

# Eagle Lake Headlight

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## NEWSBRIEFS

### Want to help out?

The annual fireworks display held on Calhoun Road (next to Taco Tony's), will take place Monday, Dec. 31, at 6:30 p.m. For those of you who enjoy it and would like to donate funds to make it bigger and better this year, stop by the Post Office to get more information.

### Senior Serve meeting is Jan. 7

A senior Serve meeting will be held Monday, Jan. 7, at 6 p.m. in the commons area of the high school. All chairpersons need to attend. The final touches will be made, so please attend. Hope everyone has a wonderful Holiday!

### Closing for New Year's Day

In observance of New Year's Day, the First National Bank will be closed Tuesday, January 1.

### Defensive driving course slated for Jan.

A six-hour defensive driving course has been scheduled by retired DPS Sgt. Gilbert Kiel for Jan. 9 and 10 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the Agriculture Building, 316 Spring St. in Columbus. To pre-register for the course call 979-732-2734 or arrive a few minutes early the first evening.  
(See Newsbriefs, Page 5)

## The new open container law could affect you

*"Alcohol and cars don't mix, period. The Legislature has given law enforcement a much-needed open container law to help us drive that point home."* -Col. Thomas Davis Jr., Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

As of Sept. 1, 2001, it is illegal to possess an open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle in Texas.

House Bill 5, passed by the 77th Texas Legislature, makes it a Class C misdemeanor to possess an open container of alcohol in the passenger area of a motor vehicle which is on a public highway or the right-of-way adjacent to a public highway.

**What is an "open container"?**  
Under the new law, an "open container" is a bottle, can, or other receptacle that contains any amount of alcoholic beverage and that has been opened, that has a broken seal, or the contents of which are partially re-

moved.

**What is considered the "passenger area of a motor vehicle"?**

The "passenger area" is the area of a motor vehicle designed for the seating of the operator and passengers. It does not include a locked glove compartment or a similar storage container that is locked, the trunk of a vehicle, or the area behind the last upright seat of the vehicle if the vehicle does not have a trunk.

**What is a "public highway"?**

This includes any public road, street, highway, interstate, or other publicly-maintained way of any part open for public use for the purpose of motor vehicle travel.

**Does the motor vehicle have to be moving for a violation to occur?**

No. Under the law, a person commits an open container offense by

possessing an open container in the passenger area of a motor vehicle regardless of whether the vehicle is being operated or is stopped or parked. There is exception for people who are passengers in a bus, taxi, or limousine; or who are in the living quarters of a motorized house coach or motorized house trailer, including a self-contained camper, motor home, or recreational vehicle.

**Did the Texas Legislature also change the DWI laws?**

Yes. House Bill 5 strengthens the punishment of repeat DWI offenses. A second DWI conviction within five years of the first now requires a mandatory one-year suspension of the offender's driver's license. Upon reinstatement, the offender must have an ignition interlock device installed on his or her vehicle for an additional

year. This device uses a breath analysis mechanism that renders the vehicle inoperable if ethyl alcohol is detected in the driver's breath.

**Why were the open container and DWI laws changed?**

Before the 77th Legislature, the State of Texas was not in compliance with federal open container and DWI repeat offender laws. As a result, it risked losing federal highway construction funds appointed to the state. The changes in the law bring Texas into compliance with federal open container laws and federal laws for repeat DWI offenders.

Also, the Department of Public Safety has observed that in the majority of alcohol-related crashes, an open container is present. The law is intended to help curb the problem of driving while intoxicated.

Still ahead of last year, but...

## Eagle Lake's sales tax rebate drops 27%+

Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Rylander recently sent local governments their final sales tax rebates for 2001. The Comptroller sent \$217.8 million to cities and counties, up 5% compared to Dec. 2000.

The City of Eagle Lake received a rebate of \$7,714.04, down 27.17% from the \$10,593.25 received last Dec.

Texas cities received \$200.6 million in sales tax revenue, up 4.7% compared to Dec. 2000. Texas counties received \$17.2 million, up 9.5% compared to a year ago.

