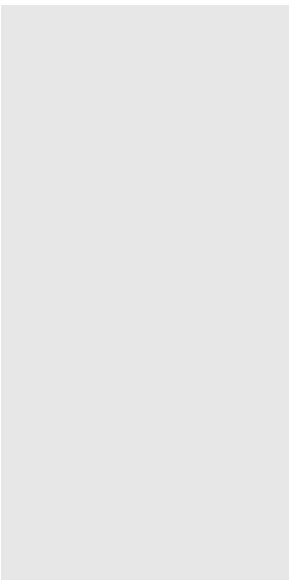




VAISD releases new HS update photos

INSIDE 7A



Van Alstyne Leader

FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2023 | VANALSTYNELEADER.COM

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Van Alstyne prepares for 150th celebration

Staff reports
The city of Van Alstyne is gearing up to celebrate its 150th anniversary celebration this fall. The event will be held Oct. 14 in downtown.
There will be several ways for area residents to get to join in on the celebration.
Activities will include carnival rides, gun fights, old- style photographs, car show, live music, a petting zoo, mechanical bull, many vendors and food trucks.
Also, performing at Central Social District that evening will be country music star Deana Carter.
But this is not the only activity coming up for Van Alstyne area residents.
The Sounds of Summer concert featuring

Infinite Journey, a Journey tribute band, will be held Sept. 9.
National Night Out sponsored by the Van Alstyne Police Department will be held at 6 p.m. Oct. 3 at Central Social District.
Local officers and first responders will be on site at Central Social District. There will be free train rides, bounce houses, face painting, hot dogs and more.
Children will be able to explore the Care Flight helicopter and the police vehicles.
Downtown Van Alstyne trick or treating will be held from 5-7 p.m. Oct. 28 in downtown.
Those wanting to get in the holiday spirit will be stationed along Marshall, Preston,

Jefferson, and Main streets. There are also an area set up at Central Social District for business owners who do not have a store front to get involved.
There will be a costume contest for children ages 2-12 years old at 4:15 p.m. at the Main stage at the Central Social District followed by a pet costume contest.
Children and pets must be accompanied by a parent or guardian at all times. There is no fee to enter.
Heading into the Christmas season. The Van Alstyne Christmas parade will be held at 2 p.m. Dec. 2, and the annual city Christmas treelighting will take place at 6 p.m. that evening.



Van Alstyne will be celebrating its 150th birthday coming up this fall. Van Alstyne Leader

Sounds of Summer concert series continues

Staff reports
Sounds of Summer kicks off this week with the first free concert of the series to be held Saturday at the Central Social District.
Infinite Journey will headline the Sept. 9 concert. The Journey Tribute band will take the stage at 8 p.m.
Other Sounds of Summer concert headliners included Jason Boland and the Stragglers, Foghat, Desperado and Neal McCoy.
“We wanted to start with a bang and end with a bang this year,” Municipal Events Specialist Kandi Hessel said at the beginning of the summer. “We wanted to make sure everything was prepared as far as security.”
Site patrons can bring their own chairs and pets may attend the event as long as they remain leashed.
“No glass containers,” Hessel said. “We allow people to bring in coolers with the beverage of their choice, but no glass containers. That is for safety. We want this to be fun for everyone.”
“No bicycles. That can be a hazard. There are signs posted that say no skateboards and no bicycles.”
Also, remember to pick up your trash.
“Be a good neighbor,” Hessel said. “Treat the park as if you were at your own home and take care of the things out there. Appreciate that we are able to do this to our community and look forward to the upcoming events.”
One of the biggest show’s put on at the Central Social District last year featured Joe Nichols concert with about 6,000 visitors.
“Van Alstyne is growing and people know that,” Hessel said. “We have a lot of fresh new faces in the town, and then there are those who have been here for generations who do not know each other. So, that is the whole purpose for our park, the Central Social District. We want people to come out and meet their neighbors. We also like to keep that sense of small town. You meet new people every time you come to the park. We want anyone that wants to come to come to Sounds of Summer. We want any one in Texoma to come if they want to.”
While a lot of things will be the same as last year, there will be some changes for concert goers.
“We have been very selective in the vendor process,” Hessel said. “We wanted to make sure we have vendors that you do not often see at every day events.”



Infinite Journey will headline the Sept. 9 Sounds of Summer show. courtesy photo



Infinite Journey will headline the Sept. 9 Sounds of Summer show. courtesy photo

Construction on FM 121 to last til 2026

Staff reports
The Texas Department of Transportation is currently working on a rehabilitation project affecting FM 121 in Van Alstyne. The affected area will go from the railroad tracks to State Highway 160.
“From the railroad tracks to Lincoln Park Road TxDOT will be milling off 2” of the surface and repaving it at the same elevation,” a news release about the project said.
“From Lincoln Park Road to SH 160 TxDOT



The speed limit is changing for a section of FM 121 while the area is under construction for the next few years. Van Alstyne Leader

will reclaim the roadway, add 8” of additional flexible base and add a two course surface treatment. Because TxDOT will have traffic running on flexible base while the project in under construction, TxDOT plans to reduce the speed limit at the construction area where they are working and move it through the project.”
The posted speed while the area is under construction is 45 mph instead of the normal 55 mph.
“The contractor will rehab the project in 2 mile segments to limit how much of the roadway is under raw base at a time,” the release said. “TxDOT will also replace cross drainage structures under the roadway and replace the signage along the road. The project is already underway and is expected to be completed in January 2026.”

Local

Child abuse offenses fill Aug. 2023 indictments. **2A**

News

For Texans, fighting state-regulated oilfield waste dumps can be a costly, do-it-yourself effort. **4A**

Weather

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Partly Cloudy

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LOCAL

Burn ban to continue

Staff reports

Grayson County commissioners did not discuss the burn ban Tuesday during their weekly meeting and that means the burn ban instituted last Tuesday is still in effect.

Last week, Grayson County Judge Bruce Dawsey suggested the county institute a 14-day burn ban instead of the 7-day burn ban the county previously would institute when the KDBI for the region is about 650.

Generally, the county considers a burn ban when the Keetch-Byram Drought Index average is above 650.

The KBDI is an index used to determine forest fire potential. It based on a daily water balance, where a drought factor is balanced with precipitation and soil moisture and is expressed in the hundredths of an inch of soil moisture depletion. KBDI numbers can vary across the county because different storms drop different amounts of precipitation across the county.

The KBDI for Grayson County for the last week was 681 according to Texas Weather Connection.

Lack of rain and continued high temperatures caused Grayson County to join more than

180 of Texas 254 counties with a burn ban.

The ban does not prohibit outdoor grilling. People are urged to use caution and care when cooking outside. The ban does make it against the law to use burn barrels or conduct controlled burns of property. People can be cited for breaking that law and can be held responsible for damages to other people’s property if an illegally set fire gets out of control. More information about burn bans can be found on the county’s website at <https://www.co.grayson.tx.us/page/oem.outdoor>.

The Texas Forestry Service explains the meaning of the KBDI numbers in the following manner:

0-200 — Soil and large class fuel moistures are high. Moist fuels will not readily ignite or burn.

200-400 — Lower litter and duff layers are drying and beginning to contribute to fire intensity. Heavier fuels will still not readily ignite and burn.

400-600 — Lower litter and duff layers actively contribute to fire intensity and will burn actively. Expect the complete consumption of all but the largest fuels. Drying of the soil will



Grayson County burn ban expected to continue for one more week. courtesy photo / Pexels

lower live fuel moistures, allowing live fuels to become available to burn.

600-800 — Often associated with severe drought and increased wildfire occurrence. Ex-

pect intense, deep burning fires, with significant spotting problems. Live fuels will burn actively at these levels and expect fires to be difficult to contain and control.

Child abuse offenses fill Aug. 2023 indictments

Staff reports

Crimes against child top the list of items for which people were indicted in Grayson County this week.

The indictments are a formal charge and not an indication of guilt. The list of indictments comes from the Grayson County District Attorney’s Office.

The following people were indicted:

Zander Damian Smith, 20, of Knollwood — four counts aggravated sexual assault of a child, one of indecency with a child sexual contact, two of injury to a child or elderly person with disability with intent to do bodily injury;

Paden Zachary Lewis, 36, of Denison — two counts of continuous sexual abuse of a child, five counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child and on of indecency with a child sexual contact;

Allen Dwayne Wilkinson, 46, of Pottsboro — aggravated assault with a deadly weapon;

David Edwin Prikryl, 24, of Van Astryne — three counts of harassment of a public servant;

Rhonda Michelle Addington, 51, of Howe — driving while intoxicated 3rd or more;

Wendy Renee Court, 45, of McKinney — DWI 3rd or more;

Gunner Val Withrow, 28, of Whitesboro — obstruction or retaliation;

Jacqueline Michelle Jernigan, 35, of Abilene —possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Elian Alfonso Colon Reyes, 21, of Fort Worth — possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Matthew Carl Crow, 42, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Matthew Casey Allen, 20, of Benbrook — possession of marijuana;

Lowell Edmond Lemons, 41, of Collinsville —possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Andrew David Murphy, 52, of Pottsboro — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Helen Barrett, 40, of Pottsboro — possession of a controlled substance (tetrahydrocannabinol);

Moesha Sierra Bush, 25, of Sherman — two counts of bail jumping and failure to appear;

Gustavo Bautista, 44, of Tom Bean — bail jumping and failure to appear;

Torrie Tenille Johnston, 46, of Mead Oklahoma —bail jumping and failure to appear;

Brian Daniel Fuller, 47, of Whitewright — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (heroin);

James Lacy Butler, 40, of Denison — deadly conduct discharge of a gun;

Charlotte Nicole Barrier, 35, of Denison — obstruction or retaliation;

Dionisio Antonio Delgado, 25, of Sherman —possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Rebecca Lynn Johnson, 40, of Madill Oklahoma — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Michele Carter Wash, 56, of Anna —possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Brice Dalton Stewart, 29, of Whitesboro — possession of a controlled substance (heroin);

Dion Taylor Caliendo, 30, of Prospoer — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Amanda Leigh Memoli, 41, of Gordonville — injury to a child, elderly or disabled person reckless bodily injury and criminal mischief;

James Wade Burrow, 35, of Princeton — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Kimberly Kay Williams, 47, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Tony Decarlo Steens, 42, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (fentanyl and meth);

Amanda Kay Anderson, 40, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth) and unlawful possession of a gun by a felon;

Cameron Preston McClain, 33, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Derrick Lewyan Dunlap, 54, of Dallas — evading arrest with previous conviction and abandon or endanger a child intentionally, knowingly or recklessly, criminal negligence;

