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+Officials tout new era for city's 'grand old lady'+

Settles survival assured

By STEVE REAGAN

Staff Writer

After decades of broken promises and dashed hopes, Big Spring's "grand old lady" is getting the facelift she deserves.

Led by Gov. Rick Perry, state and local officials joined forces with developer G. Brint Ryan to kick-start a \$20 million Settles Hotel renovation project Thursday afternoon.

The groundbreaking ceremonies marked the beginning of a two-year renovation that Ryan said will restore the 78-year-old building to its former glory.

\$500,000 in 1930, was a destination of choice for travelers for many years — as well a center of activity for the community but has been vacant and in an advanced state of dilapidation for more than two decades.

During Thursday's ceremonies, officials expressed hope that the renovation will do more than just restore a landmark.

"This is the type of urban development that can revitalize the downtown area," Gov. Perry said. "This isn't just about renovating a building, it's about revitalizing an entire community."

Perry, who recalled thinking the Settles was "the biggest building in the world" when he first visited the area as a youth in 1957, said the renovation project will herald a rebirth for Big Spring.

"This hotel is a reminder of when Big Spring was ... a vibrant community," he said. "Well, it can be again — and it



Perry and others laid most of the credit for the renovation on Ryan, a Big Spring native who has spearheaded a twoyear effort to bring the project to fruition.

"Brint Ryan is the type of visionary that every community wants to have," Perry said. "Brint, giving back to this community is a great legacy you'll leave for Big Spring and Texas

and we thank you." "One thing I've known since the day I met Brint Ryan is that this thing was going to get done," Big Spring Mayor Russ McEwen said. "A lot of us have dreamed about this day for a long time ... People with pas-

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HERALD photos/Thomas Jenkins

From left above, Big Spring Economic Development **Corporation Executive Director Terry Wegman, Devel**oper G. Brint Ryan, Big Spring Mayor Russ McEwen, State Sen. Kel Seliger, State Rep. Joe Heflin and City **Councilman Troy Tompkins participate in formal ground**breaking ceremonies for the \$20 million Settles Hotel renovation project Thursday afternoon. Below, the restored Hotel Settles sign, and at left, Gov. Rick Perry talks about the importance of the restoration project to Big Spring.





Landmark hotel stirs many fond memories

By STEVE REAGAN

Staff Writer

First-time visitors to Big Spring might have a hard time understanding the connection residents have with the Settles Hotel.

To newcomers, the old building is little more than a glass and brick monolith that dominates the downtown area.

To Big Spring natives, however, it is much, much more.

Several long-time residents shared their feelings for the Settles during groundbreaking ceremonies Thursday to mark a \$20 million renovation of the historic building.

"I drank a gazillion cups of coffee in the coffee shop there. I'm delighted (about the restoration). This will be one of the biggest boons this community has seen in years"

-Pat Porter

W.R. Settles built the hotel in 1930 for the then-considerable sum of \$500,000, money he earned in the oil boom of the 1920s.

During its heyday, the hotel was a destination of choice for travelers and hosted such luminaries as former U.S. President Herbert Hoover, band leader Lawrence Welck and the King himself — Elvis Presley.

For many local residents, however, the hotel is more than just a place to stay.

For Burr Lea Settles, greatnephew of W.R. Settles, the hotel is like a family heirloom.

"In 1926, my great-uncle owned some land near Forsan ... and he got wealthy during the oil

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News in Brief

DPS: Texas crime database poorly updated by counties

AUSTIN (AP) — Too many counties are still doing a poor job of reporting criminal information to the state's crime database, the Texas Department of Public Safety

Although officials in Dallas and other poorly reporting counties promised in 2004 to do better, DPS says counties in the most recent assessment submitted outcomes on just 69 percent of criminal charges. That is the same percentage from four years ago. In 1993, Texas began requiring counties to report criminal information to DPS, but lawmakers didn't authorize funding or penalties for

Inadequate information in the database means gaps for officials who conduct background checks on schoolteachers and volunteers who work with children. The poorly updated state crime database also can affect background checks run by employers on job applicants and landlords checking on prospective tenants.

Everyone from job applicants to people trying to adopt children or buy guns can be affected, according to Angie Klein, manager of the DPS criminal history records

She attributed the counties' lack of progress to slow resolution of many felony cases, and glitches in big urban counties, which can bring down statewide compli-

"It's hard to keep trained personnel," said Klein in Thursday's online edition of The Dallas Morning News. Of Texas' 254 counties, only 106 report to DPS electroni-

Allen Clemson, the Dallas County commissioners' court administrator, said officials in smaller cities may forget to tell DPS when they drop charges.

