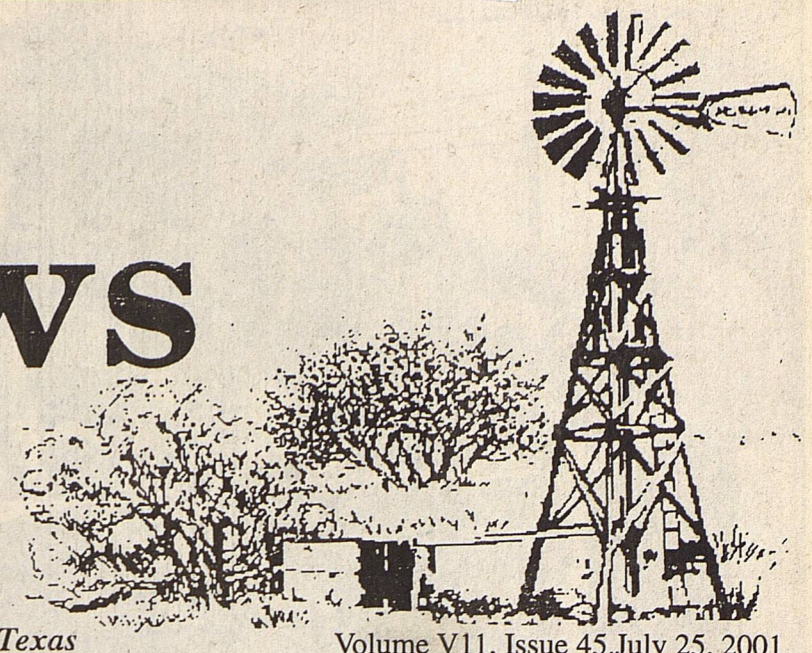


Cowboy Country News



Published each Wednesday in the county seat of Yoakum County, Plains, Texas

Volume V11, Issue 45, July 25, 2001

Texas Farm Bureau blasts LRB redistricting plan

Waco - The state's largest farm organization has sharply criticized the Texas House redistricting plan introduced by Texas Attorney General John Cornyn last Monday. Cornyn is also Chair of the Legislative Redistricting Board (LRB).

Texas Farm Bureau President Donald Patman said, "We believe the Attorney General's redistricting plan appears to be partisan, and we see it as unfair to rural Texas."

Cornyn's plan pairs incumbent Democrats in 10 new districts and pairs two Republicans in only one district. Nine new districts would have an incumbent Democrat facing a Republican incumbent. There are 22 new seats in the plan, creating new districts where no incumbent currently resides.

In two cases, in Galveston and Travis County, three incumbent House members would face off in elections against each other. Harris County and Houston would grab 25 seats under the Cornyn plan. Those gains in Harris County proposed by Cornyn would be primarily at the expense of rural West Texas.

"It is not unexpected that agriculture and rural Texas would lose seats during this redistricting process," Patman said. "But under the Cornyn plan rural Texas is being shorted. There are substantial communities of interest in rural Texas, including the agriculture industry."

Patman, a grain, cotton and cattle producer from Waxahachie, said Cornyn's plan is unacceptable. "Farm

Bureau is non-partisan. Agricultural issues are neither Republican or Democratic. We oppose any attempt to gerrymander a partisan House at the expense of rural issues."

