

State and Local

Eligibility not income-based

City project pays utilities

By JEANNE ISENBERG
Staff Writer

College Station residents who find themselves unable to pay their utility bills don't necessarily have to worry about their electricity being shut-off or their garbage being left in front of the house.

Project Beacon, sponsored by the City of College Station Utilities Department and the Brazos County chapter of the American Red Cross, could be a way out.

Project Beacon has been an option for College Station residents with delinquent bills since September 1985, says Charlotte Cook, utilities collection supervisor and the overseer of the project.

"If something prevents any resident from paying his bill," Cook says, "he can apply for this energy assistance program."

"There is no wage or income guideline. It's not how much a person makes or where he lives in the city. If it's determined that something unusual prevented the

payment of the bill, he is eligible for the program."

The Red Cross processes the applications and interviews prospective participants. If the appli-

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— Charlotte Cook, Project Beacon overseer.

cant is approved, the Red Cross notifies the utilities department. College Station utility bills include charges for electricity, sewer, garbage and water.

Once a person is accepted to the project, Cook says, he may not participate again for one year. The maximum amount of

aid given at one time is \$400, she says.

Participants are not required to pay back the Beacon aid money, Cook says, but many do anyway. Since the program's beginning in September 1985, 53 of the 70 people that applied have been helped, Cook says, accounting for about \$8,400 in funding.

Beacon began with a \$10,000 donation from the City of College Station, Cook says, but pledges and donations from residents of College Station are increasing.

"In straight donations we've received about \$740 since our start, and approximately \$136 has been committed in monthly pledges through the end of February," she says.

A resident can fill out a pledge card and the city will automatically add the pledge onto the resident's monthly utility bill, Cook says. Any pledges or donations are tax deductible, she says.

IRS official: Austin center keeping up with returns

Associated Press

AUSTIN — Local Internal Revenue Service officials say a General Accounting Office finding that the IRS regional center here is lagging behind most others in processing tax returns this year is outdated.

Larry Westfall, director of the Austin center said, "I don't think we have a slowdown in processing. I think we're doing exceptionally well."

Rep. Jake Pickle, D-Texas, heads an IRS watchdog subcommittee which received the GAO report Tuesday in Washington.

Pickle said the report showed the Austin center with 1,586 unprocessed refunds as of Feb. 21. But Pickle said Westfall had assured him the number was down to 350 as of Wednesday.

The report by the GAO, the auditing arm of Congress, said that as of Feb. 21, the Austin center had processed only 29 percent of the more than 3 million returns filed there by taxpayers in Texas and the four other states served by the center.

The report said Austin had the second-worst processing record among the IRS's 10 regional centers and was well behind the 34.8 percent national processing rate.

But Westfall said as of Wednesday, the center had received 4.2 million returns and processed 1.8 million, or 43 percent.

"We're taking four to five weeks to refund, and that is very, very fast," Westfall said. "It's a good tax season for us so far," he said.



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Houston firm to cast Texas goddess

Associated Press

AUSTIN — A Houston art foundry has been selected to cast the aluminum replica of the Goddess of Liberty for the Capitol dome, Capitol Architect Roy Graham said.

Graham said Dellray Bronze Inc. was selected by the Aluminum Co. of America, a major contributor to the

project, because of the foundry's fine-arts orientation and its capacity to handle large-scale casting in aluminum.

Graham estimated it would take about eight weeks to complete the new Goddess.

"May 31 is being considered as the tentative date for airlifting the new

Goddess to her permanent perch atop the Capitol dome," Graham said.

The weathered and time-worn original Goddess was removed last fall after 97 years on the dome.

Experts said the original 1 1/2-ton zinc statue had deteriorated and could not be repaired.

White: Texas teachers will do well on test

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The 210,000 Texas teachers who must take the mandatory competency test on Monday are understandably worried but will do well, Gov. Mark White predicted Thursday.

White, who taught a history class at Austin High School as part of a state officials' teach-in program, said the test is obviously something that has raised teachers' concerns.

"I was in class today," he said. "I saw a number of teachers. They're worried about it. But I know they will do well."

The reading and writing test,

which will be taken by current teachers and school administrators, was a key element of the school reform law passed in 1984.

A teachers' organization unsuccessfully challenged the exam in court, saying a one-shot test isn't a fair way to judge people who have been working in a profession for years.

White continued to defend the test, but also said he understands how teachers feel.

White said, "There's an enormous amount of pressure brought to bear upon them because of the test. But they're going to do well."

Terri Anderson, spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency, said the test also will be taken by about half the TEA staff — some 400 people including Education Commissioner William Kirby. Those taking the test have teacher certification.

An additional 300,000 people who hold teaching certificates but aren't teaching right now will begin taking the competency test April 10, Anderson said.

White said the test is an essential element in forging a new knowledge-based economy for the state.

"I don't know how they'll react,"

White added. "But I do know that on Monday, we're going to see the beginning of a new economy built in Texas. The new economy will be built on the basis of stronger educational programs from the very first day the child touches that educational system."

"We have to be world competitive and move away from the dependence on an oil and gas economy. I think that our teachers are going to be in the forefront of building that."

And I think they'll build it with greater pride because they have passed that test."

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