



American Profile
Get Grilling
Inside

Inside this issue

More letters to the editor
See page 5

Kopperl students sign letters of intent
See Section B

BOSQUE COUNTY NEWS 50¢

CLIFTON CRANFILLS GAP IREDELL KOPPERL LAGUNA PARK LAKESIDE VILLAGE MERIDIAN MORGAN VALLEY MILLS WALNUT SPRINGS



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Gap valedictorian banned as school board dispute continues

By Evan Moore
Bosque County News

CRANFILLS GAP – The embattled Cranfills Gap School District saw the latest in a series of controversial events on Friday, May 25, when the board voted to ban the high school valedictorian from graduation exercises.

Supporting a decision by Cranfills Gap School Superintendent Carla Sigler, the school board decided in a special meeting to force valedictorian Kaitlan Head to attend DAEP classes, a status that prevented her from attending graduation exercises on Saturday, May 26, or making her valedictory address.

The board action came after weeks of controversy in the school district and followed a series of events that began on Wednesday, May 9, when Head and salutatorian Sarah Sellers became embroiled in an altercation at the school.

According to third-party accounts, the argument began at the school that day over a derogatory statement Head wrote about Sellers on a piece of notebook paper. The argument reportedly escalated to a shoving and pushing match and ended with Sellers being stuck by a ballpoint pen held by Head.

From that point the severity of the incident was not clear. Neither police nor medical personnel were called. There was no mention that Sellers sought

medical attention. School officials did not immediately notify the parents of either girl and both girls returned to school the following day to take TAKS tests. The following day, however, concern over the incident began to grow.

The day after the altercation, said

Charles Head, Kaitlan Head's father, he received notice from Sigler that his daughter would be suspended for a day.

Later, he said, that changed to having Kaitlan's status as a transfer student (because she lives in Meridian) revoked.

"The second time I talked to (Sigler) it had gone to three days suspension and DAEP (Disciplinary Alternative Education Program)."

On Monday, May 14, six days after
Please see Gap continued on Page 2

Property owners must file appraisal protests by May 31

By Sandy Bogovich
Bosque County News

With the deadline for appraisal protests looming on Thursday, May 31, Bosque County Chief Appraiser Janice Henry asks that property owners contact the appraisal office before filing a protest.

Henry said, most of the time, property value questions, corrections to information such as homestead and agricultural exemptions, or concerns about information on tax statements can be handled by the appraisal office without the inconvenience of an owner having to appear before the appraisal review board.

Henry also urges all Bosque County property owners to review their property appraisal notices, which were mailed on May 1.

Items such as damage that occurred to property prior to Jan. 1, 2007 can be adjusted, again, without a formal protest, by the appraisal office. To accomplish this, she said, the owner must meet with an appraisal office representative prior to the May 31 deadline.

If a property owner is not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting and still wishes to be heard by the appraisal review board, there is a form for "Property Tax-Notice of Protest" that comes with the notices that were mailed on May 1.

The notice must be filled out in full, and either postmarked by May 31, or taken to the appraisal office at 9293 Highway 6 in Meridian.

Henry explained that the protests are expensive to the taxpayers, since the protest board is paid by the hour.

"It is your money being spent," she said. "This year, \$6,400 has been allocated for the June 7 to July 31 protest hearings. It would be better to be able to attempt to handle this in the appraisal office without the

expense and time consuming formal protest hearings."

County Appraisal Districts, or CADs, came into being in January of 1980 when appraisal districts were formed. The creation removed the sole taxing power from the tax assessor-collector's office.

In Bosque County the appraisal district serves 16 entities including seven cities, eight school districts and the county.

Prior to 1980, the tax assessor's office used a pre-rendered value for tax purposes that was solely at the discretion of the tax assessor-collector with no oversight.

In August of 1997 legislation placed a 10 percent cap on homesteads only. Henry explained that the 10 percent per year caps amount to a maximum increase of 10 percent per year over a three-year period. This cap does not cover personal property other than the homestead, such as rental properties or commercial properties.

