

Sheltered workshop recognizes tenured staff

A June 1 meeting of the sheltered workshop by the Cherokee County Mental Retardation Association, Inc. recognized tenured staff members with 15 years or more of service.

The board meeting was held jointly with staff members of the workshop. Thirteen of these persons have 15 or more years service. Recognized were Joyce Cox, 26 years; Martha Garner, 22 years; Andrea Grimes, 17 years; Scott Howland, 25 years; Andrea Hunt, 19 years; Karen Jackson, 17

years; Hazel Luce, 17 years; Kenneth Martin, 15 years; Elton McCune, 28 years; Barbara Polk, 24 years; W. T. Reed, 20 years; Billy Reyes, 17 years and Levell Session, 22 years.

Words of gratitude to the staff members were expressed by Executive Director Elton McCune and President Jim Cromwell.

The success of the program is determined by those who provide the leadership and service here, commented President Cromwell.

Regarding the operation of the workshop, Mr. McCune said, "We are having a very productive year. Operating cash has remained in a positive position and the next three months should also be productive for us."

Directors approved early balloon payments against the mortgage of group home property on Tremont Street. After further discussion of available, adjacent land, members authorized the executive committee to proceed with negotiations for acquisition. Prior to the meeting, early arrivers toured several of the properties operated by CCMRA including the workshop. Other routine business included the approval of previous minutes and the financial statements.

Other directors present included DeWald Lake, Gene Brumbelow, Jorda Parker, Bobby Coates, Jo Lee, Marie Whitehead, Frank Waggoner, Billy Watson, Sammie Ataway and Inez Conley, Alyn Lang, ACCESS executive director.



Cherokee County Mental Retardation Association staff and board members with 15 years or more tenure include: (from left in back) James Cromwell, president; Joyce Cox; Levell Session, Andrea Grimes and Andrea Hunt. Front row from left are Martha Garner, Hazel Luce, Karen Jackson, Barbara Polk and Elton McCune, executive director. Not pictured are Billy Reyes, W.T. Reed, Beth Benjamin, Linda Holman, Scott Howland and Kenneth Martin.

NEWS

Licenses needed to apply many pesticides

The Texas weather has been anything but normal this year following a long hot and dry spell and now an overabundance of rain that should do more than jump start lawns and gardens. Over the past few weeks the area has had more than a fair share of "weed" issues with garden and forage producers alike. René McCracken, cooperative extension agent, said most of the more effective and better valued products for weed control require a pesticide applicators' license. Persons interested in obtaining a license or a list of fees and required course materials, may contact Ms. McCracken at (903) 683-5416 or lrmccracken@ag.tamu.edu. Dates and times will be announced as soon as there are 10 or more participants.

Juneteenth parade planned June 16

The fourth annual Cherokee County Juneteenth parade is planned for 11 a.m. Saturday, June 16 in downtown Rusk.

The parade will line-up at 10:40 a.m. at the Austin Bank parking lot on Sycamore Street.

There will be a program and picnic at Conley Park. Garette Floyd, FBI agent and Daphne Session, local attorney, will speak. Food and games will follow.

The event is sponsored by the Cherokee Brotherhood Association. Contact Melvin Session or Walter Session at (903) 683-5743 or any member of the Brotherhood for additional information.

Alto

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Councilman Earl Clark said he wanted to go back and read the contract, to which Councilwoman Walker suggested the council abstain from voting on the motion so it would die for a lack of a vote, to allow Councilman Clark to read the contract.

The motion passed by a 3-1-1 vote, with Councilman Clark dissenting and Councilwoman Walker abstaining.

City buys dart gun

The council then voted to pay a \$614.18 bill to Pnewdart, Inc. for a dart gun purchased by the utilities department.

The bill was submitted to the city on April 25 and a check was cut on May 17, but then Mayor Debbie White refused to sign the check, saying the city had not authorized the purchase.

Utilities Director Charlie Luse, who oversees animal control in the city, said the issue was a miscommunication.

Mr. Luse, whose department was given animal control duties in February, said he was explaining to Mayor White and other council members that he had no way of catching dogs.

He said he needed the dart gun to tranquilize them. He said during that discussion

that Mayor White said she thought the city approved the purchase. So, he bought the dart gun.

Councilman Clark asked, "What if we make you pay for the gun?"

"Then I'll charge the city \$500 every time I have to use it," Mr. Luse replied.

"I'll shoot them cheaper than that!" Councilman Sanders said.

The council then discussed code enforcement with Mr. Luse, with questions as to whether the utilities department has time for code enforcement.

Mr. Luse said with the help of the fifth person he wants hired for his department, they could handle it. The issue was tabled for a later meeting.