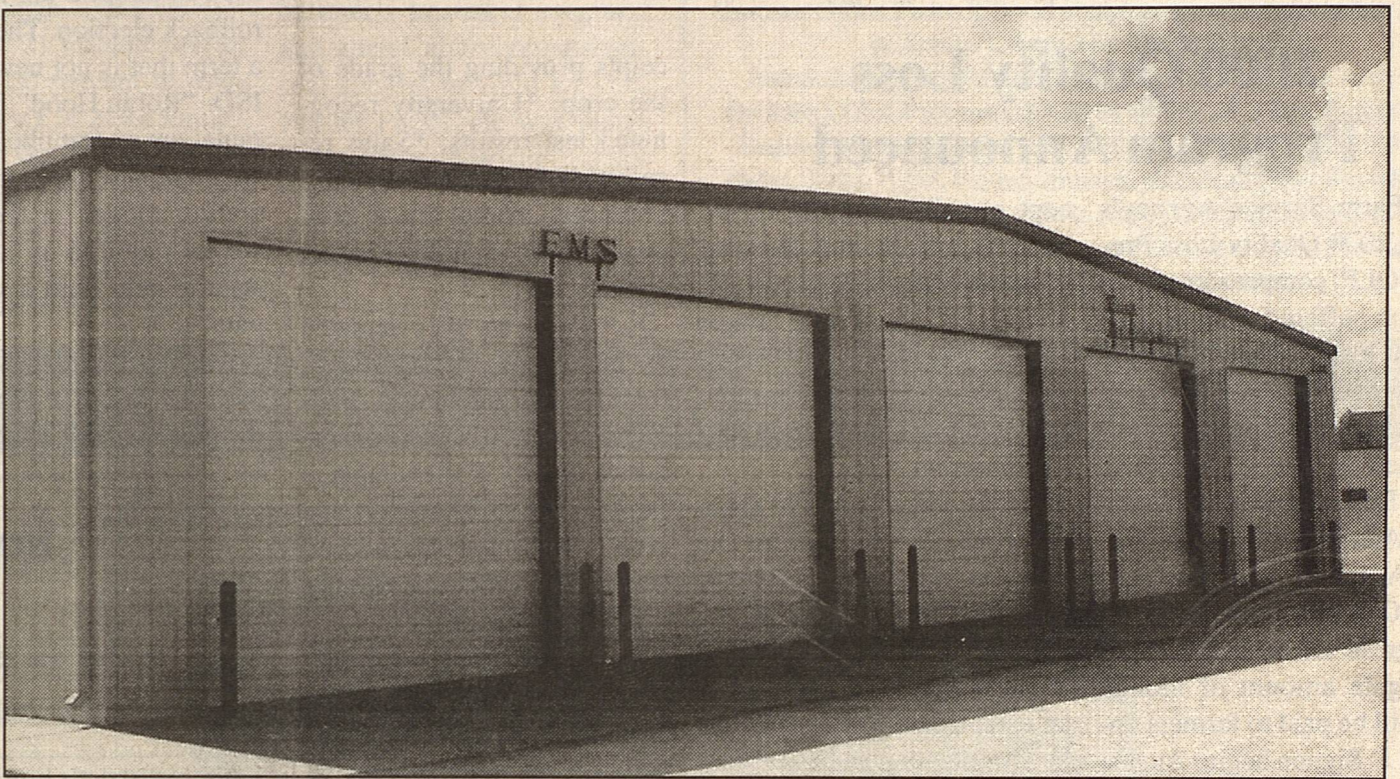
The Farm Bureau leader said the most over populated district in the Attorney General's plan is District 83, which includes the West Texas counties of Cochran, Gaines, Hockley, Yoakum and part of Lubbock. In Harris county, 23 of the 25 proposed seats are under populated, according to constitutional guidelines. The effect of the under populated districts would create more urban districts, at the expense of rural Texas.

"It makes no sense to force an already dwindling representation in rural Texas into fewer seats than is justifiable," Patman stated.

On July 16, the Texas Farm Bureau President addressed a letter to LRB Chairman Cornyn, which included these observations;

"In our opinion, the fact that this plan would pair 42 incumbents while creating 20 open seats exhibits that the main tenet followed in drawing these districts was partisan politics. We believe if each of the traditional redistricting principles are given equal consideration it is possible to draw districts of equal population, avoid retrogression, maintain communities of interest and protect incumbents. Under a plan that follows all the legal requirements and traditional principles for redistricting, the loss of agricultural and rural leadership would not be so severe."

Open House at City's new EMS, Fire Department facility



A large number of county residents had a tour of Plains' new Fire Hall and EMS headquarters last Wednesday afternoon. The 4800 square foot steel building was financed with grant funds, and city employees completed much of the interior finish work.

In the left photo below, Turner Extension Education Treasurer Jerri Lollar presents a \$300 check to EMS President Marc Traweck. The extension club conducted a number of

fund raising projects for the gift, as well as a number of scholarships for local youngsters. Other EMT's in photo include Charles Diamond, Curtis Coffman, Linda Wright and Freda Humphrey. The other photo features volunteer fire fighters Jerry Dominguez, Charles Diamond and Alex Barrientes.

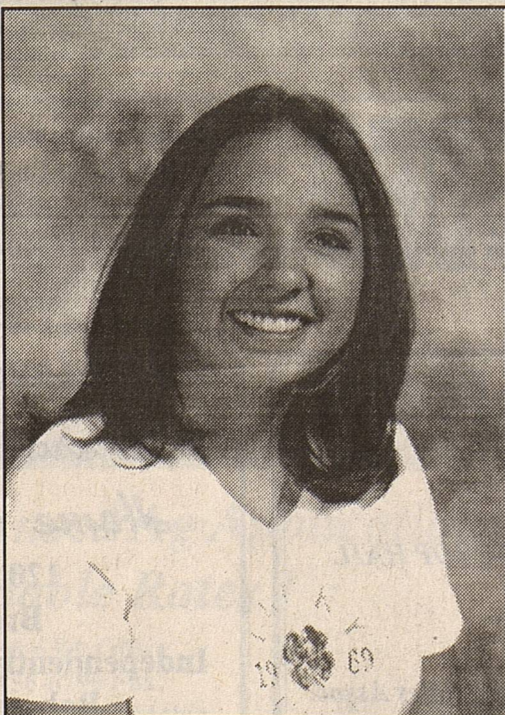
A future city project will see City Hall move into a portion of this building while the present Hallis being razed, and a new structure for city government will be erected.



Future Rodeo Royalty in this trio The 2001 Rodeo Queen Candidates Are....



