

### The Year 2010 in Review - Part II

The second half of 2010 saw some good economic news for the Hawkins area and Wood County in general.

July:

Praxair Inc. announced that it had signed a contract with Exxon/Mobil to build, own and operate an air separation unit (ASU) to supply additional nitrogen for enhanced oil recovery (EOR) operations at ExxonMobil's gas processing plant site at Hawkins.

Praxair will install the new production facility to meet ExxonMobil's requirements. Operations from the new supply network are scheduled for start-up in the second half of 2011. It is part of a \$50 million expansion in the area for Praxair.

Praxair is the largest industrial gas company in North and South America and one of the largest in the world with 2009 sales of \$9 billion.

The Gazette ran a profile of HLR resident Dr. Dan White who spends two weeks every July bringing much-needed dental care to people in Latvia.

On July 15th, Timothy Charles Parmer, 43, of Mineola, was sentenced to the maximum 20 years in a case of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon - probation revocation. The sentence was handed down of Judge Tim Boswell of the 402nd Judicial District Court of Wood County. The case of attempted capital murder, in which DPS Trooper Larry Vaughan was seriously injured, was still pending.

Fishing gear with a total value of \$57,600 was stolen in the Lake Fork area in several robberies.

Sales tax returns for the City of Hawkins for July 2010 saw an increase of slightly more than six percent for the month compared to July 2009. An influx of workers connected to ExxonMobil and Praxair construction projects held out the promises of continued upward trends over the next year or two.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session July 23rd. The commissioners approved a request from Holly Lake Ranch to remove two abandoned trailers from properties owned by the county through non-payment of taxes.

The court also approved the transfer of property in Quitman to be donated to the donated to the City of Quitman and the Quitman Development Corporation.

On the political scene, Texas Democrats announced that President Obama would be holding two fund raisers in Texas during August. The Republicans announced the formation of a new PAC. It is Hispanic Republicans of Texas. One major name associated with the new political action committee is George P. (Pete) Bush, the son of former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Pete's mother is a Latina.

On July 14th, a Wood County Grand Jury returned 29 indictments.

August:

The Gazette ran a cover feature on the controversy swirling around the proposed construction of a mosque and community center near Ground Zero in Manhattan at a cost of about \$13 million.

Early in the month, Congressman Jeb Hensarling met with a group of Wood County veterans to hear their concerns on federal issues and legislation that affects them. Hensarling has consistently supported veteran's benefit and those for spouses/survivors and as well salary improvements for active and reserve duty members. The national debt came up and Hensarling referred to a statement by Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who stated that our national debt is a threat to our national security.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on August 6th. The commissioners selected a new carrier for the insurance coverage provided to county employees and retirees.

The court tabled consideration of burn ban county-wide, although the index that measured wildfire dangers was approaching the action level.

State-wide, the comptroller's office announced that the sales tax holiday would be scheduled for August 20th through the 22nd and published a full list of all items that would be sold tax-free during those dates.

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott had a busy month. He challenged the federal government on two fronts. Following a ruling by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) on carbon dioxide emissions, he sued the agency to preserve Texas' clean air regulations. States have the right to set their own standards in this regard.

He also joined 20 other states to mount a court challenge to Obamacare. (The health care legislation recently passed.)

Later in the month, The Gazette ran a front page feature on President Obama which presented a detailed review of the president's positions on a variety of things, from the mosque at Ground Zero issue, to the Christmas bomber, the Fort Hood shootings and the Arizona immigration bill. Meeting in regular session on August 16th, the Hawkins school board held a public hearing on a proposed 2010-2011 budget and tax rate. The board advised that the \$9,751,239 budget for fiscal 2010-2011 would require a 2.9 cents increase in the tax rate. This would take the rate from \$1.881 per hundred dollars valuation on property to \$1.275.

The Hawkins City Council had to revisit the issue of open burning as a resident complained of smoke in his neighborhood. They also heard the unwelcome news that health insurance costs for city employees were going to go up by 15 percent.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on August 20th. Commissioners heard a complaint from a citizen about explosions taking place in the Pine Mills area. She said "firebombs" were being set off on a property in her neighborhood, strong enough to cause a pressure wave. She was concerned that the sudden change in air pressure could cause to her home.. She also presented a letter with the names of other homeowners. The court took the matter under advisement.

