

Happy New Year!

Rains County Leader

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2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

Rains County closes year marked by political upheaval, campus changes and controversy



Leader file photo by CHUCK FITTS

A town hall meeting to discuss the solar farm north of Point and other county-related topics was held in the Point City Hall council chamber in April.

By **STAFF REPORTS**
Rains County Leader

The year 2025 brought political upheaval, criminal allegations against public officials, school improvements and infrastructure changes across Rains County – and ended with Point City Council unable to conduct business after three members resigned.

The resignations in December left the Point council without a quorum, capping a year that began with new leadership across county offices and continued with shakeups in Emory, Point and at the county level.

Rains County Sheriff Michael Hopkins, Commissioner Jeremy Cook and Commissioner Korey Young were sworn in to new four-year terms at the start of the year.

In January, the city of Emory selected Tom Parsons as its new police chief. Parsons later resigned in September to return to the Forney ISD Police Department.

Point opened the year with the resignation of Councilwoman Courtney Frazier, who moved outside the city limits. The city also began work to repair the ground storage tank at its water plant.

County commissioners officially renamed the former *Rains County Leader* office the Hill Building. Purchased by the county in 2024, the building is expected to house the Rains County constable and the Rains County justice of

the peace.

On the courts and fields, the Rains Wildcats and Lady Cats basketball teams both reached the playoffs in 2025, but each was eliminated in the first round by ranked opponents. On January 28, Rains Lady Cat basketball coach Laura Jenkins celebrated her 250th win. Rains ISD also constructed four new tennis courts near the baseball field after the existing two courts fell into disrepair and could no longer support the district's growing program.

In February, the Emory City Council approved a contract for City Administrator Thad Chambers and began working with Hooten Real Estate to extend city services to a new subdivision on Airport Road.

Campus improvements continued into March as the Rains ISD school board approved replacement of playground equipment at Rains Intermediate School.

March also brought public safety concerns. Two high-speed chases moved through the area: one following a carjacking at a local grocery store that ended on State Highway 276 near Quinlan with two arrests, and another that began with an attempted traffic stop on State Highway 19 in Van Zandt County. That pursuit headed north and ended when the suspect wrecked in Delta County near Cooper.

In April, county leaders held town hall meetings in Point, Emory and East

Tawakoni to update residents on a solar farm being built on State Highway 69 North, the proposed special taxing district in Rains County, the status of county roads and bridges, and candidates in the May election.

Commissioners also began reviewing leases on county-owned properties, including Heritage Park, Rose Community Center and the Good Samaritan building. None had current contracts with the local organizations using them, and the court worked to draft new leases that complied with state law and protected all parties.

May opened with Founder's Day festivities at Sandy Creek Park in Emory, featuring pancakes, roasted chicken at the Emory Volunteer Fire Department, a festival and a concert headlined by Stoney LaRue.

After years of litigation, the Texas Education Agency released 2022-23 accountability ratings, with Rains ISD receiving a D. Ratings for 2023-24, released in June, showed improvement to a C, and the 2024-25 ratings in August elevated the district to a B.

Voters in May approved a new taxing district to allow Rains County to collect sales tax in unincorporated areas. The district ultimately was not established after the county failed to file the required paperwork with the state to define its taxing boundaries.

In school governance, voters elected Jim Mack Taylor to the Rains ISD

Board of Trustees to fill the seat of Philip Alexander, who did not seek reelection. The district honored Alexander's 28 years of service by renaming the board room in the Rains ISD Administration Building for him.

City elections saw Emory Mayor Trey Hill win another term. In East Tawakoni, voters elected Harold Chandler as mayor, and chose Ed Fortuna, Kenneth Reed, Teri Rose, John Disch and Chuck Moore for the city council.

The year also brought legal turmoil. A federal lawsuit was filed in district court against Rains County Justice of the Peace Jenkins Franklin over an October 2023 incident. The pending federal case prompted local charges against Franklin.

Franklin was arrested May 28 on two felony counts and two misdemeanor charges, two stemming from 2023 and two from February 2025. All four charges were dismissed by the court in December.

Point officials appointed Donna Jones in May to fill the unexpired Place 1 council term left vacant by Frazier's resignation. The council moved its regular meetings back to the second Tuesday of the month and wrestled with disagreements over city officials' job duties.

The Emory Volunteer Fire Department welcomed a new ladder truck in May, a \$1.5 million vehicle purchased

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SPOTLIGHT

Paulette Aguilar teaches Agricultural Science at Rains High School

By **JUDY KRAMER**
Rains County Leader contributor

Paulette Aguilar has been an Agricultural Science teacher and Future Farmers of America (FFA) Advisor at Rains High School for one-and-a-half years. She has a total of 13 years teaching experience including six years in the Gilmer ISD teaching Animal Science and Agribusiness, and in the Quitman ISD teaching Floral Design. She teaches Introduction to Agriculture and Animal Science at Rains ISD.

"I am also studying for an administrative degree, just in case I want to pursue it," said Aguilar. "But I really enjoy teaching. I have been fortunate in my years of teaching to have trained successful teams of wonderful students who advanced to State. (That is advancing to State in the Agricultural Proficiency Awards program, meaning they have demon-

strated exceptional skills and knowledge in their agricultural field.) I had multiple teams who went to state including one team that was a state champion farm business management team. I am trying to get another state team in Rains ISD."

Aguilar was driving to West Texas with a wool judging team while being interviewed by phone. This team went to Texas Tech University and San Angelo State University.

"I am part of a three-teacher team that travels a lot," said Aguilar. "We go to workshops, livestock shows, and during summers have been to a couple of competitions and service projects including a public speaking contest where our students were courtesy helpers working with hosts of the contest to move the competition along. They assisted teachers guiding students to rooms and did time keeping."

Aguilar is single, has two siblings

and is a proud aunt of a niece. She says that she is the product of Mineola where she graduated from high school in 2006. She was born in McAllen, Texas, but considers herself fortunate to have lived in the general Northeast Texas area since third grade (mid 1990s).

The general duties of an agricultural teacher in Rains County include lab sessions and practical demonstrations, supervised agricultural experience, student guidance and counseling on career paths and guiding them through FFA programs. Careers in agriculture are diverse and widespread and can be in agribusiness management, agricultural and natural resources communications, building construction management, agriscience, resource development and management, parks, recreations, and tourism services, packaging, horticulture, forestry, fisheries, wildlife and food science.



Paulette Aguilar (left)



City Girl:
*What does
2026...*
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Jody Dyer:
*On Raising
Dogs...*
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Bartee Haile:
*Layne put
on Cotton...*
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Rain Report

Wed., Dec. 17	0.07 in.
Total for Dec.	0.34 in.
Total for 2025	43.85 in.

Community outreach & organizations

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
Emory – Tues. & Thurs. 7:00-8:00 p.m., open meetings.
Emory Methodist Church Fellowship Hall. For info call 903-243-6766 or 903-439-7573

AL-ANON – Thurs., 7:00 p.m., Crossroads Al-anon Group, 103 N. Houston St., Edgewood, 903-896-7270

AMERICAN LEGION POST 156, Rabb Bro. Mem. Rains Co. – 4th Mon., 5:15 p.m., 215 N. Duffy St., Emory, 903-438-6045. Buffet breakfast - 2nd Saturday 7:00-10:00 a.m.

ARBALA DANCE – Mon., 7:00-9:30 p.m., Arbala Community Center

CELEBRATE RECOVERY – every Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Emory Baptist Church

EAST TAWAKONI SENIOR CITIZEN GAME DAY – every Wednesday, 9:00 a.m., 255 Oakleaf Trail.

EMORY LIONS CLUB – 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 12:00 p.m., Dos Charros in Emory. Call for information 903-473-2311

FOOD BANK AT FREEDOM CHURCH OF GOD – 3rd Fri., 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., 10830 FM 514, Emory. 903-473-2457

FRIENDS OF RAINS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY – 3rd Thurs., 1:00 p.m., Meadows Cultural Center, Rains Co. Public Library

LAKE COUNTRY NEIGHBORS – 1st Thurs., 11:30 a.m., www.lakecountryneighbors.com

LAKE FORK BAPTIST CHURCH FOOD PANTRY – 2nd Tues., 1-3 p.m. 9483 W. FM 515, Alba

LAKE FORK CHAPTER OF THE WELL ARMED WOMAN - first Thursday, 4-7 p.m. at Winnsboro Gun Club, Winnsboro TX. Sue Parrish 903-473-9819

LAKE FORK SPORTSMAN'S ASSOC. – 2nd Tues., 6:30 p.m. Jamie's Restaurant, Lake Fork Marina

MARS HILL MASONIC LODGE
#1440 – 4th Thurs., 6:30 p.m., Lodge on Hwy. 69

PIECEMAKERS QUILT GUILD OF RAINS COUNTY – 3rd Mon., 7:00 p.m., AgriLife Extension and Conference Center

POINT LADIES CIVIC CLUB – 1st Thurs., 6:30 p.m., Point Community Center, 903-269-8446

RAINS AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION
2nd Sat. of each month 9:00 a.m.
Emory Volunteer Fire Dept.,

RAINS GARDEN CLUB – 1st Mon., 11:00 a.m., House of Prayer Family Life Center, 1382 FM 515, Email TheRainsGardenClub@gmail.com

RAINS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – 3rd Mon., 6:00 p.m., Jan., Mar., May, July, Sep., Nov., Emory City Hall.

RAINS COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD – 4th Mon., 5:30 p.m., Feb., Apr., June, Aug., Oct., Meadows Cultural Center, Rains County Public Library

RAINS COUNTY GOOD SAMARITANS – Food Pantry open 1:00-4:00 p.m. Mon. & Thurs.

RAINS COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY – 3rd Sat., 1:00 p.m. Meadows Cultural Center, Rains County Public Library

RAINS COUNTY REPUBLICANS – July 31 & Oct. 30, 6:30 p.m., Roma Restaurant, 2450 FM 47

STITCH AND LEARN QUILTING CLUB – Thurs., 9:00 a.m.-noon, 903-598-3021
Miracle Faith Baptist Church

WOMEN'S SERVICE CLUB – 2nd Mon., 6:00 p.m., Rose Community Center

WOMEN IN NEED, INC. – A Battered Women's Shelter. Call 903-455-4612 or 903-454-HELP

GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

EAST TAWAKONI CITY COUNCIL
3rd Tues., 7:00 p.m., East Tawakoni City Hall

EMORY CITY COUNCIL
2nd Tues., 7:00 p.m., Emory City Hall

POINT CITY COUNCIL
2nd Tues., 6:45 p.m., Point City Hall

RAINS COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT
3rd Thurs. of every month, Rains Tax Office at 12:00 p.m.

