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The mission of the Texas Association of Counties is to unite counties to achieve better solutions. County, a bimonthly magazine, is distributed to every elected county official and county auditor in Texas’ 254 counties. Other readers include purchasing agents, budget and planning administrators, appointed department heads, state legislators and state agency personnel.

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Texas Association of Counties
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ON THE COVER
Street banners declare “Texas Counties Deliver” in Austin along Congress Avenue near the State Capitol. The banners were hung in conjunction with Counties at the Capitol Day.
Frustrated. Aggravated. Irritated. What word would you use to describe your feelings about the 2017 legislative session? It was tense, combative and, in the end, very unproductive. Little was accomplished on the major issues that mean something. School finance. Driver Responsibility. Unfunded mandates. Ethics.

But something extraordinary did happen. History was made and you made it. HJR 73, a constitutional amendment provision to prohibit unfunded mandates passed the house. Nothing like it has ever gotten out of committee before. The House debated and concluded that the state should not push down to local government any duty or responsibility that it is not willing to pay for. Much was said during the 140-day discourse about property tax reform. There is a lot of confusion about what that means, but it seems clear that some folks under the pink dome don’t realize that county officials pay property taxes too. We all recognize the burden any tax places on individuals and business. We all pay taxes. We get it. However, any policy that raises our financial liability cannot coexist with a policy that mandates expenditures that should rightfully be paid at the state level. There is no better example than indigent defense.

HJR 73 didn’t just die in the Senate. It was murdered in cold blood. It never even got a committee hearing. The same body that ranted for 140 days about property tax relief failed to do the one thing guaranteed to provide it. They failed to give the people they purportedly represent an opportunity to vote on the issue. This bill passed in the House on a vote of 127 - 18. Now that sounds like a mandate.

We should all be proud that the House heard and responded. You, through your tireless effort, accomplished something once believed to be impossible. I urge each of you to contact your state representative and personally thank them for hearing us. Let them know how valuable that support will be in the future, because this issue will not go away. Offer any information or support they need to continue the struggle. Collaterally, you might ask your state senator why they did not think the issue was important enough to at least debate. Who do they serve? The people in the district or a couple of statewide elected officials? You can figure it out.

Thank you for the time, expertise and commitment you provided in the session. It was a hard. We were frustrated, aggravated and irritated. But we did well. We made history. Congratulations to you all. ★

HJR 73 didn’t just die in the Senate. It was murdered in cold blood. It never even got a committee hearing.
Texas Association of Counties

Regional Pool Workshops

Resources and Solutions for Counties

2017

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Oct. 4
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Oct. 11
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How long have you been the Glasscock County Judge?

I ran unopposed in the primary election of 2010. My predecessor then decided to go ahead and retire, so I was appointed to fill his unexpired term on April Fool’s Day of that year. So, I’ve been in office a little over seven years.

Prior to your election, what kind of work did you do? What got you interested in running for office?

I taught school, primarily first grade, for many years. I also did some freelance marketing for the government of New Zealand and had a brief stint as a program director on a geriatric psych unit. I joke that all three of those positions prepared me for my varied roles as county judge, but I’ve always had an interest in our legal system and politics. Once my son graduated, I felt the timing was right.

What was the biggest surprise or adjustment after taking office?

Although I thought I had done my homework and in fact I actually sat down with Judge Bednar, the former judge, and grilled him about his duties, I was surprised by the variety in the day-to-day operations of the office, the long hours, the unusual requests and the lack of knowledge of the voting public about what actually happens within the walls of the courthouse.

What are some of the biggest challenges you’ve faced, and what advice would you give your peers across the state that may face the same or similar challenges?

The biggest challenge for me and our county was the oil boom. I came into office about the time Glasscock County saw some of its greatest challenges. Our quiet way of life changed almost overnight. My criminal caseload went up 500 percent, our accident rate mirrored that percentage! Our infrastructure was taking a beating. My friends, neighbors, family and constituents were faced with struggles like we had never seen. I look back now and wonder how we made it through. I advise elected officials to be flexible
in our perspectives. Remember, we have a brotherhood of officials and resources around the state and within the Texas Association of Counties who stand ready to provide help, advice and best practices. We are not alone, so never be afraid to ask for help. Once you have some experience, never be afraid to be one to offer help.

**SINCE TAKING OFFICE, WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?**

I know this will sound like a “Miss America” answer, but it’s my truth: being a good steward, preparing a legacy that ensures the next generation of elected officials have what they need to continue providing for our friends and neighbors. We are fiscally sound, with a healthy reserve, we’ve recently completed repurposing our jail into office and training space. We built a new annex and are currently renovating our historic courthouse. We have prepared to expand our landfill and have recently obtained more land to enlarge our cemetery. Last, but not least, as a result of County Energy Transportation Reinvestment Zones grant monies we received, our roads are in good shape for the next wave of oil and wind farm traffic.

**WHAT DO YOU FIND ARE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL METHODS FOR REACHING OUT TO THE RESIDENTS OF YOUR COUNTY TO COMMUNICATE WHAT YOUR OFFICE IS DOING AND WHY IT’S DOING IT?**

Because we are such a small county (population 1,226), I don’t worry too much about disseminating information to our residents. I sit on a church pew or the bleachers with them. They see me in the convenience store. They know I have an open-door policy and they aren’t afraid to pick up the phone and call me at the office and on my cell!

**HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB TO PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE DAY-TO-DAY OF WHAT YOU DO, THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUR OFFICE OR WITH THE WAY COUNTY GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS? ARE THERE ANY COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS YOU HEAR?**

If I had the chance to write a series of short stories, I might be able to accurately portray a day in the life of a county judge, otherwise I would have to say, we wear many hats and have many duties and responsibilities. There are 254 of us fulfilling those duties and more importantly, filling the unique needs of our home counties. I don’t do in a day what my neighboring judges might do. The most common misconception I see is the county judge oversees all elected officials and their employees and nothing could be further from the truth. Elected officials work as a team or in my mind, work best as a team and answer to the voting public.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT YOUR COUNTY?**

The sunsets and the night sky are magazine worthy. The county seat is Garden City, which is a misnomer. It’s not lush and green like one might imagine by the name. Instead it’s rough, stark and vast; I guess that suits me.

**WHEN YOU’RE NOT AT WORK, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? DO YOU HAVE ANY Hobbies OR SOMETHING INTERESTING YOU DO THAT MAY SURPRISE YOUR COLLEAGUES?**

I am a homebody. I am very much an extrovert, but need time to unplug in order to recharge. I like spending time hunting, fishing, reading, cooking and entertaining, but my happy place is in nature. I would rather be at the barn with the animals. There’s something about the livestock that grounds me and fills my cup.
AFTER A LEGISLATIVE SESSION LIKE THIS, DON’T MISS TAC’S LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

The 2017 TAC Legislative Conference is almost here, hot on the heels of one of the most contentious legislative sessions in recent memory. The Legislative Department is prepared to walk you through the good, the bad and the ugly of this session and what it means for county government going forward.

Attendees at this year’s conference, scheduled Aug. 23-25 in Austin, will kick off their experience on Wednesday with a talk on leadership from renowned speaker Rick Rigsby. Then, TAC’s Legislative Department films its 85th legislative session close-out episode of TAC on the Lege, the popular roundtable-style discussion web series featured on TAC’s YouTube channel and Facebook page.

“TAC on the Lege” (1:25 – 2:15 p.m.) and keynote speaker Rick Rigsby’s talk (2:15 – 3:15 p.m.) on leadership will be broadcast live on TAC’s Facebook and YouTube pages for those who are not able to attend.

Covering the Big Issues Counties Face

While the “TAC on the Lege” webcast will cover some of the big issues from the 85th legislative session, Thursday’s breakout sessions get to the meat of the issues important to county government. The sessions will feature experts and key players who will give attendees a more detailed understanding of these key issues.

