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**We will get through this by pulling together.**  
**Now is the time for us all to be good neighbors.**



# POLK COUNTY ENTERPRISE

THE DOMINANT NEWS AND ADVERTISING SOURCE IN POLK COUNTY SINCE 1904



**HAPPY**  
*Mother's*  
**DAY**

SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020

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## County sales tax income rises by 2%

**LIVINGSTON** — While Polk County's sales tax income in June is expected to sharply decline due to COVID-19 pandemic business shutdowns, the May payment was up by almost 2 percent when compared to the May 2019 check.

According to a report issued by Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, the county's May payment of \$241,576.70 was up by \$4,630.69 or 1.95 percent from the \$236,946.01 received in May 2019.

The latest increase followed a 3.7 percent decline in April and gains of 1.4 percent in March, 22.7 percent in February and 5.7 percent in January.

So far this year, the county treasury has received almost \$1.1 million, which is up by \$70,620.55 or just over 7.2 percent from the same five-month period of 2019.

The comptroller collects the sales taxes for all governmental entities and then rebates the local share to counties, cities and other political subdivisions on a monthly basis. The May check is based on sales made in March by businesses that report the tax monthly.

According to Hegar, the May allocations reflect the beginning of pandemic-related business shutdowns, but TWC expects local allocations in June to deteriorate as the full impact of pandemic unemployment and business closures begin to be felt.

"Widespread social distancing requirements were not in place across much of the state until late March, meaning the impact of those measures affected only a portion of allocations for this month," Hegar said. "The agency expects next month's allocations, based on April sales, will show steeper declines compared to a year ago."

While the latest payment is the fifth to be received during the calendar year, it represents the eighth payment the county collected under its FY 2020 budget which began on Oct. 1, 2019. Thus far, the county has received almost

See **SALES TAX** ⇨ Page 5A

## BITE-BY-BITE Moms, Dr Pepper and Bears, Oh My!



Dr Pepper Meatloaf with mashed potatoes & green bean casserole

**1B**



## Filling to capacity

### COVID shutdown sparks a race for available RV spots among Escapees

By Valerie Reddell  
[vreddell@polkcountypublishing.com](mailto:vreddell@polkcountypublishing.com)

For the million or so Americans who describe themselves as full-time RVers, a lengthy stay-at-home order can create a problem.

Livingston attorney Shawn Loring, who is CEO of Escapees, Inc. said many of the members of his organization found themselves suddenly competing for half the number of campsites.

As many state and federal officials began enacting social distancing measures, 40-60 percent of the parks with RV sites closed. Many private campgrounds also closed, since most people consider hitting the road

**“These (full-time RVers) are people we care about, they're our friends, but we have to balance that with another group of people we're also close to, the management staff ...”**

**Shawn Loring**  
 Escapees CEO

in your travel trailer, a recreational adventure. Other parks that are only open seasonal opted to skip this year.

The COVID shutdowns created a nationwide game of musical chairs, Loring said.



Rainbow's End, an RV park south of Livingston, has been operating at near capacity since officials closed public parks in an effort to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

Loring, his law partner K. Susie Adams, and others began contacting state and federal officials, urging them to reopen more sites — either by designating private campgrounds as essential businesses or by keeping public parks open.

Loring said many families living the RV life plan their North American adventures a year in advance.

One group of families found themselves "boondocking" on open land for five weeks. Only a few RVs are equipped for operating so completely off-the-grid, and those have their limits.

Eventually, generators have to be refueled, sewage holding tanks have to be dumped, and the humans

See **ESCAPEES** ⇨ Page 5A

## TDCJ holding 10K offenders approved for parole

### Actions expose more to COVID in the slammer

By Valerie Reddell  
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**LIVINGSTON** — It's no secret that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is struggling to protect staff and offenders from illness and even death caused by the coronavirus. The mystery is why TDCJ has not released 10,680 offenders that have been approved for parole.