RAINS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' COURT
2nd & 4th Thurs., 10:00 a.m., Rains County Courthouse

RAINS ISD SCHOOL BOARD
2nd Monday, 6:30 p.m., Philip Alexander Board Room
Rains ISD Administration Building.

RAINS COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT #1
3rd Monday, 6:30 p.m., Emory Fire Station

RAINS COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE:
Mon., Tues. and Thurs., 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., 110 E. North St.
TRANSPORTATION:
To schedule a ride Call 903-474-7231

RAINS COUNTY ROAD & BRIDGE
Open Mon.-Fri. 7 a.m.-4 p.m.
903-473-5099 or 5098

NEWS BRIEFS

American Legion Breakfast Sat., Jan. 10

Rabb Brothers Memorial American Legion Post #156 will hold a breakfast buffet on Saturday, January 10, from 7:00-10:00 a.m. at the Post home at 215 N. Duffy St. in Emory. Takeouts are offered. Payment is by donation, which goes towards the upkeep of the home and for veterans' projects.

Rains County Republican Meeting

Rains County Republicans will hold their monthly meeting on Thursday, Janu-

ary 29, at 6:30 p.m., at Roma Restaurant, 2450 FM 47, Point.

Good Sam Clothes/ Thrift Shop Sales

The Rains County Good Samaritan Clothes Shop will be open Monday-Thursday in the building behind the public library on Hwy. 69 in Emory. Hours for Mon.-Wed. are 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., closed noon-1:00 p.m. Hours for Thursday are 8:00 a.m.-noon. Thrift sales will be open every Saturday in January from 8:00 a.m.-noon. Funds go to buy food for the needy and to operate the center.

THE PUBLIC FORUM

Dear Editor

I believe “Texans Anti-Nazi Warning Fell on Deaf Ears” of the November twentieth edition is inflammatory and untrue.

The sheer number of Ad Hominem attacks is astonishing. The columnist called the America First Committee “the standard assortment of kooks and crackpots” with their “head-in-the-sand” and a “love affair with the conqueror of the Atlantic.” I intend to demonstrate that most Americans were in their senses and were not Nazi sympathizers.

When the columnist accused “most Americans” of “trying hard to ignore the disturbing developments on the distant continent” it must be remembered the Dust Bowl had ended only three years prior to WWII and the Great Depression ended the same year that WWII started. Many Americans were focused on feeding their families rather than bleeding to rescue the Europeans.

Until late 1941, there was simply no reason for Americans to go and rescue Europe from another war. More than 100,000 Americans died in WWI just two decades prior. America had no military alliance with the nations involved and most of the world was unaware of the horrors of the Holocaust. War is no light matter. More than sympathies are needed before condemning our young men to die far from home. Unlike WWI, we had

no Lusitania, no Zimmerman telegram and no reason to die.

According to the information available at that time, Germany was a lesser evil compared to Japanese barbarism or Soviet brutality. America had no commitments in Europe, but did have territory, servicemen, and civilians scattered across the Pacific islands. The ascent of the Japanese Empire was a major concern because they had committed terrible atrocities like the Rape of Nanking. In response, American oil was sanctioned away. The threat of Americans being slain and ravaged by retaliating Japanese hoards became greater than the threat posed by the Germans, who by this point had no surface fleet to speak of.

It would have been illogical to send Americans to fight a European war when we were battling an economic crisis, had no direct threat from the Germans, had no knowledge of the Holocaust, and were increasingly concerned about Japanese aggressions. Of course, the war did go global when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the Axis declared war on America. Knowledge of the holocaust justifiably made the war more about good vs evil, rather than another border war, but none of this could have been known to Americans then.

Gavril Avramov
Point, Tx 75472

Join the trend with these New Year resolutions

After months of rising prices on everything from milk to mortgages, money-related resolutions are prominent.



BRANDON ROBERTS
Edward Jones
Financial Advisor

Edward Jones and Morning Consult.

First is boosting your income. While side hustles, like tutoring or delivery driving, can help increase income, cutting expenses can keep more money in your pocket.

Next is building savings.

Whether you're planning for a vacation or creating an emergency fund of three to six months, having accessible cash means you're less likely to rely on credit cards and inadvertently spend more than you plan.

Finally, a popular resolution is to pay off debt quickly. Every payment brings you closer to a life of financial freedom. List all your debts and their interest rates, then build a strategy to pay them off systematically. Millions of people are taking steps toward financial freedom. Make 2026 your year to do the same.

This content was provided by Edward Jones for use by Brandon Roberts, your Edward Jones financial advisor in Emory at 903-473-1592.



SUDOKU

The aim of Sudoku is to complete the entire grid using the numbers 1-9. Each number can only be used once in each row, once in each column, and once in each of the 3x3 boxes. Visit www.sudokuoftheday.com for further tips and help about how to play - and good luck!

							8
			4	8	9		
			7	1		6	3
	1	9		5			2
6	5					9	7
2					5	6	
	9	7		2	5		
			9	6	3		
8							

EAST TAWAKONI

Council appoints board member, discusses Christmas tree

By **CHUCK FITTS**
Rains County Leader staff

The East Tawakoni City Council held a regular meeting on Tuesday, December 16, to appoint a member of the city's tourism board and discuss the Christmas tree at the library.

After monthly reports from the city's departments, the council considered the appointment of Kailea Phillips to the City of East Tawakoni Tourism Board. The tourism board is a part of the East Tawakoni Economic Development Corporation and its five-member board focuses on promoting tourism in the city.

The EDC had already

approved the appointment, and the council unanimously approved a motion to appoint Philips to the board.

The council discussed upgrading the Christmas tree next to the East Tawakoni Library and Storm Shelter. After it was determined that the tree and its setup was the responsibility of the Spirit of East Tawakoni, the item was tabled.

Teri Rose was not present for the regular meeting.

The City Council for the City of East Tawakoni has scheduled its next meeting for Tuesday, January 20, at 7:00 p.m. in the council chambers of East Tawakoni City Hall.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Continued from page 1

by the Rains County Emergency Service District to replace the older truck. The department held a ceremonial “push-in” for the apparatus in December.

Also in May, the Emory City Council voted in a special meeting to dismiss City Administrator Thad Chambers. The council later appointed Leah Drown as interim city administrator in October.

Rains ISD closed the school year at the end of May with the graduation of 104 seniors, who collectively received more than \$1.3 million in scholarships.

June marked major changes in county leadership. Rains County Judge Linda Wallace and Rains County Tax Assessor-Collector Shelia Floyd both retired. Commissioners appointed Nicole York to complete Floyd's term and, in July, selected Brent Hilliard as the new county judge.

In Point, Mayor Dustin Briggs resigned in June, and Mayor Pro Tem Tammy Hooten led the city until the November elections.

The Emory Baptist Church broke ground in June on a new Family Life Center on its grounds.

Wallace's name resurfaced in July when she was indicted on felony charges of tampering with a witness. The case, like Franklin's, was dismissed by the court in December.

Rains ISD students returned to class in August, preceded by a Back to School Fair and Meet the Teacher events across campuses.

On Aug. 2, a fire destroyed part of the manufacturing building at Kearney Trailers on State Highway 19. Fire departments from Emory, Point, East Tawakoni, Alba, Arbala, Hopkins County, Edgewood, Brinker and Como worked together to contain the blaze.

Also in August, the Lake Country Neighbors organization hosted its annual Veterans Thank You event, featuring guest speaker John Gallina.

Redistricting at the state level shifted Rains County from Texas House District 4, where it had been for 150 years, into District 32 alongside Rockwall, Wood, Camp, Upshur and southern Hunt counties.

September brought the Rains County Fair, with its traditional stock show, carnival and the crowning of Shaylee Stracener as Miss Rains County 2025. The Classics Round the Square event drew 335 classic vehicles around the Rains County Courthouse.

On the football field, the Rains Wildcats won the 2025 homecoming game over Eustace, sealed by a blocked extra point. Kamara Ragsdale was crowned homecoming queen.

County Treasurer Jennifer Trevino resigned in October, less than a year after being appointed in November 2024. Commissioners also approved demolition of the old driver license building on Wood Street after determining it was unsafe and unsuitable for county offices.

In the November General Election, voters rejected a voter-approved tax rate for Rains ISD for the fifth time. Point voters re-elected Becky Decker to the council. They also chose Angela Nelson as mayor and elected Ray Lacy and Kimberley Berg to the council.

However, in December, council members Ray Lacy, Kimberley Berg and Donna Jones resigned suddenly from the council, leaving Point City Council without a quorum to conduct business.

As 2025 ended, Rains County faces the new year with fresh leadership in key posts, major legal cases closed, and unresolved questions in Point, as the city searches for a path forward.

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A.S. Hornbeck - Before 1900
J.H. Bradford - 1901-1904

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CITY GIRL

What does 2026 hold in store?

By Linda Brendle

This is the time of year when people who claim to be able to see into the future take the spotlight and tell us what we can expect in the next twelve months. You might think this is a new phenomenon, but foretelling has been around since someone first decided the arrangement of his tea leaves or the position of the stars held a special message.

Other than biblical prophets who are in a completely different category, the reputed seer whose predictions have lasted the longest is probably Nostradamus. This French astrologer, apothecary, physician, and soothsayer lived from December 14, 1503 to July 2, 1566. He wrote a collection of poems that supposedly predict the future from the time of their writing until the year 3797.

His prediction for 2026 was that a “she-monster” would plague the world and, in fact, bring it to an end. His predictions are very vague, but some interpreters think the monster represents a virus or biological weapon that will set off the Apocalypse. Before you get too worried, keep in mind he predicted that the Death Devil would come to Earth in July of 1999. His arrival would lead to the extinction of humanity and would introduce a worldwide age of evils.

A more modern prophet was a blind Bulgarian mystic and healer commonly called Baba Vanga. She lived from October 3, 1911 to August 11, 1996 and claimed to have seen into the future. Her sayings were also vague and are a favorite source, especially this time of year, for social media gurus who want to create sensational predictions for the coming year. According to Sky HIS-

TORY, here are a few things to watch for in 2026:

The first prediction is the first close encounter between humans and extraterrestrials. This theory is backed by the July 1, 2025 sighting of a huge object that British Astronomers call 3I/ATLAS. Some say it is most likely the oldest comet ever seen while others claim it is a spacecraft, but whatever it is, it’s supposedly heading toward Earth. I wouldn’t worry too much, though. When first seen, it was over 524 million kilometers from Earth. Besides, we’ve been seeing extraterrestrial visitors in the grocery store tabloids for decades.

