

Fall 2013

COUNTY JUDGE Quarterly

News & Notes from the Tarrant County Judge
and important information from Tarrant County

TARRANT COUNTY OUR NORTH TEXAS HOME



The holidays are here and I wish everyone in Tarrant County and North Texas a safe, happy and healthy festive season. Folks, it is a wonderful time to live in Tarrant County. Judging by what we accomplished in 2013, the coming year holds great promise.

Our local economy is on solid footing, rolling along, a lynchpin to the strong North Texas economy.

Motorola opened a smart phone assembly plant that will employ more than 2,000 people and Wal-Mart.com opened a distribution center, both in Alliance. Amazon opened a distribution center in Haslet that will employ 1,000 people.

The General Motors Arlington Truck Assembly Plant has top-drawer SUVs rolling off the line and the expanding factory opened a new sheet metal stamping facility. Lockheed has new orders and Bell Helicopter is consolidating operations in a new headquarters facility in east Fort Worth.

Even the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Fort Worth's national money factory, is printing sharp new \$100 bills with a little FW in the corner, definitely Cowtown currency.

The skeeters backed off in a cooler summer, reducing the threat of West Nile virus. Also this summer, we hosted the annual conference of the National Association of Counties.

In downtown Fort Worth, Sundance Square got a facelift with new 19th century western-revival style buildings and the opening of the Plaza.

A reinvigorated Seventh Street is buzzing and there is a new smart-looking bridge over the Trinity River, so people can easily make their way to the hopping neighborhood just east of the Cultural District. Equally impressive is the retail and restaurant revival along Rosedale and Magnolia that enlivens the Hospital District and Fairmont neighborhoods.

Our colleges and universities are doing great. New buildings at the University of Texas at Arlington and adjacent development make it possible for the old Arlington downtown to become a thriving college area. The University of North Texas Health Science Center opened a College of

Pharmacy and work on a new front gate and streetscape for Texas Wesleyan along Rosedale is underway.

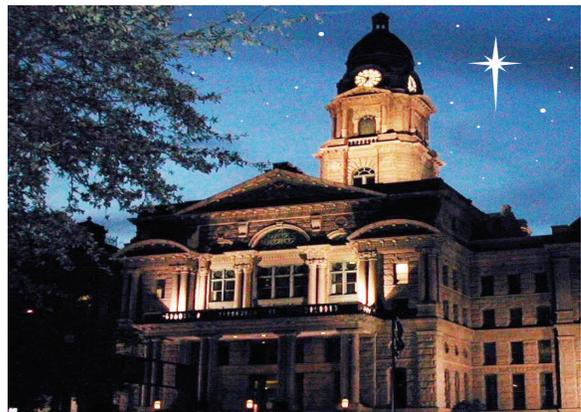
Texas Christian University had record applicants this year and Tarrant County College boasts an enrollment of about 50,000 students. The University of North Texas continues to wow with nationally recognized music programs. The Texas A&M University School of Law opened this summer and Tarleton State University is looking at a permanent campus location in the county.

The resale of existing homes is strong and new rooftops are planned on the county's west side, as we are expected to grow from 1.88 million to about 2.8 million people by 2035.

Next year, two of the big three road projects, the 27-mile Chisholm Trail Parkway from Fort Worth to Burleson and the DFW Connector north of the DFW Airport, will finish. Work on 183 and Loop 820 North will nearly be done and we will be in the early stages of a four-year rebuild of I-35W from downtown Fort Worth north to 287.

One of the best things next year will be restoration of the west entrance to the historic 1895 Tarrant County courthouse. Our symbol of liberty and justice will be rebuilt with pink granite from the same central Texas quarry used 120 years ago. A grassy park with paths and trees will be restored to match the one on the east side. What a magnificent way to ring in the New Year and to celebrate the promise of 2014.

B. Glen Whitley
Tarrant County Judge



THE TARRANT COUNTY COURTHOUSE

**AROUND THE
COUNTY**

The County Tax Assessor

Tarrant County's property tax rate has not gone up in 13 years and the County has the second lowest tax rate among large urban counties in Texas. Careful county management has kept the tax rate low, even though the county, now with 1.8 million residents, is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation.

Property tax notices are sent out in October and taxes are due by January 31, 2014.

If you did not receive a tax statement, please contact the tax office or find your account on line at www.tarrantcounty.com, said Ron Wright, Tarrant County Tax Assessor/Collector.

