

Answers sought in crash of helicopter

No sign of mechanical failure seen in wreckage

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
AND G. CHAMBERS WILLIAMS III
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

FORT WORTH — No sign of mechanical failure was found on the first day of investigation into Wednesday's crash of a Tarrant County Sheriff's Department's helicopter in which two deputies were killed, federal accident investigators said yesterday.

"Up to this time, we have not found any evidence of a mechanical discrepancy that would have existed before impact," said Georgia Snyder, National Transportation Safety Board investigator. "There is evidence that the engine was rotating at impact. We don't know at this time at what power setting."

There was fuel in the aircraft that was "visually clean and clear," Snyder said. Representatives from Bell Helicopter, Allison — the manufacturer of the engine — and the Federal Aviation Administration's Rotorcraft

(More on CRASH on Page 25)

Certification Office, working at a hangar at Fort Worth Meacham Airport, expect to finish the initial investigation today, she said.

"We would not anticipate having a definitive answer of what happened for a while. It might even be months. We've still got a lot of things to do, and we don't want to close too many doors yet," Snyder said.

Lt. George Maurice "Copter" Hendrix, the 51-year-old pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, 45, a criminal investigator, were killed in the crash.

The helicopter that crashed was one of two OH-58As that the department owned. Sheriff David Williams initially established the air fleet in July 1994 with three donated military surplus choppers — 1960s-era Hughes OH-6s — but eventually traded with a sheriff's department in Riverside, Calif., for the OH-58As.

Dalton said he did not know if the remaining Sheriff's Department helicopter was flying yesterday; he said he did not believe that the program was grounded. Williams would be the person to

suspend the program, he said.

Some county officials said they heard that a film crew was present when the helicopter crashed, but Dalton said there is nothing known to support that.

However, Dalton said, "There was a home video taken, and it was confiscated to see if there is anything on it. It was made available to the NTSB." He does not know what was on the videotape, he said.

Snyder said investigators intend to talk to a number of witnesses, including the one who shot the videotape.

"I intend to view it tomorrow. The person who shot the video believes he has the last few seconds of the flight on tape," she said.

The helicopter was 25 years old, and FAA files showed no reports of service difficulty, accidents, incidents or other information with the aircraft, said John Clabes, an FAA spokesman.

An FAA official close to the investigation said that the helicopter may have been involved in a practice or emergency procedure known as auto-rotation, a procedure

to land the aircraft when the engine is not operating.

Instead of landing safely as it should in the life-saving maneuver, it crashed from a height of about 200 feet, Clabes said.

Helicopters routinely train in auto-rotation and it is a required maneuver in a flight test, officials said.

Snyder said no one has given her any indication that Smith was a pilot or was receiving any instruction in the aircraft when it went down.

Bell Helicopter said Hendrix completed flight "proficiency training" in that type of helicopter. Hendrix held a commercial pilot, rotor craft-helicopter license and had a helicopter commercial instrument. He was a retired U.S. Army colonel with combat duty in Vietnam. Williams said Hendrix had 2,400 hours of flight time.

There was no explosion or fire in the crash and "minimal fuel leakage at the site" because the tank used in a military aircraft is four times thicker than on a civilian aircraft, Snyder said.

"We don't know what happened. It's up to the NTSB to say whether the accident was preventable," sheriff's Lt. John Dalton said.

Sheriff's Department officials were in mourning yesterday for the two men. Deputies wore black-striped badges, and flags in Tarrant County flew at half-staff.

Hundreds of law enforcement officers are expected in Fort Worth tomorrow for the funerals of Hendrix and Smith, Dalton said.

Many local officers are volunteering to fill in for Tarrant County sheriff's employees who want to attend the funerals. Dalton said there have been offers of helicopter fly-overs by other law enforcement agencies, but said that the Sheriff's Department would consult with the families "because of the nature of the accident" before allowing them.

The funeral for Hendrix is scheduled for 10 a.m. tomorrow at Bethesda Community Church, 4700 N. Beach St., with burial at

Mount Olivet Cemetery.



George Maurice Hendrix: Was a retired U.S. Army colonel



Thomas Jay Smith: Was investigator with department

Star-Telegram

/ Friday, September 19, 1997

Smith's service is scheduled for 3 p.m. tomorrow at North Fort Worth Baptist Church, 5801 N. Interstate 35W, with burial also at Mount Olivet Cemetery.

Both men will be buried with a sheriff's honor guard, Dalton said.

The black Bell OH-58A helicopter crashed about 9:50 a.m. in northwest Tarrant County over an airstrip owned by Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake. The deputies were on an investigative surveillance flight, Dalton said.

"We don't know what he was doing at Copeland's. We know why he was in that part of the county. Smith was working on a multiagency investigation," he said.

Snyder said that the sheriff's pilots and others have used the Copeland facilities for training.

A Sheriff's Department news release issued yesterday said that Hendrix contacted his superiors at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday to say he was flying one of the helicopters on "an investigative mission." Dalton said he didn't know if the helicopter had been in the air before Hendrix contacted his superiors and didn't know how the contact was made.



Star-Telegram/RON JENKINS

The U.S. flag flies at half-staff yesterday outside the Tarrant County Corrections Center in honor of the two deputies who died Wednesday.

"Not having a fire significantly benefits the investigation," she said. "So far we've concentrated on continuing the examination of the wreckage."

The engine — an Allison 250-C20C — was removed from the aircraft, but has not yet been taken apart, she said, adding that "preliminary information" is

that the engine was installed in the aircraft in 1990 and had 500 flight hours on it.

Snyder said investigators should complete their "first investigation" today, but may still have to do some testing of some of the helicopter's parts.

Staff writer Kathy Sanders contributed to this report.

T.J. Smith



FORT WORTH — T.J. "Smitty" Smith, 45, an investigator for the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, died Wednesday, Sept. 17, 1997.

Funeral: 3 p.m. Saturday at North Fort Worth Baptist Church. Burial: Mount Olivet Cemetery. Visitation: 5 to 8 p.m. Friday at Mount Olivet Funeral Home.

Memorials: Masonic Home in Arlington.

T.J. "Smitty" Smith was born Nov. 11, 1951, in Farmersville. He served in the Air Force and had worked as an investigator for the sheriff's department since 1985.

Survivors: Wife, Kathy Smith of Fort Worth; son, Lonnie Smith of Newark; brothers, James Smith of Dallas, Billy Smith and Gean Smith, both of Mesquite, and Charles Smith of Garland; sisters, Anna Duval of Dallas and Dorothy Fay Smith of Mesquite; five grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Mount Olivet Funeral Home
2301 N. Sylvania Ave., 831-0511

George M. Hendrix Jr.



FORT WORTH — George Maurice Hendrix Jr., 51, a peace officer, died Wednesday, Sept. 17, 1997, in Tarrant County.

Funeral: 10 a.m. Saturday at Bethesda Community Church. Burial: Mount Olivet Cemetery. Visitation: 7 to 9 p.m. Friday.

Memorials: Maurice Hendrix Memorial Fund, attention Cathy Dennis, Bank of Commerce, Fort Worth 76102.

Lt. George Maurice Hendrix Jr. was born Oct. 14, 1945, in Shreveport, La.

In his spare time, he helped donate food to a ministry on the north side to feed the poor. Maurice had just retired after 28 years of service with the Army Reserve.

He also loved riding his Honda Goldwing and spent many an hour in the batting cages with his son and, of course, he loved to fly.

He was a member of Lake Country Baptist Church. He was a Vietnam veteran and received the Bronze Star for valor and he worked off-duty at a Kroger grocery on some nights. He received a bachelor of science degree from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., and attended the Northwestern Traffic Institute in Evanston, Ill. He taught courses at these schools on criminal justice and public administration.

Survivors: Wife, Marcia Hendrix of Fort Worth; son, Mark Hendrix of Fort Worth; mother, Aleene Hendrix Barnett of Fort Worth; father-in-law and mother-in-law, Cy and Mildred Rone of Azle; sisters, Robbie Jones and her husband, Gene, of Fort Worth; sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Elaine and Gary Peterson of Springtown; brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Mike and Onoldah Rone of Richardson; nephew, Roy L. Fowler Jr. of Fort Worth; niece, Karen Paul of Fort Worth; nephew and niece, David and Christy Peterson, both of Springtown; niece, Heather Peterson of Springtown; nephews, Todd and Matthew Rone, both of Lake Worth; niece, Michelle Rone of Weatherford; and many friends and loved ones.

Greenwood Funeral Home
3100 White Settlement Road, 336-0584

Officials have questions about crash for sheriff

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners are asking Sheriff David Williams to explain why they and other county officials were not immediately notified of Wednesday's helicopter crash that killed two deputies.

They said they also want to know why it took Williams about four hours to get to the crash site.

Williams is scheduled to brief the commissioners at 11 a.m. Tuesday about the crash of the Bell OH-58A helicopter that took the lives of Lt. George Maurice "Copter" Hendrix, the 51-year-old pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, 45, a criminal investigator. Both men are to be buried today.

The helicopter crashed about 9:50 a.m. Wednesday, and Williams said he arrived at the site about 2 p.m.

In an interview yesterday, Williams said that before going to the scene, he prayed and then worked on contacting accident investigators and county officials. He attempted to make sure that the families had been notified, he said, and also tried to contact County Judge Tom Vandergriff, but the line was busy.

"I prayed. I prayed for the families — that's the first thing I did," Williams said. "I spent the first part of the day obtaining updates on the notification of families and getting updates from my on-scene commanders."

Williams said he was concerned about "oversupervising."

"It can be a distraction to have the boss looking over the shoulder," he said. "I think I did what I am supposed to do and that my staff did what they're supposed to do."

Added Williams: "My plan at this point for Tuesday is to give the commissioners an official briefing, an update of what we have learned. I'm hoping we'll also be able to give an overview of the [helicopter] program."

Some commissioners and deputies say the sheriff should have gone at once to the northwest Tarrant County airstrip, owned by the Kenneth Copeland Ministries, east of Eagle Mountain Lake where the helicopter crashed while on what the sheriff has said was an investigative surveillance flight.

"People have complained to me that the sheriff wasn't there. My impression is that the sheriff and the chaplain [should be] on the scene when something bad is going down," said Commissioner Marti Van Ravenswaay, who first learned of the accident at noon Wednesday.

Kelli Creed, president of the Tarrant County Deputy Sheriff's Association and a deputy for six years, said there was no immediate counseling or debriefing for the officers who responded to the crash.

"Concerns were raised from the ranks wondering where the sheriff was, because he wasn't on the scene," Creed said. "There was no moral support."

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said she wants "to hear the sheriff's explanation as to what took precedence" over getting to the crash site quickly.

VanRavenswaay said commissioners are "put in a difficult posi-

tion" if they are not notified about county emergencies. None of the commissioners or the county judge were directly notified of the crash by the Sheriff's Department, nor were other county officials.

County Budget Director Debbie Schneider got a call from the district attorney's office. She notified Vandergriff and County Administrator G.K. Maenius.

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby found out about noon from a constable, Commissioner J.D. Johnson learned of the crash an hour earlier from a constable, and Commissioner Glen Whitley was contacted by the district attorney about noon.

Federal accident investigators and the helicopter's manufacturer continued to examine the wreckage yesterday in a hangar at Fort Worth Meacham Airport, and said they still have not found any mechanical problems that could have caused the crash.

"The examination isn't complete, but we haven't ruled that out," said Georgia Snyder,

National Transportation Safety Board investigator, "We have eliminated at least one factor: There was no in-flight break up of the aircraft."

Investigators also interviewed witnesses and viewed several seconds of a videotape of the helicopter "spinning for a couple of seconds before it drops below the tree line," she said.

As for whether the aircraft was passing over or conducting flight maneuvers at the Copeland airfield, Snyder said one witness said he heard the helicopter land and take off again.

"At least that's what it sounded like to him, but I haven't talked to anyone who saw it take off," she said.

Snyder said the crash investigation will continue on Monday. Investigators have already concluded that the helicopter's engine was rotating and that it had sufficient fuel when it crashed.

Staff writer G. Chambers Williams III contributed to this report.

Last goodbye poignant for deputy's wife

By KATHY SANDERS
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

EAGLE MOUNTAIN LAKE — The last time Marcia Hendrix saw her husband, she was in a typical weekday rush to get their 14-year-old son to school and herself to work.

As they got in the car to leave, she looked up and saw Maurice Hendrix — her husband of 23 years — standing outside the door of their home, his arms stretched out wide.

"He came out the door and stood there like this and said, 'Don't I get a goodbye?'" Marcia Hendrix said.

She acknowledged him with a wave and an "Oh, honey!" before driving off.

By midmorning Wednesday, Marcia Hendrix's 51-year-old husband was dead, killed instantly with another deputy when the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department helicopter that Hendrix was flying crashed on Kenneth Copeland Ministries property near Eagle Mountain Lake.

"You just never know when's the last time you're going to see them," she said yesterday, sitting in the living room of their home, the couple's only child at her side.

Maurice Hendrix had many interests in life and had sampled much of them, she said.

"It seems like he wore so many hats: the military hat, the police hat, the hat that touched lives, a cowboy hat. ... He tasted life, and he loved every bit of it," she said.

When he turned 50, Maurice Hendrix bought a Goldwing motorcycle. But after retiring from the military reserves, he recently decided to sell it to help save for his son's college education.

Mark Hendrix is a freshman at Boswell High School, and yesterday about 200 close friends and classmates wore white-and-black lapel ribbons in memory of the teen's father.

Freshmen Andrea Aguilar, 14, said, "He's been a real good friend."

She said she met Hendrix's father on several occasions and the son is a reflection of him.

Although the students did not know Mark Hendrix's father well, the elder Hendrix was instrumental in starting a school liaison officer program that provides a deputy to the school to help keep order and hold down campus crime.

Marcia Hendrix says she has had so many questions since her world collapsed Wednesday. The crash also took the life of another sheriff's employee, Detective T.J. Smith, 45, whose family declined to be interviewed.

Yesterday, Marcia Hendrix recalled that she was at work Wednesday morning when her boss summoned another secretary into his office. She thought it odd and wondered if she or someone else was about to be fired.

Then the woman hurriedly left, ashen, and people began bustling around Marcia Hendrix in hushed tones, she said.

"Suddenly, I got nervous," she said.

And then she was called into the boss's office, where two executives, a chaplain and a deputy broke the news.

"I knew something had happened. They couldn't talk," she said. "They said, 'There's been an accident.' They said, 'Maurice is gone.'"

"I had so many questions. How had it happened? Where was he? I didn't even know he was flying that morning," she said.

Although the couple had talked about the dangers inherent in flying, her husband had told her not to worry.

"I was not fearful of his ability, but of the outside things that you can't do anything about," she said. "He didn't want me to worry."

She wondered if her husband had had a heart attack just before the crash, "but they said he had a massive head injury that killed him instantly ... I didn't want him to burn or suffer. I was just so thankful for that."

Marcia Hendrix talked yesterday about her husband's life as a Vietnam veteran in the infantry, a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, where he had served for 28 years, and a lieutenant with the Sheriff's Department, where he was hired in 1991.

She talked of his integrity,

dependability, sense of humor. He loved his family, she said, and "had a heart for people who didn't know where their next meal was coming from."

His dream had always been to fly for missionaries, carrying food and medical supplies to those in need.

But "his calling," she said, was always law enforcement.

The outpouring of support since her husband's death has been a great comfort, she said. "Each person that I see, I'm touched in a different way," she said.

Thursday night at the funeral home, she hugged a police officer, "and he smelled just like Maurice used to."

"It was overwhelming," she said as tears welled up in her eyes.

A memorial fund has been established to help pay for Mark Hendrix's college education. Donations can be made to the Lt. Maurice Hendrix Memorial Fund at the Bank of Commerce, Box 17089, Fort Worth 76102.

Staff writer Bill Teeter contributed to this report.



Copter pilot laid to rest

Pallbearers carry the casket of Tarrant County sheriff's Lt. George Maurice Hendrix after his funeral. Hendrix and Deputy Thomas Jay 'T.J.' Smith died in a helicopter crash Wednesday.

STORY ON PAGE 1B
Star-Telegram
DALE BLACKWELL

"drive up to the church with whatever vehicle he had full of ... food for the hungry.

"I remember the twinkle in his beautiful eyes when he had something special on his mind," Robinson continued, "the passion in his heart for his 14-year-old son Mark."

In addition to his love for the drums, Robinson said Hendrix — who piloted the OH-58 Bell Ranger helicopter Wednesday — was a Christian who wanted to someday acquire a helicopter "that he could use ... to fly missionaries to Mexico" to help the poor.

Speaking directly to Hendrix's son, Mark, Robinson said: "Be proud of your dad. He was a winner, and so are you."

Fellow worshiper and friend Jesse McElreath said flying "was almost a spiritual thing" with Hendrix, who he said told him that, "When it comes time for me to go, I want to go flying."

He told mourners to find comfort in knowing that Hendrix had "given his life to God."

In a 3 p.m. service for Smith, more than 60 sheriff's officers, surrounded by colorful floral arrangements, sat six rows deep in the pulpit of the North Fort Worth Baptist Church.

Smith, who was buried in his black hat and holding a rose, was remembered as a quiet man with a gentle smile.

Smith "didn't say a lot. [You] kind of had to drag things outta him," said Maj. Hugh Atwell, a Tarrant County sheriff's chaplain, who pledged to be supportive of Smith's widow, Kathy, and son, Lonnie.

Atwell recalled a church picnic where Smith volunteered to drive a law enforcement vehicle for a children's demonstration.

"He stayed out there and answered every question" from the kids and rang the siren for them, he said.

Dave Dunaway was captain of the Criminal Division Unit when he met Smith a year ago. "My criticism of T.J. was, 'T.J., there are times when you have to think of T.J.," Dunaway said. "He was always thinking of someone else."

At both services, eight Fort Worth Mounted Police officers, wearing white gloves and collars and black hats, sat erect on their horses, guarding the churches.

And at both burials, seven officers fired three rounds of bullets for a 21-gun salute, while Fort Worth police officers played *Amazing Grace* on bagpipes.

At Hendrix's burial, eight helicopters flew overhead. When the

helicopters reached the burial site, one helicopter, belonging to the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, veered left, away from the seven others as a symbol of the pilot who will not be returning.

Marcia Hendrix and Kathy Smith were presented with the



Members of the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department Honor Guard present arms at the graveside

of Lt. George Maurice Hendrix

folded flags that draped their husbands' coffins.

Others attending the funerals included county commissioners and constables, and law enforcement officers from Pantego, Runaway Bay, Burleson, Rhome, White Settlement, Denton County and Forest Hill.

Copter engine didn't fail, federal investigators find

Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH — There was no engine or transmission failure of the Sheriff's Department helicopter that crashed Wednesday, killing two deputies, federal accident investigators said yesterday as they ended their initial investigation.

"We know there was no catastrophic failure of the helicopter's engine or transmission," said Georgia Snyder, National Transportation Safety Board investigator.

The NTSB plans to release its preliminary report on the accident today or tomorrow, Snyder said. It will not contain any information that has not already been released, and it will not speculate about the cause of the crash, she said.

Sheriff's officials have moved the wreckage from the Meacham Airport hangar where it was inspected to a secure storage area, Snyder said. "It has not yet been released by the NTSB because the investigation is ongoing and continuing," Snyder said. There are still five or six witnesses to interview and some aircraft parts to test, she said.

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams is scheduled to talk to

county commissioners at 11 a.m. today about the crash of the Bell OH-58A helicopter that took the lives of Lt. George Maurice "Copter" Hendrix, the 51-year-old pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, 45, a criminal investigator.

Williams has said he intends to give commissioners an update about what the Sheriff's Department has learned about the crash and perhaps give an overview of the program.

He has been criticized by county officials for not immediately notifying them of the crash and by deputies for not arriving at the crash scene for at least four hours.

"Hopefully, [William's presentation] will be informative and everyone will find out a little more," said G.K. Maenius, county administrator. "I think it's very appropriate that the sheriff address the court."

The upcoming NTSB report on the helicopter crash will be available on the Internet at the NTSB Web site — www.nts.gov.

Staff writers Neil Strassman and G. Chambers Williams III contributed to this report.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness for his name's sake . . .
Yea, though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff
they comfort me. Thou preparest a table
before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup
runneth over . . . Surely goodness and
mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the Lord for ever . . .*

In Memory of
Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, Jr.

Who Departed This Life

September 17, 1997

Memorial Services

10:00 a. m. Saturday

September 20, 1997

Bethesda Community Church

Officiating

Chaplain Hugh Atwell

Dr. Jesse McElreath

Rev. Ras Robinson

Interment

Mount Olivet Cemetery

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

SATURDAY, SEPT. 20, 1997

3:00 P. M.

T. J. SMITH:

NORTH FT WORTH BAPTIST CHURCH

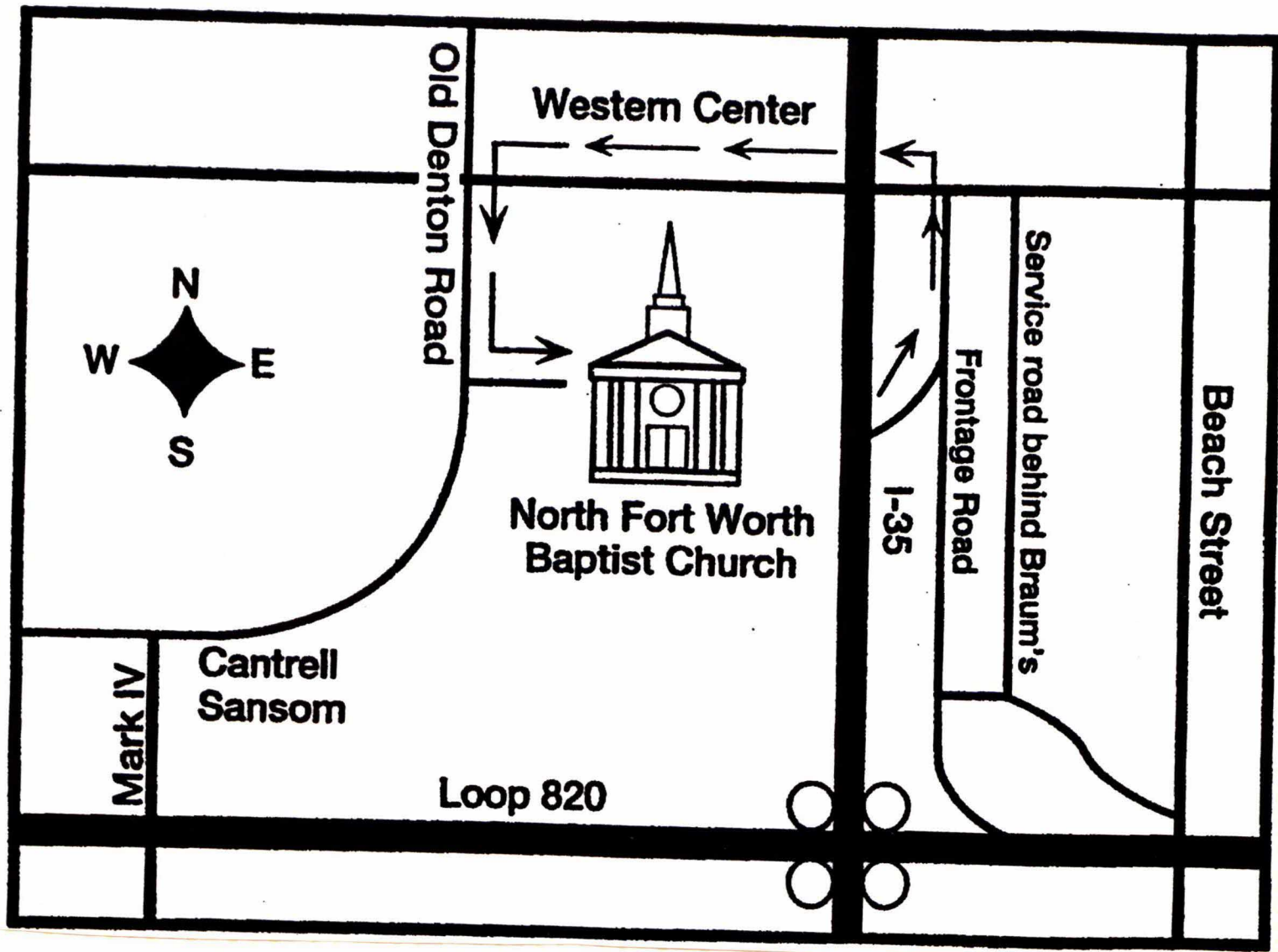
5801 NORTH I-35 WEST, FT. WORTH

**(EXIT I-35 AT WESTERN CENTER BLVD. TURN WEST TO
OLD DENTON RD. TURN BACK SOUTH TO THE CHURCH)**

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS BY:

MOUNT OLIVET FUNERAL HOME

2301 NORTH SYLVANIA AVE.



*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the
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house of the Lord for ever . . .*

In Memory of
I. J. "Smitty" Smith
Who Departed This Life
September 17, 1997
Memorial Services
3:00 p. m. Saturday
September 20, 1997
North Fort Worth Baptist Church
Officiating
Pastor Joe Byars
Rev. Larry H. Cornell
Major Hugh Atwell, Chaplain
Interment
Mount Olivet Cemetery

Sheriff keeps remarks brief on copter crash

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams made a three-minute appearance before the Tarrant County Commissioners Court yesterday to report on last week's fatal helicopter crash, but left without addressing questions about his helicopter program.

The two deputies who died in the Sept. 17 crash were on an airborne

reconnaissance mission, Williams told the commissioners, reading from prepared remarks.

"The sheriff's office lost two of its finest in the line of duty," Williams said, head down, adding that he is "grieving" for them. The families of the dead deputies are getting counseling and support, as are members of the Sheriff's Department, he said.



Star-Telegram/DALE BLACKWELL

Sheriff David Williams addresses county commissioners.

Williams addressed the commissioners at his request. He said last week that he planned to give them an update on the crash, as well as an overview of the helicopter program.

Killed in the crash were Lt. George Maurice "Copter" Hendrix, the 51-year-old pilot and Vietnam veteran who led the sheriff's effort to obtain helicopters, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, 45, a criminal investigator.

"The work we perform for the community is dangerous, and always has been. Today, and all over this nation, law officers will go on duty with the knowledge of the risks involved, and that some may not make it home. As to how and why this accident happened, this office will convey the findings to you as they are available," the sheriff said,

ending with a sigh.

Williams also criticized the media.

"Let not the memory of these brave men, both family providers, be disgraced by slipshod pick-and-choose reporting of two or three journalists at one newspaper, or anyone else, who would attempt to exploit this tragedy for any reason," he said.

Williams said it is "inappropriate to engage in any further discussion" about the accident because it is under investigation.

The sheriff did not address earlier criticism by county officials for not immediately notifying them of the crash or remarks from some deputies about his not arriving at the crash scene for at least four hours.

Williams left quickly before commissioners could question him. They made no effort to stop him as he left the courtroom and exited the building via a back stairwell.

"We will assume the sheriff is not in a position to discuss the matter further with the court at this time," County Judge Tom Vandergriff said, addressing an empty lectern.

"It was clear he was distraught and grief-stricken and obviously didn't want to talk further about the matter," Vandergriff said late yesterday afternoon, speaking of the sheriff's quick exit.

Vandergriff and most of the other commissioners, nevertheless, said they were surprised at the brevity of Williams' remarks and his departure before discussing any issues, such as the future of the helicopter program.

"I did expect a more substantive discussion of not only the accident, but also the helicopter program," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said. "At some point, we must have those discussions."

Vandergriff said, "Obviously it's a subject we must address soon, though it might not have

been necessary to do so today.”

Commissioner Glen Whitley said he was “surprised” by Williams’ actions.

“I expected something other than a prepared statement. At least the chaplain was there to give a report on the families,” said Whitley, who represents Northeast Tarrant County.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson, a staunch supporter of law enforcement, said it is “premature” to judge the helicopter program.

Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay said she is “not ready to pull the plug on a program, if it’s fighting crime.” But she added, “I don’t know what it’s been used for at this time.”

The Sheriff’s Department recently turned down a *Star-Telegram* request to inspect the flight logs of the sheriff’s helicopters.

When the helicopter program began in July 1994 with donated military surplus choppers — three 1960s Hughes

OH-6s — Williams told the commissioners that the helicopters would be used for drug investigations and to augment the department’s crime-fighting power.

He said he would not use taxpayer money to fund the operation of the fleet. Instead, Williams has used the sheriff’s criminal forfeiture fund, which holds drug money and funds from the sale of items seized because they were used in crimes, to pay for the helicopters. Even so, several commissioners objected to the helicopter program.

In 1995 Williams traded the three copters to a sheriff’s department in Riverside, Calif., for two Bell OH-58As.

It was one of those helicopters that crashed in Northwest Tarrant County, over an airstrip owned by the Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake about 9:50 a.m. Sept. 17.

