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BISD joins "wealthy" Texas school districts

New data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) shows a record number of school districts are now considered property wealthy under Chapter 41 of the Texas Education Code.

Brownfield ISD was added to the list this year, for the first time due to increased mineral values within the school district's boundaries.

Superintendent Jerry Jones said the district "just made it" onto the list and he expects it to cost BISD about \$93,000 this year.

The amount will be withheld from funds received from the state.

However, BISD is set to receive more funding from the state than last year.

The local district saw an increase in enrollment this year, which will result in additional funding from the state to the tune of almost half a million dollars.

"We'll be able to absorb the money we lose for being classified as property wealthy," Jones said. "It costs some districts a lot more and causes them to make some really tough decisions."

Wellman-Union ISD, in southwest Terry County, also is on the property wealthy list.

That district will be affected more adversely because of the size of its budget in relation to the value of minerals within its boundaries.

A total of 374 school districts are subject to the recapture provisions of the law during the 2012-2013 school year, and 23 appear on the list for the first time.

"The fact that more districts qualify for this status than ever before reinforces the fact that our method of funding public education is broken. Texas has just over 1000 school districts and having close to 400 of them considered property wealthy shows that there is not enough money in the system overall," said Christy Rome, Executive Director of the Texas School Coalition.

The Robin Hood system of school finance began in 1993 and applied to 35 school districts. It took 14 years to reach 164 revenue-contributing districts, but only five years to add the next 210 districts.

"Over half of the students in revenue-contributing districts throughout the state are economically disadvantaged," Rome said, "and now their taxpayers will be asked to send money into Austin. It will come as a shock to many in these communities, but somehow the myth continues that these districts are primarily made up of wealthy students and parents."

The Texas Legislature failed for the first time in 60 years to fund enrollment growth by cutting \$5.4 billion from public education for the current two-year budget cycle.

"Rather than continuing to add recapture districts, the obvious solution is for the Legislature to adequately fund education," Rome said.

Jones said he expects school funding to be the top issue facing the Texas Legislature when it convenes in January for its biennial session.

The last time the state's legislators met, they cut more than \$5 billion from public schools.

Jones also said vouchers will be a hot topic for discussion as well.

Proponents of vouchers want to use public funds to pay for private educations, if students or their parents chose to move them out of a public school system.

There are no private schools in Terry County, but the superintendent said it would still hurt local schools because it reduces funding across the board for all public schools.

"We'll still get our slice of the pie, but the problem is it will be a much smaller pie," he said.

Numerous lawsuits are pending in the state regarding school finance.

Most school districts in the area have joined the legal action to rectify how education is funded in the Lone Star State.

Nearly 5 million Texas children went back to school this past Monday and though for the youngsters and their parents it may be just another academic year, for teachers and school administrators across the state it might be a different story.

See BISD...Page 4



Kamryn Perry, three-year-old daughter of Queson and Raquel Perry, and Lexi Mendez, three-year-old granddaughter of Bo and Rosa Mendez were all smiles as they tested a jump house Sunday afternoon at First United Methodist Church's "Back to School Bash."



Brownfield fire-fighters Dillon Shaw (second from left) and Tyler Henderson (second from right) climbed 110 flights of stairs at Dallas' Renaissance Tower Saturday in full bunker gear. The 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb was in honor of the 343 New York City fire-fighters killed in the line of duty on Sept. 11, 2011.

Courtesy photo

Local firemen climb to remember 9-11

By JOSIE MUSICO
Staff Writer

Racing up 110 flights of stairs in full bunker gear might not sound like the most pleasant way to spend a Saturday, but two of Brownfield's bravest fire-fighters had never felt better.

Like the other Texas fire-fighters who traveled to Dallas last weekend for the 9-11 Memorial Stair Climb, local firemen Tyler Henderson and Dillon Shaw dedicated every step to their blaze-tackling brothers killed in the line of duty on Sept. 11, 2001.

The Stair Climb was one of several held across the country in tribute to the 343 New York City fire-fighters who lost their lives that day. Each stair-climber was designated one NYC fire-fighter, to whom he or she gave special honor. When they reached the top floor, they placed a card known as an accountability tag in a special location as a tribute to their late New York City Fire Department hero.

"We were never going to give up," Henderson, who climbed in honor of Division 1 Captain Joseph Farrley, told the *News*. "It wasn't just climbing when you put a name and face on it."

Henderson and Shaw traveled to Dallas after they raised \$1,226 in donations for the Texas Line of Duty Death Task Force and the Twin Towers Orphan Fund, and spent weeks getting in shape for the Stair Climb. They hit the weights every day at Fitness Zone, and spent extra time climbing the three-story tower at their practice field just south of the landfill.

Not surprisingly, when it finally

came time for the big day, they managed to climb the first few dozen flights of Dallas' Renaissance Tower - where the event was hosted - fairly smoothly, despite the weight on their backs of their bunker gear and air tanks. They finished the first 55 flights in 24 minutes, but then fatigue started catching up with them as they reached closer to the top.

"The first 55 stories went really well, and in the second half it got tough," said Shaw, who climbed in honor of Division 1 Captain Thomas Moody. "It was an endurance challenge."

The entire 110-story climb took the pair about an hour and five minutes.

Henderson and Shaw wished to thank their supporters, and made plans to return every September.

"It will be a yearly thing from here on out," Henderson said.

According to the web site of the National Fallen Fire-Fighters Associations at FireHero.org, the first 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb was held Sept. 11, 2005 when five Colorado fire-fighters climbed a 110-story building in Denver. It has since expanded to about 25 cities across the country.

Most of the participants could easily identify with the NYC fire-fighters they were honoring because they take similar risks in their own jobs, and felt the uphill workout was a small way to show support for their brothers' ultimate sacrifice.

"It's a good cause all around," Shaw said. "You never know - it might be one of us needing it someday."

County budget down slightly

Terry County Commissioners approved a budget for 2013 that they projected at slightly lower than this year's.

At \$11,581,383, the budget reflected a decrease of \$1,380,112, likely because the courthouse renovations project that took a major chunk from the last budget cycle will only continue about three months into next year.

The county operates on a calendar year, meaning the new budget will go into effect Jan. 1.

The commissioners also approved a new tax rate of 58 cents per \$100 of property valuation, up from 55 cents this year. They agreed the increase would be necessary to continue their road-maintenance and other services.

"It costs more to do business nowadays with fuel costs and everything going up, and we don't want to cut services," County Judge Butch Wagner told the *News*.

The general fund for 2013 is down \$85,745.

Commissioners budgeted another \$152,000 for the new senior center, in addition to the \$300,000 last year. They granted \$255,000 to the Brownfield Fire Department - the same as last year - after turning down a request for an increase in funding for that agency. They also budgeted \$30,000 each for Wellman's and Meadow's fire departments and \$370,000 for parks, an extra \$20,000 from 2012.

See COUNTY...Page 4

Wed 9/12	Thu 9/13	Fri 9/14	Sat 9/15	Sun 9/16



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