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1994 Olds Cutlass Supreme SL White, GM Program Car. LOADED!	\$13,995.00
1994 Olds Cutlass Supreme SL Maroon; National Car Rental.	\$13,495.00
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1994 Pontiac Sunbird SE Bright Red; National Car Rental.	\$9,995.00
1993 Chevy Corsica LT Program Car. 2 to Choose From!	\$8,995.00
1991 Ford Thunderbird Super Coupe Low Miles. DYNAMITE!	\$12,995.00
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1990 Olds Calais 4-Door WE FINANCE!	\$3,995.00
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TRUCKS...	Our Price
1994 Chevy Astro Van CL Only 10,000 Miles.	\$16,995.00
1993 Chevy S-10 Blazer 4-Door Tahoe 46,000 Miles.	\$14,995.00
1991 Chevy 1/2-Ton Pickup 36,000 Miles. Company Demo.	\$9,595.00
1991 Chevy Suburban, Texas Stagecoach Conversion	\$14,595.00
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## Hospital

rounding area (especially from the Pink Ladies Auxiliary) to augment operating revenue, the future appeared assured. Loyal patients, a stable physician staff, and a growing economy had, and would continue to serve the hospital well.

Indeed, by 1980 the "new" hospital was so busy and so full that space was at a premium. Because the hospital was frequently at 100% occupancy in those days, patients were sometimes kept in closets or hallways until a bed could be found.

Reacting to what they saw as a critical need for more space, the Board decided to build a new wing onto the facility to accommodate the ever-increasing demands placed upon it by the community and the surrounding area. Again, because of incredible generous gifts from the hospital's patrons, no debt was incurred during the construction of the new wing, which opened in 1984.

Hindsight shows us, as it often does, that these good years were the calm before the storm. The first and most serious influence in the hospital's downturn occurred in 1984, the very year the new wing of Eagle Lake Community Hospital opened, as a result of a fundamental change Medicare made in the way it paid for hospital care in the U.S.

Driven by concerns in Washington that the Medicare system was about to be swamped by debt, to cut costs, Medicare created an entirely new system by which hospitals were paid.

Where under the old system hospitals were reimbursed for the total cost of care for Medicare patients no matter how much money was involved or how many days in the hospital were needed to deal with a problem, now under the new system Medicare would pay only a set fee for a certain diagnosis. So if a patient had, say, a kidney stone, Medicare might pay \$1,000.00, and any difference between that amount and the usually-much-higher actual cost the hospital incurred in

Continued from Page 1

Shiner, Ganado, Giddings and Bastrop were forced out of business.

Other developed various strategies to stay afloat. For example, Columbus, Cuero, Hallettsville, Yoakum and Bay City formed hospital tax districts. (In 1993 there were 99 hospital tax districts in Texas.)

In Brenham and Wharton, competing hospitals merged.

In other areas, huge hospital-management firms bought local hospitals and made them profitable by ruthless cost-cutting and price-raising sometimes at the expense of necessary services. No matter how it was done, it is safe to say no hospital in the U.S. emerged from these changes without scars. And, as said, Eagle Lake Community Hospital is certainly no exception.

The second factor in Eagle Lake Community Hospital's decline is the local economy.

At about the same time in the mid-1980s that the Medicare changes were being made, the Eagle Lake area experienced an economic downturn from which it has not recovered.

The population of the area has not dropped much, but the income of those who remain is significantly lower. Fewer people in the area have health insurance, and of those who do, more are in managed care plans which lower costs to participants by forcing hospitals to discount their charges in return for their business.

The final consideration in this situation has to do with physician staffing. The story here is one of ups and downs. Dr. J.R. Laughlin and J.C. Dr. Laughlin had already retired by the time all these changes began, leaving Dr. Raymond Thomas, Dr. Curtis Laughlin and Dr. Jose Ugarte as the main support of the hospital.

Fortunately, Dr. Russell Thomas joined his father in practice here in 1984, increasing to four the number of physicians the hospital could count on.

The unfortunate and untimely death of Dr. Curtis Laughlin in 1986 was a blow. And, when Dr. Jose Ugarte left for Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and for good in 1992, the hospital was forced to rely on the admissions of only two physicians.

It must be pointed out here that hospitals are not like other businesses which can increase their revenue by advertising or cutting prices. Hospitals must rely upon physicians to advise patients that they need hospital care. The fewer physicians sending patients to a given hospital, the less will be the revenue produced by that hospital.

Indeed, so sharp has been the plunge in revenue at Eagle Lake Community Hospital that in the years since 1983, only one year, 1991, has shown a positive net income, and that was due to a large sum of money willed to the hospital by a generous donor.

*Next Week: Strategies ELCH has used to improve its financial viability.*

Prairie Edge Players present...  
**"Bull in a China Shop"**  
Friday & Saturday  
March 31 & April 1

Daylight Savings  
Time Begins  
2 a.m. Sunday, April 2  
Set Your Clocks  
Back One Hour!

