



Texarkana Gazette

\$1.00 | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2018 | texarkanagazette.com | 4 SECTIONS, 26 PAGES

TEXAS SIDE | INVESTIGATION

Alleged online school threat is reported

Police arrest suspect on terroristic threat charge

A 24-year-old Texarkana, Texas, man was arrested Tuesday after allegedly posting a photo of a rifle on social media with the comment “I’m thinking about finally going back to school.”

Police officers and FBI agents took Ricky Jared Rankin into custody early Tuesday afternoon outside his home on Park Lane on a terroristic threat charge.

Police said Rankin made the post Monday night on his Instagram account, and people who know him reported it to Texarkana, Texas, Police Department.

Detectives began investigating immediately and got a warrant for his arrest Tuesday morning. Local school districts were notified as a precaution.

During a search of his property, authorities did not find the AR-15 rifle from the photo, “but weapons belonging to other family members in the home have been secured,” TTPD spokesman Shawn Vaughn said in a press release.

“We don’t know if this post was meant as a joke or if he really planned to go to a school with a gun. However, our department takes comments like this very seriously and will take swift action to protect the children in our schools. No one wants the tragic events that we’ve all seen in other places to be repeated here,” Police Chief Dan Shiner said.

Rankin is being held in the Bi-State Justice Building jail. No bond has been set.



RANKIN

POLICE | SCHOOL SAFETY

‘See Something, Say Something’

Police, school urge people to report potential threats

Texarkana, Ark., Police Department is working with Texarkana, Ark., School District to launch a “See Something, Say Something” campaign to heighten awareness of potential threats in schools.

The campaign is a result of “the horrific events that have occurred recently involving school shootings,” according to TAPD.

Anyone who sees or hears something about a possibly dangerous or harmful circumstance should call and report it.

“With the community working together both inside and outside of our school walls, we can assure our childrens’ safety,” said Officer Kristi Bennett, spokeswoman for TAPD.

To report suspicious activity, contact TAPD at 903-798-3130.

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Photo courtesy Suzanne H. Irwin

■ Texarkana College President James Henry Russell poses with the 2018 Achieving the Dream award with staff and faculty members in Tennessee.

Texarkana College earns highest national honor

TC is one of only two community colleges to receive the award

By JENNIFER MIDDLETON
Texarkana Gazette

Texarkana College received one of the top community college awards in the nation Tuesday, a recognition leaders say is hard proof of the changes they’ve made in the college and its culture of success.

Fifteen staff and faculty members are at the Gaylord Hotel in Nashville, Tenn., where they received one of only two prestigious 2018 Achieving the Dream Leah Meyer Austin Awards, the

highest honor awarded to community colleges to recognize outstanding transformational change leading to student success and completion.

The ceremony was held on the first day of the annual Achieving the Dream conference, which will last for three days. This year’s award is sponsored by the Kresge Foundation and is accompanied by a \$25,000 prize. Odessa College is the other award recipient.

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Photo courtesy Suzanne H. Irwin

■ The Achieving the Dream Leah Meyer Austin Award is the highest honor awarded to community colleges.

TEXAS | WATER AUTHORITY

New SRBA members sworn in, take part in training workshop

By JENNIFER MIDDLETON
Texarkana Gazette

MOUNT PLEASANT, Texas—Sen. Bryan Hughes swore in the recently appointed board members of the Sulphur River Basin Authority during the group’s board workshop Tuesday.

Re-appointees Wally Kraft, Brad Drake, Katie Stedman and Bret McCoy took the oath, along with new members Gary Cheatwood, Kelly Mitchell and Chris Spencer, who Gov. Greg Abbott appointed as chairman of the organization.

The workshop was part of the new members’ board training, which is required by

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ARKANSAS SIDE | CITY BOARD

Arkansas-side directors OK deal for undercover task force police vehicles

By KARL RICHTER
Texarkana Gazette

The Texarkana, Ark., Board of Directors approved a lease-to-own deal for undercover police vehicles during its meeting Tuesday.

The board agreed to use federal grant funds to acquire the vehicles for use in investigations by the Bi-State Narcotics Task Force.

McLarty Ford submitted a winning bid

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Topping Out



Staff photo by Jim Williamson

■ Texarkana A&M University-Texarkana’s “topping out” of its Building for Academic and Student Services took place Tuesday morning. The building’s final beam was signed by university officials and community members last week but was not placed in the building until this week. The building has an estimated cost of \$32 million and will contain 58,000 square feet. It will house the expanded nursing program, business programs, classrooms, laboratories and support services. Construction is expected to be finished in late fall and students are expected to begin using the building in the spring 2019 semester.

