

# Manhunt forces lockdown on TR-Suspect found 2 days later in Euless hotel fatally wounded

Added by **The Collegian** on December 3, 2013.

By Rhiannon Saegert/managing editor



Police work to secure TR Campus during a lockdown issued Nov. 27 at 10:14 a.m. The Tarrant County Sheriff's Office warned administrators that a murder suspect had fled from the Criminal Justice Building across the street from campus. Photo by Alex Bihm/The Collegian

TR Campus was on lockdown for about 45 minutes Nov. 27 while police searched for a murder suspect who left an office in the Tarrant County Criminal Justice Building across the street. The suspect died three days later.

David Matthew Merrill, 36, was told about 9 a.m. Nov. 27 he had an outstanding warrant on a murder charge when he fled, said Sheriff's Office spokesman Terry Grisham.

Euless Police Lt. Eric Starnes said police found Merrill in a Euless hotel room around 12:30 p.m. Nov. 29 with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. He died at a local hospital about 3 a.m. Nov. 30.

TCC's lockdown began at 10:14 a.m. when a Sheriff's Office dispatcher contacted TCC and explained the situation.

A text message telling students to resume normal activities came out at 10:59 a.m. Vice Chancellor Reginald Gates said Fort Worth Police and the Sheriff's Office told TCC the danger had passed.

"They decided to lift the lockdown," he said.

Administrators referred questions to the Sheriff's Office.

"This has been a police matter, not a TCC matter," TR Campus president Tahita Fulkerson said.

During the lockdown, TCC stayed in contact with Grisham, who gave them updates as the search in downtown Fort Worth continued.

“They determined that he was not in the area of our campuses,” Gates said. “Because of the bank and the river area, they just wanted to be sure. It was just a precaution, but better safe than not if you know what I mean.”

Grisham said Merrill was never seen on TR Campus.

“We did not have a confirmed sighting by a law enforcement person anywhere but 200 Belknap [the address of the Criminal Justice Building],” he said.

Grisham said the search focused on followups with Merrill’s friends and family, places he had been and vehicles he had owned.

“I knew nothing of his whereabouts until I was contacted by the DA’s office, only after he attempted to take his life,” Grisham said. “I heard it all after the fact.”

TR philosophy professor Mark Anderson said the campus police were very efficient.

“The lockdown was just a precaution and pretty much painless,” he said.

# Star-Telegram

## Winter storm morning: Sleet continues, ice covers roads, 100,000 without power

Posted Friday, Dec. 06, 2013

**BY BILL MILLER AND BILL HANNA**

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This time, the much-anticipated ice storm lived up to all of the hype, dumping a layer of freezing rain and ice all over the DFW area.

Rush-hour commuters this morning will find roads covered in anywhere from 1 to 3 inches of ice, making driving to work difficult if not downright impossible.

“You may turn the wheel of your car, but it may not go the way you want it to go,” National Weather Service meteorologist Jesse Moore said. “If you can stay home, you should do so. If you have to go to work, it’s going to take awhile.”

More than 100,000 people were without power shortly before 5 a.m. today. In Fort Worth, MedStar had responded to 40 accidents between 4 p.m. Thursday and about 4 a.m. Friday.

The forecast calls for the sleet and freezing rain to end around midmorning, but temperatures were not expected to climb above freezing anytime soon.

The Arctic cold front lived up to its billing, barreling into North Texas as twilight fell Thursday and carrying freezing rain, sleet and bitter cold.

Most area school districts — including Dallas, Fort Worth and Arlington — as well as colleges and universities have canceled classes.

Elevated surfaces — highway bridges and freeway overpasses — “may become impassable at times,” the weather service said.

A winter storm warning was in effect until 6 p.m. Friday. More than 1,100 flights have been cancelled at DFW Airport over two days.

Oncor, the energy company that serves about 10 million households across Texas, was bracing for outages Thursday night. At a facility in Lancaster, crews prepared backup transformers should bad weather cause mass outages.

Oncor spokesman Kris Spears said hundreds of repair crews were on standby. The company advised customers to text 66267 if they lose power.

“That is the fastest way to report an outage,” Spears said. “Once you text that number, it will take you through a registration process.”

The frigid and wet weather was the forward edge of a powerful winter storm that covered much of North America. The system dumped 1 to 2 feet of snow on parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin, forcing school closures and power outages but delighting skiers who hit the slopes despite single-digit temperatures.

As it moved south, the front brought sleet and rain to a wide swath of the south-central U.S., a dangerous situation for millions of people unaccustomed to the treacherous combination of moisture and bitter cold.

The last time the temperature sank below 20 in North Texas was the first week of February 2011, said Dennis Cavanaugh, a weather service meteorologist in Fort Worth. The Super Bowl was played at what is now AT&T Stadium on Feb. 6, 2011.