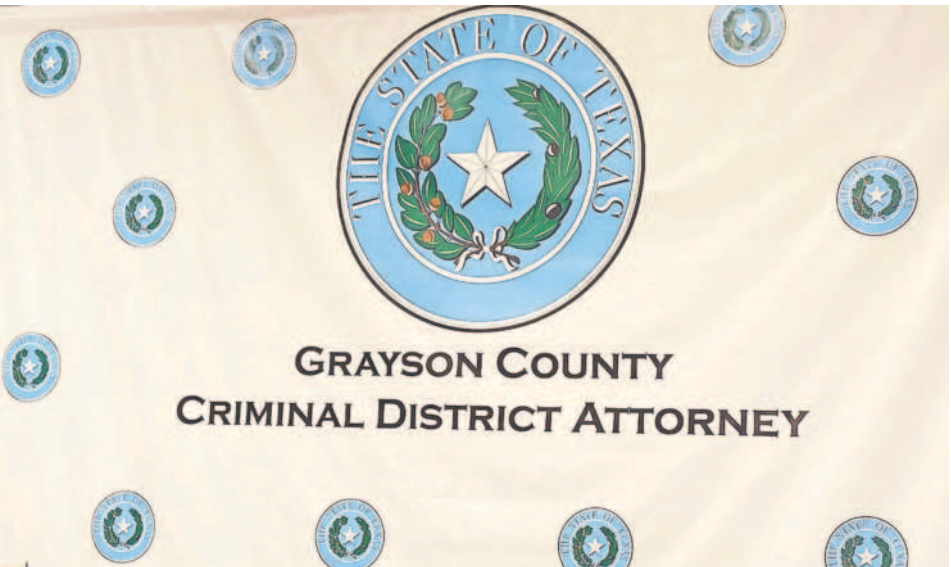
Eric Stephen Behner, 51, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Jonathan Michael Haywood, 25, of Gordonville — aggravated assault with a deadly weapon;

Montana Neal Gilleland, 27, of Denison — continuous violence against the family;

Lauren Cera Jackson, 35, of Sherman — burglary of a habitation;

Krystal Sheri Addison, 37, of Sherman — burglary of a habitation and theft of property;



The Grayson County District Attorney’s Office releases lists of indictments grand jurors held true. Jerrie Whiteley / Van Alstyne Leader

Alexandria Lauren Cockrill, 29, of Denison — credit card abuse;

Philip Colton Myers, 18, of Denison — theft of property;

Wade Lee Moncier, 32, of Whitewright — credit card or debit card abuse;

Jason Lynn Miller, 42, of Dallas —possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Cagen May Burkad, 22, of Bonham — possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Heather Alaina Wolfcale, 48, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (meth), possession of a controlled substance (meth) and prohibited substance in a correctional facility (meth);

Shanda Michelle Williams, 21, of Mead, Oklahoma — possession of a controlled substance (cocaine), possession of a controlled substance (meth) and attempt to commit tamper with evidence with intent to impair;

Frank Lee Wasson, 52, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Luciano Torres, 23, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance in a drug free zone (meth), and possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Kendrick Allen Roberson, 40, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth) and attempt to tamper with evidence with intent to impair;

Chad Gray Nickels, 51, of Sherman — DWI 3rd or more;

Valentin Anthony Murguia, 36, of Greenville — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Tommy Earl Casey Jr., 50, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (meth) and unlawful possession of a gun by a felon;

Brianna Marie Bass, 27, of Watuaga, Oklahoma — hinder prosecution known felon;

Alex Omar Salvador, 29, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Jason Ray Willis, 49, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Aldair Valezquez Sanchez, 23, of Houston —burglary of a building;

Richard Donovan Baker, 37, of Sherman — unlawful possession of a gun by a felon;

Tevin Decante Cleveland, 29, of Sherman — attempt to tamper with physical evidence with intent to impair;

Lauren Cera Jackson, 35, of Sherman —possession of a controlled substance (meth);

A. J. Wilson Jr., 67, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Josephine Smith, 50, of Sherman — DWI 3rd or more, two counts of DWI with child under 15;

Daniel Alardin Jr., 42, of Dallas — DWI 3rd or more;

Javier Garcia, 23, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Nathan Paul Lowe, 39, of Sherman — DWI 3rd or more.

Despite post-pandemic improvements, STAAR scores show Texas students are still struggling with math and reading

By Brian Lopez

The Texas Tribune

Student scores in the state’s standardized test have continued to improve since the pandemic, but more than half of Texas students are still struggling with math and about a half of them are below grade-level reading, according to score data from this spring released Wednesday.

While overall math scores improved from last year after falling to their lowest levels in a decade, they have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. And while the percentage of students who can read at grade-level — the reading level appropriate to most students in their grade — is higher than before the pandemic, overall scores in this subject remained flat from last year. The state’s most vulnerable students still lag behind state averages in both subjects.

Each spring, Texas students in third through eighth grade take the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness test in math and reading. Fifth- and eighth-graders also take the STAAR test in science, eighth-graders take a social studies version of the test and high school students take some STAAR tests known as end-of-course assessments.

The scores released Wednesday are the first to come out since the STAAR test was redesigned to more closely resemble what students learn in a classroom setting. The new test did not appear to have a significant impact on student performance.

Forty-three percent of students taking math in third through eighth grade or Algebra I met grade level or above this year, a 3-percentage-point increase from the previous year. Fifty-two percent of students who took reading in third through eighth grade, English I or English II met grade

level or above, which is the same percentage as the year before.

While the math scores represent an increase from last year, they are still 7 percentage points behind the state average in 2019, before the pandemic hit. Reading scores, on the other hand, have seen a 5-percentage-point increase since then.

“Teachers across Texas continue to work with passion and skill to help students learn,” Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath said. “This year’s results show the efforts of our educators continue to deliver improved results for students.”

Test scores for the state’s most vulnerable students — such as special education students, bilingual students and low-income students — continue to lag behind state averages, but gains have been made in recent years. About 60% of Texas’ 5.5 million students are considered economically disadvantaged.

In math, only 33% of low-income students met or exceeded grade level, compared with the 60% of students who met grade level but are not considered low income. This year’s score for low-income students is a 3-percentage-point increase from last year but still 8-percentage-points lower than 2019 scores.

In reading, only 41% of low-income students met grade level, compared with the 71% of students who met grade level but are not considered low income. The 41% did not change from last year but is 5- percentage-points higher than 2019 scores.

The latest scores show that 33% of bilingual students met grade level, representing a 2-percentage-point increase from last year and a 10-percentage-point increase from 2019. In

math, 32% of these students met grade level, a 3-percentage-point increase from last year but still 4-percentage-points lower from 2019 scores.

Meanwhile, 16% of special education students met grade level in math, a 3-percentage-point increase from last year but 1-percentage-point lower compared with 2019 levels. In reading, 17% of these students met grade level, the same as last year, but the figure is 5-percentage-points higher than 2019 scores.

Broken down by race and ethnicity, 58% of white students and 79% of Asian students were at grade level in math, but both groups are still behind pre-pandemic scores. Among Hispanic students, who make up more than half of Texas’ student population, 36% met grade level, 9-percentage-point lower than 2019 and a 2-percentage-point increase from last year. Only 28% of Black students, who make up about 13% of the state’s student population, met grade level, a 3-percentage-point increase from last year, but 7-percentage-points lower than 2019.

In reading, 68% of white students and 82% of Asian students met grade level, both representing increases from pre-pandemic scores. Forty-five percent of Hispanic students met grade level for the subject, the same as last year and 5-percentage-points higher than 2019. Forty-one percent of Black students met grade level, a 1-percentage-point increase from last year, but 7-percentage-points lower than 2019 scores.

Mary Lynn Pruneda, senior policy adviser for the public policy think tank Texas 2036, said the results show that students are continuing to recover from the learning disruption created by the pandemic, but noted that fewer students are reaching mastery-level performance, the top tier on the exam. In almost every grade level for both



A calculator and a test sheet on a desk at Elsik High School in Houston in 2018. Pu Ying Huang for The Texas Tribune

math and reading, the percentage of students who mastered either subject fell from last year and is still lagging compared with pre-pandemic levels.

Pruneda said the results show that past investments in schools to help with student performance are paying dividends but more is needed.

Over the last several years, the Texas Legislature has tried to move the needle with laws providing more tutoring for struggling kids, more preparation for educators on how to teach reading to kids and more high-quality teaching materials.

Schools have also received federal funds to aid learning recovery after the pandemic. And a special legislative session expected sometime this fall will provide another opportunity for lawmakers to pass laws that spur academic growth.

“The decisions and investments we make now will shape the opportunities that generations of students will have following graduation to pursue higher education or start a meaningful career,” Pruneda said.

ENTERTAINMENT

Creating a disaster preparedness plan for your pets

Texas A&M University

Recently, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced a wildfire disaster declaration for about 75% of the state’s counties and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also released an updated hurricane season outlook that includes a 70% chance of 14-21 named storms before the season ends in November.

With these potential weather threats in mind, now is a good time to consider what you might do with your pets if there was an emergency.

Having a plan in place is crucial for the furry members of your family. The most important way for owners to prepare for a disaster evacuation is to plan ahead and pack a go-kit, an easy-to-grab, waterproof bag or container with basic survival items and supplies.

[Guidance On Planning Ahead]

The first step in planning ahead is to know where you are going in the event of a possible evacuation by compiling a list of hotels, boarding facilities, and shelters that allow pets.

“This helps you know where you can go, depending on the types of animals you have and how many, and can give you a leg up on calling them quickly when you know you will be evacuating and need a reservation,” said Dr. Deb Zoran, a professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. “Before you need them, be sure you have information on the hotel, shelter, or boarding facilities you may use when a disaster is headed your way, check that they have a good reputation for their animal care, and make sure the facilities are completely out of harm’s way.”

While gathering information, owners can also confirm if the facilities require specific vaccinations.

“The only vaccine that is required by law in most places is rabies, yet even that vaccine is not always required for entry into an emergency animal shelter,” Zoran said. “A majority of animals brought to a shelter after being rescued from a flood, fire, or tornado come without their owners – or their owners come with them but without documentation. Emergency shelters have to operate on this premise.”

To ensure there is no doubt about a pet’s



Disaster evacuations can create stressful environments for people and pets alike, but adding identification tools and transportation supplies into a go-kit can help prevent pets’ needs from being overlooked in the chaos. courtesy photo

vaccination status, owners should keep records of vaccinations that evacuation shelters may require evidence of, including:

- Rabies
- DA2PP, a single vaccination for distemper, adenovirus type 2, parvovirus, and parainfluenza
- kennel cough for dogs
- FVRCP, or feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and panleukopenia

“Most shelters allow non-vaccinated animals into the shelter but separate the animals with vaccination papers from those without,” Zoran continued. “Ultimately, you need to consult with your vet about appropriate vaccines for your dog or cat.”

[Assembling A Go-Kit]

Owners should ask their veterinarian annually for copies of vaccine records and medication details to print and include with their go-kit.