BUSINESS | ALBERTSONS

Common rival Amazon involved in Albertsons buying Rite Aid, Walmart’s stock falling

By MICHAEL CORKERY AND CHAD BRAY
NYTimes News Service

The supermarket operator Albertsons said Tuesday morning that it would buy the remnants of the Rite Aid drugstore chain. By the end of the day, Walmart saw its stock drop by more than 10 percent on weak profit.

Both can blame Amazon.

An old-line grocer, Albertsons is striving for reinvigoration in a retail landscape being upended by e-commerce competitors and discount food stores. But it can be dif-

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TC
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Dr. Donna McDaniel, vice president of instruction, said it took an entire team working together to achieve this top goal.

“This has never been about one person. It’s about jumping in as a team and everybody doing their part,” she said. “There were so many pieces going on at the same time to transform the college and create a change of culture to get to this part.”

Since 2012, TC has been a part of ATD, a growing network of more than 220 community colleges working to together to help students achieve academic success, personal growth and economic opportunity. The program also sends two coaches to each member school annually to help them achieve these goals.

According to 2017 data, TC

has the highest completion rate of all Texas community colleges. It also tripled the three-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students from 10 percent to 33 percent between 2008 and 2014. Graduation rates for black students also increased from four percent to 27 percent during that time period.

McDaniel said that while attending the conference, she realized how different TC was from the other schools.

“They’re talking about what they want to do,” she said. “With President James Henry Russell’s leadership, we are able to do those things, implement them and put them in place and make a difference. I hope the community realizes when they passed that bond almost six years ago that it was a good investment. What we’re wanting to be is the economic driver for our area and that they recognize that

they made a good investment and we in turn are investing in our community by providing quality graduates.”

Texarkana College almost closed its doors in 2011 due to lack of state and local funding, stagnant graduation rates and gaps in student success. In 2012, Bowie County voters TC’s annexation of the entire county, a move that helped TC remain a vital educational source in the community.

Jamie Ashby, associate professor of mathematics who is also TC’s ATD core team leader, said it was very fulfilling to see the results of the hard work so many invested for so many years.

“Our hearts are passionate to see students succeed and complete,” she said. “This is a culmination of so much effort on the parts of the faculty, students and community to be able to change the lives of our students.”

She added that today’s

award ceremony really drove home the reality of all that time and effort.

“It was really very humbling and thrilling,” she said. “There are over 2,300 people in attendance at the conference. To have everyone stand and applaud and recognize on a national level the work at Texarkana College to improve student success and completion and the fact that is for systemic changes at the institution, it’s just really humbling and thrilling. Very exciting.”

TC was invited to fill out an application for the award and that application included several recommendation letters. The Texas Association of Community Colleges and the Texas Pioneer Foundation, led by Fred Markham, both submitted letters of support.

Russell said that without these letters, and the support of both organizations, TC would not have been able to rise to this level of

achievement.

“There were some early grants by the Texas Pioneer Foundation that really laid the foundation for so much of the success,” he said. “You could almost say that without Mr. Markham’s investment in some key things, I’m not sure we would have come out of the hole we were in.”

Russell also gave much of the credit to the faculty, staff and leadership for their willingness to take on additional responsibilities, in addition to changing the culture and day-to-day operations at the college.

“Donna McDaniel has truly been an instructional leader for Texarkana College and so much of the success, you have to point to her and give credit to her,” Russell said. “She’ll point to her team and say it’s the deans and the faculty. That is very, very true, but Donna has done an unbelievable job to achieve the student

success that really earned us this award. Donna has implemented procedures, policies and people.”

He also gave credit to the school’s board of trustees, which he said enabled TC to win the award.

“They have set very high expectations and monitored data and results closely and this is what happens when you have an outstanding board with great names like we have at Texarkana College,” he said, adding that winning the award is definitely a huge honor for the community.

“This is a big win for TC faculty and staff. It really shows the results of hard work when the classroom door is shut. It shows we are on the right track,” he said. “Now that we’re seeing success, we know how much harder we have to work to keep moving that needle in a positive direction.”

Campaign -
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Describe specifically what you observed, including:

- who or what you saw;
- when you saw it;
- what you heard;
- where it occurred; and
- why it’s suspicious.

