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Light fills the air at the Annual 4th of July Fireworks show.

Property Values Down About 4.9 Percent In County

Preliminary estimates on property values on the tax rolls in Colorado County show a 4.9 percent decline in overall values.

The estimated total value for this year is \$1.659 billion, according to figures from the Colorado County Appraisal District.

The decrease is the first in a number of years in the county.

Last year property values increased by 6.9 percent.

Most of the decrease was in oil and gas property values. Those decreased by 13.7 percent or \$47.8 million.

The preliminary values for oil and gas in the county are \$302.3 million.

Personal property values declined by 4.6 percent to a total of \$287.7 million.

The total value of single-family residences declined by only 1 percent, or \$4.4 million, with a total estimated value of \$431.8 million.

Farm and ranch values in-

creased by 2.7 percent for a total value of \$402.1 million.

Commercial real estate values increased by 4.9 percent for a total of \$112.9 million.

Industrial real estate values increased by 9 percent in preliminary figures for total of \$48.3 million.

There are approximately 34,000 property accounts in the county.

Individual property values are subject to revision, with the final tax roll to be certified later this month.

In the Weimar School District, overall preliminary figures show a decline of \$2.35 million, or 1.1 percent.

That brings the total value at \$217.7 million.

There were a total of 1,205 residences in the district with a total value of \$83.7 million, a decrease of \$1.5 million or 1.7 percent.

In the city of Weimar, overall values decreased by 2 percent to a total of \$105.3 million.

A total of 905 single-family houses in the city totaled \$59.7 million in value, a decline of \$1.9 million or 3 percent.

Overall, the Rice School District showed a decrease in property values of 4.7 percent.

Amounts to a decline of \$28.9 million for a total of \$582.6 million.

Single-family residences in the district totaled 2,203, with a value of \$431.3 million.

For the city of Eagle Lake, values declined by \$2.8 million or 3.2 percent, for a total value of \$82.3 million.

Values recorded for 1,313 residences in the City of Eagle Lake were \$56.9 million.

In the city of Columbus values decreased by less than 1 percent, declining by \$1.6 million, for a total value of \$218.7 million.

The Columbus School District had a decline of 8.4 percent in values, for a total of \$598.4 million.

See charts on page 10.

NEWSBRIEFS

Rice 7 on 7 still accepting donations

The Rice 7-on-7 Club is still accepting donations to defray the cost of the 2-day event scheduled for July 9-10 at Texas A&M. Any help is appreciated. Funds raised help with the tournament entry fee, lodging and meal expenses. Donations can be made at the First National Bank of EL or contact Brad Dumont at 234-6343.

Free youth camp at WCBC

Free Youth summer camp hosted by SOAH ministries. Join us at White Cloud Baptist Church (WCBC) in Eagle Lake July 7-August 21, Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Ages up to 18 years old. Meals will be served. Program activities include youth forums, life skills, arts and crafts, reading and math enrichment, dance/music, table games, physical fitness. For more information call 832-677-6320 or 832-483-2521.

GMOBC Family, friends musical July 11

Greater Mt. Olive Baptist Church (GMOBC) will be having their family and friends musical on Saturday, July 11 at 6 p.m. For those who would like to sing in the choir, there will be a choir rehearsal on July 11 at noon. The church anniversary will be on Sunday, July 12 at 3 p.m.

Fayetteville city-wide sale

The famous city-wide garage sale will be held Saturday, July 11 in Fayetteville. The sale starts at 8 a.m. Make the trip, you never know what you might find.

Public dance in Industry Sunday

The Top Cat Dance Club will sponsor a public dance, Sunday, July 12 at the Fireman's Hall in Industry from 3-6:30 p.m. Doors open at 2. Music will be provided by Donnie Wavra. If you love good music and love to dance, join the club. Walk-in guests are always welcome. Plan to attend and enjoy an afternoon of dancing, fellowship and fun.

TAKS Exit retesting set

TAKS Exit Retesting for those students who need to retest will be held Tuesday July 14-17 at Rice High School. Student planning on testing should arrive at 8:15 a.m. so that testing can begin at 8:30 a.m. Testing will be administered according to the following schedule: July 14: English/Language Arts; July 15: Mathematics; July 16: Science; and July 17: Social Studies. Tests will be given to those students who have taken TAKS Exit, but who have not yet met the state standard.

Gospel musical is July 17

The E.H. Henry High School Alumni will present a Gospel Musical on Friday, July 17 at 6:30 p.m. The musical will take place at Greater Rising Star Baptist Church, 580 Old Altair Rd. For more information call Aberleen Lemons at 979-256-7971.

Falls and Balance workshop planned

The Council for Health Education and Development along with the Houston Galveston Agency on Aging will present a four hour workshop focused on falling, direct and indirect costs of falling, the four basic strategies in fall prevention, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for falls, the five major fall risk factors, and the five skills for better balance. The workshop will be held at the First United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall in Columbus on Saturday, July 18 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. and a basic CPR class will be held from 2:30 - 4:30 p.m. that day. The classes are free to registered participants. To register, you may call 1-877-747-1542 by July 16.

RMC offering Sitter Class

Rice Medical Center (RMC) is offering a Safe Sitter Class this summer. Safe Sitter is a nationally recognized medically accurate babysitting preparation program designed for boys and girls ages 11 to 13. Safe Sitter's mission is to prepare young adolescents for the profound responsibilities of nurturing and protecting children. This program teaches sitters how to have fun with children, recognize a medical emergency and know the appropriate action to take, how to handle specific ages, injury prevention techniques, safety for the sitter and the children, care of the choking child, preventing problem behavior and the business of babysitting. For more information or to sign up for the class please call Vicki Pavlu or Shara Sunderman at 979-234-5571 x 5216 by July 16.

