



Rural Texan

Office of Rural Community Affairs ☆ Rural News and Information for Rural Texans ☆ Summer 2004

Governor Perry Names New Border Commerce Coordinator

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

The new Border Commerce Coordinator, Assistant Secretary of State Luis Saenz, sees Texas as a land of opportunity for businesses and the communities who want to bring new companies to Texas.

Like Governor Perry, who named Saenz the new Border Commerce Coordinator on June 28, 2004, Saenz is determined to nurture the state's business-friendly atmosphere as a means to promote economic development.

"Governor Perry has made economic development for the state a priority in his administration, opening opportunities for communities to attract new companies to Texas," said Saenz. "This state is business-friendly and continues to attract companies from other states who are taxing or regulating them out of business. We need to capitalize on this for the good of our state now and for the future."

A Role for Rural Communities

Saenz, who knows the challenges rural Texans face because he grew up in Carrizo Springs (Dimmit County), Texas, says rural communities are positioned to promote and benefit from the state's growth.

(Continued on page 22)

Army Corps of Engineers, ORCA Provide Water Management Training

By Jennifer Allis, ORCA

Water management is one of the most urgent challenges facing communities in rural Texas. Technological advancements, strict federal and state regulations, and public demand for better quality water are changing the way public officials manage local water systems.

In response, the US Army Corps of Engineers and ORCA initiated a joint effort to provide training to rural Texans on all local, regional, and state water issues. This joint project helped local leaders and citizens develop leadership skills and educated local leaders, citizens, regional representatives, and policy makers on the spectrum of issues and considerations in the water arena.

The multi-faceted project included:

- Conducting an inventory of small water projects and technologies, and barriers to implementing those technologies
- Hosting a conference on small-size water technology
- Providing leadership development to help reeducate local leaders on water issues
- Educating youth
- Community outreach

Although utility-related professionals such as water and wastewater operators are required to receive training prior to renewing their licenses, training is not required for local leaders. On June 7, 2004, ORCA, together with a group of

consultants called Water Resources Management, held a training session in Brownwood (Brown County), Texas, to help local leaders and policy makers understand the operations and management of their community's utility.

The curriculum focused on various aspects of utility management, such as general management, financial management, operations, regulatory issues, and water supply and resources. Approximately 30 people representing 20 different communities attended the training session.

"This training session was a valuable opportunity to share information about water management and the challenges rural communities are facing," said Nicki Harle, member of ORCA's Executive Committee. "The water workshop made evident the diversity of water management issues in rural communities and was a time to understand the resources available to public officials as they deal with the challenges inherent to managing a small water system."

ORCA and the US Army Corps of Engineers produced three publications on water management. See page 22 for information on the publications. Training sessions are scheduled for September 1, 2004 in Brownsville (Cameron County), Texas, and September 2, 2004 in McAllen (Hidalgo County), Texas. For more information, contact Jennifer Allis at ORCA.



From the Desk of...

The Executive Committee Chair

As many rural communities struggle to gain a foothold in our modern society, one of the roles that rural leaders must play is that of builder. Their goal is to build a viable, economically successful community.

Like any builder, their first task is to take stock of materials and tools. For rural Texas, the “materials” are the assets of the community – its people, infrastructure, health care system, schools, natural resources and other elements in the community.

These assets may be overlooked, taken for granted or in need of a little repair. Almost certainly, rural communities will find their cups half full rather than half empty.

Identifying assets and understanding how they fit together and drive economic development can reveal a potentially viable, successful community. Led by an active Chamber of Commerce and with the support of the community, the city of Fort Stockton in Pecos County is having notable success developing community and regional assets.

Located halfway between El Paso and San Antonio, and surrounded by tourist attractions like Big Bend National Park, the Davis Mountains, McDonald Observatory and Fort Davis National Historic Landmark, Fort Stockton is developing as a travel destination.

The community has the Annie Riggs Western History museum, winery tours, mule deer hunting and the Big Bend Open Automobile Road Race, among other events and features. The town is an encouraging example of a community full of vision and willing to understand and make the most of its assets.

How can communities understand their assets, as Fort Stockton has? The Rural Viability Index is one tool available to help leaders measure assets and make informed decisions about their communities. The Index was developed by the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M and the Office of Rural Community Affairs as a project for graduate students. For more information on the Rural Viability Index, see page eight.

By measuring a group of 10 community indicators the Index provides a basis for predicting the future survivability of rural communities through a scoring process. The indicators include demographics, economy, education, environment, government, health, housing, technology, transportation and society/culture. The measurements are analyzed and compared to a baseline measure by which rural communities can assess their survivability.

Upon examination, your community will find a wealth of assets that can be used to stimulate growth and expand resources in these interesting times of dwindling support and increasing costs. Once assets have been identified, your community can begin to establish a vision of their future and a strategic plan that will help them reach a brighter tomorrow.

William M. Jeter III
Chair, ORCA Executive Committee

The Executive Director

Rural communities all across the state of Texas are looking ahead. In some cases, local leaders are taking the lead. In others, it is a local citizen or group of citizens who are working for change. Sometimes, an organization of communities leads the way.

In each case, there are questions about vision, goals and perspectives. What should the future include and look like? In this situation the journey is, in many ways, the goal. In order for that journey to be successful, a far-reaching review should take place. The survival of the entire community, perhaps even the region, is at stake. So what should that review include?

Often the value of ‘quality of life’ is cited as a major attraction for rural communities. But how is ‘quality of life’ defined for that community? Concrete attributes that can be demonstrated and shared with others must exist if ‘quality of life’ is to attract newcomers.

We talk a lot about jobs, but too frequently, the focus falls on attracting jobs from outside the community even though 80 percent of new jobs are created by existing businesses. What is the community’s strategy to enhance the market and the expandability for its own existing communities? Is capital available? Does the infrastructure support new jobs?

Job creation should include the kind of jobs that attract young folks back to the community. ‘Youth flight’ from communities is motivated in part by the younger generation’s disappointment in the number and nature of jobs available in their home communities. Infrastructure is again a factor, e.g. the availability of telecommunications and high-speed bandwidth for the Internet.

Communities need to consider a broader picture. Where does the community stand in relation to other communities in the region? Regional organizations can bring communities together for the benefit of all. Major segments of the community’s economy should be integrated. If those segments continue to work in economic silos, they will not be able to support each other’s contributions to the community. Do local folks support local health care and businesses? It is a fact of economic life that what we don’t use, we lose. Communities must ask themselves, “How much are we willing to risk losing?”

Lately, national discussion focuses on how communities attract different kinds of people. What kind of people does the community want to attract? These days, tourists top the list. But others include retirees, youth, creative people, entrepreneurs and others. The type of person determines the infrastructure needed to attract and keep those folks.

Yes, these are all serious points, but not easy ones for a community to address. But it has to be done and someone has to do it. The future of each community may depend upon it. Have a great summer!

Robt. J. “Sam” Tessen, MS
Executive Director

Inside this Issue...

Guest Column: Quality Health Care is a Vital Sign of a Strong Rural Community.....	4
Spotlight on . . .	
TMA: Focused on Rural Texas.....	5
The City of Vernon.....	5
Governors Association Guide Focuses on Entrepreneurs	6
Family Heritage Program Seeks Historic Farms and Ranches for Recognition	6
Colonias in Texas: Challenges for Aging Well	7
EPA Report Links Water Quality with Smart Growth	8
Rural Viability Index: A New Tool for Assessing Rural Communities.....	8
Governor Perry Recognizes Community Development Week in Texas	9
Center for Community Support Helps Rural Texans Win Grants	10
info@organization.com: General Addresses Keep Emails On Target	10
BPL Blaizes Trail Across Rural Texas	11
Texas Medical Association Resolution Aimed at Training Doctors in Texas	11
Funding Opportunities	12
Learning Opportunities	13
Cost-Effective Brush Control in Pasture, Fencing: Get the Upper Hand with	
Herbicides and Smart Application	14
Key to Safe Driving on Rural Roads: Wear Your Seatbelt	14
Sponsors of Healthfind 2004	15
ORCA Delivers \$54,346,764 to Rural Texas Localities in 2nd Quarter: Community Development Block Grant Awards Total \$48,778,573	16
Medicare Boosts Payments for Ambulances	16
Tourism: Good for Texas, Great for Rural Texas	17
Rural Texans Share Ideas at Annual Summit	18
Who Visits Rural Texas? Big Spenders!	18
Web-Based Program Helps Rice Farmers Predict Crop Development	19
Rural Texas at Forefront of Renewable Energy Effort	19
First-Run Films Hit Vintage Venue	20
Crowell Courts Astronomers and Hunters	20
Living in Rural Texas ...	
Small Town Charm Meets the Great Outdoors	21
They Dream of Sprawl	21
New Water-Related Information, Resources Available: Publications are	
Result of ORCA Partnership with US Army Corps of Engineers	22
ORCA's Program Activities	23
ORCA Launches Revised Web Site	23
ORCA Vies for 2005 Federal Rural AED Grant	23
Subscription Renewal Notice	24

Rains a Welcome Change for Troubled Rio Grande

By Tom Harvey, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Often cited as one of the most endangered rivers in North America, the Rio Grande is this year gushing with hope. After years of punishing drought, recent rains have refilled reservoirs, flushed out water-sucking non-native plants and sent rejuvenating pulses of freshwater into the river's coastal estuary.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists have rushed to take advantage of the situation by stocking more than a million fish in Amistad and Falcon reservoirs this spring and summer, seizing the chance to rebuild drought-plagued fisheries while the lakes are full.

Last June, the surface area of Falcon Lake near Laredo was 22,318 acres, according to the International Boundary and Water Commission office at Falcon Dam. In late June, the lake surface covered 62,822 acres, nearly three times bigger than it was a year ago.

TPWD has so far stocked about 663,000 Florida largemouth bass and 174,000 native northern bass fingerlings at Falcon earlier this year. At Amistad Reservoir this year, TPWD has stocked 552,000 Florida bass and 42,000 northern bass.

All of this is designed to take advantage of recent rainfall that has filled up lake arms and creeks that have been dry for years, areas that provide important fish habitat.

