

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Watchdogs find over \$1 million has been spent so far this year by Union County on Music Festivals

Based on a detailed review of check registries, available invoices, and employee overtime and comp-time information the Union County Watchdog Association (UCWA) has determined that Union County taxpayers paid at least \$1,029,670 to date to stage an elaborate 5-day rock festival/fair in Clark's Oak Ridge Park.

Despite maintaining at least one employee to oversee events with the title Program Coordinator of Special Events (salary \$70,937) Union County paid Across the River LLC \$27,500 for MusicFest consultation..

During 2010 the county paid \$433,000 to This Is it! Productions to stage events and \$334,925 to the Union County Arts Center to procure acts, we could not separate the 2010 MusicFest costs from the one-day Rhythm & Blues festival held in Plainfield from reviewing the available documentation.

The MusicFest in Clark cost \$105,738 in police overtime and \$90,489 in county employee compensatory time (for every hour volunteered, county employees are awarded 1.5 hours in paid time off). Equivalent costs for the Plainfield event were not requested or offered.

Miscellaneous costs included \$21,300 for rain insurance to Hale Insurance, \$8,247 to A&E Mailing Services for a mailer to children aged 5-15 to advertise the Kids' Kingdom, \$7,630 to Clark for fire prevention staffing, and \$841 to Cross & Oberlie for MusicFest lawn signs.

These costs all have been documented through the Open Public Records Act. There were also costs that could not be ascertained. For example:

- 1) Amounts paid to county employees during regular working hours to plan, set up, and clean up after the events. How many employees would not be needed if these festivals ceased?;
- 2) Additional general liability premiums for staging these festivals with liquor and driving involved;
- 3) ASCAP fee that governments in the entertainment business must pay (\$4,631 in 2010);
- 4) State police and helicopter costs for any festival goers who might get lost in the woods;
- 5) Additional advertising through the UC Directions newsletter and other media; and

5) Lost revenue from not having Oak Ridge greens fees.

These ancillary costs could easily inflate the total festival tab for Union County taxpayers to upwards of \$2 million.

Additionally, the UCWA found there to be no obvious controls over the cash-only parking and beer concessions. By contract, This Is It! Productions was responsible for coordinating parking and the beer garden but no information was received as to where, assuming the crowd estimate of 80,000 to be accurate, the conservative estimate of \$250,000 that these concessions would have generated in cash wound up. In closing the UCWA team spent countless hours trying to follow the dollar on MusicFest 2010 and found that its not possible. There were no correlation between the statements the county made regarding the costs of Musicfest (\$350,000) and documentation to back that up. Further, the county doesn't appear to have solid knowledge on the expenditure of these public funds because they don't keep a cost ledger, or a single data source, to track the expenses and income of this event, rather monies are being funneled through third parties and citizen's have no access to their records. The county also hasn't answered the public's questions and concerns regarding MusicFest 2010 expressed during freeholder meetings.

The UCWA has exhausted their efforts on accounting for the expenditure of these public funds and has requested an investigation by all applicable state and federal authorities.

A video recording of this project can be found on www.countywatchers.com

The UCWA is a nonpartisan nonprofit 501(c)3 organization working on behalf of the residents and taxpayers of Union County monitoring the activity of county government and advocating change to eliminate waste, corruption and incompetence.