No one knows how many Texans didn't get a job because an acquittal or dismissal wasn't in the system, Klein said.

Obese aunt faces new charges in La Joya toddler's death

EDINBURG, Texas (AP) — A grand jury indicted a nearly half-ton, bedridden woman Thursday in the death of her 2-year-old nephew.

Mayra Lizbeth Rosales, 27, was indicted on one count of first-degree murder and on one count of injury to a child in the death of Eliseo Gonzalez Jr. Rosales previously had been charged with capital murder.

The grand jury indicted her after a full autopsy confirmed investigators' suspicions that the child died March 18 because he had been struck. Investigators believe the toddler was struck at least twice, crushing his

Authorities recommended Rosales' bond be set at \$150,000.

The boy's mother Jaime Rosales, was charged earlier with injury to a child because she allegedly left her son alone with his aunt. Her bond has been set at \$100.000.

Prosecutors have to work out how Mayra Rosales will be detained and prosecuted because she weighs nearly 1,000 pounds. She is unable to fit through a door to leave her home. As of Thursday evening, she was not in cusand Hidalgo County Sheriff Lupe Trevino promised that Rosales would somehow face the charges but they had little details about how that would happen. Trevino said holding her at the Hidalgo County Jail for her trial would be impossible because she needs extensive medical care.

"She would die," said Trevino in Thursday's online edition of The Monitor in McAllen.

Nevertheless, she will soon face arrest, he said.

Texas man convicted of grooming children to perform sex shows at swingers club

TYLER (AP) — A 41-year-old auto body shop worker convicted of grooming children as young as 5 to perform in sex shows at a small-town swingers club was sentenced Thursday to life in prison.

Patrick "Booger Red" Kelly also was ordered to pay restitution and pay a \$10,000 fine.

Kelly whispered to his attorney but showed no emotion after the verdict and sentence were read. Jurors deliberated about two hours before finding him guilty of engaging in organized criminal activity and another 15 minutes on the penalty.

"As we stand here, I still absolutely believe that my client is innocent," Kelly's defense attorney, Thad Davidson, said outside the courtroom.

Defense attorneys sought a suspended sentence of less than 10 years so Kelly could be placed on probation. Prosecutors had pushed for the life sentence, saying he had changed the lives of the five children he sexually abused.

"Let him change in that penitentiary," prosecutor Joe Murphy told jurors.

Authorities alleged Kelly was a member of the so-called Mineola Swinger's Club, though Kelly has testified he is innocent. They contended Kelly helped set up a "kindergarten" where young children learned to dance provocatively. To help perform at the club, prosecutors say the children were given Vicodin-like drugs the adults passed off as "silly pills."

After the sentence was read, one of Kelly's victims spoke briefly in court. The girl told Kelly he had abused her and needed to go to prison and find God.

During closing arguments Thursday morning, the prosecutor accused Kelly of sexually exploiting five children tied to the case who, he said, showed signs of sexual abuse.

'Ponytail bandit' pleads guilty to bank robbery in three states

SACRAMENTO (AP) — A Texas woman dubbed the "ponytail bandit" has pleaded guilty to robbing banks in three states.

Morgan Michelle Hoke admitted robbing banks in her hometown of Austin, in Roseville, Calif. and in Lynnwood, Wash. Federal prosecutors say the robberies netted her \$15,000 last year.

The 21-year-old's nickname is from surveillance photos showing her wearing a University of Texas baseball cap with her ponytail hanging down her back.

She was extradited from Thailand in February. She pleaded guilty to the three robberies Thursday in Sacramento federal court. Each count could bring 20 years in

EDC board holds off on pact with Ryan Inc.

By THOMAS JENKINS

Staff Writer

A possible contract between the Big Spring Economic Development Corporation and Ryan Inc., an economic development consulting firm, will have to wait, as the EDC's board passed on the issue Wednesday after a contract failed to make it in time for the meeting.

"The board agreed to pass on this agenda item," said Terry Wegman, executive director for Big Spring EDC. "Ryan didn't get the proposed contract or fee schedule to the board of directors in time. We had put the item on the agenda just in case the contract was ready, but they haven't gotten back to us at this point. The board won't take action on this item until they have had a chance to really look at the details of the contract."

According to Brint Ryan, manager of the Settles Hotel Development Company and owner of Ryan Inc., the contract calls for a onetime fee from Big Spring EDC that would purchase a "toolbox" of information identifying key industries suited for the area, state and federal credits and grants, as well as other useful information the EDC could use for economic development.

