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Monday, April 26, 2004

Sand's up Sandboarders are drawn to West Texas dun

By Aline McKenzie KRT CAMPUS

MONAHANS, Texas - In the early morning, it's as if humans had never set foot here.

Pristine sand dunes rise to 70 feet high amid the scrubby West Texas vegetation. Damp with dew, they're marked with the tracks of nightly visitorsinsects, birds of various sizes, the resident mammals: skunks, jackrabbits, coyotes, deer.

But new tracks are about to take over.

sport is that for every slip-sliding trip down a dune, which

at Monahans Sandhills State Park in West Texas.

gouged with the marks of disks.

have dug holes and finger-

shaped trenches where people

have taken breaks, stretching out

their legs and scooping sand

sliding conditions after 1 p.m.

Tanner Cash and Craig

Shelton, both 13 and visiting

with a Boy Scout troop from

Lone Oak, Texas, take a break

from sliding, instead digging

By early afternoon, the sand

over them.

largely thinned out.

There are pits where children

pockmarked with footprints and holes 2 to 3 feet deep. the laver where the satis cool, and burying themselve to their waists.

> Finally, sunset aproa People have almost about the dunes, either leave park or following other na at the edge of the sant-

is hot and dry, with a texture like kites, barbecuing. flour, and the dozens of people Suddenly, the wind pd who were on the slopes have its own. The strong with It's more difficult to slide when the sand's like this. The visitor center even has posted a footprints and filing he notice that it's not responsible for that people have dug.

within a minute it vanisha beetle emerges and walking around, leaving perlike track.

Cigarette tax increase eyed for school mon

pristine, but the ones nearby are

By Kelley Shannon THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — It takes smoker Linda Martinez only a split second to voice her opinion about the governor's proposed \$1per-pack cigarette tax increase.

'I'll pay it," said Martinez, a 54-year-old Austin woman who has smoked for 35 years. "Plain and simple — nicotine is an addictive drug, and just like any addict on the street, we are addicted.' "I'd rather pay it on the cigarettes than on the house taxes," Martinez added. Those views may resonate with some Texas legislators who returned to the Capitol last week for a special legislative session. Republican Gov. Rick Perry called the session, he said, to reduce Texans' property taxes while eliminating the state's share-thewealth education funding system, known to some as Robin Hood.

One Perry proposal to replace lost property tax revenue is a \$1 increase in the state's cigarette tax, to \$1.41 per pack.

Health advocates applaud the plan. Along with generating revenue, they say, it could help control health care costs by reducing smoking. "People don't like taxes, but this is one that does have a good public health benefit and certainly fits well with some of the state's goals, certainly on education and on health,' said Kelly Headrick, a lobbyist for the American Cancer Society's Texas division. But the tobacco industry claims raising

the tax would send smokers to neg states, Mexico or onto the Internet, to illegal cigarette smuggling.

"That obviously threatens le retailers and wholesalers in the se Texas," said Jamie Drogin, spolie for Philip Morris USA.

"As the cigarettes get more ap consumers seek out alternative venue which to buy cigarettes." Opponents say the increase impose a larger burden on the part also say it would be a dwindling and dictable revenue source because of ing declines in the number of smoles as education costs rise. Perry estimates his cigarette ta m would generate \$2.4 billion over the three fiscal years.

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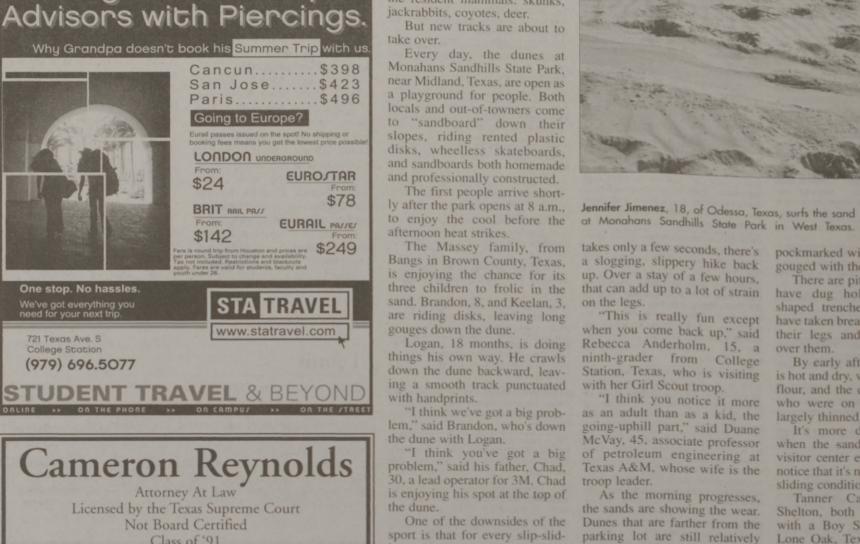
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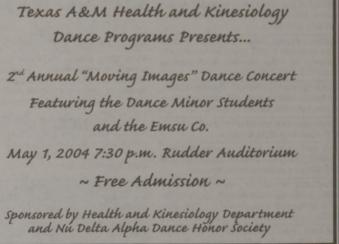
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