"Feb. 2-5 is when we had real bad ice conditions," Cavanaugh said. "It all fell on one day, and then it stayed below freezing. On Feb. 10, we had a low of 15."

Cavanaugh said this latest round of ice could also stick around for a few days.

"We're not expected to get above freezing until Sunday, and then it's only going to be briefly," he said. "It could certainly hang around awhile."

The coldest weather is expected Tuesday morning, when lows may drop to 16. By Wednesday afternoon, temperatures are expected to reach the lows 40s.

## **Canceled flights**

Dallas/Fort Worth Airport reported that 175 departing flights were canceled Thursday alone, airport spokesman David Magana said.

American Airlines canceled about 500 flights Thursday and Friday, a number that includes arrivals and departures.

All airlines canceled about 200 departures for Friday, Magana said Thursday night. That's about 20 percent of the Friday departures scheduled.

For travelers stranded in terminals, the staff provides toiletries, cots and blankets, he said. Concessions are open later, or may be open all night. Airport lights are dimmed for overnight travelers, and the airport intercom is lowered.

Runways were being treated by fleets of snowplows and trucks that simultaneously scrape the ice and spread de-icer. Planes are de-iced so thoroughly that they take off with the fluid dripping from their wings and flaps.

## **A slow ride home**

Freezing rain started to fall about 5 p.m. at DFW Airport, Cavanaugh said.

The Thursday evening commute was slow, and some wrecks were reported, including a 15-vehicle rush-hour pileup on Texas 121 in Grapevine.

But the ground was still warm, and the ice quickly melted. But by 8 p.m., icy precipitation was sticking to bridges and overpasses.

In Forest Hill, seven vehicles piled up about 9 p.m. on eastbound Interstate 20, shutting down all eastbound lanes late into the night.

“It is a very busy night,” Forest Hill Chief Dan Dennis said. “People should definitely stay off the roads as much as possible.”

Capt. Charles Ramirez, a Fort Worth police spokesman, said officers were working numerous wrecks late Thursday, and most of the trouble was on icy overpasses.

But, he said, “Believe it or not, it hasn’t been too bad.”

However, officers expected more trouble throughout the night as temperatures continued to fall, he said.

Highway crews planned to work through the night, treating trouble spots, said Val Lopez, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Transportation.

Crews have treated most overpasses and would head back out as conditions worsened, Lopez said.

Fort Worth had 30 transportation and public works trucks retrofitted with sanding equipment and fully loaded in anticipation of ice, city spokesman Bill Begley said.

Area grocery stores saw a run on canned goods, prepared foods and batteries as residents got ready for the storm.

Firewood appeared to be the most popular item at many area Kroger stores, spokesman Gary Huddleston said.

“I think people are preparing for the possibility of being home for a few days,” he said.

### **Effect on schools**

Most area school districts canceled classes for Friday, the scheduled date for some end-of-course exams under the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. Makeup sessions for English tests given Monday to Thursday must be completed by today, according to the state calendar.

Plus, this is the two-week window for end-of-course exams in algebra I, biology and U.S. history.

DeEtta Culbertson, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency in Austin, said that if schools close, the agency would work with districts.

Elsewhere across the state, Gov. Rick Perry has activated the Texas National Guard and deployed equipment to Wichita Falls and Sherman.

Perry issued an emergency proclamation, directing state agencies to prepare for the winter blast.

Staff writers Yamil Berard, Nick Dean and Diane Smith contributed to this report, which includes material from The Associated Press.

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# Star-Telegram

## Traveling today is 'to gamble with your life'

Posted Saturday, Dec. 07, 2013

**BY BILL HANNA**

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Crews were working frantically Saturday to prevent a repeat of Friday night, when motorists were stranded west and north of Fort Worth.

All highways were open and moving at midday Saturday, but some were just barely passable.

The major problems areas continued to be along Interstate 20 west of Weatherford, along I-35W in far north Fort Worth and further up I-35 near Sanger in Denton County.

Near downtown Fort Worth, the mixmaster at I-30 and I-35W was open but continued to be a problem, especially for 18-wheelers trying to negotiate the flyovers.

Large stacks of ice left behind by the tires of 18-wheelers have formed on bridges, and Texas Department of Transportation crews were trying to clean them up, said Jodi Hodges, a TxDOT spokeswoman.

"We continue to treat these ice stacks with salt and sand, and we do have plows on all of these highways," Hodges said. "We are trying to pre-treat these ice stacks to see if our plows can make a dent. Depending on the sunlight and depending on the temperatures, we may not make much of a dent today."

Traffic is moving on all roads, albeit slowly along I-20 and I-35W, Hodges said. The goal is to have one lane moving on all highways Saturday night, but Hodges warned that roads could become impassable again as temperatures fall.

"We need it to get above freezing to melt this ice pack," Hodges said. Forecasters say that won't happen until Sunday afternoon.