# Eagle Lake Headlight

March 30, 1995  
(USPS 163-780)  
Volume 92, No. 1  
10 Pages Plus 2 Inserts  
Eagle Publishing, Inc.  
P.O. Box 67 — 220 E. Main St.  
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434-0067  
409-234-5521  
**35¢ PER COPY**

## Commissioners meet extension agent candidate

Colorado County Commissioners received a first-hand look at a proposed candidate to fill the extension agent-agriculture position in Colorado County Monday morning when Jack Hunter of Madison County was presented to the Court.

Hunter was introduced by Lin Wilson, district extension director of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service in Corpus Christi, as a potential candidate to fill the vacancy created by the recent move of Rick John.

"We have completed our interview process and feel we have a candidate with a vested interest in moving to Colorado County. We truly feel (Hunter) is the best person for the job," said Wilson.

The meeting was an opportunity for Hunter to address the commissioners and vice versa, answering any questions either party might have for the other.

Hunter has 17 years experience with the extension program with the past 11-1/2 years being in Madison County. He also has worked in Orange and Brazos counties.

A graduate of Van Alstyne High School with a bachelor's and master's degree from Texas A&M University, Hunter told the Court that his primary hobby was raising beef cattle.

"I think I will be a good fit for Colorado County. I am community oriented and will stress the 4-H program," said Hunter.

He added that he is the current president of the Madison County Farm Bureau and was recently elected to the chamber's board of directors.

Commissioners questioned Hunter on his knowledge of rice and row crops and Hunter said he would be glad to learn some of the technology, but "I would accept that as a challenge."

Hunter said he had also interviewed for a position for another county and there was the possibility for two additional interviews.

"I am ready for a move and I like what I have seen in Colorado County, but I also have some other offers," said Hunter.

Wilson emphasized time and again that Hunter was the "best person for the job" in Colorado County and, hopefully, the position would be filled by May 1.

## Prairie Edge Players presentation this weekend

Prairie Edge Players are putting the final touches on their upcoming production of "Bull in a China Shop" scheduled for Friday and Saturday, March 31 and April 1, at 8 p.m. Performances will be held in the Prairie Edge Museum at 408 E. Main.

The comedy-mystery by C.B. Gilford shows what happens when a houseful of sweet, little old spinsters discover that a handsome bachelor lives just across the street. When they learn he is a homicide detective, they are faced with the problem of how to attract his attention. The answer is simplicity itself: a nice, genteel homicide with one of their number as victim!

The play, featuring actors from Eagle Lake, Sheridan and Garwood, is directed by Dr. Raymond Thomas and produced by Mrs. Helen Craig. It promises outstanding entertainment for the entire family.

Some reserved seat tickets are still available from Liz Waddell at Gifts of Distinction, 115 N. McCarty in Eagle Lake. The price of reserved seating is \$8.

General admission tickets may be purchased from any cast or crew member at a cost of \$5.50. Tickets will also be available at the door.

Mark your calendars for March 31 and April 1 and be in Eagle Lake for one of those evenings!

For more information, call 234-2807.

## Board strategies to keep the Hospital

lengthy and, because of its length, a physician's assistant was hired to handle some of the patient load while the search continued. Finally, as a result of this effort, Dr. John Lane joined the Thomas Clinic in 1993.

Another way to increase admissions to the Hospital was to expand the service area of the Hospital by establishing clinics outside the customary service area. Physicians in those clinics would admit people to the Hospital which established the clinic.

Many of our neighboring hospitals have set up such clinics. For example, the Colorado-Fayette Medical Center in Weimar has established clinics in Flatonia, Schulenburg and Giddings; Columbus Community Hospital has a clinic in industry; and Trinity Medical Center in Brenham has clinics in La Grange as well as Giddings.

In 1989, the Board of Directors decided to open a clinic in Sealy since the Sealy Hospital had closed in 1987. The initial effort to establish a clinic failed to achieve the goal of more admissions. The Board tried again in 1993 with a new clinic directed by Dr. Jaime Midez. Unfortunately, Dr. Midez has just recently left to join a busy, urban practice elsewhere in the state, but the Sealy Medical Clinic is having a positive impact on the Hospital because of the full-time nurse practitioner and physician support from Drs. Ravindra Kumar and Russell Thomas.

Finally, in 1992, the Board attempted to bring in another physician to replace Dr. Jose Ugarte. Dr. Kumar joined the health care group in this area in 1994.

The turnover that we have experienced in the years since physician recruiting began is, unfortunately, quite characteristic of physicians recruited to serve in rural areas.

In addition to physician recruiting, there have been extensive fund-raising efforts. The Board formed the Rice Medical Foundation for the primary purpose of raising money, and it has had considerable success. The money raised (\$250,000 in 1994), however, has all gone to subsidize Hospital operation.

