

Newsmaker of the Year

Glenn emerges victorious from long legal fray

IN THE END, it came down to defending a name.

All the twists and turns and obscure legal maneuvering for over two years was just background noise.

It was the cloud put over his name — a drumbeat of glaring headlines and allegations and insinuations — that pushed former Jefferson Police Chief Darren Glenn to the edge.

He could have made it go away months ago — pled to a few misdemeanor charges, maybe have paid a small fine, and the legal bills and sleepless nights and headlines would have stopped.

And why not make it all go away? Glenn had already lost his job, fired by Jefferson officials over a side issue stemming from a state investigation into the JPD.

And the odds were against him; the power and unlimited resources of a state agency, the Prosecuting Attorney's Council, had Glenn in its cross hairs. The agency had unleashed the GBI to do countless hours of digging through JPD records and to interview dozens of people.

Then there was all that "smoke." Some media outlets had linked his name with the word "corruption" so often it seemed more like fact than mere allegations.

Over time, the unrelenting state investigation became a public "waterboarding" of Glenn — a near drowning of persistent pressure with no end in sight.

So why fight all of that? Why not just plead to some minor charge, put it all in the past and move forward?

But there was the name thing. "I couldn't do it," Glenn says now of the offered plea deals. "I don't want the name 'Glenn' associated with anything negative. It was very important to clear my family name."

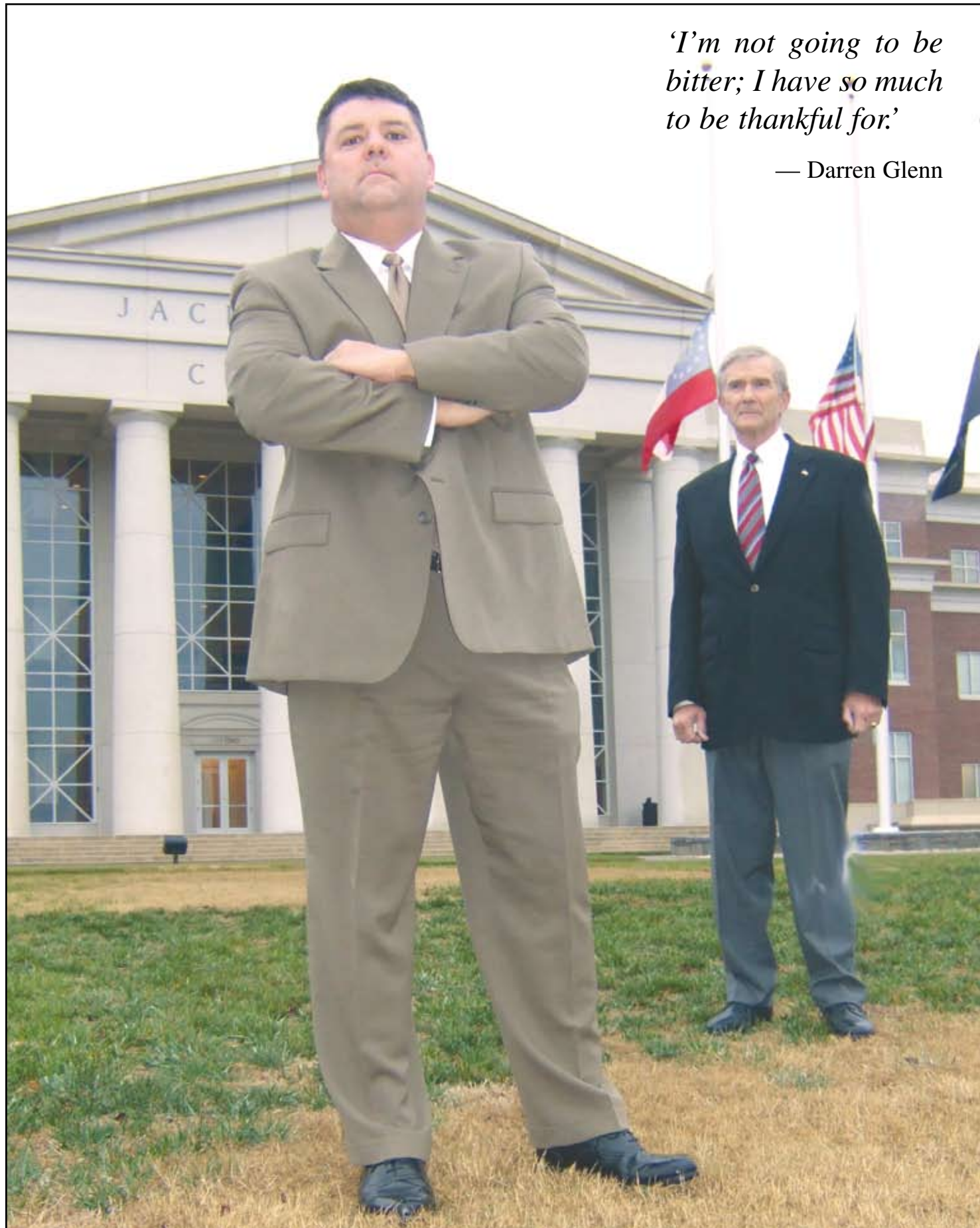
It was a stand Glenn's lawyer, former Georgia Attorney General Michael Bowers, calls "gumption."

