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WORK FACES

Moves

■ **Chris Barker** has accepted the position of director of planning and development for Euless. He will oversee the planning, permitting and code enforcement operations.



Barker

He will also serve as staff support for the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

■ **Mike Collins** has accepted the position of economic development director for Euless. Collins



Collins

has served as director of planning and development for the past eight years. He will assist in the development of new business enterprises in the Euless market as well as work to retain existing businesses. He will also be the staff liaison for the Euless Development Corp. and the Industrial Development Authority.

■ **Euless** has received four awards from the Texas Festivals

and Events Association. The awards are for: Euless Today, Arbor Daze Kidz Zone, Volunteer Program and Arbor Daze Forestry Village. The association is the official state chapter for Texas and New Mexico of the International Festivals and Events Association. Festivals and special events promote community fellowship, encourage family interaction and maintain our rich and diverse cultural heritage.

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State may finally be on the verge of expanding Airport Freeway

Funds are finally available to widen Texas 121/183 in Northeast Tarrant County, a project proposed in 1993.

By **GORDON DICKSON**
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Sixteen years have passed since the Texas Department of Transportation told dozens of Hurst residents that their homes were in the way of progress and would be removed for Airport Freeway expansion.

The proposed reconstruction of the six-lane highway, also known as Texas 121/183, has been delayed time and again by funding shortages. Many residents have been left in limbo — unable to rest easy in their homes knowing that they would eventually be torn down but also unable to sell the property and move on with their lives.

But the state agency may finally be on the verge of fulfilling its promise to homeowners in Hurst — and commuters across Tarrant County — and get the project under way.

The proposed expansion of the busiest freeway in Tarrant County, which also cuts through Bedford, Euless and North Richland Hills, will be discussed during a hearing tonight in Euless. Residents are invited to attend and submit comments.

“The hearing will give interested citizens an opportunity to provide input in this highly anticipated highway project,” agency spokesman Michael Peters said. “Ultimately, it will include the three main lanes and three toll lanes in each direction, improved frontage roads and added auxiliary lanes.”

The possibility of building noise walls in neighborhoods will also be discussed.

If you go

A public hearing will brief residents about the proposed expansion of Texas 121/183 in Northeast Tarrant County.

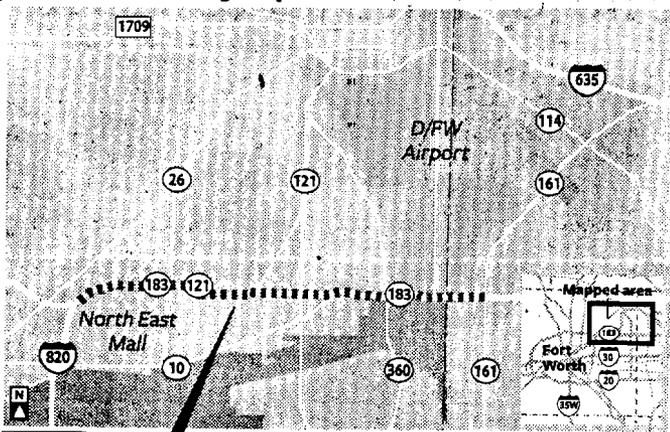
- 6:30 tonight
- First Baptist Church, Euless Campus West, 1000 Airport Freeway
- A brief open house will be followed by a presentation and an opportunity for residents to submit oral or written comments. Read more at www.txdot.gov.

Source: Texas Department of Transportation

Honkin' Mad
 Keep up with the latest Metroplex traffic and transportation news at star-telegram.com/blogs

NORTHEAST TARRANT COUNTY

Airport Freeway expansion



An 11-mile stretch of Texas 121/183, also known as Airport Freeway, could be expanded beginning next year. Existing free lanes would be rebuilt and new toll lanes would be open by 2015.

Environmental study

The hearing is part of a federal-

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First phase

The first phase of the project includes expansion of 11 miles of Airport Freeway, and Northeast Loop 820 in Haltom City and North Richland Hills. The plan is to add two toll lanes in each direction initially and a third lane by 2030.

NTE will also create a master plan for expanding other area highways by 2030, possibly including Interstate 35W in north Tarrant County by 2018.

About 83 acres from nearby property owners are needed for the project, state officials say, including 0.7 acre of the L.D. Bell High School campus. In all, land from 128 homes, 27 businesses and a church is needed.

In Hurst, 60 homeowners have already qualified for medical hardships, and their land has been purchased, Peters said. But under state law, the Transportation Department cannot buy real estate from property owners without a medical hardship until after the federal environmental study period is concluded.

The plan calls for existing lanes on Texas 121/183 to remain free, but the new lanes will have tolls. Beginning in 2015, it could cost up to \$6.50 to drive the full length of the toll lanes.

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DISCOUNT GROCER

Aldi job fair seeks trainees to run stores

Manager trainees for the company must be prepared to move to another city for "on the ground" training.

By **SCOTT NISHIMURA**
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A two-day job fair to find manager trainees for Aldi, the discount grocer that's entering Texas with about 30 stores early next year, will continue today in Arlington.

