

## ***SOLICITOR'S WORTHLESS CHECK UNIT TOPS \$1 MILLION IN COLLECTIONS***

Solicitor Trey Gowdy's effort to crack down on fraudulent checks has collected more than \$1 million for its Spartanburg County clients and local government.

The program, which began July 1, 2004, collected nearly \$703, 000 in victim restitution and service fees and nearly \$353,000 in fees for Spartanburg County's General Operating Fund. The Solicitor's Office doesn't keep any of the money.

Hundreds of merchants and individuals have submitted checks to the program. People who participate in the free program complete a one-page information form and submit it to our office in the courthouse. The check must be submitted with the worksheet.

The Solicitor's Office tracks down the offender in an effort to collect payment for the bad check. Victims receive the full amount of the check and a \$30 service charge levied by banks. The offender also pays \$41 in court costs and an additional fee ranging from \$50 to \$150 depending on the amount of the check. If the offender fails to pay, the case is referred to court for prosecution. If the offender pays the full amount before an arrest warrant is issued, they can resolve the case without having a blemish on their criminal record.

On a busy week, we send out 200-300 letters to bad check writers. Most people comply with the request for payment.

"This program is a partnership between our staff, County Council and the business community," Gowdy said. "I'm confident our numbers will continue to improve as more people learn about this hassle-free approach to recouping their losses.

"This program has multiple benefits," Gowdy added. "It creates a vibrant new revenue source for the county and it allows for the reallocation of resources that were once spent on the apprehension of bad check writers."

Program Coordinator Sheila Davis said merchants can improve their chances of recovering lost money by making sure they collect the check writers driver's license number and their physical mailing address instead of post office boxes.

"This extra step will help us help you," Davis said.