

MAYOR CITY CNCL CITYATTNY CRIM MCKAMIE RIDGWAY(2) DECK BROWN
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DATE DISTRIBUTED 10/10/08 DATE OF ARTICLE 9/26-10/24/08 NEWSPAPER NE Times

Keeping you up to date on monthly topics with personal articles from your local leadership



Mayor Saleh
Euleess

THE CITY OF
EULESS

Finally, some beautiful cool weather so that we can all enjoy the wonderful outdoors and smell the scents of autumn.

Unfortunately, it had to come with hurricanes as well. We have been so fortunate here in North Texas with no real damage from wind and rain. Not so for our neighbors in South Texas. The city of Euleess, along with many other Tarrant County cities, provided shelter for many evacuees, which included many children as well. They all are so appreciative and had many good things to say about our communities.

We are fortunate to have such trained staff and volunteers available to help during the stressful times. We are also fortunate to have good businesses that are willing to donate when asked. We are truly a "community".

November elections are just around the corner. We are fortunate in Texas to have early voting for two weeks before the election date and plenty of places to vote. Please get out, vote, and

Euleess has several neighborhoods that participate. It's such a fun evening and gives us the chance to meet and talk about neighborhood protection as well as meeting fire and police members.

October 18 is the date for the Crud Cruiser HazMat Collection. Collection will take place in the Euleess Library parking lot at 9:00 a.m. It's a great time to clean out the garage and bring in old paint cans, used electronic equipment, and all the things you are not allowed to put in the daily trash.

Halloween is close by as well. The city will be having a "Fruits & Veggies Aren't Scary Fest" from 5:30 until 8 p.m., and you need to come to the Midway Recreation Center to see what it is all about. There will be games, food and, of course, a costume awards program.

Our Texas Star Conference Centre is coming right along. The new section is open now and the old section is being renovated. All should be finished in early 2009. The staff is taking reservations for the holiday parties, and Sunday brunches are as busy as ever.

Come join good friends and taste the good foods too. The Euleess Library Foundation is busy selling the tiles for their latest art project. The project will be an 8 x 6 foot tile depicting the history of Euleess. It will be made up of many tiles of different sizes and it is three-dimensional. Prices start at \$25 for a book binder with names and increases with the size of the tile. There is a tile on display in the library for all to see and it is so beautiful. Tiles are selling fast if you would like to participate in this project.

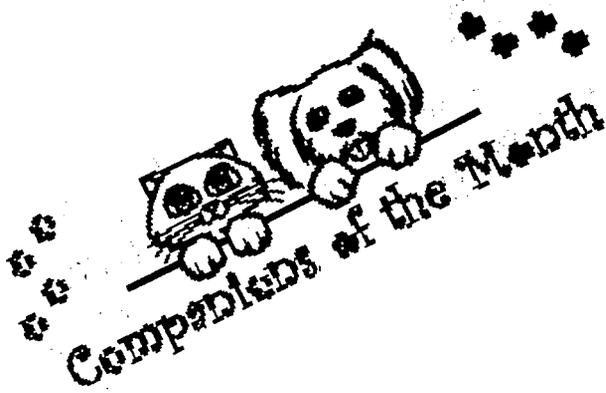
With all the many city activities during the holiday season, Euleess is fortunate to have so many dedicated volunteers to assist our staff. If you'd like to become one of our volunteers, please call Jerry Poteet at the Parks Department. He can always find a place for you, and I promise you will enjoy serving and meeting new friends.

Football season is here and Friday nights in Texas are encourage your neighbors to vote.

National Night Out is held on October 7, and is a terrific program getting neighbors to know neighbors.

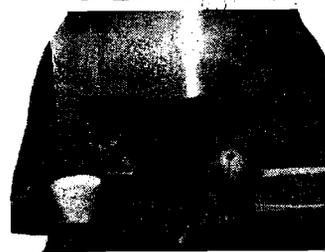
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*pets shown
may already be
adopted, but
there are plenty
of animals who
have not and
need a caring &
loving home.

BENGAL



Please call the shelter for
more details. 817-685-1594

Eules Animal Services
1517 Westpark Way
Eules, TX 76040
(817)685-1594

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MUNICIPAL BONDS

Cities see lower interest rates on debt after credit-rating changes

Municipalities are saving money and say they may forgo bond insurance.

By **SUSAN SCHROCK**
sschrock@star-telegram.com

Wall Street has decided to stop fighting city hall.

Cities have long complained that bond-rating agencies gave them an "artificially low" rating compared with corporations, even though they rarely default on the debt they sell to build roads, waterlines and other projects.

But an unexpected consequence of the subprime-mortgage meltdown is that many Tarrant County cities and public agencies say the rating agencies have begun giving them better ratings on general-obligation and revenue bonds, cutting fees and interest rates.

The ratings have been so good that several cities said they could probably further reduce borrowing costs by not buying bond insurance. This is good news, since almost all the Triple-A-rated bond insurers that cities had relied on to improve their credit ratings were downgraded this year for backing subprime debt.

AAA is the highest bond rating possible and signifies the lowest credit risk to investors.

The limited pool of top-rate insurers may mean higher insurance premiums for cities that want to boost their credit rating before selling bonds. Officials are also concerned that insurance may become hard to get if insurers fold because they are unable to cover the bonds they backed in the subprime market.

Moody's Investors Service, one of three rating agencies, said this month that it will begin rating municipalities the same way it does corporations, which could boost municipal ratings as much as two notches. Fitch Ratings also said that it would consider aligning its municipal and corporate bond-rating systems. Standard & Poor's already uses the same scale for both.

"The real problem is that bond insurance was only ever useful as long as it allowed you to get a Triple-A" rating, said Bennett Sandlin, general counsel for the Texas Municipal League.

"The combination of Moody's giving us the credit we deserve to begin with and the downgrade of the bond insurers, it remains to be seen whether bond insurance is helpful in the future."

Bond ratings are based primarily on a city's overall financial health, including how much debt it has, how much money it has in reserve and how much sales tax revenue is coming in, officials said.

Not a single city or public agency in Tarrant County has a Triple-A rating, according to a recent Standard & Poor's report.

Tarrant water district

Sandy Swinnea, the Tarrant Regional Water District's finance director, said it is a coincidence that the problems with the subprime market came at the same time that the industry was rethinking complex rating and insurance policies.

She agreed, however, that things may be better for public entities like the water district.

"The changing market and the relooking at municipals and how they are rated should ultimately benefit TRWD," she said.

For years, public agencies like the water district paid for insurance to boost their ratings and reduce their issuance costs, she said.

When the district sold \$183 million in bonds two years ago, it bought insurance so that its rating with Moody's and Standard & Poor's would jump to AAA.

It didn't seem fair, because the district, like many cities, is more conservative in financing its debt.

"We are a monopoly. No one else competes with us and, therefore, we have very little market risk," Swinnea said. "Additionally, we're not here to make a profit; we're here to safeguard assets."

Arlington

Arlington is experiencing firsthand the effects of the subprime-mortgage crisis.

In 2005, the city issued \$164 million in variable-rate bonds for the Dallas Cowboys stadium project. For the first three years, interest rates stayed around 3 and 4 percent.

But when the city's bond insurer, MBIA, was downgraded from AAA this year, the interest rates jumped to 9 percent. That spike increased monthly interest-only payments from \$500,000 to more than \$1 million.

Arlington is trying to refinance the debt to a fixed rate, which is expected to cost an extra \$23 million to \$28 million. Getting AAA bond insurance on the debt is expected to cost \$5.3 million, compared with \$553,000 that the city paid MBIA three years ago.

