

Who is David Rouzer?



One of the three billboards thanking David Rouzer.

Herald photo by Michael McLoone

By MONICA CHEN, STAFF REPORTER

Johnston County -- You've seen it -- the billboard of the smiling, sharply dressed man with brown eyes and neatly combed brown hair. And you've seen the words, in big, black letters: "Thank You, David Rouzer."

Three such billboards -- along U.S. 70 and in Four Oaks -- have been staring at motorists for the past month or so, tantalizing passersby with the inevitable question: Just who is this guy?

As it turns out, David Rouzer is an associate administrator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Although he has not seen the billboards himself, Rouzer, who lives at McGee's Crossroads and works in Washington, D.C., has certainly heard about them.

"I got one call from a fella who I know that I hadn't talked to for about a year," Rouzer said this week. "He said, 'Rouzer, I don't know what you've done, but I like your billboard.'"

Warren Stancil, whose family company, Stancil Oil Co., owns the billboards, said his client didn't want to reveal who he was or why he paid for the billboards.

On Wednesday, Rouzer shed light on the mystery. He said someone in Johnston County might be thanking him for the tobacco buyout.

A former advisor on agriculture to U.S. Sens. Jesse Helms and Elizabeth Dole, Rouzer helped to coordinate the \$10.1 billion tobacco buyout in 2004. The buyout released farmers who had been working under the decades-old quota system for growing the golden leaf.

The buyout deal -- reached by farmers, quota holders and companies like Philip Morris -- dismantled the quota system and made the tobacco industry once again reliant on the market. In all, North Carolina quota holders and growers will receive \$3.8 billion of the \$10.1 billion.

"There are a lot of grateful people down there for the tobacco buyout," Rouzer said. "It was a legislative miracle. I look back on that, and I am certain that it could never happen again."

Rouzer said that when he comes back into Johnston County, he might drive around and check out the billboards. But don't expect him to take pictures of himself with the billboards for commemorative use.

"Actually, I don't even like pictures of myself all that much," he said. Stancil said the billboards would stay up until mid-August.

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