

The year 2008 saw new faces and new initiatives in the Hawkins and Holly Lake area.

January: The Holly Lake Ranch Association announced that L&S Food Services Group would be the new owners of the Fore Seasons/19th Hole food operations.

L&S Food Services Group is owned by John Livingston and Melissa Sudik who bring a combined 40 years of food preparation, restaurant and varied management experiences to Holly Lake. They were the successful bidders as operators amongst a talented pool of applicants that included nine different companies and individuals.

L&S officially took over on January 13th at which time the restaurant was closed for the completion of planned renovations and improvements. The goal was to fill several staff positions, both full time and part time, then reopen in February.

The previous year ended on a sad note with the passing of "Coach" Robert (Red) Lowrance at age 94. He was born on August 24th, 1913 in Garrison, Texas to George Lowrance and Jennie Oxsheer Lowrance. He was descended from Texas Pioneers who entered Nacogdoches County in 1802 and established the Naconiche Ranch. After graduating from Garrison High School, he attended Stephen F. Austin University. He was a member of the so-called Iron Men who won the first conference championship at the university in 1935.

He later completed his master's degree at East Texas State. After graduating, he began his coaching career at Longview High School. The next year the Lobos won the 1937 State Championship. Through the years, he coached at Sabine, Ennis, Iraan and finally, at Hawkins, where he coached from 1948 through 1974.

In 1976, the school renamed the football stadium Lowrance Field in his honor. His teams won numerous championships through the years in football, basketball and track. After retirement, he spent his time at his farm in Hawkins. He loved giving friends and neighbors gifts of vegetables and fruit from the farm.

In 2003, Lowrance was honored by the community with a surprise 90th birthday party which was a great success.

He was inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame at SFA in 2004. That same year, he was inducted into the Texas High School Coaches' Association Hall of Honor. He was buried in the Hawkins Cemetery.

In their final regular meeting of 2007, on December 28th, the Wood County Commissioners heard that disbursement for 2006-2007 topped \$16 million, according to a report from the Wood County Treasurer.

The commissioners also adopted a mileage reimbursement rate of \$.505 per mile in line with the mileage allowance observed by the IRS.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality set up a public meeting for February 5th in Hawkins to hear concerns regarding plans by the Fellowship Church of Grapevine, Texas, for a sewage treatment plant that would place treated effluent into Lake Hawkins. This was in response to a petition with hundreds of signatures and a request from Wood County Commissioners Court. The TCEQ executive director had completed a technical review of the application and prepared a draft permit. The permit established the conditions under which the facility must operate. A preliminary decision had already been made that this permit, if issued, meets all statutory and regulatory requirements.

Hawkins sales tax returns started 2008 with a monthly gain in January compared with the same month a year previous. The gain was 8.91 percent, with \$14,700.33 returned to the city by the Texas comptroller's office compared to \$13,497 sent the previous January.

Wood County sales tax returns from the unincorporated areas of the county were up by 4.31 percent from \$89,920.94 the previous January to \$93,803.57 in January 2008. Sales tax revenues from these areas of the county go into the Wood County general fund.

At their regular meeting January 11th, Wood County Commissioners approved a recommendation by Sheriff Dwaine Daugherty to accept the donation of a drug dog. The dog was offered to the county by the U.S. Armed Services from Lackland Air Force Base. The dog and its specialized training represent a value of \$6,000.

The commissioners also approved a resolution authorizing the Office of the Criminal District Attorney to apply for continuation of state grant funds to operate a victim services project on behalf of victims of crimes in Wood County. The estimated grant award for the year is \$23, 635. The county agreed to provide matching funds for certain elements of the project.

In their January 25th meeting, the county commissioners approved a plat for a new subdivision in Precinct 3. Sandy Creek Estates is a new nine-lot subdivision on 65 acres located at the corner of Hwy 80 and CR 3440 west of Hawkins. The commissioners also opened eight bids for the purchase of a new dump truck for Precinct 2. Bids ranged from \$53,661 to \$72, 023 were received in response to advertising for bids.

The Harmony school board, meeting in regular session on January 21st, heard a report by Superintendent Jed Whitaker on a new record high for student enrollment in the district. At the beginning of the second semester of the 2007-2008 school year student enrollment achieved a record high in the history of the district with 1,016 students enrolled, up 15 from the 1,001 at the end of October.