"There were a lot of times we could have ended this with a plea," said Bowers. "(But Glenn) told me he would rather fight and lose than just give up."

That fight, a two-and-one-half year high-stakes legal battle, became the longest public investigation in Jackson County's history. As the lengthy case dragged on, it began to cut a wider and wider swath across the county and the state. Glenn may have been the target, but the vortex of the case pulled many others into its stormy path. Other people lost their jobs. Other investigations were begun. Dozens of people got caught up in the swirling winds of the Glenn case.

Then when Glenn was vindicated in December by a Jackson County grand jury, the shock rippled all the way from the Jackson County Courthouse to the state's top legal community in Atlanta. After two-and-one-half years, it had ended with a stunning turn of events. And the fallout from the case may not yet be over.

Because of the extraordinary length and widespread impact his legal case had on others, Darren Glenn is *The Herald's* 2007 Newsmaker of the Year.



'I'm not going to be bitter; I have so much to be thankful for.'

— Darren Glenn

GLENN WINS TOUGH LEGAL BATTLE TO CLEAR HIS NAME

Former Jefferson Police Chief Darren Glenn (L) stands outside the Jackson County Courthouse with his attorney, Michael Bowers, after winning an extraordinary lengthy fight to clear his name during 2007. The legal fight cost Glenn his job and involved dozens of other people during its two-and-one-half years.

AN UNLIKELY 'VICTIM'

One of the ironic things about Glenn's standing as the "David" who slew a legal "Goliath" is that he's so unsuited to the role of being a victim.

Big, brawny and brimming with confidence that sometimes borders on cockiness, the former high school football player and wrestler doesn't look or act like a victim. His demeanor is that of an impatient, gung-ho "G.I. Joe." If anyone had said Glenn would become an underdog three years ago, they would have been met with an incredulous stare.

Indeed, while serving for 10 years as Jefferson's police chief, Glenn sometimes raised eyebrows with his macho style. When he created a city SWAT team, complete with advanced equipment and training, then dressed them in all black for a newspaper photo, some wondered if he hadn't gone just a little too far in his bid to build up a small town police force. The photo even generated a couple of critical letters to the newspaper.

But there was another side, too, that sometimes peeked through Glenn's veneer as a "tough cop." He created a city summer camp program for underprivileged kids and funded it with money raised by a golf tournament.

And then there was his hiring of Richard Jewell. In the wake of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic bombing, one-time suspect Jewell had a difficult time getting a job in law enforcement, even after his name had been cleared.

Against the advice of some, Glenn hired Jewell to work at the JPD. He said that he felt it was the right thing to do. If nothing else, it was an act of compassion.

That Glenn would himself later taste the

same bitter pill of being unfairly accused of a crime, similar to what Jewell had experienced, is just one of the ironies surrounding the former chief's legal battle.

FIGHTING BITTERNESS

During a recent interview with *The Herald* about the lengthy fight to clear his name, Glenn said he's trying not to be bitter about all that happened to him.

"I'm not going to be bitter," he said. "I have so much to be thankful for."