“If your pet needs medications – heartworm, flea prevention, or specific medication for health

conditions such as thyroid or heart medicine, antibiotics, etc. – you need a copy of the medical records showing that your pet requires this medication should you not have enough or the medication is lost and has to be refilled,” Zoran explained. “Pet medications cannot be given to you without documentation or a new vet exam, so having records available is important.”

A go-kit should also include first aid supplies; cleaning supplies, including pet waste bags and sanitizing wipes; and feline supplies, if applicable, such as a litter box, scooper, and litter.

Zoran suggests owners pack additional items that can help keep pets safe and comfortable while traveling and throughout their stay in an unfamiliar place.

“Disasters are a stressful time for pets, so bringing things that smell familiar, special treats, normal food, and toys is very important,” Zoran said. “Cats, in particular, not only need the ken-

nel that they travel in, but if they are going to be away from home for days or weeks, they will need a kennel at least 2 feet by 3 feet or larger to live in; they need room to sleep, a box to hide in, and a place for the litter tray.”

Normal foods that pets are accustomed to contribute to keeping pets healthy during difficult situations.

“Familiar foods and water sources will help prevent gastrointestinal upset, as sudden food changes in the shelter environment can lead to loss of appetite, vomiting, or diarrhea, adding to the stress of the moment,” Zoran said. “Cats will be less willing to eat in a stressful or busy environment if they don’t have their own food and if they don’t have a quiet place or time to eat.”

Disaster evacuations can create stressful environments for people and pets alike, but adding identification tools and transportation supplies into a go-kit can help prevent pets’ needs from being overlooked in the chaos.

“Both dogs and cats need to have microchips, collars, or harnesses for identity protection and escape prevention,” Zoran explained. “Cats should not be removed from kennels without a harness on, as fear-inducing experiences can cause them to run and hide. Dogs, even the most highly trained ones, will also flee, so careful use of collars and leashes is essential, both for their protection and for preventing interactions with other animals at the emergency shelter.”

Pet owners should familiarize themselves with additional preparation tips by Texas A&M University’s Veterinary Emergency Team to establish a plan ahead of an emergency situation.

When disaster strikes, household pets are among the most vulnerable, as they depend on us for care. By never leaving them behind, staying informed, and, most importantly, preparing ahead for an emergency evacuation, you can keep your furry friend protected, safe, and healthy throughout any disaster.

Pet Talk is a service of the School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University. Stories can be viewed on the web at vetmed.tamu.edu/news/pet-talk. Suggestions for future topics may be directed to vmbs-editor@tamu.edu

At the movies: Blue Beetle is rock-solid superhero fare leaning into low-key pleasures

By Lisa Laman

Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

There’s been lots of internet chatter over how the new DC Comics feature Blue Beetle will impact future DC blockbusters. What I find more fascinating is how Blue Beetle relates to the last three DC motion pictures, Black Adam, Shazam! Fury of the Gods, and The Flash. Each of these blockbusters was bloated messes that traded out any trace of humanity or fun for scale and a deluge of CG baddies. All three features wanted to have the scope of a David Lean epic and the wit of a James Gunn comic book adaptation, but none of them had the creativity necessary to live up to their aspirations. After so much excess, the low-key nature of Blue Beetle is as welcoming as a drop of water in the desert. A movie willing to just focus on just a handful of characters and being an enjoyable standalone excursion is a prime way to wash out the nasty taste of The Flash from one’s mouth.

Blue Beetle begins with Jaime Reyes (Xolo Maridueña) returning from college to his hometown of Palmera City. Reuniting with family like younger sister Milagro (Belissa Escobedo), dad Alberto (Damián Alcázar), and grandma Nana (Adriana Barraza), Reyes discovers that his loved ones are going through tough times. Their house is being foreclosed on and money is scarce. Desperate to help, Jaime Reyes tries to score a job at Kord Industries through the aid of Jenny Kord (Bruna Marquezine). However, instead of scoring a cushy job, Reyes gets a scarab that attaches itself to his body. This mystical entity gives Jaime Reyes a superpowered exoskeleton known as the Blue Beetle. Now an ordinary twenty-something is dealing with all kinds of incredible abilities while also contending with the villainous Victoria Kord (Susan Sarandon) and her bodyguard Conrad Carapax (Raoul Max Trujillo), both of whom want the scarab for nefarious purposes.

Originally intended as an HBO Max exclusive title (its release strategy was changed

months before filming began), Blue Beetle’s origins as a thriftier superhero tale are noticeable on-screen but not at all in a bad way. On the contrary, having less than half the budget of Black Adam at their disposal has inspired writer Gareth Dunnet-Alcocer and director Ángel Manuel Soto to make sure the character beats of Blue Beetle truly click. After all, there is no CG skybeam in the third act to distract audiences from unengaging on-screen personalities. Luckily, Jaime Reyes and his family turn out to be an enjoyable collection of characters to spend two hours with, especially Dunnet-Alcocer wisely pumps the brakes on the story occasionally to depict low-key interactions between these loved ones.

For instance, a moment where Jaime Reyes and Alberto sit in front of their house, talking about the future while looking at plants the latter character put into the ground years earlier proves mighty touching. Meanwhile, the action-heavy third act nicely avoids the problem many superhero movies struggle with. Titles like The Wolverine tend to deliver finales that feel divorced from the character-centric sequences that preceded them. Suddenly, all the pathos is jettisoned so that the protagonist can duke it out with a CG monster. Wisely, Blue Beetle keeps the family of Jamie Reyes front and center for the entire narrative, including the climax. Never losing sight of this superhero’s relationship with his loved ones gives Blue Beetle a sense of narrative consistency even when super-powered beings are punching each other.

Those brawls between Reyes and Carapax (the latter of whom initially has a suit of armor that makes him look like one of the Jaegers from Pacific Rim) are more perfunctory than the character beats of Blue Beetle. The decision to shoot the biggest action sequences at night robs these set pieces of a chance to engage in bright colors reminiscent of vintage comic books while the choreography and sound mixing in these Reyes/Carapax showdowns often feel too derivative



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Xolo Maridueña in a scene from “Blue Beetle.” (Warner Bros. Pictures via AP)

of similar skirmishes in superhero fare like Iron Man. Anytime these fights lean into the silliness of Reyes conjuring up any weapon from his Blue Beetle suit (like axes, swords, blasters, etc.), the action scenes certainly get taken up a notch in excitement. Meanwhile, the initial tension between Reyes and Khaji-Da (Becky G), the entity inside the scarab, informs some of the most enjoyable action beats as these characters struggle to reconcile their opposing views on how to take out bad guys. Speaking of the suit, it looks great on-screen. The decision to realize it as a practical on-set outfit rather than something added in through CGI later pays off nicely, those blue hues just pop right off the screen.

Speaking of pleasant surprises, composer Bobby Krilic (a prolific musician and songwriter whose only prior film scores were limited to Triple 9 and the last two Ari Aster features) delivers a fantastic score for Blue Beetle that reinforces the distinctive personality of the overall feature. In an inspired move, Krilic has opted for an electronic sound in the score. This quality immediately differentiates the sonic landscape of Blue Beetle from other superhero movies, which often feature scores trying too hard to emulate the compositions of John Williams and Hans Zimmer. Save for occasionally distracting uses of that Inception “bwaaamm” noise, Krilic’s score here is an idiosyncratic creation that could be enjoyed even divorced from the context of Blue Beetle. These tracks lend propulsive energy that proves fitting for a movie that’s generally and enjoyably on the move, save for a second act that gets too bogged down in Blue Beetle

lore and antics involving supporting character Rudy Reyes (George Lopez).

Sometimes, it’s best to keep things low-key. Blue Beetle is a great example of this. Even just confining one’s gaze to the realm of superhero movies, Angel Manuel Soto’s feature isn’t an all-time classic. It’s too statically filmed and eager to embrace familiar superhero film hallmarks (like an action scene set to an 80s rock song, in this case, a Mötley Crüe ditty) to be the next The Batman or Spider-Man 2. However, that doesn’t discount the fact that this is still a mighty enjoyable slice of blockbuster filmmaking that finds its best moments leaning into earnest humanity and comic book tomfoolery. What a welcome reprieve that is after The Flash and Black Adam beat viewers over the head with endless spectacle in place of any soul. Oh, it also must be said that it was delightful to sit in a packed house of moviegoers and witness people getting excited at references to pop culture properties like El Chapulín Colorado or watching Blue Beetle’s equivalent to cheer-worthy superhero movie lines like “I’m always angry” getting delivered in Spanish. Those details reflect how Blue Beetle doesn’t reinvent the wheel but provides enough unique flourishes to register as a fun time. Certainly, it’s way better than Shazam! Fury of the Gods...

A lifelong movie fan and writer, Lisa Laman is a Rotten Tomatoes-approved critic who graduated from UT Dallas and is currently a writer for a variety of publications, including The Spool, Collider, ScarleTeen, and Looper.



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Xolo Maridueña in a scene from “Blue Beetle.” (Warner Bros. Pictures via AP)



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Javier Guillen, left, and Susan Sarandon in a scene from “Blue Beetle.” (Warner Bros. Pictures via AP)

For Texans, fighting state-regulated oilfield waste dumps can be a costly, do-it-yourself effort

By Jason Buch
Public Health Watch

Less than a year after an oilfield waste disposal site opened near Tara Jones' home in 2019, she and her family noticed a foul odor.

They lived a half-mile away, amid the mesquite trees and pastures west of Corpus Christi. But the sour smell from the Blackhorn Environmental Services site was potent.

Jones would later learn her neighbors had been complaining for months about Blackhorn's waste pits near the town of Orange Grove, population 1,300. Neighbors later said they sneezed, coughed, got itchy eyes and, on the worst days, felt nauseated.

When the stench reached her house, it became a regular nuisance for Jones, her husband Calvert and their two children — to the degree that she started keeping a written log. She complained to the Railroad Commission of Texas, which regulates the oil, gas and pipeline industries. After one especially bad night, when the odor gave her a headache and made her sick to her stomach, she intensified her efforts. She began filing public records requests with the Railroad Commission and poring over thousands of pages of documents.

The cause of the odor was never determined. But Jones says she discovered she and her neighbors had to agitate and do their own investigations to convince regulators to act.

In 2021, Blackhorn was found to have violated its permit by receiving industrial waste for which it wasn't authorized at the Orange Grove site; the company was sued over the issue by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, or TCEQ. Blackhorn appealed the permit violation, kept operating and wasn't fined by the Railroad Commission.

"They [the Railroad Commission] are an entity in existence for the industry and the industry alone, in my opinion," Jones said.

Jones and her neighbors aren't the only Texans frustrated with the Railroad Commission, complaining that its policing of waste disposal is weak and doesn't protect public health. The agency, led by three elected commissioners, has been criticized for years by advocacy groups and some lawmakers who accuse the commission of being too cozy with the industries it regulates.