(Continued on page 22)

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Guest Column

Quality Health Care is a Vital Sign of a Strong Rural Community

By Senator Robert L. Duncan, Lubbock

Access to quality, affordable health care is one of the most critical elements toward ensuring the growth and sustenance of rural life in Texas. Almost three million Texans call a rural community home and they must have the same benefits as their urban neighbors.

The Office of Rural Community Affairs is doing its part to ensure quality health care for our rural residents. This year alone, thousands of dollars have been granted to hospitals in rural areas of the state to help health care professionals meet Texans' needs.

This money, coupled with legislative support, is critical to ensuring rural populations have access to quality health care. Those Texans who grew up and raised their families in small towns should not be forced from their communities by a lack of health care available to meet their needs as they age. Young people with medical training should not be forced to look outside of their communities for opportunities to attend graduate medical school.

The availability of health care in a small town can have far-reaching effects on the strength and stability of the community. A strong, local health care system will keep residents in the community, provide jobs and create a favorable environment for commerce. All of these elements help improve the overall quality of life, which is a factor not only for those who already live in small towns, but for those who may choose to visit or move to a rural community.

To maintain an excellent quality of life in rural Texas we must support our local health care system and ensure the development of a healthy medical community. This is a homegrown effort that begins in our schools. Texas Tech University is a leader of telemedicine efforts and other initiatives to provide health care for rural residents. In addition, the university is helping us meet the notion of growing our own doctors and nurses, but it's up to us to make sure these young professionals have enough incentive to stay in their hometowns beyond graduation.



OFFICE OF RURAL COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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RWHC Eye On Health



"If we can just get enough American workers disgusted with their employer's health insurance, most will expect government to provide it and we are off the hook."

Cartoon by Tim Size, Executive Director, Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Reprinted with permission.



Spotlight On...

TMA: Focused on Rural Texas

By Pam Baggett, Texas Medical Association

The Texas Medical Association was formed in 1853—an era that set its root in rural Texas. As the state's population centers grew, more and more physicians would be considered urban versus rural, but the issues of rural health care are still on the front burner.

In 1989, TMA vigorously backed passage of the Rural Health Rescue Act, an omnibus bill designed to expand access to care in rural communities and stabilize rural hospitals. TMA has been involved in all pieces of rural legislation since then, working with a broad array of stakeholders to identify and promote the health care needs of rural Texans.

Rural health policy development is spearheaded by TMA's standing Committee on Rural Health. The committee's physicians monitor the effects of laws and regulations on the practice of medicine in rural areas; monitor the needs of rural-area hospitals; and educate physicians and the public about the status of rural health care in Texas. TMA supports appropriate use of the J-1 Visa waiver program to help bring physicians to underserved areas. TMA also supports the Physician Education Loan Repayment Program and primary care preceptorships to entice more physicians to rural communities. Further, TMA was involved in the development of the state's rural locum tenens program to provide temporary relief for overworked rural physicians.

In the past year, the committee worked with the Association's legislative team to increase Medicare physician payment rates; mitigate cuts in public insurance programs, including Medicaid and CHIP; enact physician liability reform; and increase physician awareness of the Medicare 10 Percent Bonus Payment Program as well as the benefits of Rural Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers.

TMA is the largest state medical society in the nation, representing more than 39,500 physician and medical student members. It is located in Austin and has 120 component county medical societies around the state. TMA's key objective since 1853 is to improve the health of all Texans.

The City of Vernon

The people of Vernon have packed a lot of living into their 8-mile town, located south of the Pease River in Wilbarger County. The Tonkawa Indians called the area Eagle Springs because of its abundance of nesting eagles, but in the early 1880s the town became Vernon, population: 25.

Modern Vernon is a town

of approximately 12,000, and it is worth the visit, whether you're scouting for western horseplay, exploring Texas history, investigating classic cars or casting about for some outdoor sports. There's plenty of Old West fun to be had, beginning in May with Texas' oldest continuing historic celebration, the Doan's May Day Picnic, which celebrates the rich history of the Chisholm Trail's Western section.

Vernon may be best known for its Santa Rosa Roundup, a 4-day Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo that attracts top-name cowboys and cowgirls every year. Recognized as one of the finest rodeos in the nation, it features the Santa Rosa Palomino Club, "Texas' Ambassadors on Horseback", whose precision drills have thrilled audiences from Houston to Canada. The rodeo is held the third week in May, and begins with a downtown parade held on Wednesday afternoon.

In August, there's Summer's Last Blast, a car show and cruise night that is virtually unrivaled in size and quality, where visitors can rock with 50s and 60s concert music and examine gleaming classic cars, meticulously restored antique vehicles and rumbling hot rods from a multi-state region.

Visitors enjoy delicious food and unique entertainment from a variety of cultures at "A Cultural Fiesta", held each fall to celebrate the community's cultural diversity. And there's plenty of small town local color for sports enthusiasts at the Vernon Invitational Basketball Tournament or Vernon College's intercollegiate rodeo competition. Bike enthusiasts won't want to miss the Vernon Burnin' Bike Ride, a summertime race for riders of all levels.

Not just a great place to visit, Vernon is also a nice place to live. The people of Vernon have invested in their parks, recreational facilities, and schools, including Vernon College, where more than 1,200 students prepare for technical jobs or to transfer to a 4-year college.

The Red River Valley Museum features world-class exhibits such as the sculpture of Electra Waggoner Biggs and Frederick Remington; paintings by Adrian Martinez and Charles M. Russell; the William A. Bond Trophy and Game Room featuring more than 140 mounts from around the world; and the intriguing Berry History and Science Room.

The town has affordable housing, three city parks, a municipal pool, and is near several state parks. Combine that with an 11-minute average drive to work and you just about can't beat Vernon for quality of living. Check out Vernon's calendar of events by calling the Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-687-3137.

Courtesy of the Vernon Chamber of Commerce.



Summer's Last Blast classic car festival at Vernon, Texas, 2003. Photo courtesy of www.vsmca.com.

Governors Association Guide Focuses on Entrepreneurs

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

How can Texas put job creation on the fast track? The National Governors Association (NGA) believes that nurturing entrepreneurs is one way to boost job growth and stimulate economic development.

The NGA recently published *A Governor's Guide to Strengthening State Entrepreneurship Policy* to help state and local policy-makers understand the importance of entrepreneurial firms, develop a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, and implement strategies to encourage the growth of new companies. Considering that two-thirds of all new jobs from 1993 to 1996 were created by new, fast-growing

companies, the guide is a must-read for policy-makers who don't want to fall behind.

Because programs in most states are meant to support traditional business development, the NGA guide advises states to "serve as a broker" of a variety of non-profit and private programs that specifically support entrepreneurs.

Traditional business development and incentive programs, warns the NGA, are not enough to provide states with the competitive advantage they will need to thrive in today's global economy.

Does Texas have a strong entrepreneurial culture?

A listing of the best cities for entrepreneurs, published by *Entrepreneur* and Dun and Bradstreet, includes five Texas cities in the Southwest category. The cities are ranked as follows:

- 18 San Antonio
- 20 Austin/San Marcos
- 21 Houston
- 24 Dallas
- 36 Fort Worth/Arlington

No matter what size the cities are, the common thread is strong government support for entrepreneurs. According to the NGA guide, "National surveys of entrepreneurs indicate that the five critical factors that state government can influence are: diversity in sources of capital; an enabling culture; strong local networks; supportive infrastructure; and 'entrepreneur-friendly' government."

The NGA guide suggests five strategies to encourage entrepreneurs:

- 1) Integrate entrepreneurship into state economic development efforts.
- 2) Use the education system to nurture and encourage future entrepreneurs.
- 3) Incubate entrepreneurial companies.
- 4) Invest in diverse sources of risk capital for entrepreneurs and growth companies.
- 5) "Get out of the way" through regulatory reform and streamlining.

A Governor's Guide to Strengthening State Entrepreneurship Policy is available online at www.nga.org.

Family Land Heritage Program Seeks Historic Farms and Ranches for Recognition

By Allen Spelce and Beverly Boyd, Texas Department of Agriculture

Agriculture Commissioner Susan Combs announced that the Texas Department of Agriculture is seeking farms and ranches for recognition by the Family Land Heritage Program, which marks its 30th anniversary this year.

Since the first ceremony on Oct. 14, 1974, the program has honored almost 3,900 farms and ranches in 222 counties for being kept in continuous agricultural production by the same family.

"These families have nurtured life from the land to make a future for their children, all the while making their mark in Texas history," Combs said. "The Family Land Heritage Program honors their contributions to the settlement of the Lone Star State. It also chronicles the unique history of Texas agriculture, a proud record that otherwise might be lost forever."

To be eligible for the program, applicants must meet these qualifications:

- 1) The farm/ranch has to have been agriculturally productive for 100 years or more and the line of ownership traced from the first family member to the present, either through direct relatives, marriage or adoption.
- 2) The land must fit the old US Census definition of a farm: 10 acres or more with agricultural sales of \$50 or more a year; or if less than 10 acres, sales of at least \$250 a year.
- 3) Owner(s) must be actively managing the everyday operation of the property.
- 4) If all the land has ever been rented to someone outside of the family, it will not qualify. If only a portion was leased, and as much as 10 acres retained in the family for agricultural production with sales of at least \$50 annually, it will qualify.

The deadline to submit applications for properties established in 1904 or before is November 15, 2004. Farms and ranches that qualify will be honored during the ceremony in Austin in March 2005. The history of the farm or ranch will be chronicled in a registry and honorees can obtain historic farm or ranch signage for their property. Program applications are available through TDA, county judges and on TDA's web site at www.agr.state.tx.us.

For more information, contact Family Land Heritage Coordinator Melissa Blair, Texas Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 12847, Austin, Texas 78711 or call 512-463-2631.

Colonias In Texas:

Challenges for Aging Well

Part 4 of 5 Part Series

By Lilita Santoyo, Texas Department on Aging

This is Part IV in a series of articles that discusses the challenges faced by older adults who live in unincorporated rural areas known as *colonias*.