The company, which plans to open 30 stores in the Metroplex between March and May, is taking applications for trainees at Arlington's Crowne Plaza Suites hotel.

Chris Daniels, director of operations for Aldi, said at midday Tuesday that he expected about 500 applicants to move through the fair for the day.

He said the chain wants to hire 20-25 trainees from this fair, the second Aldi has held in the area.

New hires must commit to moving to another city, such as St. Louis; Chicago; Kansas City, Mo.; or Indianapolis, to train for six months before moving back to the Metroplex.

Aldi wants to "get them on the ground, get them that real-world training, and then come back in the first quarter next year," he said.

Trainees make \$20 per hour, with full benefits. The lure: If promoted to store manager down the line, trainees could make \$65,000-\$85,000 per year, Aldi said.

Besides hiring trainees, Aldi is also moving some experienced store managers from other markets to North Texas to help run the new stores, Daniels said.

The North Texas market is attractive to other Aldi managers because of its cheap cost of living, housing stock and warm weather, Daniels said.

Once Aldi opens its first 30 stores here next year, it plans to open eight to 10 more a year in North Texas for the next three or four years, Daniels said. Aldi, based in Germany, has its U.S. headquarters in Batavia, Ill.

Daniels, who was hired as an Aldo district manager himself straight out of college four years ago, said the fair is attracting a good number of job-seekers who still have jobs.

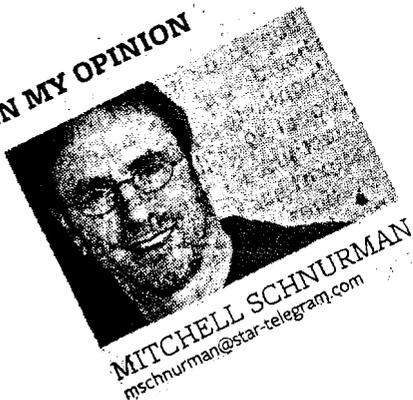
"We're getting a lot of people who are passively looking," he said. "It catches their eye."

The fair is from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 to 6 p.m.

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IN MY OPINION

MITCHELL SCHNURMAN
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Fee-based revenue has apparently become a new business model.

Death, taxes and fees?

Fees used to be an occasional expense, an additional charge in exchange for an additional service. But in recent years, they've become a common way for companies and governments to juice up revenue without raising the price that everybody sees.

Consumers still pay more, of course, and the extra fees make it harder to do comparison shopping, which may be one objective. Last month, my electric retailer added a \$5 monthly fee but kept the same variable-rate formula for calculating the bill. Try figuring out how that affects kilowatt costs — and whether a switch is warranted.

A 2006 study by the Ponom Institute estimated that Americans were paying an average of almost \$943 a year in fees, with the biggest amounts going to banks and credit card companies.

Not all fees are created equal. In general, upfront fees are easier to stomach because customers see them early and can always walk away (as I did with my electric company). By contrast, overdraft protection fees on debit cards are im-

posed on the back end, after the purchase. And their average amount is often more than the value of what the customer bought in the first place.

Credit-card companies have been dangling low interest rates and then making up the difference with higher fees for balance transfers and even monthly service. Mortgage loans have added more fees since the housing bust, and they already had a laundry list of charges that could top 3 percent of the mortgage amount.

Then there are government add-ons imposed on all players, regardless of which cable company, cellphone service, Internet provider or car rental agency is selected. Retailers generally advertise one price, with a fine-print reference to third-party taxes and fees.

But cut-rate deals on things like cellphone service are never as cheap as the advertised price, even if you manage to avoid excessive texting and Web surfing. My latest bill added a state and city sales tax, a special purpose district tax, a 911 service fee, a federal and state universal service charge and a regulatory cost recovery charge.

None of those extras go to AT&T, my cellphone service provider, but consumers have to pony up all the same.

A more extreme example is at the car-rental counter at Dallas/

“Most people don't tend to shop for banks and credit cards by looking at the overdraft fees and late fees.”

Rebecca Borne, Center for Responsible Lending

Fort Worth Airport. The quote to rent a midsize car for three days was \$54 — plus \$35 in taxes, surcharges and fees.

That's a price increase of almost 65 percent for facility charges, concession fees, customer transportation charges, motor rental tax, vehicle license cost recovery and a Euless sports venue tax.

The same car-rental company's Plano location quoted \$12 for taxes and fees.

Businesses have been adding fees for several years, often saying that lets customers pay for what they value. A year ago, most of the big airlines survived a record run-up in fuel prices, in part by adding fuel surcharges and an array of fees for checking baggage, changing reservations, even selecting an aisle seat.

Fuel costs have fallen, but airline fees are going up, not away. They've become even more valuable in a recession.

Leslie Pettijohn, the state's consumer credit commissioner, says a new business model has taken hold that depends on more fee-based revenue. In this world, it's not enough to just say buyer beware, because the costs are not

always clear.

“Consumers have to be much more engaged on the front end and not just focus on the new thing they're buying,” Pettijohn said. “It's easy to look past the taxes and fees when they're excited about a purchase. But they have to investigate the total costs, especially on things that will be used a lot.”

