



FORT WORTH

Encouraging young women

Several area leaders spoke at Texas Wesleyan University on Saturday, part of an effort to encourage young women to seek public office. **T1B**

'AMERICAN SNIPER' TRIAL

Widow draws support from near and far

Taya Kyle bolstered in court by family and friends, online by thousands around world

By **DIANNA HUNT**
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STEPHENVILLE — She sits strong and tall in the center of the courtroom, stoically fighting back tears or crying quietly.

Rarely, at only the worst moments, Taya Kyle will close her eyes briefly as the horrors of her life un-

fold before her.

The widow of slain Navy SEAL Chris Kyle hasn't missed a day of testimony in the nearly two weeks since the capital murder trial of the former Marine accused of killing her husband and another man began.

She plans to be in court as well when the verdict is returned, perhaps this week.

Through it all, she has drawn support from a small circle of family and friends who sit with her in the Erath

See **KYLE'S** Page 7B

Spectators pulled to courtroom every day

Some who knew Kyle, others who admired him line up before sunrise

By **TASHA TSIAPERAS**
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STEPHENVILLE — Days before the capital murder trial of an ex-Marine accused of killing former Navy SEAL Chris Kyle and another man,

Robert Blevins got a feeling he needed to head to Texas.

The Oklahoma retiree had never watched a trial before, but something about this one was nagging at him.

"Something told me, 'You need to go to this trial,'" Blevins said. "I came here to honor a hero. I just wanted to see what took this man's life."

Blevins, wearing a dark-colored suit and clutching a yellow legal pad,

was one of the first people to line up outside the Erath County courthouse two weeks ago to attend the first day of the trial.

But dozens of other spectators join him each day, getting up before sunrise to compete with media hordes for about 100 seats in the courtroom.

Some, like Blevins, have traveled

See **MURDER** Page 7B

NEIGHBORHOODS | COLLIN COUNTY

MONDAY
Transportation

TUESDAY
Education

WEDNESDAY
Update

THURSDAY
Public safety

FRIDAY
The Watchdog

SATURDAY
Hot Topic

SUNDAY
Neighborhoods

Burned by contract dispute

Seis Lagos residents unaware they've been without fire service since October

By **MICHAEL E. YOUNG**
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The first murmurs in Seis Lagos moved house to house, neighbor by neighbor in late January — the new homebuyer who couldn't get insurance, other residents having problems renewing policies and finally reports that if there was a fire, the nearby Lucas Fire Department wasn't coming to fight it.

In Seis Lagos, a neighborhood of 400 or so homes with in sight of Lavon Lake and smaller pools that give the place its name, anxious neighbors searched for answers. They didn't like what they found.

Almost three months earlier, after disagreements over a fire contract between the city of Lucas and the Seis Lagos Utility District, Seis Lagos, the nearby Commons of Camden neighborhood and the new Brockdale Estates lost their designated fire protection.

But no one bothered to tell the residents until a Lucas firefighter who lives in Seis Lagos

See **FIRE** Page 4B



Smiley N. Pool/Staff Photographer

"Residents as a whole are very, very upset. ... We're worried that insurance companies will start issuing cancellations," said Susie Harrison, who recently moved to Seis Lagos with her husband, James.



STEVE BLOW
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Keeping an old heart

We all have those keepsakes that stir vivid memories of our children's growing-up years.

Maybe it's a baby blanket, a favorite book or well-worn teddy bear — with every nick, stain and repair telling a story.

The Herman family has one of those keepsakes, too, but I'd wager it's like no other. Theirs is a human heart — their son's heart.

Don't worry, 12-year-old Anthony Herman has a nice new heart beating away in his chest.

But Mom and Dad, Ray and Kathleen Herman of Marshall in East Texas, haven't been quite ready to let the old one go. So they were back at Children's Medical Center Dallas last week for another look at the hunk of defective tissue that once ruled their lives — and barely sustained Anthony's for 11 years and one day.

See **THE HEART** Page 10B

INSIDE

Sleet is on the way, weather service says

The winter storm watch issued Friday by the National Weather Service was upgraded Saturday afternoon to a winter weather watch, said Steve Fano, a meteorologist with the service's Fort Worth office. **5B**

INSIDE

| | |
|------------------|------|
| County by County | 2-3 |
| Obituaries | 8-10 |
| Weather | 12 |

Detective cuffed to Oswald still shares story

Jim Leavelle is agitated. The Dallas police detective who was handcuffed to Lee Harvey Oswald when Jack Ruby shot and killed him is about done with autograph seekers. It took 52 years.

"I'm going to stop doing these autographs a bit," he says. "People tell me they're not going to sell these things. I catch them every once in a while."

The 94-year-old says he doesn't

THE WATCHDOG



DAVE LIEBER
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mind signing for people he meets. Leavelle, the man who wore the light-colored Stetson and single-

breasted suit in one of the most famous photographs in American history, wants people to cherish the classic photos he signs as much as he does.

Leavelle is a purist. He has played an extraordinary role as a star in living history. He was at Pearl Harbor as a young Navy seaman on Dec. 7, 1941. Twenty-two years later, he stood beside Oswald in a role that makes him the ultimate watchdog.

