

STATE & LOCAL

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THE BATTALION

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Group to provide free vaccines to area

By Jacqueline Mason

THE BATTALION

In order to improve the quality and access of health care in the Brazos Valley, a local group is providing free childhood and flu vaccines to thousands of area residents.

The HealthSmart Coalition, a committee of concerned community leaders, has organized Shots Across the Brazos Valley, part of the state-wide Shots Across Texas program scheduled for Spring 1994.

Shots Across the Brazos Valley is the first major campaign of HealthSmart, but members have been meeting for a year to plan it, said Regina Ragan of Texas A&M

University's department of operations analysis.

The initial purpose of the group, which was created over a year ago by A&M administrators, was to decrease the cost of health care in the Brazos Valley, now it focuses attention of the quality of availability of this care.

"We still have a lot to iron out," said Bruce Prevatt, director of Texas A&M's Employee Assistance Program. "We are still brainstorming all the avenues available to us."

This campaign is a unified effort, he said, unlike, in the past, when clinics, hospitals and individual doctors gave the shots.

Mary Miller, assistant vice president for finance and adminis-

tration at Texas A&M, said the vaccines will be administered from Nov. 5-12 at various sites around town.

Miller said HealthSmart has about 50 members, including A&M administrators, community leaders and 1,000 volunteers.

"What we are trying to do is make the people who live in Bryan/College Station healthier and more health conscious," she said.

Dena Frieda, executive director of human resources for the Bryan Independent School District, said if the group can prevent flu and childhood diseases, problems with attendance at school will decrease.

"Having not only the children immunized but the employees,

we'll have better attendance," she said.

Miller said nearly 50 percent of all preschoolers are not immunized.

"For the childhood vaccine, we are estimating that somewhere between two to three thousand children are not properly immunized," she said.

HealthSmart has already raised \$37,000 for the events, but needs about \$20,000 more, she said.

Shots Across the Brazos Valley will be free to anyone living in the Brazos Valley.

The shots will be administered at Post Oak Mall, Randall's in College Station, schools in Bryan and College Station and the Texas A&M campus.

State judge: trial will determine legality of Texas school funding

The Associated Press

AUSTIN — A state judge today narrowed the focus of a trial over the state's new school finance law.

State District Judge F. Scott McCown said he would limit arguments of a trial that opened today to the legality of the way the state funds its schools.

That would put off for a separate trial the question of whether more money is needed for public schools and whether the state should be forced to pay for the programs it requires schools to provide.

The current case involves a challenge by poor school districts to the way about \$7 billion in annual state aid is distributed under the newest finance law. Local taxes contribute another \$8 billion-plus to the system.

The trial also includes arguments by wealthy school districts against the structure of the funding law and arguments that the state relies too heavily on local property taxes.

McCown said he would decide at the conclusion of the first trial whether the second trial would begin quickly or "at a more distant time."

The fact that property-rich and poor school districts are challenging Texas lawmakers' latest effort to reform education funding may be a good sign, quipped Texas Assistant Attorney General Toni Hunter.

"They say when you make everybody unhappy, you've got the right solution," Ms. Hunter said.

The trial is the third round in the courthouse for officials trying to meet a 1989 Texas Supreme Court order to even out funding available to school districts with differing property wealth. Schools rely primarily on state aid and local property tax money.

Two other reform laws passed since the 1989 decision have been ruled unconstitutional: one on a challenge led by poor districts, the other by prop-

erty-rich ones.

This time, both have gone to court.

"I think we're all tired," said Craig Foster, executive director of the Equity Center, a group of property-poor schools involved in the long-running court fight for equity.

But not tired enough to give up what's been called "a life and death struggle" by lawyer Al Kauffman of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Compared to the funding system used last school year, about \$165 million in state money is shifted from poorer to richer school districts, according to lawyers for the poor districts.

The law decreases the state's basic per-student funding grant, and it changes and limits state matching funds that are based on local tax rates.

Districts with a poor property tax base say it's unfair to cut allotments across the board because they require much higher local tax rates to try to make up the difference.