The court also approved the Meadow View subdivision in Pct. 3 near Hawkins.

Sales tax returns for the city of Hawkins was up almost 9 percent for August 2010 versus the same period in 2009. This brought the year-to-date totals up to less than 2 percent behind 2009 year-to-date totals for the same period.

On August 30th, the Hawkins City Council adopted the proposed budget for fiscal 2010-2011. The tax rate was raised to 0.5650. The previous rate was 0.5176. The new rate will increase revenues by 7.09 percent. Under the new budget, city employees would receive a three percent salary increase and 50 cents per hour for hourly-paid employees.

On the political scene, the wrangling continued on the likelihood of a gubernatorial debate. Gov. Perry said he would discuss this when Bill White made some income tax forms public for years when White served as a deputy secretary in the U.S. Energy Dept. and as chairman of the Texas Democratic Party. White had not done so, therefore the debate standoff continued.

September:

On September 2nd, the Wood County Industrial Commission met in regular session at the Yantis Community Center. The WCIC Board approved the nominating committee's recommendations that Rodney Duplechain to serve of Holly Lake to serve as chairman and

Ladd Thompson of Mineola to serve as vice-chairman for fiscal 2010-2011. WCIC Executive Director also presented a report on the Jobs Fair held in Mineola in July along with a survey of the employers represented at the Fair.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on September 3rd. They set an October 1st date for a public hearing to seek input from residents on establishing county-wide speed limits on county roads.

The commissioners also approved fee structures for subpoenas, summons and other such service notices for the sheriff's office and for constables.

On the political scene, Labor Day saw the kickoff of political advertising for the fall election. Gov. Rick Perry and challenger Bill White were set to travel thousands of miles across Texas.

Current polls had indicated that Republicans were feeling highly motivated. Additionally, with Texas' economy running somewhat ahead of other states, this would also put the wind at Perry's back.

The Greater Hawkins Area Chamber of Commerce on September 13th. Discussion of the various elements of the 2010 Hawkins Oil Festival dominated the meeting. President Larry Huston reported that 31 vendor contracts were received for the event that was scheduled for October 19th. The theme for 2010 would be Nursery Rhymes and it was reported that parade entries were coming in.

The Hawkins City Council met in special session on September 13th to hold a public hearing. The purpose was to allow citizen's to comment on the proposed 7.09 percent property tax increase for the coming fiscal year. However, no one showed up to offer opinions or objections. The Hawkins school board met in regular session on September 13th. The board received a report that all teachers and paraprofessionals in the district were fully certified and were rated "Highly Qualified" This means teachers of core subjects must not only be certified but must also be competent in the subject area that they teach.

The board was also informed of the reorganization at the elementary school which resulted in the creation of a fourth third grade class.

Wood County Commissioners met in regular session on September 17th: They heard from IT Director for Wood County announced an award to the county for the transparency of its website in the area of financial matters. The commissioners also approved a payroll of \$291,083.11 and a variety of other agenda items.

On the political scene, it was noted that the first order of business for the Texas Legislature when it convenes in January 2011 would be filling the anticipated shortfall estimate for the 2012-2013 state budget. The numbers ranged from \$9 billion up to over \$20 billion. Across the board, the governor asked state agencies to cut 10 percent from their budgets.

October:

Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on October 1st and held a public hearing to seek input from residents on the issue of establishing county-wide speed limits for county roads. After hearing from three citizens, the commissioners established a county-wide speed limit of 40 miles per hours on all county road and 30 miles per hour on all county-maintained roads within subdivisions in the unincorporated areas of the county. The vote was 4 to 1.

Commissioners also approved three local agreements with local governments, counties and fire departments. They also recognized Jewell McCalla of Hawkins for her long and dedicated service to the greater Wood County community.

The Gazette featured a cover story on the Bob Woodward book "Obama's Wars" and

commentary from a writer who questioned the president's relationship with the military and the tensions within that relationship.

The city of Hawkins rolled into the final stretch in preparing for its annual oil festival to be held on October 9th. A hot waffle breakfast would start the day's event along with a 5K Fun Run. The parade was scheduled to start at 11 a.m.

Sales tax returns for the City of Hawkins in September 2010 saw an increase of nearly 37 percent for the month compared to September 2009. This turned the year-to-date numbers for Hawkins into positive territory.