Property owners are responsible for property taxes, including penalty interest, even if they do not receive a tax statement.

"Our office is ready to assist you," Wright said. "If you have questions or concerns about a tax statement please contact us."

There are some exemptions available and county residents should see if they qualify for them, he said.

Property owners over the age of 65 are eligible for additional exemptions on their homestead. Additional exemptions are available for disabled homeowners. Most entities have granted property tax freezes for homeowners over age 65 or are disabled.

Applications for exemptions must be made through the Tarrant Appraisal District, the agency that determines property value and is separate from Tarrant County.

All property tax payers who pay the Tarrant County Tax Office are eligible to pay half the amount due by November 30 with the remaining half due June 30.

The tax collector's office, with 180 employees, collects property taxes for 58 other taxing jurisdictions from more than one million accounts.

As an agent of the state through the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, TxDMV, the tax assessor's office issues registration and transfers titles for more than two million vehicles annually. The office also collects state beer, wine and liquor licensing fees.

Property tax payments can be made with written checks, e-checks, cash or with most credit cards. Payments can be made by mail, over the phone, or electronically. They can be made in person at the tax office in the county administration building at 100 E. Weatherford Street in Fort Worth or at any of the county precinct sub-courthouses.

Also, Tarrant County can now send tax statements directly to your email account. So, go on-line, don't stand in line.

Spotlight: Common Questions for the Tax Office

Get your answers at the Tarrant County Tax Assessor/Collector's Office at the County Administration Building in downtown Fort Worth, at any sub-courthouse, or the website www.tarrantcounty.com/etax.



Ron Wright
Tarrant County
Tax Assessor/Collector

- How are property values determined?
- How are tax rates determined?
- Do I qualify for any property tax exemptions?
- Does the tax office offer payment plans?
- What is going on with mineral rights?
- How do I transfer a car title?
- How do I get a disabled placard for my vehicle?
- What if I lost my vehicle registration renewal form?
- How do I get a toll tag?

For tax office information, email taxoffice@tarrantcounty.com or call (817) 884-1100.

For information on vehicles, email mvt@tarrantcounty.com



Elections Office offers Voters On-line Services

The Tarrant County's Elections Office oversees the electoral process and is responsible for federal, state, and local elections. The office also runs some elections for cities and governmental agencies like schools and special districts.

Texas law allows any registered voter to vote early for any reason, and the office establishes early voting locations in the county.

The elections office provides voters with several on-line services. Voters can check the status of their voter registration, view or print a sample ballot and find their polling place location for upcoming elections.

You can check your polling place by going to www.tarrantcounty.com before an election. Click on the "Elections" link and view the complete list of all election-day polling places.

On election night, periodic updates of results are posted at www.tarrantcounty.com on the elections office website as ballots are counted.

The Elections Administrator, appointed by the County Judge, Tax Assessor-Collector, County Clerk and the chairs of the Democratic and Republican Party, oversees voter registration. The office maintains voter rolls, voting equipment, prepares ballots and conducts early voting. The County has roughly 955,000 registered voters, 40 early-voting sites and nearly 365 election-day polling places.



New Texas Rule Requires Voters to Show ID at the Polls

The Nov. 5 election was the first statewide election in which Texans were required to show a photo ID at the polls.

Many Texans already have the ID they need to vote - a Texas driver's license, a personal identification card, an election identification certificate, a concealed handgun license, a military ID with photo, a U.S. citizenship certificate with photo or a U.S. passport.

All ID cards must be current or not expired for more than 60 days.

For those without photo ID, there is a new Election Identification Certificate, a voter ID card, similar to a driver's license or state ID card that is free and can be used to vote.

Texans who need a voter ID card can go to a driver's license office to get them. Voters will need to show proof of citizenship and identity, such as a birth certificate and two additional [forms of identification](#), like school records, insurance policies, vehicle or boat title or registration, Social Security cards, pilot's licenses or marriage licenses. They need to bring a valid voter registration card or apply for voter registration at the time of applying for the voter ID card.

The new voter ID cards are good for six years. Cards issued to Texans 70 or older do not expire.

Anyone voting by mail does not have to submit a photo ID. Anyone with a documented disability may apply for a permanent exemption from the requirement.

The Elections Office may be reached at (817) 831-8683.

Your **VOTE** is Your **VOICE**



Tarrant County Public Health

West Nile Virus – 2013 Not As Bad

The Tarrant County Public Health Department along with North Texas cities and agencies prepped all last winter for another bad West Nile virus summer.