Williams has previously said that he first arrived at the crash

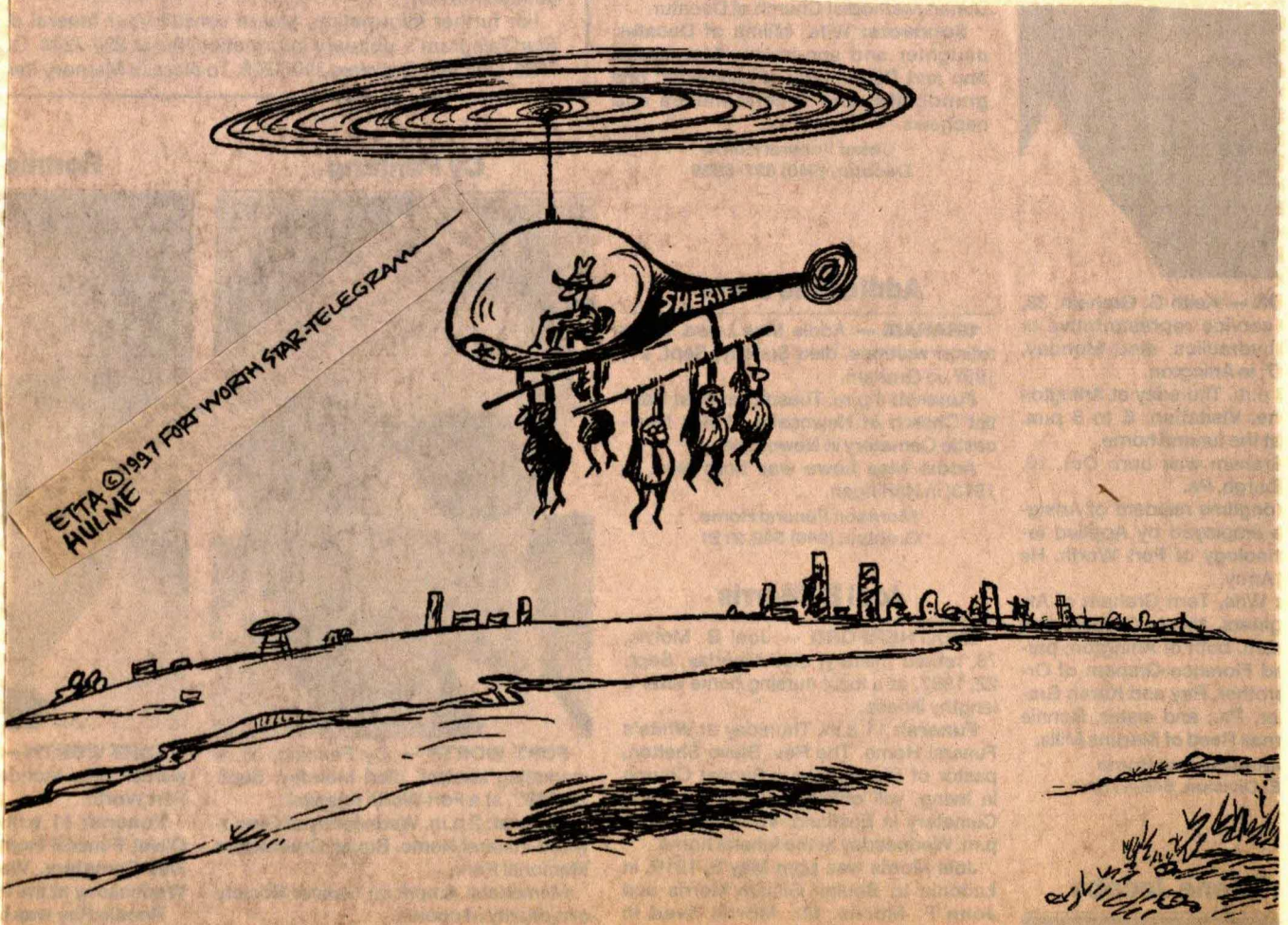
site about 2 p.m. He has said he prayed and then worked on contacting accident investigators and county officials. He attempted to make sure that the families had been notified, he said, and also tried to contact Vandergriff, but the line was busy.

Yesterday, a sheriff’s spokesman, Cmdr. James Skidmore, said the department’s remaining helicopter is flying.

“As far as our aircraft go, it’s business as usual. I don’t think the sheriff perceives it any different than he has in the past,” Skidmore said. “The program does not appear to be in question because of what caused that aircraft to crash.”

Federal accident investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board who have completed their initial inquiry have determined that there was no “catastrophic failure” of the helicopter’s engine and transmission.

The inquiry, however, is not over, the investigators said.



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSISTING SHERIFF WILLIAMS ON A SURVEILLANCE MISSION

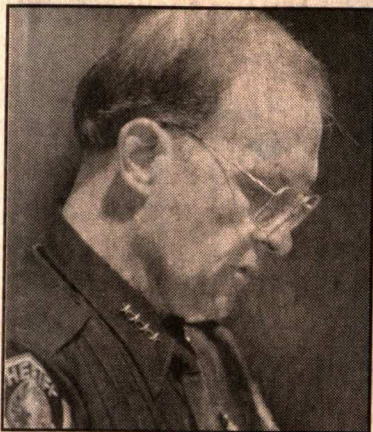
We Learned . . .

TARRANT COUNTY Sheriff David Williams arrived late yesterday for his 11 a.m. report to the county commissioners about the Sept. 17 crash of a Sheriff's Department helicopter.

Entering the courtroom by way of a back door, Williams addressed the commissioners with head down, eyes rarely wavering from his prepared statement.

Williams offered a brief recap of the accident: Two officers died in the line of duty during a helicopter flight that commenced at 9:30 a.m. from Fort Worth Meacham Airport and inexplicably crashed at 9:50 a.m. in a field north of Eagle Mountain Lake.

Williams said his command staff confirmed that Lt. Maurice Hendrix and Investigator T.J. Smith were participating in airborne surveillance as part of an ongoing criminal investigation.



Star-Telegram/DALE BLACKWELL

Sheriff David Williams speaks yesterday.

The sheriff said that the officers' families and his department's employees were being offered counseling assistance through the county chaplain's office and various social service agencies.

After taking a shot at the "slipshod pick-and-choose reporting" of "one local newspaper," the sheriff informed the court that it would be

inappropriate to engage in further discussion on this matter.

Williams quickly departed through a back door and down a back staircase, demonstrating the evasive skills that the Shadow Sheriff is known for and effectively avoiding questions from anyone, including four commissioners and a county judge who sat like stone.

It was a remarkable display of weak will — on everyone's part.

No effort was made by any court member — Commissioners Dionne Bagsby, Marti VanRavenswaay, Glen Whitley and J.D. Johnson or County Judge Tom Vandergriff — to ask about Williams' airborne command. Although it is understandable that all the elected officials wished to show respect for two lost lives, their duty to the rest of this county's residents includes asking and answering the tough questions about the future of a program that has been controversial from Day One.

The commissioners may not have much authority over the sheriff and whether he accepts donated helicopters for his department, but those were county employees who died last week. Court members have not only the right but the obligation to demand information about any program involving county employees.

Those who were expecting to learn something from yesterday's report got a lesson, all right: When the sheriff wants something, he gets it; and when he doesn't want to do something, no one's going to tell him otherwise.

Mrs. Sandra E. Wanzor

*requests the honour of your presence
at the marriage of her daughter*

Joyana Rae

to

Lee Williams

son of Mr. and Mrs. Foster Williams

on Saturday, the twenty-seventh of September

Nineteen hundred and ninety-seven

at seven o'clock in the evening

Marty Leonard Chapel

Flulen at West T-30

Fort Worth, Texas

Dinner Reception

immediately following the ceremony

Vance Godbey's Restaurant

8601 Jacksboro Highway

Fort Worth, Texas

The high sheriff — master of the county courthouse, feudal lord of the county territory, manhunter, and keeper of bloodhounds.

— author Thad Sitton, *Texas High Sheriffs*, 1988



NOT JUST THE JAILERS

■ **Does a sheriff need a helicopter? Throughout Texas' history, the sheriff has worn many hats, 10-gallon or not: principal law enforcement officer, server of warrants, chief jailer. But in an increasingly urbanized Lone Star State, these men and women must ask themselves what their roles are now, and what tools — money-laundering units, air patrols, tactical teams — are most appropriate for those roles.**

**J.R.
LABBE**

In the 160 years since the first Texas sheriff was commissioned in 1837, the Lone Star State has witnessed a long and often colorful history of men and women who have served as the

main law enforcement officials in its counties.

But as metropolitan areas around the state continue to expand, and suburban sprawl increasingly eats up the unincorporated land that was once solely the domain of the county sheriff's department, urban sheriffs

are being challenged to redefine their roles.

"In the '70s, patrolmen were out on essentially rural roads. Those days pretty much are over," said Capt. John McWilliams of the Harris County Sheriff's Department. "We find ourselves involved in sophisticated urban policing, serving an extremely diverse population that requires the police to take a contingency approach in dealing with special needs of the community.

"Some areas have developing youth gang problems, drug trafficking, money laundering — things that require specific kinds of intervention."

That is precisely what is happening in Tarrant County, (More LABBE on Page 8)

where Sheriff David Williams has complemented two of the sheriff's traditional roles — chief jailer and server of warrants — with more aggressive law enforcement that employs helicopter patrols, high-performance vehicles and a SWAT team.

It is an abrupt change from the way that the department was operated for the 30 years before Williams' first election in 1992. Under Lon Evans and Don Carpenter, the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department focused on housing inmates, not on enforcement.

The changes, coupled with the fatal crash of a department helicopter on Sept. 17, has county commissioners once again questioning what the role of the modern sheriff's department should be in a metropolitan area. The answer may be that there is no right or wrong way of being the high sheriff.

It is inequitable to attempt a straight-up comparison of urban sheriff's departments in Texas. Just the vast differences in the area that must be patrolled and the number of people who must be served make it difficult. The Harris County Sheriff's Department oversees 1,100 square miles of unincorporated area, with a population of 900,000 to 1.25 million people living outside of the Houston city limits, depending on which census numbers are used. The Dallas County department patrols 70 square miles with a population of about 50,000 people.

And management and staffing philosophies differ. Dallas County uses civilian detention officers, while 80 percent of Tarrant County's jailers are sworn peace officers. The sheriff's departments in Travis and Tarrant counties operate airborne programs; Harris, Dallas and Bexar rely on mutual aid from the Houston, Dallas and San Antonio police departments, respectively.

Tarrant and Bexar counties have SWAT teams; Dallas, Harris and Travis don't.

But several issues remain constant for urban sheriff's departments, the foremost of which is the tenuous relationship between an elected sheriff and an elected commissioners court that has authority over the budget.

"In Bexar County, I have nothing to say or do with salaries and fringe benefits for my employees," said Sheriff Ralph Lopez, who supervises a department of 1,500 employees. "The Commissioners Court has the purse strings, and the golden rule comes into play: They got the gold, they are gonna rule. It's a universal problem for sheriffs, and sets up an adversarial relationship."

Jim Ewell, spokesman for Dallas County Sheriff Jim Bowles, agreed.

"Money and salaries are always an issue between the sheriff and the court," he said.

In Harris County, a new sheriff has brought at least a temporary truce to historically tense relations between the department and the Commissioners Court.

"Since Tommy Thomas took office, for the first time in memory we have a sheriff who gets along with the Commissioners Court," said McWilliams, who has been with the department for more than 20 years. "As a consequence, the court is working well with us and moving in the same direction."

It was a direction that in large part was mandated by federal court order. For more than 20 years, the Harris County jail was under intensive federal court supervision as a result of a 1972 lawsuit that alleged unconstitutional conditions. The department was released from the provisions of the order in 1995, the same year Thompson was sworn in.

"For better than two decades, virtually all law enforcement dollars went into the jail. None was left over to focus on street operations," Harris County's McWilliams said. "We were dreadfully undermanned in patrol, but the situation is rapidly improving. We went from less than 400 people in the patrol bureau to over 600 positions now."

The allocation of limited resources between the detention and enforcement aspects of the sheriff's department is an issue common to all urban agencies.

"To meet the state and federal constitutional standards for the jail, almost everything that the county commissioners allocate goes to the detention bureau," said Cmdr. James Skidmore of the Tarrant County department, which employs about 1,300 and has an operating budget of \$51.7 million. "The official line from the court is that the jail takes priority. We've had no growth in personnel in the enforcement division in more than 20 years."

Where the departments' enforcement efforts have advanced is in the areas of communications, computer technology and specialized units.

"We use a lot of grant funds to become more specialized in our criminal investigations functions," said McWilliams. "We have a unit that works money-laundering cases because the paper trail involved in white-collar crime and money-laundering aspects of drug transactions is very sophisticated. The day is here when large police agencies need people with accounting and computer science backgrounds to keep up with the crooks."

"The old days where police traditionally came from relatively uneducated working-class backgrounds are rapidly coming to a close. That kind of officer is becoming obsolete."

The Dallas County Sheriff's Department is on the verge of installing a new radio system that will link their officers directly into the Dallas Police Department's communications system.

"We are in the process of outfitting nine supervisors' cars with Dallas Police Department radios," Ewell said. "For the first time, we can monitor DPD's calls and can go into their call system directly through our own cars. We initiated this program after the recent outbreak of the spread of violent bank robberies occurring in this country."

Mutual aid agreements — either formal contracts or just extended as a matter of professional courtesy — exist between all the urban sheriff's departments and the major metropolitan police departments in their counties.

"We don't have many calls for tactical operations and would rely on the Dallas Police Department's tactical team in the event of a street situation that requires it," said Ewell.

All sheriff's departments have internal tactical teams to handle special situations inside the jails.

"State law mandates a special emergency response team be assigned to detention," said Lopez. "We also have a patrol SWAT team and narcotics, organized crime and intelligence units."

Helicopters were a controversial addition to the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department in 1994 but are not unique to that county. In Travis County, the Sheriff's Department operates both emergency medical and law enforcement helicopters and makes their services available to the Austin Police Department.

"In addition to being the holders of the keys for small towns' incarcerations and the city of Austin, the helicopters in the county are ours," said Curtis Weeks, spokesman for the Travis County Sheriff's Department. "We own three and always have two large helicopters available. Unless we have a bunch of bank robbers shooting at each other, EMS takes priority."

Dallas, Harris and Bexar counties rely on the municipal police departments' airborne units when the need for aerial surveillance arises.

"We use San Antonio Police Department helicopters," said Lopez. "It wouldn't be cost-effective for us to duplicate that service, and the need isn't that often to justify that."

Harris County's McWilliams agreed: "We don't have helicopters or a SWAT team. The Houston Police Department has both and makes them available to us when needed."

But depending on another agency's assistance isn't as simple as it sounds, said Skidmore, who worked for the Fort Worth Police Department before joining the Sheriff's Department 11 years ago. And that is one reason why Tarrant stands alone as the urban county in which the Sheriff's Department and the Police Department both have helicopter programs.

"Using other people's personnel and equipment is not as clear-cut a choice as you think," said Skidmore. "What you have to consider when you ask others for assistance is: Who's going to assume the responsibility and liability of what goes on?"

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams began his department's helicopter unit in 1994, when he took possession of three donated military surplus aircraft. The county commissioners agreed to the program after Williams assured them that no tax dollars would be needed to maintain and operate the craft, which are funded through the criminal forfeiture fund.

"It was good common sense," said Skidmore. "Why turn down an asset to the department? A lot of agencies would give their eye teeth to have them; they just can't afford it."

So what will the new millennium bring for the state's urban sheriff's departments? "We all have got to be more sophisticated because of the people we serve," said Dallas County's Ewell. "There has always been the question of, 'What does a sheriff do?' For us, it means being more involved with the public than we've ever been, getting beyond the fortress mentality that didn't want to be involved in the outside."

Travis County — where the voters elected their first female sheriff, Margo Frasier, in 1996 — sees the possibility of taking over the operations of some of the smaller municipal departments in the county.

"In the small police departments there comes a time when they don't function properly and we are called upon to take over those operations," said Weeks. "Police departments with two, three, eight, 10 or 12 policemen, including the chief, run into trouble."

The massive area and booming population that requires sheriff's services drives the changes in the Harris County department, McWilliams said.

"Harris is far more an urban county than it was 20 years ago. It's difficult to tell now when you leave the city limits and get out into the county.

"We have opened four storefronts in last two years, one in each district, and we have a grant application pending to provide positions to open one more in each district. They are very popular with the citizens and successful as we move more toward a philosophy of community policing. It's a concept frequently oversimplified and not understood by even police administration, but we're trying to get out in the community to foster more proactive interaction."

Bexar County Sheriff Lopez, who is a director of the Major Metropolitan Sheriffs Group of the National Sheriff's Association, said three main issues are the topics of discussion every time his group meets.

"Money, labor issues and overpopulation of jails," Lopez said. "Despite the state's predictions that the space crunch is just ahead, overpopulation of the jail is here."

Skidmore said that the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department is not interested in being a superagency with redundancies of services. Rather, the department wants to be a full-service law enforcement agency providing the same level of service to residents of unincorporated areas that inhabitants of the incorporated areas receive from municipal agencies.

"The geographic land mass patrolled by the county may have shrunk, but the corresponding population has not," Skidmore said. "And the people moving into the \$90,000-and-up homes in rural Tarrant County have a certain level of service they expect from the Sheriff's Department."

"When in the past a farmer might have been willing to wait a couple of hours for the sheriff's deputy to come and take a report about a stolen tractor, the citizens living here now will complain if we're not out there in five or six minutes.

"Just because we are a county department should not mean that we are substandard to the municipal departments in our level of capabilities."

JILL "J.R." LABBE is a senior editorial writer and columnist for the *Star-Telegram*. Her E-mail address is jrlabbe@star-telegram.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Defamation

Talk about your controversial programs (Bud Kennedy column, Sept. 18) — I guess the *Star-Telegram's* program in which you allow a part-time food critic to express opinions on matters about which he hasn't a clue tops the list.

First off, had Kennedy ever read the Texas Constitution or the Code of Criminal Procedure, he might have found out that the sheriff's department of each county performs essential police duties that no other branch of law enforcement can. Kennedy appears to believe that even though you pay municipal and county taxes, you shouldn't have a reasonable expectation to receive any kind of county-level law enforcement service.

Even though Lt. Maurice Hendrix dedicated his life to his country first and his community second, Kennedy felt a need to defame his memory. Speculation, innuendo and one-sided reports are what he understands. Lt. Hendrix, on the other hand, understood ideas like honor, dedication and serving his fellow man.

Regardless of Lt. Hendrix's shortcomings, oversights and ideologies, his mission in life was to serve. Other things with which Kennedy probably is not familiar are domestic violence, child abuse, rape, robbery, murder and delivering death notices to the parents and loved ones of crime and tragedy victims. Lt. Hendrix was very familiar with these; he lived them all in the scope of his entire career, and not

from the safety of an air-conditioned office or a throne-like chair.

HANK POPE
Executive chief deputy
Tarrant County Sheriff's Department
Fort Worth

Man arrested in fatal motorcycle wreck flees

FORT WORTH — The man arrested last weekend in connection with a motorcycle wreck that killed a child during a Christian rally tried to escape yesterday, a sheriff's official said.

Kim Duane Birch, 42, who is facing an intoxication manslaughter charge, rushed past a Tarrant County sheriff's officer and up a stairwell at John Peter Smith Hospital, Cmdr. James Skidmore said in a news release.

Birch was surrounded and captured a short time later. He now faces additional criminal charges, Skidmore said.

Birch is hospitalized for injuries he received during the motorcycle-pedestrian collision Saturday that killed 12-year-old Leah Simon of Carrollton, Ohio. The wreck occurred during the Eagle Mountain Motorcycle Rally at Kenneth Copeland Ministries in an unincorporated section of northwest Tarrant County.

Sheriff's deputy is accused of favoritism, resigns

Man has ties to jailed suspect in date-rape drug case

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County Deputy Sheriff Charles Starkey resigned yesterday amid allegations that he did favors for the jailed Steven A. Sera, an Irving man accused of drugging and then raping and videotaping three women in three different states, officials said.

Starkey, 50, of Burleson, a deputy who fingerprinted and photographed inmates when they were booked into the Tarrant County Jail, resigned yesterday, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, Sheriff's Department spokesman. Starkey could not be reached for comment.

"He wasn't suspended or fired — he resigned," Skidmore said. "It appeared to me, based on reports, that he was showing favoritism toward Mr. Sera."

Skidmore declined to say what favors Starkey is accused of doing for Sera when Sera was jailed here for several days in July. Sera is jailed in Arkansas in lieu of \$1 million bail on rape and kidnapping charges.

Skidmore said Starkey had been "under investigation" because he may have violated sheriff's civil service rules. Starkey apparently had worked "in some capacity" in an off-duty job for Sera, the owner of a lumber brokerage firm, he said.

"Based on his activities, it appears to me he had a conflict of interest," Skidmore said.

In 1995, Starkey, then a sergeant, was demoted for not investigating a woman's statement that her estranged husband had kidnapped her and shot her companion, whose anvil-weighted

body was later pulled from Lake Worth.

A Tarrant County Sheriff's Department board recommended that Starkey be fired for "gross negligence," but Sheriff David Williams demoted him instead.

Sera was arrested July 11 in Colleyville after his wife found a videotape and turned it over to authorities. The tape, which showed a man having sex with three women while they were unconscious, led to charges against Sera, 39, in connection with the reported sexual assaults of a 19-year-old woman in Springfield, Mo., in September 1996; a 26-year-old woman in Warren, Ark., last November; and a 32-year-old woman in Colleyville last December.

Police who searched Sera's residence this year said they found Rohypnol, the so-called "date rape" pill. He is accused of sedating the women on the tape with Rohypnol and raping them after they lost consciousness.

Sera had been on business trips to Missouri and Arkansas at the times the attacks occurred. Police said they believe that he carried a video camera and Rohypnol on his trips.

Officials say none of the women was aware of the assaults shown on the videotape until the tape was shown to them.

Although the drug is illegal in the United States, it is used legally in other countries to treat sleeplessness, anxiety, convulsions and muscle tension. It generally causes sedation, amnesia, muscle relaxation and sleep.

Deputy testifies of favors for Sera

He called woman on rape suspect's behalf

BY DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Former Tarrant County Deputy Sheriff Charles Starkey ran errands for the jailed Steven Sera, the Irving man charged with drugging three women and raping them while videotaping the attacks, Starkey testified in Sera's divorce hearing.

Starkey delivered Sera's property to an attorney and retrieved clothing for him. Then, after Sera posted bail, Starkey called a woman who was scheduled to leave with Sera on July 12 for Mexico to tell her that Sera would be late meeting her, according to an attorney representing Sera's wife, Nancy.

"He did not even tell that woman about Sera's arrest," attorney Jonathan Bates of Dallas said.

A few hours after the call, authorities rearrested Sera, authorities said.

Starkey's testimony occurred this week in Dallas. Sera did not attend the hearing because he is in a Warren, Ark., jail with bail set at \$1 million.

Starkey resigned Tuesday from the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, where he was a deputy who fingerprinted and photographed prisoners when they were booked into Tarrant County Jail.

The 50-year-old Burleson man was being investigated because he may have violated sheriff's civil service rules, Tarrant County authorities said.

Starkey could not be reached to comment yesterday.

He had been employed by the Sher-

iff's Department since November 1988, according to Tarrant County records.

"Before Sera's arrest, Starkey had done some off-duty work for him," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a department spokesman.

Skidmore said he did not have information about how Starkey and Sera met.

In testimony during the divorce hearing, Starkey said that when he called the woman July 12, he identified himself as head of security for Chandler Lumber Co., a Farmers Branch firm that is owned by Sera, attorneys said.

Starkey told Family Court Judge Brenda Green that he was paid by

Sera's sister while the 39-year-old suspect was in Tarrant County Jail.

Green granted Nancy Sera the divorce Tuesday afternoon, but attorneys said that issues involving the Seras' two children and property remained unresolved.

Steven Sera's divorce attorney, Mark Rosenfield of Fort Worth, was in trial yesterday and could not be reached to comment.

Nancy Sera has been given sole custody of the children. Guidelines for Steven Sera to see them have not been worked out, attorneys said.

Steven Sera has petitioned for the rights to Nancy Sera's life story and to money she is to receive for a personal injury claim from an automobile accident that occurred weeks before Steven Sera was arrested. Nancy Sera was separated from her husband at the time of the accident, Bates said.

State law prohibits criminals from profiting from their crimes by selling book or movie rights.

Steven Sera was first arrested June 26 at his Irving home by Colleyville police, a few days after Nancy Sera happened on a videotape in their house, authorities said.

The tape showed the rapes of a 19-year-old Springfield, Mo., woman in September, a 26-year-old Warren, Ark., woman in November, and a 32-year-old Colleyville woman in December, police said. Sera knew the women, police said.

The women were drugged with Rohypnol, the so-called date rape drug, and were stripped and raped while they were unconscious, police said. None of the victims knew about the attacks until the videotape was shown to them this summer, police said.

Copter report lacking, some say

Officials want more detail from sheriff

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams' report on the county's 4-year-old helicopter program is inadequate, say some Tarrant County commissioners who want more specific information on the helicopters than the report offers.

Williams' report, which the commissioners received last week, detailed the helicopters missions since 1994 but made no mention of the crash last month that killed two deputies, nor did it discuss the future of the helicopter program.

"A number of people have said this helicopter is just a toy. This report was to show that the missions were genuine," Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope said. "You can see by the report that the helicopter was needed."

Williams was unavailable to comment on the report, which includes an eight-page month-by-month listing of drug

busts, missing-person searches, airborne surveillance and reconnaissance efforts, fugitive chases and community appearances. Also included are nine pages of Bell Helicopter Textron advertisements on the value of helicopters to law enforcement.

"It is just a summary and not a substantive effort," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said.

The report is "superficial and less than satisfying," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said.

"It's not a good report on what our helicopter has been doing and the kicker was including a Bell

Helicopter sales brochure," VanRavenswaay said, adding that she would like information on arrests, convictions and the value of property recovered.

"I need to get a clear understanding of how we can measure the success of our program and how much of the activity relates to Tarrant County crime," she said. "I am not trying to be an obstructionist to a viable program, but I would like additional information."

Under the Texas Constitution, the sheriff is an independent elected officer, but the county commissioners have final say over the sheriff's budget and the county auditor reviews the department's operations.

Nearly all of the Tarrant County sheriff's \$51.7 million budget comes from the county's general fund, but the money to operate the helicopter comes from the sheriff's criminal forfeiture fund, which holds drug money and funds from the sale of items seized because they were used in crimes.

Through August 1997, the department spent \$52,000 on the two helicopters this year, and for the past two years the annual expenditure has been roughly \$60,000.

On Sept. 17, one of the Sheriff's Department's OH-58A helicopters crashed over an airstrip owned by Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake. The deaths of Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, the 51-year-old pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, 45, a criminal investigator, in that accident have focused the commissioners' attention on the helicopter program.

Williams asked for time at a commissioners' meeting to report on the crash, but made only a three-minute appearance at which he read prepared remarks.

Now commissioners are split on when to discuss the remaining sheriff's helicopter, which sheriff's officials said is "operational and used as needed," and whether the sheriff should continue his Airmobile Support Tactics Reconnaissance Assistance unit.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he prefers to wait until federal investigators finish their crash investigation, which could take eight months or more.

Pope said he doubts the Sheriff's Department could talk about the future of the helicopter program before the report is in.

Bagsby said: "There ought to be substantive discussions about this program immediately. I'd have hoped we'd already had these conversations."

If a helicopter helps reduce crime and county residents want to support it, then it should be part of the general fund, Bagsby said, adding that she wants to hear from police departments about collaborative efforts with the Sheriff's Department.

In the report's cover letter, Williams said the primary focus of the air unit has been drug interdiction. The helicopters are "versatile" and are used for "a wide range of missions, at any hour day or night," to assist law enforcement and public safety agencies in and around Tarrant County, he said.

According to the report, through September 1997 the sheriff's helicopters have worked with Tarrant County cities 71 times, other counties 19 times, the federal government 14 times and the state of Texas nine times. The choppers were used 45 times in drug-related cases. They were used to catch 22 suspects, to recover six vehicles and to search for eight missing people, the report says.

In July 1996, one of the helicopters was flown more than 700 miles to the suburbs of Chattanooga, Tenn., in an unsuccessful effort to recapture an escapee from Tarrant County's Green Bay jail, police officials said.

"The report shows how the helicopters have been helpful, but we must make sure it is a safe program." Commissioner Glen Whitley said. He said he would like to see the program discussed this year.

Star-Telegram / Saturday, October 11, 1997

Backing Williams

Please go easy on Sheriff David Williams. He's done a good job here in Tarrant County. More important, his helicopters are our most advanced means of crime-fighting. Drug criminals are using them all over the world to become the heads of drug cartels to export the illegal drugs to their best customer, the United States.

We need to use our crime tax to purchase even more helicopters in this war on crime. Please forget about your personal differences with Williams and think about your own families' safety in this war on crime.

JACK O. LEWIS
Haltom City

Monday, October 13, 1997

WINNERS AND LOSERS:

TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPUTY CHARLES STARKEY resigned last week after allegations that he showed favoritism for Steven A. Sera, an Irving man accused of drugging and then raping and videotaping women in three states. The favoritism, which included running personal errands for Sera, allegedly occurred while Sera was jailed briefly in Tarrant County in July.

OBITUARIES

Star-Telegram / Monday, October 13, 1997

Hamp Stephens Scruggs



ARLINGTON — Hamp Stephens Scruggs, 63, a law enforcement official, died Saturday, Oct. 11, 1997, in Arlington.

Funeral: Noon Tuesday at Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home. **Burial:** Bluebonnet Hills Memorial Park. **Visitation:** 6 to 8:30 p.m. Monday.

Hamp Scruggs was born May 30, 1934, in Chillicothe. He was a Shriner, Mason and charter member of the Scottish Rite. He was a retired chief deputy for the Tarrant County Sheriffs Department. He was a past Chief of Police of North Richland Hills and Grapevine. He was a past president and lifetime member of the Texas Police Chief Association. Hamp also was a member of Smithfield Lodge Masons 455.

Survivors: Wife of 10 years, Judy Scruggs of Arlington; daughter, Debbie Pottorff of Coffey, Mo.; stepson, David Davis of Arlington; stepdaughters, Amy Walling of Abilene and Bethany Hunt of Evansville, Ind.; brother, Gene Scruggs of Carrollton; sisters, Ernestine Collvins of Springtown, Linda Bowles of Fort Worth, Betty Foster of Hurst and Patricia Cameron of Richardson; five grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home
Colleyville, 281-8751

In Loving Memory of

Hamp Stephens Scruggs

May 30, 1934 — October 11, 1997

*When I must leave you
for a little while,
Please go on bravely
with a gallant smile
And for my sake and in my name,
Live on and do all things the same —
Spend not your life in empty days,
But fill each waking hour
in useful ways —
Reach out your hand
in comfort and in cheer,
And I in turn will comfort you
and hold you near.*

Helen Steiner Rice

Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home

Pilot killed in copter had maintenance concerns

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
AND G. CHAMBERS WILLIAMS III
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

FORT WORTH — The pilot who died when his sheriff's helicopter crashed last month had sent a letter to Sheriff David Williams nearly three months before, detailing concerns about maintenance of the department's fleet.

Still, federal investigators said yesterday that there is no evidence that mechanical problems caused the Sept. 17 crash, which killed sheriff's Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, 51, and criminal investigator Thomas Jay Smith, 45.

"Based on what we have been told by the National Transportation Safety Board, they have no concerns about our maintenance procedures," Cmdr. James Skidmore, the Tarrant County sheriff's spokesman, said yesterday.

Hendrix's letter, dated July 1, refers to an overdue 1,000-hour inspection on the sheriff's other helicopter. The helicopter that crashed was not overdue for any inspections or maintenance, said Georgia Snyder, the chief NTSB investigator assigned to review the crash.

The 1,000-hour inspection is not legally required, officials said. But a thorough examination of the many moving parts on a helicopter is part of the maintenance schedule recommended by the manufacturer, Bell Helicopter, officials said.

In the letter, Hendrix wrote, "The most glaring deficiency, according to Tommie Parks, is that in his opinion, a 1,000-hour inspection which was due approximately 2-3 months ago has been overflown by nearly 200 hours."

Parks, a sheriff's reserve officer who had flown both helicopters and helped with maintenance, could not be reached to comment yesterday.

Hendrix took over command of the sheriff's two-helicopter fleet of military surplus Bell OH-58As in June. The letter to Williams, titled "Helicopter Maintenance Program Deficiencies," was apparently his

initial assessment of the helicopter program that he helped start four years earlier.

