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Hood County News

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COURTROOM WITNESS: Sandy Aitken, pictured with her husband Robert at their kitchen table in Springtown, recorded in the handwritten notes she took during the capital murder trial of her nephew's wife that the judge appeared to sleep at least 16 times. Darlie Routier, accused of stabbing her little boys to death, sits on death row. She denies committing the crime.

Aunt Sandy's notebooks

Questions raised by extensive notes kept at Routier trial

Sandy Aitken's incessant note-taking during the murder trial of her nephew's wife, Darlie Routier, agitated prosecutors and even the judge. Chronicled in the 405 handwritten pages is her perspective of the controversial trial, including perspectives not chronicled in the official court transcript.

Routier Revisited



Was Darlie unjustly convicted?

HCN UNDERWRITING STATEWIDE SERIES

"Justice for All" and "Revisiting Routier: Was Darlie unjustly convicted?" are two series underwritten by the Hood County News and offered to newspapers across the state through the Texas Center for Community Journalism.

ture and an antique-style radio sitting on the kitchen island. "Church in the Wildwood" is playing when a visitor comes to call.

Sandy and her husband take seats at the kitchen table to talk about the woman Sandy's nephew, Darin, married back in the late 1980s. Sandy hasn't seen her in more than a decade. Premature triplet grandbabies and other happenings in a busy life eventually made it too difficult to travel all the way to women's death row in Gatesville.

But it all comes flooding back on this Tuesday afternoon, as Sandy spreads the papers that have been tucked away for years inside the hutch by her kitchen table. The conversation involving harsh realities and modern-day crimes clashes

with the country decor.

Sandy and her husband had rushed to Dallas on the morning of June 6, 1996, arriving at

Baylor hospital just hours after Darlie Routier. Darlie's little boy, Damon, was in another part of the hospital, in a body bag. His older brother Devon, about to celebrate his seventh birthday, had died on the floor of the family's home in Rowlett. Both boys had been stabbed repeatedly and viciously. Darlie's

throat was cut, and she had immediately been rushed into surgery upon her arrival at Baylor.

When the police arrested Darlie and charged her with murder despite her claims of an intruder, Sandy promised Darlie that God would take care of her. She told her that right up to the time a jury pronounced her guilty and she was whisked off to death row.

During the month-long trial in Kerrville, Sandy sat in the courtroom every day.

"Sandy, you slipped under their radar," lead defense attorney Doug Mulder would tell her, referring to prosecutors having banished from the courtroom other family members who were set to testify.

At first, Sandy jotted notes in a spiral notebook as a way to distract herself from what she felt was an atmosphere hostile to Darlie and her family. But then she began recording the proceedings in earnest, as fast as her fingers could move the pen. Mulder, she said, would always tell her how much her note-taking annoyed the Dallas County prosecutors.

Sandy said the judge even told her that she needed to "be careful about your note-taking." Why he would say such a thing puzzled her, since the court-

PLEASE SEE TRIAL | 3A

Unwanted bees 'sticking' around longer than usual

BY MARK WILSON
HOOD COUNTY NEWS

Pecan Plantation resident Marita Crowder feels right at home with bees.

Well, almost.

She discovered a honeybee hive in a pecan tree in the backyard of her home on Hanging Moss Drive, and placed a phone call to County Extension Agent Marty Vahlenkamp asking for advice. He referred her to a beekeeper equipped to remove hives.

Before she knew it, the beekeepers who arrived Monday convinced her to put on protective gear so she could witness the removal process up close.

"I still can't believe I did this, but I suited out too," Crowder said. "It was quite a learning experience."

Crowder said beekeepers Dwain Cleveland of Glen Rose and Lee Burrough of Pecan took down the hive without incident.

"It was in a tree about 25 feet in the air," Crowder said. "That, in itself, caused a prob-



COURTESY OF LEE BURROUGH

BUSY AS BEES: This honeybee hive was found in the backyard of a home on Hanging Moss Drive in Pecan Plantation and was removed on Monday by beekeepers. It contained an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 bees.

show panic.