Choose the topics most relevant to you and customize your conference experience while in Austin. This year’s sessions include:

• Talking Property Taxes
• Community Collaboratives: Bringing Your Community Together for Mental Health Success
• Technology in Courts – The Future of Re:SearchTX
• Surveying Unfunded Mandates
• Working with your County Veteran Service Officer – Identifying Resources
• The State Budget: The County Impact
• Statewide Legislative Exchange
• Criminal Justice Roundup
• Future of Emergency Management Funding
• Crisis Communication and Media Training

Invite Your Legislators

TAC has again formally invited every member of the Texas Legislature to attend this year’s conference, but they’re more likely to attend when county officials personally invite them.

“It pays to connect, too. County officials will be reimbursed for their conference fee if they invite their legislator and have them attend. The full details about this offer can be found at www.county.org/legconference.

“Don’t underestimate the power of a phone call to personally invite your legislators to connect at this conference,” said TAC Legislative Director Paul Sugg.

TAC’s formal invitation for legislators also includes two complimentary registrations and the opportunity to meet privately with county officials in their district. These informal conversations legislators and county officials can have help establish county officials as go-to resources for legislators and help raise awareness of county government concerns and local issues.

“Legislators can rely on county officials as a valuable resource. Counties are where the rubber meets the road on state policy,” Sugg said. “But they cannot know exactly how valuable a resource local officials are unless they have good relationships with them. It’s incumbent upon county officials to make those first steps and build that relationship here.”

Register online at www.county.org/legconference.
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HEALTHY COUNTY SPOTLIGHT: 
SOUTH PLAINS ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS’ WEIGHT WATCHERS SUCCESS STORY 

SPAG WEIGHT WATCHERS GROUP LOSES MORE THAN 300 POUNDS

A single employee at the South Plains Association of Governments (SPAG) joined Weight Watchers on their own in the fall of 2016. By early 2017, this employee had lost over 35 pounds and inspired Tim Pierce, the SPAG Executive Director, to try and offer a Weight Watchers group for SPAG employees.

Weight Watchers requires 15 members in order to hold a meeting at a single location, so once the 15 members were secured (18 of SPAG’s 39 employees confirmed for the first 12-week session) a weekly SPAG Weight Watchers group was formed that meets every Thursday during their lunch hour.

While the initial group of participants varied greatly in motivation and goals, an unexpected and sincere support system began to form among the participants that has since spread to other SPAG employees, even to those that are not participating directly in this program, but who are on their own healthy living journey.

Working together 40 hours a week brought a closeness to the group, and SPAG employees have been very dedicated to encouraging one another in positive ways. For example, if an employee shares that they are having difficulty with starting to exercise or coming up with healthy eating options, there are always several employees lined up with tips and enthusiasm to help them.

When the SPAG Weight Watchers group meets each week, a variety of topics, ranging from eating and cooking tips to exercise and self-control, are discussed. The sharing of struggles and successes has made a huge impact on the success of this group. While 18 SPAG employees began this journey, additional employees signed up for the next 12-week session, and even those not participating in Weight Watchers are beginning, implementing and sharing their own programs of success throughout the office. At one meeting, an employee even shared how being on this Weight Watchers journey had led to their spouse controlling their diabetes better.

Walking challenges between siblings and co-workers, tips on new exercises and recipes to try, and having co-workers encourage and compliment each other on their progress are just a few of the new and exciting things taking place at SPAG as almost two-thirds of the entire staff embarked on this healthy journey either through Weight Watchers (with more than half of the employees) or their own program.

The SPAG Weight Watchers group lost a total of 301.9 pounds in the first 12-week session. Several members have reported improved lab results at their annual checkups and a couple have even reduced or been taken off of prescription medicines. SPAG started their second 12-week session in May and looks forward to continuing these new, healthier habits!
Healthy County Challenge: Colorful Choices

Registration begins on July 31

Registration for the next Healthy County Challenge, Colorful Choices, begins July 31. Unlike the last two challenges, this challenge will not be based on steps but instead will focus on healthy eating.

The goal for Colorful Choices is to eat at least five servings of produce each day, with a minimum of three vegetables. Each serving of vegetables is two points, and a fruit serving is one point. The daily goal is to reach eight points, with an overall goal of 240 points over the challenge timeframe. Participants will log their food by going to the challenge website or the app.

Colorful Choices is a great way to incorporate different fruits and vegetables into a healthy diet. Not sure what to do with all those fruits and vegetables? Participants will receive a daily recipe and tip to help during the challenge.

For more information, visit www.county.org/healthycounty or contact your Wellness Consultant.

Help the Census Bureau Accurately Count Your Community

The U.S. Census Bureau requests help from tribal, state and local governments in the 2020 Census Local Update of Census Addresses program. This program is the only opportunity for governments to verify residential addresses, ensuring a complete and accurate 2020 Census.

The Census Bureau mailed advance notifications about participating in the program to tribal, state and local governments in January 2017. If you did not receive the notification, you may find information about the program on the LUCA website at www.census.gov/geo/partnerships/luca.html.

Invitation letters will be mailed in July 2017 and the final participation materials will be mailed in February 2018. Governments can take the following steps now to prepare:

- Participate in the 2017 Boundary and Annexation Survey, which is the annual update for the legal boundaries and names of all governmental units.
- Start preparing your address list — make sure your list identifies multiunit structures and distinguishes between residential and nonresidential addresses.
- Identify local address sources, such as building permits, local utility records, annexation records and other files.
- Attend one of our workshops to learn about the program.

Participation in the Local Update of Census Addresses program can help ensure a complete and accurate 2020 Census in your community.

Is County Going to the Right Place?

With county officials and employees retiring and switching offices or buildings, TAC wants to make sure that County is getting to the right people and the right places. Is your subscription up-to-date? Is your county receiving too many subscriptions, or too few? Are there employees who are receiving the magazine under previous employees’ subscriptions? Let us know by emailing tacmembership@county.org.
The Conference of the County Investment Academy was held June 19-21 at the Embassy Suites in Frisco. The Academy provides educational programs that help county officials and staff learn how to best manage county financial assets. Thank you to all attendees and committee members who helped make the event a success.

An awards recognition luncheon was held to honor members for their years of service. Membership in the Academy is acquired through completion of the Basics of County Investments Course or completion of the previous TAC County Investment Officer (CIO) Level I course.

This year, the following members were honored for their years of membership:

20-YEAR HONOREES
Hon. Margaret L. McCurry
Treasurer
Kent County
Hon. Dinkie Parman
Treasurer
Hartley County

15-YEAR HONOREES
Hon. Glenna Canada
Treasurer
Randall County
Hon. Linda J. Douglass
Treasurer
Guadalupe County
Hon. Gayla Hawkins
Treasurer
Grayson County
Hon. Denise Janak
Treasurer
San Patricio County
Hon. Rhonda S. Kokena
Treasurer
Calhoun County
Ms. Mendy Nichols
Auditor
Crane County

10-YEAR HONOREES
Hon. David Betancourt
Treasurer
Cameron County
Hon. Ruben Cavazos
Treasurer
Willacy County
Mr. Raymundo Eufracio, CPA
Auditor
Hidalgo County
Ms. Linda Fong
First Assistant County Auditor
Hidalgo County
Ms. Joleen Fregia
Chief Deputy Treasurer
Jefferson County
Hon. Scott B. Hahn
Treasurer
Gray County

5-YEAR HONOREES
Mrs. Jimmel B. Aquino
Financial Administrator
Harris County
Mr. Mike Austin
Director
Harris County
Mr. Frank Bruce
Director of Budget & Planning
Harris County
Hon. Cathy Campbell
Treasurer
Brazoria County
Mr. Shain Carrizal
Deputy Director, Admin. & Finance
Harris County
Hon. Alma Cartwright
Treasurer
Aransas County

Hon. Kim Harris, CPA
Treasurer
Liberty County
Hon. Sean Kennedy
Treasurer
Victoria County
Hon. Vi Malone
Treasurer
Karnes County
Mrs. Amy Perez
Director, Financial Management
Harris County
Hon. Orlando Sanchez
Treasurer
Harris County

Hon. Nancy Coquat
Treasurer
Live Oak County
Mrs. Lisa Davis
Budget Accountant
Nueces County
Mrs. Diana Elizondo
Investment Manager
Harris County
Mr. Tim Finley
CFO
Port of Houston Authority
Mr. Scott P. Grazer
Business Manager
Tarrant County
Mr. E. Lester E. Hare, III
Financial Analyst
Harris County
Hon. Sharon Harper
Treasurer
Upton County
Ms. Gwen Huskey
VP & Controller
Harris County Hospital District
Hon. Laurie Ingram
Treasurer
Bastrop County
Mr. Jeffrey Jackson
Deputy Director - Budget Management
Harris County
Mr. William Jackson
Executive Director/Budget Officer
Harris County
Ms. Raymie Kana
Auditor
Colorado County
TAC WELCOMES NEWLY APPOINTED OFFICIALS

The following county officials were recently appointed to new offices. TAC welcomes them to their new positions and thanks them for their service to county government and Texas residents.

