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# BIG SPRING HERALD

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## Settles work 20-30 percent complete



By **THOMAS JENKINS**  
Staff Writer

Officials with the Settles Hotel Development Company say the renovation of the downtown landmark is between 20 to 30 percent completed, with plenty of contract work left to do.

According to Settles Hotel Development Company General Manager Kristopher Ryan, work between the fourth and 13th floors has steadily progressed during the past several months.

"The metal framing on those floors has

been completed," Ryan said. "We've also managed to get all of the stuff out of the plumbing and installed a stand pipe, and installed all of the duct work. Last week, our plaster contractor began his work doing repairs on those floors as well."

The building, erected 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.

Brint Ryan, a Big Spring native, an-

nounced plans for the 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. The project's budget has ballooned from \$12 million to \$20 million since its inception.

Kristopher Ryan said area residents and motorists passing by the hotel may

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## Trustees get first glance at bond project blueprints

*With groundbreaking months away, focus is on floor plans*

By **STEVE REAGAN**  
Staff Writer

Big Spring Independent School District trustees got a close look at some of the nuts-and-bolts design ideas going into its new school buildings during a special meeting Thursday night.

Trustees met with architect Jay Edwards to go over the state of affairs associated with upcoming construction and renovation projects.

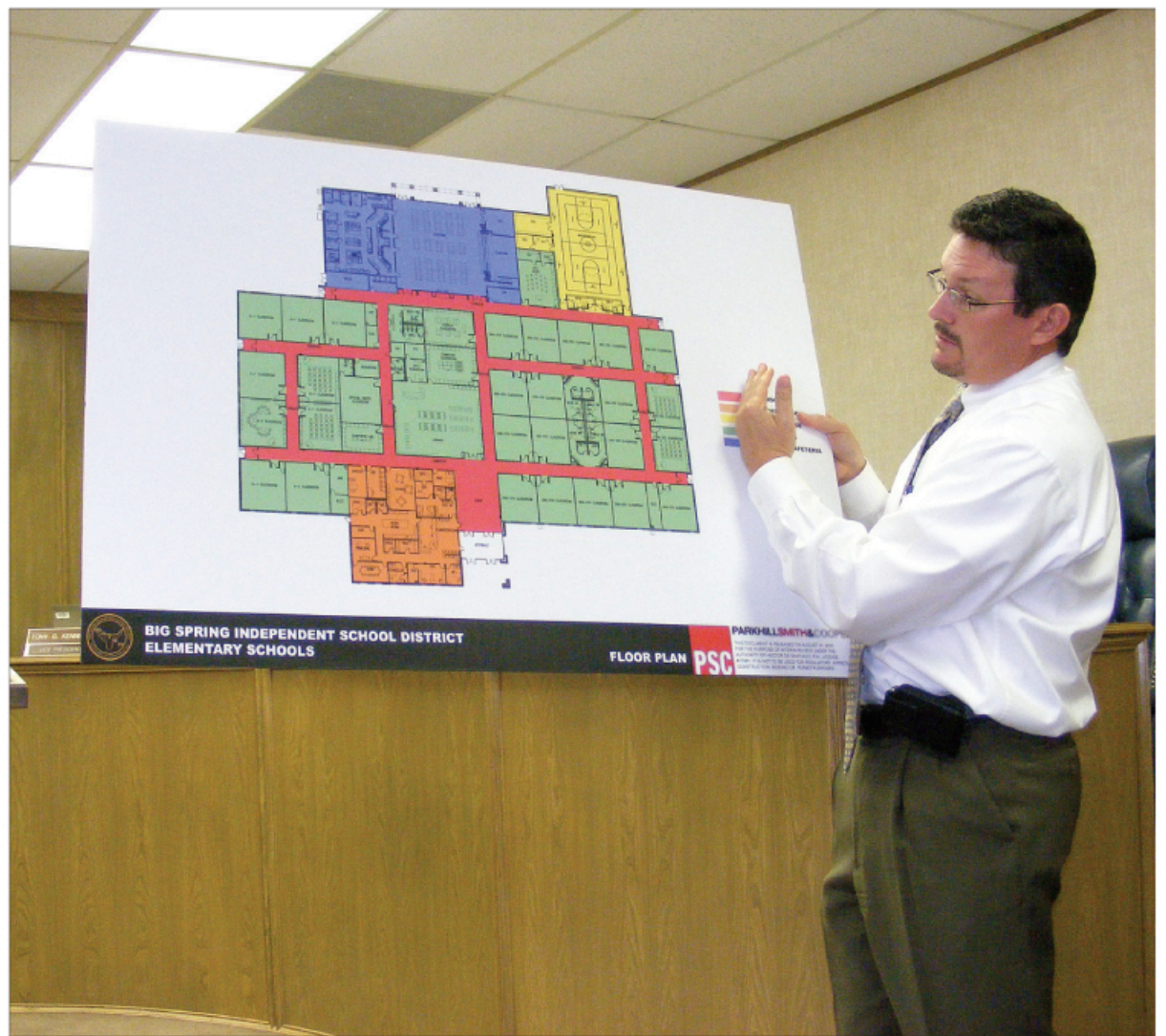
Over the course of the next few years, three new school buildings will be built, while other campuses will receive extensive renovation, thanks to more than \$50 million in bonds authorized by voters

earlier this year.

