

Lake Watch

Lake Level
on July 26

532.97'

Normal Elevation 533.00'
Lake Watch is provided by the
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
on Lake Whitney

Lakeline

'Touch A Truck' at library Thurs.

Lake Whitney Public Library will host a "Touch a Truck" event sponsored by Texas-New Mexico Power Company Thursday, July 30, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Lunch will be provided, and there will be an arcing demonstration at 11:30 a.m. Kids will be able to get a close look at emergency vehicles and TNMP trucks during the event. The library is located at 602 East Jefferson Avenue in Whitney.

MHMC to host free clinic Sat.

Mission Hillsboro Medical Clinic, at 120 East Franklin Street in Hillsboro, will be open Saturday, August 1, for its first-Saturday clinic. Registration begins at 6 a.m. Residents of Hill County without medical insurance are eligible to be seen. Services are first come, first served; no appointments necessary. No dental services are available this week. Patients should bring all medications with them. Leave a message at 254-479-1489 for more information.

July 31 fish fry to benefit chamber

The Lake Whitney Chamber of Commerce will host its second annual fish fry Friday, July 31, from 11 a.m. until sold out. Fry Daddies will be on site to cook and serve to-go fish plates for a donation that will help the chamber continue to support the community and businesses. It will be held at Go Store It, located at 1401 North Brazos in Whitney.

Free breakfast canceled in Aug.

American Legion Post 522 has announced that its monthly free breakfast has been canceled for Saturday, August 1, due to reorganization. Watch for future updates.

Senior center open Tuesdays

Lake Whitney Senior Center is open every Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Meals are provided without charge, but donations are accepted. Participants enjoy activities, guest speakers, crafts, games and fellowship. A Bible study is also offered. To reserve lunch, call Jean at 254-694-2599. The senior center is located at 503 North Colorado Street in Whitney.

Officials present county budget requests

Hill County elected officials and department heads presented funding requests for their departments when the Hill County Commissioners Court held budget workshops Tuesday, July 21, and Wednesday, July 22.

The county judge and commissioners review individual departmental budgets and requests annually prior to voting on the overall county budget and setting the tax rate for the coming fiscal year.

While many department heads only had minor budget

changes to present, the hearings led to a few larger discussions about county needs. Many department heads requested pay increases for their employees, citing rising costs and the need to remain competitive with neighboring employers.

County Judge Shane Brasell said that while nobody was approaching the court with frivolous requests, they will have to be reviewed to see what works in the budget.

The Hill County Sheriff's Office, the county's largest

department, requested a 3% cost-of-living adjustment for all employees and an additional 7% salary increase for sworn deputies to remain competitive with surrounding agencies.

Sheriff Hunter Barnes said that recruiting law enforcement officers remains challenging because of a shortage of applicants and higher salaries offered by neighboring agencies. He also requested funding for one additional patrol deputy to improve coverage and response times

and a 10th dispatcher to better balance the department's 12-hour shift rotation.

Barnes said that changes to overtime practices have saved approximately \$35,000 in dispatch costs alone this year.

He also cited rising jail operating expenses, including higher City of Hillsboro water rates, increasing electricity costs and higher supply prices. While jail staffing has stabilized, he said that hiring remains difficult, and maintenance costs are expected to continue increasing as the ag-

ing facility requires additional repairs.

Chief Deputy Tim Westmoreland said that paying off vehicle leases approved under the previous administration will significantly reduce expenses this year. He said that the department plans to purchase vehicles with state SB 22 funds whenever possible, eliminating nearly \$250,000 in vehicle-related budget requests.

Westmoreland also said that the sheriff's office is expected see BUDGET on back



A Union Pacific train struck a delivery van crossing the tracks near Itasca last week, claiming one life and leaving the driver in critical condition. See accompanying story for more information.

Train collision claims life, injures one

Multiple agencies responded to the scene of a crash involving a train and commercial delivery van that claimed a life in the Itasca area Thursday afternoon, July 23.

DPS Sergeant Ryan Howard said that the crash occurred at approximately 2 p.m. near State Highway 81 and HCR 4148 north of Itasca. Howard said that the van was westbound on a private drive and was struck by a Union Pacific train while crossing the tracks.

The driver and passenger

were transported to area hospitals in critical condition. DPS later said that the passenger, Sheldon Gutierrez-Rangel, 25, of Dallas, died from his injuries. The driver was reported to be in critical condition Friday.

A Covington volunteer firefighter on scene was also transported by air for treatment of severe heat exhaustion and was released later that day.

DPS said that no other injuries were reported, and there was no derailment.

Hill County Emergency Management reported that State Highway 81, south of FM 67, was closed in all directions, and FM 67, west of State Highway 81, was also closed in all directions.