The city could be selling more than \$140 million in bonds for streets, parks, libraries and other services over the next five years if voters approve a bond referendum Nov. 4.

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City ratings

Here's a look at some area cities' general-obligation-bond ratings.

Municipality	Moody's	Standard & Poor's	Fitch
Arlington	Aa2	AA+	AA
Azle	Baa2	A+	A
Bedford	A1	NR	NR
Benbrook	A2	A	NR
Burleson	A2	AA-	A+
Colleyville	NR	AA+	AA+
Crowley	A3	BBB+	NR
Eules	A1	A+	NR
Everman	Ba1	A	NR
Forest Hill	Baa2	A	NR
Fort Worth	Aa2	AA+	AA
Grand Prairie	Aa3	NR	AA
Grapevine	A1	AA-	NR
Haltom City	A2	A+	NR
Haslet	NR	BBB+	NR
Hurst	Aa3	AA	NR
Keller	A2	A+	NR
Kennedale	Baa1	A	NR
Lake Worth	NR	BBB+	NR
Mansfield	Aa3	AA-	AA-
North Richland Hills	Aa3	AA	NR
Richland Hills	A3	NR	NR
Saginaw	A2	NR	NR
Southlake	Aa2	AA	AA
Watauga	A3	A	A
White Settlement	A3	A-	NR

NR = not rated

Sources: Standard & Poor's, WM Financial Strategies of St. Louis, First Southwest Co.

Kennedale

Standard and Poor's recently upgraded Kennedale's bond rating from a Baa- to A, but the city still bought bond insurance to get a Triple-A rating on the \$4.5 million in street-repair bonds it was marketing, City Manager Bob Hart said. The bond insurance premium cost the city \$17,284, and the Triple-A rating lowered the interest rate, which will save the city \$191,000 over the life of the debt.

Hurst

Last month, Hurst obtained a 4.82 percent interest rate on \$16.1 million in general-obligation bonds thanks to its AA rating, which had been upgraded from AA-, said Anita Thetford, the city's finance director.

"In the past, we did purchase the bond insurance because it was relatively cheap and gave us a slight advantage. We see no need to apply for that now. We are just going to depend on our excellent rating," Thetford said.

Municipal bonds: A primer

There are three major rating agencies for municipal bonds: Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch Ratings. The agencies assign a rating for municipal bonds based on several factors, including the economy and a city's financial condition, management practices, debt structure, and demographics.

Aaa — Bonds rated Aaa are judged to be of the best quality. They carry the smallest degree of investment risk.

Aa — Bonds rated Aa are judged to be of high quality.

A — Bonds rated A are to be considered upper-medium-grade obligations.

Baa — Bonds rated Baa are to be considered medium-grade obligations.

Bonds in the Aa, A, and Baa are also assigned 1, 2 or 3. For example, an A1 would be the strongest and A3 would be the weakest.

Comparing ratings:

AAA = Aaa

AA+ = Aa1

AA = Aa2

AA- = Aa3

A+ = A1

A = A2

A- = A3

BBB+ = Baa1

BBB = Baa2

BBB- = Baa3

Mansfield

City Manager Clay Chandler said Mansfield has consistently improved its bond rating over the past decade and now has an AA-, largely because of growth in its commercial tax base and investment in Methodist Mansfield Medical Center and entertainment venues such as Big League Dreams and Hawaiian Falls.

The city also raised its property tax rate 2 cents to cover higher operating costs and to build up the city's reserve fund, an action that also improves its credit rating.

The city will request a new bond rating before it seeks to sell \$28 million in bonds in October.

North Richland Hills

North Richland Hills received a 3.67 percent interest rate on \$4.18 million in bonds it sold in April, thanks to its AA rating, which had been upgraded from AA-, said Larry Koonce, the city's finance director. In the past, he said, the city has bought bond insurance every time to enhance its credit rating but may reconsider purchasing it because of its higher credit rating.

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PAGE 3 OF 3

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Fort Worth

Fort Worth has not been marketing its general-obligation bonds publicly but instead negotiates with a limited pool of financial institutions, which is called private placement.

The city, which has an AA+ rating from Standard & Poor's, does not have a current financial audit because of problems in its financial department. That could make its bonds harder to market publicly, officials said.

Fort Worth's most recent financial audit is about 3 years old, but the city expects to be caught up by next year, Assistant City Manager Karen Montgomery said.

Staff writer Max B. Baker contributed to this report, which includes material from the *Star-Telegram* archives.

SUSAN SCHROCK, 817-548-5475

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REAL ESTATE

TRANSACTIONS

Arlington

1. Office sale

2001-2021 E. Lamar Blvd.

SCM Real Estate Services sold two office buildings at Governor's Row on Lamar Boulevard. The 55,181-square-foot multi-building complex is 80 percent leased. Seven buildings remain available for sale or lease. Landmark Bedford Holdings purchased a building at Governor's Row for a north Arlington location of Bailey & Galyen Attorneys.

Broker: Beaux Riley of SCM Real Estate Services is marketing the building and represented the seller in the building purchased by Bailey & Galyen Attorneys. Kurt Cherry of PM Realty Group represented the law firm.

Eules

2. Industrial lease

1114 S. Airport Circle

FSW Supply leased 4,508 square feet.

Broker: Justin Owen of Sperry Van Ness/Dunn Commercial Management negotiated the lease.

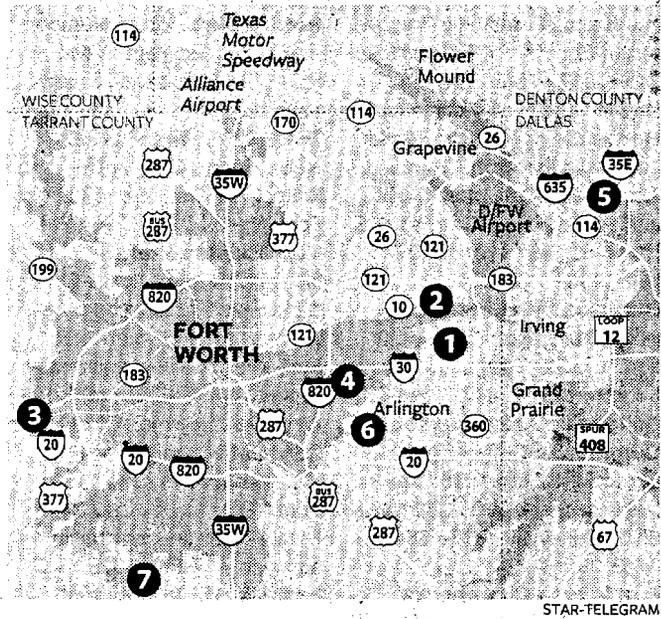
Fort Worth

3. Office lease

8851 W. U.S. 80

Home Healthcare Partners, which does business as Attentive — Primecare Home Health, has leased 2,000 square feet of office space in the Atrium Center.

Brokers: Becky Thompson and Matt Siegel of Red Oak Realty represented the building's owner. J. David Cason of Centra Asset Partners repre-



STAR-TELEGRAM

sented the tenant.

4. Office lease

6707 Brentwood Stair Road

Medical Solutions Group has leased 4,300 square feet of office space in the Meadowbrook Wells Fargo Bank Building.

Brokers: Becky Thompson and Matt Siegel of Red Oak Realty negotiated the lease.

Irving

5. Restaurant opening

1820 Market Place

Sweet Tomatoes opened its third North Texas location at Hunter Plaza Shopping Center. The restaurant offers a buffet of salads, soups, baked goods and pasta. Sweet Tomatoes opened locations in Addison in 2007 and south Arlington in March.