Jessica Rodriguez
Chamber of Commerce



Chelsi Wagnon,
Roping Club



Kayla Willis,
Plains Lions Club

These young ladies are busy selling raffle tickets for a custom made western saddle, or \$500 cash to the winner. Only your generous support of the girls efforts can make the Rodeo and Old Settlers Reunion a financial success - Be generous!

Criminal cases in Judicial District Court

Four criminal cases were heard in 121st Judicial District Court July 16, with Judge Kelly G. Moore presiding. Criminal District Attorney Richard Clark represented the state.

Carlos Gonzales pled true to the State's motion to proceed in a sexual assault cause. The defendant was found guilty, and was sentenced to eight years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, with credit for 110 days jail time served. Cases of consumption of alcohol by a minor, third enhanced, were adjudicated. Attorney Paul Mansur represented the defendant, and Officer Tracy Hinson, Denver City Police, was investigating officer.

Luis Porras pled true to the state's motion to revoke community supervision from a prior firearm theft case. He was sentenced to 180 days in the

Department of Criminal Justice, state jail division, with credit for 163 days served. Bill Helwig was his attorney.

Juan Fernando Leyva pled guilty to DWI, third or more. A 10 year prison sentence was suspended and probated 10 years. He was fined \$1500, must pay \$356 court costs, court appointed attorney fees of \$250, and \$52 restitution to DPS. He must serve 180 days in jail or until space is available in a substance abuse felony treatment facility (SAFPF) for at least 90 days but no more than one year. He must attend weekly AA meetings, surrender his driver license one year, and successfully complete the DWI repeat offender program, and serve 160 hours community service.

Turn To Page 3,
"Crime Cases"

100 Plus Degrees.....Time For A Sno Cone!



Chamber of Commerce representatives Harry Richardson and Mary Jo St. Romaine held ceremonial Grand Opening Ribbon heralding opening of the Tropical Paradise. Fred Ramos, business owner, holds scissors. Other members of the Ramos family shown are: Zackery Ramos, Abel Ramos, Fred Ramos T. J. Diaz, Sue Ramos, Odora Ramos. Back-Freddy Ramos, Morlie Diaz, Liza Garza, Cleme Ramos, Estella Ramos and Majorie Diaz.

2000 Quality Loss Program Announced

The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) 2000 Quality Loss Program (QLP) compensates farmers who suffered at least a 20 percent loss in 2000 year crop quality due to weather related disasters. This program is authorized by the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001, (P.L. 106-387). Congress set no limit on the aggregate amount of money that will be paid to farmers under QLP. Signup begins August 13, 2001. The ending date for signup has not yet been set. Eligible crops are those produced and harvested in the 2000 crop year and which suffered a minimum of 20 percent quality reduction. Unharvested production is not eligible for QLP. All crops are eligible ex-

cept certain specialty crops, such as ornamental nursery, Christmas trees, aquaculture, honey, turf grass sod, maple sap, and ginseng. Quality losses for apples and potatoes are covered under a separate \$38 million program. Persons whose gross revenue exceeded \$2.5 million for the 1999 tax year are ineligible for QLP. Losses on more than one 2000 crop on the same acreage are not eligible, unless there is an established practice on the farm of planting and harvesting two or more crops in the same crop year on the same acreage. QLP applicants must provide FSA written documentation of the quality of their harvested crop. Examples of acceptable documentation include: *Grading receipts from a warehouse or licensed grader; *Sales re-

ceipts providing the grade of the crop; *University recognized test results; *Sales receipts showing disposition to a secondary market due to poor quality, such as malting barley sold for feed.

QLP payments are calculated by multiplying 65 percent of the affected production times 65 percent of the loss in value due to quality. For example, a farmer sells 1,000 bushels of a crop whose value was reduced by \$1 per bushel due to poor quality. The payment to this farmer is calculated as follows: 1,000 bushels X 65 percent = 650, \$1 X 65 percent = \$.65, 650 X \$.65 = \$422.50 (payment to farmer).

Quality loss payments to farmers may begin soon after they sign up. The 2000 Crop Disaster Program (CDP) that USDA already paid farmers included quality payments for many crops. QLP offers an additional payment for crops where the CDP quality payments were inadequate or nonexistent. Quality loss payment earned under CDP will be subtracted from QLP. Combined total payments issued for QLP and CDP are limited to \$80,000 per person.

For more information on this and other USDA programs, contact your local FSA office or USDA Service Center. Or visit the FSA web site at www.fsa.usda.gov.

A Message From The Plains ISD Superintendent

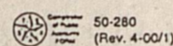
Next to this article you will find a notice for a hearing to discuss the Plains ISD budget and a proposed tax rate. The notice must be run before the hearing at which our budget and a proposed tax rate are discussed. At a second meeting immediately following the hearing, the board will adopt a tax rate from which proceeds will be used to finance the operations of Plains ISD. Because of the increase over the past year in the price of petroleum and our loss of approximately 7% of our student population, the board may be placed in a situation that will trigger a rollback election on the tax rate that they adopt. We found ourselves in a similar situation the first year I was here with one important difference. The district was not required to have a rollback election unless there was an official protest filed. Now the election is required by law even if no protest is filed. You might be asking yourself why Plains ISD would need to adopt a tax rate that would require a rollback election. The answer can be linked to a term that is not new to the patrons of Plains ISD- "Robin Hood". Because the funding formulas are so complicated the simple answer is; we must raise more money than the actual operating budget for the school district because we are required by law to send money to the state to help fund districts that are less fortunate.