All *colonias* share similar characteristics such as geographic isolation, language barriers, inadequate education, inadequate workforce development programs, and substandard health and environmental conditions that prevent many residents from obtaining needed health and human services.

However, the diversity of population, the number of *colonias*, and the distance between *colonias* in each region provide unique challenges for service providers committed to assisting *colonia* residents. In this issue, we will be discussing the *colonias* in the El Paso County region.

According to the Texas Water Development Board and the Office of the Attorney General, there are almost 200 *colonias* located in El Paso County alone, with about 75 percent located in the southeastern part of the county.

The remaining *colonias* are located in two major areas — on the west side of the county nestled in the foot hills of the Franklin Mountains close to the New Mexico state line, and in the eastern-most part of the county.

Although a large portion of the *colonias* are located in one area, they are not clustered together, making service delivery a challenge. Furthermore, some *colonias*, such as those located in the San Elizario subdivision, are hidden away in the farmlands along the Rio Grande, making it difficult for families residing there to access services.

Medically Underserved Area Designation

While income levels of *colonia* residents are low and poverty levels high, El Paso County generally fairs better than other border counties. However, since 1994, parts of El Paso County have been designated as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA). MUA designation is based on the demographics of the area, which include the percentage of elderly 65-plus, poverty rate, infant

mortality, and ratio of primary care physicians per 1,000 residents.

Services and Outreach Programs

In order to help older adults access adequate and affordable health care services, the Rio Grande Area Agency on Aging (AAA) provides access and assistance services as well as a number of other supportive services through their contracted providers and vendors. Services may include nutrition (congregate and home delivered meals), benefits counseling, referrals, and health screenings.

The Senior Fund program, a collaborative effort between the *El Paso Times* newspaper and the AAA, helps low-income elderly citizens obtain basic services (e.g., durable equipment) not provided by private insurance, Social Security, Medicaid, or Medicare. It is the only charity of its kind in El Paso.

The AAA also participates in presentations and training sessions for residents and *promotoras* — community outreach workers who facilitate communication and understanding between residents and service providers. The Rio Grande AAA is the only entity within the community whose sole purpose is to serve older Texans. They are part of the Health and Human Services *Colonias Initiative* that targets six community centers.

Last year, more than 1,200 residents received more than \$450,000 in free dental services ranging from X-rays to dentures, root canals, and tooth extraction.

There are several other agencies that work together to increase the aging population's access to medical services. The Office of Border Affairs, the Health and Human Services Commission in collaboration with the Clinica Guadalupeana (a medical clinic funded by the Roman Catholic Church), the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, and Holy Spirit Catholic Church provide medical services to residents of the Agua Dulce and the surrounding *colonias*, an area that has a large number of older adults with diabetes and related disease.

Doctors Volunteer to Provide Services

Many physicians graciously volunteer their time to provide services to residents who would not otherwise have access to these services. Once a

year, *colonia* residents also have access to dental services through the Texas Mission of Mercy (TMOM). This yearly event provides over 100 dentists and 200 dental assistants and hygienists to assist all *colonia* residents.

Last year, more than 1,200 residents received more than \$450,000 in free dental services ranging from X-rays to dentures, root canals, and tooth extraction. The El Paso Lions Club and Prevent Blindness Texas collaboration continues to provide visual and hearing screenings to residents.

To date, over \$200,000 in services have been provided within a ten-month period. HHS agencies not only facilitate the provision of these services, but they supplement them through agency programs such as vision hearing screenings by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, or health fairs by the AAA and the Texas Department of Health.

Through efforts such as these and ongoing outreach, many older adults in *colonias* have the opportunity to age well. If services were not available, many would be forced to travel across the border to Mexico to receive health care services, or would simply do without. Efforts by the HHS *Colonias Initiative* have made a difference in the lives of many *colonia* elders in El Paso County.

For a free copy of Part 1, 2 or 3 of this series, contact ORCA.

Recent Rural Publications

Heart of Texas Wildlife Trail Maps

The maps, produced by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, are available for East and West Texas and include 336 sites to view wildlife. To order, call the Texas Cooperative Extension Bookstore at 888-900-2577, or visit <http://tcebookstore.org/browse.cfm?catid=170>.

The Devil is in the Details: Rural Sensitive Best Practices for Accountability Under No Child Left Behind

Released in January 2004, this report by Lorna Jimerson, EdD, reviews rural-sensitive state accountability plans in 15 states other than Texas. Available online at www.ruraledu.org/docs/devildetails.pdf

Produce Growers and Shippers Guide

The Texas Department of Agriculture's produce guide is available online, in print and on CD-ROM. Call 877-99GO-TEX, or visit www.picktexas.com.

EPA Report Links Water Quality with Smart Growth

The US Environmental Protection Agency recently published *Protecting Water Resources with Smart Growth*, a report intended to help communities, local governments, and state and regional planners protect their water resources and implement smart growth.

The 120-page report, which was developed for readers who are already familiar with the concept of smart growth, provides new ideas for protecting water resources, and includes 75 policies divided into two sections – Protecting Water Resources at the Regional Level, and Site-Level Protection and Mitigation Measures.

Examples and tips from smart growth communities across the country are included in the report as well as policy descriptions. A section called “issues to consider” accompanies the policy descriptions and is meant to help readers avoid problems experienced by other communities on the road to smart growth.

The goal of smart growth is not only to protect water quality, but also to develop communities in ways that support the economy and jobs; create diverse housing, transportation and commercial options; and protect public health and the environment.

Protecting Water Resources with Smart Growth is the latest in a series of reports on smart growth, including the EPA’s *Our Built and Natural Environments* and the International City/County Management Association’s *Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation, Why Smart Growth*, and *Best Development Practices*.

To receive a free copy of the report, email ncepimal@one.net or call 1-800-490-9198 and request EPA publication 231-R-04-002. The report and more information about smart growth are also available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth.

Source: US Environmental Protection Agency.

Rural Viability Index: A New Tool for Assessing Rural Communities

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

A new tool designed to provide local leaders and citizens a way to evaluate the status of a variety of elements within their community is now available thanks to the 2004 Capstone Students of The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University and ORCA.

The “Rural Viability Index: A Tool for Assessing Rural Communities” offers local officials and community residents the opportunity to review the existing status of their community and identify possible options for current and future community planning.

The Capstone Students developed the Index, which combined expertise from academic resources and practicing rural leaders. The Index, designed to identify and organize a thorough set of research specific to rural community sustainability, covers 10 key areas for consideration in the community viability planning process, including (in alphabetical order): Demographics, Economy, Education, Environment, Government, Health, Housing, Society and Culture, Technology, and Transportation.

In June, the ORCA Executive Committee recognized Dr. Deborah Kerr, the Capstone Student Advisor for the Index development project, for her guidance in the development of the Index. (See photo.)

“Dr. Kerr’s leadership and the efforts of the Capstone students have resulted in a totally innovative project that is unique in every way,” said Robt. J. “Sam” Tessen, MS, ORCA Executive Director. “This Index will assist so many communities and their citizens in kick-starting the planning process for their future.”

“Capstone projects are the culminating educational experience for our graduate students. They are real-world projects for real-world clients, providing real-world experiences for students and faculty,” said Richard A. Chilcoat, Dean and Holder of the Edward & Howard Kruse Chair at Texas A&M University. “They allow us to serve in substantive ways the state and the nation. I’m delighted to learn that the Capstone report for ORCA was valuable and informed decision-makers about future quality of life issues for the citizens of Texas.”

Contact ORCA for more information on the Rural Viability Index.



L-R: ORCA Executive Committee members, Jim Roberts of Lubbock (Lubbock County); Patrick Wallace of Athens (Henderson County); David Alders of Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches County); Carol Harrell of Jefferson (Marion County); William Jeter of Bryan (Brazos County); Capstone Advisor Dr. Deborah Kerr; ORCA Executive Committee members, Wallace Klussmann of Fredericksburg (Llano/Gillespie Counties); Nicki Harle of Baird (Callahan County); and Michael Waters of Abilene (Taylor County). Lydia Rangel Saenz, also a member of ORCA’s Executive Committee, is not pictured here.

Governor Perry Recognizes Community Development Week in Texas

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

On April 12, 2004, Governor Rick Perry proclaimed the week of April 12-18, 2004, Community Development Week in Texas. During the week, Texas joined the rest of the nation in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the passage of the National Community Development Act, which provides federal funding to eligible communities for the development of decent, safe and sanitary housing, suitable living environments, and economic opportunities to low- and moderate income people.

The declaration recognized the successes that have been achieved by the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which is funded by the US Department of Housing and Development. CDBG is the premier development tool for neighborhood stabilization, revitalization, economic development, and other critical community development needs. The program brings together residents, local officials, community development corporations, and community and business leaders in partnerships that benefit local communities.

Governor Perry encouraged Texans to join the Community Development Week events in their communities. "I encourage all Texans to recognize the achievements of the CDBG program and those who have worked diligently, positively impacting the growth and prosperity of our great state," he said in his proclamation.

ORCA administers the small cities CDBG program in Texas, which is also known as the Texas Community Development Program. "We are proud of the accomplishments of the Texas Community Development Program and greatly appreciate Governor Perry's recognizing the Program with this proclamation," noted William Jeter, ORCA Executive Committee Chair. "This week, we acknowledge and commend all the cities, counties, and organizations who partner with us to achieve an improved quality of life through the development of their communities."

ORCA's Picture of the Quarter!



A colossal, smiling squirrel welcomes shoppers to Aunt Aggie De's Pralines in Sinton (San Patricio County), Texas.

ORCA Executive Committee

William Jeter, Chair
Bryan (Brazos County)
713-688-6262

David Alders
Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches County)
936-569-1284

Nicki Harle
Baird (Callahan County)
325-676-0329

Carol Harrell, Vice Chair
Jefferson (Marion County)
903-665-2700

Wallace Klussmann
Fredericksburg (Gillespie/Llano Counties)
325-247-3233

Jim Roberts
Lubbock (Lubbock County)
806-741-4200

Lydia Rangel Saenz
Carrizo Springs (Dimmit County)
830-876-9779

Patrick Wallace
Athens (Henderson County)
903-676-1191

Michael Waters, Secretary
Abilene (Taylor County)
325-670-2201

The Executive Committee encourages rural Texans to directly participate in ORCA's leadership process from the local level. In addition to meeting in Austin, the Executive Committee has met in the following communities: Albany (Shakelford County); Alpine (Brewster County); Big Spring (Howard County); Brenham (Washington County); Carrizo Springs (Dimmit County); Childress (Childress County); Fredericksburg (Gillespie County); Jefferson (Marion County); Kerrville (Kerr County); Kountze (Hardin County); Monahans (Ward and Winkler counties); Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches); Portland (Nueces and San Patricio counties); Stephenville (Erath County).

