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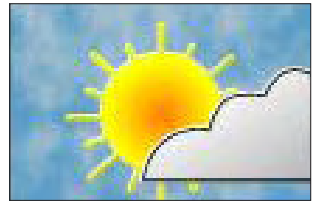


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WEDNESDAY
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United Way officials optimistic

Feel confident \$250,000 campaign goal will be met

By **STEVE REAGAN**
Staff Writer

The mood was upbeat as officials with the United Way of Big Spring and Howard County hosted their



HERALD Photo/Thomas Jenkins
Tumbleweed Smith entertains the audience at the United Way luncheon Tuesday.

annual Campaign Kickoff Tuesday.

The kickoff, which marks the starting point for the United Way's 2009 campaign, was attended by more than 200 people at First United Methodist Church's Garrett Hall.

Improved economic conditions have campaign officers feeling better about reaching this year's goal of \$250,000.

"We feel really optimistic about what we're going to accomplish this year," said Jan Hansen, executive director of the local United Way. "People are in a better economic situation than they were last year and that's the main reason we feel we're going to attain our goal this year."

This year's goal is \$50,000 less than the previous campaign, but part of that is because of a change in how the campaign collects money. Hansen said that Combined Federal Campaign money — the lion's share of which comes from

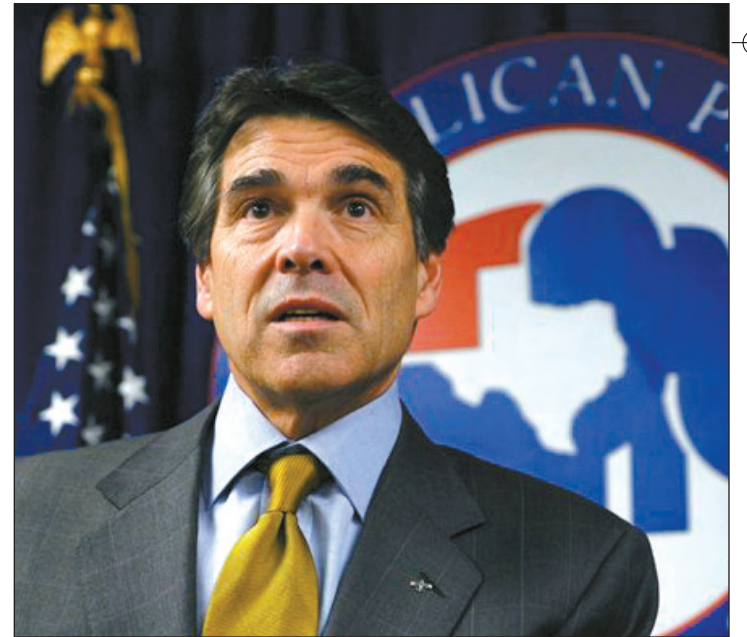
the VA Medical Center, Federal Correctional Institute and the U.S. Post Office, will be collected by the UW's Abilene office this year, although local agencies will still get credited for the money.

Tim Yeats, chairman of this year's campaign, also sounded an upbeat note during his address to the crowd, saying he was confident that the fund-raising drive would "meet and exceed" its goal.

Yeats ticked off four reasons why people should donate to the United Way:

- Money raised in Howard County stays here.
- With money staying in this area, that reduces administrative and other non-essential expenses and ensures that agencies served by the United Way receive the maximum amount possible.
- The allocation process also is determined locally.

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AP photo

Gov. Rick Perry will be among the dignitaries on hand for Thursday's ceremony to start renovations at the historic Settles Hotel.

Perry set to keynote ceremony

By **THOMAS JENKINS**
Staff Writer

While its been years since the historic Settles Hotel had an auspicious guest, that unfortunate streak will come to an end Thursday when Texas Gov. Rick Perry will serve as the keynote speaker for a ceremony to kick off renovations to the downtown landmark.

"Legendary Texas landmarks like the Settles Hotel provide a glimpse into the proud history that has made the Lone Star State one of the most unique and renowned travel destinations in the world," said Gov. Perry. "I am proud to be part of the restoration of a true Texas treasure."

Set for 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. at the Settles — located at 200 E. Third St. — the governor's appearance will be followed by the beginning of the building's abatement, according to officials.