More than 150 appear on a list of offenders who were set to be paroled on a specified date — and those dates are all prior to May 1.

Then there are hundreds of others like Thomas Martin, who was sentenced to 87 years in prison for murder



The Polunsky prison unit on FM 350 South is on lockdown in an effort to separate potentially infected inmates from those who are healthy. Elected officials have shared their growing concerns about the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's activities as the number of infected staff and offenders continues to climb.

with a deadly weapon in 1989.

Martin was approved for parole in September 2019, and has had a projected release date of Feb. 29, 2020 for quite a long time. He's still sitting in the Wynne

Unit in Huntsville. When you search for information on Martin's status, the online offender search indicates he is not scheduled for release at this time.

Kristin Ricketts, Founder of Restorer of City Streets,

a faith-based program that advocates for criminal justice reform, says an estimated 1,300 of those people simply need to complete CHANGES, a lifeskills

See **TDCJ** ⇨ Page 5A

## LISD sets graduation ceremonies

By Brian Besch  
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Livingston ISD has set dates for its Class of 2020 high school and academy graduation ceremonies. The school district has selected Friday, May 29 at 7:30 p.m. for the academy and Saturday, May 30 at 9 a.m. for the high school.

Both ceremonies are planned for Lion Stadium and the district has alternate plans in case of rain. The dates were originally to be a week later, but a conference with Texas Education Agency Commissioner of Education Mike Morath allowed for the date to be pushed forward. Guidelines for in-person graduation ceremonies restrict the school to an outdoor event and is subject to change "as underlying health conditions change."

The district has split the two campus ceremonies in order to comply with Executive Order No. GA-21, district legal guidance, and local code jurisdictions. The total number of participants has also been capped, due to the size of Livingston High School Class of 2020 (212 students) to comply with social distancing both during the event and during entry and exit of the facility. The event will be closed to the public and only the participants and families with their ticket may enter.

"The district is excited for the Class of 2020 to have been afforded this opportunity and while it absolutely is not the best of circumstances, the celebration of 13 years of these young people's lives is one that we will have to abide by the laws and regulations set forth to make the best of this situation for them," Livingston Superintendent Dr. Brent Hawkins wrote in an emailed update Wednesday. "... These young people have made history as being a class that faced tremendous adversity and persevered. This just may have prepared them as much as anything for a successful future."

Prior to attending the ceremony, participating students and attending family members will be questioned during ticket pickup for new or worsening symptoms of possible COVID-19.

Graduates will only be brought together for one event, as rehearsals are not permitted. The six-foot spacing guidelines will be maintained between all participants except members from the same household (five individuals or fewer may sit together from the same household). All must stay six feet away from any family group at all times. Seating will be randomly assigned.

There is only capacity for a family group of five to receive tickets. That number is

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VOLUME 139 • ISSUE 38

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USPS 437-340

SUN 5/10



80/54

Sunny  
 NE 6 mph  
 Chance of rain 0%.  
 Humidity 44%

MON 5/11



82/59

Mostly sunny  
 ESE 7 mph  
 Chance of rain 0%.  
 Humidity 46%

TUE 5/12



81/65

PM thunderstorms  
 SE 9 mph  
 Chance of rain 50%.  
 Humidity 59%

WED 5/13



85/68

PM thunderstorms  
 SSE 9 mph  
 Chance of rain 40%.  
 Humidity 66%

THU 5/14



87/71

Scattered storms  
 SSE 8 mph  
 Chance of rain 40%.  
 Humidity 70%

FRI 5/15



87/70

Scattered storms  
 SSE 8 mph  
 Chance of rain 50%.  
 Humidity 70%

LAKE DATA

CURRENT LEVEL ..... 131.14  
 NORMAL LEVEL ..... 131.00  
 DISCHARGE ..... 10,000 cfs  
**RAINFALL**  
 Last 7 days (Inches) ..... 0.08  
 Last 30 days (Inches) ..... 2.99  
**All weather data measured at Lake Livingston Dam**

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