This week, a new state law lets auto dealers charge a higher document processing fee; dealers say the latitude is needed because their paperwork has grown. Pettijohn's office will consider whether any increases are “reasonable,” and she expects to propose guidelines in the fall.

The fee must be written on the sales contract so customers will have the choice of paying the expense or negotiating a lower one — just as they do with vehicles, auto loans, warranties and more.

Fees on financial services are often more complex and sometimes buried in the fine print. Five years ago, most banks simply denied a debit-card purchase if the account didn't have enough money. Today, most banks automatically enroll customers in

IF YOU HAVE TO PAY FEE, AT LEAST IT SHOULDN'T BE HIDDEN

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overdraft protection so they cover the cost — and generate hefty fees.

According to a study by the Center for Responsible Lending, consumers pay \$17.5 billion in annual overdraft fees. The average transaction that triggers an overdraft is \$20. The average bank fee: \$34.

"Most people don't tend to shop for banks and credit cards by looking at the overdraft fees and late fees," said Rebecca Borne, policy counsel for the nonprofit research center in Washington.

What they compare, she says, are the monthly service fees for checking accounts and interest that's paid out. There's more competition on those fronts because the numbers are easy to find and more transparent.

As a result, people get a better deal.

The center wants regulators to require that customers opt for overdraft protection because they'll be more likely to compare overdraft charges. And the center wants ATMs to inform people when they're about to trigger a fee so they can decide whether the cost is reasonable.

Sounds like the least we could do. Americans are already paying a ton for fees they don't know about.

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STATE GOVERNMENT

Bedford pastor picked as chairman of TYC board

Scott Fisher is also a chaplain for the Euless police and a member of the JPS board.

By **DAVE MONTGOMERY**
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AUSTIN — The Texas Youth Commission has moved into another phase of its two-year recovery from a devastating sexual abuse scandal with the appointment of a new governing board headed by Tarrant County minister Scott Fisher of Bedford. The TYC oversees the state's juvenile prison system.

Gov. Rick Perry's office announced six of the seven commission members Wednesday, a day after they met for the first time to organize subcommittees and discuss priorities. TYC officials said the Tuesday meeting was posted but not announced in a release to the

news media.

Fisher, the new TYC chairman, said a key goal will be "regaining the trust" of the public, the Legislature and families of young inmates in TYC prisons and halfway houses. "It's an agency that has had some very unfortunate things occur prior to the last two years," said Fisher, senior pastor of Metroplex Chapel in Euless, which is affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene. "The families whose kids have been committed to TYC need to have confidence that it will be a very positive experience."

The agency was placed in conservatorship after members of an earlier governing board resigned at the outset of the scandal in early 2007. Cherie Townsend, who had served as TYC's executive commissioner since October, was

hired as the agency's executive director Tuesday.

In addition to the chairman, Perry also appointed Grayson County District Attorney Joseph Brown of Sherman; Larry Carroll of Midland, executive director of the Permian Basin Community Centers for Mental Health and Mental Retardation; Manson B. Johnson of Houston, pastor of Holman Street Baptist Church; Rolando Olvera of Brownsville, a state district judge in Cameron County; and Beaumont physician David Teuscher.

All but Teuscher and Olvera have served on a TYC advisory board created in October, when Townsend was named executive director.

Fisher said a seventh member was appointed but withdrew. That slot will be filled later, he said.

Other duties

Fisher, 51, is also chaplain for the Euless Police Department and has served on the JPS Health Network board since May 2005. He is secretary of the board's executive committee.

Grapevine lawyer Neal Adams said that as a JPS board member, Fisher has helped the county's public hospital district through recent sweeping changes. He also predicted that Fisher will guide the TYC in the right direction.

"With an organization that has had its difficulty and needs some stable leadership, I think Scott will provide that stability, and I think he will do the right thing for the kids served by TYC," said Adams, who has served on several local boards with Fisher.

The TYC deals with the state's most troublesome

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young offenders, operating 12 prisons, nine halfway houses and 12 contract-care residential facilities that house youths 10 to 19 who are involved in felony offenses.

Two facilities, in Vernon and Pyote, are scheduled to close in August.

Remaking the TYC

The TYC underwent a radical makeover by the Legislature in 2007 after allegations that inmates as young as 11 were sexually abused by adult supervisors in prisons and halfway houses.

The TYC scandal began unfolding in February 2007 after a Texas Ranger accused TYC officials of covering up his investigation into alleged sex abuse at a West Texas facility. Those and other disclosures sparked a public outcry that dominated much of the 2007

legislative session.

Fisher said the new board will work toward "complete openness and transparency" within the agency. "Our goal for each youth is to provide them with the tools and the training and the treatment to have a chance to succeed in life," he said.

The commission is required to meet four times a year, but Fisher said he wants at least eight meetings to build on the progress he said the agency has achieved since 2007.

"There are a lot of good stories about what is happening in the TYC that have unfortunately been lost in the scandals of the past," he said.

Staff Writer Anthony Spangler contributed to this article.

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