In the wake of a storm that dumped as many as four inches of ice on North Texas, travel remained hazardous all over. The official temperature dropped below freezing around midnight Thursday and has hovered in the teens and 20s since.

Early Saturday, I-20 west of Weatherford had to be shut down.

"The worst location is probably on I-20 at the Parker/Palo Pinto county line," TxDOT spokesman Michael Peters said. "The temperatures got down in the teens, refreezing the slush on the roadways and creating three to six inches of ice.

"That is a very hilly section of roadway for about six miles that became very difficult overnight."

At the mixmaster, trucks traveling west on I-30 had problems all night getting traction, including trying to drive across the flyover to southbound I-35W.

Other major areas that saw problems in Fort Worth overnight were I-30 and Camp Bowie Boulevard on the west side, I-35W at Texas 170 near Alliance Airport and portions of U.S. 287, where 18-wheelers parked along the road, Fort Worth police Capt. Charles Ramirez said.

“Eighteen-wheelers were a major problem due to the fact that we did not have enough heavy-duty wreckers to assist with the clearing of the highways,” Ramirez said.

Between 9 p.m. Friday and almost 9 a.m. Saturday, Fort Worth police were dispatched to 17 major accidents, 14 minor, and 3 hit-and-runs.

I-35W northbound from U.S. 287 to Heritage Trace Parkway became a trouble spot Saturday morning. Some calls to police reported that vehicles were running out of gas.

Peters, the TxDOT spokesman, said crews will try to use plows and de-icing materials along that stretch of I-35W. If that doesn't work, they will add more sand in hopes of allowing trucks to gain traction.

“It's just going to be a constant battle there throughout the day,” Peters said.

In Denton County, I-35 was still gridlocked from Denton to Sanger, and TxDOT was warning that the freeway might be an issue all day.

“The problem is, as soon we get it open, it refreezes,” TxDOT spokeswoman Michele Releford said. “If you've got to get out, go to the corner store and go back home. Avoid major highways, because you might get stranded.”

Releford said one stretch of I-35 had improved by noon Saturday between Denton and Sanger but another stretch north of Sanger was now gridlocked. TxDOT was sending more rock salt from its Tyler district to seal with that stretch of I-35, Releford said major highways in Dallas County have improved and most are only seeing patchy ice.

On I-35E across the Lewisville Lake bridge, rescuers used a crane to pull out a pickup that had fallen into the lake. One person died in the crash, said Texas Department of Public Safety spokesman Lonny Haschel.

It was too early to say whether the accident, which occurred about 3:50 a.m., was weather-related. But Haschel said the northbound I-35E bridge was icy at the time of the wreck.

Haschel warned that conditions on all major highways across North Texas were poor, from Tarrant and Denton counties westward through Palo Pinto County to Ranger Hill on I-20.

“We've got semis parked on the medians in Denton County waiting for crews to ice the bridges,” Haschel said. “I-20 had to be closed last night at Ranger Hill. If you must travel, you need to pack extra clothes and food because there's a real possibility of getting stranded.”

Conditions were also bad northward along U.S. 75 in Grayson County, where the county's office of emergency management tweeted that “traveling US75 NB & SB thru our County at this time is to gamble with your life, your property & that of your passengers & other motorists.”

The conditions aren't likely to improve until sometime Sunday, when temperatures are expected to climb above freezing.

One unusual note from the storm. MedStar's pregnancy/labor calls were way up. Between midnight Thursday and 4 p.m. Friday, they responded to 28 calls. Normally, they would see about four in that time frame.

At DFW Airport, the temperature fell to 21 degrees, but other areas saw the low drop into the teens. Wind chills were in single-digits in many areas west of Fort Worth.

Temperatures aren't expected to climb above 26 today, and another bone-chilling night is ahead. There could also be a few light snow flurries or sleet pellets, but not enough to impact roadways further.

"If you don't have to work, stay home," National Weather Service meteorologist Joe Harris said. "We're advising to avoid all travel if possible."

The good news is, forecasters now are predicting that temperatures will reach the upper 30s on Sunday with sunny skies.

"That's when we'll start seeing some melt-off," Harris said.

Thousands were stranded at DFW Airport after more than 1,400 flights were cancelled Thursday and Friday. More departures were canceled Saturday.

"Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport continued operations on a limited basis overnight, with some cargo and passenger flights departing," the airport said in a statement. "Most of the overnight focus has been on treating all airfield surfaces and public roadways, and accommodating over 3,300 passengers staying in the terminals."

DFW Airport said airlines have canceled more than 400 departures Saturday, about half of the usual departure schedule. Two runways were open.

American Airlines said operations will remain limited at DFW throughout Saturday.

Crews were also still working to move a Lufthansa jet that slid off the ice while taxiing Friday night and became stuck. Passengers were bused back to the terminal.

