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NORTHEAST BRIEFS

Service will mark death of Tongan king

EULESS - The Tongan community will host a citywide service at 6 p.m. Sunday in commemoration of last week's death of Tonga's King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. The service will take place at First Tongan United Methodist Church, 304 S. Pipeline Road.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Tuesday

EULESS - Mystery author event, 7 p.m., Eules Public Library, 201 N. Ector Drive. www.eules.org library or 817-685-1679.

Saturday

EULESS - Hazardous-waste disposal, 9-11 a.m., Eules Municipal Complex, 201 N. Ector Drive. Aerosol cans, fertilizers and more will be accepted. www.eules.org or 817-685-1410.

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EDITORIALS

TEXAS LEGISLATURE

Political reality

■ As cities examine state politics and the potential trickle-down effects, they increasingly react by hiring full-time lobbyists.

Arlington has for many years used former state Sen. Bob McFarland as its part-time lobbyist in Austin. But in January, when the next legislative session begins, the city will have its own full-time "legislative liaison" for the first time.

That's semantic jargon for a fully dedicated lobbyist — in this case, Amy Fitzgerald, a 34-year-old graduate of Southern Methodist University's law school.

McFarland represented the city fairly efficiently, but Arlington was only one of his many clients. Here's a prediction: When legislators return to Austin, they will discover that Arlington is not unique in having its own lobbyist, and many cities will have hired high-powered political consulting firms as well.

Cities cannot be faulted for this. The old saying that all politics is local is never truer than with legislative actions.

For each and every frugality pursued by the Legislature, for instance, there seems to be an equal effect that pushes costs down the governmental pecking order to be picked up by counties, cities and school districts.

The location of new state toll roads, possible relocation of rail lines, limitations on property tax assessments, mass transportation decisions, allocation of highway funds and maintenance of state parks — and many others — can have dramatic effects on cities.

Although the Legislature meets only every other year in regular session, legislative committees and myriad state agencies are constantly in action, often with impacts of considerable importance to cities.

Arlington's \$84,000 annual investment in its in-house lobbyist is probably prudent.

Unfortunately, many smaller cities don't have that luxury. The harsh reality is that in today's political climate, cities that don't play are putting themselves at risk.

That's not the way it should be, but it is the way that things are.

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MUNICIPALITIES

Cities buying more on credit

Debt loads rose sharply between 2000 and 2005

By JOHN KIRSCH
 STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

The debt load for area cities increased 24 percent between 2000 and 2005 as officials struggled to keep up with residents' demands for public services, according to a *Star-Telegram* analysis.

The amount of outstanding tax-supported debt taken on by 14 cities in Northeast Tarrant County and parts of Denton County rose from \$399.4 million in 2000 to \$494.1 million in 2005, according to the study.

Broken down per resident, the outstanding 2005 debt ranged widely among communities. Westlake had the highest rate — nearly \$27,000 per capita. Richland Hills had the lowest, at about \$58 per capita.

Statewide, the amount of tax-supported debt for Texas cities nearly doubled, from \$8.7 billion in 2000 to \$16.8 billion in 2005, according to the Texas Bond Review Board.

Rob Latsha, a senior financial analyst with the board, attributed the increase to low interest rates, which have made borrowing more attractive, and rapid population growth, which has taxed infrastructure, such as roads and sewers.

"Unfortunately, roads don't build themselves," he said.

The increase in debt has prompted critics to accuse of-

IN THE KNOW

Debt load per resident

The debt load per resident varies widely among cities and towns in Northeast Tarrant and southern Denton counties. Below is a comparison.

	2000 per resident debt	2005 per resident debt	Percent change
Trophy Club	\$294	\$840	186%
Roanoke	\$813	\$1,753	116%
Haltom City	\$361	\$519	44%
Hurst	\$328	\$451	38%
Richland Hills	\$45	\$58	29%
Euless	\$576	\$735	28%
Southlake	\$2,650	\$3,273	24%
Keller	\$1,160	\$1,278	10%
Westlake	0	\$26,871	0%
Watauga	\$435	\$428	-2%
Grapevine	\$3,121	\$3,047	-2%
Bedford	\$1,279	\$1,182	-8%
NRH	\$689	\$626	-9%
Colleyville	\$720	\$615	-15%

SOURCE: City financial reports

officials of adopting a credit card mentality — issuing debt now that in some cases won't be paid off for 20 years.

Peggy Venable, the Texas director of Americans for Prosperity, said cities and other entities should cut spending instead of increasingly relying on debt. Venable's group favors lower taxes and limited government.

"Most taxpayers don't realize that local government debt is growing at an alarming rate. Our children will be saddled with paying for local governments' overspending," she said.

But Bob Bland, professor and chairman of the public administration department at the University of North Texas, said borrowing money for long-term public improvements, such as a city hall or new streets, is appropriate. Done responsibly, he said, such spending can help a city attract businesses that provide tax revenue and jobs.