In the small East Texas town of Paxton, for example, residents raised tens of thousands of dollars to fight a proposed oilfield disposal facility, worried it would pollute their drinking water. The Railroad Commission staff last year recommended denying the permit, but commissioners allowed the company to submit a new proposal.

Deep-pocketed businesses can keep pushing permits until protesters run out of resources to fight them, said Virginia Palacios, executive director of Commission Shift, a nonprofit that advocates for the agency's reform.

Amid the criticism, the commission is rewriting regulations for waste-disposal facilities, known as Statewide Rule 8, at the request of industry and legislators. That rulemaking can be lengthy and complex. But Rule 8 hasn't been significantly revised in decades — an era that brought major changes to the oil and gas industry, including the fracking revolution. To adapt, the Railroad Commission has adopted operating procedures that aren't part of the formal rules.

Critics say those procedures are too lenient, allowing for lax oversight. Preliminary drafts of the rule obtained by Commission Shift through public records requests show the Railroad Commission is essentially "taking their current operating procedure and just codifying it," Palacios said. She added, "We definitely don't see any of the public protections in this rule that we would want to see."

Critics are also raising red flags because the process is being led by a commissioner, Jim Wright, who has ownership interests in disposal companies.

Aaron Krejci, a spokesperson for Wright, said "it would be premature to discuss" drafts of the proposed regulations and provided a statement from the commissioner. The statement said Statewide Rule 8 is badly in need of an update, and modernizing it was "one of the catalysts" for Wright's candidacy three years ago.

Wright said "it is time to update and strengthen this rule to better reflect the technological advancements and modern practices of the 21st century."

Wright ran for office "to serve the citizens of our state ... not for personal gain," Krejci said, adding that his boss's experience in the industry "is an asset to the state of Texas."

"He has seen how the actions of a few can tarnish the reputation of an entire industry and give a competitive advantage over those who follow the rules and requirements," Krejci said.

Railroad Commission's role

The Railroad Commission is the state's oldest regulatory agency, created in 1891. It hasn't had anything to do with railroads in nearly two decades, instead serving as the primary regulator of the state's oil and gas industry, a top economic driver. It also oversees pipelines and coal and uranium mining.

Headquartered in a high-rise near the State Capitol in Austin, the commission has nearly 1,000 employees and 11 additional offices across the state. Its three commissioners, all Republicans, are elected to six-year terms. A small army of permitting staffers, inspectors, hearing examiners and administrative law judges reviews records and recommends whether to grant a permit or propose a fine, but the commissioners make the final decisions.

Its stated mission, authorized by the legislature, requires a delicate balancing act: The commission is charged with promoting economic development through permitted exploration of oil, natural gas and other resources, yet is also responsible for protecting the environment and public health.

A contentious part of its regulatory landscape is the disposal of oilfield waste, created by drilling operations and related industries. The Railroad Commission issues permits to commercial dumping operations, waste pits and drying pads where oil and gas producers pay to dispose of potentially dangerous drilling byproducts. These include fracking water, sand and storage tanks.

Federal and Railroad Commission regulators do not categorize oil and gas waste as hazardous — something environmentalists and public health advocates have criticized. Producers in Texas have argued that chemicals used in oil and gas production are proprietary, and they're not required to disclose them. Yet as oil and gas production has increased, so has the need for disposal sites, putting them in closer proximity to Texas' growing population.

Critics, including landowners, say not only are the elected commissioners too deferential to industries about permits or compliance, they and staff members often take at face value companies' representations. Proving a company violated its permit is often left up to residents and community leaders, such as in Orange Grove — a potentially costly and

time-consuming exercise.

Companies applying for permits to operate waste facilities conduct their own soil testing and give the Railroad Commission information about the location of wetlands, water wells and aquifers. Commission staff generally accept those as fact, leaving nearby landowners to point out any problems, said Melissa Troutman, a climate and energy advocate who in 2021 co-authored a report about oil and gas waste in Texas.

"Depending on who's looking at it at the agency, they might find a problem, or they might rubber-stamp it," Troutman said. "Agencies are required to issue permits pretty quickly."

R.J. DeSilva, the Railroad Commission's communication director, said the agency has added a compliance team to address any issues that occur after facilities are permitted and pursue enforcement if needed.

Commission staff "take all measures to help ensure community and environmental safety," DeSilva wrote in an email.

Laura Capper, a Houston-based energy consultant who has advised waste disposal companies seeking permits from the Railroad Commission, disputed that the agency rubber-stamps permit applications. She said while the commission rarely does on-site inspections for permits, staff members carefully review information from the companies and check it against public records. Commercial disposal facilities receive greater scrutiny than private sites, where operators dispose of their own waste, and must put up large bonds, which can top \$1 million, to cover potential remediation costs, Capper said. She said "99%" of companies adhere to regulations, although among regulators "there's kind of an assumption that you're playing by the rules."

Uproar in East Texas

The controversy over waste facilities was evident in February, when the commission's chair, Christi Craddick, was testifying before a state Senate committee about the commission's budget. State Sen. Robert Nichols, a Republican from Jacksonville in far East Texas, began asking questions about why his constituents were spending tens of thousands of their own dollars to fight an oil and gas waste facility.

Texas has less restrictive rules on waste disposal sites than Louisiana, Nichols said, making disposal facilities near the state line tempting places for oil companies to dump. The proposed facility near Paxton was of particular concern. The residents had raised \$50,000 to fight the facility, Nichols said.

"Your staff has rejected ... this application from an administrative standpoint because it's right next to an aquifer, next to the city water supply, next to wetlands, things like that," he said. "But somehow or another [it] keeps being raised from the dead."

Craddick told Nichols she couldn't comment on a matter pending before the commission beyond saying companies whose permits were rejected "have a right to come file" new applications.

McBride Operating LLC had applied in 2019 to develop the waste facility with a drying pad, truck washout pad and landfill half a mile east of Paxton. Community opposition quickly grew intense. Neighbors hired lawyers and a geoscientist to contest the permit and try to poke holes in McBride's proposal, particularly its assertion that nearby wetlands and the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer would be safe from contamination. The fight culminated in a two-week hearing before a Railroad Commission administrative law judge in November 2021. The commission's staff recommended denying the permit.

At a public commission meeting in December 2022, however, Wright proposed giving the project developers another chance.

"East Texas has certain conditions like shallow groundwater, which makes it difficult to permit a location for the permanent disposal of oil and gas waste," he said. "The cost for oil and gas waste disposal in East Texas is high, and I don't want to negatively affect production in the area. However, this need for disposal capacity, dire as it may be, cannot cause the commission to relax its rules and regulations for protection of freshwater."

He made a motion to send the permit application back to the commission's hearings division, giving McBride a chance to fix its permit application.

"I myself have constructed safe landfills in similar conditions that handled not just oil and gas waste, but rather industrial hazardous waste," Wright said. "In other words, it can be done."

All three commissioners approved the motion. The Railroad Commission held a three-day hearing this spring and hasn't made a recommendation.

John Hicks, a lawyer for McBride Operating, blamed the drawn-out process in part on the neighbors protesting the site, using the term "NIMBY", an acronym for "not in my backyard." He said an inexperienced Railroad Commission staffer wrote the 2021 recommendation to deny the permit, which Hicks called "flawed." He applauded Wright's decision to send the application back for another hearing.

McBride "has also had its time and resources burdened in order to disprove the protestants' arguments," Hicks wrote in an email. "McBride is also a landowner and is merely seeking to exercise its property rights within the law."

Linda Wheeler, who lives near Paxton, spent two weeks in Austin at her own expense to protest McBride's permit application at the 2021 hearing. But she couldn't leave Paxton to attend the hearing this year because her elderly mother needed care.

"I can't tell you how many times they've given [McBride Operating] a chance to fix this," she said. "I think they're wanting us to give up."

Critics' perceptions of conflicts

Wright, a South Texas rancher who was elected to the commission in 2020, probably knows the waste disposal business better than other commissioners and most commission staff.

He says his first job at age 19 was at a hazardous waste facility. In the four decades since — he's 61 — he has gone from employee to owner. According to his public financial disclosures, Wright has ownership in three waste-hauling companies regulated by the Railroad Commission; he's president of one and director of another.

Yet Wright came onto the commission as somewhat of an outsider. He defeated an industry-backed incumbent in the Republican primary. He has taken positions that suggested he would serve independently of influence from the oil and gas waste disposal industries. Among the stances were suggesting on the campaign trail that disposal site permits are too quickly granted and proposing to recuse himself on matters involving campaign donors.

But environmental advocates question whether Wright can be an impartial regulator. He once paid fines for environmental violations by a company he had owned. He's softened his promise on potential conflicts of interest, now saying he'll recuse himself only on matters involving contributors who gave directly before a commission vote. Blackhorn executives and McBride Operating are among the dozens of companies, lobbyists, lawyers and executives with ties to the energy industry that have donated to Wright's campaign.

Wright isn't the only commissioner who critics say has conflicts.

Craddick is the scion of a political family that made a fortune in the oil and gas industry and has accepted contributions from people involved in the oil and gas industry, campaign disclosure records show. That includes more than \$20,000 from McBride Operating and its owner. Commissioner Wayne Christian, a former legislator, has also received campaign donations from oil and gas interests, including a \$100,000 contribution in 2020 from a company whose disposal site he'd voted to approve against the commission staff's recommendation. Both Craddick and Christian have received donations from Blackhorn executives. A Paxton landowner opposed to the McBride facility gave several hundred dollars to Christian and Wright.

Asked about a report on commissioners' financial ties to industries, Craddick issued a statement in 2021 saying Texas Ethics Commission laws ensure transparency and "I take these laws seriously." Christian said during his 2022 race that campaigns are expensive to run but he has never allowed a political contribution to influence his decisions.

Critics of the commission say they're skeptical Wright can lead a recrafting of Rule 8 regulations to benefit the public good.

"When it comes to the waste industry, he has a personal financial interest in it," Palacios said. "It's hard to say if he has strong enough environmental values or strong enough concern for public health that it will outweigh his business interests."

Krejci, Wright's spokesperson, said the commissioner owns less than 10% of one of the Railroad Commission-regulated companies listed on his financial disclosures and is not involved in its day-to-day operations. The other two companies also conduct operations regulated by the TCEQ and the federal government, Krejci said.

"As a candidate for office and now as commissioner, I base my decisions on what I believe is best for the state and our citizens," Wright said in a statement.

The Rule 8 regulations last underwent an overhaul in 1984 and saw minor changes in the 1990s. When Railroad Commission staff last tried to rewrite the rule 20 years ago — commissioners didn't adopt the changes — they held workshops in five cities and sought public comments. That hasn't happened this time. Commission Shift has accused Wright of soliciting input only from industry representatives.

