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Enough Signatures In Place To Put Wet Issue On Benton County Ballot, Group Says

Posted on: 10:27 am, July 12, 2012, by [Heather Lewis \(http://5newsonline.com/author/kfsmheatherlewis/\)](http://5newsonline.com/author/kfsmheatherlewis/) and [Larry Henry \(http://5newsonline.com/author/kfsmllarryhenry/\)](http://5newsonline.com/author/kfsmllarryhenry/), updated on: 05:51pm, July 12, 2012

Keep Dollars in Benton County has enough signatures to put a question on the Nov. 6 ballot asking voters to approve retail liquor sales in the county, the group said Thursday in a news release.

Keep Dollars in Benton County needs 41,171 valid signatures to put the issue on the ballot. The group needed to submit signatures to the Benton County clerk by Aug. 8.

The group needs to collect 38 percent of the number of voters who were registered in the county on June 1, said Marshall Ney, group spokesman. The number of registered voters on that date was 108,046, said Alex Reed of the Secretary of State's Office.

Walmart heirs Tom and Steuart Walton have contributed \$165,000 each to the Benton County wet-up effort. Of the \$380,000 that Keep Dollars in Benton County has raised, \$330,000 has come from Tom and Steuart Walton.

The group paid \$58,921 in May to National Ballot Access, the Lawrenceville, Ga., company collecting petition signatures, according to the June financial report filed with the state Ethics Commission.

Below is a news release issued by the group early Thursday:

BENTON COUNTY, ARK. (JULY 12, 2012) – Members of the Keep Dollars in Benton County group turned in more than 56,000 signatures to the Benton County County Clerk's office today. The group has worked over the past five months to secure enough signatures from Benton County voters to put up for vote Nov. 6, 2012, whether or not retail alcohol sales should be legal in Benton County. The County Clerk's office will now go through a process of validating the signatures to determine if 38 percent of registered voters in Benton County have signed a legal petition confirming their desire to bring the matter to a vote.

According to the Benton County County Clerk's office, 38 percent of registered voters as of June 1, 2012, is 41,171 – the number of valid signatures needed to put the wet/dry issue on the ballot.

Voters in Benton County haven't had the opportunity to vote on whether or not the county should be "wet" or "dry" since the mid 1940s when voters were last heard on this issue, said group spokesman Marshall Ney, an attorney with the Mitchell Williams Law Firm in Rogers. Since that time, when the population of Benton County was approximately 38,000, much has changed in the county with today's population at 220,000 and growing, according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

“We have worked hard through the use of a professional firm, National Ballot Access (NBA), and our many volunteers to gather enough signatures to get this issue on the ballot,” Ney said. “Based on our own internal review, we are confident that we have the necessary signatures, but, ultimately, it’s up to the County Clerk to determine if we have the necessary signatures to place this on the November ballot.”

Over the past five months, Keep Dollars in Benton County petitioners and volunteers have gathered signatures at community events, Drive Up Sign Up special signing events and door-to-door.

“We can’t thank our petitioners and our volunteers enough,” Ney said. They have worked tirelessly, especially in these last couple of months, to ensure that we have enough signatures to get this important issue on the ballot. We are hopeful that Benton County residents will finally have the opportunity to have their say on an issue that affects the economic growth of our community.”

Keep Dollars in Benton County is committed to moving the county to a “wet” county because of the many economic advantages, Ney said. According to an economic impact study from the University of Arkansas’ Center for Business and Economic Research, converting Benton County from dry to wet would be an approximately \$33 million total annual economic impact.

“Based on the study, there is no question that there are real and significant economic benefits that would accrue to Benton County if retail alcohol sales were legal,” said Kathy Deck, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research. “This potential economic impact would include additional sales and property taxes for the county and its individual cities, the creation of new jobs and businesses, and indirect economic benefits resulting from all this new activity as well.”

The full study is available on the Center’s website: <http://cber.uark.edu/> (<http://cber.uark.edu/>)

For more information on Keep Dollars in Benton County and how to donate to the group, visit <http://www.KeepDollarsInBentonCounty.com> (<http://www.KeepDollarsInBentonCounty.com>).

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