

Rusk ISD renews administrative contracts, calls May election

School will hold joint election with the City of Rusk

By GLORIA JENNINGS
STAFF WRITER

Following an executive session Monday evening members of the Rusk ISD board renewed administrative contracts.

Contracts were renewed until 2010 for Sandra Leonard, Jan Evans, Carlene Clayton, John Burkhalter, Ricky Hassell, Kathy Guidry, Scott Schwartz, Gary Robbins, Betty Collins, Harriet Page and Kathleen Glidewell.

The board called an election

for 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday, May 10 for the election of two school trustees. Terms of board members Frances Long and Dr. Anthony Holcomb expire with the election.

Houston White was appointed election judge and Donald Woodard, alternate judge.

Dr. Jim Largent, superintendent, suggested that the board schedule the May board meeting on Tuesday, May 13, to canvass the May 10 election at the same time. Setting

the May board meeting will be considered at the March meeting.

The board approved a resolution approving a joint election agreement with the City of Rusk. Both the city and school elections will be held at the Rusk ISD administration building.

Barbara McCreight, food service supervisor, presented her department's report.

The board approved an energy consumption reduction plan. The district plans to

reduce energy consumption five percent each year for the next six years. Already the district had reduced energy consumption through the purchase of energy efficient bulbs and other power saving equipment.

Attending the meeting were board president David Fulton; vice-president Dr. Holcomb; secretary Mrs. Long; and board members Roy Cavazos, Rodney Hughins and Britt Patterson. Board member Mike Ross was absent.

Coach Mahaffey

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new athletic director and head football coach will begin immediately and a replacement will be hired this spring. In the meantime, Dr. Largent said the head coaches of each sport will continue to work with their programs.

"We will also have coaches in charge of our off-season programs and the high school principal and assistant principal will step in as needed to assist with the administrative tasks in the athletic depart-

ment," he said. "While this was a very difficult decision to make, I am excited about the future of Rusk ISD athletics and look forward to the search process."

Coach Mahaffey's departure from Rusk Eagle athletics marks the second head coach to leave this week. Jacksonville Head Coach Randy Copeland accepted the job of assistant principal of Arp High School Monday.

Alto City

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Mr. Wicks told the council that the U.S. Highway 69 expansion project in Wells was a high priority project for TxDOT because it is a hurricane evacuation route. U.S. 69 is a four-lane divided highway north and south of Wells. It narrows to two lanes in Wells.

"What you have is a bottleneck situation," he said.

During the Hurricane Rita evacuations of 2005, the narrowing of the highway was a factor in traffic congestion on U.S. Highway 69 south of Wells.

"We want the highway to be four lanes all the way to Jacksonville where there is another trunk they can take, which is U.S. Highway 175," Mr. Wicks said.

He explained that all utilities will have to be moved before the project's "let" date of Dec. 1. He further explained that all utilities that are already located on highway property will not be eligible for reimbursement from TxDOT.

To fund the relocation of the gas lines, Mr. Wicks suggested a loan from the State Infrastructure Bank.

"It's a low-interest loan, with a rate at approximately 4.6 percent," he said.

Mr. Wicks told the council it will take four to six months to process the loan application. The council voted 5-0 to authorize the loan application.

Allen Ross of Shaumburg and Polk, Inc., told the council that moving the gas lines will take 60-90 days, with 30-60 days needed to plan the project.

Hurricane Rita is still impacting the City of Alto, as the council voted 5-0 to award a contract to Duplichain Contractors to install new generators at the city's water facilities. Duplichain Contractors was the low bid at \$258,610, Mr. Ross said.

The cost of the installation is covered by a \$234,500 grant

the city was awarded by the Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA). The grant was originally awarded to the city to renovate the Alto Herald Museum building to be used as an evacuation shelter, but that plan fell through when a grant stipulation required the building be owned by the city.

The council later amended the grant request to fund the installation of the generators.

While the grant is \$24,110 less than the bid offered by Duplichain Contractors, \$30,000 was allowed in the bid for the installation of new power lines, a service Mr. Ross said the city won't likely need.

"I feel we'll get this done for less than the grant amount," he said. "Duplichain Contractors is a good, local company capable of installing these generators."

Mr. Ross said Duplichain Contractors offered the lowest bid. The generators will be used to keep the water system running in the event of a power-outage.

In other action, the council passed a resolution designating March 11 as Alto Public Schools day, in recognition of Alto High School's two consecutive state championships. Superintendent Dr. Ray DeSpain asked that the entire school system be recognized in addition to the football team.

The council approved continuing the employment of Sheila Lea, court clerk, past her 90-day probationary period, changed the title of the city administrator to city secretary, passed a resolution calling for a city election on May 10, accepted the resignation of City Administrator Debra Dannelley, removed her name from the bank accounts and voted to hire her as a consultant to train her replacement at \$18 per hour.