Oncor said power outages across North Texas had dropped to 135,000 Saturday morning, from a peak of more than 200,000 on Friday, with most customers expected to be restored by Sunday night. In Tarrant County, the number without power had dropped to more than 7,000.

Perhaps remembering the fiasco of a frozen Super Bowl week two years ago, when an inadequate response to a winter storm crippled the region and left visitors stranded on impassable highways, this time, all of North Texas mobilized before the freezing rain began.

Most area school districts — including Dallas, Fort Worth and Arlington — as well as colleges and universities canceled classes for Friday. Oncor started advising customers to text "Out" to 66267 if they lost power.

Many holiday events were canceled. In Dallas, officials canceled Sunday's Dallas Marathon, which was expected to draw 25,000 runners, some of whom had trained for months.

Friday's massive winter storm extended from South Texas through the Midwest and Ohio Valley and up into northern New England and the Canadian Maritimes. In the Dakotas, the weather service forecast wind chills that would make the temperature feel as low as 40 degrees below zero.

In Texas, roads were icy as far south as Waco and as far west as Abilene. To the north, everything was covered in ice through Oklahoma and toward the Texas Panhandle.

## **Roads won't improve soon**

The freezing rain and sleet that started about twilight on Thursday stopped around lunchtime Friday, but the bitter cold remained.

By 10 p.m. at DFW Airport, it was 26 with a wind chill of 14.

But the wintry precipitation mostly moved out Friday, so the National Weather Service office in Fort Worth canceled a winter storm warning and advisory at 3:25 p.m.

But "the roads aren't going to get any better until we can get some warming," said Ted Ryan, a weather service meteorologist.

"The ice and slush already there is going to re-refreeze, and it's going to stay pretty terrible. If people don't have to travel, they shouldn't.

## **Countless fender-benders**

In Arlington, [a 29-year-old Arlington man was killed](#) when he crashed into a stopped 18-wheeler shortly after midnight Friday on Interstate 20.

"This is the worst I've seen since at least the Super Bowl," when temperatures stayed below freezing for 100 hours, Ramirez said. "I've got chains on my tires and my car is just shaking. You can only go about 15 mph. If you're planning to go to work, you need to plan on at least two hours."

Fort Worth police worked 213 traffic calls between 4 p.m. Thursday and 9:30 a.m. Friday, according to their website. Then, between 9:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Friday, they worked 58 wrecks, according to records. Evidently, people were staying inside.

Eight of the incidents were classified as "hit and run," while the rest were about evenly split between "minor" and "major."

Ramirez said that about 60 of the wrecks overnight involved injuries or vehicles blocking a roadway. But there were countless other fender-benders where police didn't respond.

"We just told them to exchange insurance information," Ramirez said. "We didn't go out unless we had to."

Staff writers Bill Miller, Yamil Berard and Andrea Ahles contributed to this report, which includes material from The Associated Press.

# Star-Telegram

## What's open, closed

Posted Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013

### Christmas Eve

All school districts and Tarrant County offices and courts will be closed Tuesday.

Municipal offices closed: Aledo, Arlington, Bedford, Burleson, Colleyville, Euless, Grapevine, Haltom City, Hurst, Keller, Mansfield, Saginaw, Southlake.

Municipal offices open: Azle, Fort Worth, North Richland Hills.

### Christmas Day

All school districts and nonessential federal, state, county and municipal offices and courts; banks; the stock market; and the Postal Service will be closed in observance of the Christmas holiday.

### Transportation

The Fort Worth Transportation Authority will not operate buses or the Trinity Railway Express on Christmas Day.

### Trash pickup

For selected cities. Check your city's website for more information.

**Arlington:** Wednesday trash pickup will take place on Saturday.

**Bedford:** Wednesday trash pickup shifts to Thursday; Thursday to Friday; Friday to Saturday.

**Benbrook:** Wednesday trash pickup shifts to Thursday.

**Colleyville:** Trash pickup not affected.

**Euless:** Thursday trash/recycling pickup shifts to Friday; Friday to Saturday.

**Fort Worth:** Wednesday trash pickup shifts to Thursday; Thursday to Friday; Friday to Saturday. Residents may place two bags of trash outside their garbage carts on their first pickup day after Christmas.

**Grapevine:** Wednesday brush/bulk pickup shifts to Thursday; Thursday trash/recycling pickup shifts to Friday; Friday trash/recycling pickup shifts to Saturday.

**Hurst:** Thursday trash pickup shifts to Friday; Friday to Saturday.

**Keller:** No trash pickup, no makeup day.

**Mansfield:** No trash pickup, no makeup day.

**North Richland Hills:** Trash pickup not affected.

**Saginaw:** Trash pickup not affected.

**Southlake:** Trash pickup not affected.

# Star-Telegram

## In Euless, Tongans usher in the New Year with traditional feast

Posted Wednesday, Jan. 01, 2014

**BY DIANE SMITH**

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**EULESS** — Americans have Times Square. The British, fireworks on the Thames. In Mexico, it's a street festival around the Zocalo in Mexico City.

