County!!! The three Commissioners up for re-election in 2024: Kevin Gordon, Ronnie Whetstine and Johnny Hutchins, have always voted to give ALWS more and more taxpayer's dollars without even one whit of accountability. If Robert A were to run and be elected as a Cleveland County Commissioner in 2024, he would vote to eliminate county taxpayer funding for the ALWS, directly and indirectly. And also evaluate all other funding to agencies, groups, commissions, etc. (including the Cleveland County Fair) that receive county tax dollars and cannot show where there is a

benefit commensurate with such funding.

In fact, Robert A would demand a return of investment from all that had previously received county funding in such a way to force those entities to be accountable and fiscally responsible. As well as to be himself responsible and accountable to the Cleveland County taxpayers. Robert A, in his personal life, practices Founding Father Benjamin Franklins, Poor Richard's Almanac advice: "Waste Not, Want Not!!!" Cleveland County Government managers and employees would soon learn to do that very same thing with Robert A around!!