"Any person who has had any long-term experience with helicopters knows that this is a cardinal sin, to disregard maintenance due of any type, especially a major inspection where the main mast and rotor system is due to be taken off and inspected for any damage or excessive wear," Hendrix wrote in the letter.

The neatly handwritten letter was addressed to Williams and Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope, neither of whom could be reached to comment.

Hendrix proposed grounding the helicopter that needed the 1,000-hour inspection, getting a new mechanic to do maintenance and posting a status board on the hangar wall so pilots could see the hours remaining before each helicopter's next service.

The helicopter was never grounded, however, because the maintenance had already been done, Skidmore said. The maintenance was not recorded, he said.

None of the concerns raised in Hendrix's letter "seem to have any bearing" on the accident, Skidmore said. Meanwhile, Skidmore said investigators were initially confused about what kind of mission the copter was on at the time of the crash, and they are still trying to determine why the helicopter crashed on the grounds of TV evangelist Kenneth Copeland's church.

An initial report said the helicopter was on training maneuvers, but Skidmore said that was based on speculation. The sheriff's criminal investigation division has since confirmed that the helicopter was on a reconnaissance flight related to an investigation, the details of which Skidmore said he couldn't discuss.

"The question we can't answer is why they were near the Copeland properties," Skidmore said. "I honestly can't help but feeling it was a coincidence he came down on that property."

Since the crash, Tarrant County commissioners have repeatedly asked Williams for detailed information about the helicopter program.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said yesterday that he wants to talk to Williams about the helicopter program before the end of the week.

"I want to know if we are flying the helicopter and whether we have got everything done in the way of maintenance and training," Johnson said.

Sheriff's officials have said repeatedly that the helicopter is not grounded.

Tarrant County Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said the letter "reveals more unanswered questions" about the helicopter program.

"We simply need more information about the helicopters so we can make informed decisions about the future of the programs," she said.

The sheriff's deputies were on a reconnaissance mission when the crash occurred about 9:50 a.m. at an airstrip owned by Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake.

Snyder spent more time examining the wreckage yesterday but said her investigation still has not focused on "any particular concern," including maintenance or pilot error.

"We're still looking for the toxicological report on the pilot and we haven't ruled out anything yet," Snyder said.

She said she has inspected the maintenance records for the helicopter that crashed, and they are in order.

"Lieutenant Hendrix's letter to the sheriff made no mention of this helicopter," Snyder said. "It had been flown only 70 hours by the Sheriff's Department and had not accumulated enough hours to be due any specific maintenance yet. We have reviewed the records and have found no evidence of discrepancies."

Snyder said she does not put much stock in a theory popular among some accident investigators that a shaft in a transmission that turns the aircraft's tail rotor might have broken, causing the crash.

Helicopter

From Page 1A

The device — a short shaft — was found to be broken when investigators examined the wreckage. Snyder said she believes it was damaged during the crash, not before.

"It is twisted in two," she said. "But the consensus is that it was broken on impact. We haven't sent it to the NTSB laboratory for testing, but we haven't sent anything else, either."

Federal Aviation Administration officials had centered their concerns on the short shaft, and experts who saw a short videotape of the aircraft in the seconds before it crashed said it was evident to them that the tail rotor was not turning — possible evidence that the short shaft had broken.

Maintenance records show that the tail rotor gearbox, which contains the short shaft, was last removed, serviced and replaced when the aircraft had been operating for 3,207 total hours. That was less than 500 hours before the crash. But the gearbox had more than 1,000 hours of use logged.

It's unclear from the aircraft's records when the gearbox was due to be replaced or overhauled. One reference indicates that the part has a life of 900 hours.

Snyder said she would like to review Hendrix's personal flight log and has asked sheriff's officials to try to find it.

"So far, it has not been found or provided to me, so I don't know whether he even had one," she said. "We only know about his flight time from what he stated on his application for a medical certificate and what he listed on documents at Bell Helicopter when he underwent training in August."

Memo released on fatal crash

Helicopter used in auto theft case

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Newly released Tarrant County sheriff's documents say that two deputies killed in a helicopter crash last month were doing aerial reconnaissance as part of an auto theft investigation in Northwest Tarrant County.

Sheriff's criminal investigators checking on a "suspected auto-theft ring" needed to use the helicopter in a "hurry-up deal" to check a rural area of the county because cars could have tipped off the suspects, the records say.

Sheriff's officials previously said only that Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, 51, and criminal investigator Thomas Jay Smith, 45, who were killed in the Sept. 17 crash of the military surplus Bell OH-58A helicopter, were doing reconnaissance for a multiagency investigation.

The auto theft investigation is "still ongoing" and there have been no arrests, Cmdr. James Skidmore, a sheriff's spokesman, said yesterday.

In an Oct. 3 memo to the Federal Aviation Administration from Bob Moehring, chief pilot for the Sheriff's Department, Moehring outlined the purpose of the fatal mission to federal investigators.

"Aerial reconnaissance of a suspected auto-theft ring was needed due to its rural location and the possibility of arousing suspicion if ground vehicles were to be used," Moehring wrote to the FAA.

In a memo to Capt. J.C. Anderson of Special Operations Command, written on the day of

Star-Telegram / Friday, October 17, 1997

the crash by the unit's executive secretary, Hendrix reportedly called the office at 9:30 a.m. to say that he was taking a helicopter up.

"He advised that Criminal Investigations had called with a 'hurry-up' deal and would be going north," the memo says.

Skidmore said yesterday that "they probably needed an overflight to see if there was any evi-

dence" to support the investigation.

But 20 minutes after the helicopter left its hangar at Fort Worth Meacham Airport, it plummeted from the sky and crashed on the edge of the runway at the Copeland Ministries airstrip, killing both deputies.

In Moehring's memo to the FAA, he said: "Prior to ending the flight, Lt. Hendrix went to Copeland Ministries to utilize the private airport and runways. This agency, as well as others, periodically use this facility for practice landings and takeoffs, hover work, confined area operations,

and other maneuvers with prior permission from the Copeland staff."

Skidmore said sheriff's officials are still unsure why the helicopter was at the Copeland airfield.

"You can't orbit around something in an investigation. You vary your altitude and time of travel. That would be a normal practice," he said. "Whether they went over to Copeland to sit and then go again, that would be logical, but we can't confirm it."

Staff writer G. Chambers
Williams III contributed to this
report.

Bobby Blackwell



FORT WORTH — Bobby Blackwell, 63, a retired Tarrant County Sheriff's Department constable, died Friday, Oct. 17, 1997, at a local hospital.

Funeral: 2 p.m. Sunday at Brown, Owens & Brumley Funeral Home under the auspices of Hemphill Heights Masonic Lodge 1164. Burial: Greenwood Memorial Park. Family visitation: 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday at the funeral home.

Memorials: Cancer Care Network of Fort Worth, 605 W. Magnolia; or Hemphill Heights Masonic Lodge, 1550 W. Berry.

Bobby Blackwell was born Nov. 11, 1933, in Antlers, Okla. He was a past master from 1995 to 1996 and a member of Hemphill Heights Masonic Lodge 1164, AF&AM; Fort Worth Valley Scottish Rite; Hemphill Heights Chapter 448 and Council 365, Moslah Shrine; Fort Worth Chapter 681, Order of Eastern Star; and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service.

Survivors: Fiancee, Roseland Wade of Fort Worth; sons, James Dow Carter and Michael Adam Blackwell; daughter, Bobbi Blackwell Thomas; mother, Betty Henley; and grandchildren, Jeremy Thomas, Rachael Thomas, Wes Carter, Shelby Carter, Emily Joe Carter and Nicholas Blackwell.

Brown, Owens & Brumley
425 S. Henderson St., 335-4567

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tough jobs

I think it is about time that the *Star-Telegram* backs off Sheriff David Williams' helicopter program. Let it go. Quit bringing up the horrid event of September. Let the sheriff and the families of Lt. G.M. Hendrix and Deputy T.J. Smith go on with their lives and begin their process of healing.

It's hard to have some newspaper person standing there behind the firing squad and taking pictures, and have it be in the paper for the next week staring you in the face day after day.

I really think the Sept. 24 cartoon was carrying it a bit too far. And so what if Williams comes in a back door to the meeting?

Williams and his many officers put their lives on the line for every one of us every day. You will never know how much it affects every one of the officers to lose one of their own, or how it affects their family lives to wonder if Daddy or Husband or Wife is going to return from work at the end of their tour of duty.

It was not Williams' fault that something went wrong on the helicopter. The only ones who know are the Big Person upstairs, Hendrix and Smith.

Thanks to all of the men and women in all the different departments who protect and serve us each and every day.

PATRICIA MORGAN
Springtown

Give Williams a break

Instead of printing every negative thing, including half-truths and innuendoes, could the very liberal *Star-Telegram* give Sheriff David Williams a pat on the back for being a good and honest sheriff?

Last month on his talk show, Mark Davis commented that "if the media liked or disliked someone or something, you would read about it for a long time." The *Star-Telegram* publishes and continues to publish every negative thing it can find about our fine sheriff. Is it possible that being a conservative makes one a target for negative reporting?

Williams is working for the betterment of all Tarrant County residents, and we are happy to have drug-sniffing dogs and helicopter aerial surveillance units to give us better protection.

Come on, guys — give him a break.

BOBBIE EDDINS
North Richland Hills

Assessing the sheriff

With all this talk of assessing the Tarrant County sheriff's programs, let's not forget the people who benefit from them. I'm speaking of the deputies who patrol unincorporated Tarrant County and the residents who live there. In past years these deputies have been asked to perform the same job as municipal officers but with substandard, outdated or just worn-out equipment.

I am not here to justify Sheriff David Williams' helicopter program but to offer a different view. His critics say that he is infatuated with high-tech tools of the trade. I don't understand the problem with that.

You wouldn't ask someone to design a 1997 computer program for you on a 1985 Commodore 64. Why should we ask these deputies to stay behind in technology and safety just because their boss is the keeper of the jail keys? These deputies are required to answer the same type of calls as municipal officers and are expected to provide the same level of service. They serve the same type of high-risk warrants as municipal officers and must also provide security for all county buildings.

If an assessment is to be done, it should not be done by people who live in a city and have a high-tech police department ready and equipped to come to their aid; it should be done by the residents of rural Tarrant County who deserve the same.

ROSS DOBELBOWER
Arlington

Panel to discuss copter crash

Tarrant commissioners plan executive session

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The helicopter crash that killed two deputies nearly five weeks ago will be discussed today by Tarrant County officials in an executive session of the Commissioners Court.

The closed-door meeting was prompted by recently released Sheriff's Department documents that related helicopter maintenance concerns and the mission of the fatal Sept. 17 flight, county officials said.

"The court needs to be rebriefed on the crash. We simply want to discuss the crash again," said G.K. Maenius, county administrator. The meeting will be closed because it is to include advice from counsel, he said.

Sheriff's Department officials said yesterday that they did not know whether they would attend the meeting. "It hasn't been decided yet," spokesman Cmdr. James Skidmore said late yesterday afternoon.

One document made public last week under the Texas Open Records Act revealed that concerns about maintenance of the helicopters were raised three months before the crash that killed Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, the pilot, and criminal investigator Deputy Thomas Jay Smith.

The helicopter crashed at about 9:50 a.m. on an airstrip east of Eagle Mountain Lake that is owned by the Kenneth Copeland Ministries.

"In a letter to Federal Aviation Administration officials, the Sheriff's Department's chief pilot, Deputy Bob Moehring, said the two deputies aboard the helicopter were doing aerial reconnaissance as part of an auto-theft investigation in northwest Tarrant County.

"We've been constantly hearing this information on the radio and seeing it in newspapers and on television. For the commissioners, it's a matter of getting updated," said Commissioner Glen Whitley, who represents Northeast Tarrant County. "It would seem like someone from the Sheriff's Department would be there to discuss this."

Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay of Arlington said she "hopes somebody has something new" to report.

"It could be from the district attorney, from the sheriff, the county administrator or county risk management, but we need more information" she said.

Under the Texas Constitution, the sheriff holds an elected office separate from the Commissioners Court, but the commissioners have final say over the sheriff's budget and the county auditor reviews the department's operations.

Nearly all of the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department's \$51.7 million budget comes from the county's general fund, but the money to operate the helicopter program comes from the sheriff's criminal forfeiture fund, which holds drug money and funds from the sale of items seized because they were used in crimes.

"Unless someone tells me something I don't know, I don't think we can tell the sheriff to take the helicopter out of the sky. It is a program he funds himself," Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff said.

Federal investigators, who have not concluded their investigation, say there still is no evidence that mechanical problems caused the crash.

The National Transportation Safety Board is expected to issue a final report on the accident in May, they said.

TWO SEEK GROUNDING OF COPTER

THE COMMISSIONERS SAY THE PROGRAM SHOULD HALT UNTIL THE SHERIFF REPORTS ON ITS STATUS AND FUTURE

FORT WORTH - Tarrant County's helicopter should be grounded until Sheriff David Williams reports to county officials on the status and future of his flight program, two of the five members of the Commissioners Court said yesterday.

Two other county officials say they favor keeping the helicopter in service.

Knowing that the demand to ground the helicopter might not be enforceable because it is flown under the auspices of an independently elected sheriff, the commissioners said they may ask the Tarrant County district attorney's office to determine their authority. The sheriff's helicopter is Tarrant County property.

"I would prefer the sheriff ground the helicopter until he talks to the entire Commissioner's Court," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said yesterday after a closed-door briefing on last month's crash of one of the two helicopters operated by the Sheriff's Department. Two deputies were killed, and the mili-

tary surplus OH-58 Bell Ranger was destroyed.

"We have not yet discussed the future of the helicopter program. We need the sheriff to address

that."

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby joined VanRavenswaay in calling for the grounding. County Judge Tom Vandergriff and Commissioner Glen Whitley said the Sheriff's Department should be allowed to continue flying.

"I'm not of a mind to tie the sheriff's hand or restrict any law enforcement agency from using its equipment," Vandergriff said. "Who knows what emergencies might occur?"

Sheriff's officials said yesterday that the department's remaining OH-58A Bell helicopter is flying missions.

"It's in operation as needed. It last flew on Friday morning," said a sheriff's spokesman, Cmdr. James Skidmore. Williams will "provide the commissioners with additional information as soon as he can," Skidmore said.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson, in Conroe for a statewide county officials conference, said he did not want to comment because he did not attend the briefing.

Commissioners have final approval over the sheriff's budget, and the county auditor reviews the department's operations. But under the Texas Constitution, sheriff is an elected office, separate from the Commissioners Court.

Almost all of the sheriff's \$51.7 million budget comes from the county's general fund, but the money to operate the helicopter comes from the sheriff's criminal forfeiture fund, which holds drug money and proceeds from the sale of items seized because they were used in crimes.

But Tarrant County is liable for any property damage or personal injuries caused by the helicopter in an accident.

The commissioners learned yesterday that, as of Oct. 13, the families of Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, the helicopter pilot, and criminal investigator Thomas Jay Smith — the two deputies killed in the crash — began receiving about \$26,000 a year under the county's self-insured workers compensation program.

Each family gets \$508 a week for life, with 50 percent of the benefit going to dependent children. The spousal benefit continues unless the widow remarries, in which case she gets a two-year lump sum payment of the benefit, county risk manager Debbie Schneider said.

Bagsby and VanRavenswaay said they are concerned about the county's liability and the safety of the helicopter program.

"We must clearly understand the [county's] liability," Bagsby said.

If the helicopter plays a significant role in fighting crime, then it should be included as part of the county budget instead of being funded by drug forfeiture funds, she said.

Bagsby said commissioners want to know about the age and condition of the helicopter, the cost and procedures for maintenance, the training of pilots and mechanics and future plans for the helicopter's use.

Most importantly, Bagsby said, the commissioners "need to know how much authority" they have over a piece of equipment that is county property.

"I feel certain there will be some formal request to the district attorney to look at what authority commissioners can have over the program," she said.

Whitley and VanRavenswaay said they have appointments to meet with Williams this week.

Federal investigator Georgia Snyder said National Transportation Safety Board officials have not concluded their investigation, but thus far there is no evidence that mechanical problems caused the crash. She said a final report on the accident should be issued by the board by May.

The helicopter crashed about 9:50 a.m. Sept. 17 on an airstrip owned by Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake.

Sheriff's officials originally said the helicopter was on a reconnaissance mission when it went down. Later, they said the flight was to investigate an auto-theft ring in northwest Tarrant County.

Skidmore said Hendrix and Smith were on a mission "initiated from intelligence" provided by a sheriff's supervisor who had been assigned to the auto-theft task force and by a member of the Northeast Street Crimes Unit, a multi-jurisdictional task force.

Deputies guard copter crash victims' homes

BY JACK DOUGLAS JR.
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Armed sheriff's deputies in unmarked pickup trucks yesterday were guarding the homes of two Tarrant County sheriff's investigators who were killed more than a month ago in a helicopter crash.

Sheriff's department spokesman Cmdr. James Skidmore said the service was provided after at least one family member "complained of being harassed by the media." Sheriff David Williams could not be reached to comment.

The suggestion to protect the families' homes from encroaching news media, as well as offering other services, came from FBI Director Louis Freeh, who called to offer his condolences after the crash, Skidmore said.

Deputies in full uniform and on county time were posted outside the home of sheriff's criminal investigator Thomas Jay Smith in White Settlement and the home of Lt. George Maurice Hendrix near Eagle Mountain Lake.

Both men were killed Sept. 17 when a Sheriff's Department helicopter piloted by Hendrix crashed near a runway on the sprawling property of Kenneth Copeland Ministries, near Eagle Mountain Lake.

The cause of the accident has yet to be determined.

Skidmore said yesterday that deputies guarded the homes of Smith and Hendrix for two weeks after the accident. Deputies were returned to the homes this week after complaints that reporters were asking questions, the commander said.

Deputy Dusty Zimmermann, stepping out of a black pickup, prevented a *Star-Telegram* reporter from reaching the front door of

Hendrix's house. "They've requested no media presence. . . . They just don't want any of the family talking to the media right now," he said.

In a telephone interview later in the day, Marcia Hendrix said she did not ask for her home to be guarded, but was nevertheless comforted by the Sheriff's Department's "courtesy."

"I didn't ask for it, but I'm sure not going to turn it down," Hendrix said. She said she especially welcomes the service since a TV reporter came to her home last week, asking for an interview.

Hendrix said she agreed Monday night to sign a statement, which she believes was written by the Sheriff's Department, ordering reporters to stay away from her property.

A statement was also signed by Smith's wife, Kathy Smith. The statement said Smith did not want reporters at her home and "I further request and authorize that such person entering my property after receiving verbal notification [to leave] . . . be arrested for criminal trespass."

When reached later by phone, Kathy Smith refused to say whether she had asked for her home to be guarded. "You need to talk to

them, the ones out there," Smith said, referring to the deputies who have been assigned outside her home.

Pct. 3 County Commissioner Glen Whitley said deputies are posted outside the widows' homes "to help them with things you don't think about until it comes up. . . . There's an awful lot they have to deal with."

Pct. 4 County Commissioner J.D. Johnson said, however, that he had not heard "anything from anyone about the families getting pressure from the press. I'm sort of shocked to hear that."

Helicopter episode begs for answers

The Tarrant County Sheriff's Department has recently been an easy target for anyone willing to take potshots, sometimes unfairly.

Historically, the Tarrant County Commissioners Court has been a convenient whipping boy (and *girl*,) even when it was unwarranted.

Now, following a tragedy that some of us sadly predicted, both deserve the lashings that will surely come their way in the weeks and months ahead.

Although I've never been one of those "I-told-you-so" kind of people, it is important to remind Sheriff David Williams and the commissioners — all elected officials — that a lot of people, including me, asked many questions in 1994 when it was pro-

posed that the Sheriff's Department get into the helicopter business.

At that time, the department and the Commissioners Court seemed only interested in who would pay for the operation. If the copters were going to be donated by the government and maintenance was to be provided through drug seizure money, then everything would be all right.

In this space, more than two years ago, I sent this warning to our county leaders:

"The commissioners have been much too passive on this issue, basically nodding approval of the sheriff's plans, especially for what supposedly won't cost the county money (such as the helicopters).

"What the commissioners must know is when they voted to accept the helicopters, the county also



Bob Ray Sanders

COMMENTARY

accepted responsibility and liability."

A county helicopter crashed on takeoff from private property Sept. 17, killing two employees.

The commissioners have begun to ask the questions that should have been raised in 1994, and they're still not getting the information they need. At least two commissioners are now suggesting that the other sheriff's helicopter be grounded until they can get some answers from the sheriff.

To this day, we really don't know what mission the sheriff's employees were performing at the time of the crash.

More questions need to be asked, and somebody needs to come up with the answers.

It seems that this would be a job for the district attorney's office, but I don't know how that agency can advise both the sheriff and the commissioners if there is an obvious conflict.

Maybe we need some outside special counsel, appointed by the district judges, to investigate this case, because there are things that

the taxpayers of Tarrant County have a right to know, like:

■ What *exactly* were the sheriff's two employees doing the day they were killed in the crash? Was it a public or private mission?

■ If it was a "private" mission, does that affect the liability issue?

■ Why was the helicopter on private property?

■ Did the helicopter ever provide private services for owners of the land where the crash occurred?

■ Were there maintenance problems with the surplus copter and, if so, were they ever addressed?

■ Was there a videotape of the crash? What does it show? Who was videotaping and why?

This is just a start. The sooner we get the answers, the faster the sheriff and the commissioners can get back to their other important duties.

Bob Ray Sanders' column appears Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. His E-mail address is bobray@star-telegram.com.

Critics hear sheriff's defense of copters

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams defended his helicopter program yesterday in private meetings with Tarrant County Commissioners Marti VanRavenswaay and Dionne Bagsby, who three days ago called for grounding the department's one remaining aircraft.

It marked the first time Williams has talked at length with county officials about his 4-year-old flight program since a helicopter crash last month killed two deputies.

Williams, who declined to be interviewed, said through a spokesman that he was "encouraged by the outcome of the meeting."

VanRavenswaay, who Tuesday called for grounding the helicopter, said yesterday that she has more confidence in the helicopter

program after talking with the sheriff for more than two hours in his downtown office.

The demand to ground the helicopter, however, could be unenforceable because it operates under the authority of an independently elected sheriff. Also, County Judge Tom Vandergriff and Commissioner Glen Whitley both oppose the move. Whitley said he plans to meet with Williams today or early next week.

As to whether the helicopter continues to fly, VanRavenswaay said: "That is Sheriff Williams' decision." The military surplus OH-58A Bell helicopter is flying missions, sheriff's officials have said.

But VanRavenswaay and Bagsby say that the helicopter program should still be discussed in public by the entire Commissioners Court, and that the district attorney

(More on SHERIFF on Page 5)

ney should determine commissioners' authority over the helicopter, which is Tarrant County property.

"He gave a very compelling justification of the helicopter program, but my concern about liability isn't diminished," VanRavenswaay said.

Referring to a large wall map, Williams showed VanRavenswaay where and how the helicopter has aided the department in serving warrants and in patrolling unincorporated areas of the county, she said.

The helicopter program "is operating on a shoestring," VanRavenswaay said. If it is needed to fight crime, perhaps it should be included in the county budget instead of being funded by drug forfeiture funds, she said.

Bagsby said her meeting with the sheriff was "informative, direct and interesting."

"The issue at this point is validation of the value of the program," Bagsby said. "I think he [Williams] has an argument for his program. I don't think he has done a good job communicating that to the commissioners or the public."

VanRavenswaay said Williams told her that he will brief commissioners on the helicopter program after the Sheriff's Department finishes its internal investigation of the Sept. 17 accident. The helicopter crashed about 9:50 a.m. on an airstrip owned by the Kenneth Copeland Ministries east of Eagle Mountain Lake.

The county's liability, VanRavenswaay said, is still her greatest concern.

The crash that killed Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, the pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, a criminal investigator, will cost the county roughly \$1 million, county officials have said. The families of the two men began receiving about \$26,000 a year, or about \$508 a week, under the county's self-insured workers compensation program.

Assistant District Attorney Marvin Collins, who heads the civil division, said his office intends to review the issue of liability and who has final authority over county-owned equipment operated by another elected official. Tarrant County is liable for any property damage or personal injuries caused by the helicopter in an accident.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of sheriff, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, but the commissioners have final say over the sheriff's budget and the county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

Almost all of the sheriff's \$51.7 million budget comes from the county's general fund, but the money to operate the helicopter comes from the sheriff's criminal forfeiture fund.

The two Tarrant County commissioners tone down their concern after the meetings but still want the program discussed in a public forum.



Sheriff Williams

The man behind the badge

Tarrant County's chief law enforcement officer would never be accused of being a showboating sheriff. He is an intensely private man, but one with a professional mission. Now, in an unprecedented 12 hours of interviews with J.R. Labbe, he answers the question: What makes David Williams run?



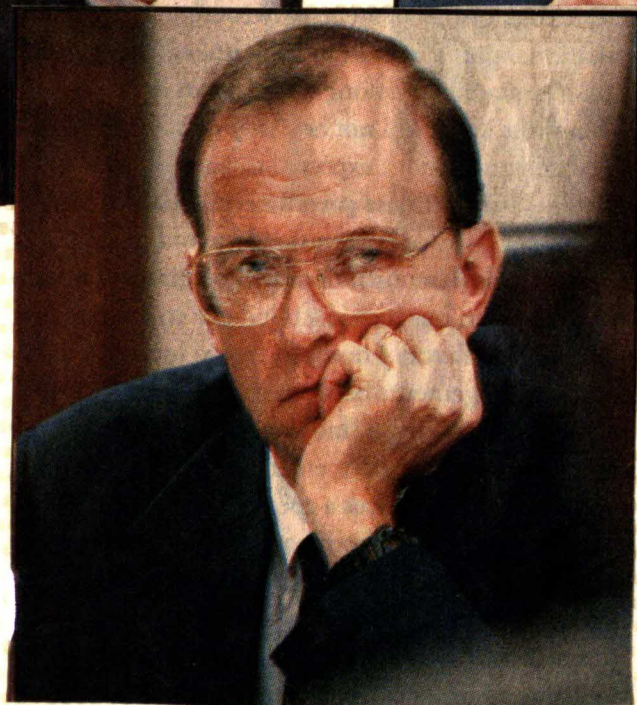
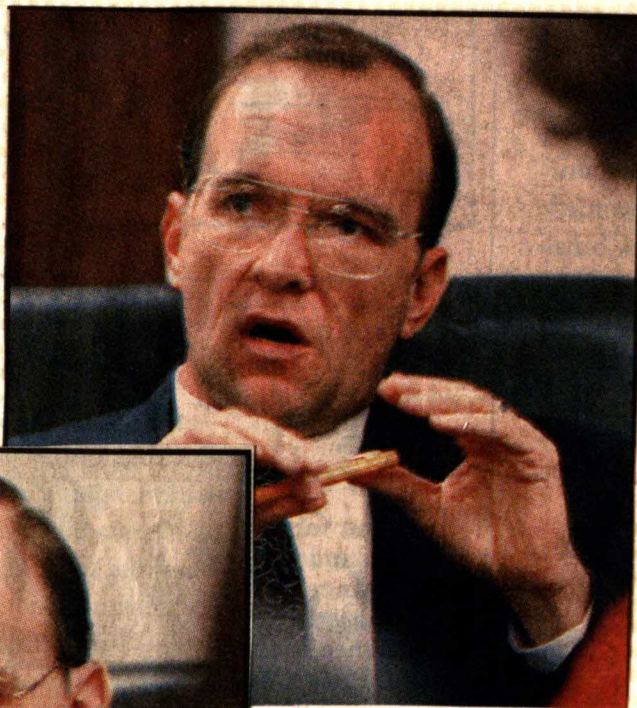
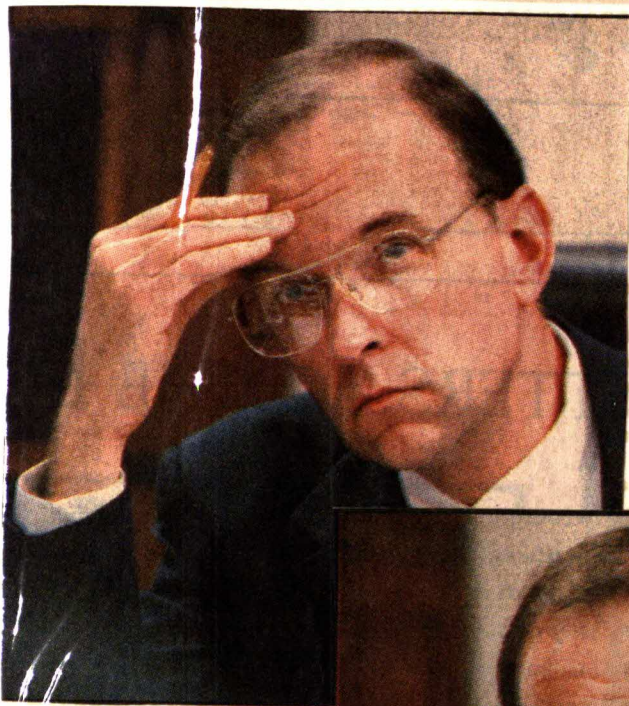
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Star-Telegram / RODGER MALLISON

A sheriff's deputy sits in a truck outside the home of helicopter crash victim Lt. George Maurice Hendrix.

The man behind the badge



AN INTERVIEW WITH TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF **DAVID WILLIAMS** BY J.R. LABBE

Sheriff David Williams' third-floor office in the Tarrant County Criminal Courts building has no windows to the outside world. It is, some would say, a telling sign of how the county's 33rd sheriff runs his department. He is a circle-the-wagons kind of lawman, protecting his troops — and information about his department — from unwelcome intruders. Throughout the conversations, he exhibited an engaging sense of humor that has gone largely unseen since the former Haltom City Police Department spokesman was first elected sheriff in 1992. He was as quick to quote a lyric from a Rolling Stones song as he was to quote a Bible verse. Williams' first introduction to politics came at age 10, during a summer visit to his paternal

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON JENKINS

grandparents' paint and wallpaper store in Tulsa, Okla. It was 1964, and Becky Templeton Williams, his college-educated and entrepreneurial grandmother, was wearing a button supporting the Republican presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater.

A young boy's curiosity about why his grandmother wasn't supporting the Democratic president turned into a practical lesson on the difference between "the Democrats' big-government philosophy as she saw it and the small, limited government" that she saw as the Republican philosophy.

It was a lesson that stuck. A lifelong Republican, Williams said that until the summer of 1990 he never envisioned running for political office, although he says he always believed in supporting others and the process. When overcrowding at the Tarrant County Jail hampered the ability of police to make arrests because there weren't cells available to house prisoners, Williams turned his sights toward politics.

"My perceptions of the incumbent and the role that the sheriff's office must play as a benchmark in the criminal justice system was not happening," Williams said.