"The appraisal district is required each year to appraise property values," said Henry. "The appraisal is based on the approved 're-appraisal plan' which is adopted by the board of directors, who designates an area (encompassing certain school districts, of which this year there are three) in the county over a three-year period. The appraisers begin the appraisals on Aug. 1 and continue through April 1 of the following year.

"Appraisers are required to gather sales information, cost to build new homes, and cost of remodeling; these figures are compiled and the appraisal district runs the ratio studies to see if the figures match the market values.

"If not, they have to make adjustments ac-

Please see Property Taxes continued on Page 2

Morgan man suffers burns from fall into sludge pit

A 73-year-old man was burned over 45 percent of his body when he slipped and fell into a gas well sludge pit containing lime in northern Bosque County on Friday, May 18.

Finnis Kimbell of Morgan was said to be in critical condition at the Parkland Burn Center in Dallas after the accident.

Don Kobliniski of Quicksilver Resources in Fort Worth, the company that manages the well, said Kimbell is owner of the property on which the well sits on CR 2850 near Eulogy.

Kimbell reportedly was visiting the site Friday afternoon, May 18, when he lost his footing and fell into the pit in which drilling mud, water and other

residue is held. Workers were in the process on mixing a truckload of lime into the pit when Kimbell fell, said Kobliniski.

Kobliniski stressed that lime was the only caustic agent in the pit.

"We use it to dry up the hole," said Kobliniski.

A backhoe operator pulled Kimbell from the pit and called an ambulance. Kimbell was flown from the scene to Parkland by helicopter.

Kimbell's son-in-law, Scott Crabtree of Glen Rose, said Kimbell has since undergone skin grafts, but his condition remained critical.

Walnut Springs 'miracle girl' not deterred by adversity

By Evan Moore
Bosque County News

WALNUT SPRINGS – They may not have been aware of it, but those in the audience at the Walnut Springs graduation on Friday, May 25, were witnesses to something extraordinary.

It happened as Amaryllis Heartsill stepped to the podium in the school gym to give the eighth grade valedictory address. Few may have realized, but the girl who spoke to them was doing so with only half a brain.

Her mother calls it "a miracle." Doctors might deem it unusual. In either case, the 13-year-old University Interscholastic League award winner, the basketball player and the girl with the straight-A average has achieved all this with far fewer brain cells than most other people.

All that means little to Amaryllis.

"I don't notice it," said the lanky teenager with a grin and a shrug.

Amaryllis's condition began before she was born, when she suffered a stroke in the womb as her mother was pregnant with her in Puerto Rico in 1994.

"I didn't know it then," said Adiola Heartsill. In fact, everything seemed perfect at the time. Adiola Heartsill had married David Heartsill, a young pilot, and at Christmas 1993, she learned she was pregnant.

One of her Christmas presents was a Red Lion Amaryllis and, as the flower burst forth with crimson petals, she thought it was the most beautiful plant she had ever seen.

"I decided I was going to name my daughter after that flower," she said.

During her pregnancy, however, Adiola Heartsill suffered from "placenta previa," a condition that affects one in 500 births. An obstetric complication that occurs in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, it reduces blood supply and can cause the death of either the mother or the baby.

In Amaryllis's case, it caused the stroke, one that destroyed the right half of her brain.

Please see Miracle Girl continued on Page 2



Staff photo Evan Moore

Amaryllis Heartsill stands with a few of the UIL awards she has won. The eighth-grade valedictorian in Walnut Springs has excelled despite a stroke before birth that destroyed half her brain cells.



Staff photo Evan Moore

Former Meridian Mayor Clark Vandergriff, right, accepts a plaque honoring his 10 years on the council (two as mayor) from Councilman Johnny Hauerland. Vandergriff and departing Councilwoman Barbara Bivens were cited Friday, May 26, at the civic center.