Itasca, Grandview and Covington volunteer fire departments responded, along with Air Evac, CareFlite, Itasca police, the Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Department of Transportation, Hill County Sheriff's Office and Hill County Emergency Management.

Whitney seeks feedback on city budget

The City of Whitney is requesting public feedback on budget priorities through 5 p.m. Friday, July 31.

Email your feedback to info@cityofwhitneytx.gov or drop off a handwritten response at City Hall during business hours.

The city is asking residents to provide feedback on what city services or projects should be prioritized and what city services or projects should receive less funding.

Each response must include an active City of Whitney water account number or Hill County property ID number (within city limits) to be counted.

One response will be accepted per active residential or business account. Account numbers will be used only to verify eligibility. The city may publish a summary of the responses received.

ESD 2 board approves Aquilla land purchase for new station

The Hill County Emergency Services District (ESD) 2 Board of Commissioners approved its latest land purchase in regular session Thursday, July 16.

The board voted to buy approximately 9.8 acres in the Aquilla area at a price of \$229,000 for the construction of a future ambulance station.

CareFlite representatives also gave their monthly report. There were 360 responses and 224 transports in April, with a response time compliance rate of 90%.

The majority of patients were transported to Baylor Scott & White - Hillcrest in Waco, followed by Providence Health Center in Waco and Texas Health Huguley in Burleson. Average response time overall was 13 minutes and 23 seconds, and 11 flights were made.

The board approved compensating First Responder Organizations within the district for their response to a total of 649 medical calls in the second quarter of 2026.

The board discussed reports on district facilities. Work continues at the district's Covington property, and change orders totaling up to \$24,812 were approved for drainage work and regrading of the property entrance, as well as the rebuilding of the entrance and associated gate.

Requests for automated external defibrillators from Mertens Volunteer Fire Department and Aquilla Independent School District were approved, at an estimated cost of \$7,500.

A special meeting to vote on a proposed property tax rate was set for 9 a.m. Thursday.

see ESD 2 on back

ESD 1 board reorganizes after recent resignations

The Hill County Emergency Services District (ESD) 1 Board of Commissioners met in regular session Thursday, July 16, and reorganized the board after the recent resignation of three commissioners last month.

Bill Heffner was nominated as the new president of the board. Newly appointed commissioner Justin Schulz was nominated to fill the treasurer position and former assistant treasurer David Hesselbrock was nominated to fill the secretary position.

With the board reorganized, commissioners addressed several items that were on the agenda last month, including reviewing funding requests for volunteer fire department grants from Blum, Mertens, Lakeview and Mount Calm.

The board approved two requests for Blum—one in the amount of \$1,250 for fire and rescue equipment and another in the amount of \$13,250 for a brush truck grant.

Commissioners approved a loan amount to Mertens Volunteer Fire Department for \$26,102. The funds will be used to cover a grant for wildland fire gear. Mertens will reimburse the ESD \$25,000 when the grant check is issued to the department.

The board approved funding to Lakeview Volunteer Fire Department in the amount of \$26,295. The funds will be used to cover a \$25,000 grant for fire equipment that will be reimbursed

to the ESD when the grant is awarded.

The Mount Calm Volunteer Fire Department was tentatively approved for \$25,000 to cover a grant for fire equipment. The board voted to cover the grant match after a complete itemized list of what will be purchased is received from the department.

Commissioners requested that departments submit the number of accountability tags needed for firefighters. The purchase of the tags was approved at a previous meeting. President Heffner said that the ESD would prefer to make a one-time purchase for all departments.

The board voted to sell two of its firefighting vehicles that are out of commission. One of the units was previously approved to be used as signage for the ESD 1 facility. Board members pointed out that while the vehicle could be used as an aesthetic addition, it would also need to be maintained and add costs to the budget. With the vehicles falling short of requirements and standards, commissioners decided that both vehicles will be prepared to be sold in the near future.

The board discussed adding a technical advisory position to give commissioners a better understanding of firefighting equipment when considering purchases. The position may also include canvassing of departments to assess training needs. The board said that ideally

see ESD 1 on back

Hill County Hiring Fair set for Thursday in Hillsboro

Workforce Solutions of the Heart of Texas will hold a Hill County Hiring Fair Thursday, July 30, from 9 a.m. to noon at Hillsboro's Historic City Hall.

Employers and job seekers will have a chance to connect at the event, which is sponsored by Workforce Solutions, the Hillsboro Area Chamber of Commerce, Hillsboro Economic Development Corporation and the City of Hillsboro.

Job seekers can register at the following link: form.jotform.com/261586332124151.

Employers can register at this link: <https://form.jotform.com/242315604020137>.

Historic City Hall is located at 127 East Franklin Street in downtown Hillsboro.

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