Pantego

6. Office lease

3273 W. Pioneer Parkway

Anita Deyanrra-Gaona has leased 6,610 square feet of office space.

Broker: Justin Owen of Sperry Van Ness/Dunn Commercial Management negotiated the transaction.

Rural Tarrant County

7. Office/warehouse lease

7920 Rodeo Trail

Aker Well Service leased 4,000 square feet at Suites 260 and 280 off Farm Road 1187, near the boundary between Tarrant and Johnson counties.

Brokers: Jordan Foster and Jim Maibach of Peyco Southwest Realty represented the landlord.

— Compiled by Sandra Baker and Andrea Jares

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BRIEFS

Man intentionally crashes car, dies

EULESS — A 39-year-old man was killed early Sunday after he intentionally crashed his vehicle during a fight with his estranged wife, police said. Luis Frias was pronounced dead at 4:45 a.m. on Texas 360 at the Harwood Road overpass, officials said. Frias' wife told police that they were arguing "about relationship issues" while driving south on the highway, Euless police Sgt. Gary Landers said. She said Frias, who was driving, jerked the steering wheel, causing the vehicle to leave the roadway and roll over. Frias was not wearing a seat belt, Landers said. His wife was not seriously injured. The wreck is still under investigation, Landers said.

— Alex Branch and Nathaniel Jones

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BRIEFS

Police department open house

EULESS — Ever wondered if your city's police station looks like the ones on TV? An open house is set for Saturday at the Euless Police Department, 1102 W. Euless Boulevard. The free event is from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tours are scheduled for the jail, courts and other departments in the station. Last year, an estimated 500 residents visited the station.

— Domingo Ramirez Jr.

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EULESS

Theft inquiry causes church rift

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

EULESS — An investigation into a possible theft of less than \$50 is causing a major rift at a local church.

No one has been issued any citations in the case. But the pastor ousted eight families from the Tongan First United Methodist Church last week and called police to restore order at the church just as the issue was about to be discussed, a few church members said.

Investigators believe the money may have been taken from a collection plate last month at the church, 1010 S. Main St.

"Right now, it looks like 99 percent of this is a civil matter," Euless police Sgt. Gary

Landers said Wednesday. "But we are looking into a possible theft of under \$50."

Theft under \$50 is a Class C misdemeanor. Generally, a violator is issued a citation and pays a fine.

Ousted church members filed the report Monday, just four days after Pastor Alex Latu ordered the families out of the church during a Thursday business meeting.

The families "were disruptive on issues we were about to discuss," Latu said Wednesday. "I called police to get them to move out of the church."

Latu declined to elaborate. The pastor said he was not aware of money missing from the church. He also said that

the families were still members of the congregation.

But Keleiola Leakona of Fort Worth, the church's treasurer, said Wednesday that the families, including hers, were told not to return.

"He has repeatedly said that our membership has been revoked," Leakona said Wednesday. "And he did know about the missing money."

Leakona said Wednesday that they have contacted area Methodist officials about the missing money and the pastor's actions.

"We are the founders of that church," she said. "We want our church back."

DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.,
817-685-3822

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D/FW Airport officials look to key indicators for sign of economic future, and it isn't bright

Business at D/FW hotels and car rentals have taken slight downturns, a sign of potential trouble as the airport tries to predict the economic future.

By **BRYON OKADA**
 okada@star-telegram.com

D/FW AIRPORT — As the economy teeters, officials are looking at revenue sources that predict how business at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport will go in coming months — and it doesn't look pretty.

A large airport like D/FW has multiple revenue streams, but a couple of key ones — hotels and car rentals — are leading indicators, the first to see a boom or a bust.

Hotels

D/FW's two hotels — the Grand Hyatt DFW and the Hyatt Regency DFW — are among 16 hotels in Grapevine.

Collectively through August, they have experienced a 2 percent decrease in business compared with last year, according to Tennessee-based Smith Travel Research. The most significant decreases were in recent months — May through August — coinciding with the fuel-price crunch.

"The tourist market contracted dramatically," said Gary Hedges, assistant vice president of hotels.

For the five full-service hotels, including the D/FW hotels, catering to business travelers means that the overall impact was less, although the trend was similar. But in September, the commercial market began contracting. It hasn't shown up in the numbers yet, but it's coming, Hedges said.

"Just as the oil crisis hit the consumer market earlier, we're seeing the financial crisis hitting commercial now," Hedges said. "The financial market has everybody frozen."

Business travel overall is decreasing. Overnight trips are becoming day trips. Although the downturn is somewhat cyclical, it may not go away this year.

For the year, D/FW officials said, the Grand Hyatt DFW occupancy is at 70 percent, compared with a normal of 73 percent. (Because regional travel is business-intensive instead of tourist-intensive, occupancy rates tend to be in this range.)

In 2005, the hurricane season brought an influx of guests from Louisiana and East Texas, escaping Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This year, because Hurricane Ike's path included the D/FW area, guests largely went elsewhere, Hedges said.

Rental cars

Rentals dipped about 1 percent this year compared with 2007, said Zenola Campbell, vice president of concessions. This coincided with a similar decrease in "destination passengers," those passengers who land at D/FW to do business or for some other reason.

And indications are that those numbers will decrease next year as well.

For fiscal 2008, D/FW expects 12.2 million destination passengers. Preliminary data, which include an expected decrease in overall passengers as airlines pull back service, suggest that this will decrease to 11 million passengers in fiscal 2009.

Based on history, D/FW can expect 12 percent of those passengers to rent cars. Using a multiplier that takes into account days per contract and rates, anticipated revenue of \$228 million can be generated.

That's \$16 million less than

this year.

Compounding the issue:

- People are requesting smaller vehicles.
 - Overall travel is down.
 - Several people going to the same event are sharing one vehicle.
 - Last month, up to 10 percent of the local fleet was sent south to help with transportation in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike.
- Typically the summer months help. This year they didn't.

"We just didn't see the kind of uptick we normally have," Campbell said.

BRYON OKADA, 817-685-3956

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Why isn't D/FW Airport using gas-drilling revenues to pay for operating expenses?

Dallas/Fort Worth Airport officials must cut \$13 million from operating expenses by April or be forced to raise the landing fees that D/FW charges American Airlines and other carriers. So far, they've cut \$2.3 million.

That raises the question: Why doesn't D/FW use royalties from natural gas drilling to cover the remaining expenses?

D/FW receives between \$2 million and \$5 million each month, according to John C. Terrell, vice president of commercial development.

But years ago, airport officials decided that any natural resources found at D/FW would be dedicated to capital development and other on-site improvements. Although it would be possible to skirt that policy, that's what's largely driving the use of the money today.

The airport is using \$45 million of present and future drilling revenues to upgrade the older terminals, Terrell said. Other drilling revenues are being used to pay down the \$2 billion debt incurred during the recent capital-development program that opened Terminal D, the Skylink people-mover and other airfield projects.

"We wanted to use it where we could get the most bang for the dollars," Terrell said.

— Bryon Okada

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HURST-EULESS-BEDFORD

Cutting down on student truancy is objective of daytime curfew

Truancy costs the schools state funding and deprives students of the chance to learn.

By MATT FRAZIER mfrazier@star-telegram.com
 Under 17?

Parent of a someone who is?

A new daytime curfew in Bedford, Eules and Hurst could bring misdemeanor charges and a fine of up to \$500 for children and their parents if the minors are walking the streets during school hours.

The Hurst-Eules-Bedford school district has asked the cities to enact the curfew in hopes of curbing truancy. Eules and Bedford adopted the curfew last month.

"We certainly see some benefit to the curfew," Bedford Police Chief David Flory said. "We don't have a huge problem of running across kids in the afternoon, but this gives us a means to deal with kids when they are absent from school."

