

County bad check collection rate is up

■ But office is earning less

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The office of Henderson County Attorney Steve R. Gold is more successful these days at collecting bad checks for merchants, but it's earning less money doing so.

"I'd like to think it's people being better at managing their finances," Gold said. "But there's also something culturally going on where people are using debit cards and credit cards more. That may or may not be a better financial decision, which is why

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BAD CHECKS from 1A

we're working on coming up with some financial management training. We'll have more coming out about that about Sept. 1."

A look at the numbers depicts a stark trend. In fiscal year 2010-11, his office collected nearly 80 percent of the 2,191 bad checks turned over for collection. The next year the bad checks numbered 2,598 and the collection rate was nearly 87 percent. In 2012-13, the checks were 1,949 and the rate nearly 92 percent, while in this past fiscal year the collection rate was 95 percent on 1,840 checks.

And the bad check revenue to his office has slid precipitously, from \$92,836 in fiscal year 2009 to \$53,019 in the fiscal year that ended June 30.

"For everybody but my office that's probably a good thing," he said

ruefully.

The system came about in the 1990s when the General Assembly, seeking to get away from funding county attorneys, decided to allow them to earn fees by collecting bad checks for merchants.

"That worked while people wrote checks," he said.

But people don't write as many checks, so there is less fee money available.

His office also operates the traffic safety program — which also is fee-based — out of the same basement office in the Henderson County Courthouse.

"That helps out as well. It keeps my office from having as heavy of a footprint as we would on the county budget by being able to earn our keep a little bit."

Former Henderson Police Department officer Ron Burleson is now in charge of the office, taking over when Steve Gibson got the job of city street superintendent.