The board also granted relief of tax penalties, interest and attorney's fees for a Holly Lake Ranch homeowner. Gene and Jeannie Humphrey, the homeowners, appeared to argue that their failure to pay their 2006 tax bill to Upshur (for Harmony School District) was due to a clerical error at the Upshur County Appraisal District in processing the change of ownership in the home they purchased at Holly Lake.

Meeting in special session on January 17th, the Hawkins school board voted 4 to 3 not to extend the contract of Superintendent Dan Rose. He was hired in January 2004 and his current contract runs to June 20th, 2010. The public vote followed a four-hour closed session, which is permitted on personnel matters,

Meeting in regular session January 21st, the Hawkins City Council approved the signing of a contract with Champion Coating to repaint the water tower. Two bids were received and the low bid of \$135,000 was submitted by the Minnesota firm. The other bid came from another Minnesota firm, Tri-State. The work, involving sandblasting plus interior and exterior paints plus lettering, was to begin in early spring and take about 90 days.

The council also ratified the election of Van Garner as chief of the Hawkins Volunteer Fire Department and Cody Thompson as assistant chief.

In others news, Gary Dixon announced he would run for Constable - Precinct 3 in the March 4th election.

February: Meeting in regular session on February 4th, the Hawkins Community Development Corporation continued their efforts to make improvements at the Hawkins Sports Youth Park. The board approved the purchase of a power grader and a drag screen for use on the baseball and soccer fields at the park at a cost of \$999.20 for the grader and \$119 for the drag screen. These can be pulled behind a tractor or an ATV.

The board also reached a consensus on looking at alternatives and costs related to a small utility building to house the tractor.

At a public meeting on February 5th, representatives of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and representatives of the Fellowship Church met with about 80 residents of the Lake Hawkins area. The residents were questioning a plan by the church to treat sewage at the church's new camp/retreat at Lake Hawkins. Vocal and written concerns were received and comments from the TCEQ and it appeared possible the church might have to go back to a drawing board and submit another application on the sewage treatment issue.

The Hawkins Chamber of Commerce announced they had selected March 29th as the date for the organization's annual banquet. This event would be held in the new cafeteria on the campus of Hawkins ISD.

At their regular meeting February 8, Wood County Commissioners were asked by Commissioner Gaskill to reject all nine bids received for a new dump truck for pct. 2. Gaskill said five bids did not meet the specifications and the remaining four bids were all deemed to be too high. The commissioners accepted Gaskill's recommendation.

Also, commissioners approved the submission of a grant application for federal funds for the "Wood County Domestic Services Project." This is a program to aid victims of violence in response to significant increases in criminal cases involving domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. If approved, the grant will help to fund protection and services for victims of these types of crimes.

In news from the Wood County Sheriff's Department, Sgt. Randal Lain Sr. recovered a motorcycle and some firearms that had been stolen in January. The motorcycle was found in Longview with the assistance of the Longview Police Department.

Meeting in regular session February 7th, the Wood County Industrial Commission (WCIC) was advised of the completion of construction of the parallel taxiway project at the Wood County Airport and the near completion of an expansion project at the airport's terminal building. The taxiway project was funded by a combination of TxDOT funds and local funds. The terminal project will increase terminal space by 1,000 feet.

Early in February, Texas Governor Rick Perry endorsed Sen. John McCain for president and hoped for an end March 4th to the long and bruising primary.

Meeting in regular session February 22nd, Wood County Commissioners received a comprehensive listing of private roads in the county prepared by Jim Dax, a county citizen. He spent the past year gathering detailed mapping and other information regarding private roads in Wood County. The report indicates more than 400 private roads in the county. He said earlier estimates put the number of private roads between 200 and 300. Some private roads are identified by the "PR XXXX" signs but many are not. This creates a confusing situation for emergency responders including EMS, fire departments, and law enforcement officers. Commissioners also heard the details of a project designed to aid victims of violence against women. This involves a grant application of \$497,210 to aid victims with protection and other services. The Wood County Criminal District Attorney's Office would operate the program with other partners in the county and East Texas.