Krejci said he expects a draft to be posted on the Railroad Commission's website by late summer or early fall. An informal public comment period will occur before the proposed rules are submitted to the commissioners. After that, the proposed rule will be published in the Texas Register for a formal comment period before the commissioners vote on whether to adopt it. While an industry task force has provided input, Krejci said the final product will be the work of Railroad Commission staff and the commissioners. He accused Commission Shift of trying "to attach false motives to the commissioner's stated goals to provide needed updates to Statewide Rule 8."

"Commissioner Wright anticipates the proposed rule will strengthen protections and provide greater clarity for all parties," Krejci said.

A recent draft of the new rules has some changes Commission Shift supports, like requiring more wells to monitor groundwater near waste facilities.

"But what we're not seeing are stronger standards for protecting the public or the environment," Palacios, the watchdog's executive director, said.

For example, a recent draft of the proposed rule would codify the Commission's laissez-faire policy toward fining permit violators, Palacios said.

Louisiana, in contrast, makes it easier to protest permit applications and limits the number of times a company can amend its application, she said.

Among the changes Palacios would like to see in the new rule: increasing public outreach, strengthening enforcement provisions, more rigorous testing of oilfield waste and requiring a more intensive review of permit applications.

Residents challenge disposal site

In Orange Grove, the odor from Blackhorn's disposal site caused neighbors to file dozens of complaints with the state in 2019, the year the facility opened.

In late 2019 and early 2020, investigators from the Railroad Commission and the TCEQ paid regular visits to the facility and nearby properties, records from both agencies show. Jones said inspectors told her that air quality was within the TCEQ's jurisdiction, not the commission's. In April 2020, the TCEQ issued a notice of violation to Blackhorn for "unpleasant petroleum odors" that interfered with "normal use and enjoyment of animal life, vegetation, or property," according to a TCEQ environmental investigator's summary. But the TCEQ didn't penalize the company.

In 2020, 11 neighbors, excluding the Jones family, sued Blackhorn in a Jim Wells County district court alleging it had failed to notify the Railroad Commission of nearby drinking water wells. The lawsuit also complained of odors that made it "unbearable to be outside and seep into the house," causing headaches, runny noses and itchy throats, according to affidavits filed in the lawsuit. Even the complainants' dogs had runny noses.

In August 2020, a TCEQ investigator responding to complaints "immediately felt nauseous [from the odor] and had to leave the area promptly," according to court filings.

Tara Jones began keeping detailed odor logs in late 2019 at the TCEQ's request. The following August, she documented 14 hours of rank odors on one day, 18 and a half hours on another.

One night in December 2020 the Jones family again came home to a foul odor. Tara Jones said she rushed her daughters inside, but the stink had permeated the house. She and her family had a metallic taste in their mouths, and she and her husband got headaches, Jones said.

"My headache was so strong, I felt like I was going to throw up," she said.

Jones decided that keeping odor logs and relying on the diligence of regulators was not enough. She familiarized herself with Blackhorn's permit and state rules, then began filing requests with the Railroad Commission and the TCEQ for records of waste delivered to the Blackhorn facility, and the tests performed on that waste.

"At that point I was like, 'If they're not going to do it, I'm going to do it,'" she said.

In April 2021, commissioners voted to renew Blackhorn's permit, with Wright noting they would keep monitoring the situation.

That same day, Tara Jones emailed a lengthy

summary of her findings to the Railroad Commission. She alleged that Blackhorn received waste from unlicensed haulers. Jones also asked why waste, identified as "backwash" and "contaminated bottoms" in the company's reports to the commission, was being shipped to Blackhorn by a facility owned by Valicor Environmental Services in nearby Robstown. And whether that waste was being tested for toxics, as required.

The following month, the Railroad Commission told Blackhorn it had violated its permit by taking waste from three companies, which Jones had flagged, that weren't approved oil and gas waste haulers. It also asked for more information about tests conducted on the Valicor waste. In early June, the Railroad Commission notified Blackhorn it had also violated its permit by accepting waste from Valicor, and the permit would be suspended, commission records show. DeSilva, the commission's communication director, said the investigation of Blackhorn was prompted by a March 2021 inspection of Valicor's facility.

Since January 2020, the Orange Grove facility had accepted 644 loads of unpermitted waste from Valicor that hadn't been properly tested for toxics, the Railroad Commission said. The TCEQ later said it tracked 3.8 million gallons and 871 cubic yards of waste from Valicor to the Blackhorn facility.

Blackhorn appealed, denying it had violated its permit. The company was allowed to keep operating pending the commission's decision on the permit suspension.

In a statement to Public Health Watch, Patricia Canales Bell, Blackhorn's attorney, wrote that "the Valicor material is non-hazardous and chemically and physically similar to traditional oil and gas waste materials that are managed and processed daily at the Blackhorn facility."

TCEQ is investigating Valicor's role in unauthorized waste sent to the Blackhorn facility, according to agency records. Valicor declined to comment.

Four days after commission staff issued the June violation notice, the commissioners voted to deny the Jones family's appeal of their decision to renew the permit. Wright said Blackhorn would have to provide more information to prove it was in compliance.

"The people of Texas have my word that we will continue to closely monitor this situation," he said.

In November 2021, the Railroad Commission gave Blackhorn a clean bill of health, ending the permit suspension without issuing a fine. The company had stopped accepting unpermitted waste and taken steps to prevent future violations, commission staff said.

"The RRC's priority was ensuring the facility was brought into compliance with its permit and that there were no continuing issues," DeSilva, the commission spokesperson, wrote in an email.

Canales Bell, Blackhorn's lawyer, wrote in an email to Public Health Watch that the company followed Railroad Commission environmental protection rules. Blackhorn had the waste tested, and the results show "that the Valicor material presents no greater concern or threat to human health or the environment when compared to traditional oil and gas waste generated at the well site," Canales Bell wrote.

"The Railroad Commission has confirmed that all operations of the Blackhorn facility are in full compliance with every aspect of the issued permit under Statewide Rule 8," she added.

In early 2022, a judge in Jim Wells County dismissed most of the claims in the lawsuit filed by Blackhorn's neighbors. A few months later, both sides reached a settlement on the remaining piece of the lawsuit. Neither would share details of the agreement.

Jones and other neighbors were disappointed with the Railroads Commission's decisions. They still didn't know what had been making them sick, and Jones said she thought Blackhorn deserved stiff penalties.

"There's no incentive to do better," she said. "You don't even get a slap on the wrist."

Palacios, of Commission Shift, said a draft of the proposed Rule 8 would allow commission staff to more easily monitor the specific waste that is dropped at disposal sites by letting companies submit their manifests electronically. But electronic reporting wouldn't be required. If it were and the commission checked the reports, oversight would be more rigorous than the system in place, which relies on private citizens like Jones to review typed or handwritten manifests and reports, Palacios said.

Jones "had to learn how the system functions, then she had to comb through the records line by line when the computer could do this in a split second," Palacios said.

State goes to court

As the Railroad Commission took steps to end the case against Blackhorn, the TCEQ pressed ahead with its investigation.

During a June 2021 inspection, TCEQ asked for records about Blackhorn's facility, according to court filings. Blackhorn initially promised to provide the records electronically, but then told inspectors they would have to return to the Orange Grove facility to view them, according to court filings and agency records.

In April 2022, the Texas attorney general sued Blackhorn on behalf of the TCEQ, asking a judge to impose civil penalties for Blackhorn's accepting waste from Valicor, which the TCEQ regulated, and refusing to provide the records. Blackhorn has argued in court that the TCEQ doesn't have jurisdiction over the company.

Canales Bell, Blackhorn's attorney, said the TCEQ's request for records was voluminous and "overly burdensome."

The agency never responded to Blackhorn's invitation to inspect records at the Orange Grove facility, she said.

"Instead, it included this groundless records allegation in its original petition and seeks damages against Blackhorn," Canales Bell said.

That case is pending. Last year, the Railroad Commission gave Blackhorn permission to receive waste from a Superfund site, but that plan was derailed after the TCEQ intervened.

Tara Jones said that when her neighbors rallied to oppose Blackhorn's operating permit nearly a decade ago, her family stayed out of it. Her husband works in the oil and gas industry, and they didn't want to bite the hand that feeds them. When other neighbors sued the company over the odors and water wells issue, the Joneses didn't join. But she spent enormous amounts of time trying to figure out what was making her family sick — a testament to how miserable they were, she said.

When she heard about the attorney general's lawsuit, she started crying.

"It was just so much work, and I wasn't getting any traction from the Railroad Commission," she said. "It was almost relief that, hey, somebody really is listening, and hopefully we can get it resolved."

A few months ago, the odor from the waste disposal site returned, although it's milder than before, Jones said. She has started keeping an odor log again.

Jason Buch is a freelance journalist based in Texas.

OUTDOOR SPORTS

Local sports calendar Aug.

Aug. 25
VA HS Volleyball @ Forney Varsity Tournament (Forney High School);
VA Varsity Football @ Pottsboro 7 – 9 p.m. (Pottsboro Cardinal Stadium);
Howe Varsity Football vs. Honey Grove 7:30 p.m.;
Howe Volleyball @ Callisburg Tournament

Aug. 26
VA HS Volleyball @ Forney Varsity Tournament (Forney High School);

Aug. 27
Howe Cross Country at Sherman 8 a.m.
Howe Volleyball @ Callisburg Tournament

Aug. 29
VA HS Volleyball vs Nevada Community 5 – 8 p.m. (Van Alstyne High School)

Aug. 30
Howe Volleyball @ Sam Rayburn 5 p.m.;

Aug. 31
VA HS Cross Country Tim Menke Invitational @ Sulphur Springs 4 – 8 p.m. (North Hopkins School);
VA MS Cross Country Tim Menke Invitational - Sulphur Springs 4 – 8 p.m. (North Hopkins School);
VA MS Volleyball @ Slayer Creek MS (Anna) 5 – 7 p.m.;
VA JV Blue Football @ Frisco Lebanon Trail 5:30 – 7 p.m. (Frisco Lebanon Trails High School);
VA JV White Football vs Frisco Lebanon Trail 5:30 – 7 p.m. (Panther Stadium);

ALL TOGETHER NOW.

Last call for Hagerman NWR bowhunt applications

By Lynn Burkhead
Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

For bowhunters dreaming of a big Grayson County bow buck this fall, there’s a lot of trail camera checking going on right now if you’re fortunate enough to have a spot to climb into a tree and chase the backyard bow bucks that our county is famous for.

Those big whitetails are nearing the completion of their antler growth, they will be shedding their velvet before long, and local stick-and-string enthusiasts will be enduring some sleepless nights between now and the start of the early archery season in a few weeks.

If you don’t have a place to hunt on private land, you might be enduring some sleepless nights for another reason as you

think about a fall with little if any chance to bowhunt. If that’s the case, it might pay to remember that we’re now only a couple of weeks away from the annual permit application deadline arrives on the calendar for Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge bow hunts this fall.

According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, that deadline looms two weeks from today on Friday, Sept. 1, this year when hunters must apply by midnight on that date.

