

# HardisonInk.com

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## Levy County approves website owner's offer for ad

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 21, 2017 at 8:27 a.m.

**CHIEFLAND** -- The Levy County Commission recently chose to accept an offer from *HardisonInk.com* publisher and owner Jeff M. Hardison.

*HardisonInk.com* offered Levy County the chance to start a trend to help investors and Florida taxpayers.

Levy County accepted the opportunity to better market the upcoming list of delinquent tax certificates for sale from the office of Levy County Tax Collector Linda Fugate.

While the *Chiefland Citizen* is anticipated to collect thousands of dollars to publish the list in three weekly editions (May 11, 18 and 25) of that tabloid-sized weekly newspaper with a circulation of fewer than 2,000 paid subscribers, Hardison is scheduled to publish a link to the part of Levy County Tax Collector Linda Fugate's website where people can check on delinquent property taxes for \$150.

*HardisonInk.com* has an average of 15,000 unique visitors a month -- in January and February. *HardisonInk.com* has an average of a million hits a month.

For \$150, the ad and link will run on all seven pages 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week during the weeks of May 11, 18 and 25.

Initially, Hardison offered to run the delinquent tax notices republished on a different webpage for one year for \$5,000.

After conducting more research, the website owner found the most efficient and least expensive method to bring in the most added revenue to the county coffers through the revised method.

The owner of the 7-year-old daily news website named *HardisonInk.com* notes that the site primarily covers news in Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties. However, there are occasions where statewide news, national news and even global news – such as NASA (or ULA or Space-X) events – are covered.

The high quality of writing, photography and videos accounts for the continual growth. With so many people visiting the website, and many of those beyond the Tri-County Area, the advertisements draw from local and well as distant potential buyers.

“I am pleased to announce that the Levy County Commission accepted my offer to increase the odds of selling delinquent property tax certificates from this county by reaching a much larger audience than it reaches through just the *Chiefland Citizen*,” Hardison said.

This action increases the marketing of sales of delinquent tax certificates to possible buyers. It will be visible to all people via the internet for the three weeks when those sales are most promoted.

There is no subscription purchase required to view *HardisonInk.com*.

This ad will be promoted on *HardisonInk.com* as well as just existing there, as are all advertisements on the site.

Levy County is the first Florida county to use this independent daily news website.

The tax collectors in Dixie and Gilchrist counties chose not to accept the offer, Hardison said.

A weekly newspaper's representative noted that it is required to place legal ads on a

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website. This placement of a link on *HardisonInk.com* is better than that.

Those ads are not easily found, and this ad will be much better promoted. This ad for a link is going to be on *HardisonInk.com* itself – not some separate place.

“Another reason to accept my offer to go beyond the mandatory minimum required by law is because I am a local vendor,” Hardison said. “The weekly newspaper is owned by a Florida corporation, which is owned solely by a Kentucky corporation. I am a resident of Levy County, and my daily news website is owned by me.”

Hardison said he appreciates the *Chiefland Citizen* putting in a correction adfter one of its former editors noted *HardisonInk.com* was a “blog.”

“For the past 45 years, since 1971 in high school and through college and graduate school,” Hardison said, “I have covered the news all over Florida. I have earned seven awards in competition with other Florida journalists.”

With the reach of this website beyond the county lines, the odds of having more buyers of these tax deeds is increases enough to buy this ad space.

It was Levy County Commissioner Rock Meeks who first asked about reducing the price.

Hardison said he after speaking with Tax Collector Fugate and considering the best management practice for this new enterprise, this is the best price for the highest return on investment for Levy County.

County Commissioner Mike Joyner has said he has used *HardisonInk.com* for his political ads, and he believes Hardison does “a wonderful job.”

County Commission Chairman John Meeks and County Commissioner Matt Brooks have used the website to advertise, and Brooks continues advertising a business interest that he co-owns -- B4 Signs & Advertising, [BUSINESS PAGE](#).

During one meeting, Joyner asked County Attorney Anne Brown whether the weekly newspaper had exclusive rights to this ad space.

Attorney Brown said that she needed to review and make sure the county has not given exclusive rights to the weekly newspaper to publish the delinquent tax notices.

It was after her review that Levy County Coordinator Wilbur Dean contacted Hardison to say the county wanted to accept his offer.

Levy County Tax Collector Fugate said historically, there have been 5,000 to 8,000 parcels listed for delinquent taxes. From that approximately 2,500 remain unsold each year, she said.

This additional ad would increase the marketing of those tax certificates.

A couple of people have complained to the County Commission that there is not the enough Internet access in Levy County to make them content.

However, the people buying the certificates noted via *HardisonInk.com* would be those people who do have Internet access and money to invest, and there is no requirement for those buyers to live in Levy County.

The idea of buying the ad in *HardisonInk.com* is to expand the reach of the marketing of this investment item beyond the four corners of Levy County, and so while a few people might complain about their lack of Internet service in some parts of the county, that is not very relevant.

In fact, too, every single Levy County resident has access to one of the five county libraries, where Internet service is provided for free.

Dale Bowen, an employee of the Florida corporation that owns the *Chiefland Citizen* and is wholly owned by a Kentucky corporation has done what he could previously to

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influence the County Commission to not accept the offer from HardisonInk.com.

Although that Kentucky-based group already captured the mandatory ad sale, since it has a monopoly as the only qualified bidder – which Bowen himself noted in his bid proposal, Bowen still felt compelled to attempt to crush Hardison’s (an independent business owner) offer to help the county.

Bowen said people who want to search for public notices can go to <http://www.floridapublicnotices.com/search/>. This site is every legal notice from every newspaper in Florida.

## **BEYOND THAT POINT**

Linda Cooper, the former office manager of the *Levy County Journal*, has said she prefers *HardisonInk.com* because it is a free publication and it is of a better quality for news and human interest content than the *Chiefland Citizen*.

“The county is not paying *HardisonInk.com* \$150,” Hardison said. “The tax certificate buyers are paying for the ads. If there are 5,000 certificates sold, then that is less than one penny per certificate buyer for this added advertisement.

“I have to laugh at the weekly newspaper,” Hardison continued. “One of its former editors noted *HardisonInk.com* is a blog.”

Hardison said he and his attorney – Sunshine Baynard of Baynard Law, P.A., (another advertiser) has noted in writing and verbally that this offer is not a bid to advertise the delinquent tax notices in competition with the weekly tabloid. This is an offer beyond that. And the law that precludes other newspapers does not exclude the county from accepting the offer.

“By the way,” Hardison said, “for people who do not know what a blog is, it is a regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group that is written in an informal or conversational style. It’s an online journal.

“*HardisonInk.com* is a daily news website,” Hardison said. “News websites are recognized by professional journalism societies all over the world. Back when I worked for newspapers that were in print, I earned two awards for investigative reporting (1983-*The Jasper News* and 2007-a newspaper in Levy County). I earned one for environmental reporting (1990-a *New York Times* Regional Newspaper Group-owned newspaper). I earned one for community service (1989-*Glades County Democrat*). I earned one for best public service (1989-*Glades County Democrat*). I earned one for front page layout (1989-*Glades County Democrat*). And I earned one for best use of full color (1984-*Naples Star*).”