The Hurst City Council is expected to discuss the curfew Oct. 14.

Officials in other area school districts, including Birdville and Fort Worth, say they have not discussed a daytime curfew.

Fort Worth handles truancy through a truancy court, which can fine parents of truants up to \$500 per case. State law says a child is truant after 10 unexcused absences.

Unexcused absences

Hurst police officer Jimmy Meeks said the ordinance would help.

"We see quite a few kids hanging out during the day, especially at the Northeast Mall," Meeks said. "This is an extra tool to try to get kids in school."

The district's action follows an increase in truancy.

H-E-B recorded 42,773 unexcused absences in the 2007-08 school year. The year before it had 39,955.

School districts receive state funding based on each day that students are in school. The district says it lost \$1.2 million because of truancy last year, up from \$1.12 million the previous year.

That's money that could have gone toward hiring more teachers, though money is not the most important aspect of the truancy problem, Assistant Superintendent Debbie Tribble said.

"The biggest deal is those kids are not in school so they are not learning. They are not going to achieve. They are not going to graduate," Tribble said.

By asking for help from Hurst, Eules and Bedford, the district is covering about 85 percent of its students. The rest live in cities at the borders of the district, including Arlington, Colleyville and Grapevine.

It would have been difficult to get those cities to pass curfews for a tiny fraction of its minors, said H-E-B truancy specialist Nate Hearne.

Crime check

The curfew can help persuade students to stay in class and out of trouble, Hearne said. And it will help protect residents of those three cities, he said.

The district is pulling crime records from Hurst, Eules and Bedford to show how many crimes are committed by juveniles during school hours.

"When they are out, the crime rate goes up. When they are in school, the crime rate goes down," Hearne said. "This is very unique that these cities have come together and combined to help."

MATT FRAZIER, 817-685-3854

H-E-B daytime curfews

Eules and Bedford have passed daytime curfews at the behest of the H-E-B school district. While school is in session, minors are not allowed to be in a public place between 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. The curfew is expected to take effect in a few weeks, after the cities inform residents of the change and after a grace period. Exceptions will be made for minors who have graduated, have a GED diploma, are out with an excused absence or are on a lunch break or a work study program.

Source: Cities of Eules and Bedford

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STATE FINANCES

Bear market takes bite out of Texas pension funds

Some government investment funds kept buying toxic stocks, even as they plunged in value.

By YAMIL BERARD
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The stock portfolios of some of the state's largest investments funds — supporting government employees' retirements and public education — have taken quite a beating this year.

By summer, the value of some of the funds had dropped by billions of dollars.

Inflicting damage was the ruthless bear market that smacked hardest U.S. and international financial-sector stocks. That's where a chunk of the state funds' investments have been concentrated, records show.

Many funds also had significant stakes in some of Wall Street's highest rollers that went bust. Some even increased their exposure by buying more shares early this year as the stock of those companies was plunging.

None of the funds have yet to make public their third-quarter rates of return, which would give the most up-to-date look at losses. But by the end of the second quarter on June 30 — before the markets rapidly deteriorated, former Wall Street powerhouses like Lehman Bros. failed and Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae were taken over — all the funds saw significant erosion of their portfolios.

Experts predict even deeper declines once third-quarter data are available.

If the bear market, which began several months ago, persists, that could mean less money available for

school construction and educational materials for Texas children. Government pension funds may need a boost, and taxpayers could get tapped for the increase.

The market decline is enough to cause growing discomfort among teacher groups, who years ago saw lawmakers' complacency as the Teacher Retirement System of Texas lost billions in the 2001 bear market.

"We have learned a lesson when the markets go down," said Tim Lee, executive director of the Texas Retired Teachers Association, representing 286,000 retired educators. "There needs to be a response by legislators saying, 'We will keep this fund solvent because it is in the best interest of educators and taxpayers to do so.'"

Problems for lawmakers

Lawmakers may have more than just the teacher fund to deal with if the market slump continues.

■ From Aug. 31, 2007, to June 30, the Texas Permanent School Fund saw its U.S. stock portfolio decline in value by about 23 percent. Money from the fund supports the state's textbook program, and the fund guarantees bonds issued by school districts.

■ The value of the domestic equity portfolio of the Texas County and District Retirement System, which provides

pensions for more than 570 counties and appraisal districts, dropped 15 percent from Sept. 30, 2007, to June 30. Its international stock portfolio fell 12 percent. About half its total portfolio of about \$16 billion is invested in stocks, records show. The market value of the overall portfolio dropped by almost \$1 billion.

■ On international stocks, the portfolio of the Employees Retirement System of Texas declined in value by 18 percent; its U.S. stock portfolio dropped by 15 percent. About 60 percent of its \$22.6 billion total portfolio is in stocks. From Sept. 30, 2007, to June 30, the value of its overall portfolio dropped by more than \$2 billion.

"That is what these markets have done with these portfolios that have a significant commitment to equity," said Mac McLain, former chief investment officer at Texas Wesleyan University. "We have a credit crisis on our hands, and when you hold equities, by definition, you're assuming that risk."

The Texas Municipal Retirement System, which manages pension investments for

more than 800 Texas cities, for years stuck with more conservative bond investments. Only 8 percent of its total portfolio was in equities in August. It posted a 10.90 percent year-to-date loss in its equity holdings, Aug. 31 returns show. But the market value of the overall portfolio increased by more than \$730 million from Sept. 30, 2007, through August.

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The Teacher Retirement System, the state's largest pension fund, provides a link to quarterly returns on its Web site, showing the fund's global equity investment rate of return for the first quarter was a negative 8.3 percent. The site does not report on more recent results. But in an e-mail response to written questions, TRS said that the fund showed a one-year rate of return of minus 4.3 percent. The fund's net asset value was nearly \$105 billion as of Aug. 31.

Officials at other funds say that market ups and downs are to be expected, and that they are in it for the long haul. Over time, they say, the funds will recoup the losses and meet target investment return rates.

"Our long-term investment horizon gives us opportunities to absorb and adjust to broad changes in the economic landscape," said Amy Bishop, spokeswoman for Texas County and District Retirement System.

Skeptics, however, believe that a recovery will be long and arduous because the hit has been so dramatic. A rally could take the funds as long as six years or more, some say.

And the funds should have known better than to keep their money in toxic stocks and other securities that clearly were tanking at the start of 2008, according to those critics.

"The period we're in, as far as the financial chaos, should not have caught any reasonably concerned, alert steward by surprise," said Ron Hagan, chairman of the board of Dallas' Investment Fiduciary Leadership Council, an organization of about 100 investment firms, pension and retirement systems around the globe. "We've had plenty of warnings of the impact of this on the banking industry and the financial markets. This is not something that suddenly

came along."

Numbers tell story

First, the stocks of troubled financial institution didn't help state pensions and endowment funds. Most had some exposure to the much-publicized culprits: American International Group (AIG), Lehman Bros. Holdings, Washington Mutual, Wachovia Corp., the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. (Freddie Mac) and the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae).

Making matters worse, ERS, TRS and the Texas Permanent School Fund kept buying some of the toxic stocks even as they plunged in value, according to data from Bloomberg.

For several months this year, ERS kept buying shares of AIG, Freddie Mac, Wachovia, Washington Mutual and Lehman Bros., even while the stocks were diving.

TRS increased its holdings of Lehman stock from February to recent months, although it did sell Freddie Mac shares. The Texas Permanent School Fund dumped Freddie Mac about as fast as the stock price dropped, but it piled on Washington Mutual and Lehman Bros. shares as those stocks sank.