As has been the case in recent years, the application process for the popular local refuge hunts will take place via the TPWD Drawn Hunts system page at <http://www.tpwd.texas.gov>. This year, the cost to apply is \$3 per person and those selected will have to have proof of successful completion of an IBEP bowhunter safety course to participate.

It’s worth noting that there will only be 139 permits available on the Godwin, Goode, and Meyers units of the refuge this year. Incidentally, bowhunt segment dates on those three units this fall will be Segment A (Nov. 4-6); Segment B (Nov. 17-19); and Segment C (Dec. 1-Dec. 3).

But that won’t likely impact demand for a famed Hagerman bowhunting permit despite the lower permit numbers being offered the last couple of years. In fact, the local bowhunts — that once produced a Texas state record Pope and Young Club non-typical a generation ago — remain immensely popular since there were 1,999 applicants for Hagerman NWR bowhunting permits last fall according to TPWD.

As I’ve noted before in this space, the drawing odds may be low, but you’ll never know what could happen if you don’t apply.

What a beautiful day for fishing on Texoma

By JB Webb
Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

After all of last week and part of this one, the heat was out of control. You better have been dressed for it.

Guides still were going out with customers but they were back in and cleaning fish early. Evidently the stripers were deep and more than ready to eat a live bait.

Now there are a few lures fishing guides who work out of our cove, I haven’t heard from any of them, John Blasingame was going out Tuesday morning but I haven’t heard from him either.

Last Sunday Charlie a.k.a Goober finally wanted to go fishing with me for the first time in a long time. Wednesday was a fisherpersons day. It started with heat in the 60s and a little wind from the northeast.

I was wearing ultralight short pants and a thin shirt. It got your attention early while running at 40 miles per hour.

At our first stop I got a Kentucky Bass on a Heddon Spook Jr. on my third or fourth cast; I can still walk the dog with that lure. Then a striper decided it looked good and hit

it also.

Charlie missed one as he was trying out a new way to work his no longer made and found now mostly in collectors’ hands Heddon Chugger Jr.

He thought he would give the fish a little more time before he set the hook. It didn’t work much better than his old way. Moving on our next stop put two fish in the boat and I had one try to get in the boat.

I had walked my lure through and over some of the brush under water I hadn’t got a bite so I started reeling fast and just as I was lifting my lure out of the water a nice bass tried to get in the boat chasing it. It got away and after a little more fishing we also left that area.

Our next stop saw Charlie catch a bass and miss another. Now Charlie isn’t a bad fisherman but it had been around two months since he went fishing. Smallie Point had me getting another smallmouth on a Cotton Cordell Sliver Gay Blade. Moving out from the back of Little Mineral we reached One Fish Rock. It gave up two bass one on a Bomber Fat Free Fry Square Bill Crankbait and the other on a Blakemore Road Runner.

Running to my 10 a.m. hole was a waste of gas. We came back to High Wire Cove and Charlie had a near hookup but his bad luck was still holding as it never came back. I picked up two more, a smallie and a Kentucky. While these didn’t jump, earlier a smallmouth I put in the boat made three big jumps before I could lift him in.

I also caught an eating-size channel cat on the Bomber Crankbait but I couldn’t count it or the striper. We had started at 6:30 a.m. and quit at 11 a.m. After all of the bad luck I had the last few weeks fishing, this was a dream trip. The weather was nice, even some smoke on the water.

It was a day to just be out in the morning. Our totals were 11 fish caught and more misses than that. I’m counting that catfish and striper.

Yahoo, it has finally arrived. High school football is here. Gunter beat Bishop Lynch 21-0 in its first scrimmage last week and they scrimmage with Van Alstyne before kicking off the regular season.

Just looks like it’s going to be a rip-snorting good year and most of the games are in Gunter until the playoffs start.

Calendar

Aug. 26 – Celina Ducks Unlimited fundraising dinner at the 3R’s Ranch in Prosper.

Sept. 1 – Deadline to apply for Hagerman NWR bowhunting permits. To apply or for more information, visit www.tpwd.texas.gov.

Sept. 1 – Nov. 1 – Dove season first split for Texas North Zone.

Sept. 1-Oct. 31 – Dove season first split for Oklahoma.

Sept. 9-18 – Oklahoma special resident Canada goose season.

Sept. 9-24 – Texas early teal season.

Sept. 9-24 – Oklahoma early teal season.

Sept. 10-25 – Texas East Zone early Canada goose season.

Sept. 16 – Lake Ray Roberts Ducks Unlimited fundraising dinner at the Double K Rustic Ranch in Gainesville.

Fishing Report

At Lake Texoma, water is stained; water temp is 86 degrees; and the lake is 0.46 feet above normal pool level. Guide John Blasingame of Adventure Texoma Outdoors tells TPWD that “Striped bass are good with catches of larger fish coming on topwaters in the early morning. By mid morning the larger fish can be caught fishing slabs beneath the smaller fish...Meanwhile, guide Jacob Orr of Lake Texoma Guaranteed Guide Service reports that “Striped bass are good on live bait, slabs or topwaters. Schooling fish are running along deep ledges and across flats. Better fish can be caught beneath the surface fish with a three-inch swimbait or small topwater. Crap-

pie are slow on our set brush piles fishing in 20-24 feet of water using electronics to target active fish that seem to be closer to the bottom of the piles. Catfish are great on prepared baits and cut shad in 25-35 feet of water on rocky ledges for limits of eater size fish. Smallmouth and largemouth are fair on topwaters early along the bluffs and swim baits later off the banks in 8-15 feet of water.”... At Lake Ray Roberts, water is clear; water temp is 89 degrees; and the lake is 1.03 feet below normal pool level. Guide Jim Walling of Ucatchem Guide Service tells TPWD that it’s typical fishing patterns for the dog days of summer. White bass continue to be good with keeper sized fish being caught in 30 feet of water on slabs. Crappie are fair on brush piles and trees in 25 feet of water using minnows. Bass are good with a sporadic topwater bite, but most catches are on Carolina-rigs or dropshots fished in 15-25 feet of water over main lake structures. Catfish are fair at Ray Roberts right now as well...At Lake Fork, the water is stained; water temps are 87-88 degrees; and the lake is 1.19 feet below normal pool level. Guide Marc Mitchell of Lake Fork Guide Service tells TPWD that “The shallow bass bite is the best bite in the early mornings in 2-4 feet around weeds, grass on wind blown points. Wake baits, spinnerbaits and Chatterbaits are producing for the first hour or so. Then push out to 5-8 feet of water with a shakyhead or Carolina-rigs with small baits. A few catches (are happening) on

a squarebill crankbait in the same areas.”... Also at Lake Fork, Alex Guthrie of Fly Fish Fork Guide Service reports that “Fly fishing for black bass is slow with an early morning topwater bite, then (a) streamer bite in late evening on shallow main lake points. Bream are slow.”...Crappie anglers at Lake Fork are finding good action according to Jacky Wiggins of Jacky Wiggins Guide Service. He tells TPWD that “The crappie fishing continues to heat up this week on Lake Fork as water temperatures soar. Great crappie catches on timber in 18-26 feet of water with the white crappie suspended and the black crappie hugging closer to the bottom. Laydowns continue to be just loaded with black crappie. Some white crappie are stacked up on brush piles as well. If you encounter fish that are finicky or just do not want to bite, then move to the next set of fish. With so many fish stacked up on the structure it is just a matter of finding hungry fish that want to bite. Minnows continue to dominate the warmer months, but if you are up for a challenge then bust out the hand tied jigs and soft plastics.”...While weather forecasters are hinting at the possibility of tropical mischief near the Texas Gulf Coast shoreline next week, for now, the fishing remains good at Bolivar Peninsula. Capt. Raymond Wheatley of Tail Spotter Guide Service LLC tells TPWD that “The surf is holding numbers of black drum, sharks, and some big redfish on cut bait or live on the bottom. The Gulf side of the North Jetty is holding limits of sheephead and trout against rocks with an occasional redfish early near the end with a popping cork and

shrimp. The wreck has good numbers of trout early on free-lined shrimp or croaker close to rocks. Channel side (is) holding some nice trout close to the rocks and big redfish on the bottom. Sharks are at the end of the jetty towards the gulf side.”...Meanwhile, at Port Aransas, Capt. Doug Stanford of Pirates of the Bay Fishing Charters reports that “Redfish and oversized redfish are good at the jetties with cut finger mullet. Catches of sharks can also be had along the way. The water has calmed and there are good numbers of trout, redfish and drum in the first and second cut on croaker or piggy perch from the island to Cedar Bayou. The west side of Aransas Bay is good for catches of redfish on cut or finger mullet when the tide drops.”...And finally, at South Padre Island, Capt. Lou Austin of Austin Fishing South Padre tells TPWD that “Limits of good trout (are being caught) free lining shrimp with a #5 split shot in the Intra-coastal (Waterway). A few redfish and black drum can be caught drifting the color line on Gaswell Flats and east of Three Islands. Red snapper are abundant at artificial reefs. Spanish Mackerel are very good near jetties with a few kingfish mixed in.”...

Outdoors Tip of the Week

Last week on Tuesday, Aug. 15, the first day of license sales took place across the Lone Star State for new 2023-24 Texas hunting and fishing licenses. Hunters and anglers should remember that current year licenses expire on Aug. 31, 2023 and that new hunting, fishing, and Super Combo licenses can be purchased online at www.tpwd.texas.gov and at license vendors across the state.

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Start Reading Today!

ACROSS

1 TXism: "he's still got some snap in his garters"

46 TXism: "just a _____ in the bucket"

47 UT has original manuscript of E.M. Forster's "Passage _____"

49 former Texas honky tonk used in "Urban Cowboy"

52 Ranger Eovaldi stat.

53 UT's Benton directed "Kramer _____ Kramer"

(cemetery)

16 TXism: "got a mind like a steel _____"

18 Hawaiian dance attire (2 wds.)

21 TX Don Henley's "All She Wants _____ Do Is Dance"

22 TXism: "working between _____" (night work)

23 once a brand of GMC cars

24 Crowell High School football (2 wds.)

30 TXism: "behind the _____" (predicament)

34 TX Chandra Wilson was _____ Miranda Bailey on "Grey's Anatomy"

35 small, narrow river

36 Gulf canvas

37 Amarillo's "Big Texan" features a 72-_____ steak

39 TX George H.W.'s NASA director (2 wds.)

43 cowboys _____ buckle on their belt

44 party inflatable

45 sodium symbol

46 TXism: "just a _____ in the bucket"

47 UT has original manuscript of E.M. Forster's "Passage _____"

49 former Texas honky tonk used in "Urban Cowboy"

52 Ranger Eovaldi stat.

53 UT's Benton directed "Kramer _____ Kramer"

54 7th signs of the zodiac

55 "if _____ me you'll be sorry"

58 what most Texas college students have (2 wds.)

59 "heavy" Cameron AM station

60 integrated circuit clock (abbr.)