Another forecast is for catastrophic natural disasters with up to 8 percent of the planet’s land area being battered by massive earthquakes, violent eruptions, and extreme weather. A Google search indicated that it’s impossible to tell exactly how much of the world was affected by natural disasters in 2025, but it’s hard to imagine that there will be any more than have already been captured on video and posted on YouTube TV.

Some Baba Vanga devotees say that, according to her sayings, 2026 will be a year of escalating global conflict. I am aware enough of current events to understand that international diplomacy is a tightrope over a chasm of worldwide warfare, but having been raised in the 1950s and 1960s, I’m not worried. We had safety drills in school, and I know that in case of incoming nuclear attack, all I have to do is get under my desk and I’ll be safe. (If you don’t understand this reference, ask your grandparents.)

Several believers think that Artificial Intelligence will reach a turning point in the New Year, dominating key sectors and causing job disruption as well as many ethical dilemmas. This is really nothing new either. When you go online now, you really can’t tell whether the pictures you look at are

real or if they’re AI generated. There is a lot of discussion in author groups about the ethics of using AI in our work, and when you look for information on the Internet, the first response you get is an AI overview. And when you click the customer service link on any company’s website, you’ll be exchanging messages with an AI device instead of chatting with a person.

Baba Vanga apparently predicted that the first four claims may cause a rough year ahead for the global economy. These financial effects can cause chaos in our lives by disrupting supply chains and markets. This shouldn’t scare us, though. After all, we lived through the toilet paper shortage of 2020.

One prediction, the mining of energy on Venus, is actually scheduled for 2028, but the preliminary work needs to begin ASAP. Of course, we all know that, if they really want to get energy from space, all they have to do is ask Elon Musk.

There are more predictions, including some medical ones about the mass production of synthetic organs and a blood test for early detection of multiple types of cancers. You get the idea. Over the years Baba Vanga fans have claimed she predicted some major events such as the Chernobyl disaster and the 9/11 attacks, while detractors say the evidence is thin. The fact is, we all do best if we make necessary provision for the foreseeable future and then live our lives one day at a time. And remember what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9:

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

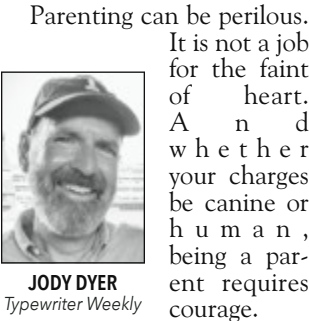
Happy New Year, and may God bless you all!

Linda Brendle writes a weekly column for Believers’ Baptist Church. She is a published author and also writes about caregiving, faith, and family on her blog at <http://www.LifeAfterCaregiving.WordPress.com>. You can e-mail her at LindaBrendle@yahoo.com.

On Raising Dogs and Children

“Having children is like having a bowling alley installed in your brain.”

Martin Mull



Parenting can be perilous. It is not a job for the faint of heart. A n d w h e n e r your charges be canine or h u m a n , being a parent requires courage. T h e human side of the parenting model is more treacherous. But being a dog dad or mom can be difficult as well. Pondering parenthood this week, I have a few thoughts to share. If you are a parent, or hope to be a parent, you might want to bone up on your parenting skills with a pup. Dogs are good practice for when you have kids.

Before you read any further, I offer this warning. This column may offend some of my more sensitive readers. That is okay. If you are offended by my observations and advice, or if you think I am just wrong, that is okay with me. Just throw this paper in the trash and go on with your life. But perhaps you might consider my words.

Let’s begin with dogs. Out and about with our little dog Mac (he is a Jack Russell Terrier – kind of like the canine version of a small James Dean) I have noticed something. While the dog people we have encountered are warm and wonderful folks, some seem to operate under the assumption that their dog is in charge. Most often we see in “bad dogs” barking and yipping and irritating anti-social behavior. Dogs will be dogs. But it is okay to correct your dog. It is okay to require that your dog traverse the neighborhood and interact with others in a respectful manner. If your dog has learned to respect you, then you can get him to behave. But you must require it, as his or her alpha dog parent.

Regarding children, the basic premise is the same. But this concept has been somewhat lost in current society. I once heard an elderly gentleman remark that the primary difference

between his generation and the current generation was this – today the kids are in charge. When he was a child, and later a parent, the adults were in charge and life was different.

Parents bending, prostrating themselves in service and obedience to their children, where did this come from? When did this shift take place? I’m not sure. If I had to guess, I would say it actually happened a long time ago, maybe about the time we became acquainted with Lee Harvey Oswald. But it has taken awhile to thoroughly soak into modern culture. Go into any public space today and watch parents with their children. Often, you will see the kids in charge. “Hey little Wally, are you ready to go now?” Little Wally is probably not ready to go, and even if he is, you are teaching him that he is calling the shots and determines when mom or dad are allowed to leave. This is wrong. Just like with yapping and disobedient dogs, you don’t have to live with in-charge, ornery, or self-centered children. Toss the modern and progressive parenting ideas aside and enjoy life with obedient, happy children...and dogs. Here is the fix. It begins in your mind, with understanding.

Dogs, like children, are concrete thinkers. They are not capable of abstract thought. That is why your second-grader, or your border collie, will have trouble diagraming a sentence or understanding geometry. Their thoughts are tied to present and specific physical experiences, processing the world through learned associations and their senses, rather than abstract concepts. Dogs remain concrete thinkers. Children remain so until about the age of eleven or twelve. Modern, progressive parenting “experts” disregard this truth. Listen to them and you will raise

disobedient and difficult feral children.

How do you teach a dog? You teach them with firm, clear, and consistent loving direction. Dogs need and want this. If your dog is misbehaving, firm words and a snap of his collar will help him learn. The same principle applies to children.

When little Wally ignores your “no” command and tries to put a metal fork in a light socket, or dashes into the street without looking for cars, your conversation and reasoning, explaining the dangers of electrical shock or passing cars, won’t compute. Little Wally is a concrete thinker. What works is a prompt swat on his bottom. With a swat, he gets the message loud and clear. He learns in a way he can immediately understand that there are consequences for unacceptable or dangerous behavior. And he learns that mom and dad are in charge. When Wally is older and capable of abstract thought, then you can converse and reason all you want with him. Then it will work, as you let him grow and make decisions in his trajectory towards adulthood.

The number one thing that you want your children (and your dogs) to learn early in life is this – their will is subservient to yours. You are the boss. As a loving parent, you are in charge and responsible for their safety and wellbeing. When you take charge, offering consistent and loving guidance, they feel secure. Secure children grow to be happy adults and good parents themselves. And they raise good dogs...

JODY DYER is a columnist, author, and former teacher. Described by some as a Renaissance man, he is a baseball fan, coffee roaster, and accomplished feral hog trapper. He likes to read, appreciates the outdoors, and is good with dogs and children. He is the father of three, and lives with his wife in Texas.

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BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

Tips for Holiday Returns and Exchanges

With so many shoppers making returns, it’s important to remember that stores set their own rules when it comes to refunds and exchanges. Stores are not legally required to accept exchanges or give refunds unless the merchandise was defective or misrepresented. While most retailers do offer refund and exchange programs, policies vary greatly from one store to another. Be sure to double-check policies this holiday season, even if you are familiar with the brand, as stores can change their policies whenever they want.

The following tips should help to make your holiday returns run more smoothly.

Research retailers beforehand. Look up the business on BBB.org to check its rating, reviews, and complaints before purchasing, especially if you are unfamiliar with the retailer. This can help avoid issues with returns later.

Get to know store policies. Before you make a purchase, find out if the store has a return policy and, if so, how it works. Understand that many retailers change their policies for the holiday season. If the store allows returns or exchanges, find out if you need to pay a restocking fee. Ask the seller if they offer cash refunds, exchanges, or only store credit. Store policies are usually posted at the check-out counter or printed on the back of receipts.

Understand online store return policies. If you are

shopping online, search for the seller's return policy and read it through before clicking “buy.” Find out if they accept returns or exchanges and who pays for the shipping when an item is returned. In some cases, you can save on shipping fees by returning an online purchase to the local brick-and-mortar store. See more of our tips for hassle-free returns for online purchases.

Get the details on a product’s warranty. Most electronics and home appliances come with warranties that are to be fulfilled by the manufacturer, not the retailer. Find out how the store handles returns and repairs if an item stops working or needs replacement parts. Will the retailer ship the item to the manufacturer for you? Or will you need to deal with the manufacturer directly? Knowing the answers will leave you well-prepared for any future issues.

Use credit cards for extra protection. Paying with a credit card may offer additional protections for returns or disputes, especially if there is an issue with the product or the retailer.

Keep your receipt and packaging. Most stores will only accept returns and exchanges if you can present the item with its receipt and original packaging. Always include a gift receipt with items you give, and hold on to any gift receipts you receive.

Know the rules for returning gifts without a

receipt. Returning gifts without a receipt can be tricky. Without a receipt, most retailers offer store credit or an exchange rather than a full refund to your original method of payment, especially if the item is marked down or on clearance.

Bring your ID. Many stores ask to see your ID when you return an item to avoid holiday return scams. Sometimes retailers require you to bring your ID and the original form of payment. If this is the policy of the store where your gift is from, you may need the assistance of the gift-giver in order to be reimbursed.

Make returns in a timely fashion. Almost all return policies are valid during a specific time period. Some stores modify their return period during the holidays, so don’t risk missing your chance to make your return. Take the item back to the store without delay.

Watch out for return scams. Be on the lookout for fraudulent return policies or suspicious third-party return services that promise to handle the process for you.

For more information

Check out BBB’s ultimate guide for a stress-free holiday by going to BBB’s Holiday HQ To report or research a scam, go to BBB ScamTracker. For tips on how to donate safely, go to the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

About BBB: BBB is a nonprofit, business-supported organization that sets and upholds high standards for fair and honest business behavior. Most BBB services to consumers are free of charge. BBB provides objective advice, free BBB Business Profiles on more than 5.3 million companies, 11,000 charity reviews, dispute resolution services, alerts and educational information on topics affecting marketplace trust. Visit bbb.org for more information. BBB Serving Central East Texas was founded in 1985 and serves 19 counties.

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TEXAS CROSSWORD
by Charley & Guy Orbison
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ACROSS

1 in Montague County on U.S. 82 (abbr.)

5 TXism: "lower than a snake's belly in" _ _ _

6 he _ me money when I needed it

7 Tex-Mex tasty superlative ending

9 TX Jim Reeves label: _ _ _ Victor

12 Texas' King Ranch has 825,000 of 'em

17 teenagers' goal at Six Flags over Texas? (3 wds.)

