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PAGE 1 OF 1

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BRIEFS

Mosquito spraying scheduled in Euless

EULESS — The city is scheduled to spray for mosquitoes at 9 p.m. Tuesday after a resident was diagnosed with West Nile virus. The city will spray between Farm Road 157 and Main Street, from Midway Drive and Ash Lane. The city will not spray if it's raining or the winds are over 10 mph. The city advises residents to stay indoors and take pets inside if the spraying is in their neighborhood.

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PROPERTY TAXES

THAT CAP IS SILLY ON YOU

Predominantly unchanged property valuations and lower tax bills in Tarrant County reveal the folly of the crusade for tax caps.

Those Texans arguing for tax caps and other ill-conceived, politically inspired gimmickry masquerading as "property tax reform" are likely to have an even tougher time making their case in the future, if Tarrant County is an example.

Gov. Rick Perry and others have contended that caps were necessitated by "skyrocketing" property valuations resulting in appreciably larger tax bills.

But look at what's happening here. As a result of dramatically lower school district tax rates and a pronounced slowdown in valuation increases, a majority of Tarrant County homeowners actually will see a *reduction* in the property tax bills mailed this fall, according to John Marshall, executive director of the Tarrant Appraisal District. Some bills could fall more than 10 percent.

The bill reductions primarily result from the new state law, strongly backed by Perry, that mandated sharply lower school tax rates. School districts in Tarrant County typically are slashing rates 20 to 25 cents per \$100 assessed valuation, Marshall said. Some have chopped the rate more than 30 cents, whacking the rate by more than 20 percent.

It's also notable that, for a sizable majority of Tarrant residents, those "skyrocketing" valuations aren't skyrocketing.

Fifty-nine percent of Tarrant's 457,991 single-family homes did not receive a valuation notice from TAD this spring — which means their appraised value did not rise.

Only one in 20 homes had a valuation jump of more than 10 percent. Valuation increases, for tax purposes, are capped at 10 percent annually for homesteads, but state legislation calling for even lower caps has failed.

Even those with substantial valuation increases in Tarrant County and various other parts of Texas could experience only slight rises in their tax bills as a result of offsetting tax-rate cuts by school dis-



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tricts and other governmental entities.

My Fort Worth home was among the 59 percent of Tarrant homes with no valuation change.

I live in the Castleberry school district. It slashed its tax rate from \$1.536 to \$1.2035 per \$100 assessed value — a shrinkage of 33.275 cents, or 21.7 percent. I'll also enjoy a slightly lower bill from the city of Fort Worth, Tarrant County and the county hospital district because all three reduced their rates.

An oversupply of homes, escalating foreclosures and a potentially slowing economy could put a continued damper on valuations. Local government officials, in making future budget projections, shouldn't count on continued large annual increases in tax revenues.

Although average Tarrant home valuations have risen sharply since 1995, the increases have been much more moderate than in many fast-growing urban areas of the nation. On a recent trip to north central Florida, my

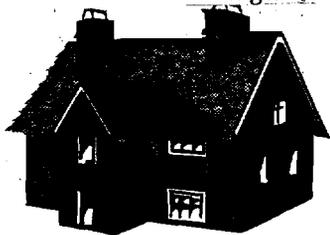
wife, Nina, and I were surprised to find that modest-sized homes that would sell for \$150,000 to \$160,000 in Fort Worth fetched \$230,000 or more there.

In Fort Worth, the average home value is \$115,470, despite thousands of bigger, more expensive homes being built here in recent years.

Property tax caps distort the concept of taxation based on fair market value. The caps shift a greater share of the tax burden to homeowners whose valuations are increasing only modestly or staying flat. Caps, by depressing tax revenues, heighten the chance that local governments will raise tax rates or scale back services to compensate. Caps don't lower the cost of filling potholes or educating children by a single penny.

With a majority of Tarrant County homeowners benefiting from unchanged valuations and lower property tax bills, the crusade for tax caps looks even more ludicrous.

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Polar adventures thrill Eules teen

The nature buff has visited the Arctic and the Antarctic.