Meeting February 18th, the Hawkins City Council heard a report on progress on the painting of the water tower, with the sandblasting operations underway. The work was expected to be finished in 90 days. There was also a substantial discussion on how debris-strewn lots and other eye sores in Hawkins could be tackled.

At their regular meeting February 18th, the Harmony school board approved the renewal of an agreement whereby Trinity Mother Frances provides the school's athletic department with a full-time graduate trainer. The cost will increase from \$7,200 this year to \$8,800 next year but

the consensus was it was worth it to have a trainer on-site and access to many orthopedic and other resources at TMF.

On February 26th, the Wood County Grand Jury returned 41 indictments.

March: In the March 4th Republican primary, Sheriff Dwaine Daugherty lost his bid for a second term as Wood County's chief law enforcement officer to Bill Wansley, the Quitman police chief. The Democrats did not field a candidate in the primary for sheriff so Wansley is sheriff-elect. Six-term commissioner Roger Pace decisively defeated challenger Larry Pack in the primary contest for Pct. 3 commissioner.

Republican John McCain and Democrat Hillary Clinton were the winners in their respective races. McCain garnered 52.3 of the Republican votes and Mrs. Clinton topped Barack Obama with 63.36 percent to 34.96 percent of the Democrat vote. In all, 10,786 ballots were cast in Wood County with 6,733 (62.42 percent) in the Republican primary and 4,053 (37.58 percent) in the Democrat primary.

Meeting on March 7th, Wood County Commissioners breezed through a 12-item agenda in a half-hour session. A new rental policy was adopted for a lake house owned by the county of Lake Hawkins. The house has had substantial renovations and a new rental fee of \$500 per month was established. The house is rented to a county employee. Commissioners also approved the restriping of the county parking lot on the northwest corner of courthouse square. A second matter involving the use of county-owned parking areas was referred to the district attorney's office. A candidate in a local election had parked a vehicle with signs all day for several signs in the lot between the courthouse and the courthouse annex.

Meeting in regular session March 3rd, trustees of the Hawkins school board voted 4-to-3 not to fund the painting of the school's "Hawk" emblem on the city's water tower. Hawkins Mayor Sam Bradley told the board two 15-foot paintings of the Hawk symbol would cost an extra \$4,200. The city is paying for the painting of the words "Hawkins Hawks" on two sides of the tower in six-foot letters.

Meeting in a special session on March 10th, the Hawkins school board voted 5-to-2 to establish a full-time athletic trainer position. They then voted 5-to-2 not to renew an agreement with Trinity Mother Frances that would have provided an athletic trainer to the district. The current trainer, Nikki Whitener, came to the district through a TMF program, would become an employee rather than a contractor.

The board also reauthorized the school nurse position and approved a search for an assistant band director.

Meeting in regular session March 20th, Wood County Commissioners accepted six resignations from the sheriff's office and also approved the purchase of a used dump truck for Pct. 2. Those resigning included Capt. Joel Blair, Sgts. Michael Taylor and Randal Lain Jr., Deputies Terry Bevill and Gary Pennington and Jailer Maggie Calvert. Three positions were filled by new hires.

In state politics, early in March, Senator Clinton's Texas campaign wrote to Texas Democratic Chairman Boyd Richie, urging the party to postpone the state Senate district and county conventions scheduled for March 29th. The Clinton people wanted the postponement so that the party could ensure that only eligible voters had taken part in the precinct caucuses held on the evening of the primary election. Only people who had actually cast a ballot were eligible to participate in a caucus in their district.

At their regular meeting held March 17th, the Hawkins City Council appointed the 2008 members of the Hawkins Community Development Corporation and also appointed a new

member to the board of directors of the Wood County Industrial Commission.

April: Hawkins Mayor Sam Bradley was challenged by two candidates for the city's top post.

Former Mayor Wayne Kirkpatrick and current Alderman Tom Parker filed for the office.

A local election for trustees of the Hawkins School District scheduled for May 10th was cancelled with the withdrawal of Robert Stradley from the race. Dr. Shane Bogard and Wende Haney, current office holders, were therefore unopposed in the election and will be re-elected to their seats.

Meeting in regular session April 4th, Wood County Commissioners dispatched a 22 item agenda. This included the recognition of the 4H program's unofficial 100th anniversary the adoption of a proclamation naming April as "Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month in Wood County."