All council members were present for the meeting.

Alto ISD accepts bond proposal

By LELAND ACKER
STAFF WRITER

The Alto ISD Board of Trustees continue to move forward on the project to build a new elementary school building as the interest rate has been set on the district's \$6.3 million bond package.

The interest rate was set at 3.4644 percent, almost 1.6 percentage points below the five percent for which the trustees had budgeted. The rate was adopted at a special Alto ISD board meeting Feb. 4.

"This rate is much lower than when we started this process and went to voters,"

said Dr. Ray DeSpain, Alto ISD superintendent. "In fact, we had projected a maximum Interest and Sinking (I&S) tax increase of almost 33 cents per \$100 valuation. Now, we're looking at a maximum increase of 28 cents per \$100 valuation, which is great news for all of us as tax payers."

Dr. DeSpain told the Cherokeean Herald that even with the (I&S) increase, school property taxes will still be lower than in previous years.

The low-bid purchaser of the \$6.3 million bonds was Morgan Keegan and Co. of Memphis, Tenn. The bonds, rated as "AAA" government entity bonds, are backed by

the Texas Education Agency's Permanent School Fund.

Until disbursed, the funds will be placed in the district's Lone Star Investment Pool construction account. Dr. DeSpain said he is researching other financial institutions' interest rates to maximize interest gains during construction.

Final drawings, topographic surveys, geotechnical testing and soil samples have been completed and architects from Goodwin-Lassiter are finalizing the engineering blueprints.

Bids will be made available to general contractors in early March, with construction to

begin by mid-April, Dr. DeSpain said.

"We hope to take ownership of the building and start making the transition from the old buildings by June 2009 in time to start with students that fall," he said.

Also approved at the meeting were: a paving project to add eight new parking spots and two sidewalks for the middle school, high school gymnasium and flooring renovations, a 39,000-square-foot paving project for a parent pick up circle that will later be used for elementary cafeteria, football and softball parking and several needed campus painting projects.

Scene in Passing

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rant. Owners were the late Quinton and Bobbie Nicholson. The two businesses were the scenes of many happy memories. Ask any of the RHS grads of the 1950s. And don't forget that this era was not only "before TV," but "before AC." Can you imagine a world of homes and businesses without television or air conditioning? All of us did just that. Technology entered the picture. TV was just one of many new words to join our vocabulary. Hopefully, this will bring some warm, fuzzy feelings to the hearts of all who yearn for yesterday. Just don't linger there too long. You could learn to live without television? Our gratitude to the town photographer Wiley Shattuck for his legacy of long-lasting photos. Keep smiling.

County

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that they have fought both in the military and afterwards will never be forgotten by this soldier.

"I will do my best to assist the commissioners court in any way possible.

"Thank you for your support of the Office of Veterans Affairs, and for me personally during my tenure at Cherokee County."

Members of the court praised Mr. Foreman for his service and the work done in veterans affairs, as well as the safety department.

In other matters commissioners approved a professional service agreement with the East Texas Medical Center Breast Center to provide services to clients through the Cherokee County Health

Department.

Interlocal agreements between the Cherokee County Health Department and the cities of Rusk and Gallatin were approved to provide food service inspections/permits.

A resolution was approved to participate in the East Texas HOME Consortium agreement.

A representative of the Pinewoods RC&D Consortium met Jan. 29 with the court to discuss the consortium.

With the county entering into this program funds can be obtained locally instead of going through the state.

When a county has less than 50,000 residents, it may join with another county in a consortium and make appli-

cation for housing and urban development funding. There are 11 counties seeking membership in the consortium.

Commissioners approved a resale tax foreclosure for properties located in Cherokee County and Bullard ISD. A representative of Linebarger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson, LLP met with the court to obtain the approval.

The sheriff's and license and weight officer's monthly reports were approved.

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

Mr. Patton

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Westwood, we went 8-2, but missed the playoffs. They only took the district champion then. Edgewood won state in basketball and we made the playoffs at Mt. Pleasant."

After coaching three solid years at Mt. Pleasant, Mr. Patton was given the opportunity to move up into school administration.

"We had finished a season in the state semi-finals. In the spring I made the decision to come out of the classroom and go into administration," he said. "I became the interim assistant principal that spring. (Later) I became the associate principal.

"I knew that, going into education, I would have the opportunity to work with young people. Being in administration magnifies that opportunity."

Mr. Patton said in school administration, he can work with the faculty, students and the community to impact the lives of the students of his school. After several years as an associate principal at Mt. Pleasant High School, Mr. Patton saw an opportunity to become the head principal at Alto High School.

"Being an assistant principal is a wonderful job, but I wanted to make more of an impact," he said. "Becoming a high school lead principal gave me the opportunity to make more of an impact on the students. Coming to Alto was just a bonus."