ORCA's Mission:

"To assist rural Texans who seek to enhance their quality of life by facilitating, with integrity, the use of the resources of our state so that sustained economic growth will enrich the rural Texas experience for the benefit of all."

Center for Community Support Helps Rural Texans Win Grants

By Kash Krinhop, Martha Garcia and Charis Rutherford, Center for Community Support

The stakes are high for rural communities, which often depend solely on grants to fund projects as vital as infrastructure, health care, emergency services and education. But critical need is not enough to trigger a flood of assistance.

Competition for grant funding can be intense. Funding programs want to invest grant money wisely, so organizations must be able to tell their story and explain why they are the best place for the program to invest its money.

Leveling the Playing Ground for Small Organizations

Small communities that frequently miss out on funding when they have to compete with larger, and better-funded groups are the focus of the Center for Community Support. The CCS levels the playing field by helping these organizations research grant opportunities and produce proposals that have a better chance of competing with the grants submitted by larger entities.

As they search for funding, small communities and non-profit organizations often don't realize that they are communicating with professional grant reviewers from all areas of the country. They must compete with larger entities who are able to devote copious resources to developing a grant, often hiring professional researchers and grant writing teams to assist them.

"Being a small organization, the DCPL does not have a paid staff to write grants," said Richard Dobie III, Capital Campaign Manager of the Dimmit County Public Library. "We often felt at a disadvantage. The CCS grant writing program put us on an 'even footing' with those organizations who retain professional grant writers."

The CCS assists groups by locating funding programs and, when necessary, helping with the finer points of writing the actual proposal—and charges them nothing.

The CCS operates out of Texas A&M University in College Station and employs an experienced, multi-disciplinary team to assist groups such as hospitals, school districts, youth and health outreach groups, law enforcement, fire and emergency services and small towns that lack a strong tax base.

Because the CCS is affiliated with Texas A&M, it can draw on a bank of public policy research and data available through the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI), substantially expanding the ability of non-profits to access sophisticated university resources. While the CCS helps with data, technical consulting, and proposal writing assistance, the communities must have a strong dedication to their projects, know what they want to accomplish, identify problems and solutions, and be willing to spend long hours working to achieve their goals.

Success Stories

The CCS has created many success stories and helped fund vital community services, including hospitals and emergency response systems. With the help of the CCS in 2002 and 2003, Texas fire and emergency service organizations were awarded more than \$1 million in federal grant money for rural fire departments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Office of Domestic Preparedness Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. The CCS has even helped worthy groups that had been denied funding on numerous occasions.

"Our city had applied six times to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection grant and out of the six times, only once were we granted," said Ricardo Reyes, Fire Chief of Rio Grande City. "This last time, we applied with the help of CCS, we got granted, and to our surprise, our city was the second highest city granted. Their expertise in this field is valuable."

A successful grant can have a profound impact on the quality of living in a small community. In the case of Kerr County, Families and Literacy Inc., a non-profit organization that facilitates lifelong learning through adult education and parenting classes, was able to continue providing services with minimal costs for the participants as a result of assistance from the CCS. Families and Literacy Inc. received \$75,000 in grants from the Hal and Charlie Peterson and Cailloux Foundations in 2002.

Getting Started

The CCS recommends that interested organizations first register with the center on the Web or in writing, then determine what project they want to pursue and contact the CCS for a possible funding search and other grant assistance services. For web registration and additional information visit the CCS website at <http://ccs.tamu.edu> or contact the CCS by phone at 979-458-3239 or email ccs@ppri.tamu.edu.

info@organization.com

General Addresses Keep Emails On Target

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

Access to timely information often makes a big difference to rural Texans looking for financial and educational opportunities. Missed deadlines due to lack or delayed information can be frustrating. However, creating streamlined communication routes can increase efficiency and enhance response time. Establishing a generic organization email address, such as orca@orca.state.tx.us, rather than relying on staff-specific email addresses, such as john.doe@organization.net, is an efficient and effective way to ensure an organization will be kept "in the loop" with timely communications.

Staff-specific email addresses jeopardize an organization's ability to receive important information in the event the staff member becomes unavailable due to vacation, illness, or employment termination. With a generic email address, the organization is sure to receive all emails. In addition, those providing the information will be less likely to delete the organization from their distribution list because there will not be undeliverable emails returned to the sender. All the more reason to set up a generic email address for your organization today!

BPL Blazes Trail Across Rural Texas

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

BPL (broadband over power line), the technology with the potential to bring high-speed Internet to remote rural communities, touched down in Texas this June and is being tested in three pilot programs in Blanco (Blanco County), Burnet (Burnet County) and Weimar (Colorado County).

BPL systems use existing medium voltage power lines to deliver high-speed Internet access that is comparable to cable modem and DSL (digital subscriber line) services. In theory, BPL promises a competitive alternative to DSL and cable, more efficient power management capabilities for the utility companies, and broadband for rural Americans. Because BPL transmits radio frequency energy over the power lines, widespread use of BPL systems could cause interference for licensed radio services such as public safety and emergency services, amateur radio operators, federal government agencies, aeronautical users, researchers and others.

On February 23, 2004, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) that cleared the way for BPL. The FCC believes that technological improvements have made BPL

unlikely to cause interference. On June 4, 2004, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) filed comments with the FCC including technical guidance to prevent or reduce interference from BPL systems. The report is available at www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fccfilings/2004/BPLComments_06042004.pdf.

Opportunity for Rural Communities?

As far as infrastructure is concerned, access to BPL is, in theory, unlimited—where there is electricity, BPL equipment can be installed and service can be delivered. However, the question of commercial viability in rural areas and the possibility of interference for licensed radio users could halt deployment of BPL.

Broadband Horizons, currently the only provider of BPL in Texas, set up the 90-day pilot programs to test the technology. If all goes well, the first public availability will be later this year.

“This opportunity is not just about broadband internet,” said Larry McClung, managing director at Broadband Horizons. “The utilities benefit by offering advanced services and load control. And of course, broadband access is a big plus for the citizens of rural communities.”

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expressed concerns about interference in a December 2003 letter to the FCC. FEMA Undersecretary Michael Brown sent a second letter in January 2004 expressing FEMA’s belief that certain rules for BPL could reduce interference.

Gerry Craeger, licensed by the FCC as an amateur radio operator since 1967, said that the possibility of interference from BPL is cause for concern because emergency officials often rely on amateur radio operators to provide communication services during disasters if regular lines of communication are damaged.

“If there is a major event in the state of Texas, the high frequency spectrum is where we pass the bulk of communications,” said Craeger.

David Vaughn, Assistant Finance Director of the city of Burnet, is monitoring the pilot program in his community. He said the city is excited about the new technology, but is waiting to see whether the business plan offered by Broadband Horizons will be a good fit for the community.

“They (Broadband Horizons) are trying to be extremely competitive,” said Vaughn. “We have cable and DSL in some areas so it would be a competitive offer.”

Texas Medical Association Resolution Aimed at Training Doctors in Texas

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

The Texas Medical Association, which represents more than 39,500 physicians and medical students, has passed a resolution to address the shortage of physicians practicing in Texas.

Dr. Roland Goertz, chairman of the TMA Committee on Physician Distribution and Health Care Access, and Dr. Charles Bailey Jr., past TMA president, authored the resolution, which calls for the American Medical Association and state Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to eliminate barriers that keep doctors from training in Texas. To meet increased demand for physician care the resolution calls for:

- Eliminating outdated caps on the number of funded Medicare graduate medical education training slots.
- Leveling the playing field for Texas teaching hospitals affected by geographically inequitable Medicare graduate medical education funding.
- Stabilizing Medicare graduate medical education and Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital funding.

The TMA says cuts to state funding, inadequate federal funding for graduate medical education and an aging population are all factors contributing to the state’s shortage of physicians. In addition, health care demographer Dr. Richard Cooper, Director of the Health Policy Institute at Medical College of Wisconsin, cited poor planning as the cause of what is likely to be a long-term shortage of physicians.

“In some ways its too late to turn the tide for today, and tomorrow, and for the next 10 years. There’s not a lot we can do that’s going to change anything 10 years from now,” said Dr. Cooper in a TMA radio broadcast. “We’re suffering from the failure of our predecessors to have planned appropriately for today. We have to plan appropriately today for the generation that follows. So, yes it’s too late for now, but its not too late to do it for my children and grandchildren.”

The Texas Public Policy foundation reported that in 2002 there were 64 general practitioners available for every 100,000 Texans. In most other states there are 120 to 135 general practitioners for every 100,000 people. For more information about the TMA resolution visit www.texmed.org.



Funding Opportunities

A Sampling of Opportunities Available to Rural Texans

ORCA Funding Opportunities

Outstanding Rural Scholar Recognition Program – Rural community organizations may nominate individuals pursuing careers in health care to receive competitive forgiveness loans from the Outstanding Rural Scholar Recognition Program. ORCA matches sponsor funding to assist rural communities in “growing their own” health care professionals so that scholars may pursue studies in health care and serve in the communities that sponsored them.

The application deadline is September 17, 2004. For more information, contact ORCA or email ddarnell@orca.state.tx.us.

Current Funding Resources

Rural Health Network Development Grant Program – Networks of three or more healthcare providers in rural areas may apply to the US Department of Health and Human Services for grants to overcome the fragmentation and vulnerability of providers in rural areas. The program is designed for organizations that wish to further ongoing collaborative relationships to integrate systems of care administratively, clinically, financially, and/or technologically.