If you ask Leavelle what happened at Pearl Harbor or in Dallas in 1963, he will gladly tell you. All these years later, Leavelle is a storytelling machine with amazing recall of names, dates, places, good guys and bad, friends and enemies. Although Leavelle has few enemies. Oh, OK, maybe a few conspiracy theorists who don't like his belief that Oswald

See **DETECTIVE** Page 7B

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Fire contract expires in Collin communities

Continued from Page 1B

sent a communitywide email on Feb. 3. In it, Tony Bohnenkamper pointed out that the community had been without fire coverage since Oct. 17 and had only just put together a six-month contract with Wylie through the Southeast Collin County EMS Coalition for emergency medical service.

At a community meeting Monday, utility district president Rolando Roman acknowledged that “we screwed up” by failing to notify residents earlier.

“We should have had a town hall meeting,” he said, adding later that, “all we want is a non-cancelable contract — that’s all we wanted.”

Calls to Roman for comment were not returned.

Despite the lack of a fire contract, county and utility district officials maintain that if a fire broke out, someone would respond. But for people worried about half-million-dollar homes going up in flames, that offered little reassurance.

“Residents as a whole are very, very upset,” said Susie Harrison, who joined about 100 neighbors in demanding answers from Roman and the rest of the utility district’s directors Monday. “We know now we’ve been paying for something we haven’t had. We’re very worried.”

“Nothing in Seis Lagos can be sold because there is no fire coverage,” she said, “and we’re worried that insurance companies will start issuing cancellations.”

The most immediate question, though, is in the event of a house fire, who exactly would respond?

Providing fire protection is the responsibility of the utility district, a tax-assessing entity created under the authority of the Texas Commission on En-

vironmental Quality. The district functions as a sort of local government in this unincorporated corner of Collin County. In return, SLUD, as residents call it, provides water, wastewater treatment, solid waste collection and firefighting, according to TCEQ documents.

But once created, there is little oversight of utility districts. A TCEQ representative said the agency oversees water, wastewater and similar issues. Fire coverage, though, isn’t the TCEQ’s turf, she said.

“This has kind of turned into an explosion — these weird districts that have massive control over people and no oversight,” said Seis Lagos resident Brian Holmes.

For the last five years, Seis Lagos had a contract with the city of Lucas for fire coverage. Lucas recently launched its own EMS service, and when it came time for the annual contract renewal, Lucas came in with a proposal.

For a flat fee of \$175,000 a year, made in quarterly payments, Lucas would provide the Seis Lagos Utility District with fire coverage and emergency medical services, Lucas City Manager Joni Clarke said. The previous year’s contract totaled about \$171,500 when final calculations were made, “so the cost with EMS would be about \$3,500 more,” she said.

“We had a meeting in June with Rolando, a really good meeting, and we talked about the calculations and making the contract a little more straightforward,” Clarke said. “We thought we had an agreement — no one at the city of Lucas thought any different — so we created a new contract.”

“We presented them with the new contract and terminated the old contract, and they chose not to accept the new contract,” she said.

When the previous contract



Smiley N. Pool/Staff Photographer

Seis Lagos lost its fire coverage in October. Residents didn’t begin to find out until January.

expired in October, Lucas told county officials it would no longer respond to fire calls in the Seis Lagos Utility District, which also includes Brockdale Estates and Commons of Camden.

“The only way the Fire Department can respond to other municipalities is through mutual aid,” Clarke said. “But we’re kind of in a difficult position, so we are not responding to calls [in Seis Lagos] because we believe we have no legal authority.”

Collin County officials, though, said fire calls from Seis Lagos would continue to be referred to Lucas, the nearest fire department, and commissioners’ declined Lucas’ request to remove Seis Lagos from its fire district. If Lucas refused the call, it would be referred to Wylie as a mutual aid call.

County’s stake

County officials have been notably quiet, at least publicly, about the fire coverage issue.

Commissioner Cheryl Williams, whose district includes much of the Seis Lagos Utility District, told Roman in an email obtained by *The Dallas Morning News* that she was “doing my best to stay out of this issue.”

Brockdale Estates, Wylie’s nearest firehouse is more than 6 miles away.

If Wylie is busy, the situation gets far worse, Holmes said.

“If [the call] has to go to Parker or Allen, you’re already two to three minutes in with the dispatcher, and their response time is something like 12-13 minutes,” he said. “When they arrive, it’s just prevention mode — trying to keep the fire from spreading to houses on either side.”

Talks continue

At Monday’s meeting, SLUD arranged four displays around the room that detailed an interlocal agreement with Lucas, an ILA with Wylie and the possibility of creating a fire district with developers of Inspiration, a new project that could someday include 1,600 homes, if the TCEQ approves such a plan.

How long might that take, the crowd asked. “Four to six

months,” Roman replied.

The district voted to pursue each possibility.

During Monday’s meeting, Roman assured the crowd that the district would quickly have a contract.

“We’re signing one tonight,” he said. “This is completely based on conversations we’ve had with Wylie.”

Wylie officials were surprised by the news.

Craig Kelly, Wylie’s spokesman, said city staff was having discussions with Seis Lagos and Inspiration, but added that City Manager Mindy Banson said there is no guarantee anything would be approved by the City Council.

But Banson and Wylie Fire Chief Brent Parker did meet with Roman on Thursday afternoon for further discussions.

And if a fire call comes to Wylie from the Seis Lagos area, Parker said the Fire Department will respond.

“It’s people’s lives up there,” he said.

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