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Produced By:
Carol Cardenas • Leslie Risk
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Shirley Luedecke • Betty Drymalla

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To The Editor & You

Who's towing the note?

There has been much written and viewed recently about the Sheridan Park and Recreation Center Inc. (SPARC). The information I offer here is from documents involving the County and SPARC.

SPARC executed a gift deed to the County of Colorado of 17,922 acres on 11-22-96. The deed states that should Sheridan ever incorporate, the County shall deed the property in its entirety with all improvements and appurtenances (accessories) back to the City of Sheridan. A grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) must go to a government entity.

On Feb. 10, 1997, the county judge and Commissioners signed a dedication to continue the agreement with SPARC for the County to hold and disburse the grant funds upon notification by SPARC. The first quarterly report from SPARC shows a total project cost of \$830,000 with matching funds of \$415,000 from TPWD.

According to SPARC's Preliminary Draft, the waterpark itself will be open for 107 days per year. The yearly projected operation cost will be \$253,000.

Using optimistic figures from the feasibility study of 80,000 attendees, 300 season passes accounting for 20,000 people and \$5 for the remaining 60,000 admissions, plus concessions, gift shop and RV income would be in the \$436,000 range.

Using conservative attendance figures from the feasibility study of 63,000 people per year from 300 season passes at \$100 being sold to account for 20,000 attendees and the remaining 43,000 attendees paying an average of \$5, income is projected at \$245,000. This does not include receipts from concessions, gift shop or RV income.

Total conservative annual income of \$334,000 is projected.

Jim Brisco, President of SPARC, said that a program is being planned to allow youth to pick up trash, now, and do other jobs to earn park admission if they can't pay the set admissions fee.

Neither Phase I or Phase II includes a pool for the immediate community. This draft states that even without the water slides, all in-ground facilities would still be operational and more entertaining than a standard pool, draw more people and provide more jobs and still have an economic impact.

Originally, the estimated budget for Phase I was \$298,000; Phase II is \$499,005.

At the present time, Elaine Dill of TPWD says that Colorado County has total responsibility and liability for the waterpark. The Texas Recreation and Parks Account Agreement was signed on June 20, 1996, by Judge Slominski.

After a recent conversation with Ms. Dill of TPWD, the Judge states in a letter that he is fully aware of the County's obligation in this project. Mr. Brisco said that the County's financial obligation will be zero.

I hope Mr. Brisco is correct because the County's tax base declined by \$100,000,000 from 1983-1994.

Judge Slominski further states that should SPARC and the Sheridan Lions Club fail to meet the requirements of operation and management, the County would have options besides complete abandonment.

The County could contract out with another entity for operations and management, operate and manage the park itself or do a partial upkeep of the

park without operating the water facilities.

The County would be ineligible for TPWD grants for the expected useful life of the park if it should be abandoned.

TPWD can involve the State Attorney General's office if program compliance is not met, per agreement signed by Judge Slominski 6-20-96.

I do not doubt the commitment of SPARC for this ambitious waterpark project.

I do think the "water should be tested" by Phase I (in-ground facility) to determine if public response is as great as anticipated.

Phase II could be delayed for two full operating seasons unless it is funded by grants, sponsorships and loans on slides and equipment as shown in the preliminary draft. If this money is available, then there need not be a financial risk or obligation for anyone in the County.

I called Noah's Ark in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., billed as the nation's largest waterpark. I spoke to Nancy and asked how they financed their business venture, she said the park is privately owned.

Grants certainly are not free - they are funded with tax dollars. People who write grants and entities that accept grants should thoroughly investigate and determine the public need for the grant and the long term consequences of the grant.

Cherry Harrison
P.O. Box 5071
Alleyton, Texas 78935

Thanks to the community

On behalf of the Eagle Lake United Methodist Church, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the

Eagle Lake Headlight for all the publicity they gave our first Easter Lenten Luncheons in the newsbriefs column.

These luncheons were very successful and we hope to make them an annual event.

Thanks also to all who attended and contributed to the love offerings. Because of your generosity, we will be able to contribute approximately \$150 to the Eagle Lake Food Pantry.

Many different church denominations were represented by our guest minister speakers as well as the people who attended these weekly luncheons. We feel that this was a means of uniting people of our community in

Proposed state law could change employers', homeowners' liability

Property owners and businesses generally are liable for injuries that occur on their property or have been inflicted by their employees.

But, under a bill being considered by the House Civil Practices Committee, the property owner would be liable for employees' criminal acts only if they approved the act or the property owner showed gross negligence in hiring the employee.

The bill, by Rep. Tom Uher, D-Bay City, is being promoted by Texans for Lawsuit Reform, a business group that says some laws make it too easy to win a big court judgement against businesses. Uher filed the bill after receiving many complaints from business owners who said they have been sued for injuries caused by criminals under whom they have no control.

Critics say the bill creates a loophole for nursing homes. C.W. Mattek of Lake Jackson and his lawyer talked about injuries suffered by Mattek's mother after employees of a Pflugerville nursing home handled her roughly. The Mattek family won a \$1.7 million judgement.

"Even management acknowledged that nursing homes routinely employ criminals and other employees who handle their patients roughly," Mattek said at a news conference.