The law would leave at least a \$600 gap per student in funding between rich and poor school districts, say poor districts, who add that it virtually ignores classroom construction funding needs.

Wealthy districts also are unhappy with the law, which is meant to ensure none of the state's 1,048 school districts has property wealth of more than \$280,000 per student. Previously, values have ranged from more than \$4 million to less than \$10,000.

The law gives school districts with more property wealth choices for sharing some of it. Among other arguments, property-rich school districts say the law amounts to an unconstitutional statewide property tax.

Wealthy school districts also have raised the argument that the state hasn't adequately funded public education.

Court rejects Tilton's effort to halt inquiry into ministry

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday rejected an attempt by television evangelist Robert Tilton to block the investigation of Texas Attorney General Dan Morales into alleged fraud in his ministry.

The Word of Faith World Outreach Center Church, founded by Tilton in Dallas in 1976, grew to an organization that grossed \$65 million in 1991 and had a 500,000-person mailing list.

In late 1991, ABC's "Prime Time Live" television program reported that prayer requests mailed to Tilton were trashed and that the church falsely claimed to run an orphanage in Haiti.

Morales' office asked a state court to order the church to produce the records.

The church countered by going to federal court with its contention that the attorney general's demand violated its freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution's First Amendment.

A federal judge ruled that the demand for the church's membership and contributor lists was "clearly unconstitutional."

But last March, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that ruling, saying federal courts must let the state court act first.

In the appeal acted on Monday, the church's lawyers argued that the federal judge was not required to defer to the state court because the judge ruled that Morales acted in bad faith.

Waiting for the state court to act would cause a "particularly serious (delay) due to the fundamental nature of First Amendment rights involved," the church's lawyers said.

Masked bandit robs churchgoers

The Associated Press

LUBBOCK — Police questioned a suspect Monday in the armed robbery of 17 churchgoers.

The masked bandit behind Sunday morning's holdup at Calvary Full Gospel Church got away with about \$550, authorities said.

"It happened so fast," said the Rev. Marvin James, who was preparing for his sermon. "This guy just came in, told people to hush up and demanded money from everybody."

The robber, holding what appeared to be a sawed-off shotgun wrapped in a towel, forced the congregation to gather at the altar.

He tossed the 66-year-old pastor a pillowcase and demanded that James collect purses and wallets, James said.

The suspect was arrested about 7 a.m. Monday by officers called to check out a suspicious car, said Lt. Dean Summerlin.

Witnesses described the robber as a white male, 6 feet tall and 25 to 30 years of age. He was wearing a red and blue wind breaker, blue jeans and new high-top tennis shoes.

The car seen leaving the church matched the description of the getaway car used during a grocery store robbery at Lubbock on Saturday, Officer Victor Quintana said.

At the church, a Sunday school teacher with children in another room had started to come into the main hall, but the robber warned her to close the door and stay away.

The robber also had asked for the churchgoers' watches and jewelry — but changed his mind, James said. The thief allowed some people to keep their drivers licenses and credit cards.

"It seemed more like a dream than anything," said Ikey Green, who was robbed of his wallet.

The man collected the money and told the victims to go into the pastor's office and not call police, James said.

GRE.

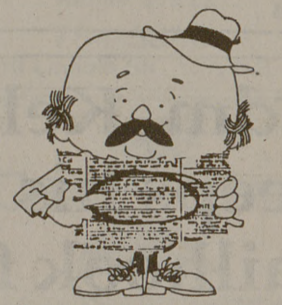
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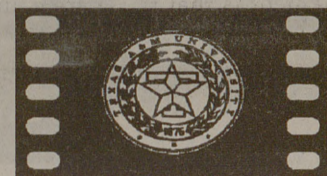
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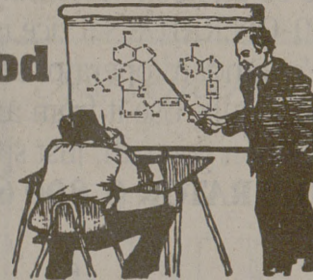
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