Only it didn't happen, at least not like last summer.

Instead, what did happen this summer was a little bit of measles and a lot more of Pertussis, or whooping cough, both preventable diseases with timely vaccinations.

The West Nile virus effort this year zeroed in on eliminating the carrier bug, the Culex mosquito, through mitigation and prevention, rather than waiting for human West Nile cases to show up, and it just may have paid off. Or, maybe there were fewer skeeters. Or both.

Mosquito trapping started earlier this year than last and there was targeted ground spraying when mosquitoes testing positive for the virus were found.

The Tarrant County Commissioners Court added three vector control specialists and bought additional spraying equipment. The Tarrant County Health Department provided countywide training and provided insight and leadership in monthly West Nile meetings with area cities, other county health departments and the Texas Department of State Health Services.

As of the end of October, the close of the summer mosquito season, there were 6 human cases and two deaths in the county, compared to 263 cases and 11 deaths in 2012.

There were 16 cases of measles this year compared to none last year. An adult not previously vaccinated, returned from an overseas trip with symptoms and all of the additional cases were connected to that first case, health department officials said.

Whooping cough, like measles, is a preventable childhood illness and the vaccine is the best protection. However, last year, other places in the state also experienced a sharp increase in the illness and this year, Tarrant County experienced it as well. Many of the cases were in infants less than 12 months of age.

	2012 All		2012 End of Sept.		2013 End of Sept.	
	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
WNV	280	11	263	11	6	2
Measles	0	0	0	0	16	0
Pertussis	162	0	93	0	518	0

CAUTION: FLU SEASON IS HERE

Flu is a most unpredictable illness. It appears in winter, usually peaks in late January or early February, but can start as early as Halloween and last until May.

It can be a headachey cold with the chills, or it can lead to hospitalization and even death. Mild or severe, flu is a contagious viral respiratory disease that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. Fever, cough, sore throat and head and body aches can come on quickly. Older adults with chronic health conditions and children under 5 years of age tend to have the most serious complications.

The most predictable thing about flu is that, for the most part, it can be prevented. Now is the time to get your flu shot. Immunization is especially important for children and adults with chronic heart, lung and immune system diseases.

Tarrant County Public Health will offer flu shots at county public health centers throughout the county. Flu shots are offered in many locations, including pharmacies and college health centers, as well as by some employers and schools.

There are some special flu vaccines made for seniors or people with egg allergies. Some flu vaccines have inactive virus strains and some have a weakened virus strain administered through the nose. There is no preferred vaccine except the one right for you based on your age and health. If a special vaccine is required or desired, you should contact your primary health care provider. Nearly everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu shot this year and every year.



Awards Given for Serving Tarrant County's Older Adults

Honors were handed out in 2013 by Senior Citizen Services of Greater Tarrant County, to individuals and groups for improving the lives of older adults in North Texas.

"We wanted to recognize those who help seniors maintain their independence and their ability to age in place with dignity," said Jerry Mosman, Senior Citizen Services executive director. The award recipients are just a few of the many people who work or volunteer their time to help our senior community, he said.

The Area Agency on Aging, part of United Way of Tarrant County, received the Carlton Lancaster Legacy Award, named in honor of the Senior Citizen Services former executive director. The Area Agency on Aging has provided seniors with benefits counseling, long-term care ombudsman, caregiver services, nutritional programs and transportation for 38 years.

Alene Washington received the President's Award for Service for 40 years of work with Tarrant County seniors. Now working at the Fellowship Corner Senior Center, she has helped countless generations of seniors improve their lives and health through nutrition and exercise. She has also given them the chance to give back to their community through volunteer service.

The Mae Cora Peterson Healthy Aging Award, named for a 97-year-old longtime supporter of Senior Services, went to Dr. Janice Knebl and the SAGE program at the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

The innovative SAGE program, Seniors Assisting in Geriatric Education Program, links older adults and medical students. Elderly patients mentor medical students about their health concerns and what is critical in their lives, while the students help patients understand the benefits of physical examinations, and proper medication use.

The Evelyn Siegel Vision Award, named for a co-founder of Senior Citizen Services, went to Patty Poma, of Guardianship Services, Inc. The agency assists, protects and serves the vulnerable senior population and works to put a stop to the exploitation of older adults.