The 43-year-old sheriff rarely eats lunch away from his rose-colored wooden desk. His regular diet of Dinty Moore beef stew, which he eats far too often for his assistants' tastes, does not show on his tall, lean figure. His long-fingered hands are at times more expressive than his face.

His wife of almost 20 years, Ruth, and their three children play a large part in bringing balance to the sheriff, for whom 10-hour days at work are standard. Known for keeping his personal life private, Williams spoke for the first time about an earlier marriage, and about the son in upstate New York who had aspirations of becoming a police officer.

"My son visited with me during the first campaign, and expressed an interest in being in law enforcement. We talked about his coming to Texas and setting out an education and career plan," Williams said. "He was just 18, and went home very excited."

Days later, the excited young man was almost killed in an automobile accident in New York. The prognosis was grim, and Williams spent many of the last days of his first campaign at his son's bedside.

"I was criticized for missing some debates that year," Williams said softly, recalling that he declined to elaborate on his absences that fall. "But I never wanted him to be part of the campaign."

After almost a year in a coma, Williams' older son, now 23, is confined to a wheelchair and faces a life of rehabilitation.

"This year, for the first time, when he called to wish me happy Father's Day, I could understand him," Williams said. "He said, 'I love you, Dad.'"

Williams keeps two mission statements readily handy in his life: a copy of the Ten Commandments under the glass top of his desk, and a well-worn card listing his 1992 campaign goals in his pocket. As the sheriff fulfills a promise he made to the voters, he checks off the item on his list.

A lot of things that are commonly viewed as part of what a sheriff does, the continual mode of glad-handing, back-slapping, sitting with the office door open and the boots on the desk — convening the spit-and-whittle club — that's what some folks think they want of a sheriff. But there's a transition occurring in all major sheriff's offices across the state. We're becoming more sophisticated.

I see a day not far away when I can spend an entire day stopping by every court in Tarrant County — all 61 of them — and just talk with the judges. See how they're doing, find out if they are happy with the bailiffs. I see the high-profile part of the job growing when I'm certain we're hitting on all eight cylinders in the operation.

Q: What kind of a relationship would you say you have with the county commissioners?

A: The Sheriff's Department and the county commissioners are partners in the equation. The

commissioners, by statute, are required to fund and operate the jail. They provide resources to run a safe and secure jail.

If I find there's a way to provide my folks with an extra layer of safety or enhance their safety, it is incumbent upon me to get it funded and make it possible. Because of the budgetary interaction with the county commissioners, therein is the challenge. I don't know if it is political theater or what, but sometimes I am perplexed how our successes take a back seat.

The budget has got to be the most simple process made difficult. They strain on gnats and swallow a camel. It doesn't have to be real complicated, but I'm intrigued by the lack of openness that seems to exist in the realm of county budget management, especially prior to and during the process.

Q: But during the budget process this year, you were criticized for not being more open with the commissioners about the deployment of your staffing resources. How do you respond?

A: One thing I just realized in this budget cycle was that the table of organization produced in the past at the request of former Commissioner Bob Hampton compromised our department. I was requested to put numbers and names to specific job classifications. So we did; I was trying to be reasonable. Then during the early part of this budget process, I realized we're totally revealing what our strengths and weaknesses are. It's not like this is the road and bridge department. If I put in numbers for every shift on patrol, in the jail, in the warrant division, it wouldn't take a rocket scientist from the criminal element to figure out our staffing levels and our strengths. It's just not something we can do anymore.

Q: As an elected official, you've been accused of being inaccessible to your constituents and the media. You keep such a low profile that even your own people don't see you for weeks at a time. How do you balance the public demands placed on a politician with your responsibilities as a lawman?

A: I have been re-engineering the total Sheriff's Department, doing it division by division, from patrol to the warrant division to judicial services. When trying to implement change, if it's meaningful and going to be of long-term effect, it is very intensive and requires a lot of monitoring. In my first term, that was my priority. Now it is time to begin to grow the organization — not in terms of size, but from a leadership perspective. I need to delegate more and impart my vision of a department that is an element of government in continual reformation.

The conversation is interrupted when a sheriff's deputy arrives to report on a possible double suicide near Rendon.

The sheriff can be easily distracted. What he later admits should have been a 10-minute briefing turned into a 40-minute discussion. Williams said that although he is the department's chief administrator, he can be drawn into discussions about ongoing investigations because he can relate so well from his days on the street as a patrol officer and a detective.

His first law enforcement job after earning his high school equivalency diploma in 1977 was as the one-man Police Department in Washington, Okla. After three months, he went to work for the department in Purcell, Okla., before moving to Fort Worth in 1980. After five years as the chief of security for the Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Williams returned to police work in 1986 at the Haltom City Police Department, first as a patrol officer and then as a detective.

Q: You've taken some heat for including \$26,000 police Tahoes in your budget request for this year. Why does the department need such expensive vehicles?

A: The Tahoes we have ordered are not high-end, bells-and-whistles sport utility vehicles. They don't have alloy wheels. They are police performance package vehicles that can be refurbished to get maybe five years of service, the first two in patrol.

The big cars are an officer safety issue. My vision for the Tahoes is this. With the exception of the Camaro interceptors — which, by the way, do work very well as cheap patrol cars needed by any department that has interstate highways to patrol — the Sheriff's Department will go to a complete Tahoe fleet. The trucks are real easy to refurbish; they can be repowered and restored cheaper than buying new cars every year. They will be in patrol for two full years before rotating them out to the warrant division. They will probably need new engines and new drive trains, but that's very cost-effective to replace with a minimal outlay.

Q: Have you articulated this vision to the commissioners?

A: No, not really. The concept of refurbishing police vehicles is very new. I've just been able to become convinced this is the way we've got to go in the last four months.

Q: The Sept. 17 fatality crash of one of the department's helicopters has renewed concerns about whether the Sheriff's Department needs an aerial component. How important is the aviation program?

A: I know that the need for aircraft is valid. When I made the list in 1992 of my campaign objectives, people said don't, they'll use it as a scorecard against you. But that's sort of why I did it. I said I would provide greater patrol service countywide utilizing aircraft secured through drug seizures and forfeitures. Two years ago the DEA was downsizing — giving away high-dollar, low-



maintenance, fixed-wing planes. I was looking at a way of saving big money real quick. Every extradition warrant has a clock on it — we have 10 days in which to go and retrieve a fugitive out of state. It doesn't take a very long trip before helicopters are cost-prohibitive, and commercial aviation doesn't give any big discounts to law enforcement and has the right to refuse prisoner transportation. I called the U.S. Marshal's service after the *60 Minutes* piece on their prisoner transport

service, but it's not as easy to access as the show made it sound. They pick the schedule; they determine availability.

We were this close to getting a Cessna 410 and an eight-passenger job. At the same time, I was still catching heat from [former Pct. 3 Commissioner Bob] Hampton and folks at the newspaper over the helicopters. So I didn't pursue it. But when you get right down to it, aviation is part of the fabric of this community and has a role in law enforcement.

A question about extradition has Williams diving for reference books. He is a meticulous researcher, not comfortable quoting the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure or other state laws unless he can precisely cite the appropriate statute.

He is a student of law enforcement history. His bookshelves are lined with volumes about public safety in general and sheriffs in particular, from an autographed copy of David Struckhoff's *The American Sheriff* to yearbooks and histories compiled from sheriff's departments nationwide.

Q: What about calling on the Fort Worth Police Department to use its helicopters?

A: We can call Fort Worth to scramble an air unit, and it may be en route when they get called back to the city because it's needed there. I'm not the only guy who'll tell you this. Every one who's ever worked in Dallas and Tarrant counties will say the aviation assets are not always there when you need them. We are blessed to have those assets, and the good people to fly them.

It's not our function to replicate existing services for luxury's sake. I believe in filling the gaps in the public safety equation, and to carry out and provide the statutory obligations that already exist on a very large scale. If we find things that we don't need, something superfluous, then we'll shut it down. If it can't stand on its own merit and the numbers aren't verifiable, then let's sunset it.

Q: You've been criticized for not showing up at the crash site until almost four hours after the accident. Why did you wait?

A: When I first became sheriff, I was given some advice from [Harris County Sheriff] Johnny Klevenhagen. He said to be real cautious about making the scene of a major tragedy or accident where your people are trying to work. The minute you come on the scene, you've oversupervised and it's a distraction they don't need. If you hire people for command staff who are capable, then that's what their job is.

Q: Would you make the same decision tomorrow?

A: We've gone through the worst case scenario possible. If all things were equal ... but I guess all things aren't ever equal, are they?

If we had everything in place for notification, and we're talking about a fatality and not someone badly injured — badly injured you would get there posthaste — I think now that I've seen what this department is capable of, the level of professionalism demonstrated as an organization, I think that I could feel comfortable in responding to the scene, getting in the area sooner.

The first thing I did the day of the crash was I prayed that our people would be able to find the family members and make notification before they were contacted by the media. As it was, we made it by a margin of minutes. One of the TV stations was airing a report by 11 a.m., and Kathy Smith [the wife of Deputy T.J. Smith, who was killed in the crash] still hadn't been notified.

Q: Two people have said you spoke with FBI Director Louis Freeh after the crash. Is this true?

A: He called me, on Friday, as we were planning the funerals. I'm listed in the national directory of law enforcement executives; I don't know if it is his practice to call everyone who loses an officer, but on Friday after the accident my assistant came in and said Director Freeh from Washington was on hold. I was still numb from the accident; it was so surreal. He extended his condolences and offered any assistance that his agency might be able to provide. We talked about how difficult this is. Fortunately, I was not experienced in this kind of tragedy. I wasn't soliciting help; I was just doing what I felt was

right. He articulated what the FBI does for survivors' families, and as he was going through it, it was almost as if he was going through my list of what we had done. The one question I did have was how long to keep security at the families' houses. The FBI makes it available for four weeks.

Q: If the opportunity arose to acquire additional helicopters or fixed-wing planes for the department, would you pursue it?

A: If all the conditions were right, yes. A lot of different things would have to be factored in — elements of resources, personnel, funding, logistics, timing. I'm sure there are other things I can't imagine. It's hard to look down that road and determine how will it be perceived and what will be the headline.

Q: Tarrant County is one of the few urban counties in Texas where the Sheriff's Department and the Police Department both have tactical teams. Is this a redundancy of service?

A: No. The Sheriff's Department is, by statute, the server of paper. There's a perception that being a server of warrants is akin to what an usher does in church handing out a bulletin or someone putting a flier on the windshield of your car advertising Bubba's Chicken. We are serving fugitive warrants — these are not people suspected of doing something wrong. They are fugitives from capital murder, sexual assault, kidnapping and armed robbery. These are bad people who many times are prone to violence and will fight law enforcement.

We had two close calls in the last six months where deputies serving felony warrants could have been hurt or killed. From that point on, I issued a directive of no more one-officer warrant teams. With the volume of warrants we serve, the odds are against us in the numbers game.

All field operations are empowered to use tactical assets whenever they think they have a need. The tactical asset is not just there for an exercise; these are to be used. The department bears a greater level of liability in not using tactical and SWAT. Threat levels are higher than they were years ago. They don't pay any of us enough to be John Waynes. He's a fictional character, and this is definitely not the movies.

I look at the job I do and the fact that I am the 33rd sheriff in almost 150 years in Tarrant County. This department has had six officers killed in the line of duty. It can happen any time, anywhere.

Running for sheriff for the first time meant raising money for the campaign. Although the donations from longtime friend and used-car dealer Ed Max in 1992 received a lot of ink, it was a donation from businessman Eddie Chiles that Williams wanted to talk about.

"Chiles had endorsed Jim Hunter, my opponent, in the Republican primary runoff," Williams recalled. "Afterward I won the runoff; I went to visit Chiles at his office. I had seen a roster of the University of Oklahoma School of Engineering, where my grandfather was the dean, and Chiles' name was on the list."

“I don’t have any plans not to run again. There are so many challenges just around the corner, just around the next fiscal year, that really will require diligent attention and someone who isn’t a rookie.”

— TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF DAVID WILLIAMS

The candidate asked the millionaire oilman if he recalled a gentleman by the name of W.H. Carson from his days at OU. Chiles confirmed that he remembered Dean Carson.

“He’s my grandfather,” Williams said.

Family ties and long memories paid off.

“Dean Carson was your granddad?” Williams remembers Chiles as saying. “Boy, you’re from good stock.”

Chiles called to a staff member in the adjoining office: “Bring in that *other* envelope.”

A contribution of \$5,000 followed. Williams never found out how much money might — or might not — have been in the first envelope.

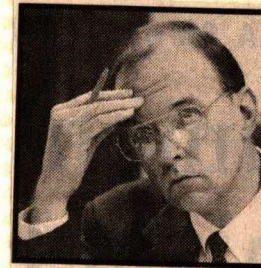
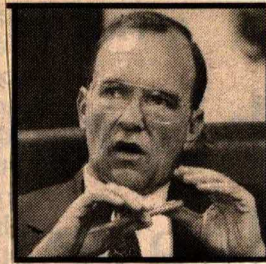
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Q: Will you run again?

A: I don’t have any plans not to run again.

There are so many challenges just around the corner, just around the next fiscal year, that really will require diligent attention and someone who isn’t a rookie. There are constraints on what one person can do, what one sheriff can do by statute and case law, yet there are lots of opportunities. It is a blessing for those communities that still have elected sheriffs who provide an element of local control over public safety. It’s important that that voice is there, someone with vision who is responsible to the citizens through the election process.

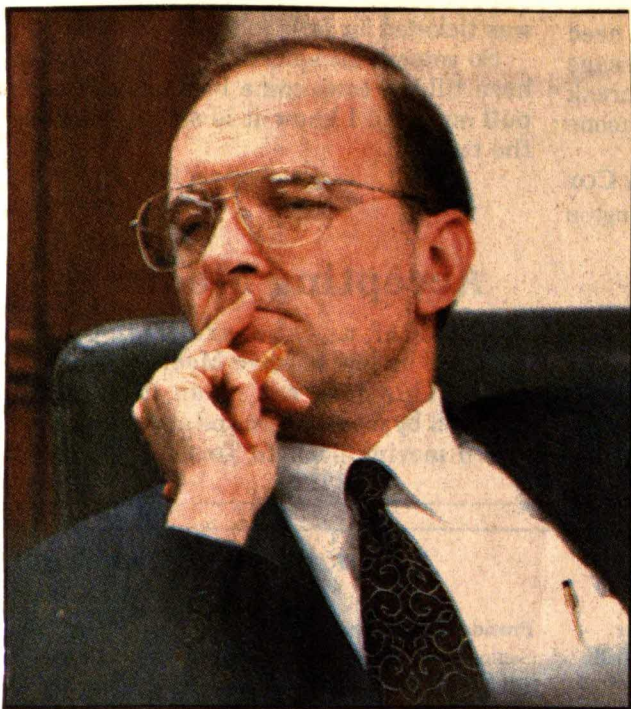
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From his first day in office as sheriff of Tarrant County, David Williams has been a man with an agenda, a mission statement that he carries in his pocket. He told the voters that if they elected him sheriff, he intended to make his department the standard of excellence for law enforcement in the county. He said he would do it by keeping the jail open and adding drug-sniffing dogs, a gang intelligence unit, aircraft secured through drug seizures and forfeitures, and a special violent-repeat-offenders enforcement program.

Every morning when he wakes, he knows exactly what his charter is — it’s listed on a piece of card stock he carries in his pocket.



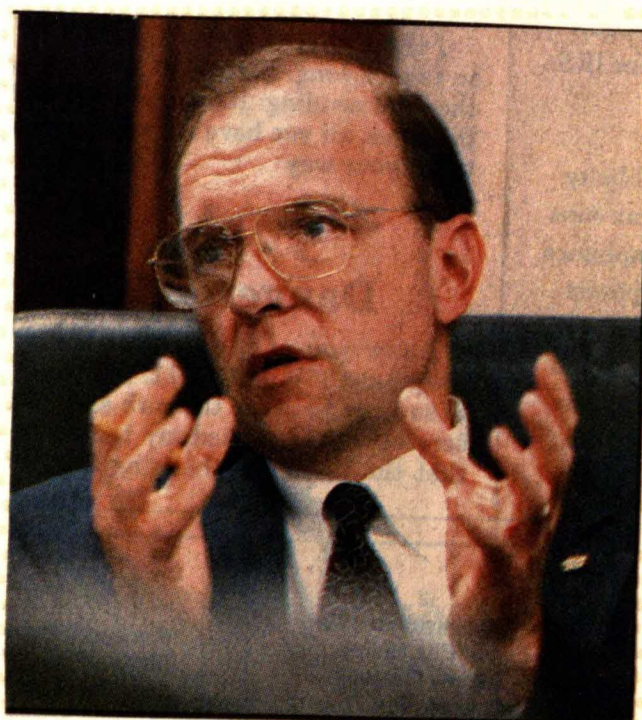
“I don’t know if it is political theater or what, but sometimes I am perplexed how our successes take a back seat.”

— TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF DAVID WILLIAMS



**TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF
DAVID WILLIAMS**

Full NameDavid Eugene Williams
Age43
BirthplaceNorman, Okla.
Education.....51 credits
 at Dallas Baptist University
Military serviceU.S. Army
Religious affiliationLiving Word
 Center,
 an independent evangelical church in
 Haltom City



Copter may have been practicing maneuver

Witnesses saw the craft spin, heard its engine sputter

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A sheriff's helicopter may have been practicing an emergency landing maneuver called autorotation when it crashed last month, killing two deputies, according to an accident report released yesterday by Tarrant County officials.

Witnesses to last month's fatal helicopter crash told the first deputies to arrive at the scene, an airfield at Copeland Ministries in northwest Tarrant County, that the helicopter may have been practicing a spin, and that it sounded as if the engine was "cutting out" before the helicopter slammed to the ground.

"According to witnesses, the helicopter was conducting a spin when they heard several different kinds of sounds as though the engine was malfunctioning or cutting out," Deputy Cloyd Polk, one of the first deputies at the crash site, wrote in the report. "The helicopter then began to spin approximately three to four times and slammed into the ground almost level."

Cmdr. James Skidmore, the sheriff's spokesman, said yesterday he has "no way to interpret" what witnesses saw.

Polk's report, written on the day of the Sept. 17 crash, was released yesterday.

In autorotation, a helicopter is landed under little or no power. When a helicopter engine quits, the rotor blades disengage and spin freely. The copter makes a spiral descent, with the fall cushioned as lift is produced from a flow of air up through the rotor blades.

If a helicopter loses power and is more than 300 feet off the

ground or has sufficient forward motion, autorotation may allow the pilot to land the craft safely, according to helicopter maintenance manuals. A helicopter pilot must perform the maneuver to get a flight license.

Polk's accident report says the helicopter was "conducting maneuvers as part of pilot proficiency training."

Sheriff's officials later said that the helicopter was on a reconnaissance mission and that the flight was to investigate an auto-theft ring in northwest Tarrant County. Most recently, they have said the helicopter was on a mission based on intelligence from a sheriff's supervisor and on additional information from the Northeast Street Crimes task force.

The lead federal investigator

looking into the crash said yesterday it is still too early to say with certainty what the helicopter or pilot may have been doing when it went down.

"Certainly people saw things and heard things and the helicopter entered a spin, but what caused that is the major focus of the investigation," said Georgia Snyder, National Transportation Safety Board investigator.

Investigators have interviewed numerous witnesses, many of whom reported hearing sounds, but most described the noise as the sound made by a tail rotor or main rotor rather than engine sounds, Snyder said. The witnesses were mostly Copeland employees and some workers servicing oilfield equipment, she said.

"Witnesses did perceive a change from normal helicopter behavior to a spin. We haven't gathered enough information to know if the pilot initiated the behavior that resulted in a spin or whether the helicopter malfunc-

tioned," Snyder said. Investigators are still ruling out any catastrophic engine or transmission failure, she said.

Several witnesses said that the helicopter hovered or touched down on the south end of the Copeland airfield, Snyder said. The helicopter then took off in "normal flight," circled around and appeared to head back south before it crashed, she said.

"We don't know what the pilot's intentions were," Snyder said.

The military surplus OH-58A Bell helicopter, one of two Tarrant County helicopters, crashed about 9:50 a.m. on Sept. 17 east of Eagle Mountain Lake. Killed in the crash were Lt. George Maurice Hendrix, the pilot, and Deputy Thomas Jay Smith, a criminal investigator.

The other helicopter is flying missions as needed, sheriff's officials have said, even though some county commissioners have called for it to be grounded.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Star-Telegram / Wednesday, October 29, 1997

News hounds

You in the media are shameless. Shame on you for hounding the widows of the two Tarrant County deputies who passed away in the very recent helicopter crash. Jesus himself had something to say about those who "devour widows' houses."

I applaud the Sheriff's Department for posting armed and uniformed men of valor in front of the grieving widows' homes in their effort to protect them from your hard-hearted and coldblooded reporters' harassment.

DOYLE JONES
Arlington

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Star-Telegram / Thursday, October 30, 1997

THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

SEPTEMBER 23, 1997

Tragedy?

No matter how hard I tried, I found it difficult to avoid the exhaustive and exhausting coverage of the deaths of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. If I hear one more fatuous reporter use the words *tragedy* or *tragic* to describe the deaths of these two famous people, I will gag up my gall bladder.

As the brilliant George Carlin pointed out in *Brain Droppings*, a *tragedy* is a drama in which the main character is done in because of his or her own character flaws. *Hamlet* is a good example.

A car wreck that kills three people because of reckless and/or drunken driving and/or "stalkerazzi" harassment is not a tragedy! Look up *tragedy* in the dictionary and see for yourself.

An 87-year-old woman's death from natural causes isn't a "tragedy" either. Have America's reading and writing skills deteriorated *that* much?

LANCE PEPPERS
Fort Worth

Tragic

I read, with great disbelief, Lance Peppers' Sept. 23 assertion that the definition of *tragedy* is not descriptive of the deaths of Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. I took Peppers' challenge and looked in the dictionary for myself. I found that the word must also include and/or be synonymous with "a dreadful happening, a sad thing, an unfortunate affair, a shocking misfortune, a pathetic occurrence, an affliction, misery, anguish, sorrow, grief, and woe."

Yes, William Shakespeare wrote "tragedies" as well as comedies. Peppers' use of George Carlin's remarks as an authoritative source for his reasoning would have been more apropos were the album's title *Bird Droppings* rather than *Brain Droppings*.

Rather than *Hamlet*, an example more relevant to the residents of Tarrant County is the recent loss of two Sheriff's Department employees in a helicopter crash. According to Peppers' logic, if such a happening were caused by mechanical or engine failure rather than a flaw in the men's character, it would not be a tragedy. To believe such nonsense is, in itself, tragic.

FLOYD F. CLARK
Fort Worth

OBITUARIES

Star-Telegram / Thursday, October 30, 1997

Ronald Gene Denton



FORT WORTH — Ronald Gene Denton, 63, a Tarrant County Sheriff's Department deputy, died Tuesday, Oct. 28, 1997, at a local hospital.

Funeral: 1:30 p.m. Friday at University Christian Church. Interment: private. Visitation: 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday at Brown, Owens & Brumley.

Memorials: Metroplex Chapter Concern of Police Survivors (COPS), 4712 Shady Lake Drive, Fort Worth 76180, in lieu of flowers.

Ronald Gene Denton was born Sept. 5, 1934, in Wichita Falls.

He was a graduate of Arlington Heights High School and graduated as a lieutenant from Texas A&M. He became a commissioned officer in the Army, attaining the rank of captain, Army Corps of Engineers Company Commander Dco 980 Battalion. In the years between being discharged from the Army and serving as a deputy sheriff, he was a professional engineer and private businessman. He was past president of the Fort Worth chapter of The Texas Society of Professional Engineers and a member of Tau Beta Pi.

Survivors: Son, James Ronald Denton and his wife, Janet, of Houston; brother, Dave Hoyt Denton Jr. of Punta Gorda, Fla.; sister, Frances Noey and her husband, Ben, of Fort Worth; nephew, Ben Noey Jr. of Wichita Falls; Cindy Noey of Fort Worth; and mother of his son, Pat Denton of Fort Worth.

Brown, Owens & Brumley
425 S. Henderson St., 335-4557

Deputy was wary of fatal mission

Investigator told wife copter concerned him

By JACK DOUGLAS JR.
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A Tarrant County sheriff's investigator who was killed in a helicopter crash last month had confided to his wife that he did not want to go on the flight, a county commissioner said she learned in a meeting with the sheriff.

And Lonnie Smith, son of the late Deputy Thomas Jay "T.J." Smith, said yesterday that he was also told "my dad didn't want to go up" on the flight.

The elder Smith and sheriff's Lt. George Maurice Hendrix were killed

Sept. 17 when a department helicopter piloted by Hendrix crashed in far North-west Tarrant County.

The cause of the crash, which occurred on the sprawling properties of Kenneth Copeland Ministries, remains under investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Sheriff David Williams, who could not be reached to comment yesterday, has met privately with county commissioners, but he has said little publicly about the events leading up to the fatal crash.

Lonnie Smith said he has tried without success to learn from sheriff's investigators something about his father's death.

"I want the truth about what happened to my dad. They need to let us know something," he said.

Thomas Smith's wife, Kathy Smith, said she has been told that her husband was dispatched on a surveillance mission to locate stolen property, but she said she knows nothing else. "Of course I've got questions. I'd like to know what happened," she said.

Pct. 2 County Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said that in an Oct. 23 meeting with Williams, she learned that Kathy Smith had told investigators that her husband did not want to go on the doomed flight.

VanRavenswaay said the sheriff was describing how distraught the Hendrix and Smith families were when "he made the comment that Kathy Smith had even said T.J. didn't want to go up."

The fatal crash was only the second time Thomas Smith had been in a helicopter, and it was his first helicopter mission for the Sheriff's Department, Lonnie Smith and Kathy Smith said.

"I know my dad didn't like helicopters," Lonnie Smith said.

Kathy Smith said she did not want to talk about whether her husband had expressed concerns about the ill-fated flight.

"I'm not going to discuss any of that right now with anybody," she said.

She said her husband volunteered for the Sheriff's Department's helicopter program, but

"that was in 1994" and "of course, they never went up then."

In a telephone interview from her home, she declined to say whether her husband had become disenchanted with the program and wanted out.

Kathy Smith said Williams assured her that no one in the Sheriff's Department "ever forced anybody to go up in the helicopter — it was a voluntary assignment."

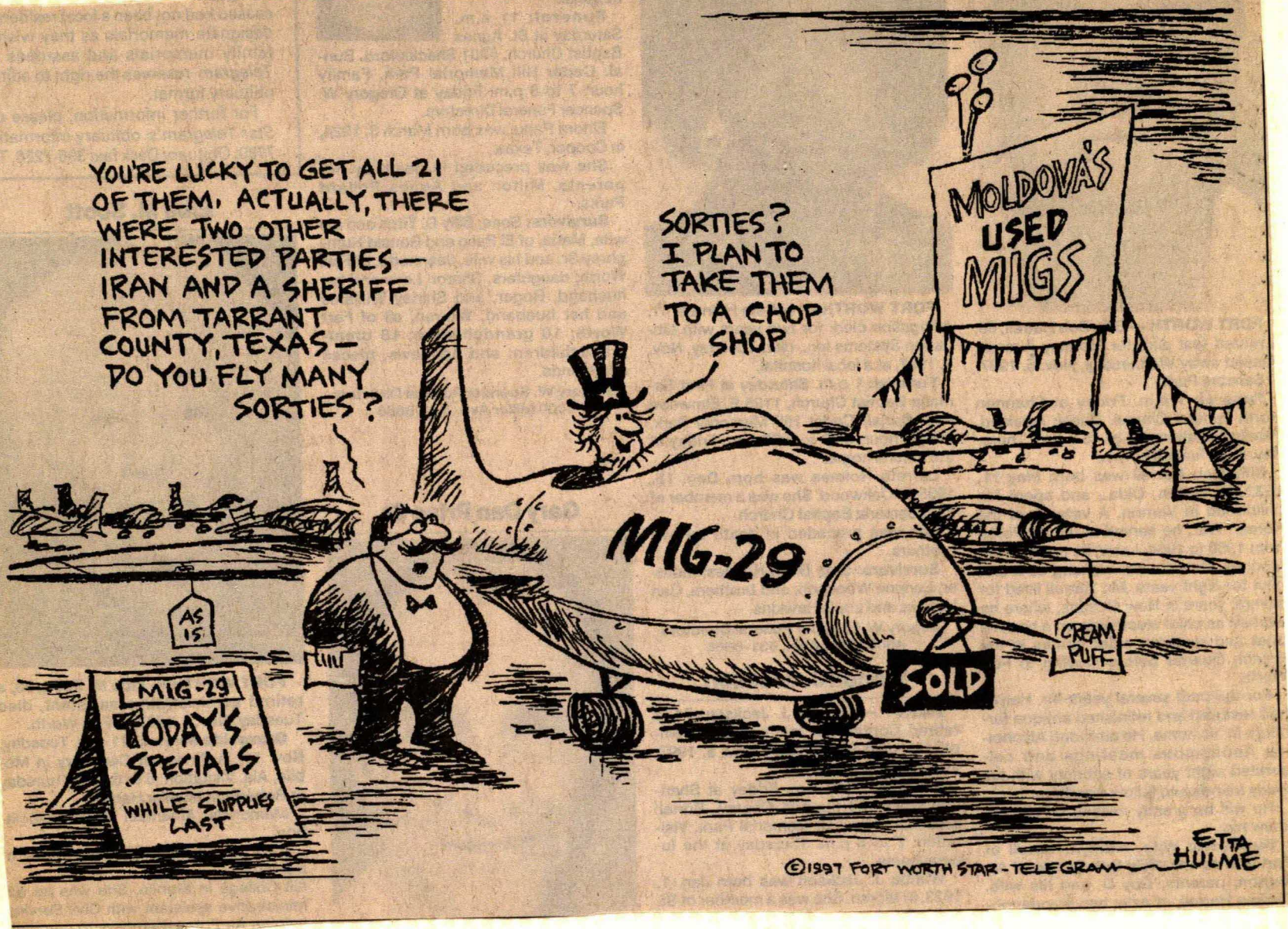
Williams' spokesman, Cmdr. James Skidmore, said he could not comment on whether Thomas Smith had said he did not want to go up in the helicopter.

"I'm not aware of that conversation," Skidmore said, adding, "The official response is that we can neither confirm nor deny that statement."

"I want the truth about what happened to my dad. They need to let us know something."

— Lonnie Smith,
son of accident victim

THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM
NOVEMBER 6, 1997



YOU'RE LUCKY TO GET ALL 21
OF THEM, ACTUALLY, THERE
WERE TWO OTHER
INTERESTED PARTIES —
IRAN AND A SHERIFF
FROM TARRANT
COUNTY, TEXAS —
DO YOU FLY MANY
SORTIES?

