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Council names new city manager **Airport deal not closed** Story on Page 9

Eagle Lake Headlight

December 10, 1987
(USPS 163-760)
Vol 84, No 37
Eagle Publishing, Inc
P.O. Box 67
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434-0067
(409) 234-5521
35-CENTS PER COPY

Death at jail sparks inquiries, investigation

'Tell Mom I Love Her' — Billy Ray

The death last week of Billy Ray Tillman, 24, of Eagle Lake, found hanging in the Eagle Lake Police Department's holding cell, sparked inquiries on several fronts. These were the major developments:

•Wednesday afternoon the Harris County Medical Examiner's office said the death was a suicide, according to Texas Ranger Ray Nutt of Columbus. In a verbal report on the autopsy, Nutt was told death was caused by asphyxiation by hanging.

•Thursday afternoon an apparent "suicide note" was discovered at the jail; it was first seen in a video tape made the morning of the death. "Tell Mom I Love her," and "Billy Ray 11-30" was scratched in a wide, flat horizontal bar that is part of the wall of vertical bars that make up the front of the cell.

•Thursday and Friday, and again Monday night, an investigator from the Texas Attorney General's criminal investigation unit met with local officers. He termed it an inquiry, not an investigation, that is required anytime a person dies in the custody of a governmental agency.

•Friday police chief Ben Johnson formed a local investigatory commission, to look into the death on a local level and ask questions that members of the community think may be unanswered.

Tillman was arrested about 5:45 p.m. on Monday of last week for a "delivery of a controlled substance (cocaine)" charge. He was temporarily lodged in the holding cell at the police station, and was to be escorted to Columbus Tuesday morning for an arraignment concerning a county grand jury indictment on another charge.

Local police officer Jay Reeves, who came on duty at 1 a.m. Tuesday morning of last week, checked on Tillman each hour, and told Johnson that Tillman was asleep at 5 a.m. when he checked on him but that he woke up and talked with him. When Reeves checked on him again about 6 a.m., Reeves found Tillman hanging from a self-made noose intertwined in the vertical wall of bars. Reeves cut the rope but Tillman apparently had already died. Reeves immediately called Johnson who contacted Ranger Nutt.

After Nutt concluded his immediate investigation, which included having the scene videotaped, and after Justice of the Peace Mary Lou Szymanski held an inquest and ruled the death a suicide, the body was taken to Houston for the autopsy. Although the preliminary, verbal autopsy report was received last Wednesday, it will be several weeks before the written report is forwarded.

Tillman's body was returned to Eagle Lake where funeral services were conducted Saturday.

The Note

The video tape of the investigation was done by an investigator in the Brookshire Police Department and a copy of the video tape was returned to Eagle Lake last Thursday. While viewing it early that afternoon, it could be seen that some wording had been scratched in the black paint in the cell. Immediate inspection of the cell revealed that a large heart shape had been scratched in the paint. Inside the heart were the words "Tell Mom I Love Her — Billy Ray 11-30"

State investigation

The investigator from the state was Mike Feary, whose card says he is "supervising Criminal Investigator" for attorney general Jim Mattox. He would not comment on the case except to say that it was more of a mandated inquest rather than an investigation. He met with chief Johnson later last Thursday afternoon and again Friday morning, and also talked with officer Reeves and officer Brad Murray. He met again with Johnson Monday evening. Feary did say he would not have a written report until after the autopsy report was received.

The NAACP also contacted Johnson last week about the death, but has not yet indicated whether they would have their own investigation. It is believed that Feary's work here was prompted by contact in Austin by the NAACP as well as the state law requirements.

Local investigation

Friday, Johnson appointed a local investigatory commission of Alex Woolridge, Willie Chrystal, Irvin Williams and Helen Glover. Johnson said they will review all evidence collected in the case as well as view the video tape. They also will be able to "ask any and all questions concerning the death," Johnson said. The chief said he has met with each one individually and asked them to meet as a group at their convenience.

Johnson to file this week as sheriff candidate

The lack of a county Democratic party chairman apparently was solved this week as former chairman Reggie Briscoe of Sheridan apparently has agreed to serve again.

Eagle Lake police chief Ben Johnson said Tuesday that he picked up the papers he needs to officially file as a candidate for Colorado County Sheriff. He said he will file the papers, and pay the $600 filing fee on Thursday or Friday of this week. Joe McCreary is Johnson's campaign chairman and H.E. Tate is the campaign treasurer.

Briscoe was not available Tuesday afternoon to see if other candidates have filed. Sheriff Jim Broussard has said he will seek re-election but he also is facing six indictments alleging misdeeds in office.

The Headlight has learned that county attorney **Edward Woolery-Price** has picked up candidacy papers and precinct one commissioner **Otto Loessin** has announced he will file for re-election.

Santa to visit with children, 2-4 p.m.

Christmas parade Saturday

The sixth annual Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce Christmas parade will be held in downtown Eagle Lake this Saturday, Dec. 12 beginning at 1:30 p.m. The official time for Santa Claus to visit with all local youngsters is from 2-4 p.m.

Parade lineup time and judging is from 1 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Any group not having everyone in place by judging time, will not be judged.