For the large Tongan community in the United States, specifically Euless, the New Year's celebration starts with a pig roast.

Tongans in Nuku'alofa, across the South Pacific, had already begun celebrating the New Year when Paula Aleamotua started prepping a holiday pig roast at 6 a.m. Tuesday in Euless.

Aleamotua and his helpers worked all morning to roast nine pigs to perfection.

"It is very important," he said of his duty.

Nuku'alofa is the capital of Tonga, a Polynesian state consisting of 176 islands stretching about 500 miles in a north-south line between New Zealand and Hawaii.

Although North Texas is more than 6,000 miles away, Tongans here still ring in the New Year in the traditional way — with family, prayer and a feast that reminds many of the islands of their ancestors.

"I look forward to it," said Losaline Falahola, 18, who helped prepare side dishes for a New Year's Day feast at the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in Euless. "It is a time when we celebrate our faith, our traditions and our culture. We celebrate a new year."

The king and the majority of the Tongan royal family are members of the Free Wesleyan Church, a Methodist-like denomination. But the Tongans who have become so intertwined with life in Euless ushered in 2014 with New Year's Eve services honoring various religions.

Many have traditional meals that have been long planned and are the result of many volunteers coming together.

The feast includes roasted pig and traditional Polynesian dishes that recall South Pacific island heritage, including sweet potatoes, corned beef, octopus, shrimp and fish.

The holiday is a time of prayer and connections to God.

During the first full week of the New Year, Tongans attend daily church services, said Patisepa Haisila-Finau. Special feasts are organized throughout the week.

"It is called Uike Lotu," she said, explaining that Tongans ask God to guide their families in the upcoming year. Each day, they pray for a specific theme. For example, they pray for church leaders and families.

The purpose of this "Week of Prayer" is to come together, lift families and prepare for 2014 with God at the center, Haisila-Finau said.

"We pray for our royal family because we have the king and queen," Haisila-Finau said. "And we pray for our countrymen."

### **A little bit Polynesian**

North Texas is a melting pot of foreign influence. But Euless has a special relationship with the Tongans who began migrating to the Northeast Tarrant city in the 1970s.

Many moved because of jobs, family ties and the existence of established Tongan churches. They were often drawn to job opportunities at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport.

"The airlines," Haisila-Finau said. "It was easy to get jobs at American Airlines at the time."

Today, Euless counts about 3,300 Tongan residents, according to census estimates. Tongan churches, civic activities and even sporting traditions have sprouted across the city.

Tongans have also settled in Arlington, Richland Hills, Keller, Watauga and Grapevine. Although large Tongan communities exist in California and Hawaii, many like Texas.

"This is home," Haisila-Finau said. "This is home for us. Euless, Texas, is our home."

Among early Tongans in Euless was Halatono Netane, who moved to North Texas in 1971. ( Netane's history was compiled by the Euless Historical Preservation Committee.)

Haisila-Finau's father, the Rev. Sione Haisila, who turns 78 today, moved to North Texas in the early 1980s. In Euless, he formed the church that became the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.

The Free Wesleyan Church is on Pipeline Road, a few blocks west of Main Street. Nearby are several churches with Tongan ties, including Mormon, Catholic and Baptist congregations.

"You find most Tongans, during New Year's Eve, at church," said Winona Alusa, 29.

Euless became a little bit Polynesian with the migration of Tongans.

"Their presence here has made some changes in the community," said Ofa "Mary" Faiva-Siale, projects coordinator for the city of Euless.

Faiva-Siale, who has served as a liaison for the Tongan community, said the imprint is visible in the Polynesian stores in Euless. City leaders also routinely meet with the Euless Tongan Community Committee.

But the most visible mark was made on Texas high school football. The Haka chant practiced by multi-year state champion Trinity High School is "the most obvious" evidence of the Tongan influence, said Faiva-Siale.

"It's completely in Tongan," she said. "It honors Euless Trinity and its football program."

## **'Not a feast without a roasted pig'**

The Tongan tradition of roasting pigs outdoors is also part of Euless' social fabric.

Vernon Gilmore, an inspector with the Euless Fire Marshal's Office, said the city has a process for allowing outdoor pig roasting. Typically, an applicant fills out a form about 24 hours in advance. An inspector checks the area where the pig will be roasted to ensure safety.

Gilmore said the roasting often takes place during holidays or family gatherings.

"It could be for a wedding, or a funeral," he said. "I've done an inspection for a roast for a returning solider."

On Tuesday, volunteers roasted nine pigs for the church feast at the Free Wesleyan Church. The pigs roasted for about four hours over an open oak wood pit. At a church assembly hall nearby, volunteers set long tables with fruit centerpieces.