The due date for applications is September 20, 2004. The announcement number is HRSA-05-002. For more information contact Kasey Farrell at 301-443-0835, or kfarrell@hrsa.gov.

Enhancing the Prosperity of Small Farms and Rural Agricultural Communities – The USDA National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program will provide grants of up to \$500,000 to organizations that develop research, education and extension projects to better understand the economic, social, biological and environmental components important to small farms and rural economic development.

The due date for applications is October 5, 2004. For information contact Diana Jerkins, National Program Leader of Competitive Programs, at djerkins@csrees.usda.gov, or by phone at 202-401-6996, or fax at 202-401-6488. Applicants should reference USDA-GRANTS-062104-001.

Ongoing Funding Opportunity

USDA Community Facilities Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program – The US Department of Agriculture accepts applications on an ongoing basis. The program offers direct and guaranteed loans and grants to construct, enlarge or improve over 80 different types of community facilities for health care, public safety and public services.

For more information, contact Deputy Administrator, Community Programs, Rural Housing Service, Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 20250-3222, or call 202-720-1490 or visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/cf/non_profit_cf.htm.

Broadband for Rural Communities

The Community Connect Broadband Program Grant – The US Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service, is offering \$9 million in grant funds to connect essential community facilities to broadband transmission services in rural, economically-challenged communities where no broadband service exists.

The grant is meant to connect police and fire departments, local government, hospitals, libraries, schools, rural residents and businesses to broadband services. Funds may also be used for community centers that provide residents with free access to broadband services.

Applications must be received by September 13, 2004. For more information visit www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/commconnect.htm, or contact Ken Chandler at 202-720-0800.

Funding for People with Developmental Disabilities

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities – TCDD will fund up to five projects to develop peer-to-peer training for self-advocates led by people with developmental disabilities. Priority will be given to projects in the Texas Panhandle, East Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, far West Texas and rural areas. Grant recipients will provide training and direct support and technical assistance to self-advocates. Up to \$100,000 per project per year is available for up to three years. The application deadline is Sept. 6, 2004. Visit www.txddc.state.tx.us, to download an application, or contact Joanna Cordry at 512-437-5410 or at Joanna.Cordry@tcdd.state.tx.us.

Got a Good Story to Share?

Do you have a cool story to share with the world, where one of your projects really made a difference in peoples'/communities' lives?

Then you should consider submitting it to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for publication on HUD's website.

We would love to see rural areas and small communities get their fair share of attention!

For more information, call 202-708-1112 or visit the “Daily Message” at <http://www.hud.gov/news/focusarc.cfm> or visit “Good Stories” at <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf20/index.cfm>.



Learning Opportunities

A Sampling of Opportunities Available to Rural Texans

Conferences, Events Around Texas

Groundwater Leasing Conference – The Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas A&M University Texas Cooperative Extension and the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service will host the “Landowner and Citizen Information on Groundwater Leasing, Marketing and Sales” conference on Sept. 14, 2004, at the College of Forestry Conference Center at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches.

To register, call Kathryn Nachlinger at 979-845-5419 or register online at <http://texaswater.tamu.edu>. For additional information, contact Val Silvy at 979-845-2027.

Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTA) will host its Mountain Central Conference 2004 on October 22-24 at the Marriott Town Square Hotel in Sugar Land, Texas. The event is TOTA’s annual educational conference and business meeting. For pre-registration, return forms to TOTA by October 1, 2004. For more information contact TOTA at 512-454-8682. To download a registration form visit www.tota.org/mcc.html.

Web Cast Training: Arsenic Rules

Training for Arsenic Rules – The Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water is offering Web cast training sessions for arsenic rules. Designed for state personnel, but open to technical assistance providers and system operators, the two-hour training sessions offer real-world experience through case studies. For information on viewing the Web cast, contact the state coordinator, Debra Cedra at 512-239-6045.

Web Cast 3: Arsenic Rule
September 15, 2004

Web Cast 4: Arsenic Rule
October 20, 2004

Small Business Development Training and Counseling

The Small Business Development Center program provides no-cost and low-cost training and individual counseling to help small business owners develop management skills and improve their chances for success. There are 68 Small Business Development Centers and sub-centers located throughout Texas.

For more information, contact Texas Economic Development at 1700 N. Congress Ave., PO Box 12728, Austin, Texas 78711-2728, or call 512-936-0100. To find out if there is a center or subcenter near you, visit the following sites:

North Texas SBDC, Dallas
www.billpriestinstitute.org/ntsbdc.htm

Northwest Texas SBDC, Lubbock
www.ntsbdc.org/

University of Houston SBDC, Houston
www.sbdc.uh.edu

South-West Texas Border SBDC, San Antonio
<http://sbdc.utsa.edu>

Small Business Development Centers
<http://www.txed.state.tx.us/guide/search/s-sbdc.cfm> – search page

Texas Economic Development
www.txed.state.tx.us/smallbusiness/sbdc.htm

Grant Workshop

Grant Writing USA and the Iola Volunteer Fire Department will offer a two-day grant writing workshop in Iola on September 9-10, 2004. The workshop is for experienced and beginning grant writers. Tuition is \$349 and online reservations are required. For more information, please visit <http://GrantWritingUSA.com>, or contact Amber Winery at amber@grantwritingusa.com or 702-739-9221.

Grant Writing Training

Governor’s Office State Grants Team – The Governor’s Office State Grants Team provides grant proposal writing training workshops that are designed to familiarize novice and intermediate-level proposal writers with aspects of proposal writing: funding research (federal, state, and private), how to plan projects that meet agency goals and constituent needs, and the “how-to’s” on writing successful grant proposals.

Training will provide the tools to:

- Locate appropriate funding sources to fit program needs
- Understand proposal writing terminology
- Facilitate proposal development activities
- Design a proposal to fit their agency’s needs
- Define program objectives
- Prepare a proposal budget
- Plan a program evaluation

Upcoming workshops:

September 14-15, 2004 – Sweetwater
Contact: Bridgett Christie, 325-236-8230

September 28-29, 2004 – Houston
Contact: Gwendolyn Mami, PhD, 713-313-7457

October 5-6, 2004 – Odessa
Contact: Leticia Gonzalez-Reinke, 432-552-2108

ORCA is teaming up with the State Grants Team from the Governor’s Office to offer the following training workshops. To register, or for more information on the workshops hosted by ORCA, contact ORCA. *There will be a registration fee for each workshop to cover facility and other costs.*

October 19-21, 2004 – Levelland

December 7-9, 2004 – Nacogdoches

January 11-13, 2005 – Fort Stockton

February 8-10, 2005 – Alice

For more information on the Governor’s Office State Grants Team, call 512-463-8465 or visit www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/stategrants.

Cost-Effective Brush Control in Pasture, Fencing

Get the Upper Hand with Herbicides and Smart Application

By Rick Hirsch, County Extension Agent

Left alone, encroaching brush can rob you of land value. In the wrong place, it can even degrade wildlife habitat. But you can gain and keep the upper hand on brush. Cost-effective herbicide treatments can be matched to your brush problem, equipment, labor and time. Consider these options.

High-volume foliar (leaf) sprays are excellent for fencerows or scattered strands of brush. With this method, you hand-spray a diluted herbicide solution directly on the leaves until the entire plant is covered and dripping wet. The method works best on trees and brush less than eight feet tall.

Spray when the brush has turned dark green and is still actively growing, usually late spring and early summer. Power sprayers are recommended for high volume foliar application, but pump-up and backpack sprayers also work.

Choose herbicides based on the species to control. Mixtures of brush control herbicides usually broaden the spectrum of control.

Low volume basal (stem) sprays work well on smooth-barked trees less than 6 inches in basal diameter. Wet all sides of the stem, but not to the point of runoff. Pump-up garden sprayers

work fine, but backpack sprayers are more convenient for larger jobs. With the directed spray, there's little chance for drill, and it's effective any time of year, including the dormant season.

The only time low volume basal sprays shouldn't be used is when snow or water surround the stem. Low volume basal has proven effective on bois d'arc, eastern persimmon, honey locust, mesquite, oaks and many other species.

With the directed spray, there's little chance for drill, and it's effective any time of year, including the dormant season.

Streamline basal (stem) sprays work well with similar equipment on slick-barked stems less than 4 inches in basal diameter. The mix is applied with a straight-stream nozzle in a 6-inch wide band completely around the stem. The band should be on slick, young bark 12 to 24 inches above the ground.

Slick bark allows easy penetration by the herbicide. Streamline basal is effective on greenbrier, hackberry, mesquite, winged elm,

Texas persimmon, yaupon and other species. The technique can be used any time of year, although the ideal time is when the plant is actively growing.

Broadcast foliar application may be an option for some managers. Though the level of brush control may be less with broadcast spraying than with individual plant treatment, broadcast usually becomes cost-effective when brush densities get above 150 to 300 plants per acre.

Plant conditions and spray coverage are critical with broadcast treatment. Optimum timing will depend on the target species. If the brush isn't too tall, boom sprayers generally will provide better coverage than cluster nozzles.

Control may be reduced if the brush has been shredded. Shredding often creates more root mass than the above-ground foliage needed to absorb the herbicide. Retreatment may be necessary.

Reprinted with permission from the July 1, 2004 issue of *Country World*.

Key to Safe Driving on Rural Roads: Wear Your Seatbelt

The US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration recommends that rural Americans wear their seatbelts. The simple act of wearing a seatbelt could prevent an estimated 5,500 deaths and 130,000 serious injuries every year. More than 58 percent of fatal traffic accidents happen in rural areas. These accidents are more likely to involve extreme terrain, faster speeds, alcohol and slower EMS response times.

Consequently, accidents that happen in rural areas are twice as likely to be fatal, compared to accidents in urban areas.

The US Department of Transportation sites excessive speed on two-lane rural roads as a cause of many fatal crashes. Two-thirds of single-vehicle run-off-road crashes occur in rural areas as drivers swerve off the road and strike a fixed object or slide into a ditch.

By 2010, the US Department of Transportation hopes to reduce truck crash-related fatalities by 50 percent and, by 2008, reduce crash-related fatalities and serious injuries by 20 percent.