Mr. Luse pleaded with the council for the hiring of another utilities employee, saying the budget was in good shape and adding if it were not, then a general clerk in the city's offices should not be hired either.

Councilman Pearman asked that Mr. Luse's request be placed on the agenda for the July meeting.

Mr. Luse reported that a lift station broke down, so extra expenses were to be expected. He also requested the city go out for bids for portable 15kw generator/welders

Special meeting: Thursday, June 14

which would keep lift stations operational during power outages and could be used for welding when not being used for generators. He said the costs for such items are approximately \$4,500 each.

The council voted to create a court security fund, which will take \$3 for every citation and use it for court security.

Money raised for the security fund can be used for anything security related to the building the court is in, said Municipal Judge R. E. Christiansen. Such items can include security cameras, lighting and even allows for the hiring of a part-time bailiff, should one be needed.

Judge Christiansen indicated that since the court is located in City Hall, the security measures would benefit the city.

Ms. Dannelley said the city has received 14 applications for the general clerk position.

Those applications will be reviewed in a special meeting scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday, June 14 at City Hall.

A budget workshop is scheduled at 6 p.m. Monday, June 18 at City Hall.

County

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off Highway 175.

An interlocal agreement between the City of Cune and Cherokee County Precinct 3 was approved to widen, repair and renovate CR 3502 when necessary.

A bid was accepted from Bill McRae Ford to purchase a 250 Crew Cab XLT pickup with a gas engine for \$22,078.

The county judge was authorized to sign all documents to finance new dump trucks with Citizens 1st Bank for Precinct 3. A contract for \$6,800 with JML Architects was approved to cover services already done by the firm in renovating the old Jacksonville Police Department. Other work will be bid.

Eight new counties were accepted for the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NETRMA) to include Bowie, Panola, Wood, Cass, Van Zandt, Titus, Anderson and Camp.

Cathy Newman was re-appointed as a trustee for ACCESS. Named to the Cherokee County Historical Commission were Dixi Russell and Dr. Richard Hackney.

No action was taken concerning a nomination to the Cherokee County Appraisal District Board. The matter will be discussed at the June 25 meeting.

Proposals will be solicited for a mental health advocate.

Matters approved from the consent agenda include reports from the auditor, Lynn Kelley, Constable Pct. 1, Joe Self, Constable, Pct. 4, Ricky Moore, license and weight officer; expenses for Louraisal McDonald to attend a meeting in Dallas, July 24-26, Health Unit employees to attend meeting in Tyler June 29 and Austin June 13-14, Judge Vera Foreman, Justice of the Peace Pct. 4, to attend training in Austin June 24-27.

Commissioners will meet again at 10 a.m. Monday, June 25 in the county courtroom.

Attending the meeting were Judge Chris Davis; Commissioners Mary Gregg, Kevin Pierce, Moody Glass III and Byron Underwood; County Clerk Laverne Lusk; and County Auditor L.H. Crockett.

TSROA

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Stutes, in explaining the status of legislation which will affect the legalization of the transfer from TPWD to the recently approved Texas State Railroad Authority.

The Authority will be composed of seven persons. Three will be nominated by the Rusk City Council and three from the Palestine City Council. These six will make a selection for a seventh member. Both Rusk and Palestine city councils are expected to announce their decisions in the near future.

The next meeting date will be 2 p.m. Thursday, June 28 at Citizens 1st Bank in Rusk.

Legislation remains unsigned by Gov. Rick Perry which contains the financial arrangements for the TSR transfer. He has approximately 20 days from the date of the session's conclusion. It can become law within a week.

"We have received no indications that there is any opposition. We expect this bill

to pass as we understand it," said Mr. Presley.

Other items on the agenda were discussed including consideration of necessary amendments to the operating agreement with American Heritage Railways.

Representatives from AHR are in East Texas this week. Their itinerary included a reception Tuesday night in Palestine.

Wednesday's schedule called for meetings with personnel at the TSR. This was to focus on the company's human resource presentation in which salaries, health care and benefits will be explained.

Wednesday evening in Rusk, Charles and Leslie Hassell will host a reception for the owners and personnel of American Heritage Railways.

"We have a lot to do to make all this happen," said Mr. Presley. "The most important is the official designation of new members to the TSR Railroad Authority."

After the seven are chosen,

Rusk council, 7B

they will draw for expiration dates in service.

The group discussed plans for a ceremonial transfer of the train to American Heritage with a combined fund raiser event, similar to last October's "Save the Train."