Plates full of corned beef, fish and chop suey were also prepared. The scent of wood and roasted pig filled the air — a reminder that a Tongan party was in the works.

"A feast is not a feast without a roasted pig," Haisila-Finau said.

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# Star-Telegram

## Flower Mound mayor's Bible proclamation draws mixed reaction

Posted Friday, Jan. 03, 2014

**BY TERRY EVANS**

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North Texans almost got through the Christmas season this year without public controversies about nativity scenes on courthouse lawns or other such polarizing church-state matters.

But one slipped in in the final weeks: The mayor of Flower Mound proclaimed 2014 “the Year of the Bible.”

[Mayor Tom Hayden](#) made the proclamation Dec. 16 at a Town Council meeting. It encourages “all residents in their own way to examine the principles and teachings found in the Bible.”

His decision to use the official language of proclamations and to present it at a council meeting has attracted public attention. Hayden’s action has been mentioned by outlets ranging from [Fox News](#) to [the Huffington Post](#).

Hayden recently declined an invitation to appear on a national news network to talk about the proclamation. “I want this to be about people reading the Bible, not about Tom Hayden,” he said.

Besides, he said, it’s no different from similar pronouncements he has made in his first year in office and is as valid as any other.

“I issued a proclamation for [Hindu awareness month](#), for [breast cancer awareness month](#),” Hayden said.

“I issue dozens of proclamations for everything under the sun.”

Is a mayor’s proclamation about “deeply held Christian beliefs,” as his proclamation says, the same thing as breast cancer awareness? And is it an official city position?

Flower Mound Town Secretary Theresa Scott said, “The town does not have established rules regarding the issuance of proclamations.”

She noted that Hayden read his proclamation from a podium facing the council during the public comment portion of the Town Council meeting, not from his mayor’s seat.

“It was determined this was an individual comment on his own, not a city action in any way,” she said.

Alix Jules, the coordinator of [DFW Coalition of Reason](#), wrote in an email to the *Star-Telegram* that he objected because Hayden’s proclamation lends the legitimacy of a government entity to the choice of “one doctrine or scriptural tool over another.”

“It ignores our Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Secular families that are also working on instilling moral values in our daily lives – without the Bible,” wrote Jules, who described himself as a former Christian. “As an atheist, I do welcome more Christians critically examining the Bible. Many in our secular community came to their stances on beliefs by doing just that.”

Closer to home, the proclamation has drawn mixed reactions, including strongly worded emails. But Hayden said the voices in his town have been overwhelmingly positive.

At least one fellow Flower Mound council member agreed. Bryan Webb said the only negative reaction he knew of was what he'd seen on Facebook.

"I've had a couple folks give me a call and we've discussed it, and their reactions have been generally positive," Webb said.

Some comments on [Hayden's Facebook page](#) insist that a proclamation implies that the town supports whatever it contains.

Town Manager Jimmy Stathos said, "When people hear of a proclamation, they assume that it was written by town staff and was put on a town council agenda, but that was not the case with this."

### **How about other cities?**

Called for comment this week, [Hurst](#) Mayor Richard Ward said the subject wasn't appropriate for a proclamation.

"I think you're looking for trouble signing a proclamation involving religion," Ward said. "I know that there will be a percentage of citizens unhappy with it. They'll ask who the mayor thinks he is."

[Euless](#) Mayor Mary Lib Saleh said that mayoral proclamations are more than just a mayor's thoughts.

"When we do a proclamation, all of our [council members'] names are on there," Saleh said. "A proclamation is saying 'this is a worthy something for the good of all people.'"

[Fort Worth's proclamations](#) are issued case by case, said Jason Lamers, chief of staff for Mayor Betsy Price and the council.

"We try to accommodate as best we can, but there are some guidelines we have to follow," said Lamers, whose office approves requests for proclamations.

The city's website said proclamations provide "an avenue to showcase the events, programs and people that make Fort Worth one of the most livable cities in the nation."

Lamers said he does not remember Fort Worth issuing religious proclamations, except when honoring a major event or specific contribution to the community.

### **'Nothing more than goodwill'**

Allan Saxe, a political science professor at the [University of Texas at Arlington](#), said that proclamations have no force of law.

"Cities all the time make proclamations like 'Allan Saxe Day' but they mean nothing more than goodwill," Saxe said. "If I was mayor, I would have a proclamation every day — 'Global Warming Day,' 'Be Kind to Animals Day.' Most people do not even know of proclamations."

Mark Sherrill, chairman of the [Baha'i Faith](#) in Flower Mound, was in the audience when Hayden read the proclamation and said he was not bothered by it.

“He is not trying to evangelize Flower Mound, but it was something he felt compelled to do as a Christian and so I have no problem with it in that regard,” Sherrill said. “I don’t feel like it is provocative in any way or that he was trying to preach to the community.”

