



State Capitol Highlights

By Mike Cox
Texas Press Association

State elections office sets up voter fraud hotline

A funny e-mail making the rounds purports to be the electronic voting system for a large Southern state that played a critical role in the 2000 presidential election.

When a recipient opens the attachment, a short animation shows a citizen's efforts to vote for one of the two mainstream presidential candidates. When the person clicks on their candidate's name, nothing happens. After a few more clicks, the user gets a message saying, "Are you sure of your selection?" A few clicks later nets the prompt: "Are you, really REALLY sure?"

In the end, after several more bytes of high tech political humor, a message pops up thanking the voter for casting his vote for the other candidate, not his.

Humor's one thing, reality's another. The Secretary of State's office, which oversees enforcement of the Texas Election Code, announced an anti-voter fraud effort with the beginning of early voting last week.

"To anyone who might be considering engaging in any sort of voter intimidation or voter fraud," Secretary of State Geoffrey Connor said in a written statement, "our message is simple and clear: Don't mess with Texas voters; don't mess with Texas votes."

Toward that end, Connor's office has set up a toll free number (800) 252-VOTE, for anyone encountering voter fraud or any other violations of election law.

In addition to the government effort, several civil rights and minority groups have organized their own anti-fraud effort. Their toll free number is (866) OUR-VOTE.

Pondering pumpkins...

Next week, a lot of political aspira-

tions will turn into pumpkins, but this week pumpkins are turning into Halloween decorations.

Year in and year out, Texas is in the top 10 of the nation's pumpkin producing states, according to the comptroller's "Fiscal Notes," citing data from Texas A&M University.

The annual value of Texas' pumpkin crop is estimated at \$4.6 million. Most of the pumpkins go for decorative purposes (read jack 'o lanterns), but then there's pumpkin pie.

New state research database...

This isn't the first national election where the military records of the opposing candidates have been an issue.

If you'd like to know whether someone in your family served in the army or navy of the Republic of Texas or the Texas Rangers, the Texas State Library has developed an online, searchable database of digital records from the library's Adjutant General Service Records holdings.

The records cover more than a century of Texas history, from the 1830s to the 1930s. For more information on the free database, visit the library's Web site at www.tsl.state.tx.us

Late benefit payments net penalties...

The Texas Worker's Compensation Commission has sent 68 violation notices to various insurance carriers for being late in paying temporary income benefits to workers injured on the job.

The notices are not just "watch that stuff" letters. They inform the carriers of \$251,000 in penalties they must pay. Another 58 notices assessing \$12,089 in penalties have gone out to insurance carriers for improper reporting of electronic data.

For more information on compliance issues, check the commission's Web site at www.twcc.state.tx.us.

We are looking for a few good entrepreneurs

If you would like to begin a new business, come learn how the business of "Tourism" may be just what you are looking for. If you are looking for ways to make your agriculture enterprise more profitable, this is definitely the place for you. The Texas Leadership Institute is sponsoring a seminar series in this region on NATURE TOURISM BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT. This is a chance to learn about this fast growing business segment from the pros.

Main Street-Eagle Lake will host the second in the series. The first of the three seminars will be held in Bellville on November 10 at the Austin County Courthouse. The second will be in Eagle Lake at the Farris Hotel on December 8. Hempstead will host the third seminar of the series in January, date to be determined. Although each of the seminars is a "stand alone", each will offer valuable assistance for different stages of business development. The Texas Leadership Institute works in co-operation with LCRA, Texas Cooperative Extension Service, the University of Texas, Texas A&M University, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and local governments across the state.

Nature tourism will be the focus of the first seminar will address "The Basics for your Business", defining nature tourism and how it relates to agriculture enterprises. The Eagle Lake session will be the "nuts and bolts" of developing a nature tourism business. Of special interest to the area landowners will be the sessions about new laws affecting landowner liabilities. The third in the series focuses on marketing a nature tourism business.

The Eagle Lake Main Street Program is excited about participating in this seminar series says Manager Rhonda Bridges. "The Main Street program is all about economic development. Many people have not understood this side of the program. We want our downtown buildings restored and filled with interesting businesses. The tools offered by the Texas Main

Street program have helped us toward this goal, and we have seen great strides toward the restoration of the downtown area. It is easy to overlook the amount of progress we have made until you look at the pictures of the downtown area before the Main Street program began. As we begin to focus more on the economic development side of the program, we had to realistically look at the type of businesses that Eagle Lake can support.

