

OBITUARIES

Star-Telegram / Saturday, April 11, 1998

George Hawkins



FORT WORTH — George Hawkins, 82, a retired deputy sheriff, died Wednesday, April 8, 1998, at a Fort Worth hospital.

Funeral: 11 a.m. Monday at Mount Olivet Funeral Home. **Burial:** Mount Olivet Cemetery.

George Hawkins was born May 23, 1915, in Madill, Okla. He served in the Navy Seabees during World War II in the South Pacific. He worked for Boswell Dairies for approximately 30 years. Following this, he worked for the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office, retiring in 1994. He was a member of the American Legion and Hemphill Heights Masonic Lodge No. 1164. He was a recipient of the 50-year award with the Masonic Lodge.

Survivors: Wife of 58 years, Melba J. Hawkins of Fort Worth; son, George E. Hawkins and his wife, Edee, of Fort Worth; sister, Jaketa Haas of Colbert, Okla.; grandchildren, Tim Hawkins, Todd Hawkins and Hayley Marsh and her husband, John, of Fort Worth; great-grandchild, Madison Marsh; and numerous nephews and nieces.

Mount Olivet Funeral Home
2301 N. Sylvania Ave., 831-0511

Auditor examines sheriff's purchases

Department may have broken law, official says

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County auditors will outline several instances today in which the Sheriff's Department may have violated state law by failing to follow procedures when making purchases, Auditor Renee Tidwell said.

Tidwell declined to release details of the audit, saying she plans to discuss them first with Sheriff David Williams. Williams, through a department spokesman, said he has no comment until he sees the audit.

Violations of the County Purchasing Act are misdemeanors.

Tidwell said most of the violations occurred in the sheriff's helicopter program and involved the forfeiture fund, which includes money recovered from drug busts and proceeds from the sale of seized items.

The latest revelations came on the same day that Williams appeared before angry commissioners to explain why five new Ford Crown Victoria sedans have sat locked in a county garage while he seeks delivery

of seven new Chevrolet Tahoe sport utility vehicles.

Williams proposed to the commissioners yesterday that the county refurbish Chevrolet Caprice sedans as a way to save taxpayer money, and he offered a variety of explanations for why the new Fords — worth \$100,000 — sat unused in the county garage for nearly a year.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff, listening patiently, finally told Williams to put "those units [the Fords] into service somewhere" as soon as possible.

"We're uncomfortable that they've been left to sit," Vandergriff said.

Williams said after the meeting that he will do that as "rapidly as possible."

It was at an early-morning meeting of the Tarrant County Purchasing Agent Board that Tidwell revealed the problems with the sheriff's purchasing practices.

Spending discretion for the forfeiture fund rests with the sheriff, but he must file the fund's budget with the commissioners and make the records available for audit.

The county audit of the forfeiture fund covered two years ending June 30.

"We had 39 instances and \$22,000 that did not go through

the county purchasing agent," Tidwell told the board. "The majority of them were related to things for the helicopter."

Tidwell said she planned to meet with Williams today to discuss the forfeiture fund audit and also a jail commissary fund audit. She said there may also be irregularities in the commissary audit, though fewer of them.

"Sheriff Williams is withholding comment until after the meeting with the auditor," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a sheriff's spokesman.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson, a purchasing board member, said the Sheriff's Department must follow the law.

"I haven't seen the audit yet, but if it's true, I guess there are questions the auditor and district attorney will have to answer. I'm assuming these laws are for some reason and that we have to follow procedures," he said.

The purchasing act requires competitive bidding on any contract for goods or services with the county and that all purchases go through the county purchaser's office, said Jack Beacham, Tarrant County purchaser. Contracts and purchases greater than \$15,000 require a sealed bid process and the approval of the Commissioners Court, he said.

"It was news to the board, but we don't have the details yet," said state District Judge Bob McGrath, purchasing board chairman.

Violations of the purchasing act are punishable by a fine, jail time or probation. If the purchase is more than \$15,000, the punishment can be up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$2,000. Other violations of the act may be punishable by a \$10 to \$100 fine per instance and jail time of at least 30 days and not more than a year, or both.

Tidwell said she planned to discuss the audit results with the district attorney's civil division, which is responsible for overseeing county legal matters.

"We are looking into it. We need to be sure our research is up to date," Assistant District Attorney Marvin Collins said.

The fund had receipts of \$252,000 for the two-year period of the audit and expenditures of \$163,000, Tidwell said. It had an ending balance June 30 of \$144,482, she said.

Commissioner Glen Whitley, also a purchasing board member, said: "He [Williams] needs to follow the state rules and to be like everyone else. We've all got to follow the law, even the sheriff."

Whitley upbraided Williams during yesterday's Commissioners Court meeting as the sheriff began to answer Whitley's question on whether the county garage had ever denied the Sheriff's Department access to county vehicles.

"Well . . ." the sheriff began.

"Don't 'well' me. Were you

ever denied the use of county vehicles in the county garage?" Whitley shot back. "It's most frustrating to watch [news] videotape of you accusing us [the commissioners] of keeping those vehicles [the new Fords] behind a locked gate without talking to any of us."

In a written statement a week ago, Williams said his dispute with the commissioners was interfering with his "statutory obligation" to track fugitives and provide public safety for Tarrant County. He accused the commissioners of micromanaging his department by bombarding him with demands for information and withholding vehicles vital to the sheriff's mission.

When the Commissioners Court learned that the new Fords had never been put in service, they asked Williams for a written report detailing how his cars are used and to whom they are assigned.

Williams gave the commissioners oral and written reports on how vehicles are used, but the commissioners said they need more details.

New vehicles that have arrived in the past few weeks have been withheld by commissioners because Williams left the new Ford Crown Victorias in the garage. The withheld vehicles include two new 1997 Chevrolet cargo vans for prisoner extradition and the seven Chevrolet Tahoes, \$28,950 police-equipped sport utility vehicles that Williams specially ordered.

EDITORIALS

Star-Telegram / Thursday, April 16, 1998

Communication

Nothing was ever learned by either side in a dispute.

— author William Hazlitt, 1820

■
HOW TRUE those words ring in light of the ongoing dispute between Tarrant County commissioners and Sheriff David Williams. As the struggle of political wills continues, no one is learning much of anything, and both sides grow increasingly frustrated.

If, as Dick Gregory once said, politics is the art of compromise, perhaps Williams was not meant to be a politician. What seemed to be a small step forward this week — the sheriff appeared before commissioners for more than an hour to personally and publicly answer questions about his department's vehicle program — faded to marching in place when it became clear that Williams wasn't going to provide all the information about specific staffing and vehicle assignments that the commissioners requested.

It was painfully obvious to courtroom observers on Tuesday that Williams is frustrated by the continuous line of questions directed at his department. But he should be prepared for the probing to continue, especially after an audit released this week revealed discrepancies in his purchasing procedures and those prescribed by the county purchasing act.

The sooner the sheriff accepts the fact that the Commissioners Court is supposed to serve as the check and balance to ensure that tax dollars are being spent prudently and appropriately — and the sooner he communicates fully — then the sooner he can focus his attention back on the business of fighting crime.

■
We're talking at each other and not to each other.

— Tarrant County Commissioner Dionne Bagsby, April 14, 1998

Audit cites Sheriff's Department

Williams to change policy

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams agreed yesterday to make sure that future Sheriff's Department expenditures comply with state purchasing laws after a county audit uncovered 39 cases in which the department did not follow the law, Tarrant County Auditor Renee Tidwell said.

"I think you will see him developing clearer policies and procedures" regarding his office's forfeiture fund, Tidwell said.

Williams said the "procedures in the accounting and expenditures" from the fund — money recovered from drug busts and proceeds from the sale of seized items over which he has spending discretion — was based on a 1994 Tarrant County district attorney's opinion.

"We will be implementing procedure and policy to ensure full

compliance" in accordance with a new district attorney's opinion issued yesterday, Williams said in a written statement last night.

Williams and Tidwell met for more than two hours yesterday to review an audit that covered two years ending June 30 and to discuss the requirements of the County Purchasing



Sheriff David Williams

Act, the state law that the Sheriff's Department did not follow. She said Williams was cooperative.

The audit will be released today after "some wording changes" are made, Tidwell said. Williams must file the forfeiture

(More on AUDIT on Page 2)

fund budget with the Commissioners Court and make the fund records available for audit.

"Certainly it's a matter that concerns us, and we await the auditor's report," County Judge Tom Vandergriff said.

Most of the 39 violations involved the sheriff's helicopter program, including purchases of fuel, oil and paint, Tidwell said. However, at least one purchase involved submachine guns, she said.

The total amount spent was \$22,000.

Ten of the purchases were made on an American Express card, and many involved reimbursements for cash outlays by

sheriff's employees, Tidwell said.

The purchasing act requires competitive bidding on any contract for goods or services with the county and all purchases must be made by the county purchaser's office. Contracts and purchases greater than \$15,000 require a sealed bid process and the approval of the Commissioners Court.

The purchases were not made through the county purchasing office, Tidwell said. None of them exceeded \$15,000, she said.

"The sheriff's defense is that the department was operating under a 1994 district attorney's opinion that spoke to competitive bidding but not to whether purchases had to go through the county purchaser's office," Tidwell said.

Assistant District Attorney Marvin Collins said the 1994 opinion was directed toward the

Audit

competitive bidding requirements and did not clearly address the question of how purchases should be made.

"After further research on the matter we concluded that purchases should be made through the county purchasing agent, even those that are less than \$15,000 and don't have to be competitively bid," Collins said. "Federal and state forfeiture funds enjoy an additional measure of independence in Texas but they do not escape all controls. They are subject to the controls placed on other county funds."

The 1994 ruling also stipulates that the sheriff could hold the forfeiture fund bank account, and that year Williams removed the account from the auditor's control, Tidwell said.

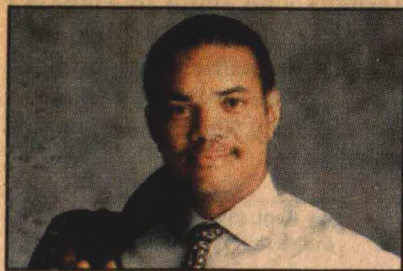
One of her recommendations to Williams is to return the account to the auditor's office,

but agreement on that has not been reached, she said.

The forfeiture fund had receipts of \$252,000 for the two-year period of the audit and expenditures of \$163,000, Tidwell said. It had an ending balance on June 30 of \$144,482, she said.

Violations of the purchasing act are misdemeanors punishable by a fine, jail time or probation. If the purchase is more than \$15,000, the punishment can be up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$2,000. Other violations of the act may be punishable by a \$10 to \$100 fine per incident and jail time of at least 30 days and not more than a year, or both.

An audit of the jail commissary fund is also expected to be released tomorrow. The major concern in that audit is whether the commissary contract needs to be rebid, Tidwell said.



Bob Ray Sanders

COMMENTARY

Sheriff's woes should have been handled long ago

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams has made himself such an easy political target that it would be almost criminal for anyone to take shots at him.

He's so vulnerable that no one should be jumping on him right now, especially members of the cynical press.

So I won't.

At least, not much. Besides, there's plenty of blame to go around in this nagging, messy sheriff's business.

For months now, the high sheriff has been under fire for his detached style of management; his lack of oversight and/or understanding of some costly new sheriff's department initiatives; and his inability (or sheer resistance) to communicate his vision and goals to the public and those elected to protect the public trust.

Although those who know, like and love him consider Williams to be a caring, humble man who is a strong advocate for providing county law enforcement with all the resources it needs to fight the ever-present crime problem, many others find him to be aloof at best and maybe even downright arrogant.

While his personality, or lack thereof, should not be an issue, it is impossible to divorce personality from politics, and maybe that is the sheriff's real problem.

I'm willing to give the sheriff the benefit of the doubt that he needs new high-powered technology, fast automobiles and maybe even those darn controversial helicopters to fight crime in the county.

But as an elected official, he has to be accountable to the public he serves. And he should start by answering completely, truthfully and quickly any questions raised by the elected governing body of the county: the Commissioners Court.

The recent standoff between Williams and the commissioners over unused new cars and sport utility vehicles recently purchased by the department was

provoked by an embarrassingly foolish ploy on the sheriff's part.

Now an audit covering the past two years of the department's forfeiture fund has revealed numerous violations of the County Purchasing Act, mostly involving allocations for the helicopter program. For his sake, and the public's, that fund needs to be back under the control of the auditor, and needs to be audited every year.

No one thinks the sheriff is a crook, or even inadvertently dishonest. But his personality, style, communications impairment and his apparent need for secrecy will continue to get him in trouble.

As I said earlier, others are also at fault.

During this week's meeting with the sheriff, the commission-

ers sounded like the Big Bad Wolf — growling, snarling and finally demanding answers, showing a little backbone for a change.

The problem is that the commissioners should have been asking some of those questions long ago. Instead, for two years, they've been more like Little Red Riding Hood, nonchalantly skipping through the woods as serious questions were raised about the sheriff and his operation.

It is time for the sheriff to start talking to the commissioners on a more regular basis, not through a spokesperson or in a written statement, but face to face.

It is also important that the commissioners continue to take their fiduciary responsibilities seriously, and continue to ask the tough questions of all department heads, including the elusive Sheriff Williams.

Bob Ray Sanders' column appears Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
(817) 390-7775

bobray@star-telegram.com

County adding up bills for sheriff's legal claims

BY NEIL STRASSMAN

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Commissioners J.D. Johnson and Glen Whitley are adding up how much more Sheriff David Williams' department is costing Tarrant County taxpayers than the \$51.7 million budgeted for it last year.

The commissioners got the county's risk management office to list the amount of money paid to settle claims against the county that were a consequence of Sheriff's Department activities from 1993, when Williams took office, to the present.

The amount so far includes \$200,000 paid in liability claims — such as false arrests, injuries in the jail, wrongful terminations — and an additional \$246,000 paid in automobile accident claims.

Other outstanding claims and expenses include about \$1 million that will be paid to the widows and families of the two deputies

killed in the Sept. 17 crash of a Sheriff's Department helicopter and a potential \$100,000 in claims from the Feb. 4 sheriff's raid on sexually oriented businesses.

"I don't know of any law enforcement agencies that don't have liability claims. Those are inevitable expenses," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, sheriff's spokesman. "It's obvious at this point the commissioners are going to be looking closely at the Sheriff's Department. They certainly have a right to look at those numbers."

The Sheriff's Department is not aware of the risk management office's report and has not seen it, he said.

Whitley said he wants to know "what the sheriff costs the county," but is not singling out the department.

"I am going to request it for all departments, not just the sheriff," he said. "The Sheriff's Depart-

ment is 50 percent of the county budget and we're going to start there."

The commissioners have also questioned the sheriff's 150-vehicle fleet and \$100,000 in new vehicles that have never been used.

"I don't want to micro-manage the Sheriff's Department. I just want it managed prudently," Johnson said. "We're losing a lot of people because of the morale problem. We've got to get a han-

dle on it because it's costing the taxpayers money."

The list of claims from the risk management office may not be complete because it doesn't include settlements of all litigation handled by the district attorney's office, said Debbie Schneider, county risk management director. Her office is putting together a complete list of claims, she said.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Deputies' rally plan provokes officials

Commissioners say sheriff using pay issue as a ploy

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County commissioners were fuming after learning yesterday that the Sheriff's Department has asked its deputies to rally for higher wages in front of the county Administration Building tomorrow.

The commissioners said the rally is a ploy by Sheriff David Williams to counter recent criticisms of his department, which is under fire for leaving five new Ford Crown Victorias unused at the county garage for nearly a year, and for an audit showing that the department violated state law in not following county purchasing procedures.

Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope and Cmdr. James Skidmore, a spokesman for the sheriff, denied knowledge of the rally and could not say whether it had Williams' approval. Williams, who did not attend Commissioners Court as he did last week, could not be reached to comment.

"He [Williams] has a lot of heat on him and he's trying to turn the heat on us," said Commissioner J.D. Johnson. "Normally people have meetings in a meeting hall. When it's held on the courthouse steps, it sounds to me like a demonstration."

Deputies in the jail said supervisors told them about the rally at briefings at the start of their Saturday shifts and a Sheriff's Department memo from Lt. Dan West, addressed to "the confinement division," is an invitation to deputies to attend the

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

1 p.m. rally in uniform.

"He [Williams] is wanting to show he has the officers' backing, but the majority of the people I've talked to don't want to give him that backing," said Kelli Creed, president of the Tarrant County Deputy Sheriff's Association. Creed, who was not at Commissioners Court and does not plan to go to the rally, said she learned of it at a Saturday briefing.

Fliers advertising the rally are posted throughout the jail, she said.

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said she "was totally shocked" when she heard about what she also called the "demonstration" and asked for an explanation from the Sheriff's Department at yesterday's Commissioners Court meeting.

"We're just going to gather on the lawn for five or 10 minutes,"

said Lt. Robert Smith of patrol. "It's just to get information to our fellow employees."

County Judge Tom Vandergriff and Commissioner Glen Whitley said they were "disappointed" at the news of the rally. They noted that in February the commissioners authorized \$850,000 for jailers' salary increases — an unplanned mid-year raise — hoping that better pay would make it easier to attract job candidates and stop the exodus of officers leaving the jail for better-paying jobs.

Nearly all jailers got raises of 5 percent to 7 percent under the plan, newly hired jailers got 10 percent raises in their first two years with the county and almost everyone working swing or graveyard shifts got an increase in their shift differential.

"They're implying we're not listening and willing to work with them. I resent that," Whitley said. "We've been trying to work with them."

Whitley and county personnel

"He has a lot of heat on him and he's trying to turn the heat on us."

**— J.D. Johnson
commissioner**

Sheriff



Star-Telegram/DALE BLACKWELL

Five new Sheriff's Department cars sit unused outside the Tarrant County garage.

officials met yesterday with Smith, West and four other deputies to talk about salary issues. Those people who got raises in February were jailers, and their concern is the other members of the department, Whitley said. He added that the deputies were unaware that the commissioners

had pledged to look at that issue.

"The meeting was very good, enlightening to both sides," Whitley said. "Communications have been opened with other members of the Sheriff's Department, but not the sheriff. We'll have to see how Thursday's meeting goes."

The rally scheduled for tomorrow

mirrors the recent effort by Dallas County deputies to get raises. The deputies staged several demonstrations and launched a petition drive seeking a referendum on whether Sheriff's Department workers deserved to be paid more.

In March, Dallas County commissioners unanimously approved

pay raises of 11 percent to 30 percent for Sheriff's Department employees as part of a compromise that will turn over several department operations to private companies.

Despite the urging of Tarrant County commissioners, there are no signs that the \$100,000 worth of new Fords parked at the county garage — the source of the most recent conflict between Williams and the commissioners — are any closer to rolling down the road.

No one from the Sheriff's Department has contacted the county garage, said Glen Shaw, garage supervisor.

Pope told the commissioners that he expects the cars "to be put in service," but could not say when.

Vandergriff, who told Williams last week to put the Fords in service immediately, said: "I don't know what the explanation is. We need those units on the highway."

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Star-Telegram / Thursday, April 23, 1998

E D I T O R I A L S

Communication

Let's assume for a moment that Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams isn't the guiding force behind today's scheduled rally by deputies for higher wages at the county administration building.

Williams isn't exactly a management-by-walking-around kind of guy. So there's a good chance he hasn't seen the fliers, since he can get to and from his interior office without nearing the confinement area. He spends his days sequestered in his office, so maybe he hasn't heard that confinement supervisors told jail deputies about the rally during Saturday briefings.

And assuming that Executive Deputy Hank Pope, the sheriff's closest internal adviser, spoke the truth Tuesday when he said he had no knowledge of the rally, then perhaps the sheriff isn't behind the event.

Where the issue got fuzzy was when Cmdr. James Skidmore, Williams' permanent stand-in as department spokesman, also contended that he had no knowledge of the rally before Tuesday. Skidmore's primary job title is commander of the jail. Are the commissioners supposed to believe that the man in charge of the confinement division doesn't know what's being said at briefings, and hasn't walked through his own jail to see what's stuck up on the bulletin boards?

County commissioners have a right to be angry about the rally, particularly since they authorized \$850,000 in jailers' salary increases in February. But they should also know from personal experience that communication is not the strong suit of the Sheriff's Department. Perhaps the only way the deputies can get any information about salary issues for the rest of the department is to rally on the courthouse lawn.

