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Firestone CEO to testify

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Texas judge has ordered the CEO of Bridgestone/Firestone Inc. and three other executives to appear in the case of a couple who died when the tread allegedly came off of their Firestone tires, said a lawyer involved in the case.

A lawyer for relatives of Patricia and Nidia Leal, who died in the accident last May, said he wants chief executive officer Masatoshi Ono to explain in a deposition when the Tokyo-based company knew that there were problems with the Firestone tires that are being recalled.

Ono told The Wall Street Journal in an Aug. 18 story that the company knew there were problems with Wilderness tires when used under "severe conditions" and moved to improve the model before the recall.

"The question that jumps up is, 'What did you know and when did you know it?'" said attorney Bob Patterson, who requested the deposition. "And what changes were they making to try and stop the problem?"

Patterson said Texas State District Judge John Pope issued the order on Friday for Ono and Firestone executives Gary Crigger, Christine Karbowiak, and Robert Wyant to be deposed Sept. 15 in Nashville, Tenn.

Patterson said attorneys may also use the executives' depositions in other cases of accidents involving the tires. More than 100 lawsuits were filed nationwide against the tire makers before the recall.

Congressional staff are scheduled to meet on Monday with Firestone executives in Nashville. A spokesman for the House Commerce Committee said they will be asking when the company knew there was a problem with the Wilderness AT, ATX and ATX II tires.

Bridgestone/Firestone recalled about 6.5 million P235/75R15 size Firestone ATX, ATX II and Wilderness AT tires, often found on Ford Explorers, on Aug. 9.

The Leals were killed in May 1999 near Brownsville, Texas, while traveling in a Ford Explorer equipped with now-recalled Firestone ATX tires, Patterson said.

The Leal trial is scheduled to begin Oct. 16, the first case to go to trial since the recall, said Sean Kane, president of Strategic Safety, a group researching the tire problem for attorneys who are suing the company.

Firestone officials were not immediately available for comment.

Look ma no hands



STUART VILLANUEVA/The Battalion

Sung Hoon Jung, a chemical engineering graduate student, prepares to practice the ancient Korean martial art Kum-Do at the Student Recreation Center Wednesday.

Stephenville school district error loses \$4 million

STEPHENVILLE (AP) — Facing a property tax hike and possible job cuts, this town is about to pay for the school district's \$4 million accounting error.

Stephenville Independent School District officials say no money is missing; the building project funds were mistakenly credited to the general operating fund.

Neither the school board nor auditors caught the error, and the system kept spending hundreds of thousands of dollars it did not have.

"It makes me mad because there's a chance kids are going to suffer," said Superintendent Darrell G. Floyd, who was hired in March. "We have a financial situation that's going to affect every person in this community, and that's not right."

For nearly two years, money for building projects was credited to the general fund rather than a separate fund that by law must be used only for construction. Consequently, the 1998-99 budget showed a \$3.84 million balance, but it actually was \$127,000 in the red. The deficit worsened in 1999-

2000 because the district overestimated revenues and kept spending. When the new assistant superintendent for business, Debbie Roesler, reviewed the books last month, she discovered the error and realized the 2000-01 budget falls short by nearly \$1 million.

"It makes me mad because there's a chance kids are going to suffer."

— Darrell G. Floyd
Superintendent of S.I.S.D.

Since then Roesler and Floyd have been scrambling to keep the district afloat. The school system is keeping nine teacher positions vacant, cutting some pay raises and implementing a 30-cent property tax increase.

The former superintendent and former assistant superintendent for business retired several months ago and could not be reached for comment.

Floyd plans to keep cutting back — not buying new computer equipment for the district office, not buying buses and eliminating as many as 35 jobs in the next few years — so the district can break even in 2002-03.

Texas Education Agency officials plan to visit Stephenville in two weeks to review the cost-cutting plans. The agency is not likely to penalize the district, even though it does not allow school districts to maintain a negative fund balance.

"It's going to be a lot of hard work, but I have the belief now that they'll be able to pull this off, although it won't happen overnight," said Ed Flathouse, TEA associate commissioner for finance and support systems.

The school system also hopes to get a boost from the football team, which won four state titles in the 1990s. The 2000-01 budget in-

cludes \$275,000 in revenues from athletics, based on figures from last year.

Generating that much money, realistic in this 15,600-resident town where the 10,000-seat high school stadium is full for home games, and it does not put too much pressure on the coaches and players, Floyd said.

The Yellow Jackets are ranked No. 1 in this year's preseason poll for Class 4A.

"I know it will be helpful for the school system for us to win," coach Mike Copeland said. "But they just kids out there. We'll do our very best we can, but our success won't affect whether the kids are educated."

Even with budget problems, the district is not likely to trim its coaching salary. Former coach Briles earned \$85,000, one of the highest salaries for a high school coach in the state, before he earlier this year to coach at Texas Tech University. Copeland earned \$75,000 as football coach and athletic director and has a two-year contract.

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Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian & Transgendered Aggies: You Have an ALLY

Each member of ALLIES has attended a voluntary training seminar, has resource information available, and has pledged to provide a "safe haven", a listening ear, and support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered members of the Texas A&M community. If you need someone to talk to, contact an ALLY, or look for the ALLY placard, posted near each ALLY's office or residence hall room.

If you are willing to become an ALLY, training sessions are scheduled for Wed., Sep. 13, 5:30-9pm; Sun., Oct. 1, 4pm; Fri., Oct. 13, 2-5pm; Sun., Oct. 29, 1-4pm; and Wed., Dec. 13, 5:30-9pm. Choose one, then RSVP to allies@tamu.edu to secure a space and learn the Advance location.

<http://allies.tamu.edu>

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