"The group of great volunteers who participate in the Main Street program have determined the best avenue for economic restructuring in our area is to encourage development of businesses relating to outdoor, nature and heritage tourism."

Main Street Advisory Board President Jean Wiese adds; "Eagle Lake has been the subject of several development studies from outside groups that all reach the same conclusion: Eagle Lake's unique quality lies in its outdoor resources. Because we are truly on the "prairie's edge", our area covers two distinct and different ecological areas, pulling from both the coastal prairies and the beginning of the hill country. This area is of interest to waterfowl hunters and avid birdwatchers, and also to those interested in our unique irrigation system, water production, and agricultural research. Naturalists from across the nation know of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken Refuge."

This is not a new idea. It comes up frequently in the conversations focused on "What we need to have here" from diverse groups of citizens. Sarah Page and Alicia Cook, economic development specialists from LCRA addressed this in their comments at the Farris Hotel when they were the guest speakers for the Chamber of Commerce luncheon and Main Street workshop this past July.

"Letting people come see these natural resources is not new. What IS new is looking at this as a business, and charging people for it. When you bring visitors into an area, they eat at your restaurants, stay in your hotels, shop in your gift shops and retail merchants, and then they go home, requiring little expansion from your existing infrastructure."

Registration for each of the Texas Leadership Institute seminars is \$49, and covers all handouts, speakers and

(See Entrepreneurs Wanted, Page 9)

Artists support art center



Artist Mary Richter with decorations she has created for the Live Oak Art Center building renovation fundraiser.

Photo Courtesy of Columbus Live Oak Art Center

Many well-known artists who live in the Columbus area are coming together to donate their talents and valuable works of art so that the 100-year old Brunson Building, home of the Live Oak Art Center, can have a much-needed restoration. A fundraiser, "A Night At The Old Brunson Saloon" will be held on November 13 to aid in repairing walls, floors and fund other improvement projects. Well-known local artist Mary Richter has created unique individual centerpieces for each table, which will be sold at the event. Artists supporting the fundraising effort include ceramic artist Pat Johnson, a top winner in the national ceramics competition held in April, who created the original drawing for the cover of the fundraiser invitations and program. Paulina van Bavel-Kearney, acclaimed potter whose

work has been shown in galleries around the country, judged top artist at the Winedale Festival in 2004, has donated one of her valuable vases.

Internationally known painter Bobbie Kilpatrick, whose work is in the finest collections around the world and who is the winner of numerous awards including the Festa Del'Europa A Stroncone in Italy, has donated a beautiful original landscape painting "Morning Peace". Well-known artist Ken Turner, whose work is hanging in the homes of many of the rich and famous from former President George Bush to Arab princes, will donate the first canvas reproduction (giclee) of his newest work entitled "Reflections II".

The feeling of the artists was expressed by Pat Johnson who said, "Art is my life, it is how I make my living. So to have an organization like the Live Oak Art Center really enriches my life. I have enjoyed coming to Columbus since the first time I read about the Blaffer Collection on exhibit from Houston nearly 20 years ago. Columbus should be very proud of this non-profit art center."

The fundraising evening will feature a gourmet seated dinner by Carol's at Cat Spring, visits from some of the famous ghosts from the building's historic past, live music by well-known jazz guitarist Jimmy Lohman of Austin, and a live auction consisting of a number of outstanding items ranging from the valuable art work, to an oriental carpet, to a week at a beautiful Ruidoso, New Mexico ranch. A limited number of tickets are still available.

For information call the Live Oak Art Center at 979-732-8398.

1886 Stafford Opera House Dinner Theatre Production

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Saturday, November 13

Social Hour - 5:30 Dinner - 6:30

Curtain Opens - 7:30

Tickets - \$25 per person

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"Live Oaks and Dead Folks" cemetery tour

One hundred years ago, when the people of Columbus gathered at the 1904 equivalent of the coffee shop, they probably talked a lot about the series of gunfights in town, which came to be called "the feud." This Nov. 6 and 7, many of the same people will metaphorically rise from their graves to resume that conversation, at the 2004 edition of the "Live Oaks and Dead Folks" cemetery tour.

This year's tour, again sponsored by the Nesbitt Memorial Library, will be completely different from last year's. "It has to be," commented the tour's creator, Bill Stein, "it will be in a different cemetery. Last year's tour of the old city cemetery was an overwhelming success. But rather than repeat ourselves, we thought we would go to the Odd Fellows cemetery this year."