But he does acknowledge the difficulties the investigation caused him and his family.

"It has been difficult on me, my family, the people in this town and the police department..." he said. "The people in law enforcement have supported me. They know my heart is in law enforcement... (but) it has been hard financially."

Glenn said that the case seemed to drag on forever. During the two-and-one-half years, his grandmother died and a son graduated from college, got married and had a baby. Glenn lost a grandparent and became a grandfather himself, even as it seemed the rest of the world was trying to put him in jail.

Life went on, but it wasn't normal, he said. He couldn't work in law enforcement with the investigation hanging over him. He eventually went to work helping to install pools for a local company.

"You get through it day by day," Glenn reflected. "People are dealing with tragedy every day... You just get up every day."

Both Glenn and attorney Bowers credit Glenn's family for standing with him during the turmoil as a key factor in the final outcome.

FEELS CITY ABANDONED HIM

While Glenn may not be bitter, he said his biggest disappointment in the entire situation was that people in the Jefferson City government whom he had worked with for a decade abandoned him. He was fired less than a year from when the state investigation started, supposedly because he had mishandled the demotion of an officer.

"Some people I asked for support, they left me..." he said. "They will have to answer for what they've done... I wish those people would have stood up and supported me and waited to see the outcome."

Just before he was fired, Glenn said he'd asked two times to meet with city attorney Ronnie Hopkins and other city officials to answer a litigation threat coming from the demoted officer and his aggressive lawyer.

But Glenn said city officials refused to set up such a meeting. Instead, Jefferson officials, including Hopkins, city manager David Clabo and assistant manager John Ward, met with the demoted officer and his lawyer. At that meeting, Jefferson officials agreed to give the officer all he asked for — back pay and his old position reinstated — and then later that same day, Clabo and Ward fired Glenn.

"After 10 years of being police chief, you would have thought I could have stood before the (city) attorney and told my side of the story," he said. "It was a hard pill to take that."

Glenn said he was especially disappointed in Mayor Jim Joiner. Joiner had been the chairman of the city council police committee for several years before becoming mayor and had worked closely with Glenn in both roles. In fact, Joiner had been one of Glenn's biggest

Glenn Case Timeline

- AUGUST 2005 — District Attorney Tim Madison calls for a state probe into allegations of corruption at the Jefferson Police Department. The call is based on two anonymous letters sent to Madison and from a conversation reported to Madison that Arcade Police Chief Dennis Bell had with a former JPD officer.

- SEPTEMBER 2005 — State officials direct the GBI to investigate the JPD. GBI agents scour records at the JPD and talk to officers about the allegations.

- DECEMBER 2005 — JPD Chief Darren Glenn demotes officer Lee New.

- MAY 2006 — New's attorney threatens to sue Jefferson, saying his client's civil rights had been violated by Glenn in the demotion from six months earlier. Glenn asks for a meeting with city officials to discuss the accusations, but no meeting was held. Assistant city manager John Ward does an internal investigation of the matter.

- JUNE 1, 2006 — City officials meet with New and his attorney. New is given his old position with back pay. In return, New agrees not to sue the city or anyone connected with the city. That evening, Ward and city manager David Clabo fire Glenn, saying he had mishandled the Lee New matter.

- JULY 2006 — Glenn wins unemployment compensation hearing against Jefferson.

- AUGUST 2006 — Despite having agreed in writing to not sue anyone connected with the City of Jefferson, New files a federal lawsuit against Glenn. Numerous depositions take place in the ensuing months.

- DECEMBER 2006 — State prosecutors say they are going to seek indictments against Glenn and four other JPD officers. They don't do that after Glenn's lawyer points out the proposed indictments cite a non-existing state legal code.

Clabo resigns as Jefferson City Manager, in part because some on the city council didn't approve of how he had handled Glenn's firing.

- JANUARY 2007 — DA Tim Madison asks the state to give the Glenn case back to him. Glenn's lawyers say later that Madison privately contacted them at the time, asking that they pressure *The Jackson Herald* to back off its questions about financial records in the DA's office. Madison reportedly indicated to Glenn's lawyers that he would make the case against Glenn go away if he could get it back from the state. But state officials refuse to give Glenn's case back to Madison and Glenn's lawyers refuse to contact the newspaper.