While actual groundbreaking on the myriad projects is not expected to begin until late April at the earliest, Edwards said architects and school officials have been busy finalizing the basic floor plans of the new schools.

Each new building — the district will construct three elementary campuses to replace Marcy, Washington and Goliad — will look roughly the same on the inside, Edwards said. Each will have roughly 70,000 square feet of space and 28 classrooms, along with computer, music and

See **TRUSTEES**, Page 3A



HERALD photo/Steve Reagan  
Jay Edwards, an architect with the firm of Parkhill, Smith & Cooper, shows the basic floor plan that will be followed when construction of three new elementary campuses are constructed within the Big Spring Independent School District. Edwards made his presentation during Thursday's special BSISD trustee meeting.

## WELCOME HOME, SOLDIER



Courtesy photo/Vickie Gomez  
Spc. Dana Lopez of Stanton and her fiancé, Spc. Dan Gescheider of Santa Barbara, Calif., are greeted by members of the Permian Basin Welcome Home Committee upon their arrival at Midland International Airport from Iraq. Spc. Lopez' son, 5-year-old Christopher Konkle, was also there for the celebration.

## ISD budget OK'd over city mayor's appeal to lower it

By **STEVE REAGAN**  
Staff Writer

If you overlook more than \$50 million for construction projects, the new Big Spring Independent School District budget is very similar to the previous fiscal package.

BSISD trustees approved the district's new budget and tax rate during a special meeting Thursday evening in the high school board room.

Non-construction bond related expenditures will increase by roughly \$200,000 this year. Those increases are accounted for in pay raises of approximately 3 percent for all district personnel, Chief Financial Of-

ficer Sandra Waggoner said.

The biggest difference, however, is on the debt service side of the budget. Thanks to obligations connected to the construction bonds (which were authorized by district voters in May), the BSISD tax rate will increase 33 cents this year.

See **BSISD**, Page 3A



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## State briefs

### Fort Worth-area line repaired after derailment

RICHLAND HILLS (AP) — Passenger service has resumed after crews fixed a section of track following a derailment in the Fort Worth area.

Nobody was injured Sunday night when several cars of a freight train derailed west of Richland Hills. The caught of the derailment is sought.

The tracks are used by Trinity Railway Express commuter trains on routes linking Fort Worth and Dallas. TRE is co-owned by Dallas Area Rapid Transit.

Transit officials say the tracks were repaired Tuesday afternoon, with full day's service back to normal Wednesday.

### Gladewater woman dead, pinned between chain, car

GLADEWATER (AP) — An autopsy has been ordered after a Gladewater woman was discovered dead pinned between the front of her car and a chain barrier to her driveway.

The Gregg County Sheriff's Office says the body of Sally Coker was located Tuesday at her rural home.

Capt. Mike Claxton says the victim's 3-year-old grandchild was found unharmed in the vehicle.

Authorities believe Coker got out of her car to

move a chain and enter her property. Investigators are trying to determine the manner and cause of death.

### I-10 closure in SE Texas continues

HAMSHIRE (AP) — Part of Interstate 10 in southeast Texas remained closed for a fourth day as crews worked to transfer a chemical load from a tanker following a wreck.

Department of Public Safety Trooper Stephanie Davis told The Associated Press that I-10 near Hamshire was still closed Wednesday, but the transfer of isobutane was expected to be completed later in the day.

I-10 has been shut down between Texas 73 and Farm Road 365 near Hamshire, about 65 miles east of Houston, since a two-vehicle wreck early Sunday. The tanker truck overturned in a collision with a pickup.

DPS says the tanker truck driver suffered non-life threatening injuries.

Isobutane is a flammable, corrosive chemical.

### Inmate dies after escape attempt at Texarkana jail

TEXARKANA, Ark. (AP) — Authorities say a federal inmate has died after falling five stories while trying to escape from a jail in Texarkana, Ark.

The U.S. Marshals Service says 30-year-old Anthony Lewis of Springhill, La., escaped from a fenced recreation area on the roof of the Bi-State Justice Center in downtown Texarkana. Authorities say Lewis tried to lower himself to the ground with a rope made of clothing, but fell five stories to the ground.

He was taken to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, where he was pronounced dead at about 10:45 p.m. Monday.

Authorities say Lewis was awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to robbing a bank in Magnolia.

### PUC may crack down on deadbeats

AUSTIN (AP) — Electric companies stuck after deadbeat customers make it their practice to rack up bills, then switch to a new provider and leave the old bill unpaid could get help from the Texas Public Utility Commission.

