

Air-traffic system upgraded

Controllers, safety officials hope new equipment will limit delays

FORT WORTH (AP) — Controllers responsible for some 160,000 square miles of airspace in the Southwest said they are flying high with some long-overdue new equipment that makes their work easier and planes less likely to be delayed.

The Fort Worth Air Route Traffic Control Center started putting the new equipment, essentially better computers and more dynamic displays, to use in June. It was the first of 20 centers around the nation to get both pieces of the new system up and running.

Industry officials and control center workers celebrated the upgrade yesterday at an official dedication.

The old radar displays, which were 30 years old, did not have the advanced features of the Display System Replacement: high-resolution color displays, improved weather information and customizable settings for each operator.

The new computers can track aircraft flight information such as speed, altitude and aircraft type and allow controllers to efficiently handle more planes.

"It does a lot of things the old system didn't do, and it's a lot faster," Bill Shedden, a controller at the center, said.

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— Bill Shedden
Air-traffic controller

The old system used vacuum-tube technology, and replacement parts for much of the equipment was becoming scarce. The only difficulty in making the transition, Shedden said, was having to look down at the new keyboards to find keys that used to be next to display screens.

Controllers at the center are separate from

the control towers at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. They handle planes shortly after takeoff and just before landing.

The center's coverage extends to portions of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Controllers there directed more than 2 million planes in 1998.

The upgrade in Fort Worth is part of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) nationwide overhaul of air-control equipment. The agency is spending \$1.055 billion nationwide to install the same systems put into place in Fort Worth.

"Four and half years ago we signed the contract," Monte Belger, the FAA's associate administrator for air traffic services, said. "At that time we set a schedule and set a budget. And we have met that schedule and met that budget."

Belger likened the switch to changing the control panel of an aircraft in flight and added that the process in Fort Worth would be a model for other centers still changing to the new equipment.

Dell to pay for child insurance

AUSTIN (AP) — Computer tycoon Michael Dell and his wife will help pay for the health insurance of many as 33,000 Austin-area children at Tokyo Disneyland.

The Dells will help pay insurance premiums for children in Travis and Williamson counties until a new federal program begins in May.

Their donation jump starts plans to promote the Children's Health Insurance Program, which beginning next May will provide low-cost health coverage for Texas families earning up to twice the poverty level.

For a family of four, twice the federal poverty level is an annual income of about \$32,000.

According to the Texas Healthy Kids Corp., some of those 33,000 children are eligible for Medicaid. But most of their families earn too much or own something, such as a car or land, that makes them ineligible under Texas' stringent Medicaid limits.

Bush asks West Virginia to extradite accused killer

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. George W. Bush asked West Virginia authorities yesterday to send to Texas a man accused in the notorious yogurt-shop murders.

Robert Springsteen Jr., of Charleston, W.Va., is one of four men charged with capital murder in the killings of four teenage girls during a 1991 robbery. He could face the death penalty or up to life in prison if convicted.

Bush sent the extradition request by overnight mail to West Virginia Gov. Cecil Underwood, Bush's office said.

Once the request is reviewed,



BUSH

Underwood can issue an extradition warrant to have Springsteen sent to Texas to stand trial.

Underwood's office did not immediately return calls yesterday. His spokesperson, Dan Page, earlier said the West Virginia governor would act quickly once the request is received.

Page said the fact Texas has a death penalty and West Virginia does not "is not an issue in this case at this point."

Springsteen has refused to be extradited voluntarily. Kanawha County (W.Va.) Circuit Judge Charles King set a final extradition hearing for Nov. 4. Springsteen is being held without bond in Charleston.

Police said Eliza Hope Thomas, 17; Amy Ayers, 13;

Jennifer Harbison, 17 and sister Sarah Harbison, 15, were shot at an I Can't Believe It's Yogurt! store. Thomas and Jennifer Harbison worked at the store, which was set on fire after they were killed.

Springsteen, Michael James Scott, 25; Forrest Wellborn, 23; and Maurice Pierce, 24, were arrested Oct. 6 and charged with shooting the four girls in the head on Dec. 6, 1991. Scott, Wellborn and Pierce were arrested in Texas.

The four are charged with capital murder.

Wellborn was 15 and Pierce was 16 at the time of the killings, so they have been charged as juveniles. Prosecutors want to have them certified to stand trial as adults.

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CHEM 227	8-10 PM	Ch. 9	Ch. 9,10	CH.8	TBA
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