

Harris faces execution after 15 years

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HUNTSVILLE — Danny Harris, facing execution this week for a murder 15 years ago, said Wednesday he wished he could have swapped places with his brother who was put to death earlier this month for the same crime. Harris is scheduled for lethal injection early Friday, the day before his 33rd birthday, for the Dec. 11, 1978, murder of Timothy Merka in what became known as the "Good Samaritan" slaying. Merka, 27, a Texas A&M University employee, was beaten with a tire tool and robbed after he stopped to help Harris and his brother, Curtis, and two others who were on the side of the road with a disabled car in rural Brazos County near Mumford.

'Good Samaritan' killer to die Friday

Curtis Harris, 31, was executed July 1 for his part in the slaying. He and his brother, one of three sets of brothers on the Texas death row, met for an hour the morning before Curtis Harris was put to death. They were teenagers — Danny was 18 and Curtis was 17 — at the time of the murder. "I constantly passed my love to him," Danny Harris said Wednesday. "I did tell him several times I wished they would take me, not you. I was expressing the same things to him that he had expressed to me. "I was trying to give him as much strength as possible." Harris, however, whose death Friday would mark the first time

Texas authorities have executed brothers since the state in 1982 resumed carrying out capital punishment, said he did not grieve for his brother. "It's amazing to me," he said. "I wanted to cry. The Lord wouldn't let me. He wanted to assure me Curtis was all right. The Lord wouldn't let me grieve. He wouldn't let me do anything negative." Harris' attorneys were hoping the federal courts would block the execution. They also asked the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to commute the sentence to life. Harris refused to say if he was optimistic the efforts would succeed, saying only that he was tired

after writing up to 10 letters a day to friends and supporters who had written him. "These people know the real me, unlike the way I have been depicted," he said. "They know I'm useful." Testimony showed Danny Harris held down Merka, who was pleading for his life, while Curtis beat the man with a tire iron. Court records also indicated Danny Harris devised the plan to kill Merka in order to steal the victim's pickup truck so he and his brother and two companions could return home to Bryan. Danny Harris on Wednesday declined to talk about the crime. "It's not even an issue at this point," he said. "What purpose is it serving? There's nothing you can do."

Parking problems still plague dome patrons

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — Public transit officials, still smarting from snafus that marred the U.S. Olympic Festival opening, are hurrying to plan bus service for upcoming Alamodome events. More than two months after the dome's opening, there is no clear policy on VIA Metropolitan Transit's park-and-ride or downtown shuttle services to the huge stadium, or who will pay for it. With only 3,200 parking spots on the premises — and a stadium capacity of 65,000-plus — the bus is a must for many dome patrons. In the coming months, two National Football League preseason games, two Southwest Conference football games, a big-name boxing match, the Alamo Bowl and a George Strait concert are scheduled at the Alamodome. VIA has yet to coordinate bus service with those event promoters, transit board chairman Arturo Sanchez said in an interview Tuesday. "We haven't heard from them," Sanchez said. "We're very concerned, and we're very serious about it ... We're notifying the sponsors and those promoters that they need to talk to us about their transportation needs." Gary Becker, president of Pace Productions, sponsor of the Houston Oilers preseason games and the Strait concert, said his understanding is VIA will pay for bus service to the events. The first preseason football game is next week, when the Oilers face the New Orleans Saints on Aug. 7. "Our opinion is the promoter of the events should not bear the responsibility — the financial responsibility — of the bus service," Becker said Wednesday. VIA offers park-and-ride service to established San Antonio events that traditionally attract thousands of people, like the downtown Folklife Festival and the Fiesta Oyster Bake. If an event is expected to attract at least 40,000 people, "it should kick in as a park-and-ride situation," Sanchez said. Park-and-ride service allows motorists to park at large, outlying shopping center lots then ride buses into downtown for a fee. Aside from the established events, VIA generally does not provide park-and-ride service unless the event sponsor agrees to offset any financial loss incurred, Sanchez said. VIA maintains that is the policy for the Alamodome, which VIA technically owns and where it operates a large bus terminal. "The general assumption is VIA will run a park-and-ride (bus service) if there's an event at the dome. That's an incorrect assumption," Sanchez said. To make sure dome events started off strong, VIA offered bus service to the stadium's opening ceremony, a Paul McCartney concert and the Olympic festival opening Friday. VIA also operates shuttle from downtown parking lots to the dome, based on demand. VIA, a taxing entity, lost about \$13,000 on the McCartney concert service, Sanchez said.

ELVIS LIVES

Air Force major files lawsuit claiming Elvis faked his death

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT WORTH — A retired Air Force major has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Fort Worth against Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc., contending that the King faked his death and ran off to live a normal life. Bill Smith, the author of "Memphis Mystery: Elvis, the Man and the Myth," charges that the corporation has violated his civil rights, among other claims. The corporation has "the world's greatest monopoly" on Elvis memorabilia and has interfered with the marketing of his book. Smith, who also names Graceland in his lawsuit, claims the corporation has perpetrated the "biggest fraud in the history of the world" concerning Elvis' death. He says he knows the rock 'n' roll star is alive because he's had frequent telephone conversations with him. "Nobody believes me, but I just go on," Smith said Tuesday. Donald Fulton, Smith's attorney, said the lawsuit "involves the question of free speech and right to market literary property free from interference." Carla Peyton, director of worldwide licensing for Elvis Presley Enterprises, said Wednesday she's heard of Smith, but had no knowledge of his lawsuit.

Brownsville man seriously injured in bee attack Tuesday

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BROWNSVILLE — An 87-year-old Brownsville man was hospitalized after he was stung more than 300 times by bees that swarmed him while he was watering a banana tree. Jose Jesus Luna was in stable condition Tuesday afternoon at Valley Medical Center, said hospital spokesman Pat Boscher. Monday's attack on Luna comes nearly two weeks after an 82-year-old man died after an attack by Africanized bees on his ranch in Starr County, about 340 miles northwest of Brownsville. When he died July 15, Lino Lopez became the first person in the United States to be killed by the so-called killer bees since they migrated into Texas in 1990. It has not yet been determined if the bees that swarmed Luna were Africanized bees. Texas Department of Health spokesman Jorge Herrera said test results to determine if they were Africanized will be available in about two weeks. Luna was swarmed while watering a banana tree outside a hamburger stand, when the bees' hive in a nearby building was apparently disturbed. "He was talking with a little girl, when all of a sudden the bees began to attack him," said Luna's daughter Blanco Diaz. Three women were also stung during Luna's attack, Herrera said. Diaz, 10-year-old Leticia Garza and her mother Elsa Garza were all stung three times. Diaz said she put Luna and the child in the store to keep the bees away from them, then tried to kill the bees by spraying them with water and smashing them with a fly swatter.

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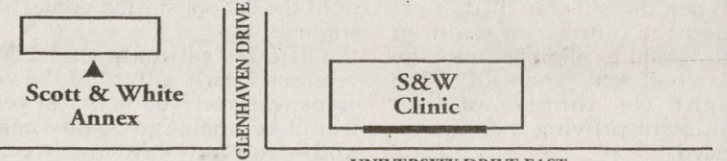
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