For an emergency, call 911.

“TAPD supports a strong emphasis on school safety by actively patrolling our school campuses, responding and following up on any suspicious information received, conducting annual active-shooter training and possessing a strong working relationship with TASD security. TAPD currently continues to seek out measures to heighten and strengthen security for our children to provide them a safe learning environment,” Bennett said.

Board
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to provide the vehicles for a total monthly payment of almost \$1,700 for three years. The money has already been awarded to the city through the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program administered by the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Ward 2 Director Laney Harris expressed concern that the funding request contained information that might identify the vehicles. Police Chief Robert Harrison assured him that was not a problem.

The board heard a second reading of an ordinance amending city personnel policy. Changes include tweaking sick leave and funeral leave rules, adding professional certifications for which employees can earn pay bonuses of \$20 a month, and establishing a social media use policy. The board is expected to vote on the ordinance at its next meeting.

Harris asked what would happen if an employee were found to be in violation of the social media policy. Finance Director TyRhonda Henderson said the chain of command, beginning with department heads and ending with the city manager, would handle the issue the same as any other disciplinary matter.

Parks and Recreation Director Ross Cowling told the board that the city’s 2017 Sparks in the Park celebration won third place in the festival of the year category at Arkansas Festivals and Events Association’s annual awards. Ward 1 Director Linda Teeters encouraged Cowling to enter more such contests in the future.

The board’s next meeting is scheduled for March 5.

On Twitter: @RealKarlRichter

‘The Johnson Treatment’



Jay Janner/Austin American-Statesman via AP

■ Andrea Solomon of Miami steps up to a photo booth to re-create “the Johnson Treatment” Monday at the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin on Presidents Day. Lyndon Johnson, the 36th president of the United States, was famous for his intimidating technique of persuasion.

Stores

Continued from Page 1A

difficult for any company, no matter how strategic its deal-making, to pull off a revival in this environment.

The retail stalwart, Walmart has been trying to build its online presence as it moves to fend off Amazon. But even deep pockets do not guarantee success in an increasingly digital landscape.

Amazon is the omnipresent foe, in whatever realm that Albertsons or Walmart plays in. The e-commerce giant wants to dominate the grocery store business, while also eyeing the health care industry.

“It’s the battle of the old generation versus the new generation,” said Craig Johnson, president of Customer Growth Partners, a retail consulting firm. “And right now the companies that are gaining share is the new generation.”

The deal for Rite Aid puts Albertsons directly in the middle of two major pushes by Amazon.

Albertsons plans to rebrand its in-house pharmacies under the Rite Aid name and to continue operating some stand-alone Rite Aid stores. The bet is that the increased foot traffic to the in-house pharmacies will bring more customers to Albertsons’ food aisles, where they will pick up a rib-eye steak or a bunch of bananas on their way out.

Last year, Amazon moved aggressively to extend its e-commerce edge to groceries, acquiring Whole Foods for \$13.4 billion in a deal that greatly enhanced its ability to deliver fresh food to millions of U.S. households.

Amazon’s entry into the grocery business could hurt Albertsons and similar chains whose greatest asset may be the convenient locations of their stores. If Amazon increases its home delivery of fresh food, that convenience may not be as appealing.

Conventional grocers like

■ See related story on 3A

Albertsons are also feeling pressure from chains like Trader Joe’s, which is known for its affordable high-quality products, and Wegmans, a growing regional chain that has built a cultlike following.

“Grocery is being hit by multiple factors,” said Gerald Storch, the former chief executive of the retailer Hudson’s Bay.

The pharmacy business, too, is undergoing major changes, with the nation’s largest operators of drugstores pursuing mergers to control costs and increase profits.

In December, the drugstore giant CVS Health said it would merge with health insurer Aetna in a \$69 billion deal that could reshape the way health care is delivered in the United States. That deal came together after a federal judge blocked Aetna’s proposed merger with rival Humana last year.

Rite Aid had previously sought to bulk up by merging with Walgreens. Negotiations between two of the biggest drugstore chains in the United States ended after antitrust authorities indicated they were unlikely to approve the combination.

Instead, Rite Aid agreed last year to sell 1,932 stores and three distribution centers to Walgreens for \$4.38 billion.

Amazon’s specter also looms over the health care field. The company recently teamed up with Berkshire Hathaway and JPMorgan Chase to form an independent health care company to serve the three firms’ employees and potentially revamp the broader industry.