"I never felt threatened at all," she said, but admitted it was hard not to flinch. "They took probably about 3-1/2 pounds of bees out of it."

Cleveland, who began working with bees in 1975 and started removing bees professionally in 2003, said he believed that the bees were the Italian variety - not Africanized. He said the worker bees are about 1-2-inch long to 3/8ths of an inch.

"There were probably not over 20,000 - maybe 25,000," Cleveland said, noting that larger hives can contain up to about 80,000 bees.

He used a suction device to store many of the bees in a wooden crate. Cleveland then transferred them, along with part of the honeycomb, to start a new colony with a new queen on his property near Glen Rose.

Cleveland said that around this time in the fall, hives have more honey so the bees tend to be more protective.

PLEASE SEE HIVES | 2A

Council candidates debate

BY KATHY CRUZ
HOOD COUNTY NEWS

Several dozen people showed up Tuesday night for a Granbury City Council candidates forum hosted by the Hood County Tea Party.



Pirkle



Tipton



Sandel

All five candidates also put in an appearance.

Incumbents Mitch Tyra of Place 3 and Laurel Pirkle, Place 5, each have challengers for re-election. For Tyra, it's Gary Couch of the Planning and Zoning Commission, a 20-year Granbury resident and real estate investor. Pirkle faces former bed and breakfast owner Keith Tipton and former City Manager Harold Sandel.

The gathering took place at American Town Hall on Travis Street. The election is Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Each candidate was given five minutes to speak, then were allowed to address written questions submitted by audience members. Each gave a one-minute closing statement.

Predominant topics were lowering the city's electric rates; the importance of the Opera House to tourism and issues with the delayed renovation project; and dealings with the Brazos River Authority (BRA) regarding the water level in Lake Granbury.

In Wednesday's issue, the Hood County News detailed the views of Tyra and Couch regarding the issues they consider to be of highest importance in their Place 3 competition.

In the Place 5 race, Tipton told audience members that

he has lived in Granbury for 13 years and spent almost 40 years in medical sales before going into the bed and breakfast business. He said that he is an independent candidate with "no ties."

Sandel said that he has more than 27 years of municipal experience, 17 of which was in Granbury and 10 of which was spent as city manager. Of the City Council's decision two years ago to replace him, Sandel said that he has no hard feelings and noted that he lasted much longer than the three-and-a-half years that is the average for city managers.

"I am more familiar (with city business) than anyone else running today," Sandel said. He added that "three issues" are of primary concern to him: the water level in the lake; fiscal responsibility, including reducing property taxes; and teamwork.

PLEASE SEE CANDIDATES | 2A

Motorcycle driver, 31, dies

BY MARK WILSON
HOOD COUNTY NEWS

A 31-year-old man on Thursday morning became the third Hood County area resident to die in a traffic-related accident in nine days.

Beau Allen Nichols, 31, of the 5800 block of Belaire Circle in the Canyon Creek subdivision southeast of Granbury, died at the scene when he was thrown

from his Suzuki motorcycle after it was struck from behind by a Toyota Camry on Mambriño Highway, according to Justice of the Peace Judy Watson. The accident was about half a mile east of Mambriño Baptist Church.

Nichols, who was wearing a helmet at the time of the accident, was pronounced dead at 8:23 a.m. The crash was called in to 911 at 6:59 a.m.

Neither the woman driving the Camry, nor her teenage son, were injured, officials said.

DPS troopers investigating the crash site said that the motorcycle was slowing down to make a right turn off of Mambriño onto Will Walters Road.

A trooper said that the crash investigation was continuing,

PLEASE SEE FATALITY | 2A

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Local, zone(s): 2 sections 24 pages plus supplements

State: 2 sections 24 pages

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Have an opinion? Write a letter to the editor, editor@hcnews.com. Include your name and city.

WEST NILE UPDATE: The incidence rate for West Nile virus may be somewhat reduced as the weather gets cooler in the area, but Hood County does have a fourth confirmed case now. The Texas Department of State Health Services confirmed that the latest one is the milder form, West Nile fever. 6A.

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