On the political scene, The Dallas Morning News endorsed Congressman Jeb Hensarling in the upcoming election. The Texas Republican Party announced that it would be putting a major effort into electing more Republicans into the Texas House of Representatives. The year 2011 will be the year of redistricting, with Texas anticipated to gain three and possibly more seats in the U.S. Congress as a result of the upcoming report on the results of the 2010 U.S. Census. The board of directors of the Wood County Industrial Commission (WCIC) met in regular session on October 2nd at the Nestle Waters Ozarka bottling plant between Hawkins and Holly Lake. The board heard a report on the status of one of Wood County's largest employers. The plant management headed by Plant Manager Scott Bradford hosted a tour and a luncheon meeting for the board. Board members heard that the plant represents an economic impact of \$29 million per year. Ozarka employs 245 employees in a 24-hour, seven-day spring water bottling operation. The 500,000 square foot plant has seven high speed bottling lines. Since opening in 2002, Ozarka has given over one million in charitable contribution, Of this, \$225,00 has gone to a scholarship program directed to those pursuing higher education in environmental and earth sciences.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session October 15th. The commissioners approved several amendments to the county's employee/family health care plans in order to be in accordance with the new federal health care plan, generally known as Obamacare. Maximum limits for coverage in several health care areas were dropped. The commissioners also officially signed a pact with the American Red Cross involving emergency mass-care centers.

The Gazette ran a cover story on the large new billboards on I-20 that advertised Holly Lake Ranch and displayed directions for reaching the ranch from the point where motorists would see the billboard. The Ranch hopes to benefit from the fact that Baby Boomers are now retiring.

On October 24th, Brian Stephen Revilla was sentenced to 15 years in prison in a case of aggravated robbery. On September 6th, 2010, Revilla, 28, had pled guilty to aggravated robbery for the robbery of Bell's Pharmacy in Winnsboro on October 16th, 2009.

On October 29th, Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session. They approved a change in the management of Lake Hawkins RV Park. The court also selected a medical provider for the inmates at the Wood County Jail.

On the political scene, the campaigns for the governor's office went into the final stretch. Both Gov. Perry and challenger Bill White traveled the state and both campaigns mounted large advertising campaigns. The Perry campaign also used social networking sites which a spokesman described as "electronic block-walking."

On October 26th, a Wood County Grand Jury returned 23 indictments.

November

The Hawkins school board met in regular session on November 1st. They continued their discussion of pending needs of the district and the methods to provide funding for the necessary

repairs. They range from infrastructure, repair of the telephone system, repairs on older building plus air conditioner unity and school bus replacements.

It was noted that the Greater Hawkins Veterans Memorial Association would honor the Holly Lake/Hawkins veterans with ceremonies at the Veteran's Memorial Wall on November 11th at 2:30 p.m. The program would include a flyover, weather permitting, choral music, presentation of the Colors, Amazing Grace and Taps performed by bagpiper Jeff Barnett, and Keynote Speaker, Neal Barton, NBC newscaster.

The Gazette ran a cover story on Obama's response to the incident involving explosives on cargo planes and the presence of al Qaeda in Yemen.

A political story became heated when State Representative Bryan Hughes, who represents this district in the Texas House, released a press statement announcing the withdrawal of his support for House Speaker Joe Straus. He said that during a phone call from one of Straus' staff, he was told redistricting maps were already being drawn, but that he had nothing to worry about if he stayed on the Speaker's list of supporters. Hughes said the conversation "first saddened and then disgusted me."

The Gazette also ran a cover story showing a pictorial review of the impressive ceremonies honoring the 10th anniversary of the Veterans Memorial Wall in Hawkins

Sales tax returns for the City of Hawkins in November 2010 saw an increase of almost 75 percent for the month compared to November 2009. This put year-to-date totals up by 12.43 percent. All of the county's municipalities had positive returns in November compared with the same month last year.

A Wood County Grand Jury returned 18 indictments on November 9th.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on November 12th. The commissioners rescinded a decision made during the court's October 29th meeting to award a management contract for the Lake Hawkins RV Park to a new operator. The matter would be put out for new bids.

The commissioners also heard comments during the public comments portion of the meeting. Four citizens voiced concerns about the proposed TransCanada Keystone Pipeline project which is slated to travel through the northwest corner of precincts 3 and 4.