GUBC Youth Day Program July 19

The Greater Union Baptist Church (GUBC) youth department would like to invite you out to help them celebrate their Annual Youth Day program on July 19 at 3 p.m. Rev. D. Curry and the Greater Mt. Olive Baptist Church will be their guest of that day.

FPC to celebrate 100th birthday

The First Presbyterian Church (FPC) in Eagle Lake invites everyone to come and celebrate the 100th birthday celebration. The program starts at 10:30 on August 9. Rev. John Howard Reed, former member

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Killer Bee Threat Likely Overblown

By Cameron Miculka

Despite the recent report in Sheridan about Africanized "killer" bees, area bee experts say the terror associated with these bees is generally overblown.

They say this is because Africanized bees originally arrived in Colorado County in October 1990, and they have since interbred with domestic European bees and are no longer as big a threat as they once were.

Two weeks ago, Aaron Keller of Pearland who owns a ranch west of Sheridan, discovered a massive beehive inside a bunkhouse on his ranch.

After being stung while mowing the yard around the house, he promptly called Texas Honey Bee Removers from Columbus to come and remove the hive.

Ben Hunt, a beekeeper and bee remover for Texas Honey Bee Removers.

"We get about one or two calls a day from people who want hives removed," Hunt explained.

However, the hive on Keller's property surpassed everything he had ever seen.

"I definitely didn't think it was going to be that big.

"It was a huge hive and had obviously been there for quite some time."

Hunt estimated that the combs and honey together had weighed about 150 pounds.

The real concern regarding Keller's bees was whether or not they were Africanized, commonly known as "killer," bees.

Charles Cole, a retired professor from Texas A&M who taught and researched bees for 31 years, explained the concept of Africanized bees.

"People always seem to have this conception that killer bees are 10 feet long with four-inch stingers," said Cole, "but that's simply not true."

Africanized bees are bees that were bred from an ancestor from the cape of Africa and a European bee.

These bees were bred in Brazil to be more tolerant of tropical climates and survive without the constant care needed by European bees.

Over time, the bees became more feral and began to build nests away from civilized areas and, due to their strong survival instincts, grew more aggressive.

Ben Hunt believes that the bees from Aaron Keller's ranch had been Africanized to some degree.

"They were fairly aggressive. I would guess they were probably a mix between Africanized bees and feral European bees."

The bees on Keller's ranch

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Pictured above is an area that was burned when the wildfire that started near Columbus on July 4 swept through. About 1,800 acres is estimated to have burned.

Wildfire Burns 1,800 Acres In County

A huge wildfire that started on Saturday, July 4, northeast of Columbus, had burned more than 1800 acres by Tuesday afternoon.

At one point, fire fighters said the fire covered a heavily wooded area about a half-mile wide by four miles long.

The heavy smoke could be seen for miles and one person described it as looking like a dark thundercloud.

It was the largest fire in the county in recent memory.

A spokesman for the Texas Forest Service, Lexi Maxwell, said Tuesday afternoon that the fire was estimated at 60 percent contained.

Even when fully contained, she said, there were places such as tree roots in remote areas that could smolder and smoke for several weeks.

The fire started near the intersection of Reese Lane and Alleyton Road on property described as the Foster place.

The cause of the fire was under investigation and fire officials refused to speculate.

One weekend home, a 1,100 square foot two story house located about a quarter mile off Reese Lane was reduced to ashes.

"It's just incredible," said the owner, Case Hollub of Weimar, describing the destruction Monday.

No one was at the house when it caught fire.

Two other camp houses or cabins were also destroyed.

One was on the property where the fire started, fire officials said.

At the height, more than 100 fire fighters and more than 30 pieces of fire equipment struggled to contain the flames, which roared and skipped through the tops of tall pine trees in the densely wooded area.

Because of the winds and vegetation, the fire burned a patchwork pattern, blackening some stands of trees and leaving

others untouched.

Columbus Fire Chief Bob Walla said the fire was already out of control and moving fast when his first units arrived on the scene about 3:30 p.m. Saturday and he immediately called for assistance.

A command post was set up near the intersection of Reese Lane and Alleyton Road.

Helicopters and airplanes from the Texas Forest Service were called in to dump water and flame retardant chemicals on the fire.

Fire fighters were able to save a number of residences and structures.

No mandatory evacuations were ordered, but most residents whose homes were threatened left voluntarily.

"These people out here know when to get out," he said.

Bulldozers from the county and Forest Service were brought in to open firebreaks through the

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First Six Months Of 2009 Very Dry

Through the first six months of 2009 Eagle Lake is on pace for another year of record low rainfall.

In 2008, only 19.81 inches of rain fell in the area, a record low since the David R. Wintermann Rice Research Station began keeping track in 1976.

So far in 2009, the area has received only 9.84 inches of rain and over the last 12 months, only 18.85 inches have fallen.

Average rainfall for the area is typically about 40 inches per year.

Tuesday, July 7 saw a brief reprieve with a rain shower, but April 27 was the last significant rainfall, with 1.72 inches falling

that day. Since then only 0.98 inches had fallen until Tuesday.

With temperatures soaring to or near 100 degrees on a daily

basis, conditions have become very dangerous for fire hazards, as evidenced by the fire in the Columbus area that burned about 1,800 acres.

Month	2008	2009
January	3.98	0.39
February	2.54	0.69
March	1.33	2.11
April	2.15	5.67
May	0.74	0.96
June	0.06	0.02
Total	11.80	9.84