For more information, contact the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/rural/ruralamerica/3promoting.html>.

Source: US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.

Tips for Safe Driving on Rural Roads

- 1) Don't drink and drive.
- 2) Always wear your seatbelt.
- 3) Always have passengers wear a seatbelt.
- 4) Do not exceed the speed limit.
- 5) Reduce speed in poor weather conditions.

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ORCA Delivers \$54,346,764 to Rural Texas Localities in 2nd Quarter

Community Development Block Grant Awards Total \$48,778,573

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

In May 2004, ORCA awarded 198 grants totaling \$48,778,573 to rural cities and counties across the state for infrastructure, public facility improvements, housing rehabilitation and planning and capacity building activities. The awards are the result of biennial competitions for the Community Development, Housing Rehabilitation, and Planning and Capacity Building Funds, which are part of the agency's federally funded Texas Community Development Program (TCDP).

In June, ORCA awarded an additional 15 grants totaling \$3,000,886 to rural cities and counties for infrastructure and public facility improvements.

The June awards were made to applicants who scored high enough to be recommended for partial or full funding from the remaining ("marginal") funds in the agency's 2004 TCDP Community Development Fund Regional Allocation, which the agency awarded in May 2004.

Colonia Economically Distressed Area Program Awards Total \$500,000

In June 2004, ORCA awarded a \$500,000 grant to Webb County for first-time sanitary sewer service to Colonia Tanquecitos I. The funds were awarded through ORCA's Colonia Economically Distressed Area Program (EDAP), which is a partnership between ORCA and the Texas Water Development Board.

Critical Access Hospital Feasibility Study Awards Total \$95,000

Since April 2004, ORCA has awarded grants totaling \$95,000 to 19 rural hospitals. Each hospital will use their \$5,000 grant to perform a Financial and Operational Feasibility Study for a Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation for the facility.

Emergency Services Equipment, Training Grant Awards Total \$244,110

In May 2004, ORCA awarded \$244,110 to rural Texas first responders for the acquisition of Automated Emergency Defibrillators (AEDs) and related Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and AED training. The funds will provide for the distribution of 122 AED units, which are portable devices that provide an electrical shock capable of restoring the normal heart rhythm of cardiac arrest victims. A total of 71 organizations also received funding for CPR and AED training.

Rural Health Facility Capital Improvement Loan Fund (CILF) Awards Total \$939,962

Since April 2004, ORCA has awarded \$939,962 to 20 rural hospitals in the state. The grants were made through the agency's Rural Health Facility Capital Improvement Loan Fund (CILF), and are to be used for making capital improvements to existing health facilities, constructing new health facilities, or purchasing capital equipment, including information systems hardware and software.

Medicare Boosts Payments for Ambulances

On June 30, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued an interim final rule with comment period that will increase Medicare payments to ambulance services by \$840 million between July 2004 and December 31, 2009. The rule, which implements the ambulance provisions contained in Section 414 of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 ("Medicare Modernization Act" or "MMA"), will benefit both hospital-based providers and freestanding suppliers of ground ambulance services to Medicare beneficiaries.

All ground ambulance services will benefit from the new rule, which provides urban ambulance services with a one percent increase in payments, while rural ambulances will receive a two percent increase. This increase applies to services furnished between July 1, 2004 and December 31, 2006. For services rendered between July 1, 2004 and December 31, 2008, both urban and rural ambulances will receive a 25 percent increase in their mileage rates for all miles greater than the 50th mile while carrying a beneficiary.

CMS is establishing nine regions to ease the transition to the national fee schedule. For each region, CMS will establish a floor amount for the ground ambulance base rate. This floor will not lower payment rates for any area, but will increase payments by as much as 38.6 percent for ambulances in the five regions that would otherwise have been paid at lower rates. This provision will be effective for services from July 1, 2004 through December 31, 2009.

Finally, the interim final rule implements a "super-rural bonus," that expressly benefits the most rural areas for services furnished between July 1, 2004 and December 31, 2009. This bonus will increase the base rate by 22.6 percent when ambulance transport originates in a rural area determined by the Secretary to be in the lowest 25th percentile of all rural populations arrayed by population density.

"This new rule improves payments for all ground ambulance services, and it's especially important for ensuring the continued viability of ambulance services in rural areas as they make the transition to the national fee schedule," said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD.

Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services press release, dated June 30, 2004. Press release available at www.cms.hhs.gov/media/?media=pressr.

Tourism: Good for Texas, Great for Rural Texas

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

The economic development benefits of tourism may be one of the best kept secrets around. According to a February 2004 report from the Office of the Governor's Texas Tourism department, there are numerous benefits of tourism, particularly to the local communities at the center of the industry.

Why is tourism so good for local communities and rural communities? There are a host of reasons why the travel industry stands out as a winning strategy for economic growth.

Tourism is an export-oriented industry, meaning it brings money from outside the community into the local economy. Other reasons include robust job creation, outside sources of tax revenues, ample funding opportunities, and unlimited growth potential.

Job Creation

The travel industry is labor-intensive, producing numerous entry-level positions, opportunities for small business ownership and entrepreneurial opportunities. The Partnership of Southeast Texas reported in July that the Beaumont/Port Arthur Metropolitan Area had gained 2,000 new Leisure and Hospitality jobs since January 2002. The travel industry produced 900 new jobs in that area even as all other sectors shed a combined total of 1,400 jobs since May 2003.

Besides the potential for substantial job creation, tourism can benefit communities by improving the quality of life for residents. Developing the high-quality visitor attractions such as recreational facilities, natural resources, cultural events, and infrastructure needed to entertain tourists can often improve the quality of life for residents.

Visitors Pay the Taxes

Tourism generates a favorable proportion of tax revenue because the taxes paid by visitors are channeled directly to local governments in host communities. In addition, the travel industry does not usually require large public subsidies compared to other industries.

Support and Funding Opportunities

Rural communities and tourism are like the peanut butter and chocolate of Texas – the two

must get together. Two programs are devoted to the support and funding of tourism in rural communities.

Texas Yes! is a member-based program sponsored by the Texas Department of Agriculture that helps rural communities generate economic growth through tourism, job creation and business development.

Texas Yes! recently concluded a summer workshop series called "Bootstrap Marketing" for Rural Texas communities and organizations looking at tourism to boost their economies.

The workshops provided step-by-step instructions from high-profile experts on how to position a community for tourism, find sponsors, work with a tight budget, gain community support, evaluate a town's potential to succeed as a tourism destination and work with state agencies to develop a thriving tourist trade. For more information contact the agency at 866-4TEX-YES or visit www.TexasYes.org.

The Texas Department of Agriculture's new Hometown STARS (Supporting Tourism and Rural Success) program helps rural communities fund projects to market their communities to tourists.

In April the TDA awarded a total of \$127,963 in matching reimbursements to 15 rural communities in the first round of funding for the new program. The Hometown STARS program is a grant-funded program initiated by Governor Perry to assist rural communities.

Stable Source of Growth

Finally, tourism is a strong and stable source of growth; demand for leisure and travel is expected to continue to increase as household earnings rise. The travel industry contributed \$17 billion to the Texas Gross State Product in 2001, 72 percent of which went straight into employees' pockets.

Travel industry employees then turned around and spent their paychecks, generating \$20.9 billion of Gross State Product in addition to the original \$17 billion contribution.

Awards, Recognitions Around Rural Texas

The El Paso Collaborative for Community and Economic Development received the 2004 Texas Rural Best Award from Texas Rural Communities, Inc. (TRC). The \$10,000 grant is awarded annually by TRC to an innovative program benefiting rural Texans. The El Paso Collaborative received the award for its comic-book style financial education materials for colonia residents.

In May 2004 the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs received the "Rural Partner" award from the Association of Rural Communities in Texas. TDHCA received the award in recognition of its work with rural communities to address affordable housing issues during the 78th Texas Legislative regular session.

Agriculture Commissioner Susan Combs was recently honored at the TIME / ABC News Summit on Obesity for her work to fight obesity. Texas was recognized as being the first state in the nation to implement a far-reaching statewide school nutrition policy and for its innovative work to combat childhood obesity. The policy limits the sale of foods with minimal nutritional value in elementary and middle schools across the state.

Dr. Sidney Ontai of Plainview (Hale County) received the 2004 Marion Zetzman award in July from the Texas Rural Health Association for his work to improve access to treatment for remote communities in West Texas and the Panhandle. Dr. Ontai collaborated with the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's School of Pharmacy and Center for Telemedicine to develop a telemedicine system so that residents of Turkey (Hall County) and Quitaque (Briscoe County) would not have to drive two hours to visit a doctor.

Rural Texans Share Ideas at Annual Summit

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

A diverse group of more than 200 government officials, community leaders, rural stakeholders, and rural Texans gathered at the all-rural Texas Summit in New Braunfels, Texas, keen to discuss everything that ails rural Texas and share success stories about their communities. The Office of Rural Community Affairs hosted the second-annual event on April 27-28, 2004.

A panel of five Texas legislators, including Representative Robby Cook of Eagle Lake (District 48), Chairman Rick Hardcastle of Vernon (District 68), Representative Warren Chisum of Pampa (District 88), Representative Mark Homer of Paris (District 3), and Representative Tommy Merritt of Longview (District 7), provided a legislative overview.

“The opportunity for a comprehensive rural summit continues to bring together a diverse representation of rural leaders and citizens from all across our state,” said Robt. J. “Sam” Tessen, MS, ORCA’s Executive Director.

Education and Health Care

The effort to fix public school finance was noted as a key issue affecting rural Texas. Changes to the tax structure and the great number of unfounded mandates passed to balance the state’s budget are

undermining the efforts of rural communities to develop stronger economies because schools are often their primary employers. A breakdown in the school system could lead to urban migration, another critical issue for rural communities.

Breakout Sessions focused on rural health care issues. In one session, Ken May from the East Texas Medical Center of Gilmer (Upshur County) discussed physician recruitment as a way to revive hospital sustainability, and Molly Hurst from Grimes St. Joseph Health Center in Navasota (Grimes County) discussed creative financing methods.