Also criticizing Uher's bill at the news conference was Barbara Suraci, whose two daughters were among four teen-agers murdered in 1991 at a yogurt shop in Austin. The civil case was settled for about \$12 million, but the killer never was found.

State Capitol Highlights

By Lyndell Williams
and Ed Sterling
Texas Press Association

She said the shop owner should be liable when their negligence makes it easier for criminals to hurt customers. "People making money off of other people" should be held responsible, she was quoted in the *Austin American-Statesman*.

Bill Protects Elderly, Disabled
Meanwhile, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock says a bill that passed the Senate by unanimous vote will broaden the state laws protecting elderly and disabled Texans in nursing homes and other health care facilities.

"No one in Texas is more vulnerable than our elderly or disabled citizens," Bullock said. "We must make every effort to keep them safe from harm."

Bullock said the bill, sponsored by Sen. David Sibley, R-Waco, expands current law prohibiting health care workers who have been convicted of certain crimes from coming in direct contact with the residents of nursing homes and other health care facilities that serve the elderly and disabled.

The bill extends the list to exclude workers who have been convicted of sexual assault, aggravated assault, injury to a child or elderly or disabled adult, abandoning or endangering a child and aiding in a suicide.

Unplanned Tax Side Effect
A special House panel is continuing work on a tax plan that would expand the state sales tax to more than 35 previously untaxed goods and services.

But panel members learned their plan has an unplanned side effect: under prior law, local governments who wish to piggyback their own tax to new state sales taxes could do so. And doing so would short-circuit Gov. George W. Bush's dream of cutting school property taxes in Texas.

State Rep. Paul Sadler, chairman of the Select Committee on Revenue and Public Education Funding, said, "We're going to make sure that if they raise additional tax revenue, they don't get to keep it."

So, the panel is looking at two ways for making sure: forbidding local governments from adding their own sales taxes to the new levies or forcing them to use the revenue to fix roads or cut city and county ad valorem taxes.

Without safeguards against "piggyback rides" on taxes by local governments, communities statewide would be able to add \$1.4 billion in new sales taxes to the \$6.6 billion they now collect in the state's two-year budget cycle.

Other Capital Highlights

•Lawmakers have filed more than two dozen bills this session offering free or reduced tuition and fees at state public colleges and universities.

Among the beneficiaries of such legislation would be children of veteran teachers, injured or disabled law enforcement officers and children in state foster care.

•The Texas Board of Criminal Justice has granted Prison Fellowship Ministries permission to launch a Christian faith-based rehabilitation program.


The program, which began last week at a prison camp near Houston, will use no state money. Former Richard Nixon counsel Charles Colson is donating \$1.5 million to run the program for two years.

•Almost 5,000 people marched up Austin's Congress Avenue on Palm Sunday (March 23) to demand stronger laws against hate crimes. Between 1992 and 1995, more than 1,600 hate crimes were reported in Texas.

•Lt. Gov. Bullock says it may serve Texas better to replace the elected State Board of Education with an appointed one. Speaking at the Texas Daily Newspaper Association's annual convention last week, Bullock said, "I'm about ready to go back to the appointed board, kick this bunch out and start again."

DeWitt County Wildflower Assn.
P.O. Box 995, Cuero, TX 77954
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Bible Verse of the Week

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

— Psalms 23:1

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Parkinson's Disease: Loss of Dopamine

If individuals experience uncontrollable tremors in the arms and legs and have a shuffling walk or gait, they may have a condition called Parkinson's disease. This condition primarily affects people over the age of 60. It can be present in a mild form for many years. A severe case can lead to serious disability within a few years.

Parkinson's disease is caused by a loss of a chemical in the brain called dopamine. This chemical acts as a transmitter of messages along the nerves, from the brain to the muscles. Loss of large amounts of dopamine usually means loss of muscle control. Characteristic signs of loss of muscle control include slow movement, rigidity (stiffness), poor posture (stooping or leaning forward), and tremor (shaking that resembles rolling a pill between the thumb and the tip of the forefinger).

The treatment of Parkinson's disease usually focuses first on dopamine replacement. The medicine levodopa (Larodopa) is converted to dopamine in the brain. It is prescribed alone or combined with carbidopa (Sinemet). Bromocriptine (Parlodel) and pergolide (Permax) both act like dopamine and may be used along with levodopa and carbidopa. Selegiline (Eldepryl) is thought to inhibit an enzyme that destroys dopamine.

Appelt, all of Eagle Lake; and Jeff Wied, Ricky Kristynik and John Waligura of Garwood. Another winner was Tommy Sedam Jr. of Bay City...

Miss Kathryn Lois Means, daughter of Mrs. Vera Means of Rock Island and Robert Means of Houston, and Dr. David Hurr, son of Mr. & Mrs. Glen Hurr of Baytown, exchanged vows in a double ring ceremony at the Columbus First Baptist Church Sunday, June 4, at 2:30 p.m....

Mr. & Mrs. Milton Hengst of Schulenburg announced the engagement and approaching marriage of their daughter, Dorothy "Maggie" to Edward Fred Walker III of Eagle Lake. They plan to wed June 24 at 3 p.m. in the St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Schulenburg...

Miss Margaret Christal, daughter of Joyce Christal, has been named to the Dean's List at Prairie View A&M for the spring semester... (See 4 & 48, Page 4)

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