19 Texas stock fraud: "___ town Scandal" (1971-72)

21 TXism: "doesn't know enough to come ___ the rain" (dumb)

22 "Eagle," TX Don

23 TXism: "blind _ _ _"

28 TXism: "stirred up a hornet's _ _ _"

29 "___ out a living" (barely got by)

30 Travis Tritt's "___ Quarter"

31 It ain't "tails"

35 milk is ___ material for Texas' Blue Bell

36 this Anna Maria was in 1955

42 "Alamo film "The Last Command"

42 "Choir" is located in Fort Worth

44 paint layers

46 a light Texas boxer

48 this Skeeter won a Pulitzer for photography at the Dallas Times Herald

49 former Cowboy Jason Witten's pos.

50 fly high

51 Olajuwon as a Cougar

52 DA evidence (abbr.)

53 Rockport is "where the fun never _ _ _"

54 TXism: "he could shoot the eye out of a _ _ _"

56 TXism: "___ biant" (good)

57 _ _ _ Grande

58 pig casa

DOWN

1 TXism for "saved money" (3 wds.)

2 in 1862, 40 Unionists were hanged in north Texas for this crime

3 Kimble County seat

4 this Prominger directed TX Genre Tierny in "Laura"

9 barn rodents

10 closet items (2 wds.)

11 TX Jim J. Bullock was on this TV "alien" sitcom (1989-90)

15 UT has ___ Stanley Gardiner's complete study

16 drove fast

18 election day (abbr.)

20 this Young created storied "Curtain Club" at UT (init.)

23 _ _ _ Belo started The Dallas Morning News in 1885

24 dir. to Azle from Springtown (abbr.)

25 TXism: "fast as ___ up a rafter"

26 desolate by death

27 TXism: "unnecessary ___ grease on a jackrabbit"

32 TXism: "let '___ rip!"

33 Ken Paxton pos.

34 22-across init.

36 "Honest _ _ _"

37 Texas "Moonraker" and "Dallas" actress, Chiles

38 Texas outlaw John Wesley Hardin quote at the time of his arrest: "Texas, ___!"

39 TXism: "I'd have ___ better to die"

40 "tall Texas _ _ _"

41 bit of gossip

43 to Dublin from Azle

45 final h.s. year

47 DART is Dallas' rapid

48 "___ la vista" (see ya)

55 Christmas gift for a kid (2 wds.)

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Sheriff's Report

The Rains County Sheriff's Office took the following reports of activity during the weeks of December 15-28:

Arrests

12-18: Milton Frazier. Driving while license invalid (driving while license suspended) - with prior convictions, no bond listed.



MICHAEL HOPKINS
Rains County Sheriff

12-19: Rodger Dale Gammons. Possession of controlled substance PG 1/1-B greater than or equal to 1 gr. less than 4 gr., non-prosecution.

12-21: Tristan William Follis. Driving while intoxicated, no bond listed.

12-23: Jake Earnest Bryant. Possession of a controlled substance PG 1/1-B less than 1 gr., \$25,000 bond.

12-26: Javen Deal. Manufacture and delivery of a controlled substance PG 2 or 2-A greater than or equal to 4 gr. less than 400 gr., \$375,000 bond.

Calls

12-15: CR 2572 Medical assist; Skyline Dr. 911 hang up call; CR 4510 Theft; CR 4525 Medical assist; Hwy. 19N Controlled burn; Hwy. 69W Medical assist; W North St. Fraud; Hwy. 69W Fire alarm; Hwy. 69W Investigation; CR 4410 Suspicious vehicle; Duffy St. Welfare concern; CR 3360 Suspicious vehicle; Hwy. 19N Grass fire; CR 3231 Grass fire; Hwy. 69 Debris in roadway; Hwy. 19 Medical assist; Harris Harbor Rd. Public assist; Wood St. Motorist Assist; Meadowview Ln. Problems with a juvenile; CR 3325 Medical assist; CR 1315 Medical assist; W Quitman St. Suspicious activity.

12-16: CR 1629 Disturbance; E Quitman St. Business alarm; Hwy. 19N Vehicle fire; CR 3345 Investigation; Ravine St. Extra patrol; CR 3430 Medical assist; CR 1308 Funeral escort; Hwy.

69E Livestock on roadway; CR 3411 Agency assist; FM 515 Intoxicated individual; Duffy St. Warrant service; Hwy. 276 Welfare concern; Skyline Dr. Courtesy transport; S Texas St. Sheriff's Office (SO) lobby Meet complainant; S Texas St. Criminal trespass; FM 515 Extra patrol.

12-17: S Dunbar Ln. Medical assist; CR 3030 Repossession; CR 1520 Medical assist; W Lennon Dr. Reckless driving; Hwy. 275 Paper service; E Lennon Dr. Business alarm; Hwy. 19N Accident; SO lobby Warrant service; E Hwy. 69 Controlled burn; CR 3335 Paper service; S Texas St. Vehicle in roadway; Pecan Dr. Medical assist; FM 513 Suspicious person; CR 3333 Paper service; E Lennon Dr. Business alarm; CR 4510 Problems with a juvenile; CR 3450 Welfare concern; N 1st St. Investigation; CR 2340 Welfare concern; FM 515 Suspicious person; CR 3150 Trespassing; CR 3450 Investigation; E Lennon Dr. Public assist.

12-18: Hwy. 19 Reckless driving arrest made; Industrial Blvd. Suspicious vehicle; CR 1402 Residence alarm; Quitman St. Public assist; Hwy. 69 Funeral escort; CR 3025 Meet complainant; FM 2795 Investigation; SO lobby Theft reported; FM 2795 Livestock on roadway; Hwy. 19N Accident; SO lobby Meet complainant; FM 2795 Investigation; Planters St. Medical assist; E Lennon Dr. Disturbance; E Lennon Dr. Fight in progress; 1st St. Accident; CR 1402 Accident; S FM 779 Meet complainant; Elaine St. Suspicious person; W North St. Agency assist; E Lennon Dr. Noise complaint.

12-19: FM 513 Suspicious person; Kathrine St. Medical assist; Smith Cir. Suspicious person; CR 1325 Accident; CR 3380 Abandoned vehicle; W North St. Brush fire; Locust St. City ordinance violation; CR 2110 Residence alarm; Third St. Investigation; PR 7704 Theft; FM 515 Medical assist; CR 2610 Animal

welfare concern; SO lobby Meet complainant; Hwy. 69 Abandoned vehicle; CR 4515 Grass fire; Hwy. 19N Medical assist; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; Hwy. 276 Grass fire; Oak St. Public service; E Lennon Dr. Accident; Industrial Blvd. Business alarm; 3rd St. Meet complainant; W North St. Medical assist; Hwy. 69 Accident; CR 2222 Medical assist; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; Hwy. 276 Traffic stop resulted in arrest; E Lennon Dr. Reckless driving; CR 1530 Suspicious person; CR 2610 Medical assist.

12-20: W Lennon Dr. Extra patrol; FM 515 Extra patrol; FM 513 Medical assist; Brazel Bay Medical assist; CR 1535 Suspicious person; Hwy. 19S Reckless driving; S Dunbar Ln. Medical assist; Puckett Pass Public assist; Hwy. 69 Accident; PR 7703 Medical assist; FM 47 Meet complainant; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; W Tawakoni Dr. Debris in roadway; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; E Lennon Dr. Public assist; FM 515 Intoxicated individual; Hwy. 69 Livestock on roadway; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; Hwy. 276 Vehicle fire; Ravine St. City ordinance violation; Smith Cir. Suspicious vehicle; S FM 779 Controlled burn; W Quitman St. Assault; N FM 2946 Investigation; Hwy. 276 Theft; CR 3325 Medical assist; Missouri St. Noise complaint; FM 47 Animal at large.

12-21: CR 3422 Medical assist; CR 3030 Welfare concern; S First St. Medical assist; Hwy. 19 Suspicious vehicle; S Texas St. Medical assist; CR 4254 Suspicious person; CR 2400 Welfare concern; Hwy. 276 Motorist Assist; CR 2400 Medical assist; Vanceville Dr. Vehicle fire; FM 514 Welfare concern; SO lobby Meet complainant; CR 1605 Medical assist; Ave. B Suspicious person; E Lennon Dr. Missing person; FM 515 Reckless driving; W North St. Traffic stop.

12-22: FM 47 Extra patrol; Egret Cir Smoke

investigation; Texas St. at N St. Debris in roadway; CR 1490 Medical assist; CR 2460 Damaged property; SO lobby Meet complainant; W Lennon Dr. Suspicious person; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; Hwy. 276 Medical assist; FM 2324 Public assist; CR 1423 Medical assist; FM 2324 Livestock on roadway; CR 1308 Follow up investigation; FM 515 Civil matter; Hwy. 69 Motorist Assist; FM 3274 Accident; E Lennon Dr. Accident; CR 2245 Follow up investigation; CR 4261 Public service; S Texas St. Terroristic threats; CR 1530 Accident; Tawakoni Dr. Accident; FM 515 Medical assist; Westside Dr. Structure fire; Hwy. 69 Disturbance; E Lennon Dr. Suspicious vehicle.

12-23: Smith Cir. Suspicious activity; CR 2181 Medical assist; Hwy. 276 Business alarm; CR 1315 Criminal mischief; E Lennon Dr. Medical assist; Smith Cir. Trespassing; CR 1308 Street blocked; E Lennon Dr. Suspicious person; CR 2131 Medical assist; CR 1490 Medical assist; W North St. Harassment; CR 2450/2470 Suspicious vehicle - one subject arrested; CR 1605 Controlled burn; Hwy. 69 Controlled burn; W North St. Public service; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; FM 513 Medical assist; Agrilife Building Special assignment; Hwy. 19N Reckless driving; CR 3412 Medical assist; SO lobby Welfare concern; CR 4261 Public service; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; CR 2430 Child custody; CR 1490 Medical assist.

12-24: CR 1503 Medical assist; FM 515 Extra patrol; N FM 2946 Extra patrol; Hwy. 69S Extra patrol; E Lennon Dr. Business alarm; CR 2430 Medical assist; CR 3325 Medical assist; N Texas St. Business alarm; FM 275 Livestock on roadway; Hwy. 276 Debris in roadway; N Texas St. Medical assist; CR 1530 Medical assist; CR 3325 Medical assist; FM 47N Accident; S 1st St. Medical assist; SO lobby Meet complainant; W Tawakoni Dr. Welfare concern; Quitman

St. Follow up investigation; S Texas St. Medical assist; E Lennon Dr. Assist motorist.

12-25: Smith Cir. Warrant service; SO lobby Meet complainant; Hwy. 69W Motorist Assist; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; SO lobby Meet complainant; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; CR 1622 Welfare concern; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; SO lobby Meet complainant; Hwy. 69 Reckless driving; FM 275 Livestock on roadway; Hwy. 19N Motorist Assist; SO lobby Meet complainant; FM 514 Public service; W North St. Medical assist; FM 515 Extra patrol; E Lennon Dr. Suspicious activity.