"The primary intent of the contract is two-fold," said Ryan. "First, it's to help the Big Spring Economic Development Corporation develop a first-class approach to economic development, using all of the tools at their disposal. Not just the local incentives they rely on so heavily today, but the federal and state tax credits, grants and other money that is available to put together a complete, comprehensive package. We think ly enhance their ability to attract new investment to Big Spring and new employers to Big Spring.

"The second part is we want to continue to develop our relationship with the economic development corporation. Since we started with the Settles Hotel, we've worked closely with them and they've been extremely supportive, and we want to grow that relationship further."

However, the cost of the contract — which was laid out for the Big Spring City Council and Big Spring EDC during a meeting last month — wasn't nearly as concise as Ryan's presentation.

According to EDC board member Larry McLellan. the cost of the contract which includes all the information and help learning how to use it, according to Ryan — is between \$75,000 and \$90,000.

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John "Jay" Magers, 51, died Friday. Funeral Services will be at 2:00 PM Friday at Myers & Smith Chapel with burial at Trinity Memorial Park.

Michael "Mike" Robert Creel, 18, died Wednesday. Funeral Services will be at 3:00 PM Saturday at Trinity Baptist Church with burial at Trinity Memorial Park. The family will receive friends from 6:00 until 7:00 PM Friday at Myers & Smith Funeral Home. A Candle Light Vigil will be held at 8:30 PM Friday at Longshore Road.

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Both Hidalgo County District Attorney Rene Guerra prison at her Oct. 30 sentencing. that is going to significantto be here today, except for was left of the building and going to be more than a he projected between 14 **SETTLES** the strong support of this

not be able to do this projin a community. All I can ect." say is thank God that Brint Ryan paid particular Ryan has a passion for the thanks to Tommy Church-For his part, Ryan rewell and others who, as turned the credit, saying part of the "Friends of that without help from the Settles" organization, state officials such as Gov. fought a holding action for

community ... and elected

officials such as the gover-

nor," Ryan said. "Without

their support, we would

buildling. "Tommy Churchwell and others ... saved what

years to keep renovation

hopes alive for the historic

made it possible for us to begin renovation," Ryan said.

Ryan promised that when the project is complete in October 2010, it will spark a renewed interest not just in the hotel, but in the downtown area as a whole.

"If you can get this one domino to fall, there's nothing else out there that can't be done," he said. "This is a great community and I want to see it back to the way it was when I was growing up ... This is

building — it is going to be a destination.

"We are certain that this project will have a significant and meaningful impact on the community," he added. "We're going to do this first class ... If you think this is an interesting ceremony, wait until you see the grand opening."

Ryan's brother, Kris, who will oversee the restoration project, said work will begin Monday with asbestos abatement that is scheduled to take about three months. After that,

and 18 months for renovation work before the project is completed.

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331 ext. 234 or by e-mail at reporter@ bigspringherald.com





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MEMORIES

Continued from Page 1A

Settles Hotel."

possible.

sion can make a difference

Perry and local leaders

like McEwen, the project

would have never been

"It would not be possible

Continued from Page 1A

boom," Burr Lea said. "He wanted to do something for Big Spring, so he decided to build this hotel."

Although the Great Depression robbed W.R. Settles of most of his money, his legacy — in the form of the hotel — remains, and his great-nephew believes the renovation project will return it to its former glo-

"When all the work is done, I believe it will be a shining star of West Texas," he said.

Ralph and Billye McLaughlin have little trouble recalling their favorite memory of the Set-

"We are about to celebrate our 60th anniversary," Ralph said. "And we had our wedding reception in that building. That's my fondest memory of the place."

When long-time resident Pat Porter and her husband returned to this area in 1974, their furniture was delayed en route, so they needed a place to stay overnight.

They chose the Settles.

"And, of course, I drank a gazillion cups of coffee in

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the coffee shop there," she said. "I'm delighted (about the restoration). This will be one of the biggest boons this community has seen in years."

Tommy Churchwell's memories of the building are a mixed bunch.

His first impression came as an 11-year-old who, along with his Little League baseball teammates, were honored by the local Rotary Club for making the state tournament.

As an adult, however, Churchwell and a group of people who called themselves "The Friends of the Settles" fought a sometimes desperate battle to restore the vacant, decaying building. The group's most significant action was to install windows in the building to keep out the elements and slow the rate of deterioration.

"We had such a jewel and we let it go," Churchwell said. "I think (the restoration) will transform the entire downtown area. Once we get this big project out of the way, everything else will fall into line."

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331 ext. 234 or by e-mail at reporter@ bigspringherald.com