For Albertsons, the Rite Aid deal is just the latest step to draw in more customers.

In November, the company reached an agreement with Instacart to provide on-demand

grocery-delivery services. It also invested last year in El Rancho Supermercado, a Texas-based retailer focused on stores for Latino customers.

Originally founded by Joe Albertson in Boise, Idaho, in 1939, Albertsons grew primarily across the West. In 2013, it was acquired by a group of investors led by the private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management for about \$3 billion.

Its biggest deal came in 2014 when Cerberus agreed to buy Safeway, another grocery chain whose roots lie in Idaho, for \$9.2 billion. A planned public offering of the company’s stock in 2015 never took place.

The Rite Aid deal provides Albertsons’ investors with a way of finally going public after investing billions of dollars. Under the deal’s terms, Rite Aid shareholders would get \$1.83 in cash and one share of Albertsons stock, or 1,079 shares of Albertsons stock, for every 10 shares of Rite Aid they owned.

Walmart’s biggest challenges are tied to its own plans to compete with Amazon.

Walmart spent heavily acquiring online retailers like Bonobos, Jet.com and ModCloth. Investors have largely been willing to forgive the company’s softening profits as long as the investments resulted in increased sales.

But Wall Street is getting impatient.

In announcing the fourth-quarter earnings Tuesday, Walmart said its online sales had grown 23 percent in the United States during the three-month period that ended Jan. 31. That was less than half the rate of growth in each of the previous three quarters.

“Walmart got a late start to the internet game, and they are still suffering for it,” said Johnson, of Customer Growth Partners.

SRBA
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House Bill 2180. It was passed during the last legislative session and includes several directives on how the organization should address deficiencies the Texas Sunset Commission reported to lawmakers.

Kraft, who’s been on the board for five years, outlined their budgeting, agenda and meetings procedures for the new members and also reminded them of SRBA’s mission.

“I think the main thing we have to do, our objective, is to take care of the Sulphur River Basin,” he said.

SRBA was created in 1985 to conserve and develop natural resources in the 11-county basin. The group came under fire in 2015, when the Sunset Commission, which has the power to abolish state agencies, issued a report stating SRBA showed a lack of transparency with stakeholders and the public and was also not following Texas Open Meetings Act requirements.

HB 2180 addressed these issues, and each board member has now received the required meeting training. It also mandated that SRBA hire an executive director by Oct. 1.

Spencer said he spoke with a representative in the governor’s office last week, and was told if they didn’t have one by the time the next legislative session convenes in January 2019, that “it wouldn’t be pretty.”

The board then discussed how they would outline a job description for an executive director and how they would pay them. SRBA is funded by the Joint Commission for Program Development, comprised of water districts in the Dallas Metroplex which are seeking additional supplies for their growing populations. JCPD gives SRBA \$225,000 annually for routine business and also funds studies with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the basin and if additional water supplies could be made available. The lack of other funding was also addressed in HB 2180, and the board discussed what role an executive director could play in seeking that money to not only pay that position’s salary, but to possibly fund additional studies.

“From inception, SRBA was not set up with a steady stream of income,” McCoy said.

Toward the end of the meeting, the board discussed the JCPD and other possible revenue streams.

“It boils down to the fact that we have the water and they want it,” Kraft said. “To me, we’re about water, not about economic fallout. If we develop it, we should get some of it.”

The next meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m. Tuesday, March 20 at the Mount Pleasant Civic Center.

Queen Elizabeth II
makes her first visit
to Fashion Week
in London

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON—Queen Elizabeth II has always dressed with style and flair—but Tuesday marked her first visit to the showy catwalks of London Fashion Week.

The monarch squeezed in the front row, chatting with American Vogue editor Anna Wintour—who wore her trademark sunglasses—and presented an award recognizing British design excellence.

It was an unusual outing for the 91-year-old monarch, who seemed totally at ease at the type of event usually frequented by stars like Kate Moss and Sienna Miller.

She was elegant in a Angela Kelly duck egg blue tweed dress and jacket detailed with tiny aquamarine Swarovski crystals set off by formal black gloves.

Elizabeth carried a matching handbag—of course—and wore her mostly white hair

swept back.

The queen didn’t bother with the statement stiletto heels favored by many of the younger fashionistas, opting for sensible dark low-heeled court shoes for the awards presentation.

“As a tribute to the industry, and as my legacy to all those who have contributed to British fashion, I would like to present this award for new, young talent,” she said.