This year Plains ISD sent about \$300,000 to the state to pay our recapture bill. Next year the price tag will go up to around \$900,000 and

the following year the bill will be around \$2.8 million dollars. This is money that must be raised over and above the cost of the money needed to operate our school district.

There is some good news however; this past year's tax rate was \$1.42 per \$100 valuation. The possible new tax rate could be around \$1.35 per \$100 valuation. That is a seven cent cut in the tax rate to the property owner. The district is required to report this rate as a tax increase because the proposed new rate of \$1.35 would raise more money than the old rate of \$1.42. The additional money raised will be drawn mainly from the mineral values of our district. The ag values for this year are actually down by about 13%. So with a seven cent cut in the rate, many property owners will actually see a small decrease in their tax bill.

It is important that as citizens in Plains and patrons of Plains ISD we maintain the high quality of the education our children are receiving. To do that an adequate supply of funds are needed. The administration and board of trustees of Plains ISD are committed to making decisions that will support our current funding needs. Plains ISD and the children of our community need your support concerning this taxing issue. When questions arise about taxes or the funding of the district operations, I will be glad to answer them and to provide solid reasons for those decisions. I can be contacted at 456-7401 or 456-6661.



NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS BUDGET AND PROPOSED TAX RATE

The PLAINS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT will hold a public meeting at 7:30p.m., August 6, 2001 in the Administration Office

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the school district's budget that will determine the tax rate that will be adopted. Public participation in the discussion is invited.

The tax rate that is ultimately adopted at this meeting or at a separate meeting at a later date may not exceed the proposed rate shown below unless the district publishes a revised notice containing the same information and comparisons set out below and holds another public meeting to discuss the revised notice.

Comparison of Proposed Rates with Last Year's Rates					
	Maintenance & Operations	Interest & Sinking Fund*	Total	Local Revenue Per Student	State Revenue Per Student
Last Year's Rate	\$ 1.42	\$.	\$ 1.42	\$ 9,527	\$ 297
Rate to Maintain Same Level of Maintenance & Operations Revenue & Pay Debt Service	1.08	.	1.08	9,532	0
Proposed Rate	\$ 1.35	\$.	\$ 1.35	\$ 12,009	\$ 0

* The Interest & Sinking Fund tax revenue is used to pay for bonded indebtedness on construction, equipment, or both. The bonds, and the tax rate necessary to pay those bonds, were approved by the voters of this district.

Comparison of Proposed Levy with Last Year's Levy on Average Residence		
	Last Year	This Year
Average Market Value of Residences	\$ 35,038	\$ 35,215
Average Taxable Value of Residences	\$ 13,031	\$ 13,215
Last Year's Rate Versus Proposed Rate per \$100 Value	\$ 1.42	\$ 1.35
Taxes Due on Average Residence	\$ 185.04	\$ 178.40
Increase (Decrease) in Taxes		\$ (6.64)

Under state law, the dollar amount of school taxes imposed on the residence homestead of a person 65 years of age or older or of the surviving spouse of such a person, if the surviving spouse was 55 years of age or older when the person died, may not be increased above the amount paid in the first year after the person turned 65, regardless of changes in tax rate or property value.

Notice of Rollback Rate: The highest tax rate the district can adopt before requiring voter approval at an election is 1.14. This election will be automatically held if the district adopts a rate in excess of the rollback rate of 1.14.

Fund Balances	
The following estimated balances will remain at the end of the current fiscal year and are not encumbered with or by a corresponding debt obligation, less estimated funds necessary for operating the district before receipt of the first state aid payment:	
Maintenance and Operations Fund Balance(s)	\$ 1,250,000.00
Interest & Sinking Fund Balance(s)	\$



Volunteers are needed to work serving lines at the Old Settlers Reunion! Ladies - Don't forget to bring your cobbles - serving cups are available at the Dairy Queen. Please be at the park by 11 a.m. Aug. 4!