Senior Citizen Services

Senior Citizen Services, Inc., founded in 1967 with one senior center in Fort Worth, now has more than 29 senior centers in Tarrant County. The nonprofit agency provides a range of programs and services to help older adults live independently with dignity. The programs address the needs of seniors facing aging and isolation providing education, information and activities to meet the goal of empowering seniors to age in place.

Community Programs

- **Meal Program** - Hot meals served daily in a home-away-from-home environment
- **Senior Centers** - Network of neighborhood centers offering services and activities
- **Retired and Senior Volunteer Program** - Volunteers 55 and older who do community service
- **Matter of Balance Program** - An eight-week, fall-prevention program
- **Better Choices Better Health** - A six-week, diabetes self-management program to improve health through personal planning and choices
- **Texercise** - Senior center-based physical fitness and wellness programs
- **Transit for Seniors** Rides to senior centers and to community events
- **HomeMeds** - Medication management

For information on programs or on volunteering at the agency

Call (817) 413-4949 • Go to the website www.scstc.org

Sr. Citizen Services offices are at 1400 Circle Drive, Suite 300, Fort Worth, TX 76119



Tarrant County working together

Helping Older Adults and People with Disabilities Get the Transportation Options They Need



The Tarrant Riders Network, a community coalition of social service agencies, local government representatives, transportation providers and faith-based organizations, is trying to fix a big problem that may impact you, your parents, your children or your neighbor.

When an older adult or someone with a disability is unable to drive, they still have to get to the doctor, the grocery store or the pharmacy. Family members often pitch in to get them where they need to go, but sometimes that's just not possible. What to do?

If they live in Fort Worth, Richland Hills or Blue Mound, they may be able to access bus service or the The-T's Mobility Impaired Transportation Service (MITS). If they live in other parts of Tarrant County, they may be able to get a ride from one of more than a dozen services, like Handitran in Arlington or the Northeast Transportation Service (NETS), that can take people places they need to go.

But those transportation services often have different age-eligibility requirements for passengers and some agencies have restrictions relating to the purpose of the trip or won't take you outside a certain geographic area. Also, most are booked solid and sometimes have to turn people away.

More than a year ago The Tarrant Riders Network (TRN), began meeting to see what could be done to address gaps in service and improve available transportation options.

TRN is working to increase public awareness in Tarrant County of existing transportation services, travel navigation and referral services.

TRN is also working to get more rides for more people. There are a few volunteer driver programs in the county. TRN is working to expand on that idea and start volunteer driver groups at faith-based and service organizations across the county to provide more rides.

Volunteer driver programs already exist in San Antonio, Austin, and in other states and are definitely the fastest and least expensive way to get more wheels on the road and more passengers to their destination.

For more information about TRN and its volunteer driver program come to TRN meetings at Fort Worth's Intermodal Transfer Center. The calendar is on the website at www.tarranridersnetwork.org, or contact the office of Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley at (817) 884-1441.

SAVE THE DATE

SENIOR SYNERGY

EXPO

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2014 - 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3401 West Lancaster Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 76107



It's up to YOU United Way

The United Way of Tarrant County is wrapping up its 2013 fundraising campaign, but the need to assist individuals and helpful organizations never stops.

United Way works to improve lives across our diverse North Texas communities:

- Prioritizing needs in education, income and health
- Forming innovative and effective partnerships with other organizations
- Strategically raising and investing resources to make lasting change

In Tarrant County, United Way is focusing on:

- Giving kids the tools to succeed in school and graduate on time
- Putting low-income working families on the path to financial stability
- Helping adults and older adults with chronic health problems or disabilities stay healthy and live independently as much as possible

United Way brings together groups with expertise and resources like businesses, nonprofits, cities, school districts - whoever can make a difference:

- Thousands of preschoolers start kindergarten ready to learn
- Families become more financially stable
- Chronically ill adults learn how to manage their health and medications to help them avoid the emergency room

Your United Way Investment at Work

\$3 a week provides 25 homebound adults a 20-minute nutrition and diabetes screening.

\$6 a week provides 14½ days of early childhood development activities for a preschool child to succeed in school.

\$9 a week provides eight low-income working individuals with free tax preparation and information about education, financial, and employment services to help them become financially stable.

\$12 a week provides medication assessments for 14 homebound senior citizens to help them avoid dangerous medication errors.

\$15 a week provides fall prevention classes for 4 older adults, enabling them to avoid falls that could lead to the emergency room or nursing home.