12-26: CR 3412 Medical assist; FM 2324 Medical assist; Hwy. 19 Traffic stop resulted in arrest; FM 2737 Livestock on roadway; Skyline Dr. Medical assist; CR 1402 Meet complainant; FM 2946 Controlled burn; FM 2737 Accident; W Quitman St. Follow up investigation; FM 514 Domestic disturbance; W North St. Public service; Clark St. Trespassing; Airport Rd. Medical assist; N Texas St. Accident; CR 1310 Shots fired; FM 515 Brush fire; FM 47 Meet complainant; FM 2737 Noise complaint; Hwy. 276 Residence alarm; FM 2946 Repossession.

12-27: Laresa St. Suspicious activity; Ravine St. Medical assist; CR 3210 Suspicious activity; FM 2946 Medical assist; FM 2737 Medical assist; FM 2737 Disturbance; CR 1399 Public assist; CR 1219 Medical assist; CR 1402 911 hang up call; FM 47 Public service; CR 1525 Animal at large; FM 2795E Brush fire; FM 779S Brush fire; Hwy. 276 Welfare concern; W Quitman St. Public assist; 2-Mile Bridge Traffic stop; SO lobby Meet complainant; W Hwy. 69 Accident; W Hwy. 69 Agency assist; CR 3330 Noise complaint; 2-Mile Bridge Motorist Assist; W North St. Criminal trespass; E Lennon Dr. Accident; FM 2324 Fireworks; FM 275 Animal at large.

12-28: S Hwy. 69 Extra

patrol; E Lennon Dr. Business alarm; FM 515 Extra patrol; E Lennon Dr. Extra patrol; CR 4020 Agency assist; Quitman St. Extra patrol; CR 1399 Medical assist; CR 3391 Medical assist; Laresa St. Suspicious activity; FM 275 Livestock on roadway; CR 3325 Medical assist; Hwy. 19S Accident; SO lobby Meet complainant; FM 2737 Public service; FM 2795E Brush fire; FM 515 Reckless driving; FM 47 Criminal trespass; FM 515 Livestock on roadway; PR 5449 Public service; CR 1411 Vehicle fire; FM 276 Stranded boater; E Lennon Dr. Accident hit and run; CR 2300 Grass fire; Oak Leaf Tr. Medical assist; Skyline Dr. Medical assist.

The Sheriff's Department reported 610 calls for the two-week period. Among the calls were: 9 paper service, 1 criminal mischief, 3 criminal trespass, 1 damaged property, 4 debris in roadway, 5 disturbances, 1 domestic disturbance, 13 extra patrols, 5 brush fires, 4 vehicle fires, 1 fireworks, 10 follow up investigations, 2 harassments, 1 structure fire, 15 livestock on roadway, 60 medical calls, 19 meet complainant, 4 noise complaints, 5 grass fires, 4 problems with a juvenile, 45 public service, 13 reckless driving, 2 repossession, 1 shots fired, 2 investigations, 1 smoke investigation, 1 special assignment, 1 stranded boater, 1 street blocked, 7 suspicious activity, 11 suspicious persons, 8 suspicious vehicle, 1 vehicle in the roadway, 2 intoxicated individuals, 1 fraud, 2 funeral escorts, 1 terroristic threat, 194 traffic stops, 3 warrant service, 11 welfare concern, 3 trespassing, 10 accident, 6 controlled burn, 8 public assist, 1 911 hang up call, 1 accident hit & run, 2 agency assist, 4 alarm business, 1 residence alarm, 2 animal at large, 5 assist motorist, 1 child custody, 1 civil matter, and 4 thefts.

There were 251 traffic stops, 49 citations, 194 warnings, 60 medical calls and 43 transports.

STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

The Texas Legislature made a host of major decisions in 2025, as The Dallas Morning News reported.



GARY BORDERS
Texas Press Association

Here are the highlights:

- Homeowners received a break on their property taxes after approving a proposed constitutional amendment in November. The homestead exemption was increased to \$140,000 from \$100,000.

People 65 and older were given an additional \$60,000 exemption on top of that.

- A major public school funding bill was passed, pumping \$8.5 billion into raises for teachers and support staff and additional operational funding. Lawmakers also approved a statewide school voucher plan with \$1 billion in initial funding. Eligible families can use public funds for private schools.

- The Texas Lottery Commission was abolished, with oversight moved to the Department of Licensing

and Regulation. Online ticket sales were banned, as were courier services.

- After devastating floods in the Hill Country, especially along the Guadalupe River, killed at least 135 people, lawmakers approved funding to strengthen flood warning systems, expand river and rainfall gauges, and speed updates to flood-risk mapping.

Warm, dry holiday weather elevates wildfire risk

Texas A&M Forest Ser-

vice is warning that unseasonably dry and warm weather conditions are raising the risk of wildfire as the New Year approaches.

"We have seen above-normal grass production across large areas of Texas, especially near Abilene, Wichita Falls, Lubbock, Childress and Amarillo," said Luke Kancelerz of the forest service. "These grasses are now dormant and freeze-dried, which means they dry quickly and can support wildfire activity when wind speeds increase."

About 90 percent of wildfires in the state are caused by human activity, with debris burning and equipment use accounting for the majority. Before traveling, drivers are urged to inspect their vehicles to make sure tires are properly inflated and trailer safety chains are secure to prevent creating sparks that can cause wildfires.

A total of 103 Texas counties are currently under a burn ban. A list of counties under a burn ban can be found at <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/>.

Judge blocks app store age verification law

A federal judge temporarily blocked a new state law that would require app stores to verify the ages of users and restrict use by those under 18, the San Antonio Express-News reported. U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman granted an injunction against the law, which was set to take effect Jan. 1, saying it likely violates free speech rights under the First Amendment.

"The act is akin to a law that would require every bookstore to verify the age of every customer at the door and, for minors, require parental consent before the child or teen could enter and again when they try to purchase a book," Pitman wrote.

Attorney General Ken Paxton said he would appeal the ruling.

The law would require app store users to be over 18 or to have parental consent before downloading or purchasing an app. Tech com-

panies such as Apple and Google objected, calling it a violation of privacy and saying it would affect all apps, including those dedicated to news, sports or weather.

Paxtons' divorce files unsealed

After months of legal wrangling, the files in the divorce case of Angela and Ken Paxton have been released. The files show Angela Paxton contended the marriage has become "unsupportable" in part because of his infidelity, the Houston Chronicle reported.

Several media companies sued to force the release of the files, contending the public had a right to know since both parties are public elected officials. Angela Paxton is a Republican state senator from McKinney. Ken Paxton is leaving his attorney general post in a bid to unseat incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn in the March GOP primary.

The couple in mid-December agreed to make the files public just before a scheduled hearing on whether the records should remain sealed.

In her motion for divorce, Angela Paxton said the 38-year marriage had become insupportable and asked for a larger portion of their assets. Ken Paxton responded that his wife should "take nothing."

South Texas builders: ICE arrests upend industry

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have arrested more than 9,100 people in South Texas, The Texas Tribune reported, and builders say the arrests are slowing construction of new homes. The arrests account for nearly one-fifth of all ICE arrests in the entire state.

Mario Guerrero, executive director of the South Texas Builders Association, said ICE agents were operating without arrest warrants — which they can do legally — but are also detaining people who have proper authorization.

"It's what's happening across the Rio Grande Valley

The Rains County Leader tries to include a little bit of everything in each issue. For those who enjoy finding errors, we included some of those as well.

Jaxie Morgan

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Obituaries

Marvin Wayne Fletcher

1938 – 2025



Funeral services for Marvin Wayne “Cowboy” Fletcher, 87, of Alba, were held on December 27, at Wilson - Bartley Funeral Home. Burial followed at Pleasant Ridge Cemetery. Serving as pallbearers were Sam Fletcher, Charles Steve Mallory, Dustin Bohannan, Mike Glidewell, Stevan Johnston, and Chandler Bohannan. Honorary pallbearers were Randy Earley, Larry Lawrence, Carrol Johnston, Mike King, Justin Barron, Johnny Byrd, Junior McKenzie, Jim Bob Williams, Land Jordan and John Stokes.

Mr. Fletcher died on December 20, 2025, holding his daughter’s hand in the same home where he was born. He was born on June 29, 1938, to Hallie-Byrd Fletcher and Marvin Fletcher. He grew up with a deep love for people, hard work, and his community.

Over the course of his life, he held many roles, but he was most proud of his 30 years of service as a Field Inspector for the Texas

Railroad Commission and his lifelong work as a cattleman. He was a lifelong gun collector and hunter and was known for making a mean squirrel stew. He was a loving husband and father, and embodied determination and resilience, always teaching his daughter to “get back on the horse,” both in the arena and in life.

He never missed a play day, basketball game, cheerleading event, UIL competition, or award ceremony.

Mr. Fletcher is survived by his devoted wife, Frances Jean Fletcher; daughter, Hallie-Byrd Jean Fletcher Johnson and son-in-law Phil Johnson; adopted daughter, Casey Bohannan; cousins, Sam Fletcher and Junior McKenzie; sister-in-law, Mary Stokes; and brother-in-law, John Stokes.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters, Georgia Stiles and Betty Ann James; and brother-in-law, George Stiles.

Joe David Orsborn

1949 – 2025



A graveside service for Joe David Orsborn, 76, was held on December 31 at Emory City Cemetery.

Mr. Orsborn died on December 24, 2025, at Christus Hospital in Tyler. He was born on March 24, 1949, in Greenville, to Lynn Sparks Orsborn and Mary Jean Nettles Orsborn. He was a proud member of a family with a rich history. He was inspired by his great, great, great grandfather, Emory Rains. His grandfather, Gus Sr. and two uncles, Gus Jr. and Max, were legendary sheriffs known for their integrity.

With over 30 years of experience on the road, Mr. Orsborn earned accolades for his trucking career, finishing the distinguished million-mile safety award—an impressive testament to his dedication and professionalism.

He was a man full of life, characterized by

his honesty, wit, and fun-loving nature. He had a reputation for telling it like it was. His interests reflected his spirited lifestyle; he loved rodeo, John Wayne, George Jones and the simple pleasures of life, finding joy in farming and spending time at home with his family.

He is survived by his wife, Debbie Orsborn, with whom he shared 30 wonderful years; sons, Terry Shelton and wife Stephanie, Vic Smith and wife Lisa, and Gary Don Smith and wife Adrianna; grandchildren, Maddie, Aiden, Tyler, Trevor, Brianna, Gabriel, and Dario; sister, Mary Lynn Vasser; and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins and many friends he cherished.