61 TX Mary Kay

DOWN

1 Texas birth town of Willie Nelson

2 northernmost Texas town

3 Grace Noll Crowell was a Texas poet _____

4 TXism: "como _____" (how are ya?)

9 TX Holly's "____, Boy" stealing cattle

11 honky tonk, e.g. Dallas' Rosewood developed Hawaii's _____ Maui Resort

12 TXism: " _____ as a sluggish turtle"

14 founder of famous TX King Ranch (init.)

15 TXism: "shin _____" (big dance)

17 "rash" vine? (2 wds.)

19 disaster relief organization (2 wds.)

20 you're apt _____ what you sow

24 35th governor, Coke (init.)

25 former Ford model

26 Semitic person

TEXAS CROSSWORD
by Charley & Guy Orbison
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16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46

47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61

P-1651

40 _____ Chaney is a San Antonio street

41 Leo Greenwood hit: " _____ Bless the USA"

42 spread near Albany (2 wds.)

48 " _____ in the tub"

50 West Texas animal: mountain _____

51 Luling Watermelon Thump once had a melon that weighed 88 of these (abbr.)

56 extreme adjective

57 TXism for old, senile men

GARDENING

Gardener’s mailbag: Is my tree sun burnt?

By Neil Sperry

Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

Dear Neil: I knew we were pushing the window by planting two new shade trees in April, but I’m usually good at keeping plants alive. The bur oak in the backyard is doing well. It has some shade from large pecans next door. However, the poor red oak in the front yard gets no shade from the western sun and it is struggling. The twigs are still flexible, but the leaves appear bleached. Is this sunburn? What should I do?

This is not sunscald. This looks like a tree that simply got too dry one or more times and turned brown because its leaves were lost in the process. Sadly, we saw a lot of this with new trees and shrubs last year and this year. People may have forgotten to water them by hand so that they could soak the original soil balls deeply. The original root systems are still pretty much together, so it’s imperative that we keep them thoroughly soaked with a garden hose and a water breaker or water bubbler. If the tree came out of a 30-gallon pot, it should be getting 30 gallons of water every other day spring through fall.

By comparison, “sunscald” shows up in the second and especially the third year when a red oak (or red maple, Chinese pistachio or other thin-barked tree) is planted without having its trunk protected with paper tree wrap. I use the term “non-negotiable” to emphasize that without such protection the bark on the west and southwest sides of the trunk will gradually dry and split like old, weathered leather. Internal tissues will be exposed, and borers and decay will move in. This happens because new trees that have had their trunks shaded by one another in the nursery are suddenly forced into the sun when planted out into our landscapes. You can try wrapping your tree now, but it may be too late.

Dear Neil: I wrote to you earlier this spring about growing Texas mountain laurels from seed. I followed your advice, and now I have three little 6-inch mountain laurels. No questions. Just wanted to tell you I was grateful for the help.

I’m glad it worked. I’ve done the same things I shared with you (filing just through the seed coats, soaking the seeds overnight, and planting in pots). They’ll grow slowly, and you’ll need to protect them from cold winter weather, but you’re on your way.

Dear Neil: I bought this oak tree 10 years ago. I’m not sure what is going wrong with it recently. It’s not right by the house, but it’s close to the driveway. Can it be saved?

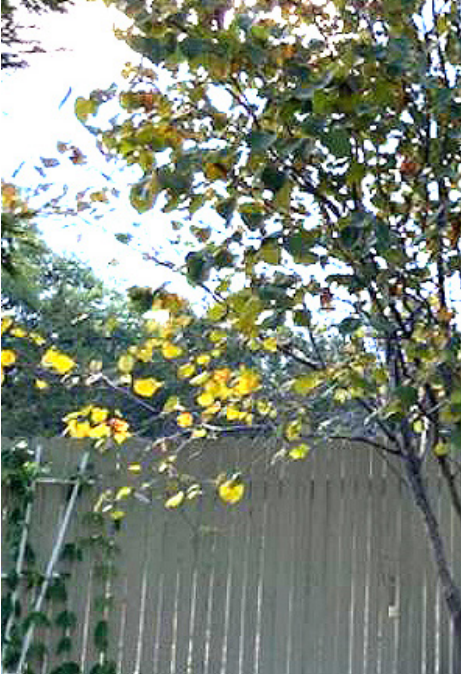


Redbud leaf yellowed
courtesy photo

There appears to be a lot of “radial shake” still showing up in the bark. That’s the term referring to damage done by the extreme cold of February 2021. Bark is still coming off oaks all across Texas in large sheets. The bark separates exposing interior wood and severing the phloem tissues that are critical for transporting sugars down to the roots. From your photos I’m also seeing narrow branch angles that could soon become weak points in the branching structure of the tree, as well as spots that look like active decay. I would strongly suggest that you get a certified arborist on site as soon as possible to determine the nature and extent of the problems over the entire tree. It’s impossible to tell from just the narrow visions in your photos.

Dear Neil: Our redbud is about 10 years old, and it appears to be in distress. It has been losing leaves, but now the pace has really picked up. It has so many yellowed leaves, and many are falling. Can you see what the problem might be?

Redbuds have relatively short life expectancies compared to other shade and flowering trees. It appears that this tree has already died back to the ground at some point years ago owing to the number of trunks coming up from what was its original base. I’ve seen this happen hundreds of times, and then the second-generation trunks develop for 10 to 20 years, but gradually fade as they become congested. I couldn’t tell from the photo if there is any decay in the cluster of trunks, but it looks like there could be. My suggestion would be to keep the tree properly watered the balance of this season and winter. See how it comes out next spring, then decide if it’s time to replace it. (For the record, the spotting that is showing up on the foliage is very minor. You’ll see it on every redbud in Texas by the time fall arrives. It is fungal, but I’m not even sure which fungus. You would have to have it cultured through a patholo-



Redbud losing leaves
courtesy photo



Oak with weak branch angle possibly due to decay
courtesy photo

gy lab, but I don’t think it’s worth spending money on at this point.

Dear Neil: My ponytail palm has been healthy and vigorous for years. How can I restore it to its old self?

When I first saw your photo of it in its pot, I thought it was submerged in water! I was going to tell you to rush to get it out. I may still offer a variant of that advice by suggesting repotting it into a heavy terra cotta pot that can serve as its base and support. You might even have to devise some hidden means of anchoring the swollen base to keep the plant from toppling over, but it needs to “ride” the top of the soil. Use a lightweight, very porous potting soil. You could even combine 10 or 15 percent expanded shale with your potting



Is this sun scald on my Shumard red oak?
courtesy photo



Oak trunk radial shake due to extreme freeze in Feb. 2023
courtesy photo

soil mix to give it yet additional ballast. Put the plant in a bright spot out of direct sunlight and feed it with a high-nitrogen, liquid fertilizer diluted to their instructions.

Be certain, however, that your new pot has a drain hole so that you can water heavily to leach excess mineral salts (from fertilizers, tap water, etc.) out of the soil. Do that at least monthly. Use small, very sharp scissors to trim the unsightly congested top foliage. As new growth emerges, carefully remove all disfigured leaves.

Have a question you’d like Neil to consider? Mail it to him in care of this newspaper or e-mail him at mailbag@sperrygardens.com. Neil regrets that he cannot reply to questions individually.

Beat the heat in August gardening

By Pat Neasbitt

Master gardener

Gardening in extreme heat is no fun, but no matter how hot it gets, we still need to water, weed, and deadhead. When the temperatures in Oklahoma hit the 100s in August and usually the first part of September, it’s best to minimize time outdoors during the hottest parts of the day for the sake of the gardener as well as the garden. Southern Oklahoma has had more than 25 days this summer with temperatures above 100 degrees with no rain, and at least another week of the same is predicted. We are so ready for cooler weather and rain. Here are a few tips to help you and your plants survive until cooler weather and rain eventually arrive – hope it’s soon.

Follow the Shade. I’ve found that it feels at

least ten degrees cooler in the shade, and there is more of a breeze. While this is usually true, the past few weeks when I go out at 6:30 in the morning, it is already in the 80s and the breeze is a hot wind that increases during the day and dries the plants out even more. It was exciting when we had a cool front and the temperature was only 96 for one day.

Work in the yard early in the morning and late in the evening. Drink plenty of water, wear a hat, and use sunscreen and mosquito deterrents since those are prime times for them to be out, also. I find sitting in the shade pulling weeds or deadheading very relaxing at times – great stress reliever, too. It’s good exercise and free therapy.

Mulch the soil. Having a layer of mulch

three or four inches deep keeps more moisture in the ground (less watering), cools the soil, keeps weeds down that will steal nutrients and water from plants, and will break down to improve the soil structure and feed the soil and the plants. Mulch would be worth it even if the only benefit was fewer weeds to pull in August; however, it does so much more.

Stop fertilizing. Extreme heat brings on a form of dormancy in plants and growth slows down as a form of self-preservation. Fertilizing speeds up the growth rate, and it is just too hard on plants when it is really hot. The exception to this rule is container plantings because nutrients are flushed out each time they are watered, and they may need to be watered twice a day during times of high heat. For container plants, apply compost tea, fish emulsion, liquid seaweed, or water-soluble fertilizer about every two weeks. A time-release fertilizer is also a lifesaver for annuals in containers that bloom their little hearts out all summer. Don’t forget to deadhead consistently to keep them blooming.

Water early. As always, water early in the morning to minimize fungal diseases. Put water at the roots, and try not to get the leaves wet. This also saves water, because it evaporates quickly when it is hot and windy. Ideally, you should provide about an inch to an inch and a half of water

to your plants a couple of times a week in August. If your crepe myrtles, lantana, and purple coneflowers look wilted, it is definitely time to water. Use drip irrigation hoses, set your in-ground sprinkler timer for 5:00 in the morning, and water deeply but less often. Make sure sprinkler heads are adjusted to put out a coarse spray instead of a fine mist that will evaporate or blow away before reaching the soil. Quit watering the lawn. Yes, the Bermuda Grass will go dormant; however, it will green up again with the first rain.

Stop pruning. Pruning, like fertilizing, increases new growth at a time when plants would just as soon barely grow at all. Minimize summertime pruning to removing dead branches and deadheading spent flowers. Stop deadheading roses now so they can build up resistance to winter cold and avoid damage. Any time you prune, new growth occurs that is lush and tender and will likely be killed by heat, the first frost, or eaten by hungry insects. It is best to wait until mid to late February to prune so plants can harden off naturally this fall to better survive winter.

It is time to divide spring-flowering perennials that are overcrowded such as iris, Shasta daisy, gailardia, cannas, daylilies, violets, liriopse, and ajuga. Of course, anything you divide and replant now will require extra care to survive the heat and drought.

Put compost in new plantings holes and water daily until plants are growing on their own. It takes about 6 weeks for the roots of new plantings to become established. You will know when they are past the crucial stages that require your constant care when you see new leaves starting to grow. By then it will, hopefully, be cooler and rain will be more abundant.