- MAY 2007 — A new state prosecutor takes over Glenn case. He indicates he will review it and make a quick decision.

- SEPTEMBER 2007 — Prosecutors present a day-long case to a Jackson County grand jury against Glenn using a dozen witnesses. But they refuse to allow Glenn to talk to the grand jury despite a state law that gives law enforcement officials that right. The grand jury hands down 30 indictments against Glenn.

- OCTOBER 2007 — A Superior Court judge throws out the indictments citing the prosecutors' failure to allow Glenn to talk to the grand jury.

- NOVEMBER 2007 — A federal judge throws out Lee New's 2006 lawsuit against Glenn, citing the fact that New had agreed not to sue anyone with the city when he got his old position back.

- DECEMBER 2007 — Prosecutors again take their case to the Jackson County grand jury, but this time Glenn is in the room and is allowed to speak. It is the first and only time he had spoken on the record about the allegations. After hearing both sides, the grand jury votes to not indict Glenn.

supporters over the years, often defending him and the JPD from city council critics.

But after Clabo and Ward fired him, Glenn said Mayor Joiner abandoned him as well.

"He (Joiner) told me he wasn't getting involved," Glenn said of a conversation that took place shortly after the firing.

After being fired, Glenn won an unemployment compensation hearing against the city. This year, he won against a federal civil lawsuit the demoted officer had filed against him. And partly as a result of how Glenn had been fired, Clabo resigned in late 2006.

Still, those legal victories and Clabo's departure didn't erase the hurt.

"I was in a fog the first two or three months this happened... the city didn't stand behind me," he said.

Not only that, but Ward would become a prosecution witness at the two grand jury hearings and other city officials, including his successor as police chief, would cheerlead for the prosecution.

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BEAR CREEK DRYING UP

The water level at Bear Creek Reservoir dropped drastically, as shown here in November. At that time, projections said the reservoir would be dry by early 2008.

Photo by Allen Luton

Environmental Story of the Year

Drought tops headlines in 2007

BY ANGELA GARY

FOR A WHILE in 2007, it seems like Jackson County and much of Georgia had become a third-world country. A historic drought slammed the county during the summer and fall of the year, draining key reservoirs of drinking water. Citizens were put on restrictions — no outdoor water use and conserve indoor use.

The fallout of the drought is not yet over, but for 2007 it was by far the major Environmental Story of the Year in Jackson County.

The drought situation got serious over the summer when an outdoor watering ban was put in place throughout the county due to a lack of rain. Jefferson had to buy its city drinking water from Commerce because its reservoir was empty. Jefferson leaders also approved a water rate increase to cover the cost of buying the water from Commerce.

By October, reports indicated that the area's regional Bear Creek Reservoir was projected to run out of

water by the end of the year. The authority overseeing the reservoir announced plans to eliminate all previous exceptions to the ban of outdoor water use.

The impact went beyond citizens taking shorter showers — some businesses, such as car washes and landscaping firms, were hurt financially because of the water shortage.

There was something of a silver lining to the drought — local communities began to work together to share resources and the state eased some of its regulations regarding water withdrawals. The drought could even speed up plans for another reservoir to serve Jefferson, plans that have been lingering for nearly a decade.

By year's end, the drought situation had improved some as several days of rain in late November and December began to refill local reservoirs. Still, local leaders are worried that if the reservoirs don't fill completely up by late spring, next summer and fall may be worse than 2007.

Economic Story of the Year

Housing, real estate skid in 2007

SINCE THE turn of the century, Jackson County had seen an unprecedented rate of growth. The population boomed as new subdivisions sprouted up in the county, mostly in the western corridor around Braselton and Hoschton and in the Jefferson area.

The housing, banking and real estate industries grew along with the new homes. A variety of new retail and service businesses began to serve what appeared to be an unrestrained amount of new customers. Growth and its demand for new housing became the county's most important economic engine.

But in 2007, that boom hit a wall. While some commercial and industrial growth continued, the housing market tanked. Foreclosures began to grow. Those working in the housing industry and its many spin-offs began to feel the pinch.