By MARK AGEE
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The raw liver of a freshly killed leopard seal tastes about like one would expect, 14-year-old John Cortes said. He sampled the delicacy after it was offered to him by an Inuit hunter last month.

"It tastes kind of like chicken and fish at the same time," Cortes said. "Having it once was enough."

The Nolan Catholic High School freshman had one of the coolest summer adventures: two weeks in the Arctic Circle with the Canadian organization Students on Ice, which aims to teach teens about nature, climate change, and how the two interact at the opposite poles of the globe.

Cortes, of Eules, a self-described science and nature enthusiast, decided to go north after a

2006 trip to the Antarctic with his grandfather.

"I'm really interested in wildlife, so I thought I should go see it," Cortes said.

Students on Ice has taken more than 500 students and teachers from around the world on expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic, said Geoff Green, who founded the group in 1999. The latest trip, of which Cortes was a part — Green remembered him being "full of energy" — included more than 70 teens from North America, Europe and Asia.

"It's like a mini-United Nations," Green said. "The kids teach each other as much as we teach them."

Cortes, who said he has been swimming in the freezing waters on both ends of the planet, got the rare sight of a polar bear feeding on a walrus, and was on a ship that endured 40-foot swells in the infamous Drake Passage, between



John Cortes visited Port Lockroy in Antarctica in 2006. Last month, he was in the Arctic. JOHN CORTES

South America and Antarctica.

Cortes' parents acknowledged that they were worried before the

latest trip, but Green said it's easier than one might think to keep several dozen teenagers in line.

"Once they look a polar bear or a whale in the eye, they understand the importance of following the rules," Green said.

Doug and Maria Cortes said they have encouraged their son to be adventurous.

"It's amazing what people can learn from books, but when you actually go there, it's different," Doug Cortes said.

John Cortes said he prefers the Arctic to the Antarctic because "there's more wildlife."

What's the most counterintuitive thing he learned on his travels? Penguins — despite how cute they are — smell horrible.

"It is the wild, you know," he said.

Online: www.studentsonice.com

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CRIME

Reopened case leads to arrest of suspects in Eulesse killing

One of the men is being held in Ohio, and police say more arrests are possible.

By DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.
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Tuesday.

Authorities will seek to extradite Smith to Texas.

The two men are accused of fatally shooting Thomas Willis, 28, in the parking lot of the Lighthouse Motor Inn, 509 W. Eulesse Blvd.

Records show that Willis checked into the motel alone on Jan. 15, 1993. After his death two weeks later, a motel tenant told Eulesse police that he heard shots and saw a man stand near Willis for a few sec-

onds before fleeing.

Police believe three other men also ran from the parking lot to a white car at a nearby apartment complex and drove away immediately after the shooting.

At the scene, police discovered bullet casings from at least three handguns. A witness told police he saw one man armed with a blue steel revolver with a 5- to 6-inch barrel.

Police checked every lead, but no suspects were identi-

EULESS — Two years ago, two detectives were handed the file:

Thomas Willis, 28.

Shot dead in a motel parking lot in 1993.

Bullet casings from three weapons.

Suspected drug deal turned robbery.

Last weekend, after hundreds of hours of investigation and trips to Houston, Louisiana and Tennessee, authorities arrested two men in connection with the killing. More arrests are possible, police said Tuesday.

A 32-year-old man was arrested in North Texas and remains in the Tarrant County Jail, and a 38-year-old man was arrested in Ohio and was in the Trumbull County Jail in Warren, Ohio, authorities said Tuesday.

Eulesse police did not identify the men, but a brother of the man in Ohio identified him as Vincent Smith. Jail officials confirmed his name.

"We want to go over the case with the DA's office before we release any details," Eulesse police Lt. Wayne Pavlik said

fied.

"Investigators did the best they could do at the time," Pavlik said Tuesday. "But many people just were not talking."

Almost two years ago, Eulesse Detective Brett Morgan was assigned the cold case along with his regular duties. He was later joined by Detective John Haecker.