In contrast, the California Public Employees' Retirement System — the nation's largest pension fund — started dumping millions of shares of Washington Mutual stock as early as early 2007 and stopped buying early this year.

Declines in stock values came at a big price for the Texas funds. For example, on June 30, TRS held more than 4 million shares of Lehman valued at 15 cents apiece. At one point last year, the stock was worth almost \$68 a share.

After the toxic stocks took their swipe at the funds, the stocks of top performers, such as Wal-Mart and Disney, fell as market confidence eroded, to produce even more losses.

Some note that the state funds can't be blamed for market volatility.

"When you hold equities, by definition, you're assuming that risk, and when you enter a bear market, you're going to be negatively affected," said McLain, Texas Wesleyan's former investment officer.

Officials of Texas Permanent School Fund said the purchases of stock in the troubled companies were made as part of an equity portfolio designed to match stock indexes. So the portfolio was fully represented in both the top-performing stocks and its worst ones, spokeswoman DeEtta Culbertson said.

She also noted that the Texas Permanent School Fund pulled \$2.8 billion from public equity markets in the past few years.

ERS couldn't pull out of some toxic stocks because its investments are locked and the fund is restricted on buying and selling, officials said. For example, when the stock market began a downward spiral a year ago, ERS policy prevented it from deviating from its investment strategy, ERS spokeswoman Mary Jane Wardlow said.

That's because ERS, like other funds, follows a long-term investment policy that sets "target" allocations for stocks, bonds and cash. It also spreads money across various types of financial instruments. In case one suffers, another's outperformance will soften the blow.

"The ERS trust is highly diversified to reduce risk and supported by long-term investment strategies that stretch far into the horizon," Wardlow wrote in a prepared statement.

The Texas County and District Retirement System made a similar point and also said it has a \$2 billion war chest in reserve in case of crisis.

Howard Goldman with the Teacher Retirement System said the fund was "ahead of the curve" by changing its asset mix starting about a year ago. The allocation is more diversified than in the past with a greater emphasis on alternative investments, he said. "Over the last six to 10 months, there has been no need to change our allocation in response to current market conditions," he said. "Rather, recent changes in market conditions have helped confirm the value of having such a diversified portfolio."

Institutional funds typically stick with an allocation strategy over time, rather than adjust to ever-changing conditions, said McLain, who has more than 20 years' experience teaching finance to undergraduate and graduate business students at Texas Wesleyan.

The funds "are going to say: 'No, we maintain our discipline. We're long-term investors. In the long term, we will be fine,'"

But others say the funds could have avoided some of the pain by shifting their stocks to higher performing economic sectors, such as technology.

In the last eight weeks, some investment firms have advised their institutional clients to go 100 percent into cash. Others are stampeding into U.S. Treasuries, so they can sleep at night, even though the returns are paltry.

"While it may not always make heroes out of investment firms, it does contribute far better outcomes than 15 to 20 percent loss in value," said Hagan of the Investment Fiduciary Leadership Council. "If you weren't in a good spot when you started, you're in a very, very bad spot now, and recovery will be very difficult for public pensions who are chasing returns."

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Some holdings of the state's largest investment funds

Employees Retirement System of Texas

Equity holdings of note as of 6/30/08	Number of shares
Freddie Mac	801,300
Fannie Mae	963,900
American International Group	1,871,600
Lehman Bros. Holdings	254,750
Wachovia Corp.	1,140,850
Washington Mutual	762,000

Teacher Retirement System of Texas

Equity holdings of note as of 6/30/08	Number of shares
Freddie Mac	1,719,383
Fannie Mae	2,123,577
American International Group	4,821,738
Lehman Bros. Holdings	4,327,272
Wachovia Corp.	4,002,546
Washington Mutual	1,344,035

Texas Permanent School Fund

Equity holdings of note as of 6/30/08	Number of shares
Freddie Mac	517,394
Fannie Mae	851,482
American International Group	2,151,084
Lehman Bros. Holdings	516,334
Wachovia Corp.	1,710,254
Washington Mutual	847,089

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EDITORIALS

RECOMMENDATION | HOUSE DISTRICT 92

Smith is the pick

Todd Smith says he's made his peace with House Speaker Tom Craddick and expects to speak against toll roads in the next session if legislation treats residents of his district unfairly.

State Rep. Todd Smith was absolutely right when, in the waning days of the 2007 legislative session, he defied the autocratic rule of Speaker Tom Craddick. The House descended into turmoil when Craddick claimed "absolute authority" to decide which members could speak on the House floor and which could not. The speaker never allowed a vote on that question, so nobody will really know how many House members agreed with Smith in the rebellion.

That was then. This is now. Smith, a conservative Republican from Euless, says his best analysis now shows primary elections and other House membership shifts have clearly moved the balance of support in Craddick's favor. He says he "can't foresee" a scenario under which Craddick would not be re-elected as speaker.

Other House members may disagree. There still may be a battle for the speaker's chair after the Legislature convenes again Jan. 13. Meanwhile, Smith says that he has made his peace with Craddick and is ready to move ahead on important issues facing state government.

Smith was first elected to represent Texas House District 92, the Hurst-Euless-Bedford area, 12 years ago. He has worked hard to stay in tune with his district's voters on key issues, particularly the needs of the H-E-B school district. He has not been afraid to stand up to powerful special interests, including electric utilities, home builders and insurance companies, when he felt that the legislation they were pushing was not right.

In the 2009 session, he expects to speak out against anticipated transportation legislation if it forces his constituents to drive on toll roads while people in other parts of the state have free roads.

The *Star-Telegram* recommends Todd Smith for state representative in District 92.

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October 8, 2008

Sports

Texas Football Team Thrives On Tonga Connection

by Wade Goodwyn



L.T. Tuipulotu (99) and his teammate Andrew Eteaki (66, at left) perform the pre-game *haka* at Allen Eagle Stadium. Scott Bjornlie/Trinity High

All Things Considered, October 4, 2008 · Trinity High School in Euless, Texas, has the nation's top-ranked football team, according to *Sports Illustrated*. The idea that the state of Texas could field some of the best players in high school football is not exactly breaking news.

But the Trinity Trojans are different because the backbone of this team, its offensive and defensive heart and soul, is Tongan — many of the players' families are from Tonga, the island nation southeast of Fiji.

The reasons so many Tongans are in Euless may seem rather random. But the reasons for the team's rise to the No. 1 national ranking are anything but random: Many credit the squad's success to the Tongan players' size.

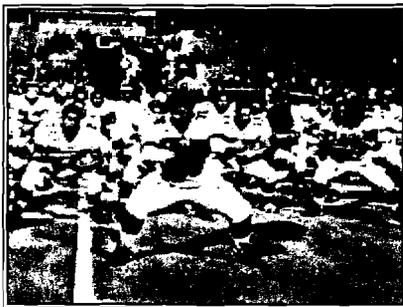
Friday Night Warriors

On autumn Friday nights in Texas, high school football stadiums are packed with hundreds of thousands of people, celebrating one of their most important and historic tribal customs.

The rituals are precisely defined: There must be music and dancing, chanting and marching. Sticks are twirled and thrown spinning into the night sky.

The tribe's future — its strong, beautiful young men and women — paint their faces, don costumes and perform amazing feats of physical prowess for the pleasure and admiration of their people.

But when it is Trinity's warriors who are preparing for a Friday night battle, there is an added ritual.



Isikeli Cocker (76) leads the Trinity Trojans through their ritual *haka*. Scott Bjornlie/Trinity High

A massive Tongan offensive lineman, Isikeli Cocker leads his fellow Tongans and the rest of his Trinity teammates in a *haka*, just before kickoff. Cocker moves around the field, gesturing in a primal, ancient way. His men affirm their readiness with chants and slaps to their legs and chests.