SORTIES?
I PLAN TO
TAKE THEM
TO A CHOP
SHOP

MOLDOVA'S
USED
MIGS

SOLD

CREAM
PUFF

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ETA
HULME

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Seeing the man

I was delighted to read "The man behind the badge" by J.R. Labbe in the Oct. 26 Weekly Review section. Just one question: Why was this not front-page news?

Well, nonetheless, it provided great insight into the character of the man whom the people have elected to public office. I think the media must be terribly frustrated that he doesn't seek the grandstand for his political aspirations, as so many elected officials would and do love to do. He must not have a guilty conscience, or he would have come forward sooner to defend himself against so much heavy criticism from the media.

As stated in the article, Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams is a man with an agenda who takes his campaign promises so seriously that he has them listed on a piece of card stock he carries in his pocket and checks them off as he fulfills those promises. How wonderfully refreshing to know that a man of such conviction is serving our country. Gosh, that's front-page news to me!

Still, I must congratulate Labbe and the *Star-Telegram* on a job well done. This is one elected official who obviously deserves a break from the bad press. Now, President Clinton — well ...

KIM TOWNSEND
Fort Worth

County running short on jail space

Commissioners hear plan to reopen old lockup

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County is running out of jail space again and must reopen the shuttered Cold Springs jail facility to make room for more prisoners, county commissioners were told yesterday.

The county's jail population is growing by about 50 prisoners a month, and it is anticipated that there will be no room for new prisoners by November 1998, said Les Smith, the county's manager of criminal justice programs.

Smith's proposal includes a partial renovation of the Cold Springs jail, a converted schoolhouse with a modern jail addition just north of downtown on Cold Springs Road, that would add 384 beds and cost \$918,350, or a total renovation that would add 500 beds and cost \$1,142,870.

"It's obvious we're going to have to at least do that [reopen the jail] if not more," Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff said.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said the county has no choice: "We can't let the bad guys run free."

There has been a 300 percent increase in

misdemeanor jail sentences over the past year and a half, Smith said.

On Nov. 1, the county jails held 3,547 inmates, about 85 percent of the total jail capacity, Smith said. The jails are expected to reach 90 percent capacity by March, he said.

At the current county rate of incarceration, a complete renovation of Cold Springs would give the county a 93 percent jail capacity by February 1999. County officials are also studying building another jail facility or expanding an existing one.

"The benefit of reopening the jail is immediate and a most effective temporary solution to a long-term problem," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a Sheriff's Department spokesman. "It's relatively inexpensive and the fastest thing we can do."

The cost of operating the jail if it is partially renovated is estimat-

ed at \$3.9 million, or, if it is totally renovated, at about \$4.9 million.

The county now operates three jails with a total capacity of about 4,195 beds: the newer Tarrant County Correction Center with 2,090 beds; the old Belknap jail with 1,040 beds; and Green Bay,

near the intersection of Interstate 35W and Northeast Loop 820, with 1,065 beds.

The Cold Springs jail was closed in August 1995 after the state reclaimed prisoners that Tarrant County was storing for the state.

If Cold Springs is reopened, it would be a minimum-security facility, primarily for holding those serving misdemeanor sen-

tences and others serving jail sentences on weekends.

The move to reopen the jail comes as the Texas Board of Criminal Justice considers building two new high-security lock-ups, plus facilities with more than 2,000 dormitory-style beds to forestall another round of prison crowding.

The fact that the state can require the county to hold its prisoners for up to 45 days without reimbursement complicates the local jail picture, Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope said. Currently, there are about 200 state prisoners in the county jail, he said.

The number of state prisoners held in the county jail is expected to increase in December. By

Jail

"The benefit of reopening the jail is immediate and a most effective temporary solution to a long-term problem. It's relatively inexpensive and the fastest thing we can do."

**– Cmdr. James Skidmore,
a Sheriff's Department spokesman**

April, Pope said, he expects the state to begin contracting with counties again to hold prisoners longer.

In other county news, the commissioners voted 3-2 to approve a \$3.1 million property and hospital district tax abatement for National Semiconductor Corp., which plans to make \$216.8 million in improvements to its Arlington plant over the next four years. In September, the Arlington City Council gave the plant a 100 percent tax break with an estimated value of \$4 million over 10 years.

Commissioner Glen Whitley opposed the tax abatement at the 100 percent level because there is no guarantee that the expansion would bring more businesses and employment to the area, he said.

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby opposed it because the company wanted and received a waiver from a requirement to use at least 15 percent minority contractors in the project and "because large corporations need to pay taxes and be a part of solving the overall economic problems in the area."

Inmate swaps tag, nearly goes free

Fingerprint check put an end to jail escape

BY GABRIELLE CRIST
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A Tarrant County Jail inmate accused of capital murder almost escaped this week by switching identification bands with another inmate, posing as that inmate in court and agreeing to a plea bargain that included his release.

No one, including the defense attorney, caught the switch until Richard Taylor was being processed for release from jail. It was then that a sheriff's deputy discovered that Taylor's fingerprints didn't match those of the inmate who was supposed to be released, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a Sheriff's Department spokesman.

"We've had a very clever inmate," Skidmore said.

Taylor, 23, could face an additional charge of conspiracy to escape, Skidmore said. Edward Lowery, 18, who sheriff's officials said switched bracelets with Taylor, will probably face similar charges, Skidmore said.

Skidmore said he did not know why Lowery, who would have been released from jail had he attended his own plea agreement Wednesday, might have agreed to the switch with Taylor. The case is under investigation, Skidmore said.

The bracelets are made of plastic and are attached with a rivet. Inmates can stretch the bracelet, which includes their photograph and an identification number, until it slips off their wrist, Skidmore said.

Taylor is not the first inmate to switch wristbands, Skidmore said. But Skidmore said he couldn't recall an inmate making it through a plea bargain and part of the release process before getting caught.

When an inmate is scheduled for court, jailers call out the inmate's name and determine that the picture on the wristband matches the wearer, Skidmore said.

But the pictures are computer-generated and often of poor quality. With thousands of inmates in the jail, there is no way for jailers to know each name and face, he said.

Skidmore said there are no plans to change any jail procedures because of the escape attempt. He blamed the defense attorney, Anita Cutrer, for not recognizing her client.

"I had hoped that the defense attorney would have known who they were supposed to be representing," Skidmore said.

Cutrer said the two inmates bear "a remarkable resemblance," and said she didn't realize that the man who appeared in court with her wasn't Lowery. She said she had met with him only briefly before appearing at the plea agreement hearing.

Cutrer said she relies on the Sheriff's Department to take the correct inmate to court hearings.

"First of all, I would hope that the Sheriff's Department would know who their inmates are," Cutrer said. "They're the ones with the procedures, with the wristbands and the fingerprinting and the safeguards."

Cutrer said she is appointed to several cases at one time and often does not meet with each inmate on a regular basis, particularly on cases not going to trial.

"My work is not talking to him," Cutrer said, explaining that she spends her time interviewing witnesses and meeting with prosecutors.

Lowery originally faced a felony charge of indecency with a child, but prosecutors had agreed to reduce it to a misdemeanor charge of attempted assault and a two-year deferred sentence.

That plea agreement is now void, and Assistant District Attorney Lettie Martinez said she will present the felony indecency case to the grand jury.

Another attorney has been appointed to represent Lowery.

In a twist, Cutrer also represents Taylor in his upcoming capital murder trial, in which he is accused of the 1991 killing of a Blue Mound convenience store clerk: Charles Eugene Clark, a co-defendant in the case, is serving a life sentence after being convicted of capital murder in July 1996.

But because Cutrer is not the lead attorney on that case, she had never met Taylor. Now that she might be called as a witness at Taylor's trial to testify about his escape attempt, Cutrer said, she is withdrawing as his attorney.

Taylor's trial is scheduled for January, according to court records.

Taylor has been in custody since August, when he was arrested on suspicion of sexual assault of a child. He had been free on bail on the capital murder case since March 1995.

County Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said last night that she was relieved that Taylor's escape was thwarted but expressed concern that the "situation was that close."

VanRavenswaay said she also hopes the Sheriff's Department will consider using sturdier inmate bracelets.

Cutrer called the attempted es-



Richard Taylor



Edward Lowery

cape "bizarre" but commended the Sheriff's Department for catching Taylor before he escaped.

"It is something I'm going to be talking about until I am 100 years old," she said.

Pepper assault on students typifies sheriff's regime

We knew the current Tarrant County sheriff was arming his force for all-out warfare.

We didn't know his deputies were going to attack college students and cheerleaders.

In the latest foul-up of Sheriff David Williams' wrong-way regime, some renegade deputies drew their pepper-spray cans on the Texas Christian University football crowd Thursday night, bringing the post-game party to a burning halt after the Horned Frogs' only victory of the season.

TCU officials, students and fans were still stinging mad yesterday. Working for TCU as private officers, the deputies ignored instructions and sprayed the celebrating crowd tearing down an

Amon Carter Stadium goalpost.

Deputies even sprayed two cheerleaders in uniform, the *TCU Daily Skiff* reported.

TCU is "very unhappy," a vice chancellor said yesterday.

"I don't think our students deserved to be pepper-sprayed," Don Mills said, calling the use of force "too severe."

Mills said TCU expects a county investigation.

Fat chance.

The sheriff's spokesman dismissed complaints and said the deputies were simply protecting private property — the goal post.

One deputy told TCU campus officers that he was pushed and kicked. An unidentified man was handcuffed, but later released by TCU officers.

TCU Police Chief Steve McGee said the county deputies "definitely" were told late in the game to "get out of the way."

"We're there to protect everybody's safety," he said. "But ... it doesn't make sense to use more force and hurt more people."

Those Frog fans were lucky. If the pepper spray hadn't ended the party, those deputies might have called out the county firepower.



Bud Kennedy

COMMENTARY

Williams could have summoned all the weapons of his taxpayer-funded totalitarian government. He could have sent in the attack dogs, the riot squad, the crack sniper team or the helicopter.

They're all itching for action. They haven't had to quash many riots lately in Lake Country or Whiskey Flats.

Trey McCrary, a sophomore, was one of the students brought to tears by the TCU victory.

"It was 4,000 of us, all happy," he said. "Then there was this burning pain. Everybody was crying and crawling. One cheerleader was really bawling."

He fumbled his way home and phoned his dad in Lubbock.

"My dad just said, 'Oh, I got Maced in college, too. We were having this protest over the Vietnam War.' ... He said this kind of thing happened all the time in the '60s."

Throughout the '60s and '70s, in the era of campus unrest elsewhere, no TCU students had ever been clubbed or pepper-sprayed — until the county cowboys went wild Thursday night.

"Nothing like this has ever happened on this campus," said Mills, who came to TCU in 1969.

"And nothing like this should ever happen again."

Try telling that to the sheriff.



Special to the Star-Telegram/PATRICIO CROOKER, TCU Daily Skiff

Police officers try to control TCU students who swarmed the field at Amon Carter Stadium after the Frogs' victory

against SMU Thursday night. A sheriff's deputy was shoved to the ground and kicked.

TCU, county investigating field fracas

BY CHRIS VAUGHN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Texas Christian University and the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department each launched inquiries yesterday into an end zone confrontation between students and deputies after the Frogs' victory Thursday night against Southern Methodist University at Amon Carter Stadium.

Sheriff's Cmdr. James Skidmore said deputies responded to assist an officer who was shoved down and kicked in the head as

hundreds of students swarmed the north goal post. Deputies used pepper spray on more than a dozen students and handcuffed at least one during the brief, chaotic episode, he said.

No one was seriously injured in the confrontation, which may have resulted from miscommunication between TCU officials and sheriff's deputies about how far they were to go to protect the goal posts from celebrating students.

► A TCU football player is under investigation in a robbery reported hours after the game. **2B**

"When it became clear that if we won the game and the students were going to be enthusiastic, we told the Fort Worth police and sheriff's deputies that we did not want students prevented from coming on the field and that if they were insistent on going to the goal posts, the officers were to stand aside," said Don Mills, vice chancellor for student affairs.

But Skidmore said that is not what the deputies involved in the fracas reported.

"That is not what we were told," Skidmore said. "We were told to protect the goal posts because they would be needed for another game and they would not have time to replace them."

TCU police provide security for the campus, but off-duty Fort Worth police and Tarrant County sheriff's deputies handle security for large athletic events such as Thursday's game. TCU avoided a winless season by beating SMU, 21-18, in its final game of the year.

Hundreds of fans, who university officials said were understandably excited because of the victory, mobbed the south goal post and were turned back by deputies. The crowd then headed for the north goal post, where six to eight deputies stood.

As the crowd swarmed, at least one person shoved a deputy to the ground and he was kicked, Skidmore said. That deputy and other deputies then began using pepper spray on people in the crowd. One student was handcuffed, but TCU police instructed

the deputies to release him.

"We don't want students getting hurt or police officers," said Mel Thomas, athletic facilities manager. "If students storm the field, their [police] instructions are to get out of the way."

TCU sophomore Trey McCrary said he and other students rushed the goal posts simply to celebrate.

"Students were having a blast, and the next thing I know my face is on fire and students were running around like ants," said McCrary, 19. "There was no need to [spray] the students."

Mills condemned the assault on the deputy, calling it "totally unacceptable," but he indicated that TCU officials were not pleased with the reaction it brought.

"My personal feeling is that it was a pretty strong response," Mills said.

Skidmore said the use of pepper spray was in keeping with departmental policy, but he said an internal review will be conducted because of the unusual nature of the incident.

"But I would have to say that this was simply a matter of a

bunch of spectators that decided to break the law and destroy private property," he said.

McCrary, who attended the game with about 15 fraternity brothers, said students avoided the officers in the rush to the end zone.

"There wasn't any violence," said McCrary, who said his face burned from the pepper spray for about 45 minutes. "You had 5,000 kids happy to be Horned Frogs, and we got punished for it."

Staff writer Terrance Harris contributed to this report.

Monday, November 24, 1997 / Star-Telegram

No need for this

I am a proud graduate of Texas Christian University and a proud resident of Fort Worth. But one thing I am not proud of is the behavior of the Tarrant County deputies at the end of the TCU-SMU game Thursday night.

As the excited students rushed onto the football field after the game in a release of frustration after a year of disappointment for the Frogs, the deputies on the field deemed it necessary to spray the crowd with pepper spray. I see no need for that type of crowd control in that situation.

These young men and women finally had a legitimate reason for celebration. The Frogs not only beat their crosstown rivals, and in the process overcame incredible odds, but also knocked that rival out of a possible championship bid.

Because these students rushed onto the field and began climbing the goal post, the deputies enveloped the crowd in an orange cloud of pepper spray and, in that instant, completely changed the positive atmosphere to one of confrontation. No wonder so many of our young people have little regard for law enforcement.

GARY JAMIOLKOWSKI
Fort Worth

Green Bay expansion is proposed to meet growing Tarrant jail needs

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — It may be necessary to expand the county's Green Bay jail in addition to reopening the Cold Springs jail to make room for more prisoners, Tarrant County commissioners said yesterday.

The county is running out of jail space once again, and last week commissioners heard a proposal to reopen Cold Springs jail, a former schoolhouse just north of downtown.

Yesterday, Commissioner J.D. Johnson said Cold Springs' 500 beds are probably not enough to alleviate the coming glut of prisoners.

"We need to start another 1,000-bed facility," Johnson said. "The reason I'm pushing for Green Bay is because the more services we can put at one facility, the more taxpayer money we can save."

The county's jail population is growing by roughly 50 prisoners a month, and it is anticipated there will be no room for new prisoners by November 1998, county officials have said. On Nov. 1 the county jails held 3,547 inmates, about 85 percent capacity. The jails are expected to reach 90 percent capacity by March, the offi-



Star-Telegram / STEVE WILSON

cials said.

The overcrowding has been fueled by a 300 percent increase in misdemeanor jail sentences in the past year, county officials said, and inmates from the state's 145,000-bed prison system, which is expected to overflow in two months.

County officials toured the Cold Springs facility on Monday, County Administrator G.K. Maenius told the court. It would take about six months to totally renovate the jail at a cost of about \$1.14 million, and it would increase the county's prisoner capacity by about 12 percent, he said.

"It needs a good cleaning and it needs to be upgraded, but it's a good solid facility," Maenius said. The county staff is reviewing the possibility of expanding the 1,065-bed Green Bay jail, a 65,766-square-foot former warehouse that had 51,637 square feet added to it.

The county now operates three jails — the Tarrant County Corrections Center with 2,090 beds; the old Belknap jail with 1,040 beds; and Green Bay — for a total of 4,195 beds.

The Green Bay jail sits on 5.3 acres southwest of the intersection of Interstate 35W and Northeast Loop 820. The county purchased 2.5 acres adjacent to the jail in 1995, and that and some parking lots could be used for additional jail space, said Gary Kirby, county facilities director.

One option that's not getting much attention is building another high-rise jail downtown, a twin to the \$50 million 13-story Tarrant County Corrections Center opened in 1991. There are provisions for walkways and tunnels to connect the two buildings, if a second tower is built, Kirby said.

But Johnson said he believes that another downtown jail would be too expensive.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Whose fault?

I am a "yellow-dog Democrat," but Bud Kennedy's Nov. 22 column is sure to lead many of us to lean away from the Democratic vote on occasion. I'm referring to the blame he put on the Tarrant County sheriff and his department for the conduct of his off-duty deputies, hired by the Texas Christian University police for the TCU-SMU football game.

Kennedy flatly stated: "Working for TCU

as private officers, the deputies ignored instructions and sprayed the celebrating crowd tearing down the Amon Carter Stadium goalpost." To me, this says that the TCU police were remiss in their hiring policies. Were the deputies properly interviewed to find out if they were qualified for this particular type of security?

I, too, believe that the pepper-spraying of the students was abhorrent, but was the blame properly placed? Were the officers briefed on the limits of their authority, and who were the superiors to whom they reported?

From what was reported by Kennedy, the blame lies with the TCU police and the off-duty deputies, not the Sheriff's Department.

I do not often read Kennedy's column, but I would be willing to bet that this is not the first negative report that he has made about Sheriff David Williams. Williams may become the first Republican to get my vote!

LUKE T. PETERS

Fort Worth

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Star-Telegram / Friday, December 5, 1997

Doing their job

The sheriff's deputies were just trying to do their job after the TCU football game on Nov. 20. If a mob of students who should know to respect authority decides to outnumber and assault a security officer, they were lucky that all they got was a little pepper spray.

If people in the mob had hurt themselves, as in a similar 1993 incident in Wisconsin when fans trespassed on the field to tear down a goal post and crushed other fans against a fence, or if the goal post in this incident had come down and hurt fans, then the deputies would have been criticized for not protecting these same kids.

If they were only celebrating, they should have done it without doing property damage and assault. I just hope that the assaulted officer is OK.

RANDY GRIFFITH
North Richland Hills

Tarrant sheriff institutes reports to commissioners

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — In Russia they called it *glasnost*. In Tarrant County it's being called the good old "spirit of cooperation."

Trying to bridge a communication gap between the Sheriff's Department and county commissioners, Cmdr. James Skidmore and executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope gave the Commissioners Court a summary yesterday of the department's activities during the first week of December.

Skidmore reported to the court on warrants served, calls handled, arrests, jail population, a recent suicide in the jail, staffing levels, recruitment efforts and investigations.

The sheriff's patrol division, with the assistance of reserve officers, handled about 1,200 calls for service last week, Skidmore said. The backlog of warrants has dropped to an "all-time" recent low of around 16,000, he said.

"The square miles in the county may be shrinking but our case-load is not," Skidmore said of the sheriff's crime-fighting efforts.

Skidmore called yesterday's report a "pilot program" and said the court will be briefed weekly on "any newsworthy or notewor-

thy events," as well as the department's regular activities.

The reaction to the briefing from county commissioners was favorable.

"It's something we should have been doing for a long time," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said. He said he hopes Sheriff David Williams will make some of the reports.

Commissioner Glen Whitley called the briefing "a beginning," and Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay said the effort "is appreciated."

The commissioners asked that the sheriff's weekly report break

down calls for service by precinct and the types of crime into categories of crimes against property and people, and traffic violations.

It marked the first time since summer budget hearings that sheriff's officials have talked generally about the department's accomplishments. The new effort comes after several months of criticism from county officials

that the department has not been as forthcoming as it should be.

The most recent criticism focused on sheriff's officials' reluctance to discuss the Sept. 17 crash of a sheriff's helicopter that killed two deputies, and the future of the helicopter programs. County officials were also frustrated over the summer at their inability to determine sheriff

staffing levels within the department.

"We want to be as open and forward as we can be. It's the spirit of cooperation," said Pope, of the newly instituted briefings. "There seems to be a perception, in the media in particular, that everything [in the Sheriff's Department] is clandestine and secretive."

Doing their job?

As I read Randy Griffith's letter Friday, I realized that Griffith has no idea of what actually happened Nov. 20 at Amon Carter Stadium. Griffith stated: "The sheriff's deputies were just trying to do their job." Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The deputies were instructed specifically to get out of the way if the students rushed the field. They were not told to "protect the goal post." They chose to take that action on their own. As they were working not as deputies but as TCU employees, that makes them vigilantes.

In addition, I was on the field no more than 10 feet from the goal post when it came down. I did not see a deputy pushed, knocked or fall to the ground. I did not see a deputy getting assaulted, kicked or stepped on. I did see deputies spraying pepper spray directly into the eyes of students (some of which were cheerleaders in uniform). Many of the students who were sprayed were 10 to 20 yards from the goal post.

KDFW/Channel 4 even showed videotape of the incident. It clearly showed improper, and I would say criminal, actions by the deputies. I challenge Griffith to show me a deputy being "assaulted" on that or any videotape.

Let's get one thing clear. Officers of the law are, in most cases, on the right side of the law. But these sheriff's deputies were out of control.

DAN HUNT
Fort Worth

E D I T O R I A L

Sheriff's Summary

THE TARRANT County Sheriff's Department has taken a long-overdue step in opening up the lines of communications between the county's law enforcement operations and county commissioners.

Executive Deputy Chief Hank Pope and Cmdr. James Skidmore provided the commissioners this week with a nuts-and-bolts summary of the department's activities this summer, including the number of calls handled, warrants served, prisoners supervised and arrests made.

County commissioners hold the purse strings to the Sheriff's Department, and having the type of substantive information that was provided about the department's activities is important for them to carry out their fiscal responsibilities to their constituents.

One concern remains. Sheriff David Williams delegated the responsibility for presenting the information to his subordinates, and he was not on hand at the meeting. Given his recent public relations problems, it would be appropriate for the high sheriff to put in an appearance, even if he deferred to his command staff to make the actual presentations.

There's symbolic value in a democratic institution of having the elected official who is responsible for the information to disseminate it.

Most county department heads attend the weekly commissioners meetings, although Williams is not alone in his absence from chambers. Hardly anyone who watches the commission on a regular basis can remember a time when they've seen Tarrant County District Attorney Tim Curry enter the courtroom for a meeting.

At a time when government is being criticized for its unresponsiveness, there is value in having elected officials put in appearances at regularly scheduled public meetings.

System picks up jail's phone

Automated update on Tarrant inmates provided for fee

By **KAREN ROUSE**
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Through the new 976-JAIL phone number at the Tarrant County Jail, callers find out jail visitation hours, charges against inmates, or an inmate's bail for \$1.25 per call.

The idea is to help callers get inmate information efficiently, while freeing the Sheriff's

Department employees to work without telephone interruptions, county officials say.

But the Jail Access Information Line — a fully automated system that doesn't give callers the option of speaking with a human operator — cannot be accessed with a pay phone, cellular phone or calling card, or from outside the local calling

area, said Juliette Grace, a manager at Interactive Systems, the Louisville, Ky., firm that operates 976-JAIL.

The caller has to be calling from a home telephone or other phone that could be billed, Grace said.

And according to Southwestern Bell, 976 numbers cannot be
(More on JAILS on Page 3)

Star-Telegram / Saturday, December 13, 1997

accessed from phones that have a block on 900 numbers.

Or, the same information can be obtained for free by going, in person, to the county jail at 100 N. Lamar St. or 350 W. Belknap St.

"The very fact that they charge for it is a problem," said Lois' Robison, chairwoman of the board of the Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, a support group for the families of inmates. "Most people who have somebody in [jail] have money problems."

And not being able to access the line from a pay phone or out-of-town number is an additional hardship, Robison said. "Some of these people don't have phones ... It seems to me they ought to have a 1-800 number or a real person."

Since Nov. 24, 976-JAIL has been the only number through which bondsmen, families, attorneys or others could gain information, in English and Spanish, on charges against an inmate, bail, instructions on paying bail, custody, the jail address, how to leave money for inmates and visitation hours.

Before that, callers could dial several numbers, and employees assigned to other tasks, such as radio traffic, telephone communication, emergency response or disturbances, would answer the phones when they had a free moment, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, spokesman for the Sheriff's Department.

Those free numbers either have or will be disconnected, Skidmore said, as the county shifts to the fully automated 976-JAIL line.

"It frees up a lot of manpow-

er," Tarrant County Administrator G.K. Maenius said. "If you have to have an individual available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer that information, you're looking at the equivalent of 5.2 employees," he said.

Sheriff's Sgt. Norman Craven said Tarrant County pays a monthly fee of \$4,905 to Interactive Systems. For each \$1.25 fee collected, Craven said 33.3 percent — or 41.6 cents — goes to Tarrant County, another 33.3 percent goes to Southwestern Bell, and Interactive Systems keeps the rest.

In the first 10 days of December, Grace said, more than 2,000 calls have come in on the line. That's a profit of \$832 for the county.

Maenius said the revenue collected is expected to allow the county to break even on the cost of the system.

Skidmore said Tarrant County "never had people employed for the purpose of answering calls from the public."

The Sheriff's Department requested 10 employees last year to staff a switchboard, but the request was denied. The county administration believed that it couldn't justify 10 people on the payroll to service such a small percentage of the county population, Skidmore said.

With an automated system, "only those desiring that information would be paying that minimal charge."

Skidmore said the jail gets as many as 1,100 to 1,300 calls per 24-hour period, and houses about 3,586 inmates in three facilities.

Both Grace and Craven said they know of no other Texas jails that charge callers for inmate information.

At the Dallas County Jail, which houses 7,000 inmates, Lt. James Monaghan said callers get inmate information through a free automated phone system

that provides the option of speaking with an operator. And a switchboard is staffed by four employees for each eight-hour shift, 24 hours a day, he said.

In El Paso County, where about 1,500 prisoners are housed, one officer per shift is assigned to answer calls from people seeking inmate information 24 hours per day, according to a jail employee.

And in the Bexar County Jail in San Antonio, eight officers are assigned to answer phones per shift, according to a deputy sheriff, who said the prison holds 3,300 inmates. Calls are also free in El Paso and Bexar counties.

Tarrant County Commissioner J.D. Johnson, representative of Pct. 4, said he was not aware of the restrictions on phone access to the system, but he understands there needs to be a way to bill callers.

Pct. 2 Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said that the line is an attempt to provide more efficient access to jail information, and that it can probably be re-evaluated later based on comments from the public.

Tim Moore, vice president of the Tarrant County Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, said, "I think that for people who call over there on a regular basis, like defense lawyers ... that they have to pay for it is ridiculous.

"Our tax dollars pay to establish the jail and to run it, and if somebody's sitting up in jail over there, I don't think they ought to have to pay to find out if they're in jail."

Interactive Systems also operates the Victim Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE, system, which notifies registered crime victims when their attacker is being released. Callers who just want to find out if an inmate is in custody can use VINE's local number, 348-8463.

Sheriff still wants utility truck fleet

Commissioners aren't sure of vehicles' value

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams still wants a fleet of sport utility vehicles, even though county commissioners months ago suggested that Williams buy a mix of those trucks and less-expensive sedans.

The Sheriff's Department asked the county Dec. 1 to buy 21 Chevrolet Tahoes, at a cost of about \$29,000 each with the special police package, to replace vehicles being taken out of service. No sedans were requested, and if the department gets the new trucks it would have a total of 31 Tahoes.

Tarrant County commissioners budgeted \$675,000 for new sheriff's vehicles in 1998, and allowed the department to decide how to spend the money. Today the commissioners will review the sheriff's vehicle request.

"The Tahoe is regarded as a top-of-the-line law-enforcement vehicle that provides officers with the most physical safety and the most room," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, the sheriff's spokesman. "It's a good multi-purpose vehicle."

But county commissioners aren't convinced, and other large police and sheriff's departments around the state use sport utility vehicles sparingly.

"I have a real hard time with it," Commissioner Glen Whitley said. "No one has

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

come to me and said why sport utility vehicles are safer or more needed. No one is talking to us about the need for the trucks and right now I am against buying them."

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he, too, would question the Tahoe purchase.

"Why do we need so many Tahoes? There may be a reason," Johnson said. "From what I've been told it will eat up the sheriff's entire vehicle budget, so I want to know how they plan to fund the other 10 vehicles they want."

Williams, in his 1998 budget request, told the commissioners he wanted 30 new vehicles, all Tahoes. The commissioners balked and asked the sheriff to consider buying a mix of sport utility trucks and sedans, such as the more mundane Ford Crown Victoria, a sedan that in 1997 cost \$19,927, when the sheriff purchased 17 of them. The 1998 cars are estimated to cost \$22,500.

"There's no intent to go to a 100 percent Tahoe fleet. A mix is what we'll have," Skidmore said.

He said that information he has seen shows that the Crown Victoria doesn't "hold up in a collision" as well as a Tahoe.

As far as performance, the police package Tahoe will do anything a sedan will do, according to the Michigan State Police, Skidmore said.

The department bought 10 Chevrolet Tahoes last year. Three 1997 models that cost up to \$27,433 have arrived and were assigned to sheriff command staff. Seven 1998 models that cost \$28,950 are on order.

But many other Texas police and sheriff's departments are, for the most part, sticking with sedans.

Sheriff

The Fort Worth Police Department, which has three Suburbans and several Ford Explorers for crime scene work, ordered 120 new vehicles this year, none of them sport utility vehicles, said a spokesman, Lt. Mark Krey. The sport trucks were not designed for "high-intensity pursuit-style driving," he said.

"The Crown Victoria is the car everybody prefers for police work. It stands at the top of the

list for performance and reliability," Krey said.

The Dallas County Sheriff's Department has four Ford Expeditions that cost about \$24,000 each, 20 vans, a few buses and several dozen sedans, said Jim Ewell, a department spokesman.

As far as replacing vehicles, the department expects to stick with Crown Victorias, he said.

The Harris County Sheriff's Department, which patrols the Houston area, has a few sport utility vehicles "reserved for special purposes," such as transporting equipment or for emergency disaster response, said Capt. Don McWilliams.

"They are impractical for our purposes," he said. "We'd be skeptical about how well they would do in a chase and how it would look to the public. We'd have a difficult time justifying the cost."