"They re-interviewed witnesses and got some new leads," Pavlik said. "They came up with names that nev-

er surfaced in the first investigation," Pavlik said.

Within the past few weeks, capital murder warrants were issued for the men, police said, because the slaying occurred during a robbery.

"It was such an outstanding job," Pavlik said, referring to the detectives. "Sometimes all they had was street names, and they managed to track them down."

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EULESS

Council lowers tax rate, OKs \$17 million budget increase

By JESSICA DeLEÓN
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EULESS — Residents and businesses will see a nearly 2-cent dip in the property tax rate.

On Tuesday, the City Council unanimously approved a tax rate of 47 cents per \$100 of assessed value for fiscal 2008, down from 48.95 cents this year.

The city's portion of the tax bill for the average Euless homeowner will drop slightly, despite a 3 percent average increase in property values.

In August, the council approved a \$97 million budget for the next fiscal year. The city does not require a second reading on the tax rate or budget, which take effect Oct. 1.

Even with the tax rate decrease, the city will increase spending because of jumps in sales tax revenue and property values.

The nearly \$17 million increase from the current \$80 million budget will be devoted

Euless budget

	Adopted 2006-07 budget	Adopted 2007-08 budget	Percent change
Total budget revenue	\$83,758,109	\$102,129,612	21.93%
Total budget expenditures	\$80,157,261	\$97,028,765	21.05%
General fund revenue	\$28,680,500	\$33,293,039	16.08%
General fund expenditures	\$28,815,584	\$33,270,986	15.46%
General fund reserves	\$4,352,843	\$4,860,332	11.66%

New budget items

Rebates for businesses	\$785,725
5% raise for employees	\$762,395
Increase in health insurance	\$713,985
Three new police officers, plus equipment	\$208,648
Sidewalks, lighting, signalization	\$200,000
3 firefighters	\$166,880
Converted 2 PT library positions into 1 FT	\$38,843
Part-time field tech for parks department	\$25,000
Part-time utility billing clerk	\$13,210

What it means to you

The budget is based on a tax rate of 47 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. That's a decrease from the current tax rate of 48.9 cents. The tax bill of the owner of an average-priced house will be \$515.47, down from \$518.99 last year. The calculations include a 20 percent homestead exemption. The average value of a house in Euless increased to \$137,094 this year, up from \$132,668 last year.

Source: City of Euless

STAR-TELEGRAM

to one-time projects, including land acquisition and design of a new senior center, expansion of the Conference Centre at Texas Star, and remodeling and improvements

to the public library and Midway Recreation Center.

Online: www.ci.euless.tx.us

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EATS BEAT

■ It's fall. So it must be time for Greek food.

The Mid-Cities Greek Foodfest leads off next weekend. It's the smallest of the three Metroplex Greek festivals — but it still packs crowds into a Euless church.

If you really like Greek food and music, then you'll want to go to the special "Taverna Night" benefit dinner Thursday.

For a \$50 donation (\$60 at the door), you get a dinner of Greek chicken and beef souvlaki with dolmas and spanakopita, plus Greek wines and beers. It's all at the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

The festival follows next weekend, featuring gyros (\$6), a Greek combination dinner for \$15 and special "baklava sundaes" for \$3.

The church is easy to find. It's three blocks south of Texas 183 on Main Street in Euless, then one block east to 303 Cullum Drive; 817-283-2291, www.stjohn.tx.goarch.org.

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CRIME

Affidavit details cold-case slaying

A 28-year-old Euless man was fatally shot in 1993 over a pound of marijuana, according to an affidavit.

By **DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.**
 ramirez@star-telegram.com

EULESS — On a cold night in January 1993, Vincent Smith kicked open the door of a room at the Lighthouse Motor Inn and rushed in with Roderick Jamison and two other acquaintances to steal drugs from Timothy Willis, authorities now believe.



Smith

Within seconds, Willis, 28, was shot twice in the back of the head and left for dead — all for a pound of marijuana, according to an arrest warrant affidavit released Thursday.