Likewise, Tarrant County Medical Examiner Nizam Peerwani, a Muslim, said that Hayden’s Year of the Bible proclamation “doesn’t change anything and doesn’t diminish me in any fashion. Whether he’s right to do it is way outside my ball game. It’s a great idea. Every Christian should read the Bible and every Muslim should read the [Quran](#).”

## **Support from ministers**

Hayden, an investment officer, was elected to the council in 2009 and became mayor in May 2012, upsetting incumbent Melissa Northern with 64.5 percent of 5,734 votes cast.

He said he made the Year of the Bible proclamation on his own authority because “as long as I’m a duly elected mayor, you can’t separate the two.”

He pointed to a similar proclamation by President Ronald Reagan on Feb. 3, 1983.

“When President Ronald Reagan did this [ [Presidential Proclamation](#)] it was formal, and the Senate and House both passed resolutions supporting it,” Hayden said.

Hayden’s proclamation cites presidents and other civic leaders for promoting knowledge of the Bible. It encourages “all residents in their own way to examine the principles and teachings found in the Bible.”

Hayden said he had been thinking about the proclamation for two years. A few months ago, he gathered ministers and other representatives of 25 Flower Mound churches to find out what they thought of the idea.

“Almost all were supportive,” Hayden said. “One of the pastors volunteered to establish a website.”

The result is [thebible2014.com](http://thebible2014.com), established by [Calvary Chapel Flower Mound](#), where the Rev. Jon Bell is pastor.

The site does more than just make the Bible available online, it also coordinates the verses so readers can discuss specific scriptures, Bell said.

“It’s a place where people can come and the portion of the Bible we’re reading that day will be available,” Bell said. “What’s happening is, people are texting sections of the scripture back and forth saying, ‘What was that all about?’ or ‘This is exactly what I’m going through.’ ”

Getting people not only to read, but also to talk about scripture was a goal, Hayden said.

“Another reason I did this is, I want people to feel comfortable in my town talking about the Bible and Christ,” Hayden said.

“I want them to feel that it’s OK to have discussions about religion.”

Columnist Bud Kennedy and staff writers Caty Hirst, Diane Smith and Monica Nagy contributed to this report.

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# Star-Telegram

## Top Tarrant election official to leave after March primary

Posted Wednesday, Jan. 01, 2014

**BY ANNA M. TINSLEY**

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**FORT WORTH** — Steve Raborn will be leaving his post as the county's top elections official after the March 4 primary.

Raborn, who has served as Tarrant County's elections administrator since 2006, said he has accepted a top job with Votec — a San Diego, Calif.-based vendor of elections-related technology — and will be moving back to his home state of Louisiana in about three months.

"Tarrant County has been great to work for," Raborn, 47, said this week. "I've enjoyed my time here. We've enjoyed Fort Worth and Tarrant County.

"But our parents are getting older and this is a golden opportunity for us to go home" to help them.

Raborn will stay here through March 14, and then become president of [Votec](#), which focuses on voter registration and election management software.

"I think he has done a great job," Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said. "He has been able to get along very well with both party chairs. They have found him to be fair and impartial.

"We have been very pleased with Steve," he said. "And we appreciate him giving us plenty of time to find a replacement."

### Searching for a new elections official

Raborn turned in his resignation to Tarrant County in mid-December but said he will stay through the March 4 primary.

The five-member Tarrant County Elections Commission that will hire his replacement is made up of Whitley, Tax Assessor-Collector Ron Wright, County Clerk Mary Louise Garcia and the chairs of the county's Republican and Democratic parties.

The group will soon kick off a search for a new elections administrator, putting out ads seeking applicants. If the initial search isn't broad enough, they will expand their search and continue looking until they find the right candidate, officials say.

Ideally, they will be able to find a replacement before Raborn leaves.

But finding the right person will be easier said than done, local officials said.

“Clearly [Steve Raborn] has done a such a great job,” Garcia said. “We are so proud of our record here in Tarrant County and how we are able to have so many polling places and work with both parties to make sure everybody has a chance to vote.

“He has just been a very steady rock for this whole process for us,” she said. “We will be looking for someone else to also bring professionalism and collaboration between the two parties. ... He is leaving big shoes to fill.”

## **Moving on**

For Raborn, this move is about going home.

When the Baton Rouge native and Louisiana State University alumnus arrived in Tarrant County in 2006, he followed in the footsteps of longtime administrator Robert Parten, who spent decades heading Tarrant County’s elections office.

During his tenure here, he helped usher in the frequent use of electronic voting machines and oversaw one of the biggest election turnouts ever, as massive numbers of voters headed to the polls for the presidential primary and general elections in 2008.

More than a dozen years ago, Raborn worked for Votec, when he served as director of customer service in San Diego.

He moved on to the post of elections administrator in Fort Bend County near Houston, where he worked for about seven years before he was [hired to come to Tarrant County](#).