The Comptroller also delivered \$74.5 million to Texas' six metropolitan transit authorities and two city transit systems, and \$7.8 million was paid to 66 special purpose districts.

One of those special purpose districts, Rice Hospital District, received \$6,447.83, down 28.77% from the \$9,052.62 received last Dec.

Dec. sales tax rebates represent sales taxes collected in Oct. and reported to the Comptroller in Nov. The state's share of sales tax collected during this period was \$1.3 billion, up 1.6% compared to a year ago.

December's sales tax rebates bring the total sales tax allocated to local taxing entities in 2001 to \$4 billion, an increase of 4% compared to \$3.8 billion in sales tax allocations in 2000.

In 2001, Texas cities received \$2.6 billion in sales tax rebates, a 5.2% increase compared to 2000. Counties received \$221.8 million, a 4.4% increase over 2000. Sales tax rebates to six metropolitan transit authorities and two city transit departments totaled \$993.6 million, up 0.5% compared to 2000. Special purpose districts received \$97.9 million in 2001, an increase of 8% compared to last year.

For details sales tax payments to individual cities, counties, transit systems and special purpose districts, locate the Monthly Sales and Use Tax Allocation Comparison Summary Report on the Comptroller's web site at <[www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/allosum/compsum.html](http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/allosum/compsum.html)>

Other cities in the Eagle Lake area and the amount of their sales tax rebate this month are:

Columbus, \$56,387.52, up 10.62%; Weimar, \$15,717.69, up 42.40%; Sealy, \$81,221.53, +5.98%; Bellville, \$29,802.62, +5.82%; El Campo, \$159,607.56, up 13.87%; and Wharton, \$79,529.44, +3.00%.

Year-to-date for the above cities and the change from last year are: Columbus, \$814,425.49, +5.68%; Weimar, \$209,314.12, +37.45%; Sealy, \$1,052,200.88, -3.51%; Bellville, \$500,932.39, +12.21%; El Campo, \$2,109,912.43, +5.13%; and Wharton, \$1,219,829.90, +7.81%.

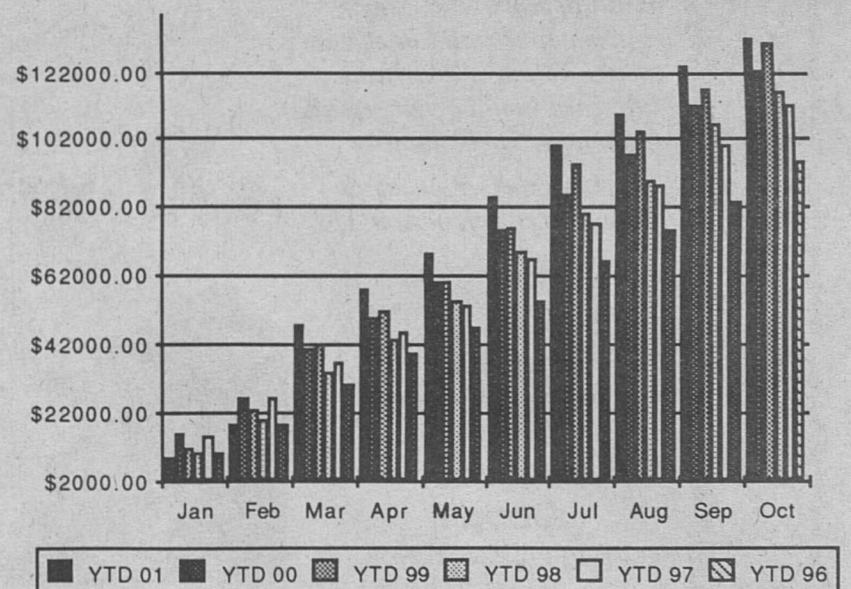
On the county level, Colorado Cou-

nty received \$44,652.81, down 3.77%. Austin County received \$49,073.85, down 27.44%. Wharton County received \$113,235.55, up 8.22%.