A uniform show of support



Sheriff's Department personnel rally for higher wages yesterday at the Tarrant County Administration Building in downtown Fort Worth. About 150 uniformed deputies attended

a briefing concerning wages, workplace conditions and serving the taxpayers, said Lt. Robert Smith, leader of the newly formed Sheriff's Quality Assurance Team.

Star-Telegram/RON JENKINS

STORY ON PAGE 1B

Deputies hold rally for higher earnings

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — As sheriff's deputies rallied for higher wages yesterday at the Tarrant County Administration Building, county officials questioned why the Sheriff's Department did not hand out 18 percent of the money set aside this year for deputies' and jailers' raises.

Commissioners are angry that \$174,500 was not distributed for raises

About 150 uniformed deputies crowded the plaza across the street from the historic county courthouse for a 1 p.m. briefing from Lt. Robert Smith, leader of the newly formed Sheriff's Quality Assurance Team.

"This is about employees knowing they have a voice in their future," Smith said. The team is "concerned about wages, workplace conditions and serving the taxpayers," he said.

He told the gathering that the team had a good meeting with Commissioner Glen Whitley and county personnel staff Tuesday on salary issues.

"We have opened a positive line of communication with county government. The commissioners are more than willing to talk with us," he said.

None of the commissioners attended the ral-

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

Sheriff

From Page 1

ly. All said they had previous engagements and learned of it only this week. Commissioners Whitley and J.D. Johnson said they were greatly displeased by the Sheriff Department's failure to distribute \$174,500 set aside for raises and because the largest raises that were handed out went to the department's highest-paid people.

Of \$958,100 originally budgeted by the county for 1998 Sheriff's Department pay-for-performance raises — merit raises — only \$783,580 was handed out, according to the Tarrant County personnel office.

"Someone is not attending to the details. These people are poorly paid, and the money could have been given to the people who are underpaid," Whitley said.

In February, the commissioners authorized an additional \$850,000 for jailers' salary increases — an unplanned raise they hoped would make it easier to attract job candidates and stop the exodus of officers leaving the jail for better-paying jobs.

Nearly all jailers got raises of between 5 percent and 7 percent under the plan, newly hired jailers got 10 percent raises in their first two years with the county, and almost everyone working swing or graveyard shifts got an increase in their shift differential.

"We dumped \$850,000 into the deal in midyear raises and they leave \$174,500 on the table [from the earlier budget authorization]. It's ridiculous," Whitley said.

Sheriff David Williams, who showed up at the end of yesterday's 15-minute rally, but did not speak publicly, said some jailers with several year's experience were earning the same as new hires. He said the commissioners should have stepped everyone in the department up one pay grade.

Of the \$850,000 in raises from the Commissioners Court, Williams said: "That's a Band-Aid on cancer. It was appreciated."

Williams said he learned of the rally only on Wednesday morning through a newspaper article, although the event was discussed

Sheriff's cars may finally be hitting road

Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH — The sheriff's five new Ford Crown Victorias, which have been parked at the county garage for nearly a year, may finally be heading for the highway.

One of the Fords was picked up yesterday, and another may be released into service today, according to a statement from the sheriff's department yesterday.

Sheriff David Williams has said he objects to the county's vehicle policy that requires every department to relinquish one vehicle when a new one is put in service. But in the end, he acquiesced.

"We have two old cars we can turn out," Williams said

yesterday.

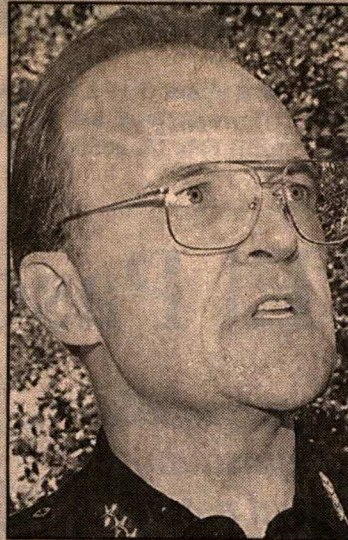
A 1994 Chevrolet Caprice was exchanged for the Ford, the sheriff's statement said. But Williams is keen on refurbishing the

Caprices. He says they are the best police cars ever made and wants to hang on to as many of them as he can.

Meanwhile, at the county garage, seven \$29,000 Chevrolet Tahoe's equipped for police work remain parked, but not because the sheriff didn't pick them up, as was the

case with the Fords, which together cost about \$100,000. County commissioners decided to hold on to the keys to the sport utility vehicles until the Ford situation is resolved.

— NEIL STRASSMAN



Star-Telegram/RON JENKINS

Sheriff David Williams speaks to reporters yesterday.

extensively at Commissioners Court on Tuesday. Williams did not attend. However, he issued a memo late Wednesday encouraging deputies to attend the rally.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he was upset because, according to county personnel records, 88 of the department's highest-paid employees got raises of between 5 percent and 7 percent, while 888 of the lowest-paid sheriff's workers got raises of between 3 percent and 3.9 percent.

Those who got the highest raises typically work in the sheriff's investigation, administration or special operations department, while those getting the least money work in the jail, county records show.

"Does he need to be shown how to spend his money on his employees?" Johnson said. "Is the sheriff ready for micromanagement, because it looks like somebody needs to manage the department."

Pay-for-performance is an

incentive for people who show up to work every day and work hard, said Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope. Individual supervisors do the evaluations, and the employees are given a score which translates into a percentage raise, he said.

"We have no way of knowing how the evaluations are going to run and how people are going to perform," Pope said. "We don't sit down and try to figure to the exact dime how to divvy it up."

Pope said the newest employees are in the jail and are the least experienced.

"They're not as qualified or as experienced as the other divisions," he said.

Whitley said he believes that the reviews of sheriff's employees were not consistently done.

"The ones that needed the money the most didn't get it," he said.

Equal raises sought

Sheriff's officials want funds shared

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff's officials asked yesterday that \$174,000 in unused Sheriff's Department funds for raises be divided equally among employees. However, county officials say they doubt it can be done.

In a letter to county Personnel Director Gerald Wright, Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope asked that "pay for performance raises where not completely expended" be "applied to expend the remaining budget equally throughout this department."

The county budgeted \$958,100 for 1998 Sheriff's Department merit raises, but only \$783,580 was handed out, leaving about \$174,000 undistributed, according to the Tarrant County personnel office.

"If we're allowed to do it,

we'd like it [the money] equally divided among all our employees," Cmdr. James Skidmore said yesterday.

The Sheriff's Department can make a formal request to the Commissioners Court for the money to be divided, said County Judge Tom Vandergriff. But, Vandergriff said he does not believe that county policy would allow the money to be dispensed that way.

Sheriff's employees are reviewed by supervisors and raises are given based on a score that translates into a percentage raise, Pope said, when asked about the additional raise money on Wednesday. The department has "no way of knowing how the

evaluations are going to run and how people are going to perform," so there is no way to know "how to figure [it] to the exact dime," he said.

The revelation that 18 percent of the money set aside for 1998 sheriff's raises was not distributed, came on the heels of a rally Thursday for higher wages by 150 deputies. A committee of deputies met once with county officials this week to discuss Sheriff's Department salaries, considered a key to retaining employees and stemming their exodus to higher paying jobs.

"Everyone who works for the county is supposed to be afforded a fair evaluation, one that is unbiased and one that is undirected in terms of how the person is to be reviewed," said G.K. Maenius, county administrator. The county personnel department trains supervisors on the review procedure, he said.

The Commissioners Court annually budgets for each county department a certain amount of money for raises, Maenius said. Enough money was set aside in 1998 for an average raise of about 5 percent, up from an average raise of 4.3 percent the year before, he said.

If the court is going to consider the proposal from the Sheriff's Department, then it will have to consider changing the salary administration guidelines that do not allow for surplus raise money to be redistributed, he said.

Commissioner J.D., Johnson said that dividing up the money would not be fair to other county employees, because county departments are required to turn in any unexpended money for raises to the county's general fund. It's then used to pay for other county expenses.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

FREEDOM TO HEAL



Tarrant County Jail inmate Michael Pownall, left, talks with Phil Breedlove of Tarrant County Mental Health-Mental Retardation Services inside the jail Friday.

Trained police should help funnel the mentally ill to treatment agencies, not prisons, advocates say.

BY LOU CHAPMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The Tarrant County Jail houses too many mentally ill people who would be better served in the mental health system — saving taxpayer dollars and improving lives, many law enforcement officials and advocates for the mentally ill say.

The answer, they say, is to have specially trained officers respond to situations involving the mentally ill and, instead of

taking them to jail, have a cooperative relationship with agencies that can evaluate and treat them.

At least one in five people in the Tarrant County Jail is mentally impaired; up to 9 percent of them have a severe mental illness, according to the Mental Health Association.

About 190 Tarrant County Jail inmates receive psychiatric services monthly, said Ramey Heddins, manager of the Foren-

(More on JAIL on Page 5)

sics Mental Health Unit at the jail. Heddins' unit, part of Tarrant County Mental Health-Mental Retardation Services, assesses about 370 new inmates a month, he said.

"If there was something in the community that would be a diverter, some kind of screening process before they were booked, it would make a large difference," Heddins said.

To consider such a possibility, the Mental Health Association of Tarrant County is sponsoring a four-hour conference Friday for law enforcement officials, advocates for the mentally ill, treatment specialists and the public to learn about similar programs in Galveston and other communities.

A federal grant will help with the planning effort.

In Galveston, the Sheriff Department's Mental Health Deputy Program saved the county and state more than \$2 million in jail, prison and probation costs in 1994 by diverting people with mental illnesses from the criminal justice system to appropriate services, according to the county.

And many mentally impaired people in jail eventually end up in the mental health system anyway — or have come out of it, statistics show.

One study found that 40 percent of the Texas prison inmates who have a mental illness had been clients of the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

"A guy standing out in front of a McDonald's and talking to Ronald McDonald may be a nuisance and may be disturbing the peace or upsetting the customers, but he probably doesn't need to be taken to jail," said Peter Hinojosa, former president of Mental Health Association and a member of the Texas Council on Offenders with Mental Impairments.

"He probably just needs to get back on his medication, or talked with about what brought him to that point. The problem comes when that person is confronted by a police officer, or some other authority figure, and all of a sudden he becomes paranoid or acts a little nuts, and things escalate, and then, bam, you have a resisting arrest or an assault on an officer."

Last month, a River Oaks police officer was shot with his own handgun after scuffling with a man whom the officer had observed roaming a neighborhood at night. The officer was saved by his bullet-proof vest.

A man who was later arrested told police that he was a clone and that he mistook the policeman for a mysterious man, dressed all in black, who has been stalking him for a very long time.

The suspect, a German national, was evaluated at John Peter Smith Hospital and released. Police found insufficient evidence to charge him with a crime, and he returned to Germany.

"With changes in the mental health laws, releasing more people from the state hospitals and state schools into the community, and for other reasons in society in general, there is a greater need than ever for the two systems — the justice system and the mental health system — to coordinate," said Lorie Poe, who is consulting with the Mental Health Association to develop a "special-needs officer program."

In some communities, such as Galveston and Travis counties, the sheriff's department houses the special-needs unit, and it works with local police departments.

In other instances, police departments have established their own teams.

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams, a sponsor of Friday's conference, supports having specially trained deputies who would work "on call" with other law enforcement agencies. Williams recently put that proposal to the Tarrant County Law Enforcement Executives Association, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, Sheriff's Department spokesman.

"We would be more than happy to assist local law enforcement agencies, to help with this kind of individual that can be very difficult to address on the scene, in addition to working them through the law enforcement system and the court system," Skidmore said.

Regardless of whether the unit lies in a large municipal police department or a countywide sheriff's department, it comprises a small cadre of men and women who have volunteered for the duty and receive at least 30 hours of training, usually more, from local mental health experts.

Officials with established programs said success requires more than trained officers to diffuse a crisis situation that usually involves not only the person with mental illness, but also an upset family member or neighbor.

Success demands cooperation among all agencies and their ability to respond to the needs of law enforcement officers.

"It has to be a community partnership, and I'm not just talking about something that looks nice on paper," said Lt. Sam Cochran, coordinator of the Crisis Intervention Team at the Memphis Police Department in Tennessee.

"There has to be a friendly delivery system for the law enforcement people," Cochran said. "That means that if an officer takes a person to the emergency room for a psychiatric evaluation, the officer can't expect to wait an hour or two hours or, as I was told in one case in one city, eight hours for that evaluation to

learn if they are still responsible for that person."

At the least, improved communication is needed between the law enforcement community and the people who have the resources for treating people with mental illnesses or have advocate programs for them.

"Improving communication would make better use of our existing programs," Heddins said. "That's a start to be sure these people get the best services for them and that we can do the best job we can."

Friday's conference is from 8:30 a.m. to noon in the Conference and Recreation Center of the Resource Connection, 2300 Circle Drive, formerly the campus of the Fort Worth State School off Campus Drive north of Loop 820.

Information is available from the Mental Health Association at 335-5405.

Lou Chapman, (817) 390-7757

Former jail inmate sues county for denying medical attention

The Arlington man says a Tarrant County sheriff's policy did not allow for treatment for his broken shoulder.

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — An Arlington man who says he was not treated for a broken shoulder while in the Tarrant County Jail has sued the county over a sheriff's policy that he claims allows prisoners to be transported to a hospital only in life-threatening situations.

But sheriff's and district attorney officials, who declined to comment on the lawsuit, say the policy applies only to elective medical procedures. Prisoners

with broken bones and other serious injuries or maladies are "regularly and routinely" taken to John Peter Smith Hospital, the officials said.

Richard Wallace, 30, of Arlington, was arrested by Arlington police on an outstanding warrant for theft after an Oct. 5 motorcycle accident in which he broke his shoulder blade and collarbone. He filed the suit because "the sheriff has to provide reasonable medical care," said David Sloane, Wallace's attorney.

Sloane said Wallace was not treated for his broken shoulder during his 36-hour jail stay because of the sheriff's policy on hospitalization of prisoners.

The policy, implemented in a Jan. 11, 1996, memo from Sheriff David Williams, prohibits transporting any jail inmate outside of the jail for an "elective medical procedure." The memo states that the Sheriff's Department will follow the guidelines of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, "which only provides for a prisoner afflicted with a life-threatening medical condition to be removed from a jail environment."

The policy was instituted the day after an inmate was returned to jail after a state district judge released her on bail so that she could decide whether to have an abortion. Several months later another prisoner sued Williams, alleging that he had violated her constitutional rights by refusing to allow her to leave the jail to have an abortion.

"If it's elective surgery, if you are choosing to have it done and if it's not done and won't cause your death, then we don't do it. On

screens all prisoners as they enter the jail for fractures, hemorrhages and lacerations that require sutures. The prisoners must be alert and able to breathe on their own, according to a hospital district policy that sends patients to the emergency room if they need to go there.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

anything of a serious nature, people are routinely taken to the hospital," said Cmdr. James Skidmore, sheriff's spokesman. "The medical staff has to tell us it's a life-threatening condition. Then the prisoner will be hospitalized."

Although the lawsuit blames Wallace's lack of treatment on the sheriff's policy, it also alleges that the Arlington officers who arrested Wallace tricked the nurse at the jail by saying that Wallace had refused medical care at the accident scene and by characterizing his shoulder injury as a bruise. The officers are also named in the lawsuit.

Medical care at the jail has been provided by the Tarrant County Hospital District since 1992. Since then, lawsuits against the county for jail medical care

"have decreased by two-thirds," said Marvin Collins, assistant Tarrant County district attorney.

"A broken shoulder is not an elective procedure. I will assure you that prisoners are routinely and regularly transported for matters that are not life-threatening, but they are not transported for elective procedures," he said.

A hospital district nurse

Sheriff will get 7 withheld vehicles

But list of department cars raises questions

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners agreed yesterday to hand over to the Sheriff's Department seven 1998 Chevrolet Tahoes, after they received a long-sought list of sheriff's vehicles.

But the list, which the commissioners waited five weeks to get, is raising new questions.

Some commissioners say 150 vehicles may be too many for the Sheriff's Department, and they want to know why 89 sheriff's employees get to drive their county cars home every night.

Sheriff's officials said yesterday that they need all their vehicles and that the "take-home" cars are assigned to people who need them.

"I think we can justify every take-home car for law enforcement purposes," Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope said as he left the Commissioners Court. "The take-home cars basically go to people who are subject to call-out."

But Commissioners J.D. Johnson and Glen Whitley said they want to make sure the Sheriff's Department is following the county vehicle policy, which places strict limitations on taking county vehicles home.

"It's ridiculous. I want to hear their explanation," Johnson said after the meeting.

(More on TAHOES on Page 2)

Tahoes

From Page 1

Among those who have take-home cars are the chaplain, Maj. Hugh Atwell; the community relations supervisor, Lt. John Dalton; most of the sheriff's administration, command staff and supervisors; detectives in the investigation division; and deputies in the warrant division.

"I think that's too many take-home cars. I think they have too many automobiles in the Sheriff's Department," Whitley said.

County policy allows employees to take cars home only when the car is used in at least 40 percent of the workday, and then only if the employee goes directly to a work site that is different than the employee's primary work site, said G.K. Maenius, county administrator.

"If they come downtown first to go to work, they shouldn't have a take-home vehicle," he said.

Pope said the chaplain counsels families and deputies in the hospital. Dalton, he said, travels throughout the county working to enhance the sheriff's relationship with the community.

The Dallas County Sheriff's Department has about 200 vehicles, but only about 30 are taken home, said Allen Clemson, Dallas County administrator. About 20 of those cars belong to the command staff and another 10 are used by investigators and by deputies serving warrants, he said, and some cars are stored at remote county parking lots.

Five weeks ago, Tarrant County commissioners decided to hold on to the seven \$28,950 Tahoes equipped for police work until five new Ford Crown Victorias that sat unused in the county garage for nearly a year were put on the road. The commissioners told Sheriff David Williams that they wanted a vehicle inventory, including a description of how the cars are used and who drives them.

The Fords were picked up last week, and the commissioners

decided yesterday that it was time to release the Tahoes, with the caveat that the Sheriff's Department could use them only for patrol.

The department now has three 1997 models in service that cost \$27,433, and the seven \$28,950 1998 models that now will be put in service.

The seven Tahoes were going to be released "sooner or later," said Commissioner Dionne Bagnby. "What this is really about is trying to establish some accountability and dialogue."

In his 1998 budget, Williams requested 30 new vehicles, all Tahoes. The commissioners balked and told Williams at summer budget hearings to purchase a mix of trucks and less-expensive sedans. They allotted \$675,000 for new cars and told Williams to decide how to spend the money, but the sheriff asked for 21 Tahoes and no sedans.

The commissioners would not go along with the vehicle purchase, and Williams never resubmitted another one.

"I most definitely will never buy another Tahoe for this county," Johnson said.

Whitley called the Tahoes "a waste of taxpayer money."

"I don't know where to use the ones we've got, but I don't think they should be used as pursuit vehicles," he said.

The commissioners have asked Williams to meet with them in a work session to discuss vehicles, staffing in the Sheriff's Department and other issues. The session is supposed to take place within several weeks, but the commissioners said they have had difficulty scheduling the meeting with the recalcitrant sheriff.

"I think [in giving up the Tahoes] we gave away the only opportunity to get the sheriff to meet with us," Whitley said.

Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay, back at court after recuperating from back surgery, said the commissioners had to release the Tahoes because they "could not be responsible" for failing to put vehicles into service.

Sheriff promotes four-year veteran

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Sheriff David Williams has promoted Capt. Larry Hester, in charge of criminal investigations, to assistant chief deputy.

Hester, 48, of Richland Hills, is a four-year veteran of the Sheriff's Department.

"Assistant Chief Hester now assumes command of the bureau previously titled administration support. The new designation for that command element is the operations and administration bureau," Williams wrote in a May 1 memo to his command staff and supervisors.

Hester will be in charge of the sheriff's special operations command, internal affairs, communications, financial services and other administrative functions.

"I hope to distribute some of the load and free up Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope and Sheriff Williams to allow them to focus more on planning and running the department," Hester said. "I have an ability to deal with people and to get them to perform at their best. That's my goal."

Hester has 20 years of experience in law enforcement and six years in corporate security.

He worked for the Texas Department of Public Safety as a state trooper for about nine years, as a training and safety supervisor for an oil company, and as a patrol and DARE officer for the Haltom City Police Department.

Hester joined the Sheriff's Department in May 1993.

County commissioners said yesterday that they were surprised to learn of Hester's promotion.

"It's Williams' department and he can do what he wants, but it would have been nice to know about this," Commissioner Glen Whitley said. "It's another example of the sheriff not talking with the Commissioners Court and it's frustrating."