On November 9th, a Wood County Grand Jury returned 18 indictments.

On the political scene, it became clear that Jeb Hensarling, the U.S. Congressman for this district, would have a clear path to a leadership position in the 112th Congress come January. This followed an announcement by Rep. Michele Bachman of Minnesota that she would drop out of the race for House Republican Conference Chair.

Locally, voters placed the Wood County Commissioners Court exclusively in Republican hands for the first time in history. Voters in Pct. 3-2, which is Holly Lake Ranch and the surrounding area, again led the county in voter turnout.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on November 24th. The commissioners approved a motion to replace a board member of the Wood County Industrial Commission who had moved out of Wood County. Linda Hernandez of Hawkins would be replaced by Erin Wright of Hawkins, in accordance with a request letter from Sam Bradley, the mayor of Hawkins.

December

The Gazette ran a story on the stringent security procedures used by Israel at its airports, considered to be the safest in the world. The Israelis don't use body scanners or intimate pat downs. Instead, they use a system of behavioral "profiling." Individuals are singled out for

further review and questioning. This requires highly trained and educated personnel. The Israelis also receive information when passengers book tickets and develop background on individual's travel habits.

The paper also ran a feature on the Texas economic outlook. This indicated that the Consumer Confidence Index for the Texas Region (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma) rose almost two percent, year-over-year and more than nine percent over September 2010 totals. The Texas Comptroller's office estimated that the Texas GSP would grow from a reduced base by 3.0 percent during calendar year 2010. The Texas unemployment rate stood at 8.1 percent, the same as the previous month and below the national rate.

In the Legislative Report, The Gazette published the major dates for the 2011 Texas Legislature. The report also noted questions rising about whether Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison would decide to run again when her current terms expired.

The Christmas edition of the newspaper carried a front page story on the real meaning of Christmas. Eleven local pastors contributed by writing their own individual views on this timely topic.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on December 10th.

Commissioners renewed the management contract for the Lake Hawkins RV Park to John and Estelline Warren. There had been confusion about missing documentation on the part of three other bidders. The Warren, who had operated the county-owned RV park over the past eight years, had completed all the required documentation. They were also the low bidder, coming in with a bid of \$59,400. The contract is for a one-year term with three yearly extensions with the agreement of both parties.

Commissioners also recognized retiring Wood County Clerk Brenda Taylor for her service to the county.

Sales tax returns for the City of Hawkins for the year finished with a 9.47 gain over 2009. The city averaged more than \$20,000 per month for the year with the final total coming in at \$240,031.17.

The Gazette ran an article written by a Holly Lake Ranch homeowner on the issue of signs on private property. He noted that outside of For Sale or For Rent signs, the HLR Board has no jurisdiction of signs on private property. It has jurisdiction of signs on common and recreational property at the Ranch. He related the "Don't Tread on Us" signs as protected by freedom of speech rights.

On the political front, it was noted that one Texas democrat and possibly two, were jumping over to the GOP. These were Rep. Allan Ritter of Nederland and possibly Rep. Aaron Pena of Edinburg. If both went to the GOP it would give the Republican a super-majority in the Texas House of Representatives. This is critical because 2011 is the year of redistricting which affects the political landscape for a full decade both in the State and in Washington.

The Wood County Commissioners Court met in regular session on December 22nd. The court addressed year-end financial matters including the approval of \$709,232.47 in line-item requests transferring funds within various departments. They also accepted \$172,000 from the recent sales of surplus equipment.

The court also recognized the service of Commissioner Jerry Galloway, Pct. 4, who has served on the court since 1999.

The Hawkins City Council met in regular session on December 20th. They approved a request from Allied Waste to conduct a city-wide cleanup on May 7th. They also added two subsections to the city's fire protection and prevention ordinance.

On the political scene, early results from the 2010 U.S. Census indicated that Texas would gain four new seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. This would bring the Texas delegation in Washington to 36. Texas would also gain Electoral College votes, going from 34 votes to 38. Texas Congressional districts will be newly apportioned and the now-heavily Republican Texas House will draw the new district lines. As the year ended, the battle was brewing between candidates competing for the post of Texas House Speaker, mounting a serious challenge to Speaker Joe Straus.