Even in rocky, hilly El Paso County, where roads run into the desert, the Sheriff's Department only has two Chevrolet Blazers and two Dodge Ram pickups, which are used mostly for the environmental crime unit.

"We don't have any sport utility vehicles for routine patrol," said Capt. Larry Wilkins, patrol division commander, adding that the department is considering getting some. "But for the price of two sport trucks we can get three sedans, and we're a poor county."

But the North Richland Hills Police Department is convinced that Tahoes are a good deal. It has four nonpolice package Tahoes that are used by supervisors and has had seven more on order for a year and a half.

"They sit up higher and provide a better field of view," Capt. Lee Pitts said.

If the department can afford to buy more Tahoes, it will, Pitts said. Tests in Michigan and California and videos show that the Tahoes "handle well enough" and are suitable for police work.

Commissioner Dionne Bagby's Pct. 1 and Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay's Pct. 2 each have a Tahoe.

"It's our road crew supervisor's vehicle," said John Weist, Pct. 2 administrator. "We feel it's necessary to have one for those occasions when they need to go into difficult terrain to look at construction projects and we have used it for that purpose."

Decision delayed on fleet for sheriff

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County commissioners grilled Chief Deputy Hank Pope over Sheriff David Williams' request for a fleet of sport utility vehicles, but postponed a decision yesterday on whether to buy the \$29,000 Chevrolet Tahoes.

The commissioners told Pope that there are better uses for the money than sport utility trucks. They also said that Williams should come personally to Tarrant County Commissioners Court to

defend his request for 21 Tahoes.

"I would like us not to order the 21 vehicles until we have a discussion with the sheriff," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said.

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said the request for Tahoes "generated concern from John Q. Public." Her office had 10 telephone calls yesterday morning opposing the Tahoe purchase, she said. Bagsby also demanded that Williams come to the court.

Williams was unable to attend yesterday's meeting because of a

(More on VEHICLES on Page 11)

Vehicles

From Page 1

"long-standing family commitment made months ago," Pope told the commissioners.

"In terms of public safety, we're trying to get the best equipment to do the job," Pope said.

The Tahoes would be used for patrol, he said. The Sheriff's Department now has three 1997 Tahoes that cost \$27,433 and seven 1998 models on order that cost \$28,950.

The department had been using the Chevrolet Caprice with the police package as its main patrol vehicle, but that model has been discontinued. Last year the department bought 17 Ford Crown Victorias, a sedan that cost \$19,927.

"What are you going to do with Tahoes that you can't do with Crown Victorias?" Johnson

"There's a severe salary problem and I'd much rather see us direct dollars to salary than vehicles."

Commissioner Glen Whitley

asked.

In his 1998 budget Williams requested 30 new vehicles, all Tahoes, to replace vehicles being taken out of service. The commissioners recommended at summer budget hearings that Williams purchase a mix of trucks and less-expensive sedans. They allotted \$675,000 for new sheriff's vehicles and allowed the sheriff to decide how to spend the money, but he did not request any sedans.

Commissioner Glen Whitley said yesterday he is concerned about the county's need to spend roughly \$1.5 million to refurbish and reopen the Cold Springs Jail, and a chronic shortage of trained jail personnel, some of which commissioners and sheriff's officials blame on low salaries. The

county was short 95 jailers as of yesterday.

"There's a severe salary problem and I'd much rather see us direct dollars to salary than vehicles," Whitley said.

In defending the request for the sport utility trucks, Pope said the Tahoe, made at the General Motors assembly plant in Arlington, is the most "crash-survivable" vehicle and most comfortable for officers who patrol the county on 10-hour shifts.

He said the Tahoes are lower to the ground than the "civilian model" and have a wider wheel base, which makes them less prone to roll over. The tendency of sport utility vehicles to roll has been a recent concern voiced by auto industry regulators and engineers.

Other large police and sheriff's departments around the state use sport utility vehicles sparingly, mostly for transporting crime scene equipment, environmental crime investigations and for disaster response.

In other county action:

■ The commissioners revised the travel policy for county employees. Those traveling to local training or a conference will not be allowed to stay in a local hotel.

■ The O.D. Wyatt Singing Chaparrals choir serenaded county officials before Commissioners Court began yesterday. The 26 choir members received a standing ovation.

■ Sheriff's Deputy Ed Hollingsworth of Watauga received a 50-inch Toshiba television in a drawing among county employees who submitted cost-saving suggestions to the Caring Ideas program.

Decision on sheriff's vehicle request parked until new year

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A decision on whether to buy Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams a fleet of sport utility vehicles has been postponed until after the first of the year, county officials said yesterday.

The county, however, is seeking bids on 38 other vehicles it intends to buy and will purchase Sheriff's Department vehicles after commissioners discuss with Williams his request for 21 two-wheel-drive Chevrolet Tahoes, said G.K. Maenius, the county administrator.

"More information on the Tahoes needs to be gathered and given to the court," said Maenius, explaining why the purchase was not on the Commissioners Court agenda, as it had been the week before.

Last week, commissioners bristled at the prospect of buying \$29,000 trucks instead of \$22,000 patrol cars. They told Chief Deputy Hank Pope that there were better uses for the money than buying sport utility vehicles and said that Williams should personally appear before them to defend his request.

Buying the Tahoes "has always been

open to discussion, and we've always got a backup plan," Pope said after the Commissioners Court meeting.

Pope said he was "pretty sure" that the sheriff, who contacted Commissioner Marti Van Ravenswaay's office for a one-on-one meeting, would go to the Commissioners Court to discuss the Tahoes. Williams didn't attend last week's meeting because of a long-standing family commitment, Pope said at the time.

"He's going to have to meet with all of us," Commissioner Glen Whitley said. "I still need to be convinced we need to

spend that kind of money. I'd rather spend it on salary increases and improvements for the jail."

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said his office has received more than a dozen telephone calls about Williams' vehicle request, all of them negative.

Pope told commissioners last week that the 21 Tahoes, equipped with a special police package, would be used for patrol. The Sheriff's Department has three 1997 Tahoes, which cost \$27,433 each, and placed orders for seven 1998 models, which cost \$28,950 each.

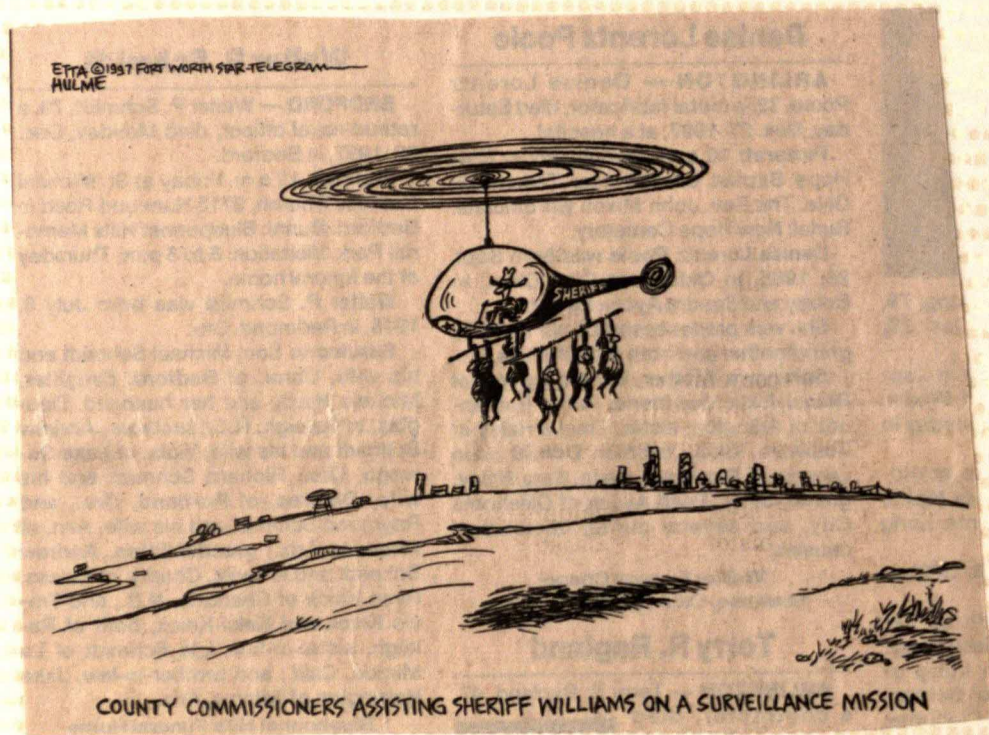
The department had been using the

Chevrolet Caprice with the police package as its main patrol vehicle, but that model has been discontinued. Last year, the department bought 17 Ford Crown Victorias, a sedan that then cost \$19,927.

In his 1998 budget, Williams requested 30 new vehicles, all Tahoes, to replace vehicles being taken out of service. The commissioners recommended at summer budget hearings that Williams purchase a mix of trucks and less expensive sedans. They allotted \$675,000 for vehicles and allowed the sheriff to decide how to spend the money, but he did not request any sedans.

The Year in Cartoons

BY STAR-TELEGRAM EDITORIAL
CARTOONIST ETTA HULME



County authorizes study of Green Bay jail addition

Existing lockups are expected to be full before construction can begin.

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Faced with a shortage of jail space by year's end, Tarrant County commissioners voted yesterday to approve a study on expanding the 1,065-bed Green Bay jail.

But even if an addition to Green Bay is approved and "fast-tracked," construction is not likely to begin before the county runs out of beds for prisoners in its three existing jails, county officials say.

"Site locations for future jails must be investigated as quickly as possible," said Gary Kirby, county facilities director.

The number of inmates is growing by about 50 prisoners a month, and the jails are expected to reach 90 percent of their 4,195-bed capacity by March and to be full by November.

Adding on to the Green Bay jail or building on the land adjacent to it is one of the most cost-effective alternatives, Kirby told the commissioners.

"I don't think we have a choice but to try to add on to Green Bay," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff said, "it is obvious we have to expand jail capacity" and called Green Bay "the most logical place" to add space.

The Green Bay jail sits on 5.3 acres southwest of the intersection of Interstate 35W and Northwest Loop 820. The county purchased 2.5 acres adjacent to the jail in 1995, and that and some parking lots could be used for additional jail space, Kirby said.

BSA Design Group, a Fort Worth-based architectural firm that specializes in jail design and construction, will do the 45-day study for \$20,000, Kirby said. The county hopes to add space for 300 to 500 inmates, he said.

BSA will study all facets of the jail operation, from capacity and manpower requirements to whether the current kitchen and recreational areas can support more prisoners, said Ken Burns, BSA president.

"We want to see how we can increase the efficiency of the operation while expanding its capacity," he said, adding that BSA will present several "conceptual alternatives" on expanding the jail.

The commissioners and the Texas Commission on Jail Standards still must sign off on the project, and construction would probably not begin until October, Kirby said.

Last month the commissioners voted to spend about \$1.6 million on refurbishing the shuttered Cold Springs jail just north of downtown, which would add space for 500 inmates, but October is the earliest it is expected to be ready for prisoners. The jail was closed in August 1995.

"If there are more prisoners than beds, we'll put mattresses on the floor," Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope said. "We'll keep the jails open."

The county houses about 3,500 prisoners in three jails — the Tarrant County Corrections Center with 2,090 beds, the old Belknap jail with 1,040 beds, and the Green Bay facility.

County officials said overcrowding has been fueled by a 300 percent increase in misdemeanor jail sentences in the past year, and by the holding of inmates from the state's 144,000-bed prison system, which is expected to reach capacity this month.

In other action, the commissioners approved Tarrant County's participation in a tax increment financing district for Southlake to enable the development of a town square, including a new municipal building, of which the county will get 20 percent.

The county's participation is limited to a combined contribution of 20 percent of the total

tion of 20 percent of the total project costs, with a maximum of \$4.6 million coming from Tarrant County and \$4.1 million from the county's hospital district. The hospital district is scheduled to vote on its participation tomorrow.

"It will promote new jobs and encourage peripheral commercial and office development," said Commissioner Glen Whitley, who represents the area.

Commissioners to vote on helicopter funds

BY NEIL STRASSMAN

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners will get a chance to vote today on funding Sheriff David Williams' helicopter program for the first time since a crash in September killed two deputies.

At stake is a \$12,450 contract with Texas Jet to provide hangar, office and storage space at Meacham Airport and fuel for the department's remaining military surplus OH-58A Bell helicopter, and storage for another nonoperational 1960s-era Hughes OH-6 helicopter.

Since the Sept. 17 crash on an airstrip that the Kenneth Copeland Ministries owns east of Eagle Mountain Lake, the commissioners have voiced concerns about how

the helicopter program is funded, its future and county liability.

The commissioners have repeatedly asked Williams to discuss the helicopter program in public at Commissioners Court, but he has had only private one-on-one meetings with them.

"I was sure thinking the sheriff told us he was going to give us some additional informational on the helicopter program, but he hasn't done that yet," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said. "I think I need more information before I can take any action" on the contract.

Cmdr. James Skidmore, sheriff's spokesman, called the contract renewal "routine" and said he does not know whether Williams will attend today's meeting.

The helicopter contract under consideration today gives the

county a hefty discount on services, said Reed Pigman, Texas Jet president.

The hangar space, plus an office and storage area, costs the county \$300 a month instead of \$900, and jet fuel is discounted 20 cents from the current retail price of \$2.09 a gallon when more than 500 gallons are used in a month, Pigman said.

The money for the helicopters comes from the sheriff's criminal forfeiture fund — drug money and proceeds from the sale of seized items that were used in crimes — rather than from county coffers, because commissioners did not fund the program when the first surplus helicopters were obtained in 1994. Even so, the commissioners have authority over county contracts.

E D I T O R I A L S

Show of Contempt

TARRANT County Sheriff David Williams' refusal to discuss his department's helicopter program in Commissioners Court has gone from a subtle contest of wills between elected officials to an open show of contempt for the public he is supposed to serve.

Once again, the county's highest-ranking elected law enforcement officer was absent from the courtroom Tuesday when a discussion about a budget item for his controversial air program got under way.

Left fending for himself was Chief Deputy Dave Dunaway, who could not say why Williams was not in attendance but only assured the commissioners that their decision to delay action on a contract for hangar space would be conveyed to the sheriff.

Another perpetual stand-in for Williams, department spokesman James Skidmore, said later that the sheriff will "respond to the request for more information" before the \$12,450 hangar contract with Texas Jet expires Jan. 28. What was left unsaid was whether that meant Williams would actually put in an appearance at court during the next two weeks, or if he'll continue his campaign of one-on-one private discussions with commissioners.

The information that the commissioners are requesting is not for their edification only. Tarrant County residents deserve to know the sheriff's long-term plans for a program that has drawn plenty of scrutiny but few answers since the Sept. 17 crash that killed two deputies.

Williams can be his own worst enemy, forcing even his traditional supporters to question why he does what he does. It may be more than two years before he must stand for re-election, but if he continues in this evasive and inaccessible manner, the voters will remember.

Tarrant County short on jailers

Commissioners studying raises to lower turnover

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County is not only running out of jail space, it's running out of jailers.

As the number of jail inmates has increased, jailers have been working overtime for at least a year to make up for an acute shortage of detention officers, sheriff's officials told county commissioners yesterday.

The high turnover rate among the jailers — many of whom leave for better-paying jobs, county officials said — prompted county commissioners yesterday to consider giving them pay raises.

"We need to pay our jailers comparable wages to what they could earn in other counties," Commissioner Glen Whitley said. "That will go a long way toward helping the morale problem and reducing our turnover."

As of yesterday, the county was short 140 detention officers from the full staff of 965 jailers, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, the sheriff's spokesman. The jail population was about 3,500. The county expects to run out of jail beds in a year, officials said.

About 40 percent of the current jailers have less than one year's experience, Skidmore said.

Jailers

From Page 1

Staffing the jail "is a real serious problem," said Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope, who acknowledged that "it's not that attractive" to work a swing shift or overnight.

"We do make it work," Pope said.

Entry-level pay for Tarrant County jailers, now about \$9.78 cents an hour or \$20,350 a year, likely will be boosted by nearly 6 percent, to about \$10.34 an hour, or about \$21,500 annually, under any of the four pay raise plans the

commissioners are considering. Current jailers would have their salaries raised, too, said Gerald Wright, county personnel director.

The only pay raises jailers get now are "pay for performance" increases (merit raises), which this year can vary from nothing to as much as 8 percent.

Under the new plan, step increases in salary will probably take the place of merit raises, so that at the end of a year's employment a jailer would have received about a 5 percent raise, increasing jailers' salaries to \$10.86 an hour or about \$22,596, Wright said. But, after two years, the step raises would end, and it would be

back to performance-based raises.

Shift differentials for working evening and overnight, currently about 55 cents per shift, will probably be increased by a nickel, and more people working in the jail will become eligible for differential pay.

But even with these changes, Wright acknowledged, it is unlikely that Tarrant jailers will catch up with those in Dallas or Harris counties.

Entry-level pay in Dallas is about \$10.19 an hour, but it escalates annually for 10 years and tops out at \$14.26 an hour, nearly \$30,000 a year, said sheriff's spokesman Jim Ewell. Dallas, he said, has openings for 100 detention officers.

In Harris County, entry-level pay is \$10.66 an hour — \$22,176 annually — with a raise to \$24,636 six months later and annual step increases every year after for seven years, up to an annual salary of \$30,216, said Celeste Spaugh, sheriff's spokeswoman.

In Harris, jailers eventually become deputies, Spaugh said.

But in Tarrant County, there are fewer chances for jailers to get ahead, and that is another problem that affects retention, Skidmore said.

Of the roughly 1,340 positions in the sheriff's department, there are only 53 in patrol, 59 in warrants, about 150 assigned to judicial services, eight investigators

and 12 in special operations.

"For one patrol vacancy, you'll have 150 applicants. We don't have as much opportunity to advance as in other sheriff's departments," he said.

Skidmore angered commissioners yesterday when he said 44 of the 140 jailers who could be put to work in the jail are assigned to other jobs, such as operating metal detectors or serving warrants.

The jailers were reassigned to those tasks several years ago to avoid layoffs when the jail population fell.

"It was never supposed to be permanent," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said. She and oth-

er commissioners have been pressing Sheriff David Williams since last summer's budget discussions for a complete and accurate explanation of how the department is staffed.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson was particularly incensed about the sheriff's unilateral decision to put metal detectors and post guards at the entrance to the building that houses the sheriff's administrative offices, two days after the commissioners ordered them removed.

"You have added security people without the approval of this court," Johnson said. "You're doing the reverse of what we requested at budget time."



Bud Kennedy

COMMENTARY

Phone scam by jailbirds more than nuisance

Ever get a phone call late at night and hear this electronic message?

"You have a collect call from the Tarrant County Jail."

Ever imagined the worst about family or friends? And have you ever nervously accepted that call?

Congratulations. You've been conned out of \$2.10.

You may not know the jailbird. It might even be somebody just dialing numbers at random to "reach out and touch someone"

— for bail money.

He or she knows you're a softie.

After all, you were fooled into paying for a collect pay-phone call.

In El Paso, phone customers and county jailers have had enough of this lock-down version of *Dialing for Dollars*, which happens to generate income not only for the inmates but also for the pay phone company.

The collect-call scam was exposed this week, when the *El Paso Times* discussed phone etiquette with an inmate who identified himself only as "Slinky."

"If you are bored and you have nothing else to do, you make collect phone calls," he said, claiming that he makes 20 or 30 random calls a day asking for money.

Slinky obviously missed out on his true calling.

He should be getting a cut of profits from the pay-phone company.

The random robbery of phone customers through collect pay-phone calls is not solely committed from county jails. Pay-phone companies themselves theoretically can ring you up with fake \$2 calls from anywhere: a hospital, an airport, any pay phone.

But it's even more irritating when you get worried and accept that "collect call from the jail" — only to meet Slinky.

In El Paso, inmates were mak-

ing calls to businesses, citizens, jailers at their home phone numbers and at least one federal judge. This week, the jail captain ordered all phones turned off after 10:30 p.m.

In Tarrant County, the jail phones go dead at 10:30 and stay dead until 6 a.m.

No rules prevent inmates from calling total strangers. But Chief Deputy Savala Swanson, who oversees jail operations, said Southwestern Bell will block jail calls on request and will also remove the billing for wrong-number calls.

"It is a problem, although not a big problem," he said.

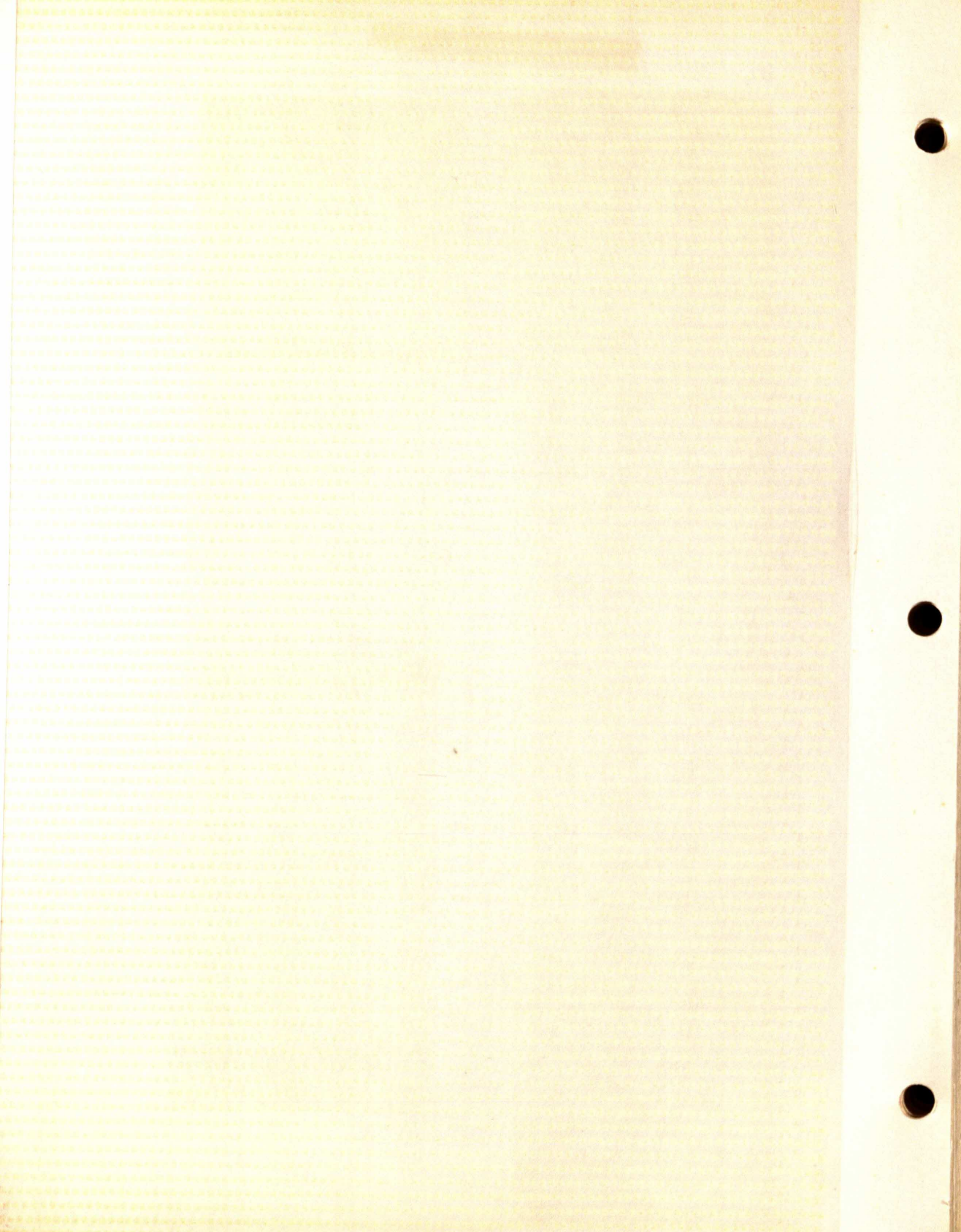
"A person will accept a collect call and then not even know the prisoner involved. We try to put those people in touch with the phone company."

A bigger problem, he said, is how inmates "use the phone correctly" and expensively, running up high phone bills.

No price break here for calling "friends or family." Inmates commonly chat their way to \$100 or \$200 in charges, Swanson said. One talkative jailbird rang up an \$8,000 family phone bill.

Swanson did not say whether his name was also "Slinky."

Bud Kennedy works in the Fort Worth newsroom. Call him at 390-7538 (fax 390-7789). His e-mail address is budk@star-telegram.com.



E D I T O R I A L S

Tarrant Sheriff

TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF David Williams made a special trip to the newspaper this week to update key editors and writers about the status of his department's helicopter program.

He has placed the department's remaining helicopter on stand-down until the National Transportation Safety Board completes its investigation into the Sept. 17 crash that took the lives of two deputies.

Williams' appearance at the *Star-Telegram* came one day after the county's top-ranking law enforcement officer visited one-on-one with County Judge Tom Vandergriff, sharing similar information.

Williams defended his lack of public disclosure of specifics about the crash by citing NTSB policies that prohibit the dissemination of information by anyone other than NTSB officials. No one wants answers to what happened that day more than the sheriff does, and he appeared earnest in his desire to provide the public with details as soon as they become available.

The media never paid much attention to Williams' attendance at the Commissioners Court until after the crash, and the sheriff conceded that he's been conspicuous in his absence of late. He also admitted that he is learning as he goes, and that he took some poor advice that led to misunderstanding and less-than-favorable media coverage.

Our advice for Williams remains the same: He can be his department's best salesman when he speaks with conviction about programs and philosophies that he believes in. This week he demonstrated that he was in control. He needs to let his constituents see this David Williams.

Tarrant County commissioners vote to give jailers pay raises

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County jailers are getting pay raises.

County commissioners yesterday voted to spend nearly \$850,000 on salary increases for jailers, hoping the better pay will make it easier to attract job candidates and stop the exodus of detention officers leaving the jail for better-paying jobs.

Nearly all jailers will get raises

of between 5 percent and 7 percent under the plan. Newly hired jailers get 10 percent raises in their first two years with the county and almost everyone working swing or graveyard shifts will get a bit more in their pay envelope.

"It's a step in the right direction. There may be further refinements," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said.

Commissioners and sheriff's officials agree that the strong local economy and low unemployment level make it difficult to attract

workers to the jail.

Chief Deputy Hank Pope, who in recent weekly reports to the commissioners has discussed rising overtime costs caused by the acute shortage of detention officers, applauded the decision.

"Hopefully this will get us more people applying, but we still need to see a departmentwide salary adjustment," Pope said.

Entry level pay for Tarrant County jailers, now around \$9.78 cents an hour, or \$20,350 a year,

will be boosted to about \$10.34 an hour, or about \$21,500 annually, under the revised pay structure.

The lowest-paid jail employees, designated as technical officer one — about 59 workers — most of whom handle clerical or administrative duties, will get a pay raise of 6.9 percent. Their average salary is \$9.23 an hour.

The bulk of the detention officers, about 629 jailers, categorized as technical officer two, will get pay raises of about 5.6 per-

cent. New hires and those who started after August 1997 will get 2.5 percent raises every six months for the first two years. Their average salary is about \$10.75 an hour.

Shift differentials for working evening and overnight will be boosted a nickel, to 60 cents per shift, for all ranks through lieutenant.

The only pay raises jailers got previously were "pay for performance" increases, merit raises that this year varied from nothing

to as much as 8 percent.

As of yesterday, the county was short 122 detention officers from its full complement of 965 jailers, said a sheriff's spokesman, Cmdr. James Skidmore, explaining that there are 57 unfilled positions, 22 new hires being trained in the academy and 43 jailers on loan to other areas within the Sheriff's Department. Roughly 40 percent of the current jailers have less than one year's experience, he said.

Thursday, February 5, 1998

Sheriff's deputies raid several nude dancing clubs in county

By NEIL STRASSMAN
AND GINGER D. RICHARDSON
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

FORT WORTH — Sheriff's deputies raided sexually oriented businesses in unincorporated Tarrant County last night, shutting down some of the establishments as they arrested employees and a few customers.

Two teams of deputies were dispatched about 9 p.m. for the

raid that continued after midnight.

"The businesses did not have the proper permits that are required by the county," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a sheriff's spokesman.

He said he was aware of only one business of about 16 in the jurisdiction that has a permit.

Before the raids began, Skidmore estimated that the teams

would target a half-dozen establishments before the night was through.

Some of the business owners had filed incomplete permit applications, Skidmore said. They were notified by letter of the need to reapply, but had not done so, he said.

And some never applied for permits, he said.

(More on RAID on Page 2)



Star-Telegram/JOYCE MARSHALL

Members of the Sheriff's Department tactical unit prepare to make misdemeanor arrests at the Showcase II nude dancing club last night.

Raid

From Page 1

One of the first stops was at the Showcase II nude dancing club at 1928 Josh Road, a block west of Interstate 35 and just south of Golden Triangle Boulevard.

Just after 9:15 p.m., 12 deputies entered the club, and instantly, bright white light replaced black lights and neon. Ten minutes later, six partially clad dancers were huddled on a corner of a stage while stunned patrons waited at their tables.

The business, which opened in September 1995, had a license, but it was not properly posted by the front door, said Capt. Larry Hester. Fourteen employees were arrested and face a Class A misdemeanor charge for "conducting business" in a place without a properly posted license.

"Not having a license properly posted is the same as not having one at all," Hester said.

Showcase manager Charles Turner said officers had visited the business before, but never mentioned that the license needed

to be posted at the door.

"They said it had to be posted and it is — posted on the wall along with our health permits."

Meanwhile, the other team, headed by Sgt. Glen Diviney, stopped first just after 9:20 p.m. along a quiet stretch of U.S. 377 south of Benbrook, deserted except for the flashing neon lights of two sexually oriented businesses.

Deputies first went into Cactus Jack's Gentleman's Club. They arrested two employees — a middle-aged man who did not speak except to ask officers to make sure that his dog was OK, and a young woman in a short, tight red dress with a black lace garter around her arm. No customers were inside the establishment, which had wooden floors, fewer than 10 tables, and a small wooden center stage with a dance pole placed in the middle.

A few moments later, the team burst into the T.U. Club about 1,000 feet away. Officers arrested seven women and detained two men who were on the premises while officers made warrant and background checks. One patron, who walked in during the raid, was arrested and faces charges of public intoxication and disorderly conduct.

The building was decorated in a mixture of Oriental flowers and western decor inside a red, wooden frame building with green-and-white shutters. The decor included life-size cardboard stand-ups of John Wayne and President Clinton playing the saxophone.

Officers asked members of the media to step outside after the business owner, wearing a long, purple-velvet sequined gown, became hysterical. Other female employees who were being arrested attempted to convince officers, without success, that they were there visiting relatives or friends.