LIVE UNITED is United Way's invitation to create a stronger Tarrant County:

- Give through the United Way campaign (where you work, or online)
- Advocate — spread the word about United Way's mission
- Volunteer — United Way's website can help you get started

Click on "Get Involved at the United Way website unitedwaytarrant.org/give.

Contribute online or learn more about how to advocate or volunteer through United Way and its partners.



Central Office
1500 N. Main Street
Suite 200
P.O. Box 4448
Fort Worth, TX 76164
817-258-8000
unitedwaytarrant.org

Arlington Office
401 W. Sanford Street
Suite 2600
Arlington, TX 76011
817-548-9595
unitedwayarlington.org

Northeast Tarrant Office
221 Bedford Rd.
Suite 306
Bedford, TX 76022
817-282-1160
unitedwaynortheast.org

2-1-1
A toll-free, 24-hour referral service with free information on literacy and financial education classes, health services and more.
Dial 211
tarrantcounty211.org

Area Agency on Aging/Aging and Disability Resource Center of Tarrant County
Resources to help older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers.
888-730-2372
unitedwaytarrant.org/aaa



County Rates Surpass State and National Average



JPS Targets Infant Mortality: Engaging the Community

The JPS Health Network has joined the effort to lower the infant mortality rate in Tarrant County, where for years it has been higher than state and national averages.

JPS is committed to making prenatal care more accessible and affordable and increasing public education about the problem, said Robert Earley, JPS President and Chief Executive Officer. The health network is hiring outreach workers to engage schools, churches and nonprofit agencies, concentrating in those Tarrant County zip codes where infant mortality is highest, he said.

“This is a great opportunity for JPS to join the community effort to reduce infant mortality in Tarrant County,” Earley said.

Infant mortality is the death of a child in its first year. A child born in Tarrant County is more likely to die before the first birthday than a child born in any other Texas county with more than 10,000 live births annually, according to Tarrant County Public Health statistics.

Researchers have found that the health of the mother, even before pregnancy, is a factor in infant mortality. In an effort to educate the public about this concern, there is now a greater focus on women’s health, especially the need to maintain a healthy weight and to quit smoking. Once a pregnancy occurs, it is important that women seek care early and regularly.

JPS is joining in the effort with community organizations such as the University of North Texas Health Science Center, Catholic Charities, Rising Star Baptist Church and the Tarrant County Public Health Department.

The health centers and faith-based organizations will work together on the Healthy Moms – Healthy Babies – Healthy Community initiative, known as the H3 Initiative, to reduce infant mortality through community engagement in the targeted areas. They will connect people to resources, create partnerships among existing or new programs, increase parenting and life skills education, increase access to healthy foods and enlist a host of other measures.

JPS will work to get expectant mothers dental care, prenatal appointments before the thirteenth week of pregnancy and teach about lactation and nutrition. The JPS program will grow stronger as it develops, Earley said.

TARRANT COUNTY CONTACTS

GENERAL INFORMATION 817-884-1111

County Clerk

Criminal / Misdemeanor Records	817-884-1066
Probate Courts	817-884-1770
Records Intake / Deeds	817-884-1062
Records Library	817-884-1069
Vital Records: Birth/Death Certificates, Marriage Licenses, and Business Records/DBA's	817-884-1195

District Attorney 817-884-1400

District Clerk

Civil Records	817-884-1240
Criminal Records	817-884-1342
Family Court / Divorce Records	817-884-1265
Jury Services	817-884-3820
Passports	817-884-2520

Elections 817-831-8683

Fire Marshall 817-838-4660

Human Services 817-531-5620

Public Health 817-321-4700

Resource Connection 817-531-7600

Tax Assessor-Collector

Auto Tag Renewal / Property Taxes	817-884-1100
<u>Texas A&M AgriLife Extension</u>	817-884-1945
<u>Veterans Services</u>	817-531-5645
<u>Sheriff's Office</u>	817-884-3009
Jail Information	817-884-3116
Warrant Division	817-884-1320
Victim Information (VINE)	877-894-8463

**Commissioners Court meets every Tuesday at 10 am
Tarrant County Administration Building
100 E. Weatherford Street, 5th Floor**

County Judge, Glen Whitley	817-884-1441
Commissioner Roy Brooks, Precinct 1	817-531-5600, 817-370-4500
Commissioner Andy Nguyen, Precinct 2	817-548-3900
Commissioner Gary Fickes, Precinct 3	817-581-3600, 817-481-8234
Commissioner JD Johnson, Precinct 4	817-238-4400

For additional information, visit: www.tarrantcounty.com