At the regular session April 7th, the Hawkins school board reviewed a long list of new facilities that have not been completed and delivered on time by WRL contractors. Superintendent Dan Rose said he was concerned about missed deadlines and ever-extended final delivery schedules of numerous elements of the construction and renovation. The program, underway for 15 months at that point, had five construction superintendents over that period.

The Wood County Industrial Commission (WCIC) held its regular session April 3rd in Mineola. The commission's executive director, Gary McKinley, gave an encouraging report with regard to the hotel/motel occupancy rates for the county's hospitality businesses. The rate at 45.5 percent for 2007 is comparable to those enjoyed in the mid 1990s and continues the upward trend since 2001. The major difference in 2007 was the inaugural Bass Classic that brought national exposure to Lake Fork and Wood County. The other factor was the acquisition of a chain motel for Mineola.

In mid-April, the community was saddened by the passing of Jo Ann Minshew of Hawkins, who was a contributor to this newspaper, Mrs. Minshew passed away April 15th at a Tyler hospice at the age of 83. She taught school in Hawkins for 25 years and was survived by her husband of 62 years, Charles Minshew of Hawkins, and numerous others family members.

At their regular session on April 21st, the Hawkins City Council heard an update on a continuing controversy surrounding Foster & Sons tire reclamation business. The council also held the first of a required two public meetings with regard to a new environmental ordinance concerning water which was mandated by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The Hawkins sales tax returns for April 2008 came in with a 36.54 percent decrease compared with April 2007. In the year-to-date amounts, however, the city came within one to two percent of its performance a year ago.

At their regular meeting on April 18th, the Wood County Commissioners Court appointed Ed Shadbolt to serve as interim Constable - Pct. 3. He was recently elected to the post of Constable Pct. 2, and would also serve out the Oct. 3 term of the late David Betts. This post would be contested in the November general election.

Our Congressman Jeb Hensarling hailed the decision by South Korea to import U.S. beef , saying that the decision would allow East Texas beef producers to once again ship their beef.

May: On May 16th, former Wood County Justice of the Peace Larry Pack filed a lawsuit against Wood County in federal court in Tyler. According to the filing, the suit was based on Pack's wrongful conviction of aggravated perjury charges in 2005. The conviction resulted in Pack being forced to resign from office, serve probation and be labeled a convicted felon.

Pack was later acquitted of the charges by a unanimous decision of the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals. The suit sought unspecified damage for various violations of civil rights arising from

the wrongful conviction.

At the close of the regular meeting of the Wood County Commissioners Court on May 16th, following a lengthy open agenda, the commissioners went into a closed session. When they returned to open session, a motion by Judge Bryan Jeanes, seconded by Pct. 2 Commissioner Jerry Gaskill, requested commissioners to authorize the issuing of two checks for medical services to two employees for a total of \$250. Sheriff Dwaine Daugherty sat in the closed session with the commissioners.

Additionally, the commissioners were informed that uncashed jury checks can be voided over 90 days and put back into the general fund or anywhere the commissioners wanted to put the funds. Commissioners were told that there are checks totaling \$2,470 dated between 1995 and 2003 that the treasurer's office would like to stop payment on. The office would also to stop payment on any jury checks not cashed within a six month period as a matter of procedure. Hawkins Mayor Sam Bradley held off two other candidates for the top post in the city election. Bradley received strong support in a very weak turnout. He garnered 75 votes to 19 each for the challengers, former Mayor Kirkpatrick and Alderman Parker.

Sales tax returns for May 2008 were down locally in every community in the county except Yantis. However, returns were down for May 2008 versus prior year for the state as a whole. The decrease was attributed to the rising costs of fuel and food. Hawkins collections for May were \$20,788.52 or 18.73 percent below the same month in 2007 when \$25,582.67 was returned to the city.

In news out of Austin, a Austin business owner said the impact of the new so-called margin tax would be greater than anticipated. He expected his business tax to skyrocket from \$3,000 to almost \$25,000 and said he could not believe that legislators did not realize the inequities and unintended consequences inherent in the legislation.

On May 22nd, the Republican Women of Wood County held a reception in Mineola to honor Kay Loan who was retiring as Republican county chairman.. So 70 people attended including county officials and many friends to thank Kay for all she did for the Republican Party in Wood County over the last eight years. Sloan was elected GOP county chair, by a 76 percent vote, in the year 2000. When she took office, there were only two Republicans in elected office in the county. When she left, only two county officials did not have an "R" after their name.