Jesus Garcia
Cameron County Justice of the Peace, Pct. 3, Place 1

Charles Edge
Ellis County Sheriff

Joyce Lindauer
Ellis County Justice of the Peace, Pct. 1

Jimmy Helms
Fannin County Constable, Pct. 2

Chris Acord
Grimes County Justice of the Peace, Pct. 1

Belinda Brownlow
Henderson County Justice of the Peace, Pct. 5

Sonja Huckabee
Hood County Treasurer

Brent Zitterkopf
Howard County Clerk

Carlos Del Moral
Kleberg County Constable, Pct. 3

Bruce Karpowski
Liberty County Commissioner, Pct. 1

Malcolm Watson
Medina County Constable, Pct. 4

Genevie Sheets
Moore County Commissioner, Pct. 2

Nathan Johnson
Real County Sheriff

James Tuck
Taylor County Constable, Pct. 2

Nicholas Chu
Travis County Justice of the Peace, Pct. 5

This list may be incomplete. Please submit new county official appointments to TAC Membership Manager Frank Baca at frankb@county.org.
COVERAGE ENHANCEMENTS
APPROVED BY TAC RMP BOARD

The Texas Association of Counties Risk Management Pool (TAC RMP) Board has approved several coverage enhancements that benefit TAC RMP members in the Property, Public Officials, Law Enforcement and General Liability programs.


“These enhancements provide counties better coverage and are specific to our needs,” said Raymie Kana, TAC RMP Board Chair and Colorado County Auditor.

Here’s a summary of the coverage enhancements approved during the Board’s January and May meetings:

Property Program
- **Flood:** The coverage limit was increased from $5 million to $10 million annual aggregate. For properties located in a Special Hazard Zone, the limit was increased from $1 million to $2.5 million annual aggregate.
- **Property in the Course of Construction:** The coverage limit was increased from $2.5 million to $5 million.
- **Equipment Breakdown:** The coverage limit was increased from $25 million to $50 million.
- **Fine Arts:** Coverage for murals was added.
- **Golf Course Greens and Tees:** Coverage was provided for specified perils with a $1 million sublimit for golf course greens and tees.
- **Automatic Coverage (Newly Acquired):** The coverage limit increased from $2.5 million to $5 million annual aggregate. A 30-day time limit was established for automatic coverage on newly acquired mobile equipment.
- **Earthquake:** The coverage limit was increased from $5 million to $10 million annual aggregate. The time period for continuous earthquakes was broadened from 72 hours to 168 hours.

Public Officials Liability Program
- Punitive damages were incorporated into the main limit of liability. The sublimit was removed. The additional punitive damage endorsement was retired.
- Coverage was expanded for a criminal and malicious act or omission to include defense for the “Named Member” or any “Member” not identified as the perpetrator, provided that the named member did not have knowledge or consent to the malicious or criminal act or omission.
- Coverage was expanded for Cyber Liability and Expense Coverage. The limit of liability was increased from $1 million to $2 million annual aggregate. Cyber Liability Coverage was renamed Privacy or Security Event Liability and Expense Coverage. It now includes coverage from non-cyber type events, such as if a member accidentally throws protected information in the garbage. This coverage was also expanded to include PCI-DSS assessments (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard). This name change was also updated within the cyber exclusion in all other liability coverage documents to remain consistent.

Law Enforcement Liability Program
- Punitive damages were incorporated in the main limit of liability. The coverage has no sublimit and the additional punitive damage endorsement was retired.
- Coverage was expanded for fraud or dishonesty or malicious or criminal act or omission to include defense for the Named Member or any Member not identified as the perpetrator provided that the Named Member did not have knowledge or consent to the malicious or criminal act or omission.

General Liability Program
- The endorsement for Law Enforcement Watercraft was incorporated into the coverage document. It is now an automatic coverage for all members.

EMERGING LEGAL TRENDS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT
REGIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOPS

SESSIONS IN LONGVIEW & HUNTSVILLE

One-day sessions on emerging legal trends in law enforcement are scheduled in Longview Aug. 8 and Huntsville Aug. 10.

Sheriffs, chief deputies, constables, jail administrators, jail staff and other ranks with supervisory oversight, as well as risk managers are encouraged to attend these workshops. Members of the Texas Association of Counties Risk Management Pool’s (TAC RMP) Law Enforcement Liability program can attend at no cost. Additional information about the specific topics to be covered can be found at the website.

Seating is limited. Register online at www.county.org/LEtrends. The last day to register is Aug. 2.

These are the final two of four trainings held this summer and sponsored by TAC RMP and the Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool. They will be presented by attorney and former police officer Jack Ryan. Ryan is a graduate of Suffolk University Law School and has 20 years of experience as a police officer with the Providence Police Department, Providence, RI. He is also co-director of the Legal & Liability Risk Management Institute (LLRMI). TAC RMP partners with LLRMI to deliver programs to TAC RMP members participating in the Law Enforcement Liability Program.

Presenter Jack Ryan, co-director of the Legal & Liability Risk Management Institute
STRONGER CONNECTIONS, STRONGER COUNTIES.

Connect, Learn and Exchange with TAC Online

Join us online and benefit from the extensive legal and legislative resources, educational opportunities, county news and best practices, essential data, and invaluable information TAC’s website and online communities offer to leaders across the state like you.

facebook.com/TexasCounties
twitter.com/TexasCounties
instagram.com/TexasCounties
youtube.com/TexasCountiesVideo
Hats Off to Texas Counties
Don a Hat and Post a Pic!

County officials and staff across the state put on ball caps with the Texas Counties Deliver logo and posted selfies on social media during April and May for the Hats Off to Texas Counties challenge.

County officials in more than 70 counties have already participated. TAC shared their photos on its Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

It’s not too late to get your county on the leader board. TAC sent hats to your county judge’s office in mid-April. If you haven’t already, pick up a hat, put it on and post a pic!

Take pictures out on the job or meeting with folks in your community, at work serving the public and with other county officials. Post the photos to Facebook and other social media sites to let everyone know that Texas Counties Deliver. Use the hashtags #TexasCountiesDeliver and #HatsOff2TexasCounties on Twitter and Instagram.

Thanks to all who have participated so far. Here are just a few!

Shackelford County Commissioner Steve Riley.

Willacy County Delivers! Left to Right: Maintenance Supervisor Ruben Rios, Commissioner Eduardo Gonzales, Justice of the Peace Yesenia Rosas, Judge’s Administrative Assistant Cassie Cantu, County Judge Aurelio Guerra, County Building Inspector Amos Prado, Commissioner Oscar De Luna.

(Facing page) Teddy, wearing Tax Assessor-Collector Sandra Burns’ Texas Counties Deliver hat, is working doggedly at the Kenedy County Tax Office.
Brazoria County Judge Matt Sebesta and Justice of the Peace Richard Davis in the community of Danbury.

Dallam County Judge Wes Ritchey and Hartley County Judge Ronnie Gordon at the Frank Phillips College groundbreaking.

Shackelford County Justice of the Peace James Breeden hams it up as Shackelford County Treasurer Tammy Brown and Shackelford County and District Clerk Cheri Hawkins pretend not to notice.