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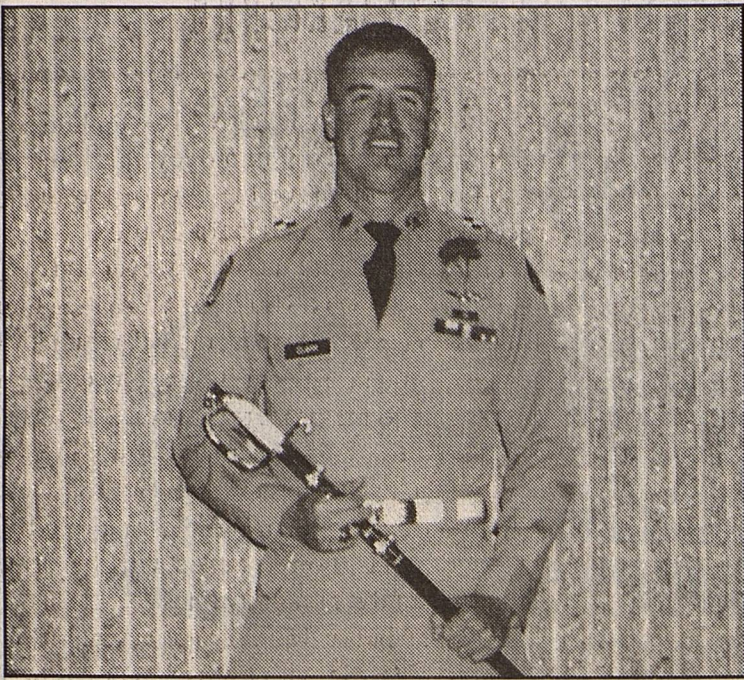
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Named to Commandant's Honor Roll



Major General M.T. Hoppood, Commandant, Corps of Cadets at Texas A & M University recently notified Richard and Kathy Clark of Denver City their son Justin Stiles Clark had been selected to the Commandant's Honor Roll.

The honor is bestowed on cadets who earn at least a 3.0 GPR while completing at least 12 semester hours.

Clark also recently received the Admiral Sam Robinson Award, presented by the Houston Chapter of the U.S. Navy League.

In recent correspondence to his parents, Justin described some of his experiences during his recent month long 1st Class Aviation Midshipman Cruise while based at the Jacksonville, Florida Naval Air Station. The cruise included flight simulation exercises, water survival, and introduction to helicopter operations.

Position open for part-time social worker at Yoakum County Hospital. BASW preferred. Job requires working with patients, families, physicians, drug companies, and clinic and hospital personnel. Initially it is planned to work one or two days a week and adjust to the community needs. Experience in dealing with government programs, social work or insurance would be helpful. Send CV and or an application to Administrator, PO Box 1130, Denver City, TX 79323. (E.O.E)

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Change the name, maintain the commitment

On August 1, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service proposes to change it's name to Texas Cooperative Extension. The Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TAES) became a part of Texas A & M in 1915. The A&M University Board of Regents and the Chancellor of the Texas A&M System recommended the name change in the best interests of:

* fulfilling the Extension mission to provide quality, relevant, outreach and continuing educational programs and services to the people of Texas.

* Positioning the agency to effectively serve a dynamic Texas in the 21st Century.

Changing demographics in Texas played a large role in persuading officials to consider a name change. The state now has almost 21 million people, and some 50 percent of them live in just six of 254 counties. It was felt the Extension Service needs a name readily recognized, indicating a statewide agency serving the state's entire population, not just one

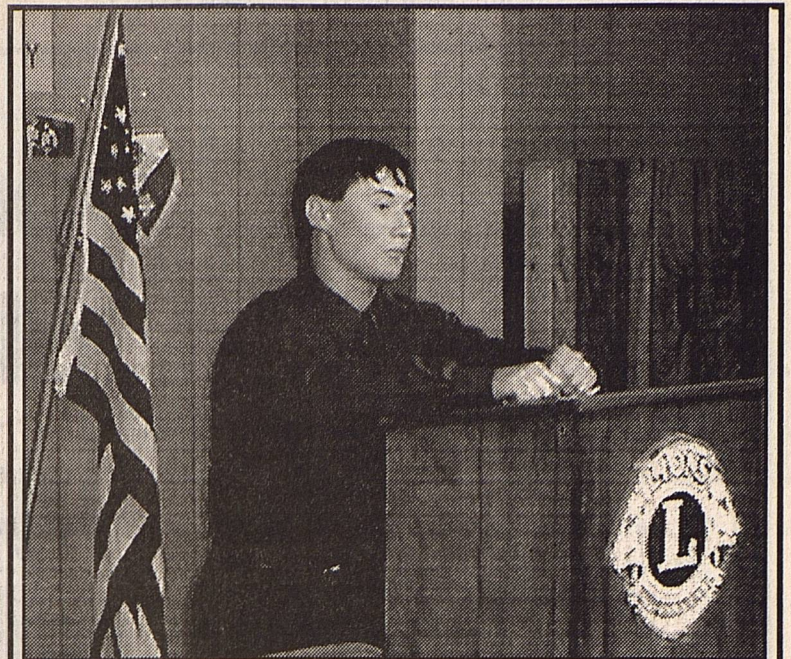
sector.

The name change will in no way diminish the Extension commitment to serve agriculture, rural Texas and related audiences, but will help build a broader base of programs and constituency support so Extension can continue to be funded to serve all it's clientele.

From Page 1, " Crime Cases "

Victor Calderon Manzano pled guilty to aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. He was sentenced to adjudication of guilt deferred finding of true on deadly weapon. He must pay \$242 court costs, a fine of \$1500, and \$2928 restitution to Yoakum County Hospital. He must serve 240 hours community service, complete the batterer's treatment program, and attend aftercare counseling, subject to Hold by U.S. Border Patrol. He was represented by Attorney Paul Mansur.