Hester, who becomes the department's fourth chief deputy, is filling the position formerly occupied by Cmdr. Scott Shepard, who resigned several months ago.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Star-Telegram / Thursday, May 7, 1998

Keep it up

Whether Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams had anything to do with planning a recent rally in front of the county administration building or not, it was certainly justifiable.

Some members of the Commissioners Court were grandstanding against the sheriff for quite some time simply because they couldn't make him jump through hoops. But when they got some of their own medicine, they were furious.

Keep up the good work, Sheriff Williams!

MILTON BULLOCK
Arlington

A TIME TO PRAY

Gatherings around Tarrant County part of National Day of Prayer observations

BY JACK DOUGLAS JR.
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — They prayed. They sang. And they fired their 21-gun salute yesterday — all in honor of the 58 police officers who have died in the line of duty in Tarrant County.

Relatives of some of the fallen officers, their eyes red and their heads bowed, sat in folding chairs in front of a podium as police commanders and chaplains talked about their loss.

"We gather to recognize and to commemorate those who have gone before us,

those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice," said Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams, dressed in black, his hands resting on a Bible.

Badges were cloaked with black tape. Children squirmed as widows wiped their eyes. Officers from all around dressed in their honor guard best.

The noon gathering downtown in front of the Tarrant County Administration Building was part of National Day of Prayer, established by Congress in 1952 and later set on the first Thursday in May.

(More on PRAYER on Page 2)

Clergy and laypeople across Tarrant County paused during the day to pray at events ranging from breakfasts in Arlington and Northeast Tarrant cities to noon rallies at Southlake's Bicentennial Park and downtown Fort Worth.

Many of the prayers were offered for public officials as well as the fallen law enforcement officers.

Among those remembered with prayer was Richard Barreda, a Dallas/Fort Worth Airport policeman killed Feb. 14, 1997, when a motorist pulled in front of his motorcycle as he tried to stop a speeder.

"I don't know, it makes things a little easier, I guess," said his 15-year-old half brother, Michael Harrigan.

During the commemoration, Gaylen Wisdom sat alone, staring at the ground, his hands clasped together. His son, Fort Worth police officer Brent Wisdom, was helping a stranded motorist on Sept. 2, 1992, when a drunk behind the steering wheel of another car slammed into him.

"I think it's great that they honor the fallen officers," Gaylen Wisdom said, his voice wavering. "I think it's wonderful."

Kathy Smith sat on the front row, a blue ribbon of honor pinned to her flowery dress, as her husband's name was called out, along with the names of 57 other dead police officers. Her husband, sheriff's Detective Thomas Jay

"T.J." Smith, died Sept. 17, 1997, in a helicopter crash, along with sheriff's Lt. George Maurice Hendrix.

Bagpipes played in the background as another 58 officers fell into line, one by one, each taking the place of a peace officer killed.

"It was beautiful," Smith said.

According to a pamphlet that was handed out at the ceremony, John A. Ogletree, a Fort Worth policeman, was the first peace officer in Tarrant County to fall in the line of duty. Ogletree died on May 15, 1913 when he tried to catch a crazed shotgun-wielding man who had already killed another person in a small cafe on Calhoun Street.

Barreda, Hendrix and Smith are among the latest peace officers to die here in the line of duty. There will undoubtedly be others, Williams said.

"The work we do has risks," he said. "It's a calling that puts us in harm's way every day."

Nationwide, an estimated 20,000 prayer meetings were planned for yesterday, said Robert Velarde, a spokesman for the National Day of Prayer Task Force in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Arlington Mayor Elzie Odom used the day to speak publicly about the faith that guides his personal and professional life.

"To be a Christian, which I am, as well as a politician, which I also am — it's as simple and normal as it is to be a Christian doctor, a Christian lawyer, ..." Odom told about 60 people at a prayer breakfast.

"Loyalty to my country, my state and my city are reflections

of my devotion to God," he said. "He is not separate from, but rather a part of, everything."

Star-Telegram / Friday, May 8, 1998



Star-Telegram/HILLERY SMITH GARRISON

Numerous National Day of Prayer observances, including this one at Fort Worth's Tandy Center Amphitheater, were held yesterday.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Monday, May 11, 1998 / Star-Telegram /

What awaits you

"What part of 'no talking' don't you understand?" boomed a fellow deputy toward two young teens chattering away despite my orders not to speak. "Keep your backs to the wall, and *no talking!*"

For those two 17-year-old girls, life as they knew it had ended, and rather rudely at that. They were but two of many young adults who got themselves arrested this year.

This letter is for the young adults out there. Jail is the last place where you want to spend any time.

An arrest record can cause a lot of

problems throughout your whole life. Every year I see promising high school and college students coming through the criminal justice system. I watch them sitting in stark terror in a cell, crying themselves sick on the floor of the booking office, or screaming, yelling and fighting as they realize that what they thought was OK really wasn't. Many sobbingly call out for Mom or Dad and telephone their parents, lamenting not taking their advice.

Some hung in the wrong crowd; others couldn't resist the temptation and, among other things, shoplifted, wrote bad checks and abused credit cards.

Space doesn't permit accurately describing life behind bars. Sure, you can act big and bad like it doesn't bother you, but in the end, it will. It always does.

Here's some advice: Stay in school, listen to your parents, and remember what awaits you when you make the wrong choices.

GARY M. SMITH
Fort Worth

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ask them why

Your coverage of Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams has been straight and to the point. Williams has no need for the secrecy he tries to claim. If he wants the placement of personnel in the jail buildings to be confidential, I am sure that the personnel office can accomplish that while still providing the commissioners with their requested information.

Williams is just hiding the fact that he is a politician just like his buddy Tom Wilder. Both of them are trying to build kingdoms with taxpayer dollars.

Ask Williams why his top computer staff person quit in the wake of the recent helicopter crash. Ask Wilder why he wanted to charge as much as we can when Tarrant County was implementing dial-in access to Tarrant County computer systems, and why he is wasting Tarrant County tax dollars, just like predecessor Tom Hughes, in trying to make a PC criminal justice system instead of supporting the mainframe system that saves Tarrant County hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

The sooner both of them get voted out of office, the better.

RUSSELL L. CONLEY
Kennedale

*Former Tarrant County Data Services
manager of technical services*



Star-Telegram/DALE BLACKWELL

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams speaks during a special meeting of the commissioners court yesterday.

Commissioners press sheriff about duties

Officials ask if the jail is being neglected in favor of other priorities.

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners yesterday questioned whether Sheriff David Williams is abandoning his responsibility for overseeing the jail in his zeal to pursue criminals and a law enforcement agenda for

the department.

The wide-ranging discussion came during a 90-minute special meeting called to discuss Sheriff's Department cars and who should be permitted to drive them home. It was the first lengthy face-to-face public exchange between Williams and commissioners in nearly a year, and it struck at the core of the contentious relationship between the county's top law enforcement officer and the com-

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

Sheriff

From Page 1

missioners who hold the purse strings.

"We will not and have not neglected the function of jail maintenance and operation," Williams told the commissioners. "There really is not a shift to becoming the primary law enforcement agency in Tarrant County."

But the commissioners relentlessly pressed Williams on his "philosophy," never letting up on the connection between Williams' 150-vehicle fleet — about 60 percent of which are take-home cars — and his foray into law enforcement.

"If we are now going to embrace a larger policing policy, then we have to have a larger discussion," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said. "We must consider budgetary constraints. We have to deal with things as they are and not as we might like them to be."

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said she was concerned about "duplication of services" between the Sheriff's Department and the more than three dozen other law enforcement agencies in the county.

"We have to look at collaboration with other agencies so that taxpayers get the most for their dollars," she said.

It was a sometimes acerbic discussion, at one point punctuated by an exchange between Williams and Commissioner Glen Whitley, who asked the sheriff if he wanted to turn in his county car and take a car allowance instead.

"If you'd like to turn your vehicle in, we'll be glad to take it," said Whitley, who was questioning why 16 people in the sheriff's administration drive take-home vehicles.

"You don't get a vehicle or vehicle allowance to drive to and from your county job," he said.

Williams said he would keep his county car.

"No. I am not making that request," he said.

County vehicle policy allows employees to take cars home only when the car is used in at least 40 percent of the workday, and then only if the employee goes directly to a work site that is different than the employee's primary work site, said G.K. Maenius, county administrator.

"There are people on the list that don't need vehicles, and there are many people taking cars home who should not be," Johnson said, singling out Maj. Hugh Atwell, the department chaplain.

"The chaplain's office doesn't need to take a car home or have a personally assigned vehicle," he said.

Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope has said previously that take-home cars basically go to people who are subject to call-out, but the commissioners questioned why the sheriff's warrant division needs take-home cars.

Williams said that marked sheriff vehicles were a deterrent to crime when they are parked in residential driveways. But, under questioning from the commissioners, he acknowledged that the warrant cars were unmarked. He said crooks can recognize the "plain Jane" white sheriff's vehicles.

After the meeting, he said that any attempt to reduce his 150-car fleet would hamper the county's law enforcement effort.

"I don't think there is any doubt," he said. "What the court may view as luxuries, the things we contend with 24 hours, seven days a week, are life-threatening."

Whitley said he was not satisfied with the sheriff's response and said that he would seek to reduce the fleet during budget discussions in August.

Johnson, once Williams' strongest supporter on the court, appeared disgruntled.

"We didn't get any answers. I don't think that was a fruitful meeting," he said.

Williams, for his part, said he and his command staff will "look at" the car issue. Williams and the commissioners agreed to meet again but did not set a date.

the
INSIDER
report

The 'Old Shoe' drops on bailiff

A bailiff's attempt to help the Junior League surprise her boss, state District Judge **Sharen Wilson**, apparently has cost the woman her job.

Janice Pullam, a longtime bailiff, says she ran into trouble when, at the request of the Junior League of Fort Worth, she didn't tell Wilson that the judge was a finalist for the league's annual "Old Shoe" award. Wilson, unaware that she was a nominee, canceled her appearance at the May 14 event, and the award was given to another finalist.

Wilson then told Pullam that she could no longer trust her and fired her, said Pullam, whom courthouse employees describe as a hard-working bailiff.

Wilson said she knew nothing of the award. **Bryan Eppstein**, the judge's political consultant, said Wilson's decision was based on job performance and accused Pullam of conspiring with Wilson's Democratic opponent, **Robert Ford**.

Ford, in turn, denies the accusation.

■
Sheriff **David Williams**' insistence that he does not neglect "the function of jail maintenance and operation" apparently didn't sit well with some of his jailers.

A day after Williams defended his management of the jail to Tarrant County commissioners with his "non-neglect" statement, about 30 jailers started their Wednesday shift at the old Belknap jail by airing grievances in a meeting that almost turned into a work stoppage.

The jailers were complaining about the small raises they received — compared with what other Sheriff's Department employees were given this year — and jail working conditions. The doors to the meeting room were closed, so the half-hour ruckus couldn't be heard. Finally, at about 7:15 a.m., Lt. **Eddie South** and Capt. **Ralph Hayes** ordered the jailers to their posts.

End of discussion.

■

GOP ponders sheriff's future

Activists consider other candidates

By **MAX B. BAKER**
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams' ongoing battles with county commissioners over vehicles, helicopters and personnel are infuriating Republican Party activists so much that they are discussing running someone against him.

Even though there are more than two years before Williams' second term ends, his future is a hot topic among party insiders. Mike Parrish, Tarrant County assistant district attorney, and Brad Patterson, former president of the Fort Worth Police Officers Association, are frequently mentioned as possible opponents. Former state Sen. Bob McFarland and state Reps. Kim Brimer and Toby Goodman are also mentioned, although they are less likely to consider a race seriously.

Parrish would not comment on whether he is considering running for sheriff. Patterson, who works for the Fort Worth Police Department, said he has been approached and is thinking about it.

Brimer and Goodman, whose legislative districts include portions of Arlington, say they've never even thought about running for sheriff. McFarland, an Arlington attorney, is on vacation and couldn't be reached to comment.

Three of the four Republican members of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court said that if the election were held today, the sheriff might be bumped from office.

"If we held the election today, he'd lose," said Commissioner Glen Whitley, a Republican representing Northeast Tarrant County. "Right or wrong, he would have a tough time being re-elected."

(More on SHERIFF on Page 4)

Sheriff

From Page 1

Tom Davis, Tarrant County Republican Party chairman, said he is unaware of any discussions about possible opposition to the sheriff, saying Williams enjoys "quite a bit of support among precinct chairmen."

Williams also dismisses speculation about opposition, saying that there is a "wealth of misinformation floating around" and that he has the support of most Tarrant County residents.

"I think there is a silent majority out there," Williams said.

It is too early to count Williams down and out, political analysts said.

Nevertheless, Williams risks seeing his support slip away if he doesn't move quickly to improve his public image, former GOP Chairman Steve Hollern said.

"I'd like David to be the person to pull it out. He's still got time, but the clock is ticking fast,"

Hollern said.

Williams has been in the spotlight since his first day in office. Within minutes of his swearing-in Jan. 1, 1993, Williams basically fired three of the department's top deputies. Eleven days later, after threatening a lawsuit, they were rehired at lower positions and salaries.

He followed that controversy by using drug sniffing dogs at a peaceful civil rights rally; giving a gun and badge to his top political contributor; and buying military surplus helicopters without briefing the commissioners.

However, nothing has drawn more fire than Williams' mission to make the department into a comprehensive crime-fighting force. Traditionally, the sheriff and his other urban counterparts primarily run their county jails.

Williams and his supporters say he was elected to do more. When he ran in 1992, Williams had a plan for using aircraft patrols, drug dog units and tactical teams to ferret out repeat violent offenders.

Tarrant County District Clerk

Tom Wilder, Williams' campaign manager in 1992, said Williams has one of the toughest jobs in the county because of the large number of employees and "the controversial nature of law enforcement."

"It is never going to operate perfectly or without some foul ups," Wilder said. He said similar disagreements between the sheriff and commissioners are commonplace.

"I think people are floating names for the fun of it," he said.

But the search for a successor is more than fun and games, some say.

In addition to Parrish and Patterson, Pct. 4 Constable Jack Allen is frequently mentioned by GOP activists as a possible challenger to Williams, along with former Sheriff's Department Capt. Jim Minter, who switched parties in 1996 to run against Williams as a Democrat.

Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said Williams' previous supporters in her predominantly Arlington district have told her they would not support the

beleaguered sheriff for a third term if the election were today.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson, one of Williams' staunchest supporters in the past, says he is "greatly disappointed" in the sheriff. He said Williams' political future is in doubt.

"From what I've heard on the street, he will face a tough reelection," Johnson said. "I don't go anywhere in Tarrant County when I'm not approached about what is wrong with the sheriff."

Although they are focused on this year's elections, Democrats also expect to have several candidates for sheriff.

"I think we'll have a candidate, or several candidates, step forward to seek the nomination for sheriff," said Chris Turner, executive director of the Tarrant County Democratic Party.

"Any time an incumbent from either party is going to face a serious primary challenge within their own party, it's a signal of extreme vulnerability," Turner said.

Max B. Baker, (817) 390-7714
maxbbaker@star-telegram.com

OPINIONS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Star-Telegram / Tuesday, May 26, 1998

Dealin' David

Shhhhhh. Don't tell anyone, but Sheriff David Williams, who is always security conscious, is attempting to disguise the Sheriff's Department as a car dealership.

While five Ford Crown Victorias sat in mothballs, the sheriff specially ordered seven new Chevrolet Tahoes at a cost of \$28,000 each. Unfortunately, the taxpayers are the ones "toting the note" for his government waste.

I was led to believe that Sheriff Williams ran as a Republican.

KEVIN HALL
Watauga

Get with the program

It's a sad state of affairs, but Sheriff David Williams just doesn't get it. As a member of the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department prior to retirement, I joined the majority who were eagerly welcoming a change in operations to a more positive image with the constituents of the county we served. We were totally unprepared for some of the antics imposed by our newly elected boss.

Though our former administration under Don Carpenter certainly had its faults, it did offer an open-door policy to its employees. Not so with Williams. From the beginning he alienated himself not only with the Commissioners Court, but with his own personnel. Not once after his election until the day of my retirement three years later did he venture to my work area inside the confinement division to meet the employees under his command.

His motives from the beginning have been questionable. From his first arguable attempt to fire two chief deputies, to his controversial directive to change the nationally recognized dress code for sheriff employees, his administration has repeatedly given cause for concern.

For some of his efforts, he is to be commended. However, most of his promising endeavors have been overshadowed by a sophomoric phobia that is uncharacteristic for a person in his position.

In his rise of power (along with Ed Max's financial support), he has diminished the fundamental duty of the chief law enforcement officer of the county — administering the operations of confinement. Instead, he has closeted himself within his impenetrable fortress with little or no regard for his employees or to the voters who placed him there.

As a former loyal member of the department, I would encourage Williams to be more cooperative and quash his "tender sensibilities," or he may not enjoy the fanfare of riding the coattails of a Republican leadership like the one that initially placed him in office.

FLOYD F. CLARK
Fort Worth

Sheriff asked for pay raise inquiry

Commissioners question leftover funds, differences in increases

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County officials asked the Sheriff's Department yesterday to investigate why it did not hand out 18 percent of the money set aside this year for deputies' and jailers' raises.

Roughly \$175,000 in raises was not distributed to the department's 1,320 employees, and Commissioner J.D. Johnson, who made the request of the Sheriff's Department at Commissioners Court yesterday, said the deputies deserve a public explanation.

The lowest-paid people in the department, jailers and clerical workers, about 900 people, got raises of 3 percent to 3.9 percent, while raises of 5 percent to 7 percent went to the department's highest-paid employees, according to the Tarrant County personnel office.

"We need to ask the sheriff to look into inconsistencies in the way raises were handed out," Johnson said.

Sheriff's officials said yesterday that they will look into why only about \$783,000 of

\$958,000 originally budgeted for 1998 Sheriff's Department merit raises was handed out.

"If they [the commissioners] want it done, we will do it," Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope said.

Sheriff David Williams asked in a letter for the money to be divided "equally" among all Sheriff's Department employees, despite a long-standing county policy that calls for it to be returned to the county's general fund.

"We have already set policy and practice," said Gerald Wright, county human resources director. If the funds are redistributed, it should be on a performance basis, he told the commissioners.

Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay said, "It would be a tremendous problem to not treat all of the county's departments alike."

Johnson said there appears to be an inconsistency in the way

supervisors rated job performance in different divisions within the Sheriff's Department.

County employees are rated on a 1 to 5 scale. Those who got the highest ratings — fours and fives — and correspondingly high raises typically work in the sheriff's investigation, administration or special operations departments, county records show. Those who work in the jail got ratings that averaged in the three range.

Pope attributed the discrepancy to training and differences between supervisors and what they see as important on the job.

"Individual people are going to put different values on different criteria, like attendance," he said.

But some of the commissioners believe that the job-performance ratings for the jailers were artificially limited at a level lower than five, creating lower ratings and raises for the bulk of the department's employees and

the \$175,000 excess.

"It might not have anything to do with training. It could have been a directive," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said.

Pope said he was unaware of any order given to alter the way job performance was rated in the Sheriff's Department.

"I am not aware of any big plot to do anything to anybody," he said.

In February, the commissioners authorized an additional \$850,000 for jailers' salary increases — an unplanned midyear raise they hoped would stop the exodus of officers leaving the jail for better-paying jobs.

Nearly all jailers got raises of 5 percent to 7 percent under the plan, newly hired jailers got 10 percent raises in their first two years with the county, and almost everyone working swing or graveyard shifts got an increase in their shift differential pay.

Sheriff David Williams has said the commissioners should have stepped up everyone in the department one pay grade.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

OPINIONS

Star-Telegram / Friday, May 29, 1998

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Root of the problem

As a police officer, I have quite effectively used the method of problem-oriented policing in fighting crime. The basic principles of problem-oriented policing are (a) identify the problems; (b) identify the root cause; and (c) remove the root cause.

Taxpayers of Tarrant County should use the same basic principles in evaluating the effectiveness of the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department. Let us begin by identifying some of the problems:

- Seven new Chevy Tahoes were ordered when five Ford Crown Victorias were not being used.

- Eighty-nine employees have take-home cars, compared with the 30 take-home cars at the Dallas County Sheriff's Department.

- The helicopter program.

- Staffing shortages in the jail.

It doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to identify David Williams as the root cause of these problems. The Tarrant County Sheriff's Department is in desperate need of a root canal.