Live Oak County Judge Jim Huff and his administrative assistant Janie Armstrong.
Hats off to Texas Counties from Daniel Mccey, Tosha Galvan, and Chet Garner of “The Daytripper” crew who’ve helped create our Texas Counties Deliver video series.

Jackson County Tax Assessor-Collector Monica Foster walks a customer out in style, and grabs a selfie to top it off.

Karnes County Clerk Carol Swize, Commissioner Shelby Dupnik and Sheriff Dwayne Villanueva say hats off!

Arturo Guajardo Jr., Hidalgo County Clerk celebrates County Government month! He visited the County Clerk’s Records Management & Recycle Center with Deputy Clerk Fabian Pedraza.
Hutchinson County Commissioners’ Court joined the “Hats Off” challenge. Front row (left to right): Commissioner Red Isbell and Commissioner Larry Coffman. Back row (left to right): Commissioner Eddie Whittington, County Clerk Jan Barnes, Commissioner Jerry Hefner, Judge Cindy Irwin.

Oldham County Sheriff Brent Warden (front) and Deputy Taner Blackburn pose for a quick picture and to say hats off to the officials and employees who work hard for the citizens of all 254 counties.

Colorado County EMS is a perfect example of how county government can be there for you on what could possibly be your worst day. These highly skilled employees serve some 975 square miles, 24/7, 365 days a year! Hats off to Guy Minshall, paramedic; Clinical Manager Kaylene Moeller, EMT intermediate; Justin Laslie, EMT basic.
Hats off to the Chambers County Sheriff’s Office employees for organizing another successful Adopt-A-Beach environmental clean-up, showing the many ways Texas counties deliver for their communities.

Hats off to Johnson County! (left to right)
IT Director Dan Milam
Commissioner, Prec. #1 Rick Bailey
Sheriff Adam King
County Attorney Bill Moore
Personnel Director Randy Gillespie
County Judge Roger Harmon
Public Works Director David Disheroon
County Clerk Becky Ivey
Commissioner, Prec. #3 Jerry Stringer
Admin Assistant to County Judge Alison Hitchcock
County Auditor Kirk Kirkpatrick
Budget Coordinator Rexann Knowles
Commissioner, Prec. #4 Larry Woolley
Purchasing Agent Ralph McBroom
Commissioner, Prec. #2 Kenny Howell
Brazoria County Commissioners’ Court, along with Brazoria County Clerk and TAC President Joyce Hudman, showing their support for National County Government Month by wearing their Texas Counties Deliver hats! Looking good in Brazoria County! (left to right): Commissioner David Linder, Commissioner Stacy Adams, County Judge Matt Sebesta Jr., County Clerk and TAC President Joyce Hudman, Commissioner Donald “Dude” Payne, Commissioner Ryan Cade.

Colorado County Judge Ty Prause’s Administrative Assistant, Susan Rogers, has been serving the county for more than 40 years! Hats off to Susan!

In recognition of National County Government Month, Newton County officials donned their caps declaring, “Texas Counties Deliver.” From left to right: Newton County Judge Paul Price, Commissioners Bill Fuller, Gary Fomby, and Thomas Gill.

Renee Couch, Comal County Treasurer; Mary Ayala, Cash Management Administrator; Cecily Chappell, Payroll Administrator.
Hats off to Crockett County! Here are just a few of the elected officials and staff members of the clerk’s office, tax office, auditor’s office, JP’s office, treasurer’s office and county attorney’s office. Back row (left to right): Shio Tambunga, Sarah Stewart, Mel Ybarra, Dolores Ramirez, Ana Knaack, Christy Cruz, Elaine Harp, Crockett County & District Clerk Ninfa Preddy, Crockett County Tax Collector Michelle Medley, Melanie Williams, Leah Contreras; Front row (left to right): Juanita Mendez, Lorena Renteria, Crockett County Justice of the Peace Evelyn Kerbow, 112th District Attorney Laurie English, Angelina Morrow.

Hats off to some of Bastrop County’s elected officials in commissioners court. Front row (left to right): County Clerk Rose Pietsch, Treasurer Laurie Ingram Back row (left to right): Commissioners Mark Meuth and Clara Beckett, Judge Paul Pape, Commissioners Mel Hamner and Bubba Snowden.
County officials gathered at the Capitol to meet with legislators and enjoy BBQ.

County officials celebrated County Government Day at the Capitol in May by being of service, feeding legislators and Capitol staff. County officials came from across the state to join their legislators, legislative staff and TAC staff for a day of conversation, education and delicious barbecue.

“It was a great time of fellowship, and we’re grateful for all of our friends at the Capitol who could join us and participate in the celebration,” said TAC Legislative Director Paul Sugg.

The day kicked off with county officials making visits to their legislators’ offices, letting them know how Texas counties deliver, and touring the Capitol before heading to the House and Senate chambers.

In conjunction with the day’s events, both chambers of the Legislature recognized the role county government plays every day in the lives of Texans and honored county officials from all 254 counties. Sen. Kel Seliger and Rep. Garnet Coleman each read resolutions commemorating the day as County Government Day at the Capitol.

County officials then donned aprons and served legislators, staffers and Capitol employees some mighty fine Texas barbecue from Louie Mueller’s in Taylor, and enjoyed good conversation.

Capitol guests were also treated to a display flanking the entrance to the barbecue luncheon that featured 8-foot tall banners highlighting TAC’s 2016 Best Practices Awards winners, infographics showing some of the many services counties deliver each day, and a video kiosk where guests could watch videos from the Texas Counties Deliver series.

A special thanks to the county officials who participated and contributed to making this year’s County Government Day a success!
(1) Chambers County Clerk Heather Hawthorne (left) and Cherokee County Commissioner Byron Underwood (right) with Rep. Travis Clardy. (2) It was a full house in the Capitol Extension. Legislators, staffers and county officials enjoyed good conversation and great BBQ from Louie Muller’s. (3) (Left to right) State Representatives Lyle Larson, Cole Hefner, John Cyrier and Andrew Murr. (4) Garza County Judge Lee Norman (right) serving Regan Elmer (left), Chief of Staff for Rep. Andrew Murr, former Kimble County judge. (5) Travis County Constable Carlos B. Lopez. (6) (Left to right) Rockwall County Justice of the Peace Mark Russo, Falls County Judge Jay Elliott, Erath County Commissioner Joe Brown, Limestone County Sheriff Dennis Wilson, Jefferson County Commissioner Everette “Bo” Alfred, Medina County Judge Chris Schuchart, and Schleicher County Judge Charlie Bradley. (7) Texas Counties Delivers videos — created in partnership with Chet Gardner of PBS’ “The Day Tripper” — entertained and educated visitors all week. (8) Capitol staff wait in line for the wonderful Louie Mueller BBQ. The line was flanked on both sides by infographics explaining the importance of county government and highlighting the 2016 Best Practices award winners.
COUNTY MANAGEMENT & RISK CONFERENCE
RESOURCES AND SOLUTIONS FOR COUNTIES

WORKING A CRIME SCENE:
TIPS FOR SECURING, PRESERVING AND COLLECTING EVIDENCE

Counties that properly secure, preserve and collect evidence as it relates to use of force or custodial death investigations in their correctional facilities may reduce liabilities, according to Gary Henderson, Texas Association of Counties Law Enforcement Consultant.

Henderson gave tips for doing so in his presentation, “Preserving Evidence through Post-Incident Investigation,” which he delivered during the County Management and Risk Conference, held April 5-7 in San Marcos.

Henderson has decades of experience in law enforcement. In addition to serving as Hemphill County sheriff from 2005-2011, he worked for 31 years for the Texas Department of Public Safety as a Texas Ranger and Texas Ranger sergeant. He also served as an investigator for the 31st and 223rd District Attorney’s Office and on then-Gov. George W. Bush’s protective detail.