Watching this spectacle unfold in a North Texas suburban football stadium seems both surreal and somehow just fine, totally appropriate. The visiting football team stands there and watches, some try to ignore the spectacle. But it's hard not to stare.

And when it's time for the team captains to meet at the 50-yard line for the

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coin toss, the Trinity players seem to have a slight edge in the swagger department. It doesn't hurt that one captain is a Tongan the size of a small skyscraper.

Strength In Diversity

Mike Harris, the young principal of Trinity High, says a lot of people are unfamiliar with the Pacific island nation. He says people often ask, "What is the Tonga population, and where are they from, where is Tonga, where are those islands?"

As for Eules, it's a suburb between Dallas and Fort Worth, next to the big international airport.

"Whenever we travel to other schools and other events, or people come here, they're surprised to see our population," Harris says.

Trinity is a big school with a sprawling campus. Its 2,200 students are in three grades, from 10th to 12th.

When you walk in the front entrance, the first thing you see are dozens of national flags hanging from the ceiling. Each flag represents the home country of one of the students, and it looks a little like the Olympic Games in there.

Harris says the entryway serves two purposes: First, to impress first-time visitors, and second, to make the students feel like the high school honors their heritage.

He says one of the unique things about Trinity that he's always loved is its diverse population.

"We have cliques, just like every school has cliques," he says. "But the majority of our cliques are all interest-based — not racial-based."

Of course, let's not get carried away. This is suburban North Texas, and Trinity is half white.

But another 15 percent are Hispanic; 15 percent are black; and 13 percent are Pacific Islander. To be Pacific-specific, Tongan. So how did a community of more than 3,000 Tongans come to be in Eules, of all places?

In the early 1970s, a Tongan man who worked for American Airlines moved to Eules with his wife.

"The first Tongan couple that moved here to Eules is Halatono and Siupeli Netane," says Ofa Faiva-Seile, a Tongan whose family moved to Eules when she was a teenager in the mid-1980s. Faiva-Seile has been recording an oral history of the Tongan community in North Texas.

"When they arrived here, they realized that the cost of living was inexpensive, [with] plenty of jobs over at DFW airport," she says. Then they told their friends and family, and the area drew an influx of people from the island.

Faiva-Seile was in the first wave of Tongans to arrive. At first, the big brown girl was an outcast, whom nobody knew was from Tonga.

"I remember coming here and going to high school at North Richland Hills, where it was nothing but cowboys. So I felt very out of place," she says.

"I didn't have a lot of friends, you know, I wasn't approached a lot. But I moved to Trinity, and I'll tell you what, there was just a whole different atmosphere to Trinity High School."

A Community's Bonds

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The word got out in the Tongan community that Trinity High School was a place where Tongans could be themselves.

And the conservative Texans discovered that, surprisingly, they had a lot in common with the Tongans. For example, Tongans are intensely family- and community-oriented, and they also don't believe in sparing the rod.

"The police here can pick up a kid, and run him over to the house and say, 'Mom, dad, we caught him mouthing off' -- or stealing, or whatever," Faiva-Seile says.

"Then, I hate to say it, but it's normal in our culture, you get a butt-whipping," she says. "Mom whips your butt, and then your daddy whips your butt, and then your uncle can come along and go whip your butt, too."

That sort of accountability goes over big here. And this sports-happy Texas culture also heartily approves of the Tongans' tendency toward the physical. Trinity High's head football coach, Steve Lineweaver, can describe it in a very political way.

"I think we've been blessed with a diverse group that brings their own strengths to the program, predominantly Tongans, that bring a passion for the game of football," he says.

Asked if that passion included a love for hitting their opponents on the field, the coach agrees.

"They're very physical," Lineweaver says, and "a lot of them are very large."

They are large -- and when they're in high school, fast, too.

In the Trinity weight room, the team turns weight-training into a party. They face each other in rows and lift and jerk heavy free weights above their heads, then drop them to the rubber floor like they're big and bad -- and don't they know it.

Senior wide receiver Alex Jones says he loves his Tongan teammates. "We've got a lot of freaks of nature, really, that come and kick people's butts," he says.

A New Tradition Is Born

As the Tongan community has grown in Euless, so has the success of Trinity football. In just the past three years, they've won their first two state championships. Last year, all five offensive linemen and their tight end were offered college scholarships.

While other top Texas high school football programs have gone to the spread offense, throwing the football all over the lot, Trinity plays smash-mouth, running it down the other team's throat.

Jones says he takes great pleasure watching the other teams' high-powered offense, with their speed and great hands and talent, standing forlornly on the sidelines, their defense being slowly ground into the dust, the game clock spinning like a merry-go-round.

"A couple of years ago, our entire offensive line outweighed the Washington Redskins' offensive line," Jones says.

The Tongan players at Trinity are, not surprisingly, proud of themselves, their team and their school.

They are a big success at something that counts for an awful lot around here. And lest any non-sports-fans sneer, they and their teammates earn every win with their sweat and blood in the cruel Texas heat.

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"We're not pass-blocking," a coach yelled at a recent practice. "Stick your nose between his numbers. Here we go — hit!

"Good! That's what some of you guys have got to learn," he said. "You've got to bring the hat!"

Motivation, And Success

Defensive end Vai Sapoi, a senior, says his parents told him when he was in the fourth grade that if he wanted to play football, he had to get his grades up.

Sapoi says he wasn't always the smartest guy in the classroom, but he worked his tail off so he could play for Trinity.

"Playing for Trinity, it's not just a sport to everybody, you know," he says. "Everyone takes it seriously. It's more like a career."

On a recent Friday night, the stadium stands were packed. Midway through the first quarter, a Trinity running back burst through the middle of his huge offensive line. He cut right, exploded into the opponent's backfield and streaked down the sideline, the defensive safeties giving desperate chase.

The opposing head coach smacked his clipboard against his leg in frustration as the defenders finally pushed the Trojan runner out of bounds inside the 10.

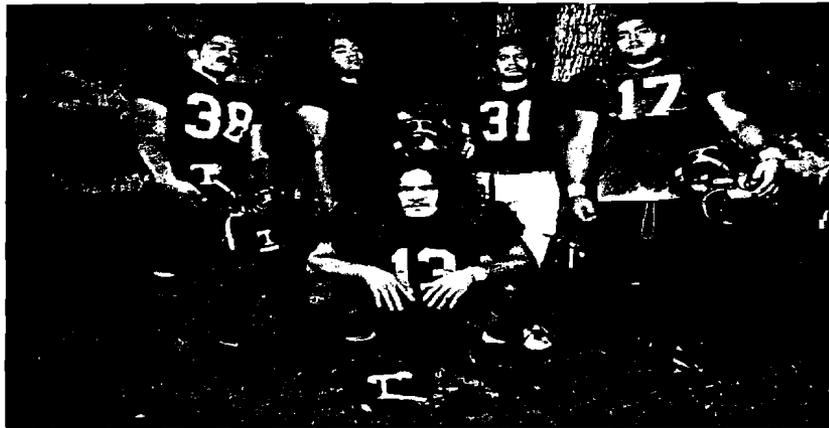
Everyone knew that play was coming. The problem is, how do you stop it?

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The New York Times

October 8, 2008



Brian Harkin for The New York Times

From left, Setefano Maile, Siieli Pauni, Elikena Fieilo (squatting), Vaimaali Sapoi and L. T. Tuipulotu are starters for Trinity High.