The regulation of sexually oriented businesses is one of the few issues over which counties have ordinance authority, said County Administrator G.K. Maenius. Commissioners passed an ordinance regulating them in 1990, Maenius said. The ordinance was last amended in 1995, he said.

The county ordinance requires that any sexually oriented business apply for and receive a permit, and renew that permit annually. The businesses are required to be at least 1,000 feet from any licensed child-care center, church, dwelling, school, public park or other enterprise, Maenius said.

10 sex-related businesses shut down during raids

BY YVETTE CRAIG
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Sheriff's deputies shut down 10 sexually oriented businesses in unincorporated areas of Tarrant County during raids that began Wednesday night and continued until 6 a.m. yesterday.

The deputies had targeted 16 businesses after an undercover investigation revealed that clubs — some topless, some all-nude — and several adult bookstores were operating without a proper permit, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a Sheriff's Department spokesman.

The deputies were unable to reach six of the businesses because of time constraints, but four of them shut down voluntarily as word of the raids spread, Skidmore said.

Of the 10 businesses raided, only one had a proper permit — but it was not posted as required by law, Skidmore said.

In all, 56 people were arrested, including five customers, during the raids.

The businesses are supposed to remain closed until they receive and post the permit, Skidmore said. The permit application takes

about two weeks.

The 51 employees — including managers, dancers, waiters and bartenders — were booked into Tarrant County Jail on suspicion of operating a sexually oriented business without a permit, which is a Class A misdemeanor, Skidmore said.

Four of the five customers were arrested on warrants, and the fifth on suspicion of public intoxication and disorderly conduct, Skidmore said.

A teen-age boy who was found during one raid was issued a citation for underage drinking before he was sent home, he said.

County commissioners passed an ordinance regulating sexually oriented businesses in 1990, and it was last amended in 1995, County Administrator G.K. Maenius has said.

The county law requires sexually oriented businesses to apply for and receive a permit, and renew that permit each year. In addition, the businesses are required to be at least 1,000 feet from any licensed child-care center, church, dwelling, school, public park or other enterprise, Maenius said.

Sex-related clubs reopen

Tarrant sheriff to study some temporary permits

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Dancers are undressing again at some of the sexually oriented businesses in unincorporated Tarrant County that were closed three nights ago by sheriff's deputies.

Sheriff's deputies raided 10 nude dancing clubs and pornography stores Wednesday night, shutting down some of the businesses and arresting 51 owners, employees and dancers because the businesses either did not have proper county permits or did not have them posted by the front entrance.

The Showcase II nude dancing club at 1928 Josh

Road, a block west of Interstate 35 and just south of Golden Triangle Boulevard, had a valid permit and reopened Thursday.

"It's up here by the front door in an 8-by-10 frame showing an expiration date of Sept. 22, 1998," said Charles Turner, Showcase manager.

Some other clubs reopened by posting a 1991 Tarrant County Sheriff's Department letter signed by then-Sheriff's Chief of Operation George Campbell that read, in part, "This letter shall serve as a temporary permit ..."

Tarrant County Administrator G.K. Maenius said

(More on CLUBS on Page 2)

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Clubs

From Page 1

some clubs were denied a permit in 1990, and were allowed to appeal. The 1991 letters were temporary permits issued by the Sheriff's Department.

"The way the ordinance was structured, if there was an appeal pending, and a temporary permit had been issued, then the business could stay open until the appeal was heard," Maenius said.

But the appeal hearings never took place, and the job of issuing permits was transferred to Maenius' office two years ago.

The Sheriff's Department has sent out investigators to examine "the documentation" that they say allows the clubs to reopen, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a sheriff's spokesman.

"We have asked the district attorney's office to rule on the validity of the letters. We are waiting for an opinion," he said. "If the district attorney rules that the temporary document allows them to remain open pending the issuance of a new permit, there will be no further enforcement activity. If the document is not legitimate, then the clubs will be closed again."

Assistant District Attorney

John Cramer said yesterday that the cases have not been forwarded to the district attorney's office yet.

The county ordinance requires any sexually oriented business to apply for and receive a permit in order to operate in Tarrant County, and to renew that permit annually. All such businesses are required to be at least 1,000 feet from any licensed day-care center, church, dwelling, school, public park or other enterprise.

The district attorney is doing a site-distance study to determine which clubs may be in violation of the ordinance, Maenius said. The study is expected to be finished by March, he said. The commissioners court has appointed a sexually oriented business permit review committee, which will then begin hearing appeals. When the 1991 appeal has been heard, businesses will have to resubmit an application for a current permit.

"I'm trying to figure out what was done that was so horribly wrong, because at least one client had a valid permit, and several other clubs have hearings pending," said Steve Swander, an attorney who has represented adult cabarets in Texas and other states. "I certainly don't think dancers and other personnel should be charged with operating without a permit."

County, city still tied up on jail fees

Tarrant, Fort Worth unable to reach deal

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County is losing about \$3.3 million a year housing Fort Worth prisoners, county officials say.

Fort Worth officials say they're willing to pay their "fair share" of the cost of jailing its prisoners, which they calculate to be about \$1.8 million a year.

Although that's \$100,000 more than Fort Worth paid Tarrant County last year, it's \$3.2 million short of the \$5 million the county estimates it will spend this year to process and house city prisoners.

For eight months, city and county officials have tried to work out the details of a successor to the 10-year contract that expired in October 1996, but the talks have stalled.

"We are a good ways apart," Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr said. "There is disagreement over allocation of funds."

County Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said the two sides "are at a standstill, an impasse."

Paying what the county requests, city officials say, would go beyond supporting Fort Worth's prisoners and involve subsidizing the total cost of running the jail.

"We're not in agreement on what costs should be included," said Bob Terrell, Fort Worth city manager. "We don't have any problem paying our fair share, but we haven't been able to agree on a number."

A February 1997 study of Tarrant County jail costs by David M. Griffith Associates of Dallas

found that it cost \$99 to process a prisoner in and out of jail, and an average of about \$40 a day to house each inmate.

The city's "internal auditors" take exception to the county's estimate, Terrell said. Fort Worth's last offer to the county, in November, was for \$34 per prisoner per day, which would include processing and housing costs.

The old contract was signed in 1985 as part of the construction of a city police headquarters and county jail at 350 W. Belknap St. The city paid \$10.9 million and the county \$6 million for the building, occupied by Fort Worth police on the bottom floors and the Tarrant jail on the top floors.

Under that agreement, Fort Worth paid \$6 for each prisoner processed and a \$1 a day for housing. The daily housing fee rose to \$30 by October 1996 and remains that; but the processing fee has stayed at \$6.

For inmates booked in and out of jail in four hours or less, the city pays only the processing fee. The prisoners become the county's responsibility after charges are filed against them, usually within two days.

"It's the upfront processing fee that costs the most," said G.K. Maenius, county administrator. "We've been operating the jail at a loss to offset the extra money the city paid for the police building."

According to county records and city estimates, about 65 percent of the prisoners booked into the jail are arrested by Fort Worth police. Of 50,228 prisoners booked into the jail last year, 32,215 were Fort Worth inmates. County officials expect an overall 10 percent increase in the jail population this year.

Many of the Fort Worth prisoners are arrested for Class C misdemeanors, the lowest level of crime. For example, the city arrested 5,171 for public intoxication, a Class C misdemeanor, last year. They are often booked into and released from jail in less than a day, Maenius said.

A shorter jail stay is costly because of the hours it takes to do such tasks as fingerprinting, showering, issuing clothes and doing inventory of property. The county also must bear the costs of bedding, clothing, laundry, building maintenance, medical and mental health care as well as maintain unused jail capacity. Maenius said.

In 1989, the county stopped accepting some city prisoners because some state inmates held in the Tarrant jail weren't being removed as quickly as expected. Fort Worth sued the county and then-Sheriff Don Carpenter for \$2 million, alleging that the county failed to meet its contractual obligations.

"It's the upfront processing fee that costs the most. We've been operating the jail at a loss to offset the extra money the city paid for the police building."

— G.K. Maenius,
county administrator

During those periods, Fort Worth held its prisoners in what was known as the "chicken coop," makeshift cells in a fenced-in part of the fourth floor at police headquarters — or sent them elsewhere. As the state began accepting its backlog of inmates, the county stopped turning away city prisoners. The suit was dismissed in 1994, and the county paid the city \$277,886.

Dallas County charges the city of Dallas \$51 to take each prisoner into jail, \$35 to release them and \$25 a day to house them, County Administrator Allen Clemson said.

"It's tough, Clemson said. "In our situation, the city simply pays its share," said

In Dallas, Bexar and Harris counties, those arrested for public intoxication go to city-run facilities instead of county jails, officials said.

In Houston, which spends \$14 million annually on its city jail, it costs \$99 a day to process a prisoner, nearly all of whom stay for a day or less, said John Cannon, Houston Police Department spokesman.

"From a jail management standpoint it makes sense, because there are different standards for city and county jails," Clemson said.

City jails are not covered by state statute or regulated by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, said Jack Crump, executive director.

County jail standards, established by the Local Government Code, cover ventilation, lighting, heating, cell size — 40 square feet for a one-person cell — as well as sanitation, food requirements and the ratio of guards to prisoners, Crump said.

Terrell said Fort Worth does not have "options for incarceration," other than the county jail.

"We've got nowhere to put them [the prisoners]. We have to agree on a reasonable amount to pay the county,"

The city, he said, is willing to pay retroactively to October, the beginning of this fiscal year.

Barr said Fort Worth always has the option of opening its own jail, but "I don't think that is the answer."

Ron Bertel, Tarrant County assistant auditor who has been negotiating for the county, said Fort Worth should pay less than it would cost the city to operate its own jail. "It should be a good deal for both of us," he said.

Damage claim filed for raided nude club

\$62,500 sought from Tarrant after arrests

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A lawyer for some nude dancing clubs raided by sheriff's deputies Feb. 4 filed a claim for damages against Tarrant County yesterday on behalf of one club, eight of its dancers and four other employees.

The claim seeks \$62,500 — \$5,000 for each dancer, a disc jockey, a waitress, a cook and the manager of the Showcase II cabaret — and an additional \$2,500 in attorney fees for James O. Ward, the club's owner, said attorney Steve Swander.

In a five-page letter to the Commissioners Court, Swander said that the Showcase employees suffered false arrest and loss of liberty. They were arrested because the club did not have its permit posted in the proper location.

"We are talking about the enforcement action by the sheriff, not about the county's sexually oriented business ordinance itself," Swander said.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff and Commissioners J.D. Johnson and Glen Whitley received the claim yesterday, but

declined to talk about it or the raid.

"I can't comment on it, and I have no idea of the claim's legitimacy," Vandergriff said.

None of those arrested at the Showcase has been charged with a crime, and district attorney officials said yesterday they were unsure if any of the others arrested had been charged. About 55 people were arrested at five clubs and five adult bookstores during the all-night raid, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, sheriff's spokesman. The five clubs were closed the night of the raids, but all had reopened two nights later.

"The paperwork on all the cases has been reviewed by the district attorney, and they advised to hold off on filing charges pending a final resolution of the legal status of the clubs' permits," Skidmore said.

Assistant District Attorneys Marvin Collins and Ray Rike said they hadn't seen the claim and

declined to comment on it.

Swander said he focused the initial claim on the Showcase II because the club had a valid permit, although it was posted in the office and not near the front door as required by county ordinance. He said he will probably submit claims for two additional clubs that had 1991 Sheriff's Department letters that serve as temporary permits.

"They are not going to win the lawsuit. They were clearly in violation of the ordinance," said Cherie Pass, 32, who daily drives by one of the clubs in western Tarrant County and has pushed Tarrant County officials to make the clubs obey the law. "If anybody is in the wrong, the clubs are."

The businesses were advised of the regulations in 1990 and should comply, she said.

The county ordinance requires any sexually oriented business to obtain a permit to operate in Tarrant County, and to renew that permit annually. All such businesses are required to be at least 1,000 feet from any licensed day care center, church, dwelling, school, public park or other enterprise.

Charles "Butch" Turner, manager of the Showcase II near Interstate 35W and Golden Triangle Boulevard, said the raid "caused a lot of people a lot of trauma," because those arrested were jailed 24 hours and were not allowed to make a phone call in the first 12 hours.

"Baby sitters didn't know what happened to the mothers of the children they were caring for," he said, adding that other club employees tried to contact the families of those arrested.

In letters to Swander, dancers wrote that the arrest had thrown their lives into chaos and that they now fear going to work.

Swander said the dancers and workers want their arrest records expunged and to be compensated for the costs they incurred from the arrest.

The district attorney is determining which clubs may be in violation of the county ordinance, and the study is to be completed next month. A sexually oriented business permit review committee of the Commissioners Court is expected to then begin permit hearings.

"We are talking about the enforcement action by the sheriff, not about the county's sexually oriented business ordinance itself."

—Steve Swander,
attorney for
Showcase II manager
Charles "Butch"
Turner

Nearly \$400,000 provided for Tarrant officer training

AUSTIN — Tarrant County law enforcement agencies and fire departments received almost \$400,000 in supplemental training funds from a pool of money filled by a special \$2 fee levied on court cases across the state.

More than \$6 million was distributed statewide under the program begun in 1995.

In Tarrant County, the Sheriff's Department received \$108,575 and the Fort Worth Police Department took in \$105,224. The next highest lump sum, \$42,083, went to the Arlington Police Department.

The rest was divided in increments ranging from about \$650 to \$8,400 among the smaller communities' police and fire departments and the eight county constable precincts.

The funds are to be used to train officers to meet criteria established by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education.

Claims against county for raids top \$150,000

Saturday, February 28, 1998

Nude and topless dancing clubs strike back against the Sheriff's Department.

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Claims against Tarrant County for damages in connection with the sheriff's Feb. 4 raids on nude and topless dancing clubs are mounting.

A claim for \$90,000 was filed yesterday on behalf of two clubs that were closed for at least one day and for dancers

and other employees arrested during the raids.

Coupled with the \$62,500 claim filed Monday for the Showcase II cabaret and its employees, the county faces claims totaling more than \$150,000 for the raids.

Five clubs and five adult bookstores were shuttered for permit violations in the raids. About 55 people were arrested for working at the clubs and bookstores that didn't have permits, didn't have them posted or had them posted in an improper location, sheriff's

officials said.

All of the clubs that filed claims with the county had permits to operate, said attorney Steve Swander, who represents the clubs and employees.

The claims filed yesterday include \$5,000 for each of the 11 dancers and employees of the New West topless club and \$2,500 in legal fees; and \$5,000 for each of the four dancers and employees of Club Dreams, \$2,500 in legal fees and \$10,000 for loss of business and reputation, he said.

The employees suffered false arrest, loss of liberty, an arrest record and humiliation, Swander wrote in connection with the claims. The motivation for the sheriff's raids was to suppress the entertainment at the club, he said. Many of the clubs were visited by sheriff's deputies on a daily basis before the raids and there was never any mention of a permit violation, Swander added.

"They were looking for a technical violation, but they reached too far when they arrested all the personnel," Swander said. The issue is the enforcement action by the sheriff, not the county's sexually oriented business ordinance, he said.

None of those arrested in the raids who have filed claims have been charged with a crime, officials in the district attorney's office said yesterday.

Cmdr. James Skidmore, the sheriff's spokesman, said the paperwork on all the cases has been reviewed by the district

attorney, who "advised to hold off on filing charges" until a review of the "legal status" of the clubs' permits is completed.

Assistant District Attorney Ray Rike declined to comment on the claims. Other county officials also declined to comment.

Unlike the Showcase, which had a valid county permit but which authorities say didn't have it properly posted near the entrance, the two other clubs were operating by virtue of a 1991 Sheriff's Department letter that served as a temporary permit.

"I lost a couple of good employees because they were terrified about going back to jail," said Richard Milan, New West manager. "Everything they did was wrong. It's a waste of taxpayers' money to go after us for a little piece of paper that we had legally. We didn't break any law."

The dancers and workers want their arrest records expunged and compensation for the costs of the arrest, Swander said.

"It's difficult to put a value on the loss liberty," he said.

The county's sexually oriented business ordinance requires businesses to apply for and receive a Tarrant County permit and to renew that permit annually. The businesses must be at least 1,000 feet from any licensed day-care center, church, dwelling, school, public park or other enterprise.

The district attorney is doing a site-distance study to determine which clubs may be in violation of the ordinance. The Commissioners Court has appointed a sexually oriented business permit review committee, which is expected to begin permit hearings next month.

Sheriff returns to Commissioners Court, but says little

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams attended Commissioners Court yesterday for the first time in five months, but he said only two sentences and never formally addressed the county commissioners.

For several months the commissioners have asked that Williams publicly discuss staffing and rising overtime costs at the jail, a request for expensive sport utility vehicles, the department's grounded helicopter program and other Sheriff's Department issues.

But his unannounced appearance yesterday turned into a strained and rare drama for the court, with little interaction between the sheriff and the commissioners, and much left unsaid.

Sitting against the back wall of the courtroom, Williams, dressed in coat and tie, listened as his executive chief deputy,

Hank Pope, gave a monthly summary of department activities. Next to Williams on the bench sat his biggest campaign contributor, Ed Max.

During his 30 minutes at the meeting, Williams never offered to speak, and when questioned by Commissioner J.D. Johnson about too much jailer overtime, he simply nodded his head in agreement.

When Commissioner Glen Whitley asked if the lack of communication with the court on the sheriff's request for 21 Chevrolet Tahoes meant that the department had scrapped its request for the \$30,000 vehicles, Williams, without rising from his seat, uttered a one-sentence response.

"We're exploring that process," he said.

After court, in an interview in his office, Williams explained his reticence by saying that County Judge Tom Vandergriff had moved to

another topic.

"It was clear the judge was introducing the other people. It seemed like the issues had been discussed," he said. "For four years I attended Commissioners Court with little notice. It's curious to me that all of a sudden I am now in demand."

But Johnson, once Williams staunchest supporter, said after court: "He made an appearance. I can't answer for him and I don't understand. I did everything I knew to do to try to talk to him and get him to talk to us. We have a lot of pending problems, but that overtime gets to me."

Pope said in his report that for the month of February, the department was short 121 detention officers from its full complement of 965 jailers — 39 officers loaned out, 29 candidates in jailers school and 41 vacancies.

During summer budget discussions the commissioners balked at Williams' request for additional deputies because four dozen jailers reassigned to other tasks in 1995 to avoid layoffs — supervising work release prisoners, warrants, court security, jail laundry and administrative tasks — are still not working in the jail.

Although county and sheriff's officials agree that much of the success of the sheriff's warrant service program is a result of reassigned jailers serving warrants, the commissioners insist that jailers should

work in the jail. If the sheriff needs people in other departments, he should request them, because the transfer of jailers to other tasks was never permanent.

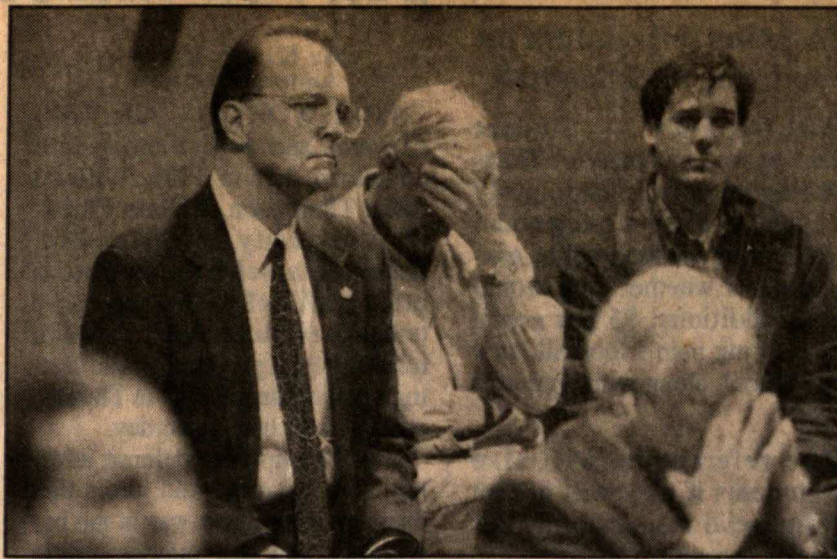
"It's costing the county time-and-a-half for these positions that should be in the jail," Johnson said. "I'm not willing to pay that for a Crime Stopper or an assistant to the chaplain."

Williams, for his part, says his requests for additional personnel have been turned down.

As for the Tahoes, Williams said after the meeting that he was "looking at different scenarios. I don't see us floating a request for 21 Tahoes."

The sheriff's helicopter program was not addressed yesterday in court.

"At this point we need to build communications with the sheriff," Whitley said. "Our goal has never been to embarrass him."



Star-Telegram/RON T. ENNIS

Sheriff David Williams, left, sits on the back row at the Commissioners Court yesterday while his deputy chief answers questions.

Sunday, March 8, 1998

Inmate jeers greet suspects in slaying

BY JEFF PRINCE
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Two self-described killers, so talkative and cavalier after their arrest on Tuesday, were stone silent as deputies escorted them to the Tarrant County Jail yesterday morning.

Both were arraigned on charges of capital murder, with bail set at \$500,000, in the death of Arlington teen-ager Amy Robinson, who disappeared Feb. 15.

Gangly, redheaded Robert Neville, 23, scowled as deputies led him in shackles through the jail's basement parking lot. Neville ignored questions from a line of

reporters, then answered only basic questions from deputies — name, acknowledgment of his rights — as he was arraigned, fingerprinted and placed in a holding cell.

A smirking Michael Hall, 18, wore the same dizzy expression he displayed during a jail-house interview in Eagle Pass three days ago, when he reveled about Robinson's death.

Other Tarrant County inmates, looking through the security windows of their cells, gave the county's newest prisoners a jeering, gesture-filled welcome. Hall and Neville were placed in isolated, maximum

(More on JAIL on Page 4)

security cells where they will be kept under suicide watch, Sheriff David Williams said.

The hostile reaction from fellow prisoners is not unusual in high-profile cases, especially one involving unrepentant suspects, Williams said.

"We process over 50,000 prisoners a year in this jail. Many are hardened criminals," Williams said. "I don't know that we've seen many people who have shown such a lack of remorse and humanity."

Hall and Neville await hearings to deter-

mine a need for court-appointed attorneys, a process that will probably occur this week, said Cmdr. James Skidmore.

"There is also a possibility of additional charges," Skidmore said. "That's up to the Arlington Police Department and the district attorney's office."

The two Arlington residents were arrested Tuesday at the Eagle Pass International Bridge as they tried to cross into Piedras Negras, Mexico, on foot. Both said that they killed Robinson, telling police where they could find her body in a Fort Worth field.

After gloating about the girl's torture and shooting death during a chilling interview on Thursday, both men said they were prepared to die for their crime.

Sheriff's deputies on Friday planned to take the suspects by van from Eagle Pass to Fort Worth. Mechanical problems, however, delayed the trip. Deputies drove to Eagle Pass in two cars and returned yesterday with the prisoners fettered in chains in the caged back seats.

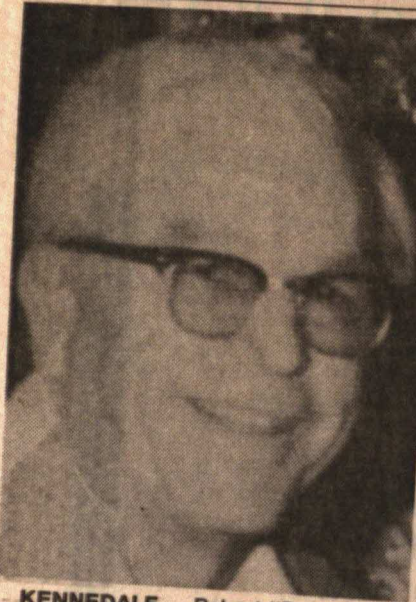
Hall stayed quiet or slept during most of the six-hour trip, Williams said.

Neville began the trip by eying the Fugitive Squad insignia on one of the deputy's uniforms and attempting a wry joke, Williams said.

"He said, 'I'm not a fugitive,'" Williams said. "The deputy said, 'You're right, not anymore.'"

OBITUARIES

Robert Ralph Stone



KENNEDALE — Robert "Bob" Ralph Stone, 78, a retired Marine Corps officer, Tarrant County chief deputy sheriff and owner of Mustang Hill Auto, died Saturday, March 7, 1998, at a Fort Worth hospital.

Funeral: 10 a.m. Tuesday at Emerald Hills Funeral Home in Kennedale. Burial with military honors: Haven Memories Memorial Park in Canton. Visitation: 7 to 9 p.m. Monday at the funeral home.

Stone, born July 28, 1919, in Kansas City, Mo. retired as a Marine Corps major after 21-years of service, having served in the Pacific in World War II and the Korean War.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Florine Spear Stone of Canton.

Stone, known variously to his friends as "Chief," "Major," and "Bob," served with distinction in the battle of Iwo Jima. The highly decorated veteran received 14 metals for valor, including the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, and numerous ribbons. He was a Marine Corps tanker and was personally singled out and congratulated by President Harry S Truman during ceremonies in Washington D.C.

He will be dearly missed by all who knew him.

Survivors: Daughters, Janis V. Boe of Kennedale, Glenda G. Czikkalla of Jacksonville, N.C.; sister, Gertrude Pratt of Newark, Del.; grandchildren, Trenton Boe, Aaron Boe, Victoria Boe, Samantha Boe, Holly Boe, Kathleen Boe, Robert Czikkalla, Michael Czikkalla; and great grandchildren, Lauren Boe and Breanna Boe.

Emerald Hills Funeral Home
500 Sublett Road, 572-1681

OBITUARIES

Thursday, March 19, 1998 / Star-Telegram

Frank Harris Pope

NORTH RICHLAND HILLS — Frank Harris Pope Sr., 82, a retired printer, died Wednesday, March 18, 1998, at a North Richland Hills Hospital.



Funeral: 2 p.m. Friday at Mount Olivet Funeral Home. Burial: Bluebonnet Hills Memorial Park in Colleyville.

Mr. Pope was born Sept. 19, 1915, in Amarillo.

He was a retired former partner of Whalin Printing Company. He was a member of Richland Hills Christian Church and served in the Field Artillery School in Fort Sill, Okla., as a technical sergeant from Nov. 19, 1940, to Oct. 20, 1945, in the Army during World War II.

He had been a resident of Fort Worth since 1955. A printer, salesman and manager by trade, he was a perfectionist and skilled craftsman by way of life. He managed Rileys Reproduction Company until he went into his own business and was elected president of the South Mid-Continent Blue Print Association in 1968.

His wife of 58 years, Earline Karr Pope, is a retired former employee of A-1 Rental in Fort Worth.

He was preceded in death by his mother; father; four brothers; and one sister.

Survivors: Wife of 58 years, Earlean Karr Pope of North Richland Hills; son, attorney at law, Frank H. Pope Jr., and wife, Judy, of Waxahachie, Tarrant County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Hank Pope and wife, Karen, of Fort Worth; granddaughters, Aimee Pope Woods and husband, Ronnie, of Dublin, Sasha Pope Tooman and husband, Tyso, of Fort Worth, Megan Pope of Waxahachie and Lyndsey Pope of Fort Worth; grandson, Justin H. Pope and wife, Lacie, of Hurst; great-grandchildren, Mackenzie, Bailey and Aubrey Woods, Kendale Pope and Hunter Tooman; and numerous nieces and nephews throughout Texas and Oklahoma.

Mount Olivet Funeral Home
2301 N. Sylvania Ave., 831-0511

Tarrant sheriff wins anti-teen smoking grant

BY KAREN ROUSE
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

A \$25,000 grant from the state comptroller's office may be used to stake out businesses that illegally sell cigarettes to minors in Tarrant County.

The county's Sheriff's Department was among five agencies awarded \$25,000 grants to be used to deter teen-age smoking. The other four were the Houston, Dallas, Austin and Pasadena police departments.

Altogether, the comptroller's office distributed \$400,000 to 91 law enforcement agencies in 60 Texas counties. Grants announced yesterday ranged from \$2,000 to \$25,000.

State comptroller John Sharp said the agencies applied for funds under Senate Bill 55, which was passed in the last legislative session and is aimed at curtailing teen-age smoking by limiting access to tobacco products, and providing teen education and penalties against minors or retailers who violate laws.

The comptroller's office based awards upon the number of licensed tobacco retailers in a law enforcement agency's jurisdiction.

Cmdr. James Skidmore, spokesman for the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, said the grant possibly "could be utilized for salaries for people talking to

students" and "overtime for existing personnel to check for voluntary compliance at stores that sold cigarettes that underage people traditionally go to," he said.

Other recipients of \$2,000 grants include Azle, Crowley, Euless, Haltom City, Keller, Flower Mound, Rowlett and DeSoto police departments, and Hood County Sheriff's Department. The Denton County Sheriff's Department won \$10,000.

the Denton Police Department and Parker County Sheriff's Department each received \$5,000.

In greater Northeast Tarrant County, police officials said, the money will be used mostly for overtime for officers working to curb teen smoking.

"I'm happy for whatever amount we got. With the money, we may be able to go from quarterly checks at stores to monthly visits," said Haltom City Assistant Police Chief Roger Macon, referring to stops at tobacco retailers.

Euless police Capt. Joey Ziemian said some of the money will be used in undercover sting operations that help authorities clamp down on retailers who sell tobacco products to youths.

Anyone with questions regarding teen smoking can call the 24-hour Texas Tobacco Prevention Hotline at (800) 345-8647.

Staff writer Domingo Ramirez Jr. contributed to this report.

County told it must bid jail food service contract

By KRISTIN N. SULLIVAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A Tarrant County Jail food service contract that pays about \$4.4 million a year to Mid-States Services of Dallas must be offered for competitive bid this year, the Texas attorney general says.

Tarrant County commissioners, still

concerned after a near-riot over another company's bad jail food in 1992, sought an opinion from Attorney General Dan Morales' office because they like working with the Mid-States staff, Commissioner J.D. Johnson said.

"When I was called over there, I walked through about four inches of slop and sewer on the kitchen floor. It

was one of the most disgusting things I had ever seen," Johnson said. "I called the Mid-States guy that day, and he came over and took over right away.

"It's a sensitive issue, and we've got a good contractor over there running it now."

Commissioners are scheduled to consider seeking bids for jail food service

during their 10 a.m. meeting today at the County Administration Building, 100 E. Weatherford St.

Mid-States owner Elbert M. "Jack" Madera, a regular contributor to county officials' campaigns, did not return telephone calls seeking comment on the ruling. A secretary said Madera does not

(More on FOOD on Page 6)



Star-Telegram/RON JENKINS

Part of a regular meal awaits an inmate yesterday at the Tarrant County Jail, where Mid-States Services holds a \$4.4 million contract.

give interviews and referred questions to a company vice president, who did not return calls.