He was preceded in death by his parents; son, Paul Sparks Orsborn; and brothers, Paul Sparks Orsborn and Tommy Gus Orsborn.

Dean Portz

1955 – 2025



Dean Portz, 70, of Emory, died on December 26, 2025. He was born on April 8, 1955.

He will be remembered as a funny, helpful and deeply loving family member whose presence brought warmth and laughter wherever he went.

An avid golfer and master fisherman, Mr. Portz was famously feared by the fish in the lake but

cherished by all who knew him. He was devoted to his family, especially his grandchildren, who brought him endless pride and joy.

Mr. Portz is survived by his loving wife; three children; and six grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Jewel and James Portz.

There are no services planned at this time.

Mildred Lorraine Hoppe-Hines

1931 – 2025



Funeral services for Mildred Lorraine Hoppe-Hines, 94, were held on December 27, at Wilson - Orwosky Funeral Home. Interment followed at Clifton Cemetery.

Mrs. Hines died on December 17, 2025, at Mill Creek Home in Silsbee. She was born on May 6, 1931, in Goff, Kansas, to Anna and Oscar Hoppe.

Mrs. Hines loved the farm and spending time with horses and chickens. She loved to read books and later in life she could be found in her recliner reading a book on her Kindle.

She touched countless lives with her love of sewing and baking and received many ribbons for baked goods and the doll and girl’s dresses she entered in the county fair. For many years she wrote The Daugherty News for the Rains County Leader.

Her career for many years was caring for others in care homes and home health and she loved caring and visiting with her patients. She touched countless lives with her generosity and taught others to live with strength, grace and sharing.

She married Albert Skoch and from that union, they were blessed with 6 children. They later divorced and she married John (Sonny) Hines, on December 23, 1974.

She was a member of the Daugherty Baptist church. She loved her church and was an active member until her health declined. She then moved to Silsbee to live with her daughter, Patti Moore.

Mrs. Hines is survived by her children, Angie Foster, Debbie (Dan) Priest, Patti

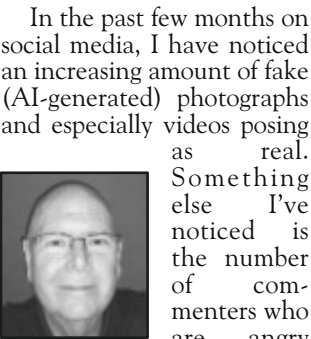
Moore, Jane (Roger) Sauer, Rob (Susan) Skoch, and Rick (Karen) Skoch; stepchildren, Karen Lynn Orange, Shelia Wright, Edward Hines, John Hines Jr., and Rusty Hines; sisters-in-law, Jane Hoppe, Barbara Jagger, Sue (Bobby) Strebeck, and Flora Hines; grandchildren, Todd Hooper, Taira (Matt) Crocker, Brandi Priest, Daniel (Yvonne) Priest, Darcy Farnsworth, Rachel Campbell, Shawn Campbell, Aaron (Jessica) Campbell, Angela (Shawn) Mead, Mindi (Levi) Long, and Ricky (Casey) Skoch; great-grandchildren, Madeline Crocker, Claire Crocker, Jack Crocker, Kaleena (Gabby) Moore, Ashley (Justin) Knight, Danielle (Bryce) Slayter, Braydan Wells, Jaydan Wells, Taryn Wells, Arya Priest, Daniel Priest III, Ethan Brucken, Gage McGuire, Ollie Campbell, Ember Campbell, Winter Campbell, Derick Skoch, Jadyn Skoch, Lucas Long, Logan Long, Garrett Mead, Hailey Mead, and Brynleigh Mead; great-great grandchildren, Kai Wells, Kain Wells, Saint McCall, Parker Slayter, Lincoln Slayter and Andie Knight; and several nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her loving husband of 45 years, John (Sonny) Hines; parents, Oscar and Anna Hoppe; sisters, Helen and Betty; brothers, Louis and Ernie; grandson, Eric Skoch; sons-in-law, Gary Hooper and Lewis Foster; and grandson-in-law, Dan Farnsworth.

Donations may be made in her honor to Della Blanton Memorial Hall at the Daugherty Baptist Church.

MY TAKE ON TECH

Is It Real or Is It Fake?



In the past few months on social media, I have noticed an increasing amount of fake (AI-generated) photographs and especially videos posing as real. Something else I’ve noticed is the number of commenters who are angry m a i n l y about AI generated videos promoted as real, and a few who are angry about any AI postings regardless of what or why.

I use and appreciate AI resources, so I’m not against AI or its products. But when AI is used to deceive or fool people by means of voice or imagery (as in many scams today), we should agree that intentional deception is not good for society or the future of AI.

Due to increasing dominance of AI-generated images and videos, the landscape is shifting from platforms for personal connection and information sharing to an adversarial environment saturated with fake media.

For centuries, a photograph or video carried inherent weight as evidence. Remember the old phrase, “the camera never lies”?

While fakery existed long before AI, it required skill and money. Now AI allows anyone to manufacture convincing ‘proof’ of anything.

This often creates chaos, where people can no longer trust their own eyes or ears. This frustration stems from a

feeling of powerlessness; you’re constantly on guard, playing a losing game of “spot the fake.” The often-angry comments reflect this fatigue—a mix of cynical dismissal, outright anger at being manipulated, and a retreat from engaging altogether.

Because of the proliferation of AI-generated images and videos, especially when used to deceive people, soon we may see a hardening of two parallel paths in social media.

One path is the mainstream platforms we see today, which may desperately implement clumsy and authoritarian “verification” systems that will inevitably censor legitimate content while failing to stop sophisticated fakes.

The other more sustainable path may be creation of smaller decentralized trust-based platforms that prioritize community and user moderation over the sole desire for clicks and likes. People who tire of the fakery will increasingly gravitate toward smaller, ideologically aligned communities where a shared set of values provides a shield against the onslaught of fake media.

One positive change we may see in the future may be less use for the broad, mass-media platforms that have been so corrosive to mental health and civil discourse.

Another positive change might benefit America’s newspapers (paper and digital) like *The Rains County Leader* and others. The escape of people from mainstream social media to seek what is real and true may

boost the readership and popularity of newspapers whose function has been and will continue to be to report the facts and be trusted sources of news.

It really boils down to the fact that the human brain is hardwired to resolve contradictions quickly as part of our legacy survival mechanism. When the same social media account simultaneously serves a genuine news clip and a hyper-real fake, the mental cost of verifying each item skyrockets. The shortcut becomes “I’m done, this whole platform is garbage.”

There are some accounts or persons I follow who use AI exclusively to generate content since there is no “real or fake” frustration—it is all fake, and everyone knows it and either enjoys it or not. It’s like *The Babylon Bee* satire media has done since its inception (Their slogan: “Fake news you can trust.”).

If reality is your goal, for credible and reliable news you can get your news from sources like *The Leader* and other legitimate news outlets where there is no issue with the “is it real or is it fake” conundrum that can really get exhausting and frustrating.

AI is here to stay, and likely will change the future in ways that few of us can even imagine. Be discerning in your social media and news choices so you can lessen the “real or fake” headaches that are not fun for anyone.

John can be reached at john2645@mytakeontech.net.

William Henry “Bill” Kuykendall

1945 – 2025

A celebration of life for William (Bill) Henry Kuykendall, 80, will be held on Sunday, January 4, at 3:00 p.m., at Lake Fork Baptist Church, Alba, under the direction of the church and his family.

Mr. Kuykendall died on December 23, 2025. He was born on March 6, 1945, in Pearsall, to A.R. (Buck) and Edith Leonard Kuykendall.

He married Celia Knox on December 1, 1971, in Littlefield. They lived in McMullen County for three years and then moved to Sudan where he attended South Plains College. After graduation they made their home in Sudan for 27 years. There they raised their two children, Len and Melissa. They moved to Littlefield while living part-time at Toledo Bend Lake. In 2011, they moved to Lake Fork.

Mr. Kuykendall was a talented man and could repair anything. He loved the challenge of building or making things work. He and Celia also owned and operated Tax

Service in Littlefield for 35 years. His hobbies included visiting his grandchildren, traveling to all 50 states and several countries, fishing, boating, scuba diving, flying his plane, camping and being outside. He was a member of Lake Fork Baptist Church and a member of the Littlefield Masonic Lodge. He was an excellent husband for 54 years and 22 days, a wonderful dad, son and brother.

Mr. Kuykendall is survived by his wife; son, Len Kuykendall and wife Angelique and their children, Karson and Kolton; daughter, Melissa Jones and husband Chris and their children, Chloe and Callie Jones; sister, Mary Edith (Ralph) Edwards; niece, Melinda (Neal) Dunn; brothers-in-law, Chester (Sandra) Knox and Jimmy Knox.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother, Leonard Kuykendall; and his inlaws, R.B. and Janice Knox.

In lieu of flowers please make donations to St Jude’s Children’s Hospital at stjude.org.

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Believer’s Baptist Church

By Linda Brendle

And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.

1 Samuel 2:35

This week Pastor Jerod Haygood brought a message from II Samuel titled “God’s Forever Priest.” The Lord made Aaron and his descendants priests and said they would be priests before the Lord forever. However, when Eli and his two sons dishonored the priesthood through immorality and deceitful ways, the Lord said that He would remove the blessings from the household of Aaron because of this wickedness. But God had a plan all along that would bring about a greater sinless High Priest. This Priest is the Son of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was made a priest not by bloodline, but by divine oath. His priesthood is forever.

The new adult Sunday School classes

begin January 4:
Apologetics/Evangelism (Ages 18-35) – Jason Rolén
Ephesians – Ken Bernhard
Genesis – Kyle Slaymaker / Lane Garland
Revelation – Duffey Henderson
January Schedule:
Scripture Reading Challenge – January 4
Regular Wednesday Night Schedule, including Adult Bible Study, resumes January 7
The Church Praying – January 11
Bible-n-Biscuits resumes January 13
Members’ Meeting – January 25
Wednesday Morning Women’s Bible Study resumes January 28
BBC and Emory Baptist Student Ministry Winter Retreat – January 17-19, \$85 per student. See Pastor Haygood for more information.
The Asking for a Friend Podcast Episode #238 is titled “Christmas Hymns.” Find the link at www.bbcmemory.org.

Emory Methodist Church

By Mary White

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Luke 2:14

Rev. David Banks continued his series “God Keeps His Word – The Promise Unfolds” with scripture text taken from Luke. The story continues and the Word goes forth.

We have lit the candles of hope, peace, joy, love and the Christ candle. The unknowing and the anticipation of Advent

has passed, and the light of Christmas invites us into the warm glow that God is with us. We look forward to 2026 and watch God’s Mission unfold.