KEVIN HALL
Watauga

Sheriff defends sending unsought aid to water park

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams said yesterday that he decides "on a case-by-case basis" whether to send deputies into a Tarrant County city, even if the local police department has not requested aid.

Williams' comments came in an interview a day after Arlington police said they were surprised when Williams showed up at the Hurricane Harbor melee Friday night with two prisoner-transport buses and almost a dozen deputies.

Arlington police have said that they didn't ask Williams for assistance and that they declined offers from neighboring police departments.

Williams, for his part, stated chapter and verse when it comes to his responsibilities.

"The state Constitution and state statutes provide that the sheriff is the conservator of peace in the county and has not only the duty but the right to keep peace through the county," Williams said.

The state code of criminal procedure "expressly places upon the sheriff" the responsibility "to quell and suppress" all assaults, batteries, insurrections and unlawful assemblies, he said.

"The sheriff clearly has an obligation to do these things," Williams said.

Arlington police were caught off guard when Williams and his two buses pulled up to the water park after the disturbance was under control, police spokesman Dee Anderson said.

"I think we just politely told them we had everything under

control," he said.

Arlington police Lt. Kim Shoemaker said the Sheriff's Department said it "had extra deputies on duty" and that it would send them to Arlington so they would be there if needed. Shoemaker said she made it clear that she was not requesting assistance from any outside agencies.

Williams said he has no "extra deputies." He said he "held over personnel and put some on stand-by" because of the problem at the water park.

The incident was over, the crowd was cooperative and Arlington police were trying to match parents with their children when Williams and his entourage arrived.

Williams said a Sheriff's Department shift supervisor, Sgt. Eric Love, contacted him after he

learned of the disturbance and then contacted Arlington police to see if they needed help.

Love talked with an Arlington sergeant who told him it would be a good idea to bring the buses, Williams said.

"Even if he [the Arlington sergeant] had not said that, just based on what Sgt. Love conveyed to me, we probably would have done the same thing," Williams said. "We have the statutory obligation to respond to circumstances of this magnitude. It's clear in the statutes."

Arlington Police Chief David Kunkle said no one from his department called the Sheriff's Department to request aid for crowd control or prisoner transport buses.

C.D. Giddens, Christy Gonzales and Brian D. Crecente contributed to this report.

Sheriff, officials spar over budget

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — It's two months before Tarrant County begins debating next year's budget, but Sheriff David Williams already is sparring with county officials over spending for his department.

At stake is \$51.7 million, the largest component of the county's \$171 million general fund — money used to run Tarrant County's jail, to combat crime in unincorporated areas of the county, to fund a 150-vehicle fleet and to pay the salaries for 1,340 county employees.

Dividing the Sheriff's Department into multiple budget categories such as administration, warrants, county jails, investigation, patrol, special operations and courts is "inaccurate and a distorted method of accounting," Williams wrote in a March 17 letter to his assistant, Sherry Johnson.

In the letter he told his staff to consolidate the budget categories into one classification — the "Office of the Sheriff."

"We prepared our budget in a consolidated cost center mode," Williams said on Thursday, three days after the deadline for submitting his proposed budget.

(More on BUDGET on Page 6)

County budget director Debbie Schneider has since told Williams he must redo his budget, preparing it in the same manner as other county departments.

Tarrant County commissioners, who have struggled for nearly a year to get a clear picture of how Williams deploys his resources, said yesterday that they were "disappointed."

The commissioners have continually questioned staffing levels in the jails, in the warrants division and for other sheriff's services and pressed for a complete

and accurate explanation of how the department is staffed.

But Williams, instead of providing more information to the commissioners on how he spends his money, attempted this year to say less than ever before.

"We need more than one lump sum. It's disappointing. It's not even a good-faith effort to provide minimum information," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said. "It's been difficult to get answers."

She said it would be "extremely difficult to have accountability" with so little information.

Under the Texas Constitution, the sheriff's office, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have authority

over county contracts and purchasing and final say over the sheriff's budget. The county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

"We have enough trouble getting him to communicate to us. We desperately need the accounting done so we know how the dollars are being spent," Commissioner Glen Whitley said. "I want to get back to where we communicate and work together."

Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said the Commissioners Court "is not attempting to play power games" with the sheriff.

"We want to be accountable to the citizens. For us to be responsible, we have to have information. We can't give him 30 percent of the budget and say, 'You do what you want,'" she said.

And Commissioner J.D. Johnson said simply that Williams has to do his budget like everyone else in the county.

"There would be no way of knowing how many employees he has and where they're at if the budget's not broken down. We have enough problems with that now."

Roughly 40 of the department's 965 jailers are assigned to other jobs, such as operating metal detectors, serving warrants or working in administration. The jailers were assigned to those tasks several years ago to avoid layoffs when jail population fell, but the reassignment was never intended to be permanent.

Williams, for his part, says the

reassignment helped the department accomplish some of its tasks, such as halving the backlog of outstanding warrants, from more than 30,000 to 16,000.

On Wednesday, Williams said he would try to prepare his budget the old way, but needs until June 24.

"Right now, we're looking at what our options are," he said.

Nothing doing, said budget director Schneider.

"We opened the computer system back up and gave them an opportunity to revise their budget. It's due Monday morning," she said.

Schneider said she expects to meet with Sheriff's Department officials to discuss next year's budget on June 11.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657.

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher

MICHAEL BLACKMAN, Vice President, Editorial Director

JACK B. TINSLEY, Vice President, Community Affairs

JIM WITT, Vice President, Executive Editor

E D I T O R I A L S

High Sheriff

IF NOTHING ELSE CAN BE said about Sheriff David Williams, he is consistent.

From his midnight swearing-in ceremony in 1993 — and his firing of three deputy chiefs immediately thereafter — to his late-night arrival last month at an Arlington water park where his services were not requested or needed, Williams has been constant in his ability to make people ask, "What is he doing now?"

In his early years as Tarrant County's sheriff, it was easy to attribute his actions — deputizing his main campaign contributor, outfitting a county SWAT team and developing a helicopter unit — to inexperience mixed with put-away-the-bad-guys zeal.

But now, after a protracted battle of wills with County Commissioners over money, personnel and management issues, even his Republican handlers are distancing themselves from the consistently unpredictable and headstrong Williams.

Williams' explanation for personally showing up May 22 — unannounced and uninvited — at Arlington's Hurricane Harbor with two prisoner transport vans and a dozen deputies was to cite the section of the state constitution that allows county sheriffs to get involved in any city in their jurisdiction — even if the local municipal police department has things under control.

Here's the way it looks to us: Williams is the top law enforcement officer in Tarrant County, by gosh, and he's not going to let anyone forget it. Not the voters, not the police chiefs and not the County Commissioners.

A sheriff's department activity report is a scheduled agenda item for today's 10 a.m. commissioners meeting. It's an open meeting, and interested parties are encouraged to attend. Perhaps Williams will even put in an appearance, but don't count on it. He's consistently inconsistent in his attendance.

Two competitors seek county jail food service contract

The out-of-state companies have submitted bids hoping to oust Dallas-based Mid-States Services, which has fed Tarrant inmates since 1992.

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Two companies are vying with Mid-States Services for the Tarrant County Jail food services contract.

The contract to feed Tarrant County's 3,500 prisoners — worth about \$4 million a year — is being competitively bid for the first time since 1992 because of an opinion by the Texas attorney general.

Aramark Corp. of Oak Brook, Ill., and Valley Innovative Services of Jackson, Miss., have submitted bids, hoping to wrest the contract from Dallas-based Mid-States. Five companies that initially expressed interest in the contract did not present bids.

"This is our business. We have lots of experience," said Larry Bearden, Aramark's regional sales director.

The company serves meals at 160 correctional facilities nationally and holds about 10 contracts in Texas, including those for the Lubbock County Jail and several Texas Youth Commission sites, Bearden said. Aramark also serves meals to 6,000 prisoners in Philadelphia jails and 8,000 prisoners in Washington, D.C., jails.

Mike Kraft, Innovative vice president, said his company holds a contract to provide meals to 10,000 state prisoners in Mississippi prisons. It also serves meals to 4,500 prisoners in the jails of Fulton County and to 3,000 prisoners in DeKalb County, both in Georgia. Innovative also prepares about 15,000 meals for seniors in Texas, including 2,000 in Tarrant County, he said.

"Corrections has been a good market for us, and we're looking to expand our market base," Kraft said.

Mid-States holds contracts to

provide meals to prisoners in the Dallas County Jail, as well as to those in the jails of Johnson, Smith, Nueces, Jefferson, Parker, Kaufman and Denton counties, according to the bid proposal. Mid-States executives were unavailable to comment yesterday.

Mid-States' contract, which dates from 1992, was renewed three times on one-year renewal options. Beginning in 1996, the service was continued without a

contract because the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department had approved the vendor's past performance.

The Tarrant County district attorney, in a letter dated July 11, 1997, asked the attorney general if the Mid-States contract was exempt from competitive bidding requirements because it was either a personal or professional service.

The attorney general's office responded with an opinion in March that a county jail food services contract worth more than \$15,000 is subject to competitive bidding.

Mid-States officials have previously declined to comment on the attorney general's opinion.

Sheriff's officials have said Mid-States has provided quality service for a minimum price and consistently met state jail standards and county health standards.

The bids will be reviewed by an evaluation committee comprising County Administrator G.K. Maenius, Deputy Chief Savala Swanson and purchasing officials. County Purchaser Jack Beacham said he expects to present a recommendation to the Commissioners Court within two weeks and secure a new jail food services contract by July 8.

Commissioners pitch \$94.3 million bond plan

Wednesday, June 3, 1998

The proposed package is anchored by a new county courts building.

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A new county courts building and parking garage, a new health department building and a larger jail make up a \$94.3 million bond package that county commissioners say Tarrant County voters must approve on Aug. 8.

"There is such a need for these

facilities. We are in dire need of more adequate and appropriate space," County Judge Tom Vandergriff said at yesterday's Commissioners Court meeting. "And we can do it without any tax increase."

The planned \$70.6 million, 8-story courts building, the \$9.1 million health department building and the \$14.6 million expansion of the Green Bay Jail will be listed as separate propositions on the ballot. It is the first county bond package since 1987.

"We have to pass this bond issue," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said. "We need additional and safer courtrooms."

The big-ticket item in the bond package is an 8-story family law and civil courts building in downtown Fort Worth to replace the 39-year-old Civil Courts Building that has been redecorated with a faux exterior to match the historic courthouse next door.

A new civil courts building, along with the 9-story Tarrant County Justice Center completed in 1991 that houses criminal courts, would complete the makeover of Tarrant County's court buildings, county officials said.

The historic pink granite courthouse, first occupied in July 1895, has largely been converted to offices, although it still has several courtrooms. The Civil Courts Building is inadequate and has long raised safety concerns for people appearing in family court, the officials said.

There have been two Tarrant County courthouse shootings in the past 120 years.

On July 1, 1992, George Lott pulled out a

gun and started firing as the 2nd Court of Appeals heard arguments in a case. A Tarrant County prosecutor and Dallas lawyer were killed and three others were wounded.

On Aug. 1, 1989, Manuel "Manny" Cabano took his former girlfriend, a county worker, hostage in the justice of the peace court on the first floor. Cabano, a former sheriff's deputy, held Juanita Hermosillo at gunpoint while then-Sheriff Don Carpenter unsuccessfully negotiated with him. Cabano shot her and then killed himself.

"This will give the family law courts a specifically designed facility with the kind of security it needs: a place for a judge to meet with children and individual conference rooms so attorneys can confer with their clients in private," said G.K. Maenius, county administrator.

The 426,000-square-foot courts building would have a day-care center on the second floor, district clerk offices on the fourth floor, civil and family law courts on other floors and the 2nd District Court of Appeals on the eighth floor.

A 6-story, 600-space parking garage would be built downtown for county workers and people doing county business.

The county needs its own health department building because the county and Fort Worth jointly ran the health department

together but parted ways last year.

A 60,000-square-foot health department to house clinics and administrative offices is planned, said Gary Kirby, Tarrant County facilities director. The county is considering putting the clinic on property it owns adjacent to the Resource Connection in south Fort Worth, he said.

Health department offices who deal with communicable disease prevention, sexually transmitted diseases, environmental health, tuberculosis control, AIDS, chronic disease and injury prevention, epidemiology and a laboratory would be located there, along with an office of the Women, Infants and Children federal nutrition program, he said.

A \$13.4 million, single-story expansion of Tarrant County's 1,065-bed Green Bay Jail is also planned. It would add 1,150 beds to the county's 4,195-bed inmate capacity. Sheriff's officials have said they could run out of jail space by year's end.

Sites under consideration for the courts building are just east of the County Administration Building and the old courthouse. If the bond is passed this year, construction could begin in 2000 and the courtrooms could be functioning within four years, Kirby said.

Star-Telegram / Saturday, June 6, 1998

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

OPINIONS

Recall, anyone?

I must have missed something. Did we elect David Williams sheriff or God?

If I were a Democrat (which I am not), I would gloat. If I were a Republican (which I am not), I would hide. If I were a resident of Tarrant County (which I am), I would be embarrassed. Time to reconsider?

JACK DURHAM
Fort Worth

E D I T O R I A L S

County Bond

TARRANT COUNTY VOTERS ARE being asked to go to the polls in August to consider a \$94.3 million bond package.

The proposal includes three big-ticket items that at a preliminary glance look necessary: a new \$70.6 million family law and civil courts building, a \$9.1 million health department building and a \$14.6 million expansion of the Green Bay jail facilities.

We'll reserve final judgment on supporting the plan until after commissioners have had the opportunity to make their case to voters on the need for each project.



**1998 TARRANT
COUNTY BOND
PACKAGE**

To do that, commissioners need to meet two important criteria: Voters have to trust the governing body presenting the package, and the governing body has to demonstrate responsible stewardship of public money.

Commissioners in large part fulfilled the trust factor by separating the propositions on the ballot. Lumping them together in one up-or-down vote could prove unwise — witness Arlington's recent failure in the Johnson

Creek/Smithsonian Museum/arts-funding bond election. Lawmakers have to trust the voters to do the right thing; it can be taken as a sign of arrogance if a bond package is structured in such a way that voters have few options.

If the county truly needs each of these building projects, then each will stand on its own merits.

Then there is the Sheriff's Department. The current rift between the commissioners and Sheriff David Williams could be an insurmountable hurdle for the \$14.6 million jail expansion. Commissioners must think it is necessary — they wouldn't give Williams a drink of water right now if he were parched in Pecos — or they wouldn't put it on the ballot. But persuading the voters to expand Williams' law enforcement empire will take plenty of hard work.

On its face, the bond package looks reasonable and is structured in such a way that no tax increase will be needed to implement it. The task at hand for the commissioners is to convince voters of the worthiness of each element of the package.

It should be a busy and interesting summer.

Sheriff's office may take fewer cars home

Department to suggest more pooling of vehicles

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Responding to a county commissioner's request, the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department said yesterday that it is planning to slash by about one-third the number of cars deputies can take home.

The sheriff's fleet-quality team determined in a recent study that 32 of 89 sheriff's take-home vehicles should be used as pool vehicles. The team is expected to present its report to commissioners today along with a recommendation on who should be permitted to drive the vehicles home.

"We've made a real good-faith effort to comply with their request. We've made a sacrificial effort to comply with their concerns," said Larry Hester, a chief deputy.

But the commissioners, who are questioning whether a 150-car sheriff's fleet is necessary, say they are not sure that the department is cutting the right vehicles.

"There are several cars I want to talk to the sheriff personally about that are not on the list. They have a ways to go, but this is a start," said Commissioner J.D. Johnson, who in the past has questioned why department chaplain Maj. Hugh Atwell has a take-home car.

Under the sheriff's recommendations, Atwell and some other administrative personnel would retain their vehicles.

"There are several cars I want to talk to the sheriff personally about that are not on the list."

— Commissioner
J.D. Johnson

Sheriff

From Page 1

Most of the take-home cars that will go to the pool — 22 cars — belong to warrant officers, the report says.

"I'm not sure some of those shouldn't stay as take-home cars," Johnson said.

At least seven deputies take county cars to their homes outside of Tarrant County, according to a Sheriff's Department list of vehicles submitted to Commissioners Court.

Although the county's vehicle policy doesn't prohibit employees from taking cars home to another county, it does require that the car be used at least 40 percent of the workday. Under the policy, cars may be taken home only if an employee "frequently" goes directly to a work site other than a primary work site.

The commissioners are united

behind the vehicle policy and insist that all county employees obey it.

Commissioner Glen Whitley said that while he is pleased by the Sheriff's Department's action, he, too, believes that more cuts can be made.

"For the most part he [Sheriff David Williams] did what we asked him to do. There are still a couple of cars that I have questions about," Whitley said.

Hester said problems are associated with the cutback in take-home vehicles.

"Law enforcement is required to respond in a critical mode. Response time is critical," Hester said. In emergency situations response time could be higher without enough take-home cars, he said.

Parking is at a premium in downtown, and if off-site parking is used for pool vehicles, deputies would lose valuable working time commuting to and from the parking lot, he said.

Hester questioned who would

pay for an accident if a deputy is called to work and doesn't have a take-home car, because he would be "on duty" from the time he leaves his home.

Paul Wood, the county's risk management specialist, said that for any county employee called to work from his house, the employee's primary insurance is the policy that covers the car. The county could be liable for amounts in excess of what the personal insurance doesn't cover," he said.

The debate about take-home cars is the latest installment in a yearlong controversy over Sheriff's Department vehicles. First, there was the request for a fleet of 30 sport utility trucks — \$30,000 Chevrolet Tahoes — that the commissioners refused to buy, and then there were five new Ford Crown Victoria patrol cars that languished unused in the county garage for a year. The Fords have since been put into service.

Tuesday, June 16, 1998 / Star-Telegram

Sheriff favors inmates paying for upkeep

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Sheriff David Williams said last night he favors requiring payment from jailed prisoners and supports a bill that would require them to contribute to their upkeep.

Williams told the Metroport Republicans, a club formed in March 1997 by area conservatives, that he backs billing prisoners for their time in jail.

"I think that's the kind of thing we can do," he told about 30 club members at their monthly meeting at the Marriott Solana. "These are ways to offset some of the costs of running a jail."

Billing prisoners for their time spent in county jail is an idea that has spread to more than a half-dozen budget-conscious states. The concept recently attracted the support of Denton County Sheriff Weldon Lucas and the Denton County commissioners.

Under the plan, convicts are assessed fees for each day they are incarcerated and are

ers and it never will be as long as he remains sheriff.

He said he is proud of his department's efforts to halve outstanding warrants in the county.

Metroport Republicans invited Williams to speak on crime, growing concerns about drug use and the interaction between the Sheriff's Department and other Northeast Tarrant cities, said Mike Farhat, chairman of the club's board of directors.

Williams said the easing of trade restrictions with Mexico poses a growing challenge in the fight against drugs.

"Traffickers are bold, sometimes they will probe our defenses," he said, adding that the department works with other drug-fighting programs in the county.

When asked if he will run again for sheriff in 2000, Williams said, "I don't have any plans not to run; I'm here for the long haul."

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7710

The move would help offset some of the costs of running a jail, Williams says.

billed, usually after their release. The revenue goes to the county general fund or toward other jail-based programs.

Lucas has sought statewide support for the plan, which was approved by the Denton County Commissioners Court in April. He has asked every sheriff in Texas to take the prisoner reimbursement proposal to local commissioners in hopes of support.

He and Denton County officials, who are studying programs in other states to determine the best model for the county, said they plan to lobby the Legislature to clear the way for counties to institute the program.

At the meeting, Williams also spoke of his accomplishments during his six years as sheriff. He said that when he took office, "it was not an option" to close the jail to new prison-

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

OPINIONS

Star-Telegram / Tuesday, June 16, 1998

Standing in the breach

Being sheriff is a thankless job. Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams is a man of fine, upstanding character doing a difficult job in a competent way.

His power-monger critics somehow perceive him as standing in their way. What does truth, justice and the American way stand in the way of? They say that if an election were held today, the sheriff would not be re-elected. He would be re-elected by a landslide if the people knew what a great job he is doing of holding back the onslaught of crime that is trying to pervade our county.

The residents of Tarrant County want a sheriff like Williams — a servant, not a demagogue.

Thanks, Sheriff Williams. May you be able to prevail against the little people who want to take you down. Little people destroy — big people build.

MARLENE MITCHELL
Eules

Commissioners want meeting with sheriff

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A Sheriff's Department plan to cut take-home vehicles by one-third falls short of reductions the department must make, Tarrant County commissioners said yesterday.