The results of all these efforts have been substantial, but not substantial (See Hospital, Page 10)

## Holland says, no tax rate increase for 1996

Eagle Lake City Council agreed to purchase 27,982 acres of land from Joe Frazar Jr. and his sons, Joe N. Frazar III and Richard D. Frazar, for the airport expansion project at its regular meeting last week, March 14.

By Lynda Appelt, Contributing Writer  
The first letter of offer in Sept. of last year.

Local city sales tax rebates for March were \$110.9 million, 12.2% above the payments one year ago of \$98.8 million. The rebates of \$11.7 million to Texas counties reflect a 9% increase over the \$10.7 million payments of March 1994.

The citizens will participate with us," said Cook.

Bill Appelt was appointed as presiding election judge for the May 6 election with Helen Supak as alternate. Three clerks will be hired.

Budget expenditures were moved from one line item to another in the Police and Water Departments and did not change the total amount for the departments or their budgets.

Bill Bersky, representative of TCI Central Inc., received approval for a cable increase on one-time installation and monthly equipment charges.

Under administrative reports, Holland told Council that sidewalk work is being done by the Texas Department of Transportation and not by the City. The workers are adding handicapped ramps to existing sidewalks.

According to Holland, K-9 Officer Jack Knox and canine, Posha, have made several drug arrests.

Also some 25 applications for the police chief's position have been received.

Councilwoman René Cooper-Scott announced that the Selection Committee has narrowed those 25 down to 14 candidates. Applications are to be received through March 17.

## City sales tax rebate shows slight gain

"Texas employment has risen by over 331,000 jobs in the last year, to stand at 7.9 million jobs, for another new all-time high," State Comptroller John Sharp said Friday, March 10, as he delivered \$122.6 million in March sales tax rebates to 1,073 Texas cities and 111 counties.

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This month's payments include local sales taxes collected in Jan. and reported by businesses filed monthly returns in Feb.

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The City of Houston received the largest municipal sales tax rebate of \$15.7 million, up 8.5% from the \$14.4 million in March 1994.

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## Pharmacy & Your Health

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**New Concerns About Acetaminophen Safety**

Acetaminophen is back in the news. In late December there were news reports of health problems linked to acetaminophen (Tylenol), a popular over-the-counter pain and fever medicine. These reports indicated that use of the drug could lead to kidney and liver damage. Medical reports were based on a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

According to the study conducted at Johns Hopkins University, about 10 percent of serious kidney disease in the United States is caused by acetaminophen that is taken for long periods of time. For example, taking more than one 325 mg tablet of acetaminophen every day for over a year can double a person's risk of kidney failure. The same risk existed if more than 1,000 tablets were taken over several years. Persons who took aspirin did not appear to have this increased risk. A separate research team reported that consumption of high doses of acetaminophen during voluntary or illness-related fasting can cause serious liver damage.

Researchers indicate that these findings do not effect most situations where people take acetaminophen for a few days for a headache, fever, or the flu. This medicine has a long record of safety and can continue to be used safely if proper dosage guidelines are followed.

**100 Women in Hats' April 9**

Providence Baptist Church will present 100 "Women in Hats" on Sunday morning, April 9, at 11:30 a.m. Rev. Bob Shorter Jr., Pastor, invites the public to attend. For more information call 409-234-2069.

**Seaholm Golf Tournament set for April 22**

## Wintermann honored

David Wintermann of Eagle Lake, right, was honored by the Texas Parks & Wildlife and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Departments for "commitment to the conservation of Texas natural resources including the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. For more than 25 years you have been advocating ecosystems management and have set an example for both federal and state agencies."

Presenting the certificate of appreciation was Steve Labuda, manager of Attwater's Prairie Chicken National Refuge outside Eagle Lake, and Royce Jurries who have been advocating ecosystems management and have set an example for both federal and state agencies."

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## Law enforcement report 'routine' week

The Eagle Lake Police Department reported that on March 22, Officer Jeremy Moore was dispatched to 200 E. Post Office Street in reference to a fight in progress. Sgt. Steve Hasin was at the scene talking to the two females when Moore arrived. The females agreed not to fight any more and no charges would be filed if they did as agreed.

On March 24, at 4:32 a.m., Officer Ochoa was dispatched to the police department to talk to a complainant who reported that she had been beaten up. After meeting with the female complainant, Ochoa arrested Christopher Lujan for family violence. He was transported to the county jail for confinement.

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On March 25, at 12:05 p.m., to file an assault charge. A report was taken and the case is under investigation.

On March 25 at 2:35 a.m., Officer Clem Johnson was dispatched to Shirley Street in reference to a fight in progress. A juvenile was taken into custody and turned over to the juvenile probation officer for aggravated assault-family violence.

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