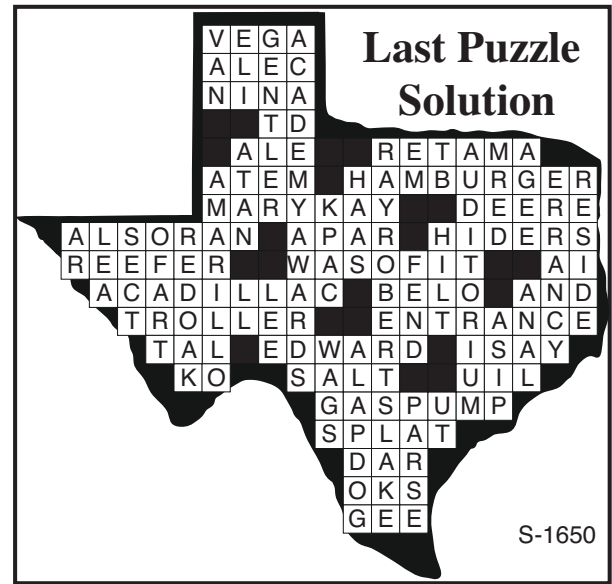
Cut back on mowing. Turf grasses slow their growth rates in response to heat waves which means you shouldn’t have to mow as often. That’s a good thing in August when it’s so hot it feels like a sauna when you step outside. When you do mow, raise the blades on the mower and cut the grass high, at least 2” for Bermuda. The taller the grass the deeper the roots. The thicker the grass the better it crowds out weeds. Either mow early in the morning as soon as the dew has dried or late in the evening to give the grass time to recover overnight. Mowing during the heat of the day puts a lot of stress on the grass, not to mention the one doing the mowing. I saw several people mowing at 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon this week and worried that they were killing the grass and putting themselves in grave danger of a heat stroke.

Take a Gardening Class. The best way to learn more about gardening in your specific area is to take a gardening class taught by local gardeners, especial-

ly ones who have learned from experience – that means they probably killed a lot of plants over the years and learned the hard way from trial and error – lots of errors! The saying, “You learn more from failure than success” is especially true in gardening.

The climate in southern Oklahoma, especially south of the Arbuckles, is unique and unpredictable. Home Gardening & Landscaping is all about how to make gardening in your southern Oklahoma garden fun and easy. Learn what plants will not only survive but become more beautiful each year. Learn when the best time is to plant, where to plant so plants will do their very best, how to plant so you will have happy healthy plants, and how to take care of your landscape after planting. Learn how to make a beautiful yard that will attract birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects.

Classes will include Xeriscape Gardening, Native Plants, Vegetable Gardening, Butterfly & Hummingbird Gardening, Oklahoma Proven Plants, Lasagna Gardening, Crepe Myrtles, Pass Along Plants, Cottage Gardening, Plant Propagation, IPM (Integrated Pest Management), Raised Bed Gardening, Container Planting, Gardening Tips for Each Month, and much more. Looking forward to seeing you in class. Stay Cool & Happy Gardening!



VAISD releases new HS update photos

Each month Van Alstyne Independent School District releases high school construction update photos. August photos show the inside and outside of the building as well as progress being made on the campus. The new school is expected to be complete by summer of 2024. courtesy photos



Texas History Minute: The first and only Texan to serve on the US Supreme Court



By Ken Bridges

Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

Thomas Campbell Clark played an important role in shaping many of the civil liberties Americans enjoy today during his career. As part of a long and distinguished legal career, Clark became the first – and to date, only – Texan to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

Clark was born in Dallas in 1899. As a young man, he received a degree from the University of Texas in 1921 and completed law school the next year. He quickly returned to Dallas, eager to begin his law career.

He worked for the next few years in private practice in Dallas. In 1924, he married Mary Ramsey, the daughter of a former state supreme court justice, and eventually had three children with her. With a growing family to support, Clark joined the district attorney’s office in 1927. He left after a few years



Former Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Tom C. Clark in the Oval Office in 1967. Wikimedia Commons

to return to private practice, but in 1937, he received a great opportunity when he became a special assistant to U. S. Attorney General Homer S. Cummings.

At the attorney general’s office, his career advanced quickly. In 1938, he was assigned to the antitrust division, combating monopolies. After World War II began, Clark investigated cases of espionage and subversion against the United States. By 1943, he was serving as assistant attorney general in the War Fraud division. Through this work, he several defense contractors indicted who sold shoddy equipment to the military or outright stole money from the government during the war.

Shortly after Harry S. Truman became president upon the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945, he appointed Clark as the new attorney general, having been impressed by Clark’s work against contractor fraud.

When Supreme Court Justice Frank Murphy died in 1949, President Truman appointed Clark to fill the position. As a member of the Supreme Court, Clark helped usher in drastic changes in civil rights laws across the nation. In 1950, in Sweatt v. Painter, he ruled with the court’s majority that the University of Texas must admit African-American applicants. With Terry v. Adams in 1953, he helped strike down the “white primary,” which allowed state political parties to exclude minorities from their primary elections. In 1954, he was part of the High Court’s unanimous ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education case that ruled racial segregation in all schools to be unconstitutional.

Clark was also part of the majority decision in Gideon v. Wainwright in 1963, which declared that states had to provide attorneys for anyone accused of a crime. This decision led to hundreds of wrongfully convicted inmates being freed. He was also part of the unanimous New York Times v. Sullivan decision in 1964 to protect newspapers and free speech by redefining libel as a statement that is both knowingly false and meant to defame another person’s reputation.

Tom Clark retired from the Supreme Court in 1967 and was replaced by Thurgood Marshall. Shortly after his retirement, his son, Ramsey Clark, was appointed attorney general by President Lyndon Johnson.

He remained very active in his retirement.



Photograph of President Truman shaking hands with Tom Clark in the White House Rose Garden, on the occasion of Clark’s taking the oath of office as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Vice President Alben Barkley, Treasury Secretary John Snyder, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, Chief Justice Fred Vinson, and others look on. Wikimedia Commons



Warren Court (1962 - 1965) Wikimedia Commons

He became director of the Federal Judicial Center, a program designed to help courts with research and training for judges, shortly after its founding. He stepped down from the center in 1970 and continued to serve as a visiting judge for the US Court of Appeals, acting as a temporary judge for special cases. He died quietly in New York City in 1977. Years later, Clark High School in San Anto-

nio, was named for him as well as the Tom C. Clark State Office Building in Austin.

Ken Bridges is a Texas native, writer and history professor. He can be reached at drkenbridges@gmail. com. The views and opinions expressed here are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Van Alstyne Leader.

SGLY: Peace I give you



By Tiffany Chartier

Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

When was the last time you experienced peace? This question was recently posed to a group where I was in attendance. The speaker asked for volunteers to share. As I wrote the question in my notebook to ponder later, I felt the gentleman beside me shift in his seat. I could smell his cologne as he raised his hand; he smelled of pine and tobacco. I had yet to notice him, and when I did, he was nothing like the man I had pictured based on his scent. I was expecting someone older, and I imagined him wearing classic black business pants with a white button-down shirt. Perhaps he would have hands that looked leathery due to years of fishing or hunting. I was wrong on all accounts except for the white button-down shirt.

The man beside me was older, but not older than me. He wore loose-fitting tan linen pants with a drawstring rather than a belt. His white button-down shirt was made of the same material and was partially tucked. The only thing leathery on him was his brown

sandals. His skin was a rich olive with yellow undertones that gave him a bronzed glow. As the presenter pointed at him to speak, he looked at me briefly before wiping his hands on his pants and raising his voice toward the stage. I saw a flood being restrained behind the misty teal color of his eyes, and despite his voice being controlled and calm, I sensed he was holding himself together with an unseen force greater than any dam.

“There is no expression of peace in my life. None,” he said. “I cannot give you a last time because I’m uncertain if I’ve ever experienced a first time.”

I felt the stares coming upon him, and I instinctively wanted to shield him from their darting eyes. The man’s voice began to crack as he continued. I knew the dam was about to break.

“I moved to this country when I was 17. I was so happy to be in America that I cried for three days. I came to the United States because it was known as the land of the free. I had the imagination of a teen and soon discovered that I would have to take on the responsibilities of an adult to survive. I had no one when times got tough. No one to call. No family.”

“How did you feel during that time?” the speaker asked.

“Tricked. Like a fool. I left my parents and culture because I felt controlled. I came here and realized I was controlled once again, but this time with bills, illness, and poverty. The only difference was that I was now alone. My burdens were mine to carry with no help.”

I looked closer at the man speaking beside me. The face of his gold watch covered

the width of his wrist, and he wore two rings encrusted with diamonds. His finger and toenails were buffed and polished with a clear coat, and his coal-black hair was styled with pomade that gave a light luster to each thick wave. There was nothing about his appearance or vernacular that communicated poverty.

“And how do you feel during this time in your life?” the speaker asked.

The man paused, and in his silence, I felt his struggle. I reached and put my hand upon his arm. He looked at me, putting his hand on mine, and squeezed it firmly before speaking. “The same. The bills have gotten bigger, I’m in chronic pain, and despite my wealth, I worry that it could all be taken away with one nod from God.”

“What drives you to continue?” the speaker asked.

“Drives me? Fear. Fear of what would happen if I stopped showing up to work; if I stopped picking up my mail and dry cleaning.”

“What do you fear would happen?” the speaker asked.

The dam broke. His eyes flooded, and he wept. I watched a grown man grieve, shedding tears to reveal the vulnerability of a scared boy. Catching his breath, he said, “I fear I will die alone, and no one will notice my absence. That my life will be meaningless — that I’m meaningless. What is the point, you know?” He looked at me. “What’s the point?” he whispered.

“What is important to you now?” the speaker asked.

“I don’t know anymore. Whatever I thought, I was mistaken.”

“How do you know you were mistaken?” the speaker asked.

“Because I have no peace,” he said.

When these final five words escaped his mouth, an emptiness echoed through the room, touching all who related to this man’s pain. A palpable sadness sat like an uninvited guest amongst the crowd, and I was not surprised when the gentleman did not return after the break. He left, but the effects of his honesty remained for the rest of the conference, leaving us all feeling a little more exposed.

When I returned to my hotel room, I grabbed my bible and looked up John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” I stayed with this verse, repeating it over and over aloud, allowing His Word to expose any emptiness that I may have been ignoring or looking to the world to fill.

When was the last time you experienced peace?

When do you feel most peaceful?

How can you continue to express peace within your life?

SGLY, dear reader.

(Smile, God Loves You.)

Tiffany Kaye Chartier is an inspirational author and columnist. To share feedback or request a topic for consideration, visit http://www.tiffanykayechartier. com or email connect@tiffanykayechartier. com. Follow on Facebook: Tiffany Kaye Chartier. The views and opinions expressed here are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Van Alstyne Leader.

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