Meeting in regular session May 30th, Wood County Commissioners Court accepted the resignation of Wood County Tax Assessor/Collector Tommie Bradshaw. She had served two terms. The commissioners appointed Carol Taylor as Bradshaw's replacement effective July 1st. Taylor won the Republican nomination in the April primary and will run unopposed in November. The court also approved a disaster declaration for Winnsboro and parts of Pct. 4 for rain and wind damage. It will go to the state of Texas seeking aid from the Governor's Division of Emergency Management.

Meeting in regular session May 19th, the Hawkins City Council accepted a 4.4 percent price index increase in garbage collection fees by Allied Waste. The regular household rate for garbage service would increase, on the July billing, from \$12.32 to \$12.86 for Hawkins residents due to a consumer price index clause in the city's contract with Allied Waste. Also, Mayor Sam Bradley was asked to seek a letter from Wisenbaker, Fix and Associates stating that the firm would delay until next budget year any billing for engineering and design fees on the next sewer line project (known as the Hwy 80 East project). A second motion directing the engineering firm to solicit bids for the project was also passed.

The Wood County returned 38 indictments on March 31st and 40 indictments on April 24th.

June: Meeting in their regular meeting June 2nd, members of the Hawkins school board approved an increase in prices for food in the school cafeteria. Breakfast for elementary and middle school students would go up 35 cents to \$1.25 and 50 cents for adults, to \$1.50. Lunches would go up 50 cents across the board. Food Services Director Donna Hall made the recommendation based on her survey of pricing at ten area schools.

The Hawkins Community Development Corporation came through with \$4,200 to help city council pay for the painting of two large hawks on the repainted city water tower.

At their regular meeting July 25th, Wood County Commissioners adopted a "Resolution of Disapproval" of the Wood County Appraisal District's proposed 2008-2009 budget. They cited an "across the board salary increase of five percent" in the district's proposed budget as well as an increase in the overall budget as excessive. One commissioner noted the five percent increase would put pressure on commissioners to match that for other county employees.

The Hawkins school board met in special session June 26th on the matter of teacher contract renewals. Seven contracts were extended and the board accepted two resignations.

On June 25th, Franklin Albert Pearce was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault of a child. This followed a three-day trial before a Wood County jury of four women and eight men.

On the same date, Wood County Investigators Randall Lain and Miles Tucker cleared several local thefts with the arrests of Timothy Vaughn, 22, and Jason Craig Williams, 21, both of Winnsboro. They had been identified as possible suspects in several thefts. After some months of investigation, surveillance was set up on them. They tried to sell one of the stolen items and investigators caught them with the items.

Benny Joe Hammond, 42, of Mineola, received three 40-year sentences of aggravated sexual assault of a child in an agreement reached with the Wood County District Attorney's office. Hammond must serve half of his sentence day-for-day before his eligibility for parole can be considered.

Meeting in regular session June 19th, the Harmony school Board approved an increase in the pay schedule for substitute personnel. As a result, the pay for a substitute teacher will increase \$15m from the current \$50 per day to \$65 per day in 2009. The board also accepted bids from several food vendors for the 2008-2009 school year.

At their regular meeting June 13th, Wood County Commissioners and County Judge Bryan Jeanes lent their support for Pct. 4 Commissioner Jerry Galloway, following the publication of an article in The Winnsboro news on June 5th that was critical of Galloway's decision to clear trees along CR 4930 which the News story claimed were on private property. The story also featured a photo of what the newspaper identified as "county equipment and employees" stacking fallen timbers on the property. Galloway stated, "We never cleared any land for the landowner or piled any trees or brush for him."

Meeting in regular session June 16th, the Hawkins City Council held a lengthy discussion about the practice of picking up garbage in the city's alleys. The heavy trucks damage the alleys. It was suggested that residents bring garbage to their street curb. The council voted in favor of eliminating the alley pickups. The council was also advised that the budget for fuel would result in a \$5,000 deficit for the fiscal year.

The Wood County Grand Jury returned 22 indictments on May 21st and 14 on June 6th.