EULESS, Tex. — Public-address announcers at games for Trinity High, the nation’s top-ranked prep football team, sometimes inadvertently twist players’ names into what Pacific Islanders consider swear words. Anywhere else in this state, the land of “Friday Night Lights” where high school games can draw tens of thousands of fans, such mispronunciations would not be an issue. But the Trinity Trojans hardly fit the familiar image of the Texas gridiron.

A pipeline from the Pacific Island kingdom of Tonga has delivered a Polynesian influence to this town’s churches, markets and championship football team, which won state titles in 2005 and 2007 among Texas’ largest schools. Players of Tongan descent have brought imposing size, strength and toughness to the Trojans — and the need for a roster with phonetic spellings for the announcers.

“That would stop the cursing,” said Ofa Faiva-Siale, projects manager for the Eulesse Parks and Community Services Department.

Students at Trinity speak 53 languages, and the flags of 31 nations hang in the school’s entrance. The proximity of Eulesse to Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, which is located partly within the city limits, has brought a remarkable diversity to this town of 54,000.

Thirteen of the 24 Trinity players who have made all-state since the 1980s, and 16 members of the current roster, are of Tongan descent.

“When you think of Texas high school football, you think of country kids, farm kids; you don’t expect to see players from the South Pacific,” said Siieli Pauni, who has two sons on the Trinity team.

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The parents of many players work at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport as baggage handlers and food-service employees, facilitating affordable travel on special family occasions. Others are self-employed as landscapers, carpenters and masons. Meanwhile, their sons are resolute linemen and linebackers, who weigh from 200 to 333 pounds and find in football a brisk physical exertion similar to the Tongan national sport of rugby.

Each time he knocks a defensive lineman on his back, Uatakini Cocker, a 6-foot-2, 297-pound offensive tackle, screams: "Mate ma'a Tonga," meaning, "I will die for Tonga." Later, the playful Cocker said, he often has to explain his heritage to opposing players and fans in this typical postgame conversation:

"Are you Mexican?"

Polynesian Pipeline Feeds a Football Titan

"Polynesian."

"Samoan?"

"Tongan."



Brian Harkin for The New York Times

Trinity High of Euless, Tex., the nation's top-ranked prep team, has 16 players of Tongan descent.

"O.K., because you would be a very big Mexican."

The presence of 3,000 to 4,000 Tongans here has lent an unmistakable touch of Polynesia to Euless and Trinity High. The Hawaiian Market advertises kava root used for a traditional drink. A nonprofit organization called Voice of Tonga addresses concerns about immigration, culture, language and health, and broadcasts a program, including Trinity football highlights, on local cable television.

The Free Church of Tonga, the Tongan First United Methodist Church and the First Tongan Assembly of God Church — three of nine Tongan-affiliated churches in the area — sit on or near South Main Street. A Catholic chaplain, who is Tongan, visits several times a year from San Francisco, but must work his schedule around football season, said Faiva-Siale.

"I'll call and say: 'Don't come this weekend; we're in playoffs. Only two or three people will show up,'" Faiva-Siale said.

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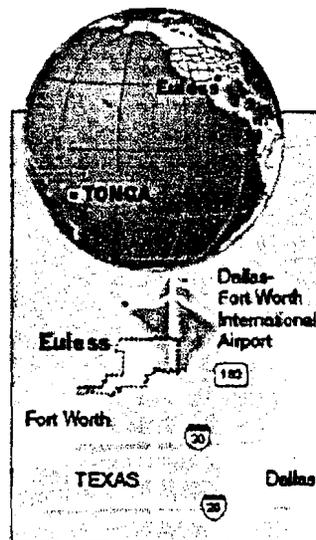
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Half of Trinity's 2,189 students in grades 10 through 12 are white, with a roughly equal mix of black and Hispanics and about 275 Asians and Pacific Islanders. This year's football team is represented by at least eight nations, from Laos to Rwanda. Nine of the 22 starters are Tongans.

"It makes you a better person, learning to accept different people," said Dontrayevious Robinson, Trinity's star running back, who is African-American.

Trinity has a Polynesian Club, and Polynesian students frequently join the choir and participate in the arts. Often, they are chosen homecoming king and queen, coaches said. Ukulele music wafts through the school courtyard at lunchtime and between classes. Occasionally, someone wears a traditional lava-lava sarong. Before and after each football game, Tongan players lead a ceremonial team war dance called a haka.

About 10 Polynesian players from Trinity (5-0) are now playing college football.



THE NEW YORK TIMES
The New York Times

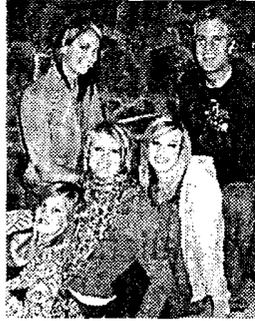
Eules has a big airport within its limits, a key to its diversity.

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OBITUARIES

Cynthia Eldridge



Pastor Eldridge has given the invocation at our City Council meeting over the last six years.

COLLEYVILLE — Cindy Eldridge left us to be with the Lord on Monday, Oct. 6, 2008.

FUNERAL: 12:30 p.m. Friday in Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home Chapel. Visitation: 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday at the funeral home.

MEMORIALS: Donations and condolences may be sent to New Life Covenant Church, 2501 N. Main St., Euless Texas 76039. Flowers and memorials may be sent to Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home, 5725 Colleyville Blvd., Colleyville, 817-281-8751.

In Loving memory of Cindy Eldridge

Cindy was born in Clovis, N.M., on Aug. 25, 1958, to Billy Watts and Mina Sheets. She graduated from high school in Farwell, Texas, in 1976, and received her bachelor's from Eastern New Mexico University in 1981.

Cindy decided to give her life to Jesus Christ when she met Kevin. After trying for many years to have children the Lord blessed them with three beautiful daughters. After several years Kevin was called to the ministry where Cindy followed and served with him. Cindy loved and touched everyone she came in contact with even animals. Cindy will be missed by everyone she knew and all those she was yet to meet.

SURVIVORS: Her husband, Kevin Eldridge; daughters, Carly, Taylor and Kenzi; father, Billy Watts of Conchas Dam, N.M.; mother and stepfather, Mina and Harry Sheets of Farwell; brother and wife, Kayle and Denise Watts and daughters, Katherine and Meredith; father-in-law and wife, Dean and Carol Ann Eldridge of Colleyville; mother-in-law, Coelita Eldridge of Clovis N.M.; sister-in-law, Shelly Burger and husband, Marty Burger, and sons, Trevor and Connor of Clovis, N.M., and Steve and Karen Eldridge and children, Trapper and Amber, of Plano.

Bluebonnet Hills Funeral Home
 Colleyville, 817-498-5894

View and sign guestbook at
www.star-telegram.com/obituaries

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Chow down on gyros and watch your football heroes

Looking for a new twist on tailgating for today's football game between Trinity and Colleyville Heritage?

Then stop by the 17th annual Mid-Cities Greek Food Festival and load up on bakiava, gyros and other Greek goodies before kickoff.

The 17th annual festival begins today and continues through Sunday at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, 303 Cullum Drive in Euless.

"It keeps getting bigger and better every year," said Debbie Manos, event coordinator.

Besides food, you'll find Greek folk dancing, including dance lessons, shopping, arts and crafts and tours of the church.

Admission and parking are free for the festival, which goes from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. today and Saturday and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.

Adrienne Nettles

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EDITORIALS

H-E-B SCHOOL DISTRICT

Daytime curfews are too extreme

To fight truancy, cities make it illegal to be out in public on a school day. That goes too far.

Let's say you're a 16-year-old (we know, nobody wants to go through that again, but bear with us for a moment) and you are walking your dog down the sidewalk near your home. It's the middle of a school day.