The Odd Fellows Rest Cemetery, on Montezuma Street next to the golf course, is the largest cemetery in Colorado County. It has been used as the city's main burial ground since the 1870s and now has about 3000 graves.

Many of the characters from the feud are buried there, including Larkin Hope. Though the feud arose out of earlier troubles, it began in earnest in 1898, when Hope was killed. Gunfights between the participants continued through 1907; and many died violent deaths in later years.

Hope's grave, as well as those of Bob Stafford, Will Burford, and Dick Bridge, all of whom had some involvement in the feud, will be on the tour. "I wish we could have put one of the Reeses on the tour after all, they were really the ones who kept the feud going but they are all buried in Weimar," Stein said. "Still, there will be plenty of talk about them, and about the feud."

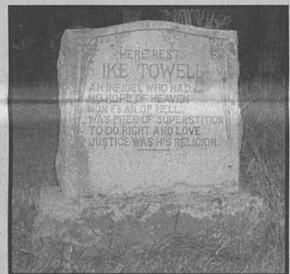
Another highlight will be the grave of Ike Towell. His tombstone has the most famous inscription in the county. It was used, in slightly modified form, by the acclaimed American poet, Rita Dove, in one of her books.

On each evening, tours will begin at seven o'clock. A new tour will be scheduled to leave every ten minutes. The last tour is scheduled to leave at 9 p. m.

Each tour will have a guide, who will conduct the tour from grave to grave, comment on the stories, and relate other information about the cemetery. The graves will be illuminated by torches, and the guides will carry lanterns. There will be a water stop halfway through the tour.

Because the spaces in the cemetery are tight, tours will be limited to fifteen people. "That means we will only have 390 tickets to sell. I don't believe we will be able to get any more people through the cemetery than that, and more than 400 people took the tour last year. So please buy your tickets in advance," recommended Stein.

Tickets are on sale at the library. They are ten dollars apiece. Most of the ticket money will go to benefit the



The tombstone of Ike Towell, at the Odd Fellows Rest Cemetery in Columbus, is perhaps the most famous grave marker in Colorado County. It is one of fourteen graves on the 2004 Live Oaks and Dead Folks cemetery tour, coming up on Nov. 6 and 7.

Photo Courtesy of the Nesbitt Memorial Library

library, with the rest going to the cemetery itself.

Other characters on the tour will be Virginia Baker, Fannie Darden,

Bettie Munn Gay, Martha Gloger, Tyla Hadden, Jesse Johnson, Stella Luck, Pauline Russell, and Oscar Zumwalt.

Many of the actors from last year have returned, including Charlene Anderson, Chris Hancher, Amber Hollywood, Paulina Kearney, Bill Mosley, Bob Pickens, Mary Anne Pickens, Ernest Mae Seaholm, Betty Jo Seifert, and Tracey Wegenhof. One of last year's guides, Jim Kearney, will play a character this year. And there will be four new additions to the cast, Chelsea Hollywood, Ron Lambert, Laura Ann Rau, and Robert Russell.

This year's guides will include Toni Burns, George Fox, Larry Hickman, and Mary Mattingly, all of whom played characters last year. Among the other guides will be Cindy Eden and Pat Gillespie.

"The only complaint I got about last year's tour, and it was a mild one, was that it was not very funny, so this year we tried to add a little comedy," said Stein. "We were amazed, and of course gratified, at the response to last year's tour. I can only hope that this tour will be as successful."

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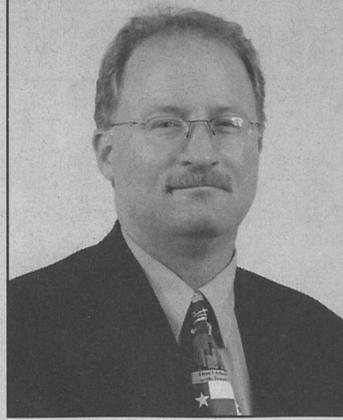
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-Martin J. Placke

mplacke@cmaaccess.com

- Martin is the most qualified candidate to be judge for the 335th Judicial District. He knows the district, its courts, its people, and its needs.
- Martin was raised in Giddings. He has lived and worked in the district his entire professional career.
- Martin's extensive courtroom experience has given him the knowledge of the unique needs of each court in the counties of this judicial district.
- Martin's continuous practice of law in criminal and civil matters provides insights into all aspects of the law that a rural judge must deal with every day.
- Martin lives by the traditional rural values that are common to people in the district.
- As a prosecutor with over a decade of experience, Martin will make sure our families and communities are safe and the rights of victims protected.