Still, Bland said, residents should monitor spending and be aware of debt proposals at their city halls.

"Citizens have to understand that they are ultimately responsible for what happens in their community," he said.

In 2000, 53 percent of the debt in the 14 area communities was general-obligation bonds, which require voter approval, and 47 percent was certificates of obligation, which don't require voter approval unless residents petition for a vote.

By 2005, the percentage of general-obligation bonds had risen to 57 percent while certificates of obligation fell to 43 percent.

Roanoke City Manager Jimmy Stathatos said his city used certificates of obligation to build a 38,000-square-foot recreation center that opened in December. Borrowing is a way to quickly provide amenities that residents want, he said.

Roanoke's outstanding tax-supported debt rose 326 percent from 2000 to 2005. The debt service portion of the city's tax rate rose from 9.49 cents in 2000 to 12.27 cents, but the total tax rate — covering debt payments and day-to-day operations — remained at 37.51 cents, according to the Denton Central Appraisal District.

That was because of rising sales tax revenue and increasing property values, Stathatos said. The city's population nearly doubled from 2,810 in 2000 to 5,550 in 2005, increasing the demand for services.

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IN THE KNOW

Debt load

Most area cities and towns have increased their borrowing over the last five years to pay for public services. Below is a comparison of the total tax-supported debt that communities had in 2000 and 2005.

	2000	2005	Percent change
Roanoke	\$2,285,000	\$9,730,658	326%
Trophy Club	\$1,870,000	\$6,090,000	226%
Haltom City	\$14,094,000	\$20,470,000	45%
Hurst	\$11,909,895	\$17,225,612	45%
Southlake	\$57,040,786	\$81,347,125	43%
Eules	\$26,528,796	\$37,775,000	42%
Keller	\$31,731,464	\$43,911,888	38%
Richland Hills	\$370,000	\$480,000	30%
Watauga	\$9,540,000	\$10,290,000	8%
Grapevine	\$131,280,000	\$138,810,000	6%
NRH	\$38,354,402	\$38,992,038	2%
Westlake	0	\$18,810,000	0%
Bedford	\$60,315,085	\$57,295,000	-5%
Colleyville	\$14,150,000	\$12,925,000	-9%
Total	\$399,469,428	\$494,152,321	24%

SOURCE: City financial reports

Stathatos said certificates of obligation are quicker than general-obligation bonds because of the voter-referendum requirement. But he said that decision does not occur in a vacuum, noting that city officials provide several opportunities for residents to comment.

State law requires cities to issue public notice of their intent to use certificates of obligation before the bonds can be sold. State law also allows residents to petition for a referendum before a city can issue the certificates.

In May, Keller voters defeated a proposed \$7.6 million library that would have been financed by certificates of obligation. Some residents were unhappy that the public was not allowed to initially vote on the library. So they took up a petition to force an election.

Such elections are rare, said Bennett Sandlin, general counsel for the Texas Municipal League. Many residents are unaware that state law allows an election if a valid petition is presented to city officials, Sandlin said.

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THIS WEEK'S POLICE SCANNER

INSIDE THE POLICE SCANNER

Rescued dog missing after burglary

STAR-TELEGRAM

EULESS — Doggone it, a pit bull puppy is missing.

A burglar broke into a house Sept. 7 in the 700 block of Mills Drive, took a DVD player and maybe even grabbed the puppy.

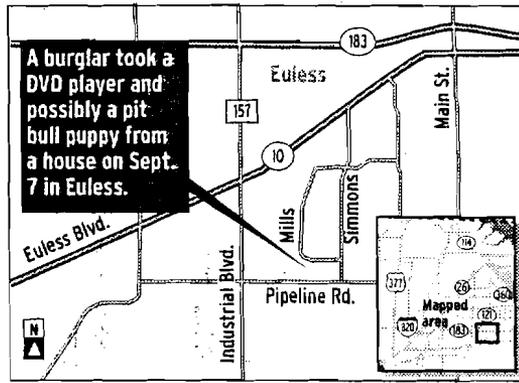
A woman told police that she left her home that morning and returned later to find that it had been broken into.

Police found a broken window at the back of the house where the burglar entered.

The woman checked her house and discovered that her \$70 DVD player had been stolen.

And the stray tiger-

Puppy stolen?



STAR-TELEGRAM

striped puppy, which the homeowner had rescued after she found it wandering on the street a few days earlier, was gone.

The unnamed puppy may

have run away because the burglar left a sliding back door open during his escape, according to police reports.

— Domingo Ramirez Jr.

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Barbara Lucas



Barbara Lucas was a member of the City of Euless Citizen's Police Academy Alumni Association.

EULESS — Barbara Lucas, 74, a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister and friend, passed away Thursday, Sept. 14, 2006, at a local hospital.

Celebration of life: 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at Brown Owens & Brumley's Joe B. Brown Memorial Chapel. Burial: 3 p.m. Tuesday in D-FW National Cemetery. Visitation: The family will receive friends 6 to 8 p.m. Monday at the funeral home.