During another session presenters discussed methods for finding and evaluating economic solutions for health care needs. Mike Hare and Evan Moore from De Leon/Comanche Hospital in Comanche County explained how two failing hospitals were able to consolidate into one viable hospital. Ella R. Helms of Fisher County Hospital in Rotan, Texas, discussed the integration of economic development and healthcare services through a holistic approach. Economic development, promoting volunteerism, and funding community growth were also topics up for discussion at the summit.

Success Stories

Despite challenges, rural Texas communities that have discovered their own paths to success are cropping up all over the state. Towns such as La Feria (Cameron County), Littlefield (Lamb County), Fort Stockton (Pecos County), Carthage (Panola County), Crowell (Foard County) and Cuero (DeWitt County) have developed their natural resources, encouraged entrepreneurship and promoted their unique cultural identities to jump start economic growth. They shared their experiences at the summit.

“It’s exciting to see folks who share one another’s issues find new ways to learn and work together,” noted Tessen. “Their positive effort shows that the future of rural communities is in good hands.”



Chairman Rick Hardcastle of Vernon discusses rural community issues at the all-rural Texas Summit in New Braunfels, Texas.

Who Visits Rural Texas? Big Spenders!

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

Across the state, tourists spend about \$2 billion a year as they travel to rural communities to visit family, enjoy outdoor recreational activities, attend festivals and fairs, and conduct business. In 1999, overnight leisure travelers to rural Texas spent an average of \$54.89 per person, compared to the \$190 per day, per person average spent state-wide in 2002 by overnight business travelers.

Although business travelers usually visit urban destinations and tend to spend more per person than the leisure travelers who frequent rural communities, rural Texas still gets its share of big spenders.

People who visit rural communities often come to hunt, fish, hike, camp, view wildlife and enjoy the natural resources still available in abundance in rural Texas. A 2001 Fish and Wildlife Service survey found that the Texas economy benefited greatly from wild-life recreation, which generated \$4.7 billion and 96,700 jobs.

Sources: *Nature Tourism in Texas*, available at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/tourism/pdf/natureTourismInTexas.pdf; *Rural Texas In Transition*, available at <http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/rural/6newpaths.html>; *Travel to Rural Texas*, available at www.travel.state.tx.us/tourism/special/ruralpre/RuralTexasReport.pdf. Additional sources available at www.travel.state.tx.us: *Economic Significance of the Texas Travel Industry*, *2002 Travel to Texas Report* and *Travel Trends Report Summary*.

Web-Based Program Helps Rice Farmers Predict Crop Development

By Jay Cockrell, Texas A&M University

Current low commodity prices and high input costs mean rice farmers must simultaneously cut production costs and maximize yield potential. Since the average Texas rice farm is 500 acres, producers often face the cost of hiring additional help. Fortunately for these farmers, technology can transform a farmer's toolbox to include a cutting-edge forecasting machine.

Using any standard home computer with Internet connection, rice farmers can now access a Web-based program called the Rice Development Advisory (RiceDevA), which is designed to help them track crop growth and development.

Created at the Texas A&M University System Research and Extension Center in Beaumont, the program is user-friendly with advanced options for creating, running and displaying field growth forecasts for different rice varieties in the Texas Rice Belt.

According to Dr. Ted Wilson, director at the Beaumont center, the program is a useful tool for rice farmers, even those with very little computer experience.

"The pop-up menus and fill-in-the-blank windows walk you through in a step-by-step fashion to input all the necessary information," Wilson said. "Once the raw data is loaded, the farmer can log in as often as they want to check on the progress of their fields."

Based on the variety, location, planting date and weather data, RiceDevA can tell farmers when the rice is likely to reach certain stages, such as tillering, panicle development or full heading.

Since the timing of fertilizer applications for rice production is so critical, the RiceDevA can be like another pair of eyes in the field, alerting farmers to apply nitrogen for maximum effectiveness. For added flexibility, RiceDevA allows farmers to choose weather station data or add in their own data from personal weather stations on their farms.

Scientists at the Beaumont center have gone a step further and are working to help farmers predict crop yields. The team is developing a Web-based version of the Rice Cultivar Selection Program (RiceCSP),

which has been proven to accurately predict rice crop growth stages and crop yields.

It accounts for changes in crop development due to temperatures, rainfall, solar radiation, soil type, fertilizer application, water management, planting density, row spacing and other factors. Scheduled for release in spring 2006, RiceCSP will increase users' options to manage and predict their rice crops.

According to Wilson, the team is just gearing up. "As we continue to increase our knowledge and understanding of the rice cropping system through our research, we are also realizing the increasing importance of extracting and integrating knowledge in agronomy, physiology, ecology, entomology and economics into a system that is user-friendly and easily accessible," Wilson said. "Such an integrated system would greatly help rice producers and consultants in managing their crop production."

Visit <http://beaumont.tamu.edu/RiceDevA> for more information.

Rural Texas at Forefront of Renewable Energy Effort

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

The state of Texas has taken proactive steps to establish renewable energy sources – wind, solar, biomass and geothermal energy – as contenders in the energy arena. Texas' Renewable Energy Standard (RES) calls for 2,000 megawatts of new renewable capacity to be built by 2009. The state has already met half of that goal, with much of the capacity coming from rural communities where the wind, agricultural waste and sun needed for renewable energy production are abundant.

In 2002, renewable energy sources supplied 1.3% of the state's total electric generating capacity. A report by The Wind Coalition, presented to the

Texas Energy Planning Council in June 2004, stated that wind energy has created 2,500 jobs statewide and contributed \$11.6 million to local schools. And, according to the Union for Concerned Scientists' report on Texas' RES, "Tripling US use of biomass energy could provide as much as \$20 billion in new income for farmers and rural communities."

Wind energy producers across the nation are struggling because the US Congress failed to extend a tax credit that provides 1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour to utilities. On June 23, 2004, Representative Jim Nussle of Iowa introduced HR 4652, The Energy Policy Act of 2004. The bill provides tax credits for wind, ethanol, biodiesel, manure and small ethanol producers.

Support for Rural Texas

The Rural Alliance for Renewable Energy (RARE) is a group of federal and state agencies, research organizations, grain production associations, privately held companies and public entities dedicated to helping rural Texas communities develop their renewable energy resources. Through forums and expo events held across the state, RARE informs rural leaders and citizens about

opportunities in renewable energy. On October 15-16, 2004, RARE will hold a forum at the Corpus Christi Holiday Inn Airport & Conference Center to provide information on small-scale wind, biodiesel and ethanol, solar electricity and geothermal heat-pumps. Visit www.treia.org/rare.htm or contact Russel Smith at 512-345-5446 for more information.

New ORCA Staff Member

The Comptroller of Public Accounts, State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) will provide half of the funding for the first state employee focused solely on renewable energy initiatives. ORCA will provide the other half of the funding for the full-time position.

Jim D. Aanstoos began working with ORCA on August 1, 2004. He will help rural communities learn about renewable energy and secure funding for energy projects. He will also assist businesses and communities with business recruitment and economic development. Mr. Aanstoos will coordinate outreach activities with SECO, RARE and the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism Division (EDT).

First-Run Films Hit Vintage Venue

By Mary Alice Smith, ORCA

In 1948, the neon marquee above the Rialto Theater in Three Rivers (Live Oak County) advertised films like *Zorro Rides Again*, a western starring John Carroll. Now, more than 20 years after closing in 1981, the Rialto Theater is again open for business and showing *Van Helsing*, a sci-fi thriller starring Hugh Jackman.

The Three Rivers Economic Development Committee was able to preserve the original marquee when it purchased the theater and restored it to its former glory as a venue for first-run movies. Located on Thornton Street, the Rialto Theater serves as one of the primary sources of entertainment in the town of 2,000.



The Three Rivers Economic Development Committee purchased the Rialto Theater and supplied state-of-the-art sound and video equipment.

The Three Rivers Economic Development Committee restored the theater so that area residents would not have to drive to Beeville or Corpus Christi to see a film on the big screen. The Rialto is the only operating theater in the three-county area of Live Oak, San Patricio and McMullen counties. It is leased to Galen Jansky, who also operates a restored theater in Floresville (Wilson County), Texas.

The two-screen theater is equipped with state-of-the-art sound and video equipment. As a new addition, it features a soundproof “cry room” for parents of young children.

The Rialto began showing films again on June 22, 2001, when it featured *Pearl Harbor*. The theater hosts weekly kid’s movies, holiday film showings, and can be leased for parties or events. The theater also has video and power point projectors for corporate meetings and advertising.

For more information about the historic Rialto Theater, call Murrell Foster at the Three Rivers Economic Development Committee, at 361-786-4330, or visit www.threeriverstx.org.



The marquee is as famous as the theater. The Rialto Theater is once again showing first-run feature films.

Crowell Courts Astronomers and Hunters

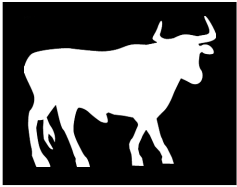
By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

Crowell (Foard County), the self-proclaimed hog capital of the world, is populated by 1,141 visionaries who decided to market their natural resources to put Crowell on the map for tourists, hunters and astronomers. The town is located 115 miles north of Abilene, that’s 1,200 miles from Los Angeles, California, according to the Crowell web site.

Not long ago, the small town was deteriorating, but with the help of 501(c)3 foundations, volunteers and former residents who donated money to the city, Crowell pulled itself up by the bootstraps. The town has hogs and starry skies aplenty, which led citizens to launch a volunteer effort to promote the town’s unique assets.

In 2003, more than 2000 amateur and professional astronomers came to Crowell to take advantage of the dark, wide-open skies. Crowell also hosts the annual World’s Championship Wild Hog Cook-off, a western trail ride, monthly star walks, a music camp and the annual Cynthia Ann Parker festival. In addition, several community improvement projects are underway including a new library, a downtown cleanup project, improvement of the country club golf course and the addition of a new telescope, which was purchased by the Three Rivers Foundation for the Arts & Sciences.