"Thursday we have our groundbreaking ceremony scheduled and we appreciate the governor being willing to come out," said Big Spring native G. Brint Ryan, manager of the Settles Hotel Development Company. "He's been very gracious in accepting our

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The Pillsbury Doughboy, Wal-Mart employee Andrew Calvio, helps celebrate the store's grand re-opening Wednesday morning to recognize the end of a 90-day, approximately \$3.5 million remodeling project. Pomp and pageantry herald in the celebration with the Big Spring Police Department Honor Guard leading the event. Jason Sanderson of Life Church sang the National Anthem before Wal-Mart Store Manger Tim Walsh recognized his employees and the remodel team for an "outstanding job." Big Spring Mayor Russ McEwen — pictured here with Calvio along with Big Spring Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Debbye ValVerde — called the employees "ambassadors of Big Spring."

HERALD photo/Lyndel Moody



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Witness disputes Alon appraisal as trial continues in 118th court

By **THOMAS JENKINS**
Staff Writer

According to testimony entered by an expert witness Tuesday morning, the 2007 appraised valuation of the Big Spring Refinery should be approximately \$173 million — almost half the \$320 million the facility was appraised for by the Howard County Appraisal District.

Testimony in 118th District Court, part of a lawsuit filed by Alon USA — owner of the Big Spring Refinery — against the

appraisal district for what it calls "inflated appraisal valuations, continued Tuesday. Alon disputed its \$320 million tax appraisal, claiming it should only have to pay taxes on approximately \$152 million.

The \$320 million assessment was later upheld by the appraisal district's review board, spurring the petrochemical company to file the suit, which began Mon-

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UW Dine Out Day

Sonic Drive-Ins at 1200 Gregg and 601 E. FM 700 are this week's Dine Out Restaurants assisting the United Way for Big Spring and Howard County.

Proceeds from Friday's sales at the two Sonic Drive-In locations will benefit United Way. Future participating restaurants will include K.C. Steakhouse, Al's & Sons Barbecue, Dell's Cafe and Greg's Grill. Others will be added.



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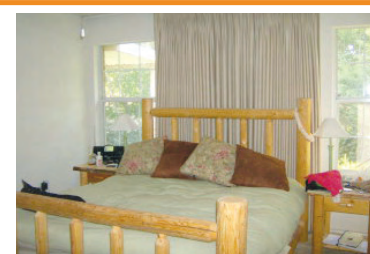
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HERALD Photo/Thomas Jenkins

An officer with the Big Spring Police Department talks to the driver of this Honda sedan following a two-car traffic accident near the intersection of 11th Place and FM 700 Monday afternoon. According to law enforcement officials, the Honda was westbound on 11th Place when it failed to yield the right-of-way to a Chevrolet pickup traveling south on FM 700. No injuries were reported as a result of the traffic accident.



HERALD photo/Steve Reagan

Big Spring Fire Department personnel responded to a structure fire in the 1400 block of Main Street Wednesday morning. Damage estimates were not available, but there were no reported injuries.

UW

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The drive will most help local people who benefit from one of the United Way agencies.

"We don't harbor any dreams that we can cure all of society's ills," Yeats said. "But giving to the United Way matters to those people who use one of our agencies."

Keynote speaker for the event was Bob "Tumbleweed Smith" Lewis, who presented audio vignettes from oral histories collected over the course of the past four decades. The sound bites from several of Big Spring's "colorful characters" — such as Hoyle Nix, Horace Reagan,

Polly Mays, Shine Phillips and Joe Pickle — captured Big Spring's "generous and loving" nature.

Monies raised from the annual campaign, which runs from Sept. 1 to Nov. 15, are used to fund the following 15 area non-profit agencies:

- The American Red Cross, West Texas Chapter. This agency provides disaster relief services, assistance to military personnel and their families and offers first aid instruction.

- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) of West Texas. CASA volunteers serve as advocates for abused and neglected children who are in the care of Child Protective Services when the court is considering the perma-

nent placement for the child. Location, 210 Third; St. Phone, 263-4162.

- Buffalo Trail Council, Boy Scouts of America. This is an educational and character-building program for boys and young adults. Location, 610 Scurry; Phone, 263-3407.

- Big Spring Humane Society. The Humane Society provides shelter and care for abandoned, abused and neglected cats and dogs and also arranges pet visitations for elderly and disabled. Location, W. I-20 North Service Road; Phone, 267-7832.

- Boy's Club of Big Spring. The program offers guidance, instruction, recreation and leadership to boys 6-17 years of age. Location, 212 E. Third St.; 263-1822.

- Northside Community Center. Northside provides clothing, household articles, rent and utility payments, emergency shelter and counseling for those in need. Location, 108 N.E. Eighth St.; Phone, 263-2673.

- Dora Robert Rehabilitation Center. This is a rehabilitation program to help improve the health and welfare of disabled children and adults. No one is turned away due to their ability to pay. Location, 306. W. Third; Phone, 267-3806.