This slow-down in new home construction and the related impact on the county was undoubtedly the Economic Story of the Year in 2007 for Jackson County.

One of the areas hardest hit in the slowdown has been around Jefferson where the Quad Cities Planning Board saw a 55 percent drop in new home permits the first nine months of 2007 compared to 2006.

While that agency includes the towns of Arcade and Talmo, the major decline was in the City of Jefferson where new home permits fell from 336 issued the first nine months of 2006 to just 144 this year.

Areas where permits are issued by the Jackson County planning department, mostly in unincorporated parts of the county, new residential permits fell 27 percent.

This decline in homebuilding not

only affected those who actually hammered the nails, but also suppliers, lenders, landscapers and real estate salesmen.

The decline wasn't limited to just Jackson County. All across the country, housing was in a slump in 2007 and in many cities, including Atlanta, housing values actually dropped.

That also hurt Jackson County as people from other areas around Atlanta, especially Gwinnett County, couldn't sell their existing homes and thus, couldn't make a planned move to Jackson County.

As the year ended, the ripple effect of this housing slowdown had begun to be felt in other local businesses. Nationally, economic officials are casting a wary eye toward 2008. Officials worry that the decline in housing prices, along with other factors, may create a national recession during the year.

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STATE WOULDN'T BACK OFF

If Glenn was hurt by the feeling that Jefferson officials had betrayed him, he was also aggravated by the fact that state prosecutors and investigators didn't want to hear his side of the story.

Former District Attorney Tim Madison had put the wheels in motion on the Glenn case in the fall of 2005, when he asked for a special prosecutor to look into accusations of corruption within the JPD. Whether Madison had a legitimate reason to call for the probe, or was motivated by a personality conflict with Glenn, remains a point of contention.

Whatever the initial motive, the obscure Prosecuting Attorneys Council, a small state agency that mostly provides training and accounting services to prosecutors in Georgia, was appointed to lead the JPD probe. Under PAC's direction, the GBI began spending hours digging through records and talking to dozens of witnesses both inside and outside of the JPD.

They talked, that is, to everyone but Glenn. He was never interviewed by the GBI or by PAC officials. Through his lawyer, Glenn even offered to take a polygraph, but investigators refused to consider it.

Glenn believes the probe took on a life of its own.

"They just couldn't quit — they had so many hours invested in this case," he said.

Glenn was also galled by efforts of prosecutors to keep him from testifying before the grand jury during 2007. PAC prosecutors didn't allow Glenn to appear before the September 2007 grand jury, but they did carry in a half-dozen boxes of investigative files and they paraded a dozen witnesses before the grand jury. As a result, Glenn was indicted on 30 counts.

But because he wasn't allowed to appear at the hearing, Glenn challenged the indictments and they were thrown out by a Superior Court judge in October 2007.

Even before all of that, there were hints Glenn was being treated unfairly by investigators. PAC prosecutors had planned to go to the December 2006 grand jury with indictments that used bogus legal citations. They backed off when Glenn's lawyer pointed the problem out to them, but the matter raised a serious question of PAC's legal competency in the Glenn case.

VICTORY AT LAST

But the real shock to Glenn came in December 2007 when he was finally allowed to speak to the grand jury. At the hearing, he presented evidence he believes was the key in clearing his name, evidence he found out PAC prosecutors knew about, but had never shown the grand jury.

"He (prosecutor David Fowler) had that evidence the whole

Past Newsmakers of the Year

- 2006 Kathy Wilbanks, Jackson BOE chairman
- 2005 Pat Graham, Braselton mayor
- 2004 Stan Evans, sheriff
- 2003 Concerned Citizens of Jackson County
- 2002 Scott Martin, IDA chairman
- 2001 Emil Beshara, county commissioner
- 2000 Jerry Waddell, BOC chairman
- 1999 Scott Tolbert, state representative
- 1998 Richard Cathey, chamber of commerce
- 1997 Pat Bell, BOC member
- 1996 Citizens United for a Better Jackson County
- 1995 Ronnie Hopkins and Andy Byers, schools
- 1994 Jerry Waddell, BOC chairman
- 1993 Charles Segars, Arcade mayor
- 1992 Bill Mahaffey, BOC chairman
- 1991 Sandy Beem, anti-airport leader
- 1990 Henry Robinson, BOC chairman

time... he told a grand jury member that he 'forgot it,'" said Glenn.