Mrs. Lucas was born on March 12, 1932, in Fort Worth to George and Dorothy Madden. She graduated from North Side High School and in 1950 married James R. Lucas Sr.

She worked with the Boy Scouts of America for 12 years, served in PTA for 13 years, joined Eastern Star and Ladies Oriental Shrine, Nyanca Court 34, the Drum Corps and was a member of Martin Methodist Church.

Barbara worked for Bell Telephone in Fort Worth for 17 years, Pacific Telephone and Telegraph for two years and in San Francisco, Calif., for three years.

Survivors: Husband, James R. Lucas Sr.; sons, James R. Lucas Jr. and wife, Joann of Pinedale, Wyo., David R. Lucas and wife, Diane of Franklin, Tenn. and Marvin Kyle Lucas and wife, Carol of River Oaks; daughter, Linda Nanette Lucas Burt of Euless; sisters, Alice Hardin of Azle and Dianne Kramer of Fort Worth; eight grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Brown, Owens & Brumley Funeral Directors
425 S. Henderson, 817-335-4557
View and sign guestbook at
www.star-telegram.com/obituaries

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NORTHEAST CLICK



Julie Neal, Suzy Goldman, David Medina and Ellie Schweyher



Melody Moore, Mike Moore, Georgia Borden and Jamey Borden



Jan Hogg and Leon Hogg

Chamber stars dance through gala

"Dancing With the Stars" was the theme for the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Chamber of Commerce's annual awards gala, held this year at the Hyatt Regency DFW.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/
D.J. PETERS

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Talk of murder at the Euless library



STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

Five mystery and true-crime authors spoke Tuesday at the "Murder in Texas - Fact & Fiction" series at the Euless Public Library. Former *Star-Telegram* reporter Mike Cochran, who wrote a book about the Cullen Davis murder, was moderator. Other writers included Kathryn Casey, Bill Crider, Harry Hunsicker and Carlton Stowers. At right, Charlotte Moseley of Grapevine, second from right, laughs along with the audience at a clever line. The event benefited the Euless Library Foundation.



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE: The University of Texas at Arlington Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sergio Espinosa, will perform "And God Created the Great Whales" by Alan Hovhaness along with other selected pieces from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Sept. 30 at the Villages of Bear Creek Amphitheater, 1951 Bear Creek Parkway in Euless. The orchestra will play along with recordings of whale sounds from the northern Atlantic Ocean. A University of Texas at Arlington faculty member will give a presentation about these creatures of the sea and show children how whales communicate with each other. The event is free and open to the public. For information, call 817-685-1666 or visit www.euless.org.

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Leaders spread word on violence

By BEN TINSLEY
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

ARLINGTON -- Tarrant County leaders trying to prevent domestic violence kicked off a 50-city campaign Wednesday to make people aware of the dangers of multigenerational abuse and teach them how to access resources for the abused.

SafeHaven of Tarrant County said it plans to spread the word in the next few weeks by inserting fliers and CD-ROMs in water bills; putting displays on electronic signs; placing ads in newspapers; and hanging posters in libraries, recreation centers, police departments and city halls.

"We are just getting started on our outdoor campaign, asking cities to get on board," said Jennifer Rhodes, vice president of development for SafeHaven. "The key to teaching this is through repetition."

The three-month campaign will also include door-to-door outreach throughout the county, Rhodes said.

Speakers at the Summit on Family Violence shared personal stories and statistics.

Arlington Mayor Robert Cluck, who is a physician, told the audience about a patient he had in 1978 who lost three pregnancies because of abuse -- one stillbirth and two miscarriages -- before she died.

Cluck said he missed the abuse because he was young and didn't know what to look for.

"I finally saw it, but it was so late in the course of things," he said. "He was with her all of the time, and she wouldn't talk to me."

Fort Worth Police Chief Ralph Mendoza said victims of abuse need to be taught how to help themselves.

"The first step is speaking up, which is often the most difficult," he said.

Eules Mayor Mary Lib Saleh said it's important to remember how easily the cycle of abuse can continue.

"It's going to go from generation to generation in our families if we don't stop it," she said.

IN THE KNOW

Domestic violence

By the numbers

An estimated 74 percent of Texans have either experienced some form of family violence themselves, or had a relative or friend who experienced it.

Nearly one-third of Tarrant County households report that family violence is a problem in their neighborhood.

At least six Tarrant County residents have died in 2006 because of domestic violence.

Help and prevention

Signs you are being abused include: apologizing all the time; watching every word you say; constantly seeking your partner's approval; constantly excusing your partner's behavior.

Signs you are an abuser include: acting jealously or possessively; refusing to accept breaking up; always having to be in control; becoming violent with or threatening your partner.

To get help, call the SafeHaven 24-hour hot line 877-701-SAFE or 877-701-7233, or go to www.womenshaven.org

SOURCES: SafeHaven of Tarrant County, Fort Worth Police Department. Tarrant County Council on Family Violence