The Sheriff's Department, like all other county departments, must obey the county's vehicle

policy and that will likely mean fewer take-home cars, the commissioners told sheriff's officials.

"A car is not part of the job offer if you come to work at the county," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said after the Commissioners Court meeting.

While thanking sheriff's officials for a report proposing that

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

Sheriff

From Page 1

32 of the 89 sheriff's take-home vehicles be used as pool vehicles, the commissioners said additional vehicles and perhaps different ones than those recommended by the department should be removed from the roster of take-home cars.

The commissioners demanded a workshop — with Sheriff David Williams in attendance — to resolve differences between the court and the department over who should be permitted to drive county cars home.

"We did not see this report as an end product," said Chief Deputy Larry Hester, who agreed to the workshop.

J.D. Johnson and other commissioners

questioned why the majority of the take-home cars that will go to the pool — 22 vehicles — belong to warrant officers. Johnson said Williams needs to answer the commissioners' questions himself.

"I would really appreciate the attendance by your sheriff," he told Hester. "We need to work with the sheriff directly."

Williams did not attend yesterday's Commissioners Court meeting because he had another meeting, Hester said, adding that he could not "speak for the sheriff" on whether he will attend the workshop.

Johnson said there are "a heck of a lot of these" cars that aren't going to qualify under the county's vehicle policy.

"I can pick out 15 or more cars that don't meet our policy," he said.

The vehicle policy requires that a take-home car be used at least 40 percent of the

workday and that cars may be taken home only if an employee "frequently" goes directly to a work site different from the primary work site.

VanRavenswaay said that in a "preliminary review" she also found take-home cars that don't comply with the county policy.

Hester said he had no idea to which 15 vehicles Johnson was referring.

"Possibly they [the commissioners] don't understand why we need the take-home vehicles," he said.

Hester said that in any case, the commissioners should allow some time for the conversion of take-home cars to pool cars.

But VanRavenswaay said that any cars driven in violation of the county policy should become pool cars immediately.

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher
MICHAEL BLACKMAN, Vice President, Editorial Director
JACK B. TINSLEY, Vice President, Community Affairs
JIM WITT, Vice President, Executive Editor

E D I T O R I A L S

Sheriff's Vehicles

AS WITH TOO MANY reports coming from the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, the Fleet Quality Team report presented in Commissioners Court this week leaves one asking more questions than it answered.

The cursory review of the department's assignment of 89 take-home cars found 32 vehicles that could be reassigned to pool status. We say "cursory" because the six Sheriff's Department employees who made up the review team apparently were working without

Commissioners raised a few legitimate questions of their own, not the least important being, "Where is the sheriff?" David Williams was again missing in action Tuesday morning ...

benefit of knowledge about the county's vehicle policy. When the committee goes back to compile the final report, it is anticipated that additional vehicles that don't meet county policy will be removed from the take-home list.

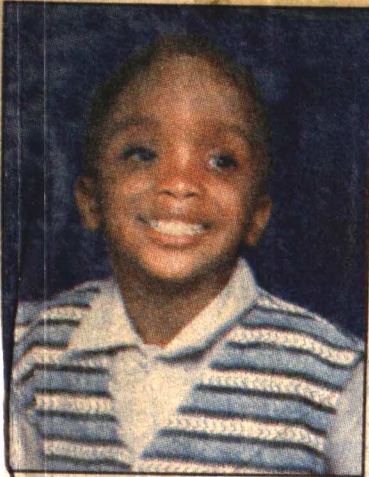
There's no plausible explanation for why the committee convened without a copy of the county's vehicle policy in front of it. The question of liability raised by

Assistant Deputy Chief Larry Hester in his presentation to the commissioners could have been easily answered by a phone call to the county's risk management office.

Commissioners raised a few legitimate questions of their own, not the least important being, "Where is the sheriff?" David Williams was again missing in action Tuesday morning, although he was able to make it to a Republican club meeting on Monday night.

Pct. 4 Commissioner J.D. Johnson expressed concern about the number of vehicles removed as take-home cars from warrant division employees. Twenty-two of the 32 total vehicles placed in pool assignment would come from warrant officers under this preliminary plan. While the commissioners wait for the review team's final report, which we hope will answer their questions, it looks as if the interim plan inconveniences the worker bees — the men and women running the warrants — and leaves the drones, or command staff members, with wheels.

Boy, 5, shot as mother chases carload of teens



Antonio Demond Jackson, 5, was injured in what police called a feud between adults.

By KATHY SANDERS
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A 5-year-old boy riding next to his mother was shot in the face and critically wounded late Monday as the woman pursued a carload of teenagers she suspected of smashing the windows of her older daughter's car.

The bullet lodged in the back of Antonio Demond Jackson's head, leaving the youngster in intensive care at Cook Chil-

dren's Medical Center.

"It's tragic that a 5-year-old gets caught up in what appears to be a feud between some adults that didn't involve or concern that child, and now that child is fighting for his life," Fort Worth Police Sgt. Fred Pendergraf said yesterday.

When the passenger-side window in her car was shattered, the boy's mother, Sandra Wright, thought the men in the car

(More on SHOOTING on Page 2)

she was pursuing near the 3000 block of Southwest Loop 820 had thrown a rock or smashed the window with a bat, police said.

The 37-year-old Fort Worth woman quickly fled, asking her two children with her if they were all right. Her 9-year-old son in the back seat was screaming, but the 5-year-old son in front with her was eerily silent, investigators said.

"She gets on the service road and thinks something's weird because one is bawling and the other one is quiet," said homicide Detective David Sears. "So she reaches over and touches his face and feels something wet. Then she turns on the dome light and sees that it's blood."

Wright drove her son to the hospital after the shooting, which police said happened about 11:40 p.m.

Antonio lives with his grandmother in Texarkana, but was in Fort Worth visiting his mother when the shooting took place, the family told police.

The boy's relatives declined interview requests.

Three men suspected in the shooting were arrested within an hour.

They were identified as Brian Keith Carroll, 19; Ivan Nathaniel Hamilton, 17; and Nicholas Adam

Winqest, 18, all of Fort Worth. Police say they believe that Carroll was the gunman. All three remained jailed in lieu of \$500,000 bail each on suspicion of attempted capital murder.

Winqest also was held without bail on an unrelated charge in connection with an escape from the Texas Youth Commission, the state's facilities for juvenile offenders. No other details on the escape charge were available.

Officials said Carroll's 21-year-old girlfriend, a Tarrant County jailer, was questioned yesterday because she apparently lent her car to Carroll while she was at work. Authorities believe that her gun may have been used in the shooting.

The shooting apparently grew out of a nine-month feud between one of the suspects and Mike Ober,

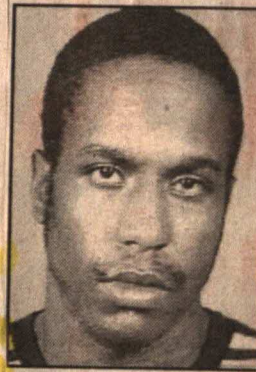
23, who was dating Wright's 19-year-old daughter, Lequesa Wright.

Investigators said the ill feelings between Ober and Winqest apparently began in September when the two crossed paths, either during a basketball game or when Ober told Winqest to stop spray-painting gang graffiti at Kellis Park in south Fort Worth.

Ober was outside his house Monday night when Winqest, Carroll and Hamilton drove up, and Winqest invited Ober to fight, Pendergraf said.

Ober declined and went inside with his girlfriend, he said. While the two were in the house, they heard banging and glass breaking and found that the men were breaking the windows out of Lequesa Wright's car, Pendergraf said.

Lequesa Wright called her moth-



Brian Carroll



Ivan Hamilton



Nicholas Winqest

Shooting

er, Sandra Wright, who put her two young sons in the car and drove to Ober's house, he said. Police also were called and, after officers left, the car carrying Winquest and the others drove past Ober's house, Pendergraf said.

"The mother and her two boys got in their car and the girlfriend and boyfriend got in the girlfriend's car and they follow this car trying to get the license number," he said. "At some point, they split up and the boyfriend and girlfriend kind of went around to cut them off."

Unbeknownst to Sandra Wright, the men had gotten out of their car and were standing in front of a house when she drove past about a block from 3000 S.W. Loop 820, police said.

Wright's 9-year-old son told police that he saw a man with a gun run toward the car and fire one shot.

Lt. Mark Krey, a Fort Worth police spokesman, said a resident who saw one of the men fire at the car followed the attackers and was shot at several times, with some rounds striking his car. The man, who was uninjured, fled.

Within a few minutes, police arrested Carroll, Winquest and Hamilton at Winquest's apartment in the 3100 block of S.W. Loop 820 near Cockrell Avenue, Krey said.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Effective management

What wasn't mentioned in your Thursday "Sheriff's Vehicles" editorial were the positive comments made by some members of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court about the Sheriff's Department's efforts to efficiently manage the vehicle fleet. As a member of the committee appointed to review department vehicle usage, I can

recall constant and continuous reference to the Tarrant County Vehicle Policy during several different meetings.

I am also aware that the reorganization of the Warrant Division no longer necessitates the need for take-home vehicles as it once did. Those personnel are not now subject to off-duty recall, as they once were when the Warrant Division only operated a limited number of hours a day. They now have on-duty personnel who are certainly capable of handling those situations that come up during those periods considered as off hours.

Your readers should have been informed of the cost savings to taxpayers that this type of fleet management represents. As your editorial pointed out, a phone call to the county's risk management office is where you could get that kind of information. Instead you chose to print only the negative, when in fact we reduced the take-home fleet by 36 percent without drastically impacting our level of service to the citizens. That's effective management in anyone's opinion.

It is also my opinion, supported by 27 years of experience at the Sheriff's Department, that those individuals you referred to as drones are in fact more dedicated, work harder and display a higher level of professionalism than your staff even attempts.

CAPT. RAY BELL
Patrol Division

Tarrant County Sheriff's Department

Someday, Scarlett will be gone, too

Call it serendipity. Yesterday, the American Film Institute's rankings of the top 100 American movies of all time appeared in newspapers across the nation.

Today at the AMC Sundance 11, I get the opportunity to view a spruced-up and technologically improved version of the No. 4 film on that list, *Gone with the Wind*, and then express my view of it.

Tomorrow is Juneteenth.

Now what *today* has to do with *tomorrow* is this: In my view, *GWTW* is a spectacular, romanticized apology for the Southern slavocracy; Juneteenth, a.k.a. the 19th of June, is a celebration of the demise of that horrible, unromantic chapter of the grim saga of human degradation.

I will be joined in the discussion by *Star-Telegram* books editor Larry Swindell and longtime TV personality and movie commentator Bobbie Wygant. I am obviously outgunned. And I expect that I shall be in hostile territory.

The screening, a prelude to the fanfare for the 60th anniversary of the release of *GWTW*, is for a by-invitation-only audience of frequent film festival patrons. And I suspect that a majority of them will be avid fans of the cinema masterpiece, but I intend to disagree.

I will not disagree with the proposition that it is a great film. It is all of that and a dash of whipped cream. The grim scene during the Atlanta siege in which row upon row of dead, dying and wounded Rebel soldiers are laid out reaching toward the horizon and a tattered Confederate battle flag slumps at the top of the frame devastates me.

Moreover, the film is far superior in its own way to the shallow novel upon which it



Cecil Johnson

COMMENTARY

is based.

But from my perspective it is a bad/great movie, a movie based upon distorted history that over the years has done immense harm because of the heights of technological and performance excellence that were achieved in it.

It has effectively convinced millions of the historically naive that the antebellum South was an idyllic realm populated by courtly ladies and gentleman and contented darkies.

In portraying the South as a martyred land without clarification of what the Civil War was about, it helped perpetuate

a myth that continues to provide ammunition to hate-mongers, drunk with nostalgia for the days when black people knew their place and stayed in it.

Mammy knows her place. Prissy knows her place. Pork knows his place. And everyone loves them for it.

"I don't know nothing 'bout birthin' no babies, Miss Scarlet."

You can't, of course, blame Butterfly McQueen for taking the money to play a half-wit

house



CECIL JOHNSON is a *Star-Telegram* columnist and editorial writer. You can e-mail him at cecil@star-telegram.com or call him at (817) 390-7663.

girl. Pickings were pretty slim for black actors back in the '30s and '40s. They took what they could get.

Ditto for chicken-chasing Oscar Polk.

And also for Hattie McDaniel, who became the first African-American to win an Academy Award for her supporting role as the Aunt Jemima archetype who submerges herself totally in the life of her white masters and mistresses. Of course, McDaniel was not allowed to sit at the same table with the rest of the *GWTW* nominees during the ceremonies.

Despite McDaniel's signal achievement, I maintain that all those roles could have been played just as well by white actors in black face.

Now, if I am accused of committing the sin of anachronistic evaluation, I will plead guilty. I am judging a movie made in 1938 by 1998 standards. And that, many will say, is unfair.

In fact, I have African-American friends who say they can put those stereotypes and the historical distortions out of mind, suspend disbelief and enjoy the movie for its cinematography, its acting and the charm of the relationships among the characters.

I don't know how they can do that. *GWTW*'s lasting appeal is not just to those who appreciate it as art for art's sake. The people who really enjoy that movie most get swept away by it, get caught in the splendor of its panoramas and empathize with its characters and situations.

That's why it's coming back to movie houses again. But I predict that its appeal will not survive the next decade because the teaching of American history as it really was will overtake it, and it will come to be viewed as a mere curiosity out of another century.

If I'm not gone with the wind when that happens, I may change my view of the film classic.

In the meantime, happy Juneteenth.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

OPINIONS

Friday, June 26, 1998 / Star-Telegram

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Disappointing

I was deeply disappointed in Cecil Johnson's June 18 commentary concerning *Gone With the Wind*. Being an ardent admirer of this great film classic, I find that he is partially accurate in his comment that the movie is a "romanticized apology for the Southern slavocracy" and that June 19 each year marks "a celebration of the end of that horrible, unromantic chapter of the grim saga of human degradation."

But Johnson's remarks that the film is based on distorted history and has done immense harm over the years through its technological excellence, providing ammunition to hate-mongers "drunk with nostalgia for the days when black people knew their place and stayed in it," were grossly unfair.

Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson, we cannot rewrite history, but we can learn from it. *GWTW* goes beyond its technical expertise, beyond the painstaking craftsmanship that went into the creation of such historic scenes as the Confederate wounded lying along the tracks at the Atlanta depot. It is a tempestuous love story that has held the nation — indeed, the world — spellbound for almost six decades.

But, like Scarlett, I won't think about Johnson's comments any more today; I'll think about them tomorrow. For, after all, "tomorrow is another day."

FLOYD F. CLARK
Fort Worth

Jailer linked to shooting

The Tarrant County employee furnished the gun and drove the car used by the suspects, police say.

BY KATHY SANDERS
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A Tarrant County jailer was arrested yesterday, accused of providing the gun used in the shooting of a 5-year-old boy and driving the car used by the three suspects, police said.

Fort Worth police arrested 21-year-old Tablisha Taylor, the girlfriend of the man suspected of being the gunman, about noon on an attempted capital murder warrant. She was released from Tarrant County Jail last night after posting a \$15,000 bond.

"She did nothing to stop them other than to ask them what they were going to do with her gun," Fort Worth police Sgt. Fred Pendergraf said. "She did nothing to report that her gun was taken, nothing to report it stolen and nothing to stop" the shooting.

Investigators said that when Taylor was questioned, she lied about why her gun was taken apart and cleaned after the shooting, about when it had been fired, and who had fired it.

Taylor was suspended with pay on Tuesday, the day after Antonio Demond Jackson was shot,

The mother, Sandra Wright, told police that as she approached the intersection of Westfield Avenue and Cockrell Avenue, a block off the 3000 block of Southwest Loop 820, a gunshot smashed the passenger-side window of her car, striking her son in the cheek.

The boy remained in critical condition yesterday at Cook Children's Medical Center with the bullet still lodged in his head.

Within an hour after the shooting, police arrested Brian Keith Carroll, 19; Ivan Nathaniel Hamilton, 17, and Nicholas Adam Winquest, 18, all of Fort Worth. All three remain jailed in lieu of \$500,000 bail each.

The arrest warrant affidavit for Taylor says all three men gave statements admitting their roles in the shooting and implicating Taylor.

According to the affidavit, Carroll dropped Taylor off at work, left in Taylor's car and then picked up Winquest and Hamilton. They later picked up Taylor

when she got off work, and she drove to a house in the 3700 block of Park Ridge Boulevard, where the three men got out and smashed the windows of a car, the affidavit says.

Taylor waited down the block, and then picked up the men and was driving when Wright began pursuing the car, the affidavit says.

At the intersection of Westfield and Cockrell, Carroll told Taylor to pull over, and took Taylor's 9mm semiautomatic pistol from the holster, the affidavit says.

Carroll told Taylor he needed the gun for the cars following them and, the affidavit says, she let him have it. The three men got out of the car and "took up positions surrounding the intersection," the affidavit says. Taylor drove away.

When Wright approached the intersection, the affidavit says, Carroll fired one shot that struck Antonio in the face.

A neighbor who witnessed the shooting followed the three men as they ran away, and Carroll fired eight shots at the witness's car, the affidavit says.

When Taylor returned minutes later, Carroll put the gun back in her car and told her to go home, the affidavit says.

The document says that Taylor dismantled and cleaned the gun when she got home. When investigators asked her about the condition of the gun, Taylor said she had been to a pistol range that day.

However, the affidavit says, detectives determined that Taylor had not been to the range.

Kathy Sanders, (817) 390-7705

according to a statement from Sheriff David Williams. The statement says an internal investigation is under way, but refers all questions to the Police Department.

Antonio was riding in the front seat with his mother, who was pursuing a carload of people she believed had bashed in the windows of her 19-year-old daughter's car, police said.

Copeland Ministries

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The family of a 12-year-old girl killed at a Christian motorcycle rally in September filed a wrongful death lawsuit yesterday against Kenneth Copeland Ministries, the motorcyclist who ran over her, the Sheriff's Department and Tarrant County.

The lawsuit alleges that Copeland Ministries is liable for the death of Leah Simon of Carrollton, Ohio. She was killed Sept. 27 while she was in-line skating on a runway at the Eagle Mountain Motorcycle Rally for Christ at Copeland's northwest Tarrant County complex.

The lawsuit claims that Tarrant County property — sheriff's vehicles, radar guns to clock speeding motorcycles, starter pistols and barricades — was misused at the rally.

It says the Sheriff's Department failed to follow "established policies" governing "on-duty and take-home use" of county cars and failed to properly supervise its reserve officers. It alleges an improper relationship between the Sheriff's Department and Copeland Ministries.

"We want to make sure the responsible parties are brought to justice," said Ken Pompura, Leah's brother, who filed the suit in state district court. "My family wants some answers. We're looking for some peace."

Ministry officials as well as



Ken Pompura: Brother of girl, 12, killed at motorcycle rally

Tarrant County and Sheriff's Department officials declined to comment on the lawsuit. The motorcyclist, Kim Duane Birch of Newark, could not be reached to comment.

"Since we are already under litigation, KCM [Kenneth Copeland Ministries] has no comment," said the Rev. Barry Tubbs, Copeland Ministries associate pastor and spokesman.

Tubbs repeatedly has said that motorcycle racing is not allowed at the rally and that adequate safety precautions were taken to protect the roughly 35,000 people who attended the annual rally for four days of fellowship and prayer. Last year was the event's eighth year; it was canceled this year.

Copeland Ministries has never condoned or encouraged use of motorcycles on the runways, and there was no sanctioned activity at the airstrip and no reason for anyone to be on the north-south runway where Leah was killed, he has said previously.

But the lawsuit says that Copeland Ministries extended "an open invitation to bikers to camp and race motorcycles at will on open airstrips surrounded by spectators" without providing adequate security.

It also alleges that the Copeland compound was used to store Sheriff's Department equipment and hold Sheriff's Department social functions and awards banquets, and that the grounds have been used for driver and helicopter training, in return for providing security at the rally.

"The sheriff's reserves should have protected the children and adults, and Kenneth Copeland

didn't pay attention when he was warned by them to stop racing," said Pompura, 27, of Toledo.

Tarrant County documents show that Copeland Ministries was repeatedly warned by sheriff's reserve officers that racing was "reckless and dangerous," and that safety concerns had been raised for at least two years before the fatal accident.

Safety concerns were also raised several hours before Leah was killed, when a go-cart and a motorcycle collided, injuring several children, one of them seriously.