His presentation included several important tips for working crime scenes. Here are a few key takeaways:

**Securing Evidence at a Jail Death**

Important to-dos: secure the video from the jail; isolate phone calls made by the inmate; photograph the area without disturbing the scene; document whether the outside door to the cell block is locked; determine if the inner door to the cell is locked; find documentation of the last jail check; determine if the lights were on or off; and determine the room temperature at the time of the incident.
SECURING AND PROTECTING THE CRIME SCENE

- The first officer on the scene should remove any threat to the responding officers and inmates.
- Secure the crime scene by ensuring that no one enters it until the lead investigator arrives. The only exception would be for the preservation of life. Realize that emergency medical services personnel may alter the crime scene.
- Determine to which extent the scene has thus far been protected.
- Set up an entry/exit log to ensure adequate scene security.
- Keep out unauthorized personnel.
- Use a disposable or digital camera to photograph the scene as it initially appears. Take photographs from multiple perspectives including overview photos of the whole scene, midrange photos and close-up photos. “Our juries are very visual today,” Henderson said. Take photos to illustrate details that may be presented in a trial.
- Watch where you step as you examine the scene and remember - you will always take something into the scene and take something out. You might track something in or out on the soles of your shoes, or your clothes drop fibers on the scene.
- It is critical to protect the integrity of the crime scene. “Give away the integrity of your crime scene and you will not get it back,” Henderson said.

INVESTIGATING THE CRIME SCENE

- Be sure your crime scene search is a planned and coordinated legal search to locate physical evidence or witnesses to the crime under investigation. If the search isn’t legally conducted, “We might as well not conduct one at all,” Henderson said. “We’re going to lose all the evidence and all of our effort goes for nothing.”
- A good search determines what happened and whether a crime was even committed. “Things are not always what they appear to be,” Henderson said. “I’ve been in a lot of situations where things appeared to be a crime, but it was actually a natural cause (death).”
- Search to determine where the crime was committed. “Where you find the body is not always where the crime was committed,” he said.
- Use your common sense. Aim to answer who, what, when, where, why and how. “If you answer those questions in any situation you’re probably going to be fairly successful,” Henderson said. “It’s not that easy, but if you can get them all answered you are well on your way to a successful investigation.”
- Without a good crime scene investigation, you likely won’t have a (criminal) case or a conclusion to whatever investigation you’re doing (such as a suicide investigation).
- Good crime scene investigations provide you with the knowledge to determine if the suspect and witnesses are telling the truth.
- Take your time. Spend many hours on the investigation. Keep revisiting the scene with fresh eyes. “Walk, do not run,” Henderson said. “What you see is not always what you get. Don’t take the scene at face value. Keep an open mind. Look for what you do not see. Always question yourself.”
- Be sure to look up, down and all around the scene for evidence.
- Take extensive notes, he said. “Don’t rely upon your memory.”
- Does the crime scene match the crime? Pay attention to blood flow and post mortem lividity, determine if the body has been moved and think about what is missing from the scene.
- Does the crime scene match what your suspect and witnesses are telling you? Repeatedly interview people related to the situation. See if their responses are the same. If they are lying, their stories may change upon retelling.
- If you have a suspect or witness who is following you around, they may have something to hide. Your witness might turn out to be your suspect.

PRESERVING AND COLLECTING ITEMS OF EVIDENCE

- Do not alter the crime scene. “If you’ve altered it, you must explain it,” Henderson said. “What you do today may have to be explained in court a year from now, or maybe 29 years later.”
- Don’t touch the body. Let the medical examiner do all examinations of the body.
- Photograph any notes left behind and then preserve them for fingerprinting. Don’t contaminate such evidence with your fingerprints.
- Always wear gloves. “Change gloves after each incident where you handle a piece of evidence,” Henderson said. “It preserves the integrity of the scene.”
- Don’t undo knots. Photograph them and then cut them so they can be kept for evidence.
- Process one piece of evidence at a time. “Photograph it, identify it, collect it,” he said. “Tag it as a piece of evidence before moving on. Put the date, time, officer’s initials and where the evidence was recovered.”
- Any evidence with potential DNA value must be placed in a paper bag, instead of plastic, so it won’t degrade. Don’t place more than one piece of evidence in a bag.
- Create an evidence log for notes, photographs, etc. “Remember, you only have one chance to do it right,” Henderson said in conclusion. “You’re going to have 12 to 15 or 24 hours to work that scene, but a defense attorney has two years to tear it apart. You only get one shot at it. Let’s do it with integrity and with hard work.”
Musculoskeletal health issues, depression and stress frequently occur together and are major issues within county employee populations. These three issues are often overlooked or are not taken seriously because they seem unavoidable, are surrounded by myths and misperceptions, and some people are ignorant of the health consequences they can cause. When treatment for these issues is not pursued, this often results in the problem getting worse, in turn leading to higher-cost treatment.

MUSCULOSKELETAL
Musculoskeletal issues are the second top cost driver in the TAC Health and Employee Benefits Pool at $20 million, with cancer being the top cost driver. Examples of musculoskeletal issues include low back pain, neck pain, arthritis and fibromyalgia, broken bones, sprains, joint replacements, and chronic pain. According to the the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Health Assessment results, 40 percent of county employees suffer from back pain.

Counties and their employees could save a significant amount of money and lower risk if they focused on alternative, soft-tissue treatments first, and saved traditional medical treatment like drugs and surgery as the last resort. Non-traditional treatments include soft-tissue treatments like Airrosti, massage, and physical therapy, weight loss, posture/structure correction, chiropractic, physical activity, a change in diet, supplements and most importantly, finding the root cause of the issue. Due to the common overlap of pain with depression or stress, many cases of musculoskeletal issues could be more effectively treated if the stress or depression were addressed along with the physical problem.

DEPRESSION
Depression is a common issue that affects mood, attitude, work and family. It can be biochemical, situational or both. Symptoms may include feeling helpless, hopeless or worthless, weight loss or weight gain, fatigue, insomnia or hypersomnia, or thoughts of death or suicide. There are many myths that surround depression, like something is wrong with the patient or they can just snap out of it.

The optimal solution for depression includes making a change in brain chemistry, as a result of physical activity, better nourishment and or medication. Counseling and therapy can also help, as well as learning skills that reduce situational depression.

STRESS
Surprisingly, stress can be both good (eustress) and bad (distress). Eustress is a positive form of stress having beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance, and emotional well-being. Exercise is an example of eustress. Distress causes pain or suffering that affects the body and the mind. Financial issues, occupational stress, a failing marriage and traffic are all examples of distress.

Some experts estimate that 80 percent of all doctor’s visits are caused by stress. This means that the stress has manifested as a physical symptom, and the patient is going to the doctor to help alleviate the physical symptom. However, the root cause in not a physical issue, but the underlying stress.

Immediate stress, also known as
acute stress, is very intense, but short-lived. To find relief during these short moments, look at something blue or green. These colors have been shown to help the body release stress. Smelling something nice, muscle relaxation, chanting and sweets (just a small taste) are all things that can also help relieve immediate stress.

Chronic stress, which occurs for a longer period of time, requires different solutions. It is important to identify the source of the stress. Sometimes the source of stress is within personal control, and other times it might be beyond personal control. Time management, money management, relationship skills, parenting and setting boundaries are skills that can be learned to proactively reduce sources of stress within our control. Massage, prayer, meditation, exercise, pets, aromatherapy, music therapy, going to the mountains or the ocean are examples of activities that can help induce a relaxation response to counteract stresses that are beyond our control.

**TREATMENTS THAT POSITIVELY AFFECT ALL THREE ISSUES**

There are some things that will help with all three issues. Healthier lifestyle choices, like increasing physical activity and making better food choices, can help relieve musculoskeletal issues, depression and stress. Using food as medicine, and avoiding certain foods like grains, dairy, and artificial sweeteners can help change the biochemistry shared by stress, depression, musculoskeletal issues and chronic pain. Sufficient, high quality sleep is also extremely important to the body, and a lack of sleep can exasperate all three issues.