Birthday wishes go to Linda Northcutt and Roy Bryant. Anniversary wishes go to Kenneth and Betsy Neinast.

Pray for Rusty Hines, Gloria Shows, John Rice and Scarlet Vance.

Have a very happy New Year and as always it is better to be kind than right.

FISHING REPORT

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department released the following information for Lake Fork and Lake Tawakoni taken on December 24:

Fork: Fair. normal stain; 51 degrees; 2.74 feet below pool. Water temperatures are 48-55 degrees. The morning bass bite is slow, with a better bite midday to evening. Chatterbaits and spinnerbaits are good around small creeks or ditches in 3-5 feet. Red square bill crankbaits are good in the same areas around big stumps. Flats are fair with lipless crankbaits and suspending jerkbaits. Jerkbaits work best around docks. Jig bite has slowed down, but should bounce back with warmer temperatures.

Lake Fork crappie fishing is finally in a wintertime

pattern. There are some fish on brush piles, tire reefs, lay downs and points in 18-25 feet of water. You can also find fish on bridges as fish move to deeper water. Tons of fish have moved into the deeper water areas following bait fish. You can find large schools of crappie congregating on timber along creek channels in 35-60 feet of water. These fish may only be 12-25 feet deep grouped up on tree tops or limbs. They will bite anything you put in front of them. We are having great success with hand tied jigs in all kinds of color combinations. Minnows will most certainly work as well as soft plastics of all shapes and sizes. The winter bite on Lake Fork is the best time of year to catch a limit of crappie quickly and even catch some giant crap-

pie mixed in with the eater size fish. Report by Jacky Wiggins, Jacky Wiggins Guide Service.


Tawakoni: Good. Water lightly stained; 52 degrees; 1.65 feet below pool. Lake Tawakoni has settled into a healthy winter pattern and all species of fish are feeding! Water temperatures are sitting right at 52 degrees on the main lake. There is a big warm-up in the forecast, so water temperature could rise as high as 55 degrees on the main lake. The hybrid striper and white bass bite has been solid. Lots of big whites and some jumbo hybrids being caught on artificials in 30-50 feet. Best lures have been 4 inch swimbaits and 4 inch chartreuse flukes. The eating sized catfish bite has slowed some as it does every year when waters get into the lower 50s. Fishing under the cormorant roosts still are producing good numbers of quality eating sized fish 3-6 pounds. The trophy catfish bite is good for fish up to 55 pounds. Targeting fish in 20-35 feet has been the ticket on fresh cut gizzard shad. The crappie bite is steady. Fish have staged up in deeper more open water and finding the bigger schools of fish is important. Jigs are working best in 18-35 feet near bridge pilings and deep vertical timber. The largemouth bite is surprisingly good right now. Docks in 4-7 feet have been very good with Texas or Carolina rigged soft plastics, or slow rolled square bills crankbaits.

SAVVY SENIORS

How To Find a Quality Nursing Home for Your Loved One

Dear Savvy Senior,
Can you give me some tips on picking a good nursing home for my father?

Since his stroke, I’ve been taking care of him at home, but he’s gotten to the point where it’s too much for me to handle.



JIM MILLER
Savvy Senior

Exhausted Daughter

Dear Exhausted,

Choosing a nursing home for a loved one that provides quality is a very important decision that requires careful evaluation and some homework. Here are some steps you can take that can help you find a good facility and avoid a bad one.

Make a list: There are several sources you can turn to for referrals to top nursing homes in your area including the Area Agency on Aging (call 800-677-1116 or visit Eldercare.acl.gov for contact information); your dad’s doctor or nearby hospital discharge planner; friends or neighbors who may have had a loved one in a nursing home; and online at Medicare’s nursing home compare tool at Medicare.gov/care-compare. This tool will not only help you locate nursing homes in your area, but it also provides a 5-star rating system on recent health inspections, staffing, quality of care, and overall rating.

Also, keep in mind that it’s always best to choose a nursing home that’s close to family members and friends who can visit often, because

residents with frequent visitors usually get better care.

Call your long-term care ombudsman: This is a government official who investigates nursing home complaints and advocates for residents and their families. This person can tell you which nursing homes have had complaints or problems in the past and can help you locate a good facility. Visit LTCombudsman.org for local contact information.

Contact the nursing homes: Once you’ve narrowed your search, call the nursing homes you’re interested in to verify that they can facilitate your dad’s needs. Also, find out if they have any vacancies, what they charge, and if they accept Medicaid.

Tour your top choices: During your nursing home visit, notice the cleanliness and smell of the facility. Is it homey and inviting? Does the staff seem responsive and kind to its residents? Additionally, be sure to taste the food, and talk to the residents and their family members, if available. It’s also a good idea to visit several times at different times of the day and different days of the week to get a broader perspective.

And be sure to find out about their staff screening and training procedures, staff-to-patient ratio, and the staff turnover rate.

To help you rate your visit, Medicare offers a helpful checklist of questions to ask at Medicare.gov/media/document/12130nursing-home-checklist508.pdf that you can print and take with

you on your visit.

Paying for Care

With nursing home costs now averaging \$324 per day nationally for a semi-private room and nearly \$371 for a private room, paying for care is another area you may have questions about or need assistance with. Medicare only helps pay up to 100 days of rehabilitative nursing home care, which must occur after a hospital stay of at least three days.

Most nursing home residents pay for care from either personal savings, a long-term care insurance policy, or through Medicaid once their savings are depleted. Or, if your dad is a veteran, he may be able to get funds through the VA’s Aid and Attendance benefit (see VA.gov/pension/aid-attendance-house-bound).

To learn more about the payment options, ask the nursing home director. You can also get help from your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), which provides free counseling on all Medicare and Medicaid issues. To find a local SHIP counselor visit ShipHelp.org or call 877-839-2675.

And for more information, see Medicare’s booklet “Your Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home” (product # 02174). You can view it online at Medicare.gov/Publications.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of “The Savvy Senior” book.

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
Trails to Trout’ brings fishing to Tyler’s Nature Center

Celebrate the start of the new year by introducing a kid to the Texas winter tradition of rainbow trout fishing. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s (TPWD) “Trails to Trout” fishing days are scheduled for Jan. 4 and Jan. 10 at the Tyler Nature Center.

TPWD will stock 900 rainbow trout at the pond for kids and people of all ages to pursue from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anglers only need to bring fishing equipment and bait. TPWD will be on hand to assist new anglers and provide limited fishing equipment for those who need it on a first-come, first-served basis. Trout bait will also be available for those who need it and ice will be provided for attendees that choose to

harvest their catch.

After a morning of fishing at the pond, folks can explore the rest of the Tyler Nature Center by taking a stroll on one or more outdoor hiking trails to complete the great outdoors experience.

Recommended Equipment: Bring a light-action rod and reel combination with small fishing hooks, light line (6 lb. test or less), small bobbers (optional), and small split shot. For bait, bring salmon eggs, whole kernel corn, marshmallows, small worms or prepared trout bait. Small rooster-tail spinners also work well. If you intend to keep trout, make sure to pack a stringer or small cooler.

TPWD plans to stock

335,048 rainbow trout in Texas across the state through early March. Because rainbow trout are only available during the colder winter months in most areas of Texas, anglers are encouraged to keep up to their daily bag limit of five.

Dates and locations are subject to change due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances. Be sure to check the 2025-26 Trout Stocking Schedule online before going fishing to confirm the stocking date, check fishing regulations and find other winter trout stocking program angling tips.

For more information, contact Jake Norman, TPWD Inland Fisheries Biologist, at (903) 566-1615 x 213.



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Pastor Joe Pierce
903-259-1147 & 903-259-0348

St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

Rev. Michael Ledesma
551 East FM 2795
903-473-5116

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County Line Baptist Church
Bro. Wayne Darty

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emorychurchofchrist.org

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MorningWorship 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday
Adult Bible Study 6:30 p.m.
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PUBLIC/LEGAL NOTICE

LEGAL NOTICE

Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for a Wine and Beer Retailer's Off-Premise Permit (BQ) by TMT DFW LLC, operating under the trade name **BIG DADDY'S**, to be located at 121 FM 513, East Tawakoni, Texas 75472, in Rains County. The sole managing member of the company is "Talat Mahmood".

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice to all persons buying property in the vicinity of the Shirley Water Supply Corp.

Shirley Water Supply Corp. urges any prospective buyer to verify with the manager at the office, located on FM 1567, east of Hwy. 19, north of Emory, Tex., or south of Sulphur Springs, Tex., whether or not water is available at the tract of land in question.

Shirley Water Supply Corp.
6684 FM 1567W
Sulphur Springs, Texas 75482

PUBLIC NOTICE

In accordance with Texas Local Government Code 212.134, Notice and Public Hearing Requirements, notification is hereby made that the East Tawakoni, TX Planning and Zoning committee held a public meeting on December 15, 2025 to review the request to rezone parcel located on the North side of State Highway 276 known as 2175 State Highway 276 East Tawakoni, Texas. This property is currently zoned residential and was reviewed for purpose of the change to commercial property and was given their approval recommendation. A public city council meeting will be held on January 20, 2026 at 7:00pm, East Tawakoni City Hall, 288 Briggs Blvd. East Tawakoni, TX 75472 to consider P&A recommendation and make a final decision, also to allow residents to voice concerns /questions.

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This Texas Lottery scratch ticket game will close on January 17, 2026. You have until July 16, 2026, to redeem any tickets for this game: **#2584 Bingo Times 20** (\$5) overall odds are 1 in 4.37. These Texas Lottery scratch ticket games will close on January 21, 2026. You have until July 20, 2026, to redeem any tickets for these games: **#2634 \$30,000 Cash** (\$2) overall odds are 1 in 4.29, **#2563 Mega Loteria** (\$10) overall odds are 1 in 3.54, **#2621 \$1,000,000 Blitz** (\$20) overall odds are 1 in 3.74. These Texas Lottery scratch ticket games will close on February 18, 2026. You have until August 17, 2026, to redeem any tickets for these games: **#2639 Double Sided Dollars** (\$5) overall odds are 1 in 4.35, **#2582 \$250,000 50X Cashword** (\$10) overall odds are 1 in 3.56, **#2515 Loteria Supreme** (\$100) overall odds are 1 in 3.23. **Texaslottery.com** is the official source for all pertinent game information. Game closing procedures may be initiated for documented business reasons. These games may have prizes unclaimed, including top prizes. In addition, game closing procedures will be initiated when all top prizes have been claimed. During closing, games may be sold even after all top prizes have been claimed. Must be 18 or older to purchase a ticket. **PLAY RESPONSIBLY.** For help with a gambling problem, ncpgambling.org. © 2026 Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

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TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Kick Start 2026 With a First Day Hike at a Texas State Park



Photo courtesy of TPWD

First Day Hike at Tyler State Park 2025.