July 4, 1845: Texas formally accepted annexation from U.S.



Chris Hansen, a PHS Senior this Fall, details some of his experiences as a delegate to the American Legion Sponsored Boys State Convention in Austin this June. His tuition and expenses were funded by the Plains Lions Club. Chris said he was very impressed by the convention, where over a thousand young men learn valuable lessons in citizenship, and how our form of government works. He was elected a " County Commissioner" by residents of his created " town".

Plains ISD invites interested parties to make proposals for providing milk for its school lunch program beginning August 16, 2001.

Proposals will be received until 1:00 pm., August 6, 2001 at the Business Office. Plains ISD will accept proposals from venders for its Annual Contract for Teaching and

Instructional Materials until 1:00 pm., August 6, 2001, at the Business Office. Proposals should be addressed to Eric Banfield, Business Manager, Plains ISD, 1000 10th Street, P.O. Box 479, Plains, Texas, 79355. For information, please call (806) 456-7483.

Plains ISD reserves the right to accept or reject any and all proposals, to waive all technicalities, and to contract with the vendor that represents the best value to the district.

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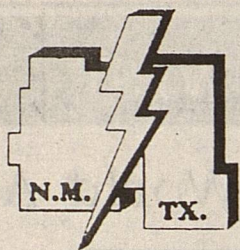
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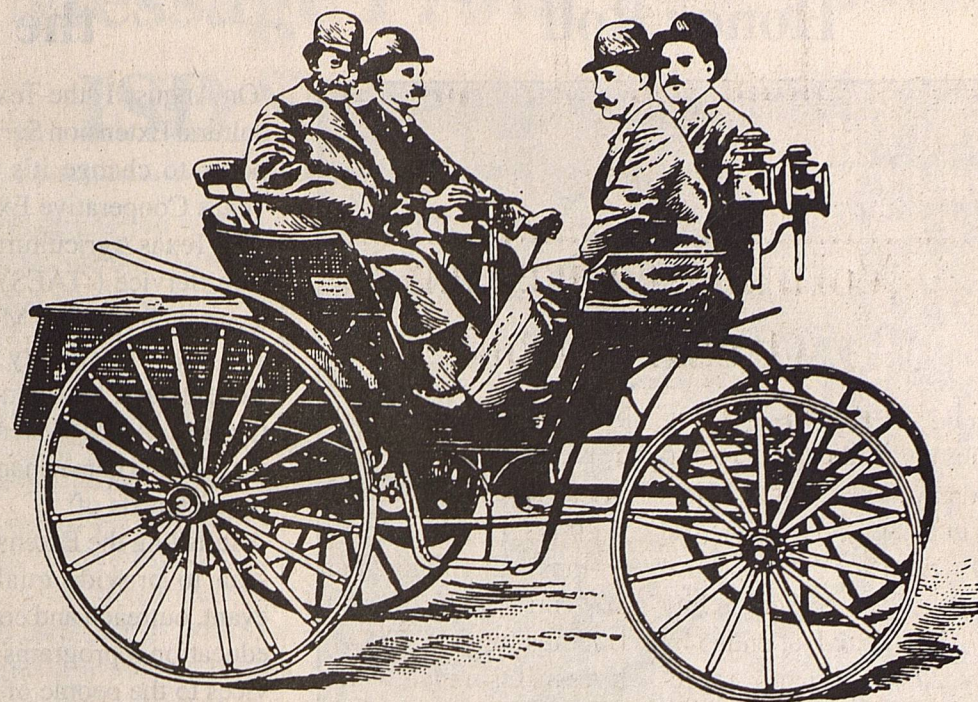
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Lots of
strange stuff
goes on at the
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Reunion. Be
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Lifelines & Styles

Volunteer Firemen Attend School

College Station- Jerry Dominguez, volunteer fireman of Plains Volunteer Fire Department in Plains is attending the 72nd Annual Municipal Firemen's Training School July 22-27. The school, attended by nearly 2,000 students, representing about 750 cities from more than 25 states, is being held on the Texas A&M University campus this week.

Firemen can choose a course at the school from a list including Fire Fighting, Fire Prevention, Fire Department Officer Development, Fire Service Rescue Practices, Specialized Fire Protection and Public Safety Emergency Service Dispatcher.

Fireman Dominguez is being sponsored by Yoakum County Farm Bureau and Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Companies

by contributing toward the cost of the school. Since volunteer firemen are interested in attending this school to help do a better job for fire fighting and fire prevention, 125 County Farm Bureaus and the Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Companies in the statewide program have sponsored 125 firemen at the school.

"Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Companies believe volunteer fire departments have been very effective in reducing the amount of loss involved by fire in rural areas," said Texas Farm Bureau president, Donald Patman of Waxahachie. "It is our hope in sponsoring this program that the fireman will help the Plains Volunteer Department to better serve the residents of Yoakum County."

