

targeted to youth," said J.P. Banks, project coordinator of the Drug Free Coalition of Hall County.

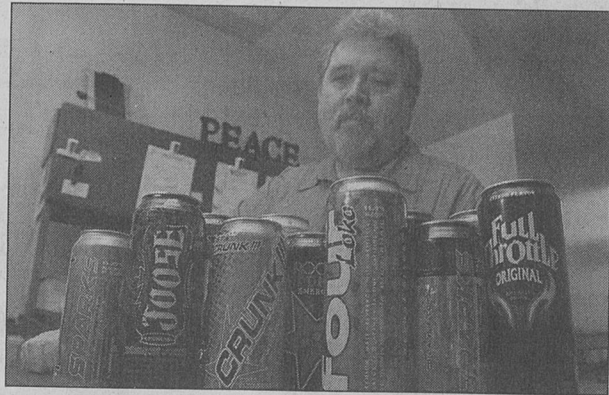
This month, coalition members are surveying Hall County stores to see where alcoholic energy drinks are being sold and how they are marketed. Banks said the coalition wants to determine the "four Ps of marketing" for the drinks locally: product, price, placement and promotion.

"We don't want to put vendors out of business," he said. "Our goal is to address substance abuse and underage drinking."

Energy drinks — soft drinks that contain high levels of caffeine — have become a \$4.8 billion market in the U.S. In 2008, there were more than 270 energy drinks on the market, according

The report says that "teenagers and young adults are the core consumer group for (energy drinks)" and concludes that the same marketing

serve as a bridge from soft drinks to alcohol." A study by the International Institute for Alcohol Awareness found that in 2005, underage



Photo/Scott Rogers, FCN regional staff

Hall County Drug Free Coalition Project Coordinator J.P. Banks shows an array of energy drinks, some of which contain alcohol. Many people do not realize the difference between the similar packaging of the two types of energy drinks, Banks said.

Two industry giants have already responded to the criticism, however.

Last year Anheuser-Busch discontinued its alcoholic energy drink "Tilt" under pressure from 11 attorneys general who said it was geared toward young consumers.

MillerCoors in December agreed to remove the caffeine from its alcoholic "Sparks" drink in an agreement with 13 states and the city of San Francisco.

Raduka said those moves amount to an admission that alcoholic energy drinks fuel underage drinking.

"I'm glad that the industry is willing to take some of these products off the market," Raduka said. "The problem is, there are so many more still out there."

Cumming, was hit by a car while cycling Tuesday on Hwy. 9. Muller remains hospitalized.

## BIKE from 1A

able to put weight on his leg for at least 10 weeks.

Tuesday's wreck has him thinking about advocating for safer roads for bicyclists in Forsyth.

"We've got to do something as a county or people are going to die," Muller said. "It's getting worse."

He said he used a hand signal to indicate that he was making the turn.

The incident is the second time he's been hit by a car. The first time was in 1996.

"You put yourself on

that road and you're counting your prayers nothing happens," Muller said.

Huggins also cautioned motorists.

"Highway bicycling, even long-distance bicycling, is becoming more and more popular as a way of exercise and motorists need to be aware that bicycles have a right to be on the highway," Huggins said. "Be aware that Hwy. 9 is a very popular bicycle route."

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## FEDS from 1A

ever charged on that. Never."

Smith said the situation amounted to "a political vendetta."

"I have heard of trying to crucify someone in the media, but this is outrageous," he said.

Tuesday's decision comes on the heels of the recent reorganization of the elections department.

The shakeup earlier this month elevated

Barbara Luth to supervisor of elections, overseeing the day-to-day functions of the county's elections and voter registration department.

The county commission approved the reorganization, eliminating three positions in the department and creating two new ones.

The matter stemmed from a long-running issue over the legality of

Smith serving as both chairman and head of the elections department.

Smith also has drawn fire for his use of taxpayer money. Though it was determined at the time that he probably had not done anything illegal, his questionable spending habits resulted in multiple audits and calls for his resignation.

The county responded by reining in Smith's

spending in 2007.

That same year, Bates, Carter & Associates also performed an audit.

Smith billed the county for mileage and other travel expenses. He also bought meals for poll workers using county money.

A report covering expenses from 2004-06 showed cause for concern, including reim-

bursement of 72 transactions totaling \$7,081 that did not have receipts.

Former Commissioner David Richard, who served during that time, defended Smith on Wednesday.

"It's ridiculous," Richard said. "Each of the issues [in the Sawyer report] have been addressed and corrected by the board of commissioners ... Now they're

going to waste federal money on something that's already been corrected."

Richard said he thinks the justice department is "going to laugh in the commissioners' faces," adding that if he were Smith, "I'd sue the county for harassment."

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## Deaths

## SHIFT from 1A