AUSTIN – Celebrate the beginning of a new year and the start of America’s semiquincentennial (America 250) with a First Day Hike at a Texas State Park.

This annual tradition is a unique opportunity for people of all ages and skill levels to experience Texas’ wild places through ranger-guided and self-guided walks, bike rides, paddling trips, polar plunges and more as part of the national initiative aimed at getting people outdoors.

Last year, Texas once again broke the historical record for participation numbers. Texas State Parks hosted 178 events where 9,484 participants hiked a combined 18,932 miles. The number of events, participants and miles are all new records for the fourth straight year. Texas also outpaced the nation with the most sites, events and participants.

“One of the many reasons that I love Texas is the nice weather that we can have even in the winter, and there is no better way to spend a beautiful January day than walking with friends and family at a Texas State Park,” said Rodney Franklin, director of Texas State Parks. “Each year, Texas leads the nation as thousands of Texans turn out to a nearby state park to ring in the new year and celebrate with a First Day Hike. I always look forward to seeing the photos of smiling folks enjoying parks on January 1, and this New Year’s Day is

extra special as we also ring in America’s 250th birthday. Hope to see you on the trail!”

Trails at Texas State Parks range in length and difficulty. Some short, easy trails are perfect for family-friendly scenic strolls, while more strenuous ones can challenge experienced hikers. Trail maps for all Texas State Parks can be found on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) website, the official Texas State Park app and individual park webpages.

“State parks across the country protect and provide access to the landscapes, stories and places that create the fabric of our country,” says America’s State Parks President Paul McCormack. “As our country starts to celebrate its 250th birthday in 2026, we invite you to start your year on a First Day Hike enjoying and celebrating our incredible public lands.”

TPWD strongly encourages anyone planning a trip to a Texas state park to reserve a day pass in advance since some parks are expected to reach their capacity limit. Reserve day passes online through the TPWD reservation website or by calling the Customer Service Center during regular business hours at (512) 389-8900.

Anyone with the resolution of visiting multiple state parks in 2026 can purchase a Texas State Parks Pass (TSPP). The \$70 TSPP waives entrance fees to all

state parks for passholders and guests in their vehicle for a full year. Additionally, passholders get discounts on overnight reservations, state park store purchases and more.

Purchase passes online through the TPWD reservation website, through the Customer Service Center or at any state park.

Find a list of all First Day Hike events on the TPWD First Day Hikes Event page.

Examples of some First Day Hikes are listed below:

From 8:30 to 11:00 a.m. join experienced guides for the first bird tour of the new year at Goose Island State Park and discover the birds that call the park home. You’ll learn about and identify the birds seen on the route.

Check out a self-guided First Day Hike on the Shinnery Ridge Trail at Meridian State Park, featuring the children’s book “Walking Through Texas” by author Courtney Rubalcaba.

Join park rangers at 7:00 a.m. for a brisk, early morning hike on the Triassic Trail at Palo Duro Canyon State Park and catch a beautiful sunrise over the canyon! Hike approximately 1.5 miles round trip.

From 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. join a Village Creek State Park ranger to get acquainted with one of the oldest navigation tools in history. Learn to navigate without technology and explore nature simultaneously.

THIS WEEK IN TEXAS HISTORY

Layne put on a Cotton Bowl show

by Bartee Haile

The Texas Longhorns piled up the points on Jan. 1, 1946 setting a Cotton Bowl scoring record that stood for 29 years. Bobby Layne played



BARTEE HAILE
Historical Columnist

17 more seasons in college and the pros but was never better than that New Year’s Day in Dallas. Robert Lawrence Layne graduated from Highland Park high school in 1944 a year ahead of teammate and close friend Doak Walker. While Doak completed his schoolboy career that fall, Bobby called signals for the University of Texas under a wartime waiver of the rule banning freshmen from varsity competition.

After short hitches in the merchant marine, the boyhood buddies went to New Orleans for their discharges. Southern Methodist happened to be in town that night for a game with Tulane, and the reinstated civilians arrived at the stadium in time to watch the visitors lose a nail-biter 21-18.

Although Doak was leaning toward his hometown college, Bobby had not given up on the idea that he might join him in the Texas backfield. Disappointed by the Mustangs’ defeat, the coveted recruit agreed to meet the Longhorn head coach at a local hotel. But Blair Cherry was nowhere to be found, and the Horns let the future Heisman Trophy winner slip through their hooves.

Exactly a week later, the talented Texans lined up on opposite sides of the ball. Doak gave SMU the lead with a dazzling dash, but Bobby saved the day for UT by passing for the go-ahead touchdown.

With Bobby back as quarterback, the Longhorns stampeded through the rest

of the schedule winning the Southwest Conference title and the host berth in the tenth annual Cotton Bowl. With a record of nine victories against a single loss, the SWC representative was a two-touchdown favorite over Big Six champion Missouri.

The partisan crowd of 46,000 smelled a rout after Texas tallied on its initial possession. Bobby connected with Joe Baumgardner on a 48-yard pass-and-run and added the extra point with a perfect place kick.

Missouri needed only four snaps to even the score at seven. The Tiger quarterback caught the Texas defenders napping with a deep strike to a lanky end, who took the ball over his shoulder at the Longhorn 40 and galloped untouched into the end zone.

UT went right back on top with a 60-yard march capped by Bobby’s successful sneak from the one yard line. He again split the uprights, and the scoreboard flashed 14 for Texas.

After missing a field goal on their next possession, the Tigers capitalized on a Longhorn miscue – a fumble at the Missouri 38. Eight plays and an extra point later, the score was tied at 14.

Bobby pulled a razzle-dazzle rabbit out of his helmet to set up Texas’ third TD. He lateraled to a backup halfback, who fooled the Tigers by throwing to end Hubert Bechtol. The trick play gained 56 yards and paved the way for Bobby’s second paydirt plunge.

Compared to the offensive fireworks of the first and second quarters, when the high-powered opponents combined for 35 points, the third period was downright dull. Taking advantage of a fumble recovery at the Missouri 20, Bobby extended the Longhorn lead to 27-14 with a touchdown toss to Baumgardner for the only points of the stanza.

Never-say-die Missouri drove 93 yards in the final quarter to shave the margin to six. But Bobby quickly put the Longhorns back up by 12 with a role-changing reception of a 50-yard pass.

When the final gun sounded, both teams had crossed the goal line one last time. Texas’ 40 points would stand as a Cotton Bowl until 1975.

Bobby had a hand in each of the six Longhorn touchdowns. He carried the ball for three, passed for two and caught the sixth. In addition the versatile quarterback kicked the four extra points.

Bobby played two more years for Texas before turning professional in 1948. After single seasons with the Chicago Bears and New York Bulldogs, he was traded to Detroit and reunited with Doak Walker. Together they led the Lions to NFL championships in 1952 and 1953, the first in franchise history.

When Bobby called it quits nearly a decade later, he had an impressive list of achievements: most pass attempts, most pass completions, most passing yards and most touchdown passes. But mere statistics never did the Blond Bomber justice.

It was his fiery competitive spirit that put Bobby Layne in a league of his own. As Doak Walker once said, “Bobby never lost a game in his life. Time just ran out on him.”

Before his death from cancer in 1986, Bobby reminisced about the 1946 Cotton Bowl. “I remember it was a wild game. Neither team had much of a defense. It seemed every time one got the ball, it went for a touchdown.”

Pressed for an assessment of his own performance, Bobby conceded, “I would have to call it my biggest day in football.”

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TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Warm, dry holiday weather elevates wildfire risk across Texas

COLLEGE STATION, Texas – Texas A&M Forest Service warns that unseasonably warm and dry conditions combined with freeze-cured grasses could spark more wildfires during the holidays.

Texas is forecast to experience unusually warm and dry weather during this holiday season. These conditions can quickly dry vegetation and may support an increased number of wildfires. If strong winds and critical fire weather occur, these fires could grow large and be difficult to control.

“We have seen above-normal grass production across large areas of Texas, especially near Abilene, Wichita Falls, Lubbock, Childress and Amarillo,” said Luke Kanclerz, Texas A&M Forest Service Predictive Services Department Head. “These grasses are now dormant and freeze-cured, which means they dry quickly and can support wildfire activity when wind speeds increase.”

Be cautious with any activity that could spark a wildfire this holiday season. Approximately 90 percent of wildfires in Texas are caused by people and their activities, and during the winter holidays, debris burning and equipment use account for nearly 70 percent of them.

“With warm, dry weather and dormant grasses creating ideal conditions for wildfires, we need every Texan to do their part to help prevent sparks from turning into a dangerous wildfire,” said

Jared Karns, Texas A&M Forest Service Fire Chief. “Follow local burn bans, maintain equipment properly and take extra precautions during holiday activities to keep Texas safe.”

Stay wildfire aware. If a wildfire is spotted, immediately contact local authorities. A quick response can help save lives and property.

Holiday debris burning and recycling

Careless debris burning is the leading cause of wildfires in Texas. Unsafe debris burning of wrapping paper, gift boxes and Christmas trees after the holidays could spark outdoor fires.

Before burning: Always check with local officials for burn bans and other outdoor burning restrictions.

Avoid dry, hot and windy days.

Keep burn piles small, locate the pile at least 150 feet away from buildings and have a water source within reach.

Never leave a fire unattended; stay with your fire until it is completely out.

Recycling can serve as a great alternative to debris burning. Only plain wrapping paper can be recycled. Metallic, glittered or textured wrapping paper can’t be recycled, and be sure to remove tape, ribbons and bows.

“Use the “scrunch” test to tell if paper is recyclable or not,” said Laura Stevens, Texas A&M Forest Service

Program Coordinator. “If you scrunch a piece of paper into a ball and it stays that way, it can be recycled.”

Real Christmas trees are also renewable and there are several ways to recycle and dispose of them properly.

Travel safety

A significant number of wildfires are started by equipment, including vehicles, each year. Take time to inspect your vehicle before you take to the highways.

Before traveling: Check tire pressure and condition. Sparks from rims can ignite wildfires.

Avoid parking in tall, dry grass.

Secure trailer safety chains to prevent dragging and creating sparks.

Fireworks safety

Fireworks should always be used outdoors on flat, smooth surfaces and away from dry grass and flammable materials. Check for local restrictions on fireworks and burn bans before use. Always have a water source nearby and call 911 immediately if a fire starts.

For information on the current wildfire situation in Texas, visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/wildfire-and-other-disasters/current-wildfire-status/>.

For more tips on how to prevent wildfires, visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/wildfire-and-other-disasters/homeowners-prevention-and-preparedness/prevent-wildfires/>.

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