A September date was considered with invited dignitaries to include officials who supported the change of operation from TPWD to the public-private concept. It has already been announced that Thomas the Tank will pay an official visit to TSR Oct. 19-21 and Oct. 26-28.

In addition to those named, board members attending the meeting were Dan Davis and Dale Brown of Palestine; also Charles Hassell, Bob Goldsberry and Marie Whitehead of Rusk. Daniel Mahoney, administrative assistant to State Rep. Chuck Hopson, was also present.

Transition

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state railroad employees who go to work for American Heritage Railways will not be eligible for administrative leave. Administrative leave is the TPWD equivalent of severance pay. Ellen Buchanan, regional director for TPWD, said when the department conducted a reduction in force 18 months ago, laid-off employees were given eight weeks of administrative leave.

"They were paid by TPWD to find another job, either with TPWD or outside," Ms. Buchanan said.

TPWD officials were on site at the Texas State Railroad to explain the transition process to employees last week. Ms. Buchanan said state railroad employees who do not go to work for American Heritage Railways or take another state job will be eligible for four weeks of administrative leave. Those who accept positions

with American Heritage will not be eligible for administrative leave.

This is the result of legislation, which swept the \$2 million state railroad budget from the train after the approval of the privatization bill.

Ms. Buchanan said as a result of the sweeping, TPWD officials in Austin say there is no money left for administrative leave.

"We have constraints on what we can do," said TPWD Human Resources Director Al Bingham. "We want to make the transition as smooth as possible for the employees. Whenever we lose employees or are forced to shut down some facilities, it is difficult on us as well as employees. We try to understand and make their situation as pleasant as possible."

Mr. Bingham said TPWD's hope is that state railroad em-

ployees will be offered positions with American Heritage. He said not giving administrative leave to employees who accept other state positions or positions with American Heritage is due to budget constraints and statutes against double-paying state employees.

One employee, who asked not to be named, said, "The announcement of the leave policy knocked morale down even more at the railroad."

Ms. Buchanan said last week's meetings between TPWD human resources personnel from Austin and state railroad employees went well.

"The folks were very nice, very professional," she said, but added that her concern is that state railroad employees would quit after having the opportunity to consider their options.

"They may take other jobs

and there won't be enough employees to keep the train running after Aug. 31," she said.

Concerning employee retirement accounts, Ms. Buchanan said employees have several options. If they do not continue their employment with the state, they can leave their money in the retirement account.

Ms. Buchanan said outgoing TPWD employees may also withdraw their retirement funds, but heavy IRS penalties will be assessed.

Ms. Buchanan said employees who wish to continue with the state will have an opportunity, as TPWD was given 229 new positions in the region. Some of these positions are hourly, but are full-time equivalent positions. Mr. Bingham added the TPWD will try to place those employees who are close to retirement in some

stand why you wouldn't want to drive a train through a depot," he said.

Mr. Crossman explained in such a situation, railroad staff tries to reschedule the passengers whose run is cancelled. Passengers who do not want to reschedule are given a refund, he said.

Representatives from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department were on site at the state railroad Wednesday and Thursday to explain the transition process to the employees.

"That dropped morale," Mr. Crossman said.

Of the morale killers, Mr. Crossman said the future of the employees' retirement accounts was the biggest let-down.

"They feel like they have sacrificed in the short term for a long-term benefit - only to wind up sacrificing the long-term benefit," he said.

Mr. Crossman said state railroad employees who go to work for American Heritage

will not only be unable to continue investing in state retirement, but if they choose to withdraw their retirement accounts in order to put it into another account, they will do so with a 10 percent penalty plus IRS fees. Another option is to leave their money in the account until they retire. Mr. Crossman said some of the staff is leaving to continue with the state so they can keep their retirement.

"We're doing the best we can to keep the staff we have and replace those who leave," Mr. Crossman said. "We have the power-driven revolving door in high gear."

Board Member Sarah Welch thanked Mr. Crossman for his leadership, commitment and loyalty during the uncertain times of the state railroad. After that, the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting of the Friends of the Texas State Railroad will be at 10 a.m. Thursday, July 5, at the Rusk Depot.

will be."

Mr. Harper said while everyone fears the unknown, American Heritage has a track record of good employee relations.

"Call our other businesses in Durango, Colo. and the Great Smokey Mountains," he said. "Our employees are loyal. The average tenure in Durango is 18 years. I don't think (state railroad employees) will find they have a lot to worry about."

Mr. Harper said he wants to keep the railroad staff in tact.

"We want to keep the crew together," he said. "I am excited about the good nucleus and good staff in place. We have a great benefits program and want to keep the crew together."

Mr. Harper said his plans are for the Texas State Railroad to grow and additional staff to be hired.