**RESOURCES**

TAC Health and Employee Benefits Pool members have access to Healthy County powered by Provant, which provides fitness tracking, challenges, nutrition tracking, and healthy lifestyle workshops, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas specific back pain and depression coaching programs, a gym discount program, and online courses. Well on Target provides lifestyle management and stress management courses. Weight Watchers also is available to Pool members. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas app is available for download and can help find Airrosti, physical therapy and chiropractic providers, as well as counselors, therapists, and psychiatrists in your area. ★

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The 7 Deadly Sins of Retaliation

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC) website, “Retaliation is the most frequently alleged basis of discrimination in the federal sector and most common discrimination finding in federal sector cases.” Human Resources Consultant Terri Swain spoke at the County Management and Risk Conference (CMRC) about how counties can avoid such claims against them by county employees. If a county is found guilty of retaliation, it can cost lots of money and time—preventing such a claim in the first place is vital.

According to Swain “Nothing will get the EEOC’s attention quicker than a discrimination claim.” Employee discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability or equal pay can have a chilling effect and should be taken seriously, she said. Retaliation claims occur when a person charges that they were mistreated after filing an initial discrimination charge. For example, if an employee files a claim of discrimination by their boss, then their boss demotes them — they can claim retaliation, and the EEOC would likely agree.

When asked how many people in the room of nearly 50 people responded to an EEOC charge in the past five years, almost 10 people raised a hand. According to Swain, in 2016 there were 42,018 retaliation charges in the U.S., which was 46 percent of all discrimination charges. “Often the original case was without merit,” Swain said, “but the retaliation sticks.”

As a way to lessen claims of retaliation among county employees, Swain offered “7 DEADLY SINS OF RETALIATION:"

1. Thou Shall Not Take Adverse Action Because of a Complaint
   “Do not fire, demote, harass or discipline any employee because they filed a complaint, whether internally or externally,” Swain said. This includes action against any witnesses to the complaint, or close associates like a spouse or friend of the employee filing the claim.

2. Thou Shall Watch Your Timing
   Before disciplining an employee who has filed a complaint, consider the timing. How long ago was their complaint filed—was it fairly recent? Also, consider if there is any connection between the complaint and current disciplinary action. Lastly, ask if the disciplinary action would have been taken absent the complaint.

3. Thou Shall Not Investigate and Be Done
   Always circle back with the complainant and witnesses regularly and monitor the climate of the workplace.

4. Thou Shall Not Ignore the Squeaky Wheel
   The squeaky wheels are often just waiting to cause trouble, hoping their complaints are ignored and they can file a claim. “Don’t take the bait by ignoring any complaint,” Swain said. But also, don’t stop dealing with their performance issues if they arise.

5. Thou Shall Not Ignore Performance Problems
   Always separated performance issues from discrimination claims, but be sure to always deal with performance issues immediately. Lack of action may lead to feelings of discrimination.

6. Thou Shall Not Get Rid of the Problem
   Firing an employee who has filed a discrimination charge will undoubtedly lead to a retaliation claim — one that will likely be found in the employee’s favor.

7. Thou Shall Have a Meaningful Complaint Process
   Swain believes that organizations that deal with all employee complaints with respect avoid retaliation claims more frequently than those without a plan. It is always better to prevent an issue than defend against a retaliation claim.

Swain offered several best practices for investigating complaints internally.

- Start with an investigative plan of who to talk to (claimant, witnesses, etc.) and other evidence needed, such as emails, memos and other communications relevant to the claim.
- Finish with a written report. Document everything and compile it into one final, written report.
- Be neutral or seek outside help to conduct the investigation if you are the subject of the complaint.
- Take immediate action and document any delays in the investigation.
- Follow up frequently to speed up the claim and get to a resolution as soon as possible.
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Counties, Distinctly Texas

How Did We Get to 254 Counties?

What’s the difference between your city, state and county government?

And many more!

Texas Association of Counties
Today’s advancing technology provides many new tools to accomplish day-to-day tasks — both personal and professional — including more efficient banking, data management and security, just to name a few. However, most technological advances also come with downsides. With each new tool, there’s the chance that someone may use it to their advantage at the cost of unsuspecting victims.

There are many ways to fall victim to cyberattacks that result in severe losses, according to Louis L. Barton (above), executive vice president and director of operational risk management with Frost Bank. But there are also ways to protect yourself.

Barton spoke on the last day of the County Management and Risk Conference (CMRC), held April 5-7 in San Marcos, about myriad cyber dangers and how to avoid them. He noted that some of the serious consequences of cybercrimes include loss of funds, loss of data, damage to your reputation, threats to your physical safety and potential legal problems. Learning to spot a potential threat before it affects you or your county is the key to staying safe.

**SKIM AND SHIM**

Skimmers are devices inserted into ATMs and Point of Service machines (POS) — the credit card readers at store checkouts — with no need to access its internal components. When a user inserts their credit or debit card, the device reads the magnetic stripe on the card, capturing its data. Criminals can install a skimmer in as little as three seconds, said Barton. Once they have your data, they can use the information to quickly run up your credit card charges or empty your bank account.

So, what can one do to avoid this? Pay closer attention when using the POSs at stores. While they are often made to look very much like the real thing, you can tell a fake by trying to lift off the faceplate. If it is fake, it will come right off.

The most important thing to do is keep an eye on your financial accounts. “Check your bank statement regularly to catch any irregularities,” said Barton. Most banks will work with you to restore funds if you become a skimmer victim.

**WI-FI**

Barton asked the crowd “Have you ever used free Wi-Fi?” Naturally, most of the hands in the room went up. Who doesn’t want to take advantage of free Wi-Fi — whether it be at a hotel, coffee shop or mall? If you do, Barton said, be aware that it may cost you.

There are several things to consider. First — is the Wi-Fi hot spot real? Criminals can set up fake hot spots. Barton told a story of a research group that was testing the general public’s trust in free Wi-Fi in New York City. They set up a hot spot that allowed users 24-hour access for just $1.

Within hours, thousands of people had entered their credit card information to take advantage of the hot spot. If the tester had been malicious, they would have been able to
steal hundreds of thousands of dollars without detection in no time. Barton suggests never giving out credit card information to a hot spot you do not know.

But what if you do know the network and verify it is safe — for example a Holiday Inn's free wireless? There is still a danger of hackers getting into the network. Barton suggests that if you use a free Wi-Fi network, do not access any of your critical information — like bank accounts and data files. Hackers may be able to record your keystrokes.

Lastly, for home and office Wi-Fi networks, Barton suggests contacting your service provider to help configure the router to ensure it is as safe as possible from outside hackers. Notice the "safe as possible"; it is nearly impossible to be 100 percent safe. Because of that, vigilance is also critical. Change passwords regularly, turn off auto connect on your devices and use a hot spot protector.

MALWARE

“Ransomware is a serious security threat that has data-kidnapping capabilities. It limits access to files or system functions or even renders systems totally useless. Then it forces victims to pay a ransom to regain access to their files/systems,” Barton said. Often the malware is deployed when a link is clicked or attachment opened from an email. Once the link is clicked the malware launches, taking over the user’s computer. There are a couple of motives for a malware attack — to steal data to sell or to demand a ransom. “They seize control and then say, ‘Pay up or we’ll breach your data and you’ll have to pay a huge fine,’” said Barton.

The easiest way to avoid malware is to never click on a link or open an attachment within an email that looks even remotely suspicious. If it is not entirely clear that it is from a reliable source, DO NOT CLICK. There are also some new tools available to help prevent ransomware attacks, like RanSim — a software that tests network defenses against these scenarios. Barton also suggests always using antivirus software and updating regularly.

TABLETS AND SMARTPHONES

Tablets and smartphones can also be targets of malware via apps. Cybercriminals have used apps to access data on these devices by adding malware to apps. “Over 700 million Android smartphones contain a secret ‘backdoor’ that surreptitiously sends all your text messages, call log, contact list, location history and app data to China every 72 hours,” said Barton.

Barton recommends getting apps from trusted sources like the Apple Store and Google Play, never from search engines. Android phones and tablets are the primary targets of malware, so consider Sophos Mobile Security for Android devices, Barton said.

CYBERATTACKS

There are many different ways cybercriminals can launch a cyberattack. They can render a website inoperable, thus making it unavailable to users, by flooding the site with superfluous requests that overload the system. For advice on avoiding such a scenario, “Discuss with a trusted computing consultant or internet service provider,” said Barton.