Now he returns to Votec, to serve as the company president, since the “CEO is looking to semi-retire over the next few years,” Raborn said. “They’ve asked me to come in and help with the day-to-day operations.”

Now county officials will begin the search for his replacement.

“Obviously our elections are critically important to everyone,” Wright said. “Steve brought a level of efficiency that we will miss and hope we can replicate with the next person.

“It’s not an easy job,” he said. “It’s a non-partisan job but it’s a highly political position.”

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## USDOJ: Justice Department Obtains \$317,000 in Discrimination Settlement with Eules, Texas, Apartment Complex

The United States has settled a housing discrimination lawsuit in Eules, Texas, concerning discrimination against persons of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent, the Justice Department announced today. Under the agreement, defendants in *United States v. Stonebridge at Bear Creek LLP et al* will pay a total of \$107,000 in civil penalties and \$210,000 in a damages fund to compensate victims of the defendants' discrimination identified during the term of the agreement.

The agreement was filed today in federal court in Dallas and takes the form of a joint proposed order whose terms may be enforced by the court. The department's complaint alleged that, for several years, the owners, employees and management company of Stonebridge at Bear Creek Apartments violated the Fair Housing Act by denying housing opportunities to persons of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent. Among other unlawful actions, Stonebridge's property manager ordered leasing agents to misrepresent apartment availability based on the accent and perceived race or national origin of potential tenants, and to segregate those approved tenants of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent into two buildings in order to isolate any smells allegedly associated with ethnic cuisine that the manager disliked.

"The Fair Housing Act ensures that people searching for a home are protected from discrimination, no matter what part of the world their family comes from" said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jocelyn Samuels for the Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department will continue to vigorously protect the rights of all individuals to obtain housing free from discrimination."

Under the agreement, which must be approved by the federal court in Texas, the defendants must adopt a nondiscrimination policy and enact or undertake numerous other corrective measures, including training, record keeping and monitoring. In addition, the property manager who ordered the discrimination will no longer be employed by the owners of Stonebridge at Bear Creek Apartments or its management company.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the department's Civil Rights Division. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability.

More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at [www.justice.gov/crt/](http://www.justice.gov/crt/). Persons who believe they have experienced or witnessed unlawful housing discrimination may call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, e-mail the department at [fairhousing@usdoj.gov](mailto:fairhousing@usdoj.gov), or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777. More information about the Fair Housing Act can also be found at [www.justice.gov/crt/housing/](http://www.justice.gov/crt/housing/) or [www.hud.gov/fairhousing](http://www.hud.gov/fairhousing).

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## Eules apartment owner ordered to pay \$317,000 in discrimination settlement



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Published: 10 January 2014 10:41 PM

Updated: 11 January 2014 09:37 PM

The owners and managers for a Eules apartment complex will pay \$317,000 to settle a federal lawsuit alleging they discriminated against people of Middle Eastern and South Asian ancestry.

The defendants at Stonebridge at Bear Creek will pay \$107,000 in civil penalties and \$210,000 in a damages fund to compensate victims, under a consent order issued by Chief Judge Sidney Fitzwater of the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Texas.

The consent order doesn't constitute a "judicial finding of any violations of law," Fitzwater wrote.

The civil rights complaint was filed in April alleging that for several years Stonebridge at Bear Creek, S&H Realty Management of Minnesota and apartment manager Nancy Quandt violated the Fair Housing Act.

The lawsuit was filed by the U.S. Justice Department. It said Quandt told leasing agents they were prohibited from leasing to Middle Eastern or South Asian people unless there were openings in buildings No. 16 or 18, which were designated for “curry” people.

The Justice Department alleged Quandt “routinely made derogatory comments, referring to residents and potential residents of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent, as ‘curry people,’ whom she ‘hated’ and who ‘stink’ and are ‘dirty.’”

Under the agreement, Quandt will no longer be employed by Stonebridge or its management company.

Nancy Hart, vice president of operations for S&H Realty, said the lawsuit was settled to end an expensive legal fight. “We are not admitting any wrongdoing,” Hart said.

The consent order with its monetary damages was viewed as a victory by a Muslim civil rights leader. “We are ecstatic,” said Alia Salem, executive director of the Dallas-Fort Worth chapter of the Council for American Islamic Relations.

Salem praised Daniesha Davis, a leasing agent at Stonebridge who came forward to discuss what she viewed as problems at the Eules complex. She no longer works at Stonebridge.

“It’s a big win for everyone but particularly for Muslims and people of Middle Eastern and South Asian background,” Salem said. “When you have everyday Americans who are willing to stand up to this blatant racism and bigotry, it is a win on so many levels. It is a win when the community stands up for others.”

Salem and others will coordinate efforts to identify and compensate victims.

The Muslim population in North Texas is estimated to exceed 100,000. The North Texas population of those of Indian ancestry is about 107,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.