



OCTOBER 8, 2009 - AUSTIN, TEXAS

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GET OUT THE VOTE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

On Tuesday, November 3, 2009, you will have the opportunity to vote on 11 proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. These measures were approved by a two-thirds vote in the Texas House and Senate earlier this year, but must have the consent of the people of Texas to become effective. During the 81st Legislative Session, I supported all of these measures, and I plan to vote for them in November as well. Following is a brief description of each proposition along with comments "for" and "against" for your consideration.

Amendment No. 1 (HJR 132)

This amendment would authorize the financing for municipalities and counties to acquire buffer areas or open spaces adjacent to a military installation.

- **For** - The amendment would protect military installations from further development that could encroach upon or restrict military training or missions. It would also promote further investment to protect and promote new military installations.
- **Against** - The bonds used in such projects could result in a higher tax burden on property owners.

Amendment No. 2 (HJR 36, Article 1)

This amendment would authorize the Legislature to provide for the valuation of a residence homestead based solely on its value as a homestead, eliminating consideration of the "highest and best use". The exemption would apply solely to a primary residence homestead.

- **For** - This amendment would protect homeowners that live in areas that are transitioning from a residential area to a commercial area by keeping property taxes down.
- **Against** - Because the proposed amendment would base ad valorem taxes solely on residential use, it would reduce the values of taxable property and therefore reduce local tax revenue. If these values decline, the school district's per-student taxable property value will also decline, and the state must then provide additional funding under the Foundation School Program's equalization formulas.

Amendment No. 3 (HJR 36, Article 3)

This amendment would provide for uniform standards and procedures for the appraisal of property for ad valorem tax purposes. The property tax has been solely a local tax and is primarily administered on the local level. However, the state does retain an interest in property tax appraisal professionalism and competence. This proposition would allow the Legislature to strengthen state oversight of appraisal district practices and procedures. Because the Legislature did not pass enabling legislation to implement this amendment, the Legislature would determine how to enact this amendment in a future legislative session.

- **For** - Tax appraisal processes vary widely across the state, and there is no state oversight to require an appraisal district to follow state law or apply a standard

appraisal method. This amendment would allow for the state to implement a standard practice of tax appraisal processes and ensure state law is being enforced.

- **Against** - There is no known opposition at this time.

Amendment No. 4 (HJR 14, Article 2)

This amendment would enable the Legislature to dedicate state revenue, such as revenue now allocated to the Higher Education Fund, to the National Research University Fund's credit in an effort to establish additional nationally-recognized research universities.

- **For** - This amendment will help establish additional nationally prominent research universities. Because Texas only has two prominent research universities, the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, it can only admit a limited number of qualified applicants. Establishing more universities of this stature would ensure Texas could keep its best students.
- **Against** - The proposed amendment should focus the state's resources on those universities that are the closest to attaining tier-one status.

Amendment No. 5 (HJR 36, Article 2)

This amendment would authorize the Legislature to allow two or more adjoining appraisal districts, if they elect to do so, to consolidate appraisal review board functions. This amendment is permissive, allowing for appraisal districts to adopt this system.

- **For** - The ability to consolidate appraisal review boards would benefit rural counties that have a limited number of qualified persons to serve on an appraisal review board.
- **Against** - The amendment should more comprehensively address district consolidation--not just the one aspect of appraisal review board consolidation.

Amendment No. 6 (HJR 116)

This amendment would authorize the Veterans' Land Board to provide for, issue and sell general obligation bonds of the state for the purpose of selling land to Texas veterans or providing them home or land mortgage loans. The proposed amendment would also remove the \$500 million cap on bonds previously authorized for those purposes by prior constitutional amendments. This proposition would remove that requirement and allow the board to issue new bonds in place of those retired or redeemed.

- **For** - This amendment would give the Veterans' Land Board the sufficient bonding authority needed to continue the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program and Veterans' Land Program. The current constitutional provision requires the board to return to the Legislature and the voters every four years to secure bonding authority, which, to date, voters have never denied.
- **Against** - There is no known opposition at this time.

Amendment No. 7 (HJR 127)

This amendment would allow an officer or member of the Texas State Guard or other state militia or military force to hold other civil offices. There are a list of exceptions to the dual office holding prohibition, however, at the time the exceptions were written, the Texas State Guard or other state militia or military force were either overlooked or not in existence.

- **For** - The amendment is needed to allow a civil official to become active in the Texas State Guard or other state militia or military force.
- **Against** - There is no known opposition at this time.

Amendment No. 8 (HJR 7)

This amendment would authorize the state to contribute money, property and other resources for the establishment, maintenance and operation of hospitals for veterans in Texas.

- **For** - Texas currently lacks the authority to contribute to a veteran's hospital and this amendment would give the state the opportunity to improve existing veteran's facilities and establish new facilities.