Leah was attending the revival with her mother. She was killed at sunset when she skated in front of Birch's speeding motorcycle, which the suit said was traveling at 90 mph at the south end of the compound's airstrip.

Birch was arrested on suspicion of intoxication manslaughter, but the district attorney's office declined to accept the charge or to refer the case to a grand jury.

Initial sheriff's reports showed that Birch's blood-alcohol level was 0.08 and that he had tested positive for cocaine and marijuana. But records given to prosecutors contained no references to cocaine. They showed that Birch tested positive for marijuana and benzodiazepine, a tranquilizer, and that he had a blood-alcohol level of 0.054, well below the 0.10 level that defines intoxication in Texas.

Nurses on the helicopter ambulance that took Birch to the hospital wrote in witness statements that he smelled of alcohol. A passenger on the back of his motorcycle told sheriff's deputies that he and Birch "drank two beers prior to driving the motorcycle down the airfield runway," according to county documents.

No damage amount was included in the claim filed yesterday.

"We're looking at a fair amount that a jury will give us," said Joe Solomon, Pompura's attorney.

"I believe they [Copeland Ministries] think they did absolutely nothing wrong."

The 1998 motorcycle rally was canceled this year by Kenneth Copeland after he said that God told him not to hold it.



CHEERS & JEERS



THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Saturday, June 27, 1998

Cheers: To Brian Loar of the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department. On May 24, I hit a metal object on Interstate 35W that flattened my tire. Loar looked for my wheel cover (which had been knocked off), changed my tire and offered to follow me home. People need to know that we still have public servants like this.

JIM NICHOLS, CROWLEY

Family, Copeland Ministries reach settlement in injury of boy

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The family of a boy injured in a go-cart accident at a Christian biker rally where a 12-year-old girl was killed in September has agreed to a settlement with Kenneth Copeland Ministries, a lawyer for the ministries said yesterday.

The family of Jeremy Travis Mannino, 9, of Broken Arrow, Okla., has agreed to a settlement for injuries he received in a go-cart/motorcycle collision that occurred Sept. 27 at the Eagle Mountain Motorcycle Rally for Christ at Copeland's northwest Tarrant County complex, said John Barr, a Dallas

attorney.

Barr declined to disclose the nature of Mannino's injuries or the terms of the settlement. The Mannino family could not be reached to comment.

"They have settled their disagreements," Barr said.

The go-cart accident happened several hours before Leah Simon,

of Carrollton, Ohio, who was inline skating on a runway on Copeland property, was run over and killed by a speeding motorcyclist.

The Simon family filed a wrongful death lawsuit Friday against Kenneth Copeland Ministries, the motorcyclist, the Sheriff's Department and Tarrant

County.

The lawsuit alleges that Copeland Ministries is liable for Leah's death and that Tarrant County property — sheriff's vehicles, radar guns to clock speeding motorcycles, starter pistols and barricades — was misused at the rally.

It says the Sheriff's Depart-

ment failed to follow "established policies" governing the use of county cars and failed to properly supervise its reserves who provided security for the event. The lawsuit also alleges an improper relationship between the Sheriff's Department and Copeland Ministries.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

THURSDAY, JULY 2, 1998

Prisoner recaptured at Fort Worth tavern

BY BETSY BLANEY
AND MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

After seven hours of freedom, a federal prisoner who had overpowered an investigator with the Tarrant County district attorney's office and fled in her car was arrested at a southern Fort Worth bar last night, authorities said.

William David Williams, 36, a con-

victed bank robber, was in handcuffs and shackles about 2 p.m. when he struck and bit the investigator. He took her car along with a shotgun, a handgun and keys to the handcuffs and the leg irons, officials said.

Police said they believe that he robbed a Bedford business 90 minutes

(More on ESCAPEE on Page 15)

Escapee

Williams, who is serving a 12-year sentence at a federal penitentiary in Florence, Colo., was brought to the area to help Tarrant County investigators with ongoing cases, officials said.

The suspect was arrested about 9:30 p.m. at Mr. Magoo's bar at Interstate 35W and Felix Street, officials said.

Witnesses and police said he walked into the bar about 8:45 p.m. and ordered two vodka Collinses and nachos supreme from a nearby Mexican restaurant. The suspect played a game of pool before two district attorney's investigators walked in, ordered two draft beers and left a 50-cent tip, said bartender Joann Ketchum.

The men approached the suspect at the end of the bar and asked him to step outside, she said.

"They said, 'He'll be back in a minute,'" said Ketchum, who was tipped \$8 by the fugitive.

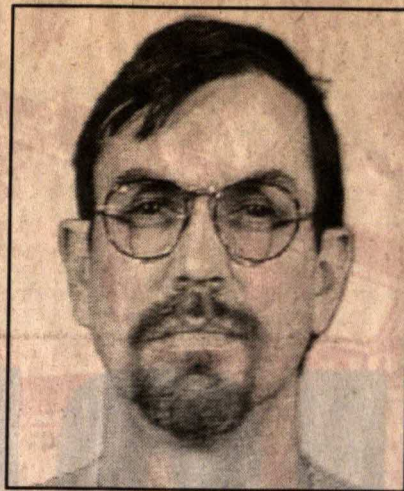
The suspect was returned to the Tarrant County Jail, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a Sheriff's Department spokesman.

"We're just thankful we got him back into custody as soon as we did," said David Montague, a Tarrant County assistant district attorney.

Skidmore said investigators had apparently spotted the stolen car in the bar's parking lot.

The district attorney's investigator, Celeste Rogers, and Williams had been working together for a couple of weeks to gather evidence, Montague said.

They had been with each other



William D. Williams: Escapee was quickly recaptured

for several hours yesterday before stopping about 2 p.m. for lunch at an Arby's Roast Beef Restaurant at 5100 E. Belknap St. in Haltom City. That's when Williams attacked her, officials said.

"He struck her a couple of times when they were struggling,

"We're just thankful we got him back into custody as soon as we did."

— David Montague
assistant district attorney

and then he bit her arm," Montague said.

Rogers, who has been with the Tarrant County district attorney's office for about 15 years and was a Fort Worth police officer before that, was treated at a Fort Worth hospital for wounds to her right arm and was released, officials said.

Williams apparently changed from his tan jumpsuit into clothes that were in the investigator's car, officials said.

The man who walked into a Bedford storage business in the 2700 block of Bedford Road was

not wearing a tan jumpsuit, said police, who believe that man to be Williams.

The man posed as a customer and pulled a gun on a 43-year-old employee at the business, telling her that he would not hurt her if she cooperated, Bedford police Capt. Mike Mason said.

The man and the employee went into a living area in the back of the office, where he put leg irons on the woman, Mason said.

"He put one on her and one on the bed," he said. "He secured her and stole an undetermined amount of money."

Investigators found a pistol inside an Arby's bag in a car at the business from which a rear license plate was taken, Mason said.

The man had found the pistol in a night stand in the business' living area, Mason said.

The man again changed clothes and took clothes from the business, Mason said. The employee told investigators that the man appeared to be injured, Mason said.

"He was having some problems walking," Mason said. "It appeared he had hurt his back."

In 1995, Williams, who was a Tarrant County resident who also went by the alias of Stephen Galier, was convicted of robbing three Bank of America branches in Fort Worth. No weapons were displayed in the robberies, officials said.

The U.S. Marshal's Office in Fort Worth is filing an escape charge against Williams, FBI spokeswoman Marjorie Poche said. Information was unavailable about charges Williams could face in connection with yesterday's attack.

Betsy Blaney, (817) 685-3821
ecblaney@star-telegram.com

feed Tarrant inmates

7-8-98

Mid-States and Aramark received equal evaluation scores from a county purchasing committee that reviewed the bid proposals. Valley, which was dropped from the competition, got a lower score because its emergency plan for serving meals was judged inadequate by the committee.

"The point evaluations are identical. If both are qualified, you'd think a government body responsible to taxpayers would make its decision based on price," Jameson said.

Commissioners Glen Whitley and County Judge Tom Vandergriff said they are concerned about the cost differences between the two bids.

"I'm looking for some good negotia-

tions," Whitley said. "If we can't work it out [with Mid-States], maybe we'll have to reject all the bids and start again."

County officials said they were concerned about the Aramark proposal because it used fewer employees to do the same work that Mid-States does and because Aramark proposed one serving line at the Green Bay jail instead of two.

The new Mid-States contract is for one year. It has four one-year renewal options.

"If we don't do the job right, the county will get someone else," said Jack Madera, Mid-States' chief executive officer.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Sheriff gives up on plan to buy fleet of Tahoes

Department's last-minute request for sedans on hold

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — In a move that surprised county commissioners, the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department yesterday abandoned its attempt to buy a fleet of expensive sport utility trucks in favor of trying to buy less expensive sedans.

But the department's effort to spend its 1998 budget allocation of \$675,000 may be too late, county officials said yesterday.

The commissioners postponed for at least one week any consideration of the Sheriff's Department request to buy 30 cars. The department originally sought \$30,000 Chevrolet Tahoes.

Chief Deputy Larry Hester said the sedans are "needed vehicles," adding that the Department has more than 60 cars with more than 100,000 miles. "My only concern in delaying [the purchase] is the high mileage," he said.

But Commissioner J.D. Johnson shot back a reply indicative of the frustration the commissioners have felt since the sheriff asked for the Tahoes.

"For the record. You all have delayed it. We have not," Johnson tersely told Hester.

First, there was the request for the Tahoes, which the commissioners refused to buy. They told the sheriff to buy a mix of sedans and trucks

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)

with the \$675,000, but Sheriff David Williams insisted on buying only Tahoes.

The commissioners nixed that, too, and a stalemate ensued.

Then, it was discovered that five new Ford Crown Victoria patrol cars had languished unused in the county garage for a year. That prompted the commissioners to ask for a complete list of sheriff's vehicles.

The commissioners held back from the Sheriff's Department seven Tahoes that were ordered last year. The Fords were put in service and the commissioners got their list.

Now the commissioners are questioning whether 150 vehicles is too many for the Sheriff's Department, and they want to know why about 90 sheriff's employees get to drive their county cars home every night.

Commissioners were hardly charmed yesterday by the sheriff's last-minute vehicle request.

"It could be done, but time is against us," said Commissioner Glen Whitley. "Inventories are dwindling."

When asked if Sheriff Williams had dropped a plan to refurbish older Chevrolet Caprice patrol cars, Hester said that he had not. Instead of buying patrol cars with special equipment, the Department wants to buy conventional cars that would be used by deputies who perform tasks such as serving warrants, he said.

County purchaser Jack Beacham said it might be difficult to find the desired vehicles at a good price because of low inventories and the effects of the General Motors strike.

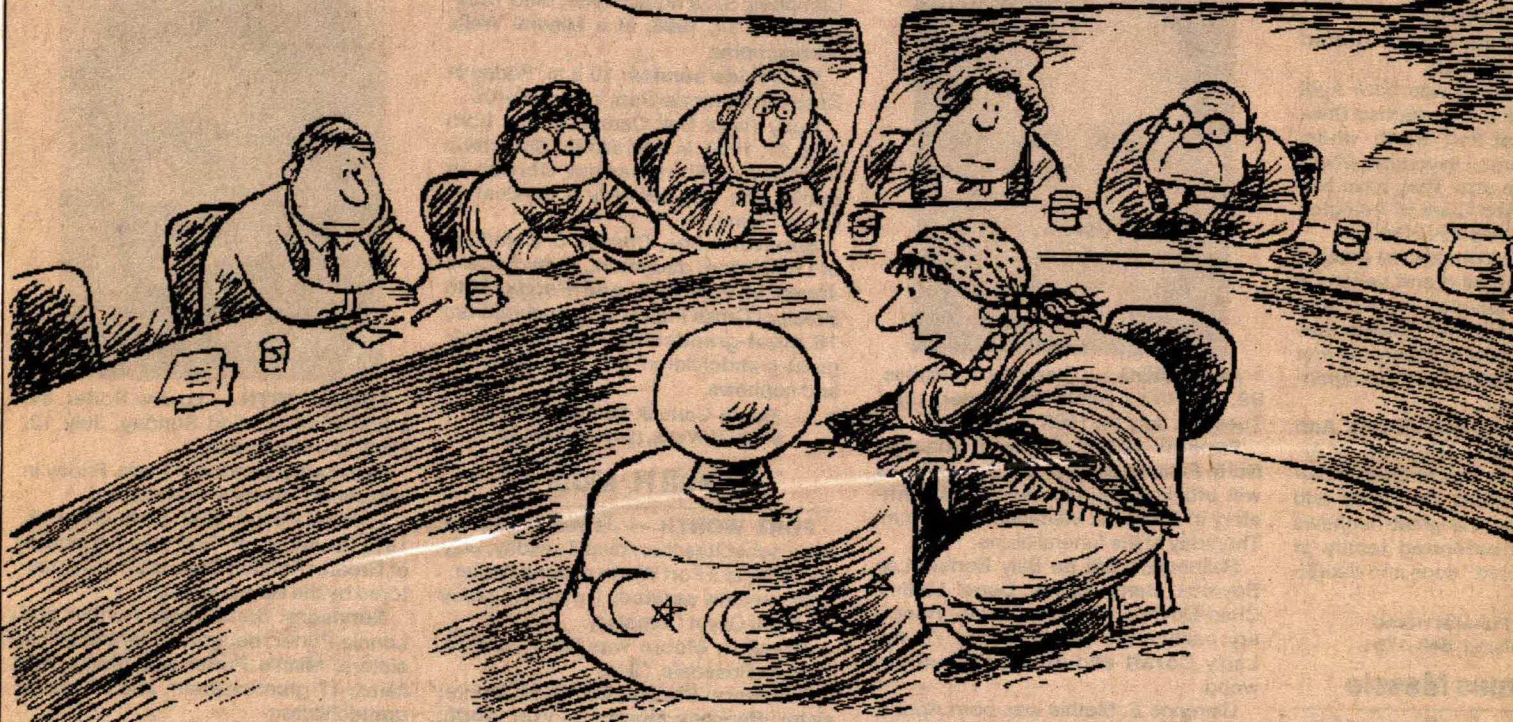
Finally, Commissioner Marti Van Ravenswaay snapped at Hester: "Let's delay the matter one week."

When told that sheriff's officials planned to discuss the car purchase with County Administrator G.K. Maenius on Thursday, several commissioners said they would attend the meeting.

If the money allocated to buy the cars are not spent in this fiscal year, it could be applied to next year's vehicle request for the sheriff, said Debbie Schneider, county budget director.

ETTA © 1998 FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM
HULME

I SEE FIVE CROWN VICTORIAS IN STORAGE...
... I SEE THE SHERIFF WANTING A FLEET OF TAHOES...
...NO, WAIT... I SEE THE SHERIFF CHANGING THAT TO
THIRTY CARS ... NO, WAIT... I SEE THE SHERIFF...
...I'M NOT SURE YOU WANT TO HEAR THIS...
...OH, DEAR...



THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS APPOINT A COUNTY PSYCHIC
TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SHERIFF.

OPINIONS

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Sheriff's official is under investigation in car use

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

After a special 90-minute meeting to discuss which sheriff's deputies get to drive county cars home, authorities confirmed yesterday that Cmdr. James Skidmore, a department spokesman, is being investigated in connection with using his county car while on vacation.

While county and sheriff's officials reviewed every take-home car and the responsibilities of the driver, no one at the meeting mentioned the investigation of Skidmore.

Commissioners Marti VanRavenswaay and J.D. Johnson attended the meeting between county staff and sheriff's command staff. Commissioner Glen Whitley listened from outside the door to avoid violating the state's open meetings law.

Afterward, Capt. John Dalton, acting spokesman, confirmed the investigation in a phone interview.

"There is an internal affairs investigation going on in relation to Cmdr. Skidmore's alleged unauthorized use of his vehicle," Dalton said.

(More on CARS on Page 2)

Skidmore said he could not comment.

"Yeah," he said, when asked whether he is under investigation. "I'm supposed to be on vacation, and I can't talk about it."

Although the Sheriff's Department has cut the number of cars deputies take home from 89 to about 60, the commissioners say they are not sure the department has cut the right vehicles. They are questioning whether the department's 150-vehicle fleet is too big.

Under the county's vehicle policy, people assigned take-home cars must use them during at least 40 percent of their workdays. Cars may be taken home only if employees "frequently" go directly to a work site different from their primary work site, and it imposes stiff sanctions for personal use of county cars.

County commissioners are united behind the vehicle policy and have insisted that all county

employees obey it. Any employee who violates the county vehicle policy loses the car.

"I'll await the end of the investigation before making a decision on Skidmore," VanRavenswaay said. "It's ironic this comes up when we were reviewing take-home vehicles."

Johnson said the Skidmore investigation is "another reason the county needs its automobile policy adhered to and cleaned up."

After the meeting, the commissioners said they are not inclined to buy the department 30 new

sedans that sheriff's officials asked for at Tuesday's commissioners court meeting. It was a last-ditch effort to spend \$675,000 allocated for cars in this year's budget.

The department had asked for 30 \$30,000 Tahoes nearly a year ago, but after the commissioners refused to buy them, it made no further vehicle requests until this week. In its initial budget request for next year, the department has asked for 41 replacement cars and 17 additional vehicles.

"I don't want to give them any more cars until we determine how

many they actually need," VanRavenswaay said.

At yesterday's meeting, county officials asked Chief Deputy Larry Hester why jailers and deputies involved in training, crime-fighting and anti-drug programs in schools need take-home cars. They wanted to know what the deputies involved in the school programs do with their take-home cars during the summer and said they don't understand why the department's chaplain, Maj. Hugh Atwell, drove a car home.

"To us, our chaplain is our backup," Hester said because he

provides counseling to families when a deputy is wounded and counsels other deputies.

Hester said many deputies with take-home cars are called out at odd hours while off duty and need the vehicles. The county vehicle policy "doesn't truly reflect the needs of law enforcement" and the Sheriff's Department.

County officials wanted to know why many of the deputies couldn't drive their own cars and be reimbursed for the miles they drive while on county business.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Marshal under investigation

'Looks like I'm in a world of trouble,' Bransom says

By LAURA VOZZELLA
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Federal investigators are looking into whether U.S. Marshal D.W. "Dub" Bransom committed perjury in a federal hearing and leaked grand jury information to a TV station, Bransom and others involved in the matter confirmed yesterday.

"Looks like I'm in a world of trouble over this thing," said Bransom, who was appointed to the post by President Clinton and is one of North Texas' highest-ranking federal law enforcement officials. He took office in December 1995.

"I'm under a pretty good accusation at this point. I don't think you'll see me at the



D.W. Bransom

office any time soon."

Bransom and his second in command, Chief Deputy Anthony Odom, could be placed on administrative leave during the investigation, said Bransom's attorney, Joe Tooley of Dallas. Officials with the U.S. Marshals Service are expected to make a decision about leave next week, Tooley said.

U.S. District Judge Joe Kendall asked for an investigation at a July 9 court hearing in Dallas that lawyers say featured con-

(More on MARSHAL on Page 2)

tradictory testimony from Bransom, 60, and two of his deputies.

The deputies, Douglas Corey and Eric Smith, testified that the marshal told them he was out to "get" Odom, whom the marshal accused of participating in a fraud scheme. Bransom, well-known in the area as the folksy former River Oaks police chief, a longtime Fort Worth officer and a two-time candidate for Tarrant County sheriff, testified that he never vowed to "get" Odom.

Kendall concluded that someone was lying and asked for an investigation, according to lawyers who attended the hearing. A transcript of the hearing is not yet available. Kendall does not comment on pending cases, his staff said.

The hearing was called to consider whether a Nov. 4 KTVT/Channel 11 broadcast affected a grand jury investigation, which led to a Marshals Service employee's indictment on fraud charges.

Bransom was interviewed on TV two days before the grand jury returned its indictment against Joseph Wayne Teel Jr.

Teel, a systems administrator, came under suspicion for computer work he was supposed to supervise for the Marshals Service office in Tyler. Teel is accused of doing the computer work himself and cashing \$1,300 in checks made out to two fictitious subcontractors. He

has pleaded not guilty.

Teel's lawyer, Shirley Baccus-Lobel, argued at the July 9 hearing that the news report could have prejudiced grand jurors against her client. She asked that the indictment be dismissed.

Kendall declined to dismiss the indictment. But he expressed concern about the dissemination of secret grand jury information, said Ralph Jones, a Dallas lawyer who attended the hearing and represents Odom in a civil suit against Bransom.

Tooley, Bransom's attorney, said the marshal agreed to the Channel 11 interview because the reporter knew all the details of the case from some other source.