After hearing both sides, the grand jury did an about-face from its September meeting and this time, voted not to indict Glenn.

The long fight was over. Attorney Bowers said that he'd never seen anything like the Glenn case in all his years as a prosecutor and now, a defense lawyer.

"I cannot explain it — I don't understand it," Bowers said of the prosecution's unrelenting efforts to nail Glenn. "I know (prosecutor) David Fowler, I know (PAC executive director) Rick Malone; they are honorable men. Why this case went on for two and a half years, I do not know."

Still, Bowers said that the final outcome was something special.

"This is one of the most gratifying cases I've ever worked on in 35 years," he said. "Our whole law office is very proud of it."

Bowers also said aggressive local reporting about the case was important to Glenn's ultimate vindication.

"It makes me appreciate a robust free press," he said. "In the final analysis, there is no substitute for a robust, free press."

Looking back, Glenn said what happened to him could happen to anyone.

"It's scary that this could happen to anyone if someone's out to get you... if I had not had a powerful attorney, I would have been in jail, knowing that I had done nothing (wrong)," he said.

THE FUTURE?

As for what the future holds, Glenn wouldn't say. He said he wanted to enjoy the holidays with his family first.

"Right now, I'm going to enjoy the burden that has been lifted from my back after two and a half years..." he said. "I'm going to sit back, pray about it, take my time and do some soul searching. I don't know what the future holds."

Glenn wouldn't say if a lawsuit might be part of the future, but local officials are reportedly worried about that prospect.

The questionable handling of

Glenn's firing and the subsequent affiliation of key Jefferson officials with prosecution efforts against him creates some interesting legal questions. The recent firing of a JPD officer who took Glenn's side in the case could add weight to an argument that city officials wrongly fired Glenn, then attempted to sweep that away by helping prosecutors in their attempts to indict him.

Even PAC officials may not be immune from litigation, given that they never talked with Glenn and that they apparently withheld key evidence from the grand jury.

As for working again in law enforcement, Glenn wouldn't say "yes" or "no." He said he's considered teaching or coaching and getting out of the law enforcement game.

That would be a major change. At one time, Glenn was considered a potential candidate to run for sheriff when incumbent Stan Evans retires. Whether that's still on the agenda, Glenn wouldn't speculate.

"I'm just not sure now," he said.

Whatever he does, there's no doubt all of this has changed Glenn. Observers note that the hard, brash edges have softened. At times, he's uncharacteristically humble and self-reflective.

He picks his words carefully. Out of the turmoil, a calmer, more mature man has seemingly emerged.

Glenn credits attorney Bowers for having had a huge impact on his life both professionally and personally during the legal crisis. There's a fondness in Glenn's voice when he speaks about Bowers and the mentor-like relationship the two developed.

"I've learned a lot from him," Glenn said of the countless hours spent talking with Bowers. "Two years ago, I would have been a lot more bitter... I'm a better person for meeting Mr. Bowers. I'm not bitter... I can do whatever I want. I'm ready to move on with my life."

— By Mike Buffington and Angela Gary

Education Story of the Year

Three new schools, including a third high school, open across county

BY ANGELA GARY

NOT SINCE the closing of the old black high schools during integration of the 1960s had there been more than three high schools in Jackson County. Despite some years of controversy and political feuding, the three high

schools had reached a relative calm balance of power.

That all changed in 2007 with the opening of a fourth high school and the creation of several other new schools in the county. Driven by a growing student population, the new East

Jackson Comprehensive High School, Kings Bridge Middle School and Jefferson Academy all opened in 2007.

The opening of these new schools, especially EJCHS, made up the Education Story of the Year for 2007.

Built to relieve overcrowding at Jackson County Comprehensive High School in Jefferson, EJCHS had been on the drawing board for over six years when it opened its doors in August. The building consists of 96 classrooms, an auditorium that seats 784 peo-

ple, and a gym that comes in at 59,230 square feet in size, as well as athletic facilities on the premises. The total square footage of the building is just over 312,000 feet.

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