In a letter dated March 19, the attorney general's office issued an opinion saying that a food service contract worth more than \$15,000 may not be awarded without competitive bidding.

In July, the district attorney's office asked whether a food service vendor, with a staff that includes professional dietitians, provides a personal or professional service that is not subject to competitive bidding laws.

Mid-States Services won a three-year contract in July 1992 to provide three meals a day to Tarrant County Jail inmates. The menus must be prepared by a dietitian and must meet state jail standards for nutrition, said Jack Beacham, county purchasing agent.

County commissioners extended the Mid-States contract for three consecutive years. The county currently pays Mid-States .961 cents per meal for each prisoner, which garners the company an estimated \$4.4 million a year, Beacham said. But this year, commissioners will have to seek new bids under the attorney general's opinion.

"Because we were pleased with the service Mid-States had provided, I don't know if we would have bid it out if we didn't have to," Commissioner Glen Whitley said.

Mid-States also controls the Tarrant County Jail commissary, which operates from mobile carts that are rolled through the jail's housing units, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a spokesman for Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams.

Williams did not return calls or a fax seeking comment on county contracts with Mid-States.

Under the commissary agreement, Mid-States pays the county \$2 per prisoner per month for the right to sell cigarettes, snacks, toothpaste, lotion and other sundries to inmates. The county makes between \$80,000 and \$100,000 in revenue from Mid-States; an audit showed that the company grossed \$1,893,910 from commissary sales in fiscal year 1995-96, said Ron Bertel, the county's first assistant auditor.

Mid-States also operates the commissary for the Dallas County jail system, runs Dallas County's cafeteria in the Frank Crowley Courts Building and holds the county's vending machine concession contract, said Linda Boles, a Dallas County contract analyst.

Last week's opinion from the attorney general recalls a previous legal dispute over Mid-States' business with Tarrant County. In 1987, commissioners recommended letting the jail

commissary contract, known as the "banana wagon," to a competing vendor. But then-Sheriff Don Carpenter signed his own agreement with Mid-States and refused to let the other firm into the jail.

The dispute advanced to the state court of appeals. But since then, changes in state law give the sheriff exclusive authority over the jail commissary business, said Ray Rike, an assistant district attorney for Tarrant County.

Since 1995, Madera has given at least \$1,900 in cash to District Attorney Tim Curry's re-election campaign and two prized shotguns for Curry's fall fund-raiser.

Madera contributed \$2,400 to Johnson's 1996 campaign and \$500 to Johnson's 1997 campaign. Madera gave \$1,000 toward Commissioner Dionne Bagsby's 1996 re-election; he gave \$150 to Whitley's campaign fund in January 1997.

Bagsby was unavailable for comment yesterday. Commissioner Marti Van Ravenswaay was out of the office recovering from recent surgery.

Tarrant will rebid jail's food contract

The deal, worth \$4 million a year, has been renewed without bidding since 1992.

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County officials voted unanimously yesterday to rebid the food services contract for the Tarrant County Jail.

The contract, with Mid-States Services of Dallas, to feed Tarrant County's 3,500 prisoners will be competitively bid for the first

time since 1992 because of a ruling by the Texas Attorney General. The contract is worth about \$4 million a year.

Mid-States' one-year contract was renewed three times, on one-year renewal options, but beginning in 1996 it was continued because the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department approved of the job the vendor was doing. County officials were also awaiting an attorney general's ruling on whether the contract had to be competitively bid.

"We were advised by the sher-

(More on JAIL on Page 2)

Jail

From Page 1

iff's department that they were getting excellent service and that they wished to continue with that vendor," said County Judge Tom Vandergriff. "We were agreeable to continue but we felt it was necessary to ask for an opinion from the attorney general."

The Tarrant County district attorney, in a July 11, 1997 letter, asked the attorney general if the Mid-States contract was exempt from being competitively bid because it was either a personal or professional service.

But the attorney general's office ruled in a March 19 letter that a county jail food services contract worth more than \$15,000 can only be awarded through the competitive bidding process.

"Such a contract is not a personal services contract, nor — even if professionals play some part in its execution — is it a professional services contract," the ruling said.

Mid-States officials declined to comment yesterday.

Sheriff's spokesman Cmdr. James Skidmore said Mid-States has done "a very good job of providing quality service for a minimum price." The company has consistently met state jail standards and county health stan-

dards, he said.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said the county is going "to make sure the company that gets the contract is a qualified jail food provider."

Vandergriff said the county would advertise for bids as soon as possible.

County Purchaser Jack Beacham said a new contract, either with Mid-States or another vendor, would be in place by July.

Skidmore said the sheriff's department would probably be able to work with whoever gets the contract.

"Anyone that can earn that contract can most likely meet our needs," he said.

Section B, Page 8 / Star-Telegram / Thursday, March 26, 1998

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher

MICHAEL BLACKMAN, Vice President, Editorial Director

JACK B. TINSLEY, Vice President, Community Affairs

JIM WITT, Vice President, Executive Editor

E D I T O R I A L S

Jail Food

TARRANT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS have found out that sometimes being the stewards of the public dollar is a frustrating job.

The county has contracted with the same company since 1992 to provide food service for the Tarrant County Jail. Mid-States Services of Dallas, by all accounts from the Sheriff's Department, which oversees the service, is doing a good job. But since 1996, the commissioners have let the company continue to provide services without putting the \$4 million-a-year contract up for bid.

Therein lies the problem.

Anyone who's been around these parts for a while can remember what a nightmare jail food service was under previous sheriffs. It's hard not to blame the commissioners for wanting to stick with a provider that works. But the attorney general has ruled that any jail food service contract worth more than \$15,000 annually must be awarded through a competitive bidding process.

The court did the right thing this week when it voted to put the contract out for bid rather than to fight the ruling. If Mid-States is as good as the Sheriff's Department says it is — and can provide food at a competitive rate — the company should have a healthy edge in securing the contract through the bidding process.

7 Tahoes won't be delivered to sheriff

Commissioners want list of vehicles used by department

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners hit the brakes yesterday on the delivery of seven new 1998 Chevrolet Tahoes to the Sheriff's Department.

The \$28,950 sport utility vehicles specially equipped for police work, delivered to the county March 20, will not be released to the sheriff until the Commissioners Court gets a complete list of the sheriff's vehicles along with a description of their use and who the cars are assigned to, the commissioners said yesterday.

But Sheriff David Williams said he isn't sure that it is "wise" to provide such lists and to make them public because of security concerns.

"I need to huddle with my command staff to see if it's really what we want to do. We have to protect undercover cars," Williams said. "My staff has done back flips to provide this court with information they've requested and much of that is sensitive in nature from the security perspective."

The commissioners said their action was prompted by the finding that five new \$19,963 Ford Crown Victorias — delivered to the county and assigned to the sheriff — were never picked up and have been in the county garage since June 10, nearly 10 months.

"We clearly have to call into question why brand new vehicles are sitting there unused," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he, too, doesn't understand why the vehicles were never

put into service if the Sheriff's Department needs new vehicles.

"I don't understand what the holdup is. I certainly hope the Tahoes don't sit out there that long," he said.

Williams said that the Fords did not meet the department's "expectations" and that they have

required extra maintenance.

"But I'm ready for them now," he said. "I want to put everything the department has purchased into the fleet."

Commissioner Glen Whitley said he "would not release any vehicle [to the sheriff] until we get the list." County Judge Tom Vandergriff asked the commissioners if there was agreement and they concurred. Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay was not present because she is recovering from back surgery.

The commissioners and the sheriff have wrangled over vehicles since last summer, when Williams asked the commissioners to buy a fleet of 30 Tahoes for the department.

But the commissioners balked at the request, recommending instead that Williams purchase a mix of the trucks and less-expensive sedans. They allotted \$675,000 for new sheriff's vehicles and allowed the sheriff to decide how to spend the money. Williams then asked for 21 Tahoes

and no sedans. The commissioners balked again and Williams never resubmitted a new vehicle request.

Now the opportunity to buy new vehicles for next year has passed, said Jack Beacham, Tarrant County purchaser, because car manufacturers make police vehicles only at the beginning of the model year. It's too late to order 1999 vehicles, he said.

Williams said the department will nevertheless have to replace and purchase some new vehicles. He is interested in reconditioning some of the department's present vehicles.

"Since last summer we have been working on a plan to refurbish some of the vehicles. It's a cost effective alternative to buying new ones," Williams said.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of the sheriff, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have the final say over the sheriff's budget and the county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

Sheriff's officials have in the past told commissioners that the Tahoes equipped with the special police package would be used for patrol. The Sheriff's Department now has three 1997 Tahoes that cost \$27,433 each and the seven 1998 models being withheld by the commissioners.

The department had been using the Chevrolet Caprice with the police package as its main patrol vehicle, but that model has been discontinued. Last year the department bought 17 Ford Crown Victorias.

Sheriff to give vehicle list to commissioners

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams said yesterday that he will give county commissioners a list of Sheriff's Department vehicles in hopes that his department will get to use seven 1998 Chevrolet Tahoes the commissioners have declared off limits.

Williams' announcement came a day after the commissioners

decided to hold onto the \$28,950 sport utility vehicles equipped for police work until they get an explanation of why five of the sheriff's new Ford Crown Victorias — worth a total of about \$100,000 — have sat unused in the county garage for nearly a year. The commissioners asked the sheriff for an inventory of department vehicles and a description of their use.

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

"I'm prepared to put together a list of where vehicles are deployed, with the exception of [unmarked] vehicles for which security needs to be maintained," Williams said at an impromptu news conference in his office. "I would hope they release all the vehicles."

Commissioner J.D. Johnson called Williams' action yesterday "a step in the right direction."

He said the commissioners will need to review the vehicle list.

Of the Fords, Williams said:

"They haven't been available to us."

The county commissioners and administrators applauded Williams' decision to turn over a vehicle list, but they said the Sheriff's Department could have gotten the Fords at any time.

G.K. Maenius, county administrator, said the county garage repeatedly called the Sheriff's Department about the Fords. A month ago sheriff's officials said they would notify the garage when they were ready to accept the Fords, he said.

In explaining why the Fords were never moved into the Sheriff's vehicle fleet, Williams set forth a number of options, never

settling on a single explanation.

He initially said the Fords lacked county decals, but then said the decals had been on the cars for six months. He said the cars were unavailable because they were behind "a locked gate" at the garage. He also said he did not pick them up because, under a county policy he disagrees with, he would have had to exchange a used vehicle for a new one. Williams wants to refurbish his current fleet of older Chevrolet Caprices because, he said, they are superior to the Fords.

Maenius called Williams' explanations "absolutely ridiculous."

"The gates to the garage are open from 7 a.m. till 4 p.m.," he said.

"There's an established county policy for swapping out vehicles," he said. The Sheriff's Department could hang onto the Caprice and turn in the worst cars in the fleet, as they have done in the past, Maenius said, adding that Williams has never talked to the Commissioners Court about a vehicle refurbishment program.

Johnson said Williams' options are limited.

"He needs so many cars, and those he's not using he's going to turn in. That's the way it is in county government," Johnson said.

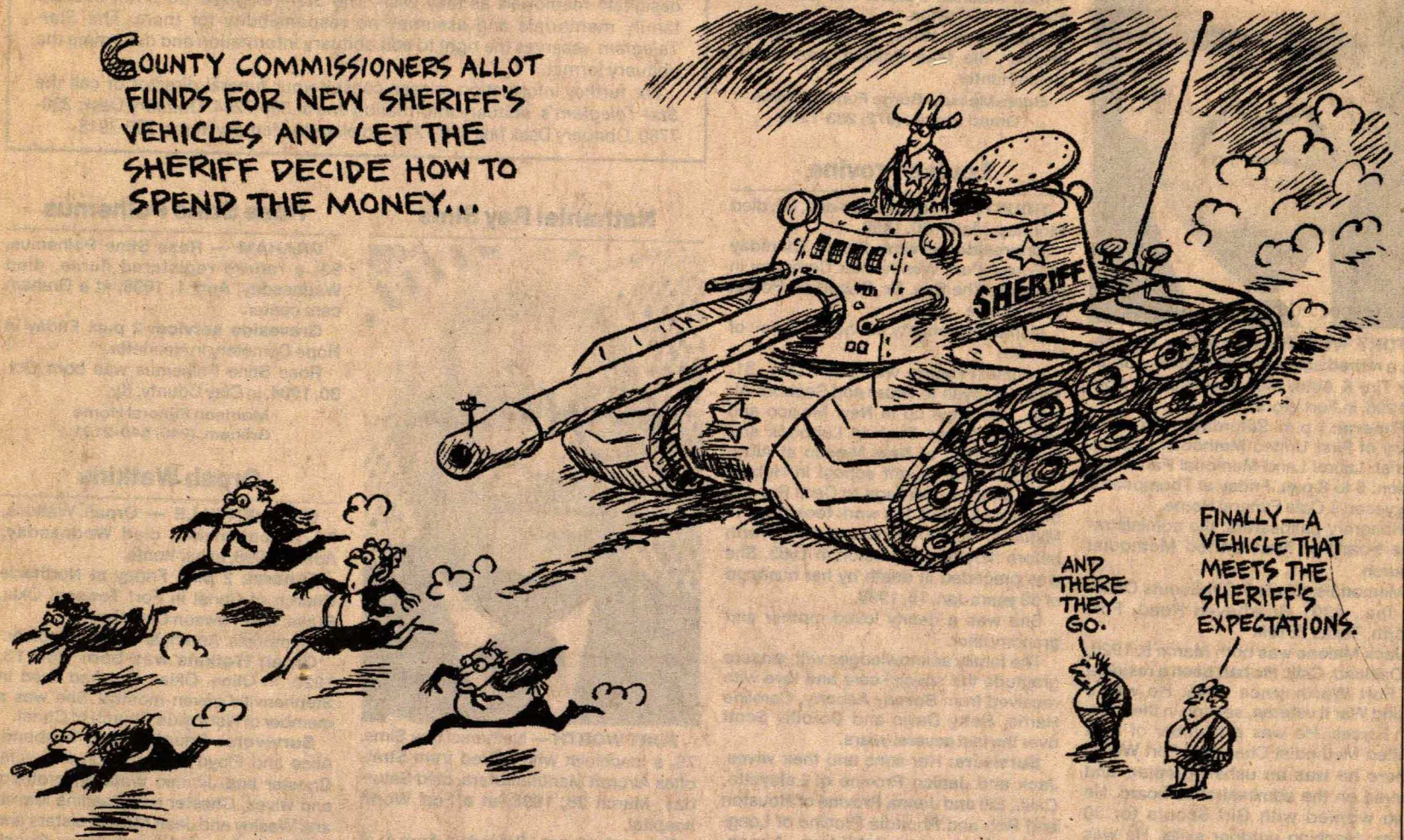
County Judge Tom Vandergriff

said he was pleased that Williams is giving the court "the information it has the responsibility to receive. We have a responsibility, just as he has," he said.

Commissioner Glen Whitley said he was peeved that Williams would not allow the county's new press information officer, Mark Flake, into yesterday's news conference.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of sheriff, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have authority over county contracts and purchasing and final say over the sheriff's budget. The county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ALLOT FUNDS FOR NEW SHERIFF'S VEHICLES AND LET THE SHERIFF DECIDE HOW TO SPEND THE MONEY...



AND THERE THEY GO.

FINALLY—A VEHICLE THAT MEETS THE SHERIFF'S EXPECTATIONS.

Star-Telegram / Thursday, April 2, 1998

Somethin'

AS *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*'S Rosanne Rosanna-danna used to say, "It's always somethin'."

That seems to be the motto of late for the tiff between the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department and the Commissioners Court. The most recent "somethin'" was the revelation that five brand-new but never-used police-package Ford Crown Victorias have been sitting in the county garage collecting dust since June 10.

There isn't a law enforcement agency in the world that isn't constantly crying for new vehicles, so the obvious question is: Why didn't Sheriff David Williams — or whoever is overseeing the department's motor pool — put the five new cars into the fleet as soon as they arrived? Williams' explanation that the almost \$100,000 worth of vehicles required extra maintenance just raises another question: How can five cars that have never had the rubber hit the road need 10 months of extra maintenance?

The county commissioners, frustrated by this latest discovery, are holding up delivery of seven much-desired Tahoes until the sheriff can provide an accurate accounting of department vehicles.

As stewards of the taxpayers' dollars, the commissioners have a vested interest in knowing how the Sheriff's Department is spending its vehicle money. A list of what's being driven is a reasonable request. What the commissioners don't have any business demanding are vehicle identification numbers, license plates or specific descriptions of any vehicle beyond year and make.

A compromise is in order, but don't hold your breath. The constant spitting contest between the commissioners and the sheriff is looking more and more like a bad *Saturday Night Live* skit — it's gone on far too long, and it's not very amusing.

Few arrested in raid will be charged

Dozens of employees of adult businesses were jailed in a Sheriff's Department sweep.

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Most of the 55 people arrested in last month's Sheriff's Department raid on nude and topless dancing clubs and adult bookstores will not be charged, Tarrant County officials say.

Dancers, bartenders, cooks, disc jockeys, waitresses and club managers arrested and jailed for 24 hours in the Feb. 4 raid faced potential misdemeanor charges. They were arrested for working at clubs and bookstores that didn't have permits posted or had them posted in the wrong location. No patrons were arrested in the raid.

"The consensus is we probably aren't going to charge the majority of the people arrested," Tarrant County District Attorney Tim Cur-

ry said.

The clubs either had permits or the equivalent — a 1991 Sheriff's Department letter allowing them to operate pending a county hearing on the permits — under the county sexually oriented businesses ordinance that was adopted seven years ago, he said.



Curry

The county failed to meet its responsibility because hearings were never held, Curry added.

Sheriff's spokesman Cmdr. James Skidmore said the department accomplished its primary goal with the raid: getting the clubs and bookstores to comply with the permit requirements of the county's sexually oriented business ordinance.

"The district attorney advised on the cases. Everyone employed at the clubs was arrested on the advice of the district attorney's office," Skidmore said, adding that

"it's not unheard of or unusual" for the district attorney not to file charges in misdemeanor cases.

Other county officials declined to comment.

Five clubs and five adult bookstores were raided and temporarily closed for the permit violations in the all-night raid. They reopened within days.

The county now faces claims totaling \$150,000 from those arrested at three clubs. The claims include \$5,000 for dancers and other club employees who say they suffered false arrest, loss of liberty, an arrest record and humiliation, and \$2,500 in legal fees per club. The claims may be considered in closed session Tuesday by the county commissioners, said attorney Steve Swander, who represents some of the clubs and employees.

"I hope that leads to a prompt settlement offer from Tarrant County," Swander said, adding that the dancers and workers want their arrest records expunged and

compensation for the costs of the arrest. "The mass arrest was clearly inappropriate."

The motivation for the raid was to suppress the entertainment at the club, Swander said. Sheriff's deputies visited many of the clubs on a daily basis before the raid and there was never any mention of a permit violation, he said.

About two dozen cases submitted to the district attorney's office for prosecution were returned to the Sheriff's Department for additional information, Assistant District Attorney Richard Alpert said.

"I have not had the Sheriff's Department tell me what they are going to do," Alpert said. The additional information sought by the district attorney involves questions about witnesses and details about what the witnesses did and observed before and during the raids, he said.

Skidmore said the Sheriff's Department will try to provide the additional information and resubmit the cases.

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher
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JACK B. TINSLEY, Vice President, Community Affairs
JIM WITT, Vice President, Executive Editor

E D I T O R I A L S

Ouch

TARRANT COUNTY SHERIFF'S Department Cmdr. James Skidmore contends that his agency consulted with the district attorney's office before arresting 55 employees during February raids at a number of sexually oriented businesses that allegedly had permit problems.

"Everyone employed at the clubs was arrested on the advice of the district attorney's office," Skidmore said last week.

Au contraire, said District Attorney Tim Curry.

"I'm not aware we advised to arrest or when to make the arrests," he said when explaining that his office will not charge most of the arrested.

Caught in the middle of this "he said/he said" battle are dozens of people who now have arrest records even though they will not be charged with any crime as a result of the Sheriff's Department's zeal to enforce the county's permit requirements.

Funny thing about asking the media to ride along during a law enforcement operation: Not only do they report on what happens during the raid, but they have a tendency to follow up on any arrests. And in this case, the follow-up includes word that most of the businesses targeted on Feb. 4 were in fact operating under the letter of the law. The clubs either had permits or the equivalent — a 1991 Sheriff's Department letter allowing them to operate pending a county hearing on the permits. Curry said that the county failed to meet its responsibility because hearings were never held.

We're not thrilled to have these clubs in Tarrant County, but they are constitutionally protected endeavors. When all is said and done, we have to question whether this shotgun approach of arresting every employee at a sexually oriented business is the most effective way of accomplishing the stated mission — to make sure such businesses are operating within the law.

Vandergriff angered by sheriff's absence

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — In a rare display of temper, Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff scolded Sheriff David Williams at yesterday's Commissioners Court meeting for not appearing to discuss sheriff's business.

"He is a public official, we are public officials, and this is public businesses," Vandergriff said at the close of yesterday's meeting. Then, he said resolutely, nearly

shouting into the microphone, "This is where we would like him to be so we can discuss these matters."

The "matters" he referred to concern five new Ford Crown Victorias — worth about \$100,000 — that have sat unused in the county garage for nearly a year; staffing shortages in the jail; and department morale problems.

The uncommon outburst from Vandergriff — usually mild-man-

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Sheriff

From Page 1

nered and polite — followed the second consecutive week when neither Williams nor any of his command staff gave an oral report to the commissioners.

Williams defended his department's actions yesterday.

"After observing the oral report [several weeks ago] it seemed clear to me that we were spending a tremendous amount of time providing information they [the commissioners] currently have," Williams said.

Although a written report was submitted, it did not include information on staffing shortages in the jail or a list of sheriff's vehicles that Williams said last week he would provide to the commissioners. He said he gave each of the commissioners a separate "classified, confidential sealed" document that detailed staffing levels.

After the meeting and after calming down, Vandergriff said in his office: "The time is long past that we need to sit down face to

face. There is no need for confidential messages," he said, referring to Williams penchant for one-on-one closed-door meetings and his oft-voiced concerns for not releasing information because of security reasons.

Last week, the commissioners decided not to release seven Chevrolet Tahoes until the court gets an inventory of department vehicles and a description of their use. The \$28,950 sport utility vehicles, equipped for police work, were specially ordered by Williams.

Williams said he hopes to finish the vehicle list by tomorrow but said he intentionally dropped sheriff's personnel and staffing level information from the weekly written report to the commissioners.

Williams said that in the past he has "resisted revealing those numbers for security concerns."

That classified report shows the department with 37 vacancies last week, and 69 people assigned to training and 41 assigned from the jail to other jobs within the department. But it does not show the number of people assigned to the jail.

County commissioners also

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher
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E D I T O R I A L S

County Sheriff

TARRANT County Judge Tom Vandergriff is the model of public decorum. He's the King of Kindness at the courthouse for his ability to impart a nice word about everyone and everything.

So when Vandergriff's temper publicly flared this week over Sheriff David Williams' reticence to openly discuss county business, it was a sure sign that relations between the Sheriff's Department and the Commissioners Court have reached a new low.

Williams has stated that he's a committed lawman and a reluctant politician, but he can't get around the fact that he's a duly elected public servant who must be accessible and accountable to his constituents. There's also no getting around the fact that the commissioners are merely putting a public voice to a question being uttered in homes and workplaces throughout the county: What is Williams doing?

The majority of voters in Tarrant County aren't afforded an open door to the sheriff's office. For that matter, hardly anyone is. The only way that residents can access information about how their county tax dollars are being spent is through the Commissioners Court, which holds the purse strings for all county departments, including the sheriff's.

The commissioners, as representatives of county taxpayers, are well within their rights to demand answers from the sheriff about county-purchased vehicles sitting idle at the county garage for almost a year. And voters are well within their rights to expect an elected official to answer questions about fiscal responsibility.

Frankly, it's mystifying why the sheriff persists in being so distant from the people he is supposed to serve, and it is an insult to the voters to call one of the only ways they have to communicate with their elected officials "political theater."

If Williams doesn't like publicly answering for what he's doing with the taxpayers' money, perhaps he's picked the wrong line of work.

Sheriff says dispute impairing him in job

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
AND BOB MAHLBURG
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams said yesterday that an ongoing dispute with Tarrant County commissioners is interfering with his "statutory obligation" to track fugitives and provide public safety for Tarrant County.

The commissioners are micro-managing the Sheriff's Department by bombarding the department with demands for information and withholding vehicles vital to the sheriff's mission, Williams said in a written statement yesterday.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff

and County Commissioner Glen Whitley said that in withholding new vehicles from the Sheriff's Department they are just being good stewards of the taxpayer's dollar. They flatly denied that they are interfering with the sheriff's mission.

But Williams sees it differently, especially since county workers on Tuesday refused to release to sheriff's officials two new 1997 Chevrolet cargo vans for prisoner extradition. The commissioners are already withholding seven Chevrolet Tahoes, \$28,950 police-equipped sport utility vehicles specially ordered by Williams, because he left five

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Williams said the commissioners "seemed to have moved the bar, with more information demands and the withholding of other equipment also previously purchased for this agency. ... It's one thing to respond to multiple requests that are clearly micro-management, but it's another thing when they bombard you with additional demands while you are trying to accurately respond to the first in a timely manner."

Officials in Texas counties of similar size said that information about sheriff's cars and employees is readily available to county commissioners and that getting such information has never been an issue.

"Right now, I could get an inventory of all the sheriff's vehicles," said Karen Castro, senior planning and budget analyst for Travis County.

Even records of unmarked, undercover cars used by the sheriff and the district attorney are available to commissioners, she said. Told that Williams has cited security concerns, she said, "We haven't had those kind of problems."

Nor do Travis County commissioners have problems getting a list of how sheriff employees are assigned, she said.

"To my knowledge there's no one in a 'black box,' so to speak, that we don't have access to," Castro said.

new Ford Crown Victorias — worth together about \$100,000 — unused in the county garage for nearly a year.

"The withholding of this equipment is interfering with my statutory obligation to track, pursue and capture 15,000 fugitives currently wanted by the state of Texas for criminal activity in Tarrant County," Williams said in the statement.

The reference to 15,000 fugitives refers to outstanding warrants ranging from felony crimes such as murder, to Class B misdemeanors such as drug charges, credit card fraud, check abuse and various degrees of assault, but it does not include traffic tickets, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a sheriff's spokesman.

"I take issue with that [Williams'] statement. He evidently has enough equipment that he left some inventory unused for almost a year," said Vandergriff, who sternly chastised Williams at Tuesday's Commissioners Court meeting for not publicly discussing sheriff's issues with the court. "He has enough equipment to fulfill his responsibilities."

Whitley was equally blunt.

"If that is so important, why didn't the sheriff get the Fords 10 months ago?" he asked. "The commissioners have a responsibility to oversee the use of taxpayer dollars. He's wasting \$100,000 of inventory. We haven't held them up. He's held them up."

When the Commissioners Court learned about the Fords, they asked Williams for a written report detailing how his cars are used and to whom they are assigned, which he has said he would provide. The commissioners have also told Williams that

they want information on staffing shortages in the jail and a clear explanation of how the sheriff's staff is assigned.

Whitley said that through sheriff's briefing reports, commissioners learned that Williams was transferring jailers to other jobs in the department, but still allocating the costs to the jail. The county auditor determined that \$413,000 needed to be allocated to other departments where the money had been spent, he said.

That's also true in El Paso County, County Auditor Edward Dion said.

He keeps a "manning table" listing each employee's name, pay and job title "for every department that includes every single employee," he said. If the sheriff moves someone to a new position, a "personnel action form" must be filed, he said.

"It's monitored daily," Dion said. "They know how many people are assigned to each department, and at any given time they can tell how many are assigned to each division."

Dion said he's heard of many flaps between county officials, but not one where a county sheriff won't list his cars and employees to commissioners.

"That sounds like a financial situation that the [commissioners] court would need to know," he said. "A lot of your budget is determined by how many cars you have and how many people you have."

A Fort Worth Police Department spokesman, Lt. Mark Krey, said information about department personnel, their jobs and the number of department cars is readily accessible via computer. Such reports are also given to the City Council quarterly, he said.

Vandergriff said the dispute can be easily resolved.

"It could be solved as early as next Tuesday, when we trust he [Williams] will join us for an open discussion about these issues," he said. "We will be here from 10 o'clock on, and we're as anxious as he is to come to some understanding of these matters that are of mutual concern."

Star-Telegram staff writer Deanna Boyd contributed to this report.

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Bud Kennedy

COMMENTARY

Sheriff triggers rare eruption of Mt. Vandergriff

The sudden eruption of a long-dormant volcano left the Tarrant County Courthouse shaking yesterday, jolted by the unexpected blast from Mount Vandergriff.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff is perhaps the most gentle and fatherly of local public officials. A famous Arlington mayor — already immortalized in a bronze statue at The Ballpark in Arlington — he is regarded less as a county manager and more as the courthouse patriarch.

So when Vandergriff's deep, melodic voice rose on Tuesday, his words booming out in anger like peals of rolling thunder, reporters scrambled as if the Trinity River bluff had felt a tremor.

"County Judge Tom Vandergriff gets mad!" one radio reporter said yesterday morning, promoting the story. "We'll tell you why in news at the top of the hour."

If the old *Fort Worth Press* was still in business, the banner headline would have read: "Judge Tom Blows Top."

Nearly lost among the seismograph readings was any detail of what made Vandergriff mad.

It figures. He and his family sold Chevys here for half a century.

Now he's mad over Fords.

These particular Fords are five Crown Victoria police squad cars, bought and paid for with about \$100,000 of our tax money. They have been left parked — brand

(More on KENNEDY on Page 2)

new — for 10 solid months by our finicky county sheriff, David Williams.

The sheriff wants bigger and fancier vehicles. Fords aren't good enough for him anymore. He wants a fleet of \$30,000 Chevy Tahoe sport-utility trucks.

Since he took office six years ago, he has wanted military weapons, attack dogs, sports cars and a helicopter fleet — even though his only defined job is to

run the county jail. (His deputies, along with county deputy constables, also patrol a fringe rural area with a population of about 36,000 people.)

He got it all.

Now, the sheriff doesn't seem to want his new Fords. He wants Tahoes.

If he's going to get any new cars in the next two years, he needs to start explaining how he's spending our money.

Under the Texas Constitution, the county commissioners can't take away his badge or jail keys. But they can take away everything else, including his patrol

deputies and cars.

Williams seems to be getting political advice from Jack Kevorkian. He says he can't tell us where our deputies are working, where our cars are going or how our money is spent.

He says he can't tell "for security concerns."

In one of Vandergriff's finest moments, he used two radio interviews yesterday to poke fun at the sheriff's paranoia and secrecy.

"This is not the Secret Service that we're running here," Vandergriff said. "This is just a Texas county sheriff's department."



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