Free Internet Access For Health Information

Lubbock Regional Mental Health Mental Retardation Center is providing free public access to the Internet for people interested in finding health related information on the Web. Public Internet access is available at three of the Center's locations in Lubbock: 1950 Aspen; 3804 I-27; and 1602 10th Street.

Access is available on a first come first serve basis and time is allotted to patrons in 30-

minute increments. Helpful links will be available that have useful information about general health, as well as information about mental health, mental retardation, and chemical dependency.

The Center is able to provide free Internet access through a telecommunications grant from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board. For more information please call Victoria Rivera at 767-1747.

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Tuesdays & Fridays
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Cold Watermelon.....



This little guy was enjoying a free slice of Yoakum County's famed watermelons at last year's Watermelon Round Up. The scene will be repeated hundreds of times when the sixth annual Round Up kicks off Saturday, September 1.

Legislation Addresses Nursing Shortage

Schools Can Use Funding To Expand Capacity

The Texas Legislature approved a bill that will create an opportunity for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the state's nursing schools to address the shortage of registered nurses. Senate Bill 572 by Sen. Mike Moncrief (D-Fort Worth) and Reps. Patricia Gray and Craig Eiland (both D-Galveston) was signed by Gov. Rick Perry on June 17.

Introduced at the request of the Texas Hospital Association and Texas Nurses Association, the bill directs the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to administer a program for two and four year colleges and universities to expand the capacity of nursing education programs. Funding to address the nursing shortage is included in the final state budget. Nursing will have the first draw on some \$22.5 million set aside for higher education in the Dramatic Growth Fund.

The coordinating board is directed to use the income for the next two years from the Nursing, Allied Health Tobacco Fund to fund grants addressing the shortage. Any program preparing students for initial licensure as registered nurses, including two year institutions of higher education and independent or private institutions of higher education, may apply for a grant. Priority will be given to institutions seeking to increase nursing program enrollment through financial incentives to faculty to provide clinical and classroom instruction in addition to carrying a full teaching load.

Registered nurse vacancy rates in Texas hospitals range from 10 percent to nearly 30 percent in some specialty areas, according to several recent Texas surveys. In 1999, to match the national average of RN's per 100,000 of population, Texas would have

needed nearly 28,000 more RN's. "Our goal is to double the number of nursing graduates by 2007," said Clair Jordan, RN, executive director of TNA. "For each of the past three years, some 3,000 qualified applicants were turned away from Texas nursing programs due to lack of capacity," she said. The additional funding will give these applicants their opportunity to become nurses.

One of the biggest barriers to expanding nursing education capacity is lack of facility, according to a recent survey of the deans and directors of nursing programs. Hospitals are hopeful that the nursing schools will use the funding to expand their programs and produce more registered nurse graduates.

Senior Citizens Corner

We are having some of our 'family' to return for our lunches and to be with us for fellowship. They are Mr. and Mrs. Stephenson. Mr. and Mrs. Dolloff, Mrs. Prichard, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, Faye Nelms and Chris Humphries. We are glad to have all of you back, hope you can continue to come here all the time.

Yesterday was pool tournament, the winners were: Women's 8 ball-1st Eileen Filipp, 2nd June Hanneman, 9 ball-1st June Hanneman, 2nd Inez Turner. Men's 8 ball-1st Joe Trujillo, 2nd Guy Williams, 9 ball-1st Pete Arenivas, 2nd-Joe Trujillo.

Vera Sparks is home from the

hospital, remember her and her family in your prayers.

We would like for all Seniors from Yoakum county to come and take part in our activities and fellowship.

I am doing a little ceramics, Maggie Powell is still working on ceramics, Darlene Clevenger does ceramics and crochet.

Next Tuesday is '42' tournament.

Come on down and eat with us. There is nowhere else you can get so much for \$2.00 donation 60 years and older. It is \$4.00 for under 60.

Till next week,
Wanda B.

Registration Underway For Camp SPC

Registration is underway for an expanded week long orientation focusing on college success skills scheduled August 6-10 at South Plains College in Levelland.

Camp SPC (Success through Participation and Commitment) is scheduled 9 am. - noon daily in the Counseling Center, located in the Student Services Building, with extended hours until 3:00 pm. August 9 for advisement and preregistration for fall classes.

The camp is designed to help students develop college success strategies, help them reach college and life goals and empower them to serve as mentors and leaders.

The camp is targeted toward

students who may need assistance in study skills and other areas, student entering college with a GED, first generation college students, students who may have been out of college awhile, those with physical or learning disabilities and students who may need developmental courses in one or two areas.

Cost is \$200.00 but students can substitute the cost with 20 hours of mentoring and assistance activities during the fall 2001 semester.

Preregistration is required. For more information, contact the SPC Counseling Center at 806-894-9611, ext. 2364, 2563 or 2358.

