

the city

C.S., county settle fire bills

Negotiations between Brazos County and Bryan-College Station over firefighting services have now reached the bargaining table.

College Station is presently involved in a contract dispute with the county over fire services. Under the present contract which expired Dec. 31, the county pays College Station whenever the city attends a fire outside the city limits.

The city claims the county has not paid for several calls over the past two years. To help resolve these disputes, Brazos County and College Station are now working on a new fire services contract.

Although the city of Bryan does not have a contract with the county, they do handle several rural fire calls, and are concerned with the contract negotiations.

County Judge Dick Holmgreen, who is representing the county in the negotiations, says this problem is not a new one.

This problem, and it is a problem, in Brazos County developed five to eight years ago," said Holmgreen. "As community developments in the outlying areas grew, many people moved out there to have the city, because of no city taxes, the availability of open space around their homes, or various other reasons. Many of these people are what I refer to as city people."

These people, says Holmgreen, did not learn to expect certain city services.

"Many did not realize that they were no longer in the city," said Holmgreen. "But now they suddenly realize that some of the services the city offers are not included in the rural areas."

According to the city charter, there is no rule stating the county government is responsible for fire protection in rural areas.

"Because of the growth in these communities over the years, cities have seen fit to go out into the rural areas and fight fire one-on-one," Holmgreen said. "In other words, if there was a fire and they got a call, then they would go."

Doug Landua, College Station fire chief, said the dispute between the county and the city has been going on for quite awhile. The 1978-79 College Station Fire Department budget is an example.

"During the fiscal year of 1977-78, the fire department had an operating budget of \$479,468. Fire calls outside of College Station amounted to \$100,688, or 21 percent of the budget," Landua said.

"In the fiscal year of 1978-79, we made a total of 907 fire runs," said Landua. "Out of this, 102 were outside of College Station. Those runs cost us \$14,005.37. That's three per-

cent of our operating budget."

The county is billed on a per-run basis. The county does not pay for the stand-by time, or the time spent waiting for a fire, Landua said.

Another obstacle in the way of the rural fire service calls is the lack of an adequate water supply.

"If you don't have anything to hook up to, it gets to be a real problem fighting any grass fires or something that could pose a threat to homes or property," said College Station City Councilman Homer Adams. "Out in the county, it's difficult sometimes to get water."

The fire departments have always had problems with the lack of water, Landua said.

The city does, however, have fire vehicles equipped with pumps to connect with alternate water sources, such as ponds and tanks.

"It used to be we didn't have any hydrants outside of the city limits," he said, "so we always had problems finding a water supply."

Landua said the city often had to resort to a shuttle effect to resolve the problem.

"We would go out and use the water we had, then drive all the way back here and get more water," said Landua.

"It was easier if we had two units, though. One would battle the blaze

"We would go out and use the water we had, then drive all the way back here and get more water."

while another would go to get water," he added.

Landua said some trips cost as much as \$50 because of the coming and going for water. He convinced the county to have fire hydrants installed in small towns to aid in the water shortage problem.

The situation is better, Landua said, but there are still areas that need water supplies.

Another major problem which needs to be solved in the new contract is the communication between the city and area volunteer fire departments, said College Station City Manager North Bardell.

There have been several instances, Bardell said, when the city was called to a rural fire and when the truck arrived, a volunteer unit had already shown up to fight the fire.

Landua feels the communications problem is due in some part to the sheriff's department, which handles all rural fire dispatches. There is no central dispatch system between the volunteer units and the Bryan-College Station fire departments, he

said, so this accounts for overlapping of units attending the fires.

The College Station city officials feel a central dispatch unit would help solve some of the problems, but even it has drawbacks.

"There are problems, however," said one city official. "You must train people in the dispatch unit, you must decide on the type of system you want and you have to build a place to house it all. It takes money."

"In spite of the problems we had in the past with the county commissioners over the payment of rural

"To get the reimbursement, we gave the county a 30-day notice in September to solve the problem or face termination of the contract."

calls, we now have all that straightened out," Adams said. "To get the reimbursement, we gave the county a 30-day notice in September to solve the problem or face termination of the contract."

As a result of the notice, the county asked for a deadline extension to better organize the rural volunteer fire departments. These volunteer units would help alleviate the rural fire calls to Bryan and College Station.

The county is now taking further steps to try to find a solution to the fire service calls problem.

"The county budgeted \$51,000 to be used for fire suppression for both (city) departments and a communication system," said Bardell.

The central dispatch unit would be on a different frequency than that of Bryan and College Station, says Bardell. Although the central unit would be only for the volunteer fire department's use, both cities would monitor the frequency. This way, added Bardell, responses could be made to mutual aid calls.

Mutual calls are calls by fire units asking for assistance from other units.

These calls would be answered only if the fire departments making the call felt the need for assistance. The dispatching system would also put an end to both city and volunteer units attending a fire when only one is needed. With the present system, the city fire departments have no way of knowing whether or not a rural fire call has been answered.

Even though the dispatching system would be a definite advantage, the delayed response time to rural calls is still a problem, said Landua.

"The response time for Bryan and College Station to these rural calls is going to be above the maximum limit," stated Landua. "It may take

17-19 minutes to answer a call in the county, whereas it only takes three-five minutes in the city."

Despite the fact rural calls will be answered sooner, county officials don't want to create a false sense of security.

Citizens living in the rural areas presently receive the same fire services as citizens of College Station, but without paying the taxes that city residents do. The deadline for this city service will continue until July 1, 1980, if the city council members vote to extend the time limit.

The College Station city council said their main concern in this matter is whether or not College Station is getting the best values out of their tax dollars.

"I think the people in the city would be served best if they (College Station fire department) didn't answer any county calls and kept all units ready for city fires," said Bardell. "I think we should get optimum usage of equipment and manpower."

Adams agrees.

"If we respond to any county calls, the citizens of College Station or of Bryan are getting it in the neck," commented Adams.

"However, our obligation is to serve, and we will remain in that capacity on the basis of the present contract until something happens."

Anti-Khomeini Iranians form protest group

United Press International
HOUSTON — An Iranian industrialist who fled to Houston about three months ago said the occupation of the U.S. Embassy was designed to mask failures of the current Iranian government. Ali Ebrahimi, in an interview published Saturday in Houston, said the embassy takeover is a maneuver to create international conflict in order to cover up the

economic and social failures of the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini.

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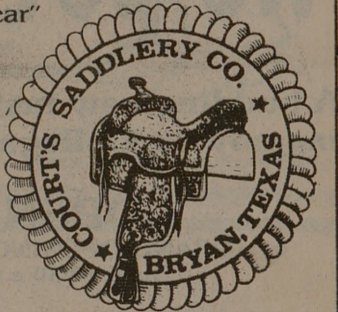
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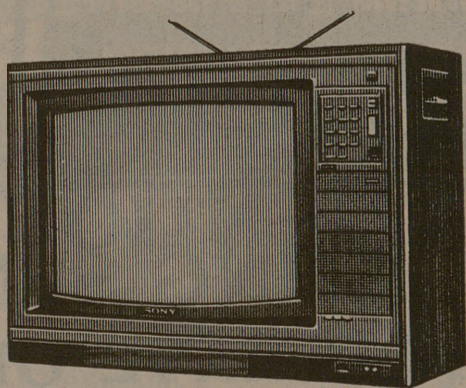
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