Criminals also use the phishing tactic to defraud you of financial information by posing as a legitimate company. “Always avoid clicking links or opening attachments in emails not expected,” said Barton. This also avoids unleashing malware onto your computer or network as mentioned previously. Also, Barton adds, beware of pop-up windows while online — never click on a pop-up link. Finally, as previously mentioned, protect all devices with firewalls, spam filters and anti-virus software.

KEY TAKEAWAYS TO STAY SAFE

While there are many risks, the constant evolution of technology provides more good than bad. The important takeaways from Barton’s presentation are to use common sense, take advantage of security tools to protect devices, stay alert to potential dangers and keep a close eye on your accounts. ★

HAS MY PHONE BEEN HACKED?

Several red flags may point to a hacked device. If malware is suspected, take the device to an IT professional or the data service provider for cleaning.

- Is the phone receiving weird text messages with foreign languages or strange symbols? It might be hacked.
- Is the battery draining extremely fast? It might be hacked.
- Does the phone bill have strange or unknown charges? It might be hacked.
- Does the call log show any unfamiliar international calls? It might be hacked.
- Are apps not opening properly on the device when trying to use them? It might be hacked.

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The County Best Practices Awards Program recognizes accomplishments and best practices in county government. The 2016 winners will be highlighted throughout 2017 in County magazine.

Learn more about the winners at www.county.org/bestpractices.

**WINNERS:**

**Bexar County:** New tax payment plan available for seniors, disabled citizens and disabled veterans

Bexar County officials realized some residents had difficulty paying their property taxes on an annual basis. To help them pay their taxes while avoiding financial penalties and interest, the county created a 10-month payment plan for seniors, disabled citizens and disabled veterans.

TAC has awarded Bexar County a 2016 County Best Practices Award in recognition of this innovative program.

The county devised a payment plan that spreads tax payments out over 10 months, from October to July. To launch the plan, the Bexar County Tax Assessor-Collector Albert Uresti and staff spoke around the county, informing citizens in the targeted groups, and got the word out on English and Spanish language media channels.

“Bexar County studied the tax codes to create the only 10-month property tax payment program in the state,” said TAC Executive Director Gene Terry. “We hope this award will inspire other counties to follow suit with their own initiatives.”

**Williamson County’s** new, same-day appointments at Tax Assessor-Collector’s Office reduce customers’ wait times

The Williamson County population boom caused growing lines at the Tax Assessor-Collector’s Office. Often, the wait was over an hour and a half. To address this, Williamson County created Same-Day Appointments, which allows residents to schedule their appointments online and avoid the queue.
3 URBAN COUNTIES EARN BEST PRACTICES AWARD

TAC has awarded Williamson County a 2016 County Best Practices Award in recognition of this innovative program.

Scheduling a same-day appointment for specific services — such as vehicle registration renewal, title changes or property tax payments — has reduced wait times to less than four minutes. More than 3,200 customers have used the online service in less than a year. Williamson County also posts live wait times online to let residents know what to expect.

“Williamson County’s program has reduced wait times by 80 percent,” said TAC Executive Director Gene Terry.

El Paso County’s collaborative initiative limits filing of fraudulent documents

A
fter El Paso County Official Public Records staff noticed an increase in the number of fraudulent liens and fraudulent property records filed with the county, county offices collaborated with state and federal law enforcement to prevent them.

TAC has awarded El Paso County a 2016 County Best Practices Award in recognition of this innovative program.

The filings were attributed to “sovereign citizens,” individuals who believe that federal, state, and local governments operate illegally. The fraudulent liens filed with the county were made as a form of threat and harassment.

A collaborative effort between the county attorney’s office, the county clerk’s office, state and federal law enforcement, and a designated state district court created a systemic solution that addressed such sovereign filings. The county clerk may not reject offered documents without cause, so the county established a process to provisionally receive the offer and ask the filer to return in 10 days. During that time, experienced senior staff and the county attorney review the document to confirm its validity.

“These records are at the foundation of an orderly society, and this program maintains that order so vital to our way of life,” said TAC Executive Director Gene Terry.
A LIFETIME OF CHANGES

In searching about for a topic, and being in a reflective mood after the regular legislative session ended, the idea popped into my head to look at how each of the counties have changed over time. One of the easiest and most revealing ways to investigate what changes have occurred is to look at the change in population over an extended period.

Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau released their county population estimates for 2016, which gives us the ending year of our time period. Then, articles were published online recently discussing the impact of the growing U.S. (oil) rig count on petroleum prices. 1 Texas has experienced numerous oil booms and busts, most recently centered on shale plays like the Eagle Ford in South Texas. Since much of our economy is driven by the oil industry, which largely insulated the state from the ill effects of the recent Great Recession, 1970 seems like a good starting point.

Since 1970, the state has also weathered numerous ups and downs like that decade’s oil crisis, which began when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) declared an oil embargo in 1973. 2 The higher prices caused Texas to experience an economic boom. That ended in 1986, when prices came crashing down, 3 followed by 1989’s savings and loan crisis. 4

There was a brief respite before the dot-com boom of the late 1990’s that turned into the dot-com bust of 2000-2002. 5 More recently, the state fairied reasonably well through the Great Recession, which officially lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, 6 ending just about the time the fracking boom was taking off.

Through all of those economic ups and downs, the state population grew. In 1970, almost 11.2 million people called Texas home. By the 2010 census, that number grew to more than 25.1 million and is estimated at 27,862,596 as of July 1, 2016. A population increase of more than 158 percent can be hard to get your head around.

Here’s one way to think about it. The Bureau estimates the population of
Houston at just under 2.1 million as of 2016. If we removed the equivalent of eight cities the size of present day Houston, the population of the state would be slightly less than it was in 1970. Prefer to use Dallas? You would have to remove the equivalent of almost 14 cities the size of present day Dallas to get the state back to its 1970 population. Those are some eye-opening statistics.

And they might lead anyone to believe the growth occurred across the state, however the map on the previous page shows how inaccurate that assumption is.

As the green highlighted counties reveal, most of the growth was limited to the eastern two thirds of the state — specifically to the counties around Houston, Dallas and San Antonio-Austin, although the border counties also did fairly well. But the blue reveals that many of our western counties, particularly in and near the Panhandle, lost population from 1970 to 2016.

Of course, looking at the overall change over an extended period of time can hide much of the detail. For example, the graph above shows the changing population of Clay County by census from 1850 to 2010.

Clay County was created by the Legislature in 1857, but not organized until 1860 when it had a population of 109. The Civil War interrupted development, and the 1870 census found no one living in the county; it was later re-organized in 1873. The n/a designations indicate that either the county did not officially exist as in 1850 or had no population at the time of the census.

For several decades after the Civil War ended, Clay County grew at a good pace, but then went into a decline until the 1970’s. More recently, the county grew for several consecutive decades, and then again lost population from 2000 to 2010. On the map, the county shows up in green since it remained well above its 1970 population as of 2016 (10,193 versus 8,079).

While many counties have experienced similar increases and decreases, some, like Harris County, have only seen growth. To see a similar graphic for Harris and other counties, go online to TAC’s County Profiles (www.txcip.org/tac/census/CountyProfiles.php) and select the county to open its profile. On the profile page, click on the History link.

The County Information Resources Agency (CIRA) services more than 140 counties and local governments in Texas by providing technology services and resources including:

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- County management of website content

For more information on CIRA, visit www.cira.state.tx.us

www.cira.state.tx.us
(800) 456-5974
Note: More information regarding events can be found online via the TAC Education Calendar, www.county.org/calendar.

**JULY 2017**

11, Emerging Legal Trends in Law Enforcement Workshop  
Waxahachie Civic Center, 2000 Civic Center Ln., Waxahachie. For more information, contact your Law Enforcement Consultant at (800) 456-5974.

13, Emerging Legal Trends in Law Enforcement Workshop  
Abilene Civic Center, 100 N. 6th St., Abilene. For more information contact your Law Enforcement Consultant at (800) 456-5974.