- Isaiah 58. The program provides food, clothing and other essential of daily life to those in need. It also provides assistance with prescription drugs, rent and utilities. Location, 107 Runnels St.; Phone, 263-

4758.

- Girl Scouts of the Permian Basin. Girl Scouts provide programs aimed for girls age five through 17.

- The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army provides a number of services for the poor including meals and lodging for the homeless. Location 811 W. Fifth St.; Phone, 267-8239.

- Victim Services. The volunteers for victim services for immediate after-crises support for victims of rape and sexual assault. 24-hour support hotline, 263-3312.

- Westside Community Center. This program provides an education-based, after-school and summer programs for public school children. Location, 1311 W. Fourth St.; Phone, 267-6680.

- Westside Day Care Center. This program provides day care and education for children ages 0-12 but the parents must be employed or participate in training that will lead to employment. Location: Big Spring Industrial Park; Phone, 263-7841.

PERRY

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invitation to deliver the keynote address at the ceremony, and we're really looking forward to that. After he steps off the podium, we're going to start asbestos abatement, and we're really thrilled about that."

Big Spring Mayor Russ McEwen will also take part in the ceremony, and according to SHDC officials, several long-time residents will also share their memories and experiences at the hotel during the presentation.

"It is an honor to bring this landmark back to its original glory by maintaining the inventive 30's design concepts and many of the hotel's most recognizable features, such as

the winding staircases in the foyer and the grand ballroom," said Ryan. "Our primary objective is the restoration of the Settles Hotel to its 1930's architectural grandeur, following strict adherence to the original construction documents, while simultaneously upgrading the mechanical, electrical, plumbing and lift systems to modern standards."

Ryan said plans are also underway to incorporate commercial spaces along with a full service restaurant and fitness center to the hotel's design in order to facilitate economic development in downtown Big Spring and attract more residents and tourists to the community.

The project — which has seen its budget balloon from \$12 million to nearly \$20 million over the past year — is behind sched-

ule, according to a recent update from Ryan, but he feels confident it's moving in the right direction.

"This has been a very exhausting process. We've had a number of legal issues dealing with the microwave equipment that had to be removed from the building," said Ryan, "we had significant consulting that had to be done on the asbestos abatement and we've been in the salvage operation in the building for the last six weeks, removing all the salvageable material before we start abatement. That includes all the sinks, the bath tubs, the fixtures — basically anything we can save for the reconstruction. In addition to that, we've had issues with the approval from the Texas Historic Commission and we received their final approval of our schematic design

six weeks ago. We're very excited about that.

"We're doing the project right, and we're doing it right because that's how we want it and it's required to secure our tax credit financing. It's taken a little bit longer than we had initially planned, but the outcome is going to be more than worth it."

SHDC announced plans for a multi-million dollar renovation project in December 2006. According to SHDC officials, the project includes plans for commercial and residential use of the property, with retail space available on the first and second floors.

Since that time, the purchase price for the structure — \$75,000 to be paid to the city of Big Spring — has remained in escrow, waiting for Ryan and his company to take legal ownership of the local

landmark.

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at citydesk@bigspringherald.com

TRIAL

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day with District Judge Robert H. Moore III hearing the case.

According to expert witness Kathy Spletter, a representative of Stancil and Company, the value of the Big Spring Refinery is \$460 million after physical depreciation is applied. However, technological obsolescence — formed mainly around the lack of technological upgrades to the refinery — drops that value by an estimated \$287 million.

According to Spletter's testimony, the \$460 million value — based on cost evaluations — is decreased by \$85 million in energy consumption; \$131 million for the reforming unit; \$31 million for the FCC (fluidized catalytic cracking) yield penalty; and \$46 million for cost-to-cure spending.

Spletter said the an additional \$3 million was tacked on to the total to provide for land and personal property taxes, which is undisputed in the

matter.

According to information presented by attorney Mark Hutcheson, lead counsel for Alon, the FCC unit at the Big Spring Refinery was 60 years old at the time of the 2007 valuation, and although it's been updated to some extent, yields remain below industry standards, coming in at approximately 74 percent compared to other

refineries, which produce at 78 to 80 percent.

Spletter also explained the formulas used to determine the refinery's discount rate, yet another tool used by appraisers to determine the value of the facility.

According to reports following the filing of the lawsuit, Alon agreed to pay \$80 million in taxes until the matter is resolved, leav-

ing Howard County with a shortfall of more than \$700,000 and Big Spring Independent School District picking up a \$264,000 loss.

Testimony was set to resume Wednesday morning.

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