- **Against** - There is no outright opposition to this amendment, however, there is some question that this is the best means to achieve the desired result.

Amendment No. 9 (HJR 102)

This amendment would protect the right of the public, collectively and individually, to access and use the public beaches bordering the seaward shore of the Gulf of Mexico.

- **For** - The amendment would strengthen the Texas Open Beaches Act by clarifying its intent to protect the public's right to access to public beaches. Putting this law in the Texas Constitution would protect it from future tampering. There has been recent dispute over the "rolling" beachfront easement, which authorizes the state to enforce the easement as natural changes occur in its location. The amendment would reduce litigation by clarifying the law's intent to keep beaches public.
- **Against** - The effect of Hurricane Ike was that the surge moved the line of vegetation, leaving homes, which were previously on private land, on the public beach. The state is currently authorized to require private property owners whose houses now stand on a public beach because of erosion and storm damage to remove the structures from that land. The amendment would make this law more difficult to change in the future and restrict property owners' rights to enjoy their property.

Amendment No. 10 (HJR 85)

This amendment would limit elected members of the governing boards of emergency services districts to terms that would not exceed four years.

- **For** - Currently, emergency services district commissioners are required to run for re-election every two years, which offers little continuity and experience. Requiring commissioners to run for election and then re-election every two years detracts from the work of the district and could politicize the office.
- **Against** - Emergency services districts are responsible for critical services and have broad power and the authority to levy taxes. The proposed amendment would weaken the accountability voters hold over commissioners.

Amendment No. 11 (HJR 14, Article 1)

This amendment would prohibit the taking of property for certain economic development or enhancement of tax revenue purposes and limit the Legislature's authority to grant the power of eminent domain to an entity.

- **For** - The amendment would enhance property protections by specifying that "public use" excludes the taking of property for the primary purpose of economic development or enhancement of tax revenue.
- **Against** - Most eminent domain problems have been addressed in statute, and putting this in the Texas Constitution would make the proposed changes permanent that could result in unintended effects that could impede legitimate eminent domain projects.

The House Research Organization and the Texas Legislative Council have provided more detailed information on the proposed constitutional amendments. These expanded analyses can be accessed at the following websites:

<http://www.hro.house.state.tx.us/framer2.htm>
www.tlc.state.tx.us/pubsconamend/pubsconamend.html

REGISTER TO VOTE!

Election Day is November 3, 2009 and the deadline to register to vote is October 5. You can find out whether or not you are registered to vote at <https://team.sos.state.tx.us/voterws/viw/faces/SearchSelectionVoter.jsp> or at the Secretary of State's voter hotline: 1-800-252-VOTE (8683). In Collin County, contact the Elections Division at www.co.collin.tx.us/elections/index.jsp, or in Dallas County visit the Elections Department at www.dalcoelections.org.

STATE NEWS

H1N1 VACCINE HEADING TO TEXAS

The first shipment of the H1N1 (Swine Flu) vaccination is expected in Texas early this month, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Texas is among 25 states and large cities that ordered more than 600,000 doses, but may only receive 137,000 doses of the FluMist nasal spray, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. That's out of about 237,000 FluMist requested. In addition, about 22,000 pediatric doses of the liquid anti-viral Tamiflu have been shipped to Texas. People with severe symptoms and medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes and immunosuppression should receive the anti-viral medication, as should pregnant women. Nationally, about 100 pregnant women have required hospitalization, according to news reports, and 28 have died from H1N1 influenza.

Medical experts warn that those under age 25 are at highest risk, with public schools being high density places for infections to spread. More than 70 percent of confirmed swine flu cases in Dallas County have been in people under age 25, but only 1 percent of cases have been elderly patients. Doctors are prescribing Tamiflu to children with severe flu symptoms or underlying medical problems in hopes of preventing bacterial infections, pneumonia or death. In Dallas County three children have died from the flu and Collin County has seen two teenage girls die from the virus.

The Texas Department of Health Services is issuing the following warnings to help curb the spread of this virus as well as traditional flu and any other airborne illnesses:

- Hand hygiene - wash hands regularly and use anti-bacterial hand cleansers
- Cough etiquette - cover your mouth when you cough; cough into your inner elbow
- Stay home when you are sick
- Be prepared to be sick
- Get flu vaccines for both seasonal and, if appropriate, H1N1 flu
- No aspirin for children
- Pneumococcal vaccine as recommended to provide additional protection against pneumonia

For more tips like these, visit www.TexasFlu.org.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY BILL IN ACTION

As mandated by Shapiro's HB 3 this session, the School Accountability Bill, the Texas Comptroller will begin conducting a study of school district resource allocation practices. This study is aimed at improving academic achievement and encouraging more cost-effective operations. The Comptroller will partner with the Education Research center at The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of Texas at Austin, and Texas A&M's Bush School of Government and Public Service. The Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, public school superintendents, and other education stakeholders will also participate.