So far, have we told you anything that says you are breaking the law?

Not in most places.

Even if you are skipping school without an excused absence, that's not against the law until you establish a pattern of frequent skipping.



What do you think?

To comment, go to www.star-telegram.com/opinions

In Euless or Bedford, it's different.

New daytime curfew ordinances in those cities say you

could be stopped by a police officer, questioned and given a citation.

That citation could result in a \$500 fine unless you properly defend yourself in court.

Defend yourself for what?

For being in a public place during school hours.

Say you had a really, really bad day yesterday, broke up with your boyfriend/girlfriend, spilled your lunch all over your clothes and all the cool kids laughed at you, whatever. After a lot of crying about it you persuaded your mom and dad to let you stay home just one day.

Maybe that's a bad decision by your parents, but it doesn't mean you or they should have to explain yourselves to police. It doesn't mean you should face the threat of a big fine or the trouble of convincing a judge to let you off the hook.

Going to North East Mall?

Watch out, because City Council members in Hurst, home of the mall, will talk about a similar ordinance next week. And yes, Hurst residents, you are the ones who would pay for the police and courts to enforce this ordinance against young people who might come to the mall from any other city.

Officials in Euless and Bedford say they established the daytime curfew to help the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district. The district has seen an increase in truancy, which is a serious problem.

State law defines truancy and says how to deal with it. The law targets students who skip at least three times in a four-week period or at least 10 times in six months.

Skipping school is never a good thing.

But if the H-E-B school district needs help with legitimate truancy cases, or if its officials believe that state law should be tightened, they should take that up with the Legislature.

The Legislature should make any needed changes and provide school districts with the resources they need to combat truancy.

It shouldn't be like it is in Euless and Bedford. Cities shouldn't be making it illegal simply to be in public in the middle of the day.

There has to be a better reason than that to focus the power of police and courts on any individual.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Trinity players find themselves in the national spotlight again



"It's fun to have all this attention sometimes, and the interviews, but not too much," says Paul Pauni, center, a junior defensive lineman.

STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

A large number of Tongan players and often-dominant play on the field have brought the school plenty of attention.

By ANGEL VERDEJO and BRYON OKADA
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EULESS — Maybe you remember the *Wall Street Journal's* 2006 front-page story on the *haka*, the Trinity High School football team's pre-game war chant.

Or the Gatorade commercial featuring Trinity players. Or the *haka* feature on the CBS Evening News last year.

Or the National Public Radio segment on Trinity's Tongan players last week. Or the clips

on YouTube.

Did you catch the curly black hair of a Trinity football player on the front page of *The New York Times* this week?

That's right — you can lay any doubt to rest.

Trinity Tongans are not just national sporting news — they're national news, period. (One might even argue that Euleless Trinity is this year's Southlake Carroll.)

Of course, Tongans have been part of the Northeast Tarrant County community for three decades, adding their unique and familiar profiles to Euleless' diverse cultural mix.

Much of the suburban city is an ethnic mishmash continuously infused with new blood because of nearby Dallas/Fort Worth Airport.

But many of the 4,000 Tongans estimated to live in Euleless were born in the mainland U.S. or have lived here for many years.

Nevertheless, in other parts of the U.S. — where some folks might think North Texas is about cowboys and cacti and reruns of *Dallas* — it apparently still comes as a surprise that Friday night football players are not all farm boys or sons of wildcatters.

Last week's NPR report began with this introduction, not lacking in incredulous tone: "It's not exactly breaking news that Texas fields some of the nation's best high school football, but the Trinity Trojans are different. . . . The backbone of this team, its offensive and defensive heart and soul, is Tongan.

"That's right, *Tongan* . . . from the Pacific island of *Tonga* . . ."

Not that local writers didn't also gawk in the early 1980s, when the Tongan community was newer here. (Even into the '90s, the *Star-Telegram* often included a boilerplate paragraph in stories that let readers know where Tonga was.)

Mostly, the national spotlight's all good, said Paul Pauni, a junior defensive lineman. "It's fun to have all this attention sometimes, and the interviews, but not too much. Not with everyone coming and saying we're the big thing at Trinity — the Tongans. We try not to get too big-headed about that."

Importantly, for the players, pride in one's individual heritage doesn't mean some teammates are better than others.

"We're all brothers — we don't look like it, but even though we may be different colors, it doesn't matter," said Sione Moeakiola, a junior linebacker.

"We grew up together, coming up from the same junior high schools. We started playing together in pee-wee when we were little."

Team unity is a big message at Trinity, as it has been for years.

In yellowed newspapers

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25 years of Trinity Tongans

OK, so maybe it's not the same as being in the national spotlight, but the Trinity Trojans football team and its ties to the local Tongan community have been a mainstay in the *Star-Telegram* news and sports pages for years. Here's a small sampling:

1983: Tongans in Eulesse discuss life in Texas and their affinity for a sport similar to football: rugby. It is mentioned that resident Fotu Katoa also played football for the Trinity Trojans and that the team made the high school playoffs the previous year.

1985: It is suggested that many Tongans move to Tarrant County for better educational opportunities. Sam Katoa of the Trinity Trojans is described as being named *Star-Telegram* defensive player of the year the previous year.

1992: The diverse ethnic background of the Trinity Trojans football team, including Tongans, is discussed at length.

1993: Junior Filikitonga, a Trinity Trojan defensive end, is profiled.

1993: Local Tongans find a slice of home in Texas by cheering for the Trinity High School football team, as they have since the early 1980s.

1995: A tutoring program started through the Polynesian Club by Trinity High School assistant coach Fred Katoa is discussed.

1995: A profile of Trinity High School includes this sentence: "Nearly every Tongan in Texas lives in Eulesse, according to census figures."

1996: Sam Katoa becomes the first Tongan officer in the Eulesse Police Department.

2002: Trinity star Ofa Mohetau is profiled.

2003: Sam Katoa is described as a mentor for Trinity High School football players.

2006: Tongan students are described as engaging in a wide range of high school activities in addition to football.

Source: *Star-Telegram* archives

clippings, team leaders touted the team's ethnic mix as an advantage.

It was a message also imparted in Wednesday's *New York Times* article, and something that pleased Trinity head coach Steve Lineweaver in a week where media distractions could possibly take the focus off the team's big game Friday night against Colleyville Heritage High School.

"I think it was different in that way, to the point where I don't think it's going to bother our focus," Lineweaver said. "I thought it was an interesting article more or less about Trinity's diversity."

In particular, Lineweaver said, he was gratified by descriptions of Eulesse as a comparatively safe place for Tongan students to go to school.

"That meant a lot to me," he said.

That observation was made by Fotu Katoa, Trinity's first Tongan player in the early '80s.

Katoa, who is now Utah's director of Pacific Islander affairs, said in other states with larger Polynesian populations, like California, Arizona and Utah, there is more gang activity and sometimes the presumption that young Tongans will gravitate toward negative behavior because of their physical size.

In those states, even though Tongans have been there 50 years or longer, they have not assimilated like they were able to in Northeast Tarrant County.

"Eulesse is different — they're known for something positive there," Katoa said. "Teachers and coaches in the community welcome them as good kids with futures, who can contribute to the community."

In many ways, Trinity football shaped that — setting the right tone and expectations from the get-go. Even when Katoa was the only Tongan on the team, he felt accepted. Too bad it's not possible to transplant a little of that acceptance into other states, he said.

"I call Eulesse home still," Katoa said.

Online: Hurst-Eulesse-Bedford school district, www.hebisd.edu

Staff writer Domingo Ramirez Jr. contributed to this report.

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