21-24, NACo Annual Conference and Exposition  
Columbus Convention Center, 400 N. High St., Columbus, (614) 877-0084. For more information contact NACo at (202) 393-6226.

24-25, Impaired Driving Symposium  
Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa, 575 Hyatt Lost Pines Rd., Bastrop, (512) 308-1234. For more information, contact Laura Tolin at (800) 456-5974.

29-1, 139th Annual Sheriffs’ Training Conference & Expo  
Gaylord Texas Grapevine Resort, 1501 Gaylord Trl., Grapevine, (817) 778-2000. For more information contact the Sheriffs’ Association of Texas at (512) 445-5888.

**AUGUST 2017**

2, TAC Regional Pool Workshop  
Sheraton Georgetown Texas Hotel & Conference Center, 1101 Woodlawn Ave., Georgetown, (737) 444-2700. For more information, contact Ashley Royer or Amy Lawson at (800) 456-5974.

8, Emerging Legal Trends in Law Enforcement Workshop  
Maude Cobb Convention & Activity Center, 100 Grand Blvd., Longview. For more information, please contact your Law Enforcement Consultant at (800) 456-5974.

10, Emerging Legal Trends in Law Enforcement Workshop  
Walker County Storm Shelter - Veterans Complex, 45 State Hwy 75 North, Huntsville. For more information, please contact your Law Enforcement Consultant at (800) 456-5974.

23-25, TAC Legislative Conference  
Hilton Austin Hotel, 500 E. 4th St., Austin, (512) 482-8000. For more information, contact Haley Click at (800) 456-5974.

**SEPTEMBER 2017**

6, TAC Regional Pool Workshop  
Omni Corpus Christi Hotel, 900 N. Shoreline Blvd., Corpus Christi, (361) 887-1600. For more information, contact Ashley Royer or Amy Lawson at (800) 456-5974.

7, Fall Panhandle County Judges and Commissioners Association Conference  
Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, 6500 Amarillo Blvd. W., Amarillo, (806) 677-5600. For more information contact Michele Ewerz at (800) 456-5974.

11-14, 69th Annual County Treasurers’ Association of Texas Conference  
Dallas/Addison Marriott Quorum by the Galleria, 14901 Dallas Parkway, Dallas, (972) 661-2800. For more information contact Deanna Auert at (800) 456-5974.

14-16, Envision 2017  
Omni Dallas Hotel, 2001 Flora St., Dallas, (214) 496-8500. For more information contact Michelle Ewerz at (800) 456-5974.

17-20, Annual Texas Association of County Auditors Fall Conference  
Courtyard Marriott Dallas-Allen, 210 East Stacy Rd., Allen 75002 (214) 383-1151 or (800) 627-7468. For more information, contact Luz Hinojosa at luzh@county.org or (800) 456-5974.

22-25, Leadership 254 - Module 3  
Travaasa Experiential Resort, 13500 FM 2769, Austin, (512) 334-4649. For more information contact Haley Click at (800) 456-5974.

**NOVEMBER 2017**

8, TAC Regional Pool Workshop  
Holiday Inn Tyler - South Broadway, 5701 South Broadway, Tyler, (903) 561-5800. For more information contact Ashley Royer at (800) 456-5974.

15-17, Fall Judicial Education Session  
Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center, Seven Hope Blvd., Galveston, (800) 582-4673. For more information contact Allyssa Lee at (800) 456-5974.
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Readings
Research, articles, publications and websites

THE RECKONING: THE TRIUMPH OF ORDER ON THE TEXAS OUTLAW FRONTIER
By Peter R. Rose
In 1873, opportunistic Anglo cattlemen and homesteaders, protected by little other than personal firearms and their own bravado, began settling the stream-laced rangelands east of the plateau. An insidious criminal element soon followed: a family-based tribal confederation of frontier outlaws took root in the canyonlands around the forks of the Llano River, in Kimble County. Sometimes disguised as Native Americans, they preyed on neighbors, northbound trail herds and stockmen in adjacent counties. They robbed stagecoaches repeatedly. They traded in border markets alongside Mexican Indian raiders, and may have participated in the brutal Dowdy massacre of 1878. Outnumbering and intimidating law-abiding settlers, this criminal confederation took over the Kimble County government in 1876. Only dogged persistence by Texas Rangers, with increasing support from citizens and local law officers, would stem the tide. Texas Tech University Press

CLOYCE BOX, 6’4” AND BULLETPROOF
By Michael Barr
Cloyce Box was an American original. He was handsome, athletic, intelligent and ambitious, and his life was the stuff of which dreams and miniseries are made. Starting out as a dirt-poor farm boy from the Texas backcountry, he used his great talents to become a star in the National Football League, a corporate CEO and a very wealthy man. He was fearless, flamboyant and controversial. His story is an epic Texas tale of football, cattle, horses, oil, money, power, incredible success and spectacular failure. The ranch he owned near Frisco became famous as the fictional Southfork Ranch on the hit television show “Dallas.” Financial over-reaching eventually cost him his fortune, just before his death in 1993. Texas A&M University Press

BIG BEND VISTAS: JOURNEYS THROUGH BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
By William MacLeod
A superb souvenir of this exotic terrain that takes readers on five journeys that begin at Panther Junction and travel to Study Butte, Chisos Basin, Santa Elena Canyon, Boquillas Canyon and Persimmon Gap. Easy to read and understand, “Big Bend Vistas” describes how volcanoes created some of the most striking scenery millions of years ago in Texas. The author includes vivid photographs, maps and diagrams that explain the landscape and geology of Big Bend National Park in layman’s terms. Texas Christian University Press
Join TAC’s Core Legislative Group

To schedule a luncheon with your legislators or to join the Core Legislative Group, contact Legislative Group Coordinator Rhita Koches at RhitaK@county.org

(800) 456-5974
county.org

Texas Association of Counties

Luncheons with Legislators
In early March, Oldham County courthouse staff discovered a Great Horned Owl nest with three eggs while trimming the trees. Sadly, only one egg hatched, but it was interesting to watch the owl chick grow over the ensuing weeks. The mother owl stayed with the chick continuously, and the male owl was usually somewhere in the courthouse trees.

By mid-May the juvenile owl had grown big enough and was coaxed out of the nest by the mother, who watched carefully as it flew across the courthouse lawn. In this photo, Oldham County Game Warden Matt Marshall approached the young owl close enough to make it go into its defensive posture. Marshall said the mother owl would not permit the young owl to return to the nest; from then on he will be out perfecting his flying and hunting skills, under the tutelage of both parents for a few more months.

*Photo by Oldham County Game Warden; story by Oldham County Attorney Kent Birdsong

County officials and employees (and anyone else in a Texas county) are encouraged to email their high-resolution photographs for publication in Last Look to County Managing Editor Anna McGarity at annam@county.org. Please make sure to write about the events behind the photograph — why the picture was taken, what makes the moment or memory special, or what can’t be seen in the shot.
Texas judiciary members, you are invited to attend the 2017 Impaired Driving Symposium, a TxDOT-sponsored conference, brought to you by the Texas Association of Counties, Texas Center for the Judiciary, Texas Justice Court Training Center, and the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center.

This joint program brings together judges of all levels to discuss impaired driving issues. Topics will include Setting Bail and Bond Conditions, Challenges and Solutions of Drugged Driving, Occupational Drivers’ Licenses, Legislative Updates and more.

Registration and Information on Reimbursement is available at the following websites:

- **Constitutional County Judges:** Register with the Texas Association of Counties at www.county.org.
- **Appellate, District Court, Statutory County Court Judges:** Register with the Texas Center for the Judiciary at www.yourhonor.com.
- **Justices of the Peace:** Register with the Texas Justice Court Training Center at www.tjctc.org.
- **Municipal Judges:** Register with the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center at www.tmcec.com.

For this conference, hotel reservations will be made through a rooming list. Hotel reservations will be made by the organization with whom you are registering. Please do not call the hotel directly.

**Hotel Info**
Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa
575 Hyatt Lost Pines Road
Lost Pines, TX 78612
Texas Association of Counties

2017 Legislative Conference

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