In April 2004 Crowell received matching reimbursement funds to promote stargazing from the Texas Department of Agriculture’s Hometown STARS (Supporting Tourism and Rural Success) program. The “Star Attraction” tourism project will help introduce astronomy to children as well as professional stargazers. Crowell will provide stargazers with certified instructors to educate and entertain visitors. No wonder Crowell’s motto is “Small Towns Don’t Have to Die!” For more information visit the town’s web site at www.crowelltx.com.



Living in Rural Texas!

Small Town Charm Meets the Great Outdoors

Knox County

By The Honorable Greg Clonts, Knox County Judge

Knox County is the gateway to the great ranches of West Texas, home to fierce football rivalries, great people and terrific hunting and outdoor recreational activities. Very few places in Texas offer the variety of wildlife to be photographed, hunted or simply observed.

Hunting leases, lodging and guided hunts are all available here where participants will see bobwhite and blue quail, mourning and white-wing dove, white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, feral hogs, coyotes and cats. South of Goree lies the Miller Creek Reservoir, a great lake for fishing and boating, and to the north of Benjamin lies the beautiful Truscott Brine Lake.

Knox County is home to three exceptional school districts, the Knox County Hospital, and recreational facilities that include two nine-hole golf courses and excellent tennis, track and swimming facilities.

Alice (Jim Wells County)

By The Honorable L. Arnoldo Saenz, Jim Wells County Judge

Founded in 1888 as a railhead for the South Texas cattle industry, the city of Alice was named after

Alice King Kleberg, a daughter of one of the founders of the famed King Ranch.

The mural in the Alice Post Office was painted by the Alice Art League and depicts various phases of the development of the town. The history of Alice and its significant events are preserved in the South Texas Museum, which originally was the office of the Magill Cattle Co. and is fashioned after the architecture of the Alamo.

Centrally located at the South Texas crossroads of US Highway 281 and State Highway 44, Alice has developed into the "hub city" of South Texas. Its geographical location creates a logistical advantage for Alice, thus making it a center for the South Texas oilfield, for import/export freight, and for agribusiness. Alice has the infrastructure, experienced workforce and community support to maximize its participation in growth and economic development.

Milam (Sabine County)

By The Honorable Jack Leath, Sabine County Judge

The early settlers crossed the Sabine River into Texas in the early 1800s, settled just across the river, and named the area Red Mound. The name was changed to Milam in 1835 in honor of Ben

Milam. These events are memorialized at El Camino Park. In addition, Milam Settlers Day celebrates these pioneers and is held on the third Friday and Saturday of November each year.

A combination of massive forests and water is home to many species of birds including the bald eagle and redheaded woodpecker, along with plenty of wild hog, fox, white-tailed deer, beaver and coyote.

Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn lakes hold approximately 300 pounds of fish per acre. More than 50,000 acres of the Sabine National Forest is in Sabine County, furnishing great opportunity for inexpensive hunting. The East Texas Deerfest is held the third Saturday in October.

Besides the outdoor attractions, Sabine County has the historic Sabine County Jail Museum and the newly restored courthouse. The people of Sabine County are friendly and always have a hearty welcome for visitors.

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Why Stop in...

Rusk County

"Rusk County was established in 1843 and is two years older than the state of Texas. Henderson, our county seat, is a Main Street City and a Lone Star City, offering a sense of history, fabulous shopping and beauty – especially at Christmas. For sportsman, Rusk county has fishing, hunting, and camping within a short distance. I'd have to say that what makes Rusk County unique is the wonderful, giving people who live here. We are blessed with great neighborhoods, beautiful churches, good schools and excellent shopping. You can't beat Rusk County for good living and a good visit."

- *The Honorable Sandra Hodges, Rusk County Judge*

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They Dream of Sprawl

How do you grow a town? You give land away. That's what's happening in Marquette, Kan., where the population was declining so much residents feared losing their high school. So town leaders purchased 50 acres of wheat fields for \$100,000, divided the land into 80 lots and started giving them away to anyone willing to move there and build a home. Twenty-one lots are already gone, and 20 more kids are expected to enroll in the schools.

A few other central Kansas towns are offering similar incentives. Nearby Minneapolis has been successfully giving away lots since 1999. The towns of Ellsworth, Holyrood, Kanopolis and Wilson are offering free water and sewer hookups, a year's worth of cable and cash payments to people who move in from outside their county.

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Rains a Welcome Change ...

(Continued from page 3)

Most of the stocked fish are 1.5-inch fingerlings that should grow to legal, catchable size within 1-2 years. However, TPWD has also stocked hundreds of larger broodfish weighing 5-8 pounds each to help jumpstart lake fisheries.

The locals recall the “good old days” at Lake Falcon and back it up with yellowed Polaroids on tackle shop walls. For two years running during the mid-90s, this massive 87,000-acre reservoir was ranked by TPWD as the number one bass tournament lake in Texas; better than Lake Fork or Sam Rayburn or Toledo Bend.

By 1997, in the midst of what turned out to be a 10-year drought, Falcon’s reputation and water level were dropping rapidly. In the summer of 2002 this once mighty impoundment was sitting 54 feet below normal pool level and covered only 13,000 acres.

Even if you wanted to go fishing on Falcon, chances were slim you’d be able to access the water at all since most of the boat ramps were high and dry.

The recovery brings new hope from anglers and state fisheries biologists that Falcon could reclaim its glory days.

“While the lake was down we saw all kinds of plant regrowth along the shoreline and when the water increased, that created new habitat,” said Jimmy Dean, TPWD’s fisheries biologist for Falcon Lake. “It’s creating in essence a new lake.”

Excerpt from *Rains a Welcome Change for Troubled Rio Grande*, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department press release dated July 12, 2004. For a copy of the complete article, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Submit Photos to ORCA!

ORCA is interested in publishing images of rural Texas. Please include caption and contact information. Email jpeg files to jkelly@orca.state.tx.us.

New Water-Related Information, Resources Available

Publications are Result of ORCA Partnership with US Army Corps of Engineers

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

In early 2003, ORCA and the US Army Corps of Engineers initiated a unique partnership designed to develop local leaders’ and citizens’ skills in rural water issue leadership. The joint venture focused on educating local leaders, citizens, regional representatives, and policy makers about water availability and accessibility. The results of the partnership are three useful publications:

Utilizing Technology for Small Water Systems in Texas

This publication highlights water treatment technologies available for small water systems and profiles existing small community systems that can serve as a guiding force for other rural systems. The first section of the report gives an overview of various water treatment technologies for small water systems. It addresses the barriers to using these technologies and lessons learned by small water system operators. The second section of the report is a two-page profile on 42 different small water systems spread across Texas.

Water Resources Guide for Texas

The Guide is a compilation of Texas resources for those interested in water issues and solutions. The publication lists federal agencies with Texas contact information, resource conservation and development offices, state agencies, councils of government, associations and organizations, river authorities and Groundwater Conservation Districts (GCDs).

Managing the Water Well: A Guide for Local Leaders on the Management of Rural Water Utilities

This document provides in-depth information on every aspect of water management in Texas including legal responsibilities and liabilities for noncompliance, general management, financial management, water supply and resources, operations and regulatory concerns.

Call ORCA to request publications or visit www.orca.state.tx.us.com.

Governor Perry Names New Border Commerce Coordinator ...

(Continued from page 1)

He cited companies’ need to locate within two to three hours from large cities as an example of how rural communities fit into the state’s plan to bring in new businesses.

“Rural Texas is Texas — it is what people think of when they think of our great State,” said Saenz. “I am excited that rural communities will be able to compete to house the suppliers and smaller manufacturers that will bring more jobs to Texas.”

Over the next few months, Saenz said he will focus on meeting with local leaders in both the public and private sectors. Promoting collaboration on projects is one of his primary goals as Border Commerce Coordinator.

Saenz has served as Assistant Secretary of State since August 2003. As Border Commerce Coordinator he will be responsible for examining trade and transport issues with Mexico and Canada, reducing regulations, improving infrastructure, and encouraging cooperation between federal, state and local governments. He will also explore the sale of excess electric power from Texas to Mexico and work to increase financing for water and wastewater facilities.



ORCA Program Activities

ORCA Launches Revised Web Site

By Jill McFarren, ORCA

On June 9, 2004, ORCA launched its new Web site, which is designed to accommodate and enhance accessibility to information about the agency, and its programs, services and activities.

The new site was purposefully designed to include intuitive navigational tools and comprehensive content.

Key to the new site's development and success is the home page's clean, clutter-free appearance, which should upload quickly using most service lines.

Next time you're surfing the net, visit www.orca.state.tx.us and let us know what you think!

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ORCA Vies for 2005 Federal Rural AED Grant

By Al Lewis, ORCA

The Office of Rural Community Affairs has submitted a continuation application for the Federal Rural Access to Emergency Devices Grant Program, also known as the RAED Grant, and has taken on the role as the state-level lead applicant for this program for fiscal year 2005. The federal government will accept only one complete grant application from each state.

Providing early defibrillation is vital for the survival of victims of sudden cardiac arrest. The AEDs and training provided by this grant will enhance the defibrillation capability available to cardiac arrest patients and increase their chances of survival. In some cases having access to this equipment may mean the difference between life and death.

Overview of the grant

The Office of Rural Health Policy's RAED Grant Program provides funding to rural community partnerships for the purchase of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and training in their use and maintenance. AEDs are portable devices that provide an electrical shock capable of restoring the normal heart rhythm of cardiac arrest victims, greatly improving their chances of survival.

The extension of the partnership will come from the communities and organizations applying for an AED to ORCA, which is recognized at the federal level as Texas' State Office of Rural Health and is the lead state agency for the community partnership.

In 2003, ORCA was awarded \$244,110 by the US Department of Health and Human Services through the Rural AED Grant Program. The funds provided for the distribution of 122 AED units and funding for CPR and AED training for 71 organizations. Overall, the RAED Grant Program awarded a total of \$11.6 million to 49 states.

For additional information, please contact ORCA.

Want to E-mail ORCA?

To e-mail a member of the ORCA staff, address the message to the staff member's first initial and full last name@orca.state.tx.us.

For example, to e-mail Julie V. Kelly use jkelly@orca.state.tx.us.

Just want to send comments to the agency in general?

Send your e-mail to orca@orca.state.tx.us.

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