A trophy will be awarded for the best Christmas theme entry. Rosette ribbons will be given to the best marching band, best twirling group, best chamber entry, best service/civic club entry, best decorated bicycle, best business or commercial entry, best school entry, best open class.

Following the parade, Santa Claus will make his yearly visit in the foyer of the Municipal Building from 2 p.m. 4 p.m. The Chamber of Commerce will provide bags of goodies for the children who visit with Santa.

The parade lineup includes Rice Area Memorial VFW Post Color Guard, Sealy Chamber of Commerce, Rice school disrtrict bands, Sheridan Sparklers, Children's Community Choir "Twinkle II," Xi Pi Psi Angels, Rice OEA (office education association), Marilyn Thomas' Super Strutters, Eagle Lake Police Department, Eagle Lake Unit of the Colorado County Volunteer Ambulance Corps and the Eagle Lake Volunteer Fire Department.

Parade entry deadline is this Thursday.

Mall-Mania door prize winners announced

Last year's Mall Mania was so successful that Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce officials repeated the Christmas promotion again this year. A large crowd, not as big as last year, showed up for Mall Mania, which was held Thursday, December 3 in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce's Operation S.E.L.F.

Merchants filled booths that were installed by Chamber members at the Eagle Lake Community Center. Interested shoppers once again filled the aisles to see what each participating merchant had to offer.

Winners of door prizes given away by merchants at Mall Mania are as follows:

Martha Duncan, gold belt, donated by The Gold Center; Shelia Mathis, basket of goodies, Anna

Continued on Page Eleven

Santa is coming to town

The Headlight received the following letter this week, written by Santa Claus to tell all the children in the area that he indeed will be here for the Santa Parade this Saturday.

#1 Peppermint Lane
North Pole City
November 30, 1987

Boys & Girls of Eagle Lake
c/o Eagle Lake Headlight
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434

Dear Children,

I finally have all the Christmas activities under control so I can make plans to do some visiting. The elves are busy making toys, the reindeer are in training, and Mrs. Claus is insisting I take a day off.

Since the boys and girls of Eagle Lake always treat me so well, I really look forward to going there. This year I will be in your town on Saturday, December 12 and I hope to see all of you then!

Sincerely,

Santa Claus

newsbriefs

College bound student workshop

Norton Shiflet, Rice High School academic counselor, will present a financial aid workshop on Thursday, December 17 for interested parents of college bound high school seniors.

Parents of junior class students also are welcome to attend. This meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the Rice High School library.

First Baptist Christmas program

The Sanctuary Choir of First Baptist Church, Eagle Lake, will present a Christmas program on Sunday, December 13 at 7:30 p.m. The choir is directed by Scott Powers and instrumentalists are Mrs. Clara May Nash and Mrs. Melburn Sibley.

The program includes Christmas music and dramatics. Script for the dramatics was prepared by Mrs. Kerry Porter. People of all ages will participate in the program of Christmas celebration.

Visitors from the community are most welcome to attend.

The church also will present a Service of Candles and Carols on Sunday, December 20, at 7:30 p.m.

Submit Santa letters by Friday

Letters Eagle Lake youngsters write to Santa will be printed in the Christmas-week issue of The Headlight. Generally, students in area schools write letters in classes, and submit them to the newspaper for publication.

If your child isn't yet in school, or did not get to write a letter to Santa in a class, you still can help them write one at home and mail the letter to P.O. Box 67, Eagle Lake, Texas 77434, or drop it by our office at 220 E. Main. The letter must be postmarked or in our office by this Friday, December 11.

Make sure your child did not write one in school before sending one so it will not be duplicated.

Collection boxes for needy

Collection boxes have been set up at Wilcox Minimax, Miller's Grocery, Eagle Market and Austin's Grocery for anyone wishing to donate a can good for needy families in this area.

Charles Abel, coordinator, reported the students at Eagle Lake Middle School also are participating in this worthy cause and are bringing can goods to school. Abel will distribute the can goods to needy families at Christmas time.

"The people in Eagle Lake have always been generous in the past and we hope they share some Christmas joy this year by donating the can goods," Abel said.

Meadowbrook area decorated

Residents in Meadowbrook Addition on Willow Lane and Melody Lane in Eagle Lake invite one and all to come by to view the Christmas decorations now in full lighted color.

Once again the residents of the area have given unselfishly of their time and money to transform the streets into a lighted Christmas wonderland of unbelievable beauty. There appears to be more lights and decorations in the area than in previous years.

Among the attractions in the Meadowbrook Addition will be the **appearance of Santa Claus** in his sleigh at 618 Melody Lane from 6 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, December 19 only.

Also, many other residents in Eagle Lake have decorated their homes and yards for the joyous holiday season. Take an evening to see the wonderous transformations and enjoy the holiday spirit.

Ludy's has grand opening

The welcoming committee of the Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce met at Ludy's on December 4 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. As Tom Reed, president of the chamber, cut the ribbon, he said "On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, we welcome your new establishment and wish you every success." The new location is at 727 E. Main in Eagle Lake and has a seating capacity of 96. The welcoming committee includes Tom Reed, president; Steve Taylor, vice president; Gwen Paschall, secretary; Michael Henry, treasurer; Don Bendy, chairman; and, Sandy Bendy, director. Pictured next to Reed are Ludy and Javier Esparza, owners of the restuarant.