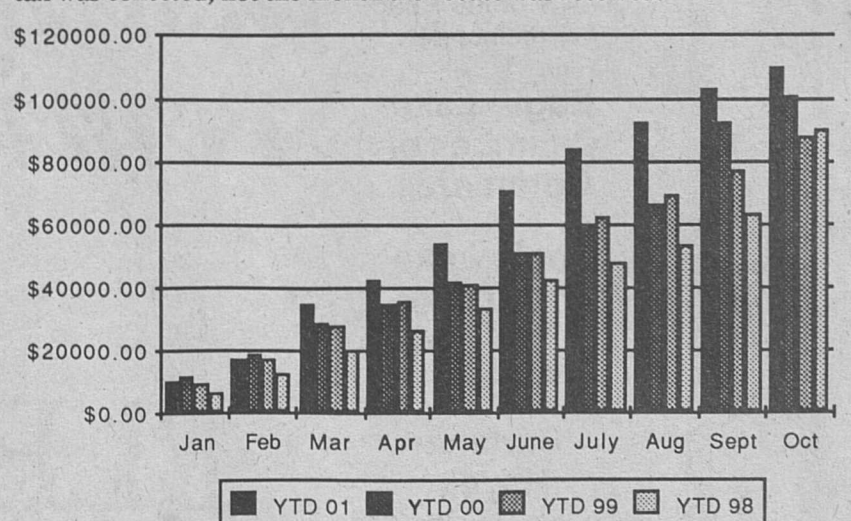
Year-to-date figures for these counties are: Colorado, \$675,502.85, up 8.26%; Austin, \$793,456.80, -7.16%; Wharton, \$1,557,800.94, +6.15%.

The Comptroller's next sales tax allocation will be delivered Friday, Jan. 11, 2002.

\*This is an inaccurate comparison; Weimar recently increased the city's portion of sales tax to 1.5%



The year-to-date sales tax rebate totals for the City of Eagle Lake (above) and Rice Hospital District (below) are charted according to the month the tax was collected, not the month the rebate was received.



## Car insurance by the mile?

Starting Jan. 1, a new state law will encourage insurance companies to let car owners buy miles of insurance as needed. It's called "cents-per-mile choice" and it could finally put Texas on the road to making compulsory car insurance work.

Two decades ago, despite opposition from insurance companies, compulsory car insurance was adopted in Texas. Since then, penalties for non-compliance have been increased and proof-of-insurance requirements have been enacted. But company representatives say the proportion of uninsured cars may be even higher than it was before insurance was made compulsory; about one in five cars now on the road are without insurance.

The major problem according to proponents of the "cents-per-mile now" project is that car insurance can

only be bought at fixed rates. Such rates, they contend, make insurance like a tax on owning a car instead of a cost of driving it, the activity that produces accidents. This fixed cost may be resented, they say, but it's affordable in most zip codes.

However, studies show that in low income zip codes, making insurance a fixed cost of owning a car force drivers to put more miles on fewer cars causing the average miles per insured car to spiral upward, and insurance costs to skyrocket.

"We thank the legislature and governor for this opportunity to put forward an alternative way to buy car insurance that is essential to making compulsory insurance work," said Deborah Bell, president of Texas National Organization for Women (NOW), which lobbied hard to get the

Texas law enacted. "We challenge the companies to try to explain why they oppose compulsory insurance."

Bell said insurance companies owe it to the driving public to explain why they often charge from 50% to 150% more for car insurance in low income zip codes. "No wonder compulsory insurance isn't working," she said.

Dr. Patrick Butler, Director of NOW's Insurance Project, says having a choice of payment options won't change the way your car is profiled.

"A company assigns the car to one of the company rate categories by profiling your zip code, car type and use, household drivers, your credit history, and other information they have access to. The choice of continuing to pay a fixed rate or buying miles as

(See Insurance, Page 5)



Because the hour is getting late  
Our New Year's wish for you can't wait  
We hope your year will be first-rate  
Now kick up your heels and celebrate!

We look forward to your continued patronage. Thanks, folks!

From All of Us at...  
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