Jamison

The four then fled into the night.

The affidavit gave that account of a slaying that remained a mystery for 14 years until last weekend.

That's when police arrested Jamison in Fort Worth and Smith in Ohio on suspicion of capital murder in the slaying of Willis.

More arrests are possible, police said Thursday.

"In the cold cases I've read about, DNA has been what detectives worked on to match up with suspects," Euless police Lt. Wayne Pavlik said Thursday. "This case was just one where a couple of investigators did a great job of tracking down leads."

Jamison, 32, remained in the Tarrant

County Jail on Thursday in lieu of \$750,000 bail. Smith, 38, remained in the Trumbull County Jail in Warren, Ohio, in lieu of \$750,000 bail.

Smith was fighting extradi-

tion, authorities said Thursday.

Smith and Jamison are accused of being the gunmen in the shooting, according to the 18-page affidavit.

The shooting

Willis moved into the motel room Jan. 15, 1993. His mother told police that she last saw him Jan. 30, 1993, when he went to visit her about his tax returns. Relatives said that Willis used cocaine and marijuana and that he owed people money, according to the affidavit.

Euless police were dispatched to the motel shortly before 2 a.m. Jan. 31, 1993, on a report of a possible shooting. Officers found Willis lying face down near the front door of his room. He later died at Harris Methodist H.E.B. Hospital in Bedford.

Witnesses told police that they heard several gunshots and saw several men running away.

Within hours of the shooting, police had information that Willis had planned to sell marijuana to a group of men that morning, according to the affidavit. Investigators even contacted a man they believed set up the drug deal, but could not link him or anyone else to the shooting.

The case lay dormant until January 2006, when detectives Brett Morgan and John Haecker were asked to re-investigate.

Cold-case investigation

The two re-interviewed witnesses and rechecked leads. But it wasn't until May that police received information about two men — nicknamed Junior and Psycho — who may have been involved in the shooting, according to the affidavit.

Through FBI, Arlington police and Drug Enforcement Administration records, Psycho was identified as Roderick Jamison and Junior was identified as Vincent Smith. Other men at the scene also were identified, the affidavit states.

After many interviews with witnesses this summer, police believe this is what happened that January morning:

Smith, Jamison and several other men met at an Arlington

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apartment to decide how to obtain marijuana for the night, according to the affidavit. They also decided to rob the dealer, police said.

One man recommended that they buy the drug from Willis, who had moved into the Eules motel two weeks earlier, police said.

The group left Arlington in two cars — one carrying two men and the other, a white Ford Mustang, carrying five, according to the affidavit. After arriving at the Eules motel, the Mustang was parked near Willis' motel and the other across the street, the affidavit states. No one got out of the car parked across the street, the affidavit states.

Smith, then 24, and Jamison, then 18, rushed in, followed by two acquaintances who punched Willis, according to the affidavit. Willis reached under his bed, but was shot in the back of the head twice, the affidavit states.

Witnesses told police that when the men checked under the bed, they found the marijuana.

Three men — described as "very hyped" — rushed out of the room, ran to the Mustang and jumped in, the affidavit states. Smith walked back to the car slowly and even pointed a gun at the Mustang because they were about to leave him, the affidavit states.

The affidavit states: "Junior was very upset, threatening everyone about being a snitch, and was angry because everyone had ran."

The Mustang returned to the Arlington apartment, where Smith continued being angry at the others, saying "he deserved most of the marijuana" because he had done most of the work, the affidavit states.

The break in the case

The investigation in 1993 didn't turn up the names of any suspects.

And months after they began their investigation in 2006, detectives Morgan and Haecker had only the street names as possible suspects in the shooting. They traveled to Dallas, Houston, Shreveport, and Memphis, tracking down leads.

The two detectives eventually identified Smith and Jamison and others at the scene.

"The hardest part for them was that they only had street and gang names at first. They had to find out who was who before they could talk to anyone about specifics," Pavlik said Thursday. "They were going all over the place to get a name. It took a lot of legwork to track everyone down."