Mr. Patton said he knew about Alto before he applied for the job.

"I knew Alto had good athletic programs and followed Steve Lofton while I was at Timpson," he said. "He got faster as he ran."

Mr. Patton was hired as Alto High

School principal a few months after Alto dropped into Class A in the UIL realignment. With a veteran team returning to the field, Alto had high hopes of winning a state championship in 2006. In his first months as principal, the excitement of a possible state title ring and his first principal job was soon dampened by the accreditation rating handed down by the Texas Education Agency. Alto High School was given the "unacceptable" rating.

"It is always a major concern when students are not performing up to par according to state standards," Mr. Patton said. "As educators, we are in the business of enhancing student performance. As administrators, we are in the business of serving the public, faculty, students and working collectively with teachers and parents.

"And this is what holds me here to Alto. We have great students. They are likeable. We have a great staff and great support from our administration which can't be beat. The ministerial alliance was very supportive as well as the parents."

In addition to the vertical curriculum alignment designed by Superintendent Dr. Ray DeSpain, Mr. Patton enlisted the help of the Christian Brotherhood, who provided tutorials for students on Monday evenings. Excelling students were also enlisted to tutor struggling students in what Mr. Patton called "peer tutoring."

"The excelling students at it up," he said. "It made them feel more valuable and useful. It instilled pride and character in them."

Mr. Patton also enlisted the student body to repaint Alto High

School. After one year, Alto High School was lifted from the "unacceptable" rating to "acceptable."

"It's still in a continuous process," he said. "We still have to have new innovations to improve student performance."

His experience in his first year and a half at Alto High School has Mr. Patton smiling.

"(Alto) is a close family-knit community with parents supporting the school and school board. This working relationship is not as strong in larger schools," he said. "I think of Alto as a nice friendly environment to raise a family. I'm living in the district and enjoying every minute of it."

When Mr. Patton was asked to narrow his message down to one thing to tell his students, he said he had many things to say to them.

"You can do anything in life you set out to do," he said. "Opportunities are all around you. You have to work to place yourself in a position to meet opportunity. Without education, all opportunities for success are limited. That's what I did. I worked to place myself in a position to meet opportunity."

Mr. Patton has been honored twice by the Texas Association of Secondary Principals, once in 2006 as principal of the year (while at Mt. Pleasant High School) and he serves as the committee chair for the organization.

He was hired as the Alto High School principal in the summer of 2006. His son, Devon, was a defensive back for Alto's two state championship teams. His wife, Vearnita, teaches sixth-grade math at Alto Middle School.

El Camino Real

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as Tanner's grandpa Carlton Jones, but for some reason Tanner got her calmed down and she performed wonderfully in the arena. Kenneth Hicks was pulling all the animals home when his truck started blowing out diesel and had to be left in the shop in Bastrop. Terry Black had a gooseneck hitch in his truck and was able to pull all the cows back home safely. Congratulations to our winners in San Antonio! Another group of students will be heading to San Antonio this week for the tractor restoration and ag mechanics show. Good luck and have a safe trip.

John Griffith had a stroke of good luck with a hog trap last week. He called me one afternoon early last week to come and see all the hogs in the trap. I drove out by Doris Hartman's place and met John to see his catch. He had caught 20 wild hogs of all sizes at one time in one trap. I was proud for John's big catch, but I haven't caught anything but a little baby pig in mine. Tony Ray Johnson helped John get the pigs loaded in a trailer. I guess Tony is some kind of professional pig herder. John cleaned pigs all week long and into the weekend, and I'm not sure he has them all cleaned yet. During the middle of dealing with all of these hogs, his dad Larry Griffith runs into a herd of about 20 more hogs and shoots one of them, so then they had 21 to clean. That is sure a lot of hog meat, but the farm-

ers that cut hay around there will sure be proud that those pigs won't be rooting up their pastures this spring.

My mother-in-law bought a new stove last week and I still don't understand why. If somebody buys her old stove they will certainly be getting a deal. I've been in and out of her house for the past 33 years and I've only seen that stove fired up on special holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving and for the Holcomb reunion. It seems like I do remember her cooking for me some when I was dating Jay Anna, but once I said, "I do," the cooking stopped. She got a new fancy digital stove this time, so now she has an excuse not to cook. She can't figure out how to turn it on. I bet she complained when she had to rub two sticks together to start a fire. It's just the nature of a mother-in-law. I haven't been invited to eat anything prepared on the new stove as of yet, but I'm waiting for my invitation, and it may be a while after this article.

I better wind this thing up and start thinking about what I'm going to do for my Valentine. One little Valentine mistake and a man can wind up in the dog house quick.

Keep the news coming and I'll get it spread. I'll see ya next week! And remember, **Show me a man who never makes a mistake and I'll show you a man that never makes anything.**