The PUC this month is scheduled to consider preventing some nonpaying customers from switching providers until they pay their previous utility debt.

Stream Energy chairman Rob Snyder says some people out there "switch professionally." He estimates his company gave away about \$30 million in electricity last year to people who didn't pay their bills.

## SETTLES

Continued from Page 1A

also see workers on the roof of the structure during the next few days, as work to stabilize the building's cap stones continues.

"There was a problem some years back with kids loosening the mortar holding the cap stones in place, causing them to fall to the street below," Ryan said. "However, these contractors are remov-

ing the cap stones and waterproofing the areas beneath them, then pinning them together to prevent the same sort of problems in the future."

Ryan said electrical wiring on floors four through 13 will also begin in the near future, as work to renovate and restore the aging structure continues.

"We're about to begin wiring the walls," Ryan said. "That means we'll also be able to put up one side of the dry wall

on those floors. Overall, we're between 20 and 30 percent complete with the project. Approximately 20 percent of the mechanical and plumbing work has been completed, so we're making good progress. However, there are still a lot of contracts that haven't even been started, so we're a long way from completion."

Ryan said one of the projects expected to begin soon is the installation of the window frames on the second

and third floors.

"The window frames for those floors are in the warehouse and we expect to begin stalling them next month. We'll also begin working on the store fronts that will be located on the bottom floors," he said. "Right now there are plans for a restaurant and a bar, with between two and three retail spaces, as well. However, that could change at any time because this is very much a work in progress."

According to information provided by SHDC, the original cost of construction for the Settles Hotel was reported to be \$500,000. Opening in October of 1930 to great fanfare and support by the local community, the Settles Hotel was often compared to the finest hotels of its day. In its prime, the Settles hosted dignitaries and celebrities such as Elvis Presley, Lawrence Welk, Herbert Hoover and many others.

For more informa-

tion on the project, visit <http://www.settleshotel.com>

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## TRUSTEES

Continued from Page 1A

science rooms, gymnasium, library, cafeteria and special needs instructional areas.

"We found we could expand the number of classrooms to 28 instead of the original 24 we had planned," Edwards said. "That works out to nine classrooms for students in kindergarten and first grade, nine for those in second and third, nine for grades four and five and one for

special needs students." All classrooms will be in excess of 800 square feet, he added.

All three new buildings will follow the same basic floor plan, which should save the district money in the long run, Edwards said. Moss Elementary, which will be extensively renovated, will end up having many of the same features as the new buildings, he added.

"It will save you money on the design side, obviously," he said. "Then, you'll save a lot more

money on the construction side ... because things will go much more efficiently."

The next step will be for architects to meet with teachers and campus administrators to get their input on classroom design. Those meetings will take place within the next two weeks, BSISD Superintendent Steven Saldivar said.

After that, the major concern for officials will be finding a construction manager to oversee the various projects

over the course of the next two to three years.

The process of finding the construction manager will begin at the Sept. 14 board meeting, when trustees will officially call for "requests for proposals" from interested contractors.

With the state economy in a downturn, the BSISD project is already attracting attention from construction firms, Edwards said.

"I've taken about a half-dozen calls from contractors in the past week," he said. "Obvi-

ously, the economy is down right now and there's not as much construction work going on as in the past couple of years. That, coupled with the way the project is designed, makes it very attractive to contractors."

Edwards said a construction manager should be named by late November.

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## BSISD

Continued from Page 1A

That means taxes on a median-priced home within the district (\$42,000) will increase by about \$11 a month, Waggoner said.

The new package drew fire from Big Spring Mayor Tommy Duncan, who urged trustees to show fiscal restraint prior to approving the budget.

"I know the other taxing entities in Howard County have worked very hard to keep taxes where they are or even reduce them some," Duncan said. "This may not be the time to increase the tax burden on the community ... I want to encourage you to re-look at the tax rate

and make every effort to decrease the tax burden on this community's residents."

In particular, Duncan objected to the district having \$10 million in reserve funds.

Those funds, however, are placed in reserve to allow the district to continue operation in case of an interruption in state aid, Waggoner said.

"The Texas Education Agency strongly recommends that we hold about three months in operating expenses in reserve," she said. "For us, that equals \$10 million."

BSISD Superintendent Steven Saldivar defended the new budget and tax rate.

"I think it's important to realize that our budget and tax rate will be

pretty much the same as last year, except for the increase in debt service, of course," Saldivar said. "The point I'm trying to make is that we didn't go up all that much ... and most of the increase was because of the salary increases we gave."

The new budget and tax rate were approved unanimously.

In other business, trustees approved:

- An agreement with Greater Opportunities

of the Permian Basin to continue operating the local Head Start program at the Lakeview school building.

- The purchase of 245 computers at a cost of \$168,000.

- The hiring of Janine Noble as a math teacher at the junior high school.

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331 ext. 234 or by e-mail at [reporter@bigspringherald.com](mailto:reporter@bigspringherald.com)


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