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Mr. Willis is likely to associate with other attorneys in the handling of this matter

From The Hack

An unusual occurrence on the golf course last Thursday. A couple of guys alternated turns on the phone, begging me to play with them that eve (after they received the Bride's permission, of course). Truly, I wasn't too thrilled about it... I had leaped out of bed at 4 a.m. and furiously went to work on last week's CCN, and by 5 p.m., their suggested tee time, I was physically beat. Nevertheless, I showed up.

After having a gun and knife pulled on me following the final hole and final results, and after I swore to mention no names of my playing buddies, naturally I cannot divulge either of their identities. I can, with a great deal of honesty, hint that one of them is intimately involved in processing cotton and knows his way around the local bank. The other gentleman is a retired, and almost filthy rich former farm equipment dealer, most of which was painted green and yellow. Their identities now secure, let

me tell you of the match. I arrived at the course with three bucks, borrowed against my allowance from the Bride. The two vultures quickly announced, " Don't worry, old sport, we'll be happy to extend credit. If you lose, however, we would feel more secure if we held your golf bag and shoes till you pay up."

They further explained the rules; Dollar greens on par 3's, dollar skins, if no one wins a skin, carry over to the first winning skin.

Let me quickly sum it up, and spare you the violent, obscene behavior of the pair. I have been called lots of filthy names, but I had never been called a curmudgeon before. I asked the former green paint peddler if he knew what the word meant, and he said, " No, but I hope it's vile and horribly filthy, you curmudgeon!"

The other buddy fairly familiar with banking and cotton handed me \$27 after serious;y questioning my ancestry, then had the gall to hand me his personal bank business card. He gave me a cat sipping cream grin, and said, " Come see us, Squire, give this to any of the people at the bank, they'll treat you right!"

Only on the next day did I happen to look on the back of the card - " To all employees - if this creep presents this card,

immediately call the Sheriff Department and FBII. He is a thief!"

Don't you hate winey loosers?

Two priests were talking together and the older one said to the younger, "You know, when you came into church with all your new ideas, I had questions about how you were going to fit in and how well your ideas were going to work. When you wanted to put bucket seats down in the front two rows of seats, I had my doubts. But now, at every mass, the seats are filled up with young people, so I have to agree that it was a good idea. Then, when you wanted to 'jazz' up the choir and we started singing newer, peppier songs, I was afraid it would offend the parishioners. Now, we have a lot of new, young choir members, and the music seems to pick up the services a lot more than the old music. So, once again I have to agree that you were right. But when you wanted to put in the drive through confessional, I have to admit I thought you'd lost it. But now, at least, there are more people coming to confession than ever. I think you've come up with another good idea. However, the neon sign out front that says "Toot 'n tell or go to hell!" has got to go."

Bush's Medicare reform plan is a blueprint for positive bipartisan change

By Walter D. Wilkerson, Jr., M.D.

Help may soon be on the way for America's seniors.

For some time now seniors have been targeted and enticed by promises of cheaper drugs, more choices and less bureaucracy. But let's face it, seniors have been kept in Medicare limbo.

President Bush's plan to strengthen and improve Medicare comes at a critical time not only for the beneficiaries, but also for the solvency of the program.

It now takes the payroll taxes of four workers to support one Medicare beneficiary. By 2010, with Baby Boomers leaving the workforce for retirement, there will only be two workers supporting each beneficiary. Unless improvements are made soon, our children will pay twice the amount of payroll taxes that we pay now in order to support our Medicare benefits.

A report released earlier this year found that the cost of the Medicare program will begin to exceed program revenues after 2015, leading to a complete depletion of the hospital insurance trust fund by the year 2029.

This week President Bush outlined several key principles to comprehensively reform and bolster the Medicare system. Most notably, he wants to improve Medicare by offering seniors the option of a new prescription drug benefit - a move that would create more choices for beneficiaries and simply give seniors more control over their health-care options. Importantly, these principles are modeled after recommendations from the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare.

Practical, common sense solutions should drive any effort to improve this 36-year-old program, which has become bloated with 130,000 pages of regulations and red tape. An improved Medicare system should offer seniors the choice to either stay with the current fee-for-service program or select from a menu of private health plans, let doctors and patients be in charge of prescription drug decisions, and allow low-income citizens to receive assistance to afford the same good private coverage that others have.

The President is right: bigger government is not the answer. The

answer lay in seniors' ability to choose their own kind of health care and for it to be affordable. Imposing new rules, regulations and restrictions could very well interfere with the availability of the newest and most innovative medical advancements and what doctors can prescribe.

We must keep our choices, keep medical decisions between the doctors and the patients, and ensure that those who need assistance get it and have the same ability to get good coverage as everyone else.


As Congress hammers out the fate of Medicare, the country will watch, awaiting a decision that will either force seniors into the eternal misery of a complex one-size-fits-all plan or into a less complicated world of choices and access to life-enhancing medications. Lets hope it's the latter.

The bottom line is, Congress must take a market-based, bipartisan approach to Medicare reform this year.

Walter D. Wilkerson, Jr., M.D., is a retired family physician from Conroe and former chairman of the Texas Department of Health

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