The legislation requires the Comptroller to evaluate current academic accountability and financial data by integrating the data, then to rank the results of the evaluation to identify the performance by districts and campuses and to identify areas for improvement. The comptroller will also analyze the operating cost for each student and each program and the staffing cost for each student. It is expected to be completed in late 2010. The results will be made available free to school districts.

STATE TO ESTABLISH TEXAS STUDENT DATA SYSTEM

The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation has committed \$10 million to establish a Texas Student Data System (TSDS) for K-12 students in Texas. Goals for the system will be the capacity to enter and store information that allows educators to make decisions, predict

performance levels and graduation rates, changing the course of individual students at risk and better preparing all students for college and beyond.

The Texas Education Agency already has a comprehensive state reporting framework full of student data and information. However, that system is outdated and the information is said to be difficult to access and not conducive to providing information on how to impact student achievement.

Estimates are that TEA data collections - 104 of which are required each year - cost more than \$300 million per year. Houston alone reports costs at \$7 million per year. The TSDS will be used to deliver a higher level of automated functionality and service at lower costs by standardizing certain functions while preserving privacy of records.

The \$10 million from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation is geared to developing a statewide system to power educator dashboards and snapshots that deliver state education data to assist administrators so they can get information quickly. The information is also geared to follow students across both campuses and districts. It is hoped that the system will also better position Texas when the state applies for Recovery Act funding.

LINES IN THE SAND

The Texas House Committee on Redistricting held its first interim hearing at the end of September. By law, the Texas Legislature must redraw congressional and legislative districts every ten years. The redistricting process will begin during the next legislative session in 2011. This particular hearing was focused on the upcoming 2010 census as it relates to redistricting. The committee heard public testimony, as well as a presentation from the U.S. Census Bureau.

BORDER SECURITY RECENT FOCUS OF FEDERAL AND STATE ATTENTION

Border security has been the recent focus of both federal and state attention, with the proposal of the Department of Defense appropriations bill in the U.S. Senate.

In the Senate Appropriations Commission, \$2 million was approved for the Center for Border Security and the Center for Defense Systems Research at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). The measure has been laid out before the full Senate, but awaits a vote.

The research program focuses on developing monitors and sensors for use in a variety of border security and military applications. UTEP was awarded funding two years ago from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and named a Center for Academic Excellence for the Intelligence Community. This allowed UTEP students to specialize in homeland and national security degree programs.

At the state level, the Governor recently announced the deployment of Ranger Reconnaissance Teams that will be comprised of Texas Rangers and Texas National Guard counter drug forces, with the support from Operation Border Star Unified Command, including Texas sheriffs, Highway Patrol strike teams and DPS aviation resources. The teams were launched early in August, specifically to address an increase in burglaries of rural homes, ranches and hunting camps in remote areas along the border.

In 2008, more than 5,700 homicides occurred in Mexico, with roughly 1,600 in Juarez alone. In 2009, Juarez has experienced more than 1,500 brutal homicides. Nearly 73 percent of Texas' 1,254 mile border is privately owned, and landowners often face threats from violent criminal organizations that smuggle drugs, people and weapons across the border.

The Ranger Recon Teams will identify these high-intensity smuggling routes in remote areas, and conduct operations to reduce border-related crime in these corridors. According to the Texas Rangers Assistant Chief, L.C. Wilson, who has oversight of the Ranger Recon Teams, they are mostly worried about the spillover of drug cartel violence in northern

Mexico. "We want (smugglers) to be fearful that anytime they come over they could be running into a team."

Perry also recently announced the award of \$2 million in state criminal justice funds to the Border Sheriff's Coalition to continue the video surveillance program along the border, known as the Virtual Border Watch Program. The program uses a system of cameras along the border that creates a virtual online patrol allowing the public to view and report suspicious activity to law enforcement.

HHSC AWARDED \$50M GRANT TO HELP WITH INSURANCE COSTS

Just as a national report is issued showing that health insurance premiums Texas families pay increased almost five times as fast as family incomes in the last 10 years, a \$50 million grant through the federal Health Resources and Services Administration has been awarded to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to provide cost-sharing accounts to assist low-income Texans in the purchase of health insurance. While employers will still cover most of the employee insurance cost, the state will provide additional help for employees who either cannot afford their part of the premium or their co-pays. First-year funding can also be used for outreach, marketing and related costs to launch the new initiative.

The grant covers five years for up to \$10 million each year, with the state contributing a 20 percent match. HHSC will create cost sharing accounts for Texans earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$66,000 for a family of four. The cost sharing accounts will be managed by the health plan, with the employee directing how the funding is used.

The three new initiatives for eligible employees that will be available in 2010 include:

- Healthy Texas helps small businesses by lowering premiums with a state-funded pool to help cover employees with high health care costs.
- TexHealth Coalition provides coverage to small businesses in