"There's no merit to the claim about releasing information," Tooley said. "As far as the testimony [about 'getting' Odom], we stand by Dub's testimony and his recollection. And I guess whoever else testified would stand by their recollection."

The Channel 11 interview had already brought Bransom trouble in the form of a defamation suit filed by Odom. A career Marshals Service employee who has often been at odds with his political-appointee boss, Odom asserts that Bransom implicated him by suggesting that "higher-ups" were involved in the fraud scheme.

It is not clear why Odom might be placed on administrative leave along with Bransom. Jones said his client is no longer under investigation in the Teel case.

Laura Vozzella, (817) 390-7688
vozzella@star-telegram.com

WESLEY R. TURNER, President & Publisher
MICHAEL BLACKMAN, Vice President, Editorial Director
JACK B. TINSLEY, Vice President, Community Affairs
JIM WITT, Vice President, Executive Editor

E D I T O R I A L S

Odd Meeting

TARRANT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS tried not to violate the state Open Meetings Act last week, but in the process they managed to step squarely on the spirit of the law.

Until Tuesday's court session, commissioners were apparently unaware that County Administrator G.K. Maenius had scheduled a Thursday meeting with Sheriff's Department personnel to discuss the take-home vehicle policy. Assistant Chief Deputy Larry Hester surprised the commissioners with that information and a request for 30 new sedans during the weekly Sheriff's Department report.

Commissioners Marti VanRavenswaay, J.D. Johnson and Glen Whitley expressed the desire to attend said meeting, feeling the issue was important enough to be held in open session.

There was one problem: The state's Open Meeting Act requires a 72-hour notification of all meetings in which a quorum of a governmental body convenes to deliberate public business. The clock had run out on that opportunity, so one of the commissioners had to stay out of the room during the 90-minute question-and-answer session.

Whitley spent the time either listening to the proceedings from his office or sitting outside of the chamber door.

The issue here, however, is one of citizens' access. What good does it do to hold an open meeting when no one knows it is taking place? Why didn't the court postpone the meeting for 24 hours, giving county staff the opportunity on Tuesday to post the notice?

Few issues have been higher-profile lately than the Sheriff's Department and its vehicles. The commissioners themselves have made law enforcement vehicles the poster children for more responsive and responsible government. They have harangued Sheriff David Williams for not being more open about the workings of his department. But then they turn around and hold a "public" meeting that the public has no opportunity to know about.

Sheriff's official is punished for car use

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
AND GINGER D. RICHARDSON
Star-Telegram Staff Writers

FORT WORTH — Cmdr. James Skidmore, a spokesman for the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, has been disciplined for using a county car while he was on vacation, a department official said last night.

Skidmore received a written reprimand, lost the use of his county car, and he was removed yesterday as the department's spokesman, Chief Deputy Dave Dunaway said.

"It was cut and dried," Dun-

away said last night. "He was using his county car while on vacation."

Skidmore could not be reached to comment last night.

The car that Skidmore used will be turned in to the county garage as required by the Tarrant County vehicle policy, Dunaway said.

Skidmore's use of the car came to light after a 90-minute meeting last week during which county and sheriff's officials reviewed the take-home car policy.

Under the policy, people
(More on CAR on Page 2)

assigned take-home cars must use them during at least 40 percent of their workdays. Cars may be taken home only if employees "frequently" go directly to a work site different from their primary work site. The policy imposes stiff sanctions for per-

sonal use of county cars.

During the meeting Thursday, no one mentioned the investigation of Skidmore, but later Dalton confirmed that Skidmore's use of the vehicle was the subject of an inquiry.

County commissioners have said that they are united behind the vehicle policy and have insisted that all county employees obey it.

"I believe it should have been clear to the members of the

Sheriff's Department who were there [at the meeting] that violations of the policy would not be tolerated, so I am not surprised by this," said commissioner Marti VanRavensway last night. "It just impressed me as being stupid."

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said the take-home car policy will continue to be scrutinized and perhaps tightened.

"I think it's one that we definitely need to take a look at all

over the county, but especially within the Sheriff's Department," Johnson said. "We've been looking at that real hard these past weeks, and I don't expect to slack up on that."

Skidmore had been the department's spokesman for about five years. Capt. John Dalton was assigned to the job yesterday, Dunaway said.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657
Ginger D. Richardson, (817) 390-7616

WATER RESTRICTIONS

Sweating it out

BY MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Overheated hospital workers bought every fan at a couple of Wal-Marts and suburban firefighters brought in desperately needed water tankers. Inmates and deputies sweated it out at the downtown jail.

It was that kind of hot night when a 36-inch cast-iron water main broke outside Fort Worth's downtown Holly Water Treatment Plant late Thursday, drying up thousands of water taps and knocking out water-cooled ventilation systems at hospitals, jails and downtown buildings.

Perhaps hardest hit were Cook Children's Medical Center and Harris Methodist Fort Worth hospital. Security guards rushed through Harris' sweltering halls with electric fans to cool the hospital's approximately 400 patients.

"It's miserable," said Harris X-ray technician Dan Golden.

Firefighters from Burleson, Everman and other outlying cities filled tankers with water at hydrants outside the affected area around downtown Fort Worth. They pumped thousands of gallons into water-cooled ventilation systems at Harris, Cook Children's and the Southwestern Bell building on Throckmorton Street.

Fire officials called Capt. Larry Smith immediately to supervise the tanker operation outside Cook Children's.

Hospital spokesman Randy Sachs said staff members gathered in small areas to conserve air conditioning and used fans to cool approximately 150 young patients.

"I said, 'I hope we have no fires,'" Smith recalled as he watched firefighters haul a 3-inch

hose up several flights of stairs to the hospital's cooling towers.

City officials including Mayor Kenneth Barr, City Manager Bob Terrell, Police Chief Thomas Windham and Fire Chief Larry McMillen directed operations throughout the night from an emergency center inside City Hall.

"It's calm," Terrell reported at 2 a.m. "There's no panic. We're just trying to assess what the problem is and get it solved ASAP."

Cook Children's chief engineer, Jimi Shelton, found his patience beginning to wear at 2:10 a.m. as he poured a cup of ice onto his head, rubbed the cubes into his forehead and waited for the water to come back on.

Hospital workers made the rounds of local Wal-Marts throughout the night, buying up

the stores' entire stocks of fans as nursing home operators made a run for water coolers and dozens of cases of bottled water.

One hospital administrator rushed into Wal-Mart manager Tom Boltz's store at 6300 Oakmont Blvd. to buy fans about 3:30 a.m.

"He said, 'I need 25 more,' and then thought about it and said, 'Give me everything you've got,'" Boltz said. "They'd already been to the store on White Settlement and bought all their fans. I believe he was going to buy all 100 of them in Burleson."

Fort Worth police Lt. Rich Hoepfner took a gallon of bottled water to his off-duty security job at Harris, but still, he explained just before 3 a.m., "It's hot. It's getting unbearable."

Tarrant County Jail Lt. Ouida Johnson was hoping for the best

at 6 a.m. as the 1,630 prisoners at the Tarrant County Corrections Center were fed a cold breakfast on plastic plates in a jail with no air conditioning or running water.

Residents of the Presbyterian Night Shelter awoke to low water pressure and reheated coffee.

"The water's been down most of the night down here," security guard Larry McClain said. "They can't bathe and we can't hardly make coffee for people. They're getting thirsty."

Guests at The Worthington hotel on Main Street got bottled water, buckets of ice and a recorded message alerting them to the water problem, night manager Robert Sloan said.

com

Tarrant raises jailers' pay after sheriff's 'mea culpa'

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County commissioners agreed yesterday to give Tarrant County jailers \$175,000 in raises that they said were inappropriately denied, but only after Sheriff David Williams took the blame for not distributing the money.

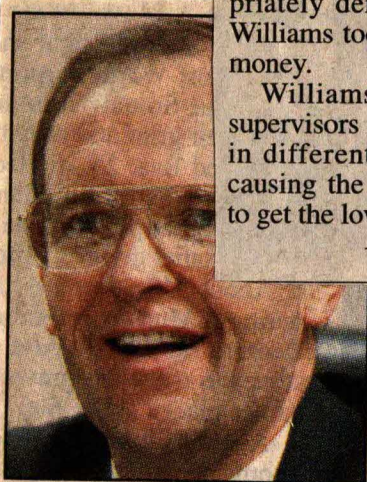
Williams told the commissioners that his supervisors inconsistently rated job performance in different Sheriff's Department divisions, causing the lowest-paid department employees to get the lowest raises.

"I bear responsibility for this failed effort," Williams said of the botched attempt to hand out raises.

About 18 percent of \$958,000 originally budgeted for 1998 Sheriff's Department merit raises for the department's 1,320 employees was not given out in March.

The lowest-paid people in the department, jailers and clerical workers, about 900 people, got raises of 3 percent to 3.9 percent, while raises of 5 percent to 7 percent went to the department's highest-paid employees, according to the

(More on RAISES on Page 2)



Sheriff David Williams says he was responsible for a bungled attempt to hand out merit raises to Tarrant County jailers.

Tarrant County personnel office.

"A mistake has been made. I hold supervision responsible for that mistake," Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff said.

Despite a long-standing county policy that calls for unused raise money to be returned to the county's general fund, the commissioners voted unanimously to award the money to the jailers. They postponed a decision on which employees would be re-evaluated — though there was agreement that at least some new evaluations are in order — and asked the county's and the sheriff's staff to devise a formula for paying out the money.

"The only reason we are doing this is because there was definite inconsistency in the way the Sheriff's Department reviewed its employees," Commissioner Glen Whitley said.

County employees are rated on a scale of one to five. Those who got the highest ratings — fours and fives — and correspondingly high raises typically work in the sheriff's investigation, administration or special operations departments, county records show. Those who work in the jail got ratings that averaged in the three range.

The commissioners believe that the job performance ratings for the jailers were artificially limited at a level lower than five, creating lower ratings and raises for the bulk of the department's employees and the \$175,000 excess.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he wanted to make sure the "bad evaluations" are removed from the employees' personnel records.

"Re-evaluations are going to have to be done in fairness to these employees," Johnson said.

Williams said he agrees with Johnson.

"It's going to be labor-intensive on our part, but we owe it to

our employees," Williams said.

He previously asked the commissioners to divide the money "equally" among all Sheriff's Department employees, but Gerald Wright, county human resources director, said at the time that if the funds are redistributed, it should be on a performance basis.

In February, the commissioners authorized an additional \$850,000 for jailers' salary increases — an unplanned midyear raise they hoped would stop the exodus of jail officers who found better-paying jobs.

Nearly all jailers got raises of 5 percent to 7 percent under the plan, newly hired jailers got 10 percent raises in their first two years with the county, and almost everyone working swing or graveyard shifts got an increase in his or her shift differential pay.

Williams said then that the commissioners should have stepped up everyone in the department one pay grade.

Jailers to split \$175,000 for botched pay raise

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County commissioners and sheriff's officials agreed yesterday on a plan to distribute \$175,000 to Tarrant jailers because they were improperly shorted on their raises this year.

Sheriff David Williams, who took the blame for the botched attempt to hand out raises and publicly apologized at Commissioners Court last week, said yesterday that he approved of the plan.

Last year, Sheriff's Department supervisors inconsistently rated job performance in different department divisions, causing the lower-paid jailers — about 714 workers — to get the lowest raises, while administrative and law enforcement deputies got the highest raises.

The lowest-paid people in the

department, jailers and clerical workers, received raises of 3 percent to 3.9 percent, while raises of 5 percent to 7 percent went to the department's highest-paid employees.

At the county, job performance is rated on a scale of one to five. Those who got the highest ratings — scores of fours and fives — and correspondingly high raises typically work in the sheriff's investigation, administration or special-operations departments, county records show. Those who work in the jail got ratings that averaged in the three range.

Consequently, about 18 percent of \$958,000 initially budgeted for 1998 raises for the department's 1,320 employees was never given out in March. There was raise money left over.

"The basic principle is to try to correct the inequity between con-

finement and other divisions," said Dave Hudson, an assistant district attorney.

Under the plan, the raise money will be split into one pool of \$45,600 for 186 newly hired jailers who have only one job evaluation, and a pool of \$129,600 for 528 jailers with two or more evaluations, said G.K. Maenius, county administrator. A complex formula assigning a percentage value to the difference between last year's evaluation and this year's will be used to determine the raise each jailer will receive, he said.

Jailers who received an evaluation with a rating of 4.1 or above — more than a 5.5 percent raise — are ineligible, Maenius said. Longtime county jailers at the top of the salary range will get a 3 percent lump sum payment only if their job performance rating was

3.5 or higher last year, he said.

"It's fair to everyone," Commissioner Glen Whitley said.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson, concerned that the bad evaluations could mar a county employee's work history, had asked that the jailers be re-evaluated. Although the jailers will not be evaluated again, Johnson said, he is satisfied with a compromise that calls for a letter placed in each employee's file explaining the 1998 foul-up.

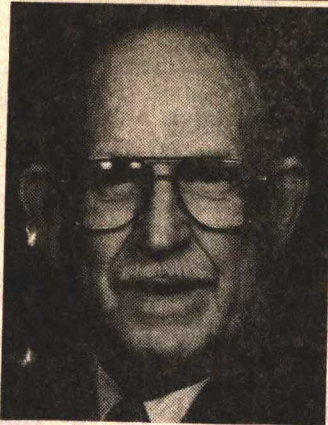
In giving the raise money to the jailers, the commissioners violated their long-standing policy that calls for unused raise money to be returned to the county's general fund. In this case, it was important for those county workers to get the raise they deserved, the commissioners said.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Thursday, August 6, 1998

OBITUARIES

Reginald E. Hedgpeth



HALTOM CITY — Reginald Elwood "Reggie" Hedgpeth, 73, a letter carrier and bailiff, died Monday, Aug. 3, 1998, at a Fort Worth hospital.

Funeral: 11 a.m. Friday at Mount Olivet Funeral Home. Burial: Mount Olivet Cemetery. Visitation: 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the funeral home.

Pallbearers: David Hedgpeth, Jerry Gilbreath, Brent Weast, Shawn Nugent, Joe Arnold and Eddy Arnold.

Memorials: Christ's Haven for Children.

Reginald E. Hedgpeth was born May 25, 1925, in Tolar. He was a graduate of Paschal High School. He served in the Marine Corps during World War II and Korea, in K Battery, 4th Battalion, 11th Marine Division. He was a survivor and hero in the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir where he saved a wounded comrade. He was a member of the Chosin Few, American Legion and the National Association of Letter Carriers. He retired as a letter carrier after 38 years and retired from the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department as a bailiff after 8½ years. He was a member of Birdville Church of Christ.

Mr. Hedgpeth was preceded in death by his infant children, Susan Gay and Gerald Blake, and his brother, W.B.

Survivors: His wife of 46 years, Edith Algura Beggs Hedgpeth; son, Robert Hedgpeth of Fort Worth; daughter and son-in-law, Pamela and Jerry Gilbreath of Haltom City; sister, Connie Robinson of Casper, Wyo.; grandchildren, Tamera Weast and her husband, Brent, Regina Hedgpeth and Deanna Gilbreath and her fiance, Shawn Nugent; and several nephews, nieces and cousins.

Mount Olivet Funeral Home
2301 N. Sylvania Ave., 831-0511

Sheriff's proposal draws a close look

County aims to hold the line on expenses

BY NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The Sheriff's Department budget will be scrutinized today by county commissioners in what promises to be the most contentious part of the county's 1999 budget negotiations.

The strong North Texas economy makes this year's budget discussions a relatively easy affair. That is, for all but the Sheriff's Department.

Property values are climbing in the Metroplex and unemployment is low. It's the kind of prosperity that allows government to do its work without raising taxes, county officials said yesterday after the unveiling of the 1999 budget.

The \$240.9 million budget includes \$179.5 million for the county's general fund, \$29.4 million for road and bridge work and \$32 million for debt service. The general fund is used to operate county government.

"The tax rate can remain the same. We said that during the recent successful bond election and we meant it," Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff said. "I'm committed to no tax-increase, as are the commissioners."

The county is anticipating an increase of nearly 9 percent in the net taxable value of

(More on COUNTY on Page 2)

properties — about \$4 billion — and the taxes from those properties make up the bulk of the money used to run the county, said G.K. Maenius, county administrator.

"The best news we've had for several years is that immediately we're presented with a balanced budget. No tax increase and no reduction in services," Pct. 2 Commissioner Marti Van-Ravenswaay said.

But commissioners, aiming to pinch pennies when it comes to spending the public's money, have long been concerned about the Sheriff's Department budget and how that money is spent.

A yearlong controversy over a denied request for a fleet of \$30,000 sport utility vehicles, five new Fords that sat unused for 10 months and an inability to get a clear picture of how the Sheriff's Department is staffed prompted the commissioners to put the county's jail and law enforcement budget under the microscope.

"I'm sure there will be quite a searching analysis of the Sheriff's

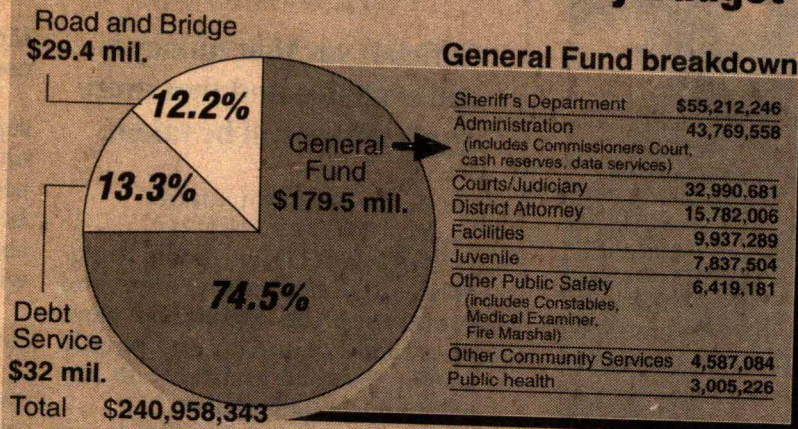
Department, with a view to holding the line on expenses," Vandergriff said.

Sheriff's officials say they will make their case before the commissioners.

"We need to articulate our needs. That's all we're asking for," Chief Deputy Hank Pope said. "We're trying to be realistic and still meet public safety needs."

The department has increased staffing demands, Pope said. In particular, the work-release program has grown from 800 to 1,500 participants over about six

Proposed 1999 Tarrant County Budget



SOURCE: Tarrant County Budget and Risk Management

Star-Telegram

years and needs more people to run it, he said.

The Sheriff's Department is asking for about 150 additional positions, but county officials want to add only about eight.

Nearly every department would like additional staff, but plans call for the addition of only 25 new positions countywide, said Debbie Schneider, budget director.

Commissioner J.D. Johnson said he doesn't want the county to staff any extra positions.

"The sheriff can come over on an as-needed basis. I will not fund

a bunch of positions so he can play the rotating game," he said.

Most other county departments are seeking improvements, but their road will probably be far less rocky than that of the Sheriff's Department.

The district attorney's office wants to strengthen its civil division, which represents the county and its officials, by adding attorneys and paralegals. The medical examiner wants new equipment and seven new employees, and most county employees would like a pay raise.

The net taxable value of Tarrant properties is expected to jump from the 1997 figure of \$50.38 billion to about \$54.5 billion for 1998. Each billion-dollar increase in assessed value generates \$2.6 million in revenue for the county, according to the county auditor's office.

The county tax rate of 26.48 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation has not increased for six years.

The hearings on the Sheriff's Department budget are scheduled for 2 p.m. but could begin earlier, at the conclusion of Commissioners Court. They will be in the County Administration Building, 100 E. Weatherford St.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657

Commissioners move to limit sheriff's duties

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — County commissioners took steps yesterday to force Sheriff David Williams to focus on jail responsibilities, challenging his longstanding effort to turn the Sheriff's Department into a broad-based law enforcement agency.

The commissioners proposed cutting some of Williams' most cherished programs. His special operations command would be disbanded, and the chaplain transferred to the county personnel office.

Commissioners also said during a five-hour budget hear-

ing that the Sheriff's Department has too many jailers.

"God bless you for getting crack and marijuana off the street, but you did it with people who were extra, and there isn't extra anymore," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said. "We didn't authorize a special operations command, and I want those people moved back to patrol, criminal investigations and warrants."

The sheriff's special operations command has been involved in drug interdiction efforts and tracking violent offenders since it was formed in 1995.

Williams has asked for \$65.4 million for next year. His department asked for 150 additional officers, but the county is proposing adding only eight.

