

Eye on the ball



Karen Schmidt, of Texas Hallettsville, Texas, takes a break from her student orientation to shoot pool in the basement of the Memorial Student Center Wednesday. Schmidt will attend Texas A&M in the fall.

JAKE SCHRICKLING/THE BATTALION

Fire in the sky

Dallas man offers land for people to have Fourth of July celebration

DALLAS (AP) — With fireworks bans in place across the state because of a drought that has turned much of Texas into a tinderbox, one rancher is inviting folks to his land to light up the sky.

Gary Turley has turned 16 acres of his land about a half-hour south of Dallas into "You-Pop," a park where revelers may ignite all the firecrackers and sparklers they want for a \$3 admission fee, \$2 with a coupon.

Turley also is operating a fireworks concession, with devices ranging from 25 cents to \$40, for those who don't bring their own explosives.

Turley insists the idea is more about fun than money. Although Turley said he's heard of no other event like this, at least one nonprofit outfit is running a similar venture this Independence Day. The volunteer fire department in the small town of Rhome, about 23 miles northwest of Fort Worth, has mowed and soaked a three-acre field next door to the fire station where locals can come set off their bottle rockets. It's free but not set up for lots of people.

Turley's park opened last Saturday and will remain in business until the last firework fizzles on July 4th.

"We have had several people coming out, and everyone said they are coming back on July Fourth," Turley, who expects a crowd of 2,500 on Independence Day, said. "Everyone is loving it."

Well, almost everybody.

Johnson County Judge Roger Harmon said he's not too happy about Turley's plan and has banned aerial fireworks.

"Anyone who pops any (aerial) firecrackers in our county is subject to a Class C misdemeanor," which is punishable by a \$500 fine, Harmon said.

But the ban applies only to missiles and rockets, said Turley's mother, Nan, who helps him run the ranch.

"We'll be sure to check and see that no one has any of those," Turley said. All other fireworks

will be allowed.

The Lillian Volunteer Fire Department doused one blaze at the ranch. Firefighter said he, like Harmon, doesn't like Turley's plan.

"I think we might be spending a lot of the next (several) days," Salmon said.

Turley has been in the holiday business a decade. He first raised Christmas trees, then rides for children and eventually was taking a pumpkin patch for Halloween. That led him to change the name of his land to Christmas Tree Farm to Holiday Ranch.

The fireworks idea came last summer when he heard a friend's son was in trouble for setting off in a place where it wasn't allowed.

"Then it just hit me," he said. "I had a place to do this."

His timing was perfect as just last year's legislature made it legal for landowners to allow people onto their property to shoot fireworks.

"If it's a safe area, that would be a good idea," U.S. Forest Service spokesman Gary says.

Turley takes the place of everyone doing their own thing.

An extended heat wave and drought have made the state extremely susceptible to wild fires.

More than half the state's 254 counties have fireworks, and authorities in many cities have issued crackdowns against aerial fireworks.

Turley has taken several precautions to make the event safe. He has mowed his grass "to the max" and plowed firebreaks that are supposed to prevent flames from spreading.

Turley also has hired off-duty sheriff's deputies to help with crowd control and enforce a strict alcohol policy.

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