Williams, the commissioners said, must get by on the \$55.3 million that county officials have proposed for 1999, a \$2.1 million increase over last year.

"We're going to have to look at doing that," said Williams, who arrived at the budget hearing nearly four hours after it began.

He appeared briefly at the Commissioners Court morning meeting, but said he could not remain for the afternoon budget session

because he had to attend a 2 p.m. meeting of area security officials. The Sheriff's Department presentation was made by his administrative assistant, Sherry Johnson.

Nearly one-third of the county's proposed \$179.5 million general fund budget is used for sheriff's operations. No final decisions were made on any of the budget items discussed yesterday.

Johnson asked Williams the status of the sheriff's helicopter program, which has essentially been grounded since a Sept. 17 helicopter accident took the lives of two deputies. Federal investigators

have not issued a report on the cause of the crash.

"The future of the program is uncertain at this time," Williams said of the department's one remaining helicopter. The department's only qualified pilot quit several months ago.

Williams said he disagreed with a proposal to move the chaplain's office to the county personnel office. The chaplain, Maj. Hugh Atwell, has served many other county departments from his post in the sheriff's office and can continue that work, Williams said.

The drug interdiction efforts of

the 15-member special operations command have gotten "good results," Williams said. Last year, the county spent \$722,084 on the unit. The Sheriff's Department asked for \$872,210 for 1999.

"I would hope everyone can see the clear value" of keeping the special unit, Williams said.

But the commissioners, struggling as they have for more than a year with a muddied picture of how the Sheriff's Department is staffed, appeared to have run out of patience.

The overtime jail budget is running 200 percent, Johnson said. Next year, if the department runs out of money, it will bring layoffs, he said.

Sheriff's officials told the commissioners that they have about two dozen jailers assigned to other responsibilities. But the commissioners said there are too many employees designated as jailers for the roughly 3,500 prisoners in jail.

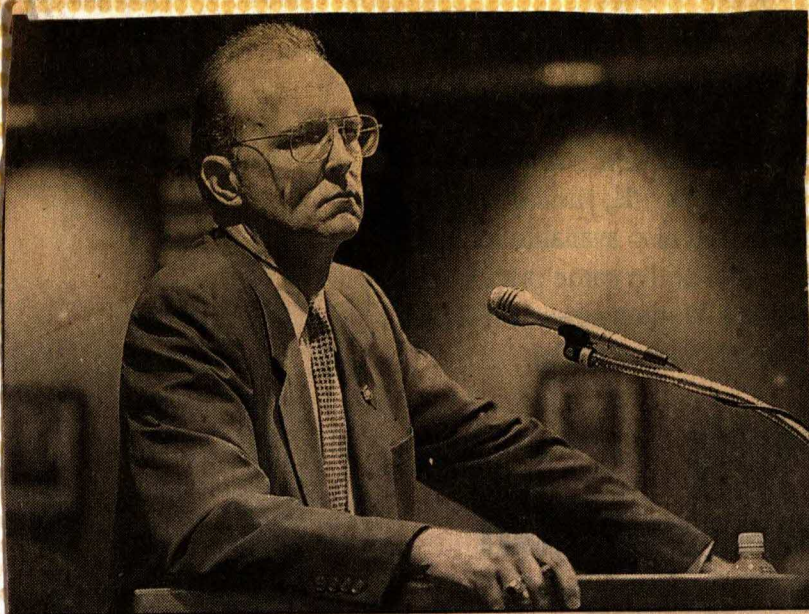
"If you need more warrant officers, people in administration or investigations, we would give that consideration, but it is frustrating and we've got to get the people back to where they belong," Commissioner Marti VanRavenswaay said.

A discussion of the sheriff's cars, an issue that has been going on for months, was postponed, probably until next week. This year the commissioners denied a request for a fleet of \$30,000 sport

utility vehicles, found five new Fords that sat unused for 10 months and have questioned whether the department needs all of its take-home cars.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of sheriff, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have authority over county contracts and purchasing and final say over the sheriff's budget. The county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

Neil Strassman, (817) 390-7657



Star-Telegram/RON T. ENNIS

Tarrant County Sheriff David Williams listens yesterday as county commissioners discuss his budget request.

EDITORIALS

On Thin Ice

TARRANT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS have been patient, almost to a fault, with Sheriff David Williams.

But charitable feelings ran out this week, and it looks as if Williams' department will fall victim to the sheriff's stubbornness and inability to cooperate.

Williams has been playing hide and seek with the Commissioners Court for years. From his reluctance to attend meetings to his reticence in providing information requested by the commissioners, the sheriff has established a pattern of obfuscation that has court members frustrated and the public asking questions.

His tardy arrival at his department's budget hearing Tuesday, coupled with his desire for 150 new employees and a \$12 million increase over his previous budget, set the stage for the court to issue a resounding "no" to his 1999 budget.

Williams' goal of providing county residents with the same law enforcement services that are available to those living in municipalities was not necessarily wrong. Where he failed was not getting the keepers of the checkbook — the commissioners — to buy into his plans from the start. Instead, Williams developed a special operations division and shifted around personnel without consulting the court, resulting in jail overtime running 200 percent over budget.

Frankly, Williams is lucky to serve as sheriff during a time when the court is composed of exceptionally reasonable people. Under previous administrations, his behavior would have drawn not just a verbal rebuke but also a punitive response in the form of a slashed budget. This court is actually proposing a \$2.1 million increase in the Sheriff's Department budget for next fiscal year.

Williams' arrival four hours late for the budget hearing was explained as his need to attend a meeting of area security officers. He might want to look on that experience as a networking opportunity. He may also need new employment come November 2000.

Monday, August 10, 1998



Bud Kennedy

COMMENTARY

County business takes a back seat to e-mail antics

Two of Sheriff David Williams' employees apparently have too much spare time.

They have so much spare time, one used a county computer to post political comments on the Internet. Another wants cookie recipes.

When county commissioners start cutting Williams' bloated budget next week, it's too bad they can't start with the clueless guy at the top. But if they're looking for ways to save taxpayer money in Williams' toy-happy office, I would suggest they take away his Internet computers.

Under the official address of "TarrantCounty.com," here's a message posted April 3 from the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department:

"I am looking for some really yummy, low-fat chocolate chip cookie recipes," signed by a Sheriff's Department employee.

"I'm talking REALLY YUMMY!!!"

This point seems to be taking a long time to soak in at some government agencies. But the county computers — and all government computers — belong to us.

They don't belong to employees for personal use or mail. They definitely don't belong to elected officials. And they're for public business only, not for play, and definitely not for political grandstanding or cookie recipes.

The most meaty public comments from the Sheriff's Department

(More on KENNEDY on Page 2)

ment don't have anything to do with cookies.

They came straight from Williams' administrative office.

Under Tarrant County's official return address, signed by Williams' administrative employee John Knight, these comments were posted on an Ohio-based message board labeled as a "Ronald Reagan memorial page":

On July 13: "1980, a year never to forget ... I was only 6 years old, but I remember watching a

televised debate between Ronald Wilson Reagan and Jimmy Carter ... I remember saying, 'Muzzy (that's what I called my grandmother) that man is stupid!!'

"Of course, I was referring to the peanut farmer (Jimmy Carter).

"... I have vowed to someday run for Statewide elective office and I hope to 'win one for the gipper!!' Please feel free to email me with your takes on Reagan!!"

Another message under Knight's name and Tarrant County's official address appeared Thursday:

"I wish the Gipper was still in office, we would never have to hear all of the smut coming out of the current administration. ... I don't really feel like an AMERI-

CAN right now."

Somebody challenged the remark. This was the response:

"During the past six years, a very close friend of mine has been raped, another murdered and then two of my fellow officers here at the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office were killed in the line of duty. ... In addition, my apartment was broken into by some jerk from Arkansas.

"So take a hike, pal. Go back to your Greenpeace-Amnesty International meetings."

Yesterday, the comments under Knight's name and Tarrant County's address became simpler, a derogatory remark about President Clinton. Another county

message tells "liberals" to go to the devil and "rot."

Tarrant County's rule seems specific: "Only county business goes on the computer system," said James Shander, director of data services.

"I understand that some people may be putting personal information on the Internet," he said, reading the formal policy: "Personal use is strictly prohibited."

I wonder whether Williams' office follows the rule.

I wonder whether he ever got those cookies.

Sheriff's overhaul proposal rejected

Commissioners criticize reorganization, overtime

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — A proposal by Sheriff David Williams to reorganize the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department was soundly rejected yesterday by county commissioners.

In a heated two-hour budget hearing that ended abruptly when Williams left the room after his plan was dismissed, the commissioners railed against the sheriff's plan to shift 36 jail support-service workers to other jobs in the department and fumed about jail overtime, which this year is 200 percent over budget.

"To us it appears you are costing the taxpayers of this county millions of extra dollars," Commissioner J.D. Johnson said to Williams.

It was the second time in a week that commissioners and sheriff's officials have gone toe to toe over next year's Sheriff's Department budget. Last week the commissioners wanted to disband Williams' \$722,084 special operations command and transfer the department chaplain to the county personnel office.

(More on SHERIFF on Page 2)



County commissioners told Sheriff David Williams to live with his \$55.3 million budget.

County Judge Tom Vandergriff told Williams then that the Sheriff's Department must get by on the \$55.3 million county officials have budgeted for it for 1999, a \$2.1 million increase over this year.

"I think my staff made a good-faith effort to put together a proposal to work within the budget amounts the county proposed," Williams said after the meeting.

Vandergriff said Williams' plan was "not acceptable" to commissioners.

"It's obvious a majority on this court is not satisfied. We insist, we demand, that you go back and rework your budget," he said.

Williams had asked for \$65.4 million for next year. His department asked for 150 additional officers, but the county wants to add eight. Williams' latest proposal, presented yesterday, trimmed the request to seven.

It called for using some jail clerical workers and others who do booking to supervise work-release prisoners, to be "call takers" in dispatch and to do preparatory research on warrants. The plan called for keeping the 15-person special operations command intact.

But Williams' plan to cut 10 people from the jail booking operation irritated commissioners.

The booking operation is running about an hour behind, causing delays in getting Fort Worth police officers and deputies back on the street after they take prisoners to the jail, Johnson said. Losing 10 people from the operation would worsen the delay, he said.

"We can't have Fort Worth prisoners lined up on Belknap. Are you saying we need to cut 10 out of the booking area to make the budget balance?" Johnson asked.

Williams replied: "That's my recommendation. I think we can work with what we've got."

The sheriff said there might be "systematic changes" that could be made to streamline the booking process.

The commissioners have strug-

Sheriff

From Page 1

gled for more than a year with a muddled picture of how the Sheriff's Department is staffed. Sheriff's officials have said they have about two dozen jailers assigned to other responsibilities.

The tone of yesterday's meeting degenerated further when the commissioners questioned Williams about overtime costs, especially at the Green Bay jail, where jailers work three overlapping 10-hour shifts in what Williams calls a staffing "experiment."

Commissioner Glen Whitley kept after Williams and other sheriff's officials, wanting to know how it could possibly be cheaper to have jailers working 30 hours to cover a 24-hour period.

"It results in six more hours of pay every day. We're not willing to finance these extra people," Whitley said.

Vandergriff cut off discussion, but before Sheriff's Department vehicles could be discussed — which was the stated purpose of yesterday's meeting — Williams left by the side door to confer privately with Chief Deputy Larry Hester.

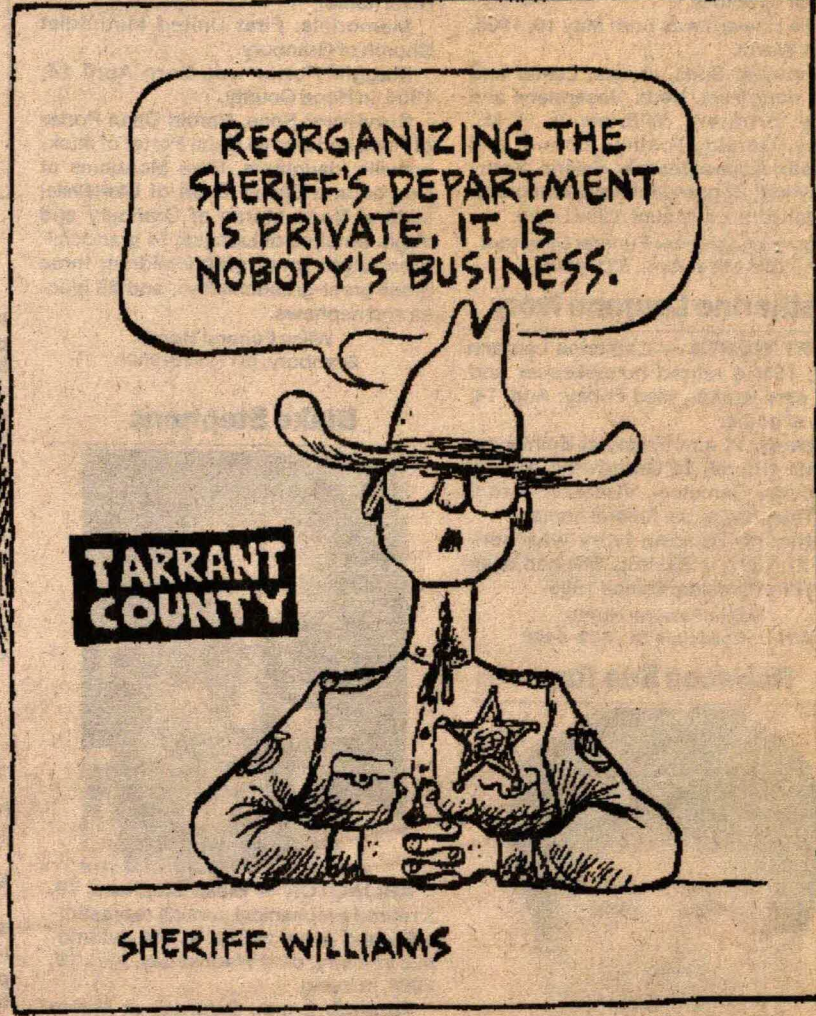
"If the sheriff's going to leave, I'm not going to stay," Johnson said.

Williams returned five minutes later, seemingly unaware that his absence had provoked the adjournment. No further budget meetings between the commissioners and sheriff's officials have been scheduled.

A discussion of the sheriff's cars, an issue that has been going on for months, was postponed, probably until next week. This year the commissioners denied a request for a fleet of \$30,000 sport utility vehicles, found five new Fords that sat unused for 10 months and have questioned whether the department needs all its take-home cars.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of sheriff is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have authority over county contracts and purchasing, and final say over the sheriff's budget.

Nearly one-third of the county's proposed \$179.5 million general fund budget is used for sheriff's operations.



RECENT NEWS STORIES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

ETTA HULME © 1998 FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Sheriff staff shuffle planned

Commissioners unanimously back proposal

By NEIL STRASSMAN
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Tarrant County commissioners voted unanimously yesterday for a proposed reorganization of the Sheriff's Department in the absence of Sheriff David Williams, the elected official in charge of the department.

Exasperated by Williams' lack of cooperation with the Commissioners Court over the past year, the commissioners backed a proposal by Pct. 3 Commissioner Glen Whitley

to cut the sheriff's command staff, combine some programs and slash the number of take-home cars available to deputies. A final vote will come with adoption of the county budget in late September.

Thirty-six positions would be eliminated departmentwide under the proposal but there will not be layoffs, just reassignments, Whitley said. Money to pay for overtime, now running 200 percent over budget for this

year, would be meted out to the Sheriff's Department every other month instead of annually, under a proposal by Commissioner J.D. Johnson.

"It seems to me to be a logical move for us to make," County Judge Tom Vandergriff said.

Williams, who abruptly left a similar budget meeting Monday after the commissioners summarily dismissed his proposal to remake the department, did not attend yesterday's meeting. It appears he has lost all chance for input into his department's \$55.3 million budget.

He could not be reached to comment on the commissioners' actions.

"The sheriff said that he didn't come because he didn't want it to degenerate into theatrics," said Executive Chief Deputy Hank Pope, who represented the department at yesterday's meeting.

The commissioners did not hide their displeasure at Williams' absence from budget discussions.

"I'd be more comfortable if the elected official would participate," Commissioner Dionne Bagsby said.

Pope presented two Sheriff's Department plans for reorganization, but was cut off by Whitley, who rolled out his plan detailing the breadth of the cuts across the department — from the administration of the jail to special operations.

The cuts include a chief deputy, two commanders and three majors. The chaplain's office would be eliminated, and the 15-person special operations command would be combined with the criminal investigations department, eliminating a captain and a sergeant.

"We don't like it. I guess we'll have to work with it," Pope said afterward.

Under the Texas Constitution, the office of sheriff, an elected position, is separate from the Commissioners Court, although the commissioners have authority over county contracts and purchasing, and final say over the sheriff's budget. The county auditor reviews the department's financial operations.

The commissioners have a right to set job classifications, duties and salaries, and the authority to write "line items" in the sheriff's budget, said Assistant District Attorney Marvin Collins. The commissioners do not have the authority to

draw up an organizational chart assigning people to roles within the department, he said.

The commissioners have struggled for more than a year to understand how the Sheriff's Department is staffed. Sheriff's officials have said they have about two dozen jailers assigned to other responsibilities.

"We need to approve each of the positions, and then they cannot be shuffled," Johnson said.

Pope yesterday said that some sheriff's programs have been "staffed without the consent of the court."

The commissioners, while trying to cut what they see as fat, kept some of what they called the positive programs the sheriff created without their permission. They did not cut field deputies from the special operations command, which does narcotics interdiction and hunts violent repeat offenders. Also in the budget are positions for warrant profilers,

who do preparatory research on serving warrants, and a spot for a "crime-stopper" deputy to work in the schools.

"We're not proposing cuts to jailers. We're proposing that the jail have the people it should have. These people have been sent hither and yonder and they're going back," Johnson said.

The number of take-home cars in the department would drop from 89 to 71, with many captains and lieutenants losing their cars for failure to comply with county vehicle policy.

Among those losing cars would be the captain over internal affairs and the captain over judicial services.

County Administrator G.K. Maenius said budget director Debbie Schneider will revise the Sheriff's Department budget based on the commissioners' actions.

EDITORIALS

Tuesday, August 25, 1998 / www.star-telegram.com

The Latest

TARRANT COUNTY Sheriff David Williams' refusal to attend last week's budget meeting with county commissioners was just the latest in his derelictions of duty.

By choosing not to attend the session that specifically addressed staffing levels and overtime concerns, Williams let down every employee in the Sheriff's Department, not to mention the voters who put him in office. The people who trust Williams to represent their interests with the commissioners were abandoned by a man who was worried about "theatrics." Unless there's a dramatic turnaround between now and the final budget vote next month, the department's future operation will be determined by civilian bean counters, not a law enforcement professional.

The stated excuse for Williams' absence last week — he wanted to avoid theatrics — was at best weak and at worst a pitiful misdirection by a man who is either unwilling or unable to carry out the duties of his office.

The distinction between *unwilling* and *unable* is an important one, even if the results are virtually identical. If Williams is neglecting his responsibilities out of stubbornness, a refusal to work with the commissioners because he isn't getting his way, then he has vastly overestimated the power vested in the sheriff by the state Constitution.

The second scenario is somehow sadder. Williams may indeed be way over his head in managerial responsibilities, a man without the personal tools he needs to do his job. Lacking the experience or the temperament to handle the head-to-head public questioning of the commissioners, his response has been to dig in, literally hole up away from where business is being transacted.

If he pretends to tap-dance long enough, maybe people won't notice that he doesn't know the steps. The question for the voters is a simple one: Do you want two more years of this?

the
INSIDER
report

■
David Carruthers, a deputy U.S. marshal in Fort Worth, likes to whistle while he works, especially when that work is escorting federal inmates to and from court.

Among his top tunes: *(Please) Release Me, Chain Gang, I Fought the Law (and the Law Won), I Shot the Sheriff.*

Most of the inmates get a chuckle from his selection of tunes, Carruthers said. But if they're not amused, too bad.

"That's their punishment while they're with me," Carruthers said.

■
It's all a matter of priorities. Tarrant County Sheriff **David Williams'** dance card may have been too full for him to appear before Tarrant County Commissioners Court for something as insignificant as a budget hearing.

But he had time to appear for the second time in recent months at a meeting of the Metroport Republican Club. Many of the sheriff's buddies, including District Clerk **Tom Wilder**, are members of the club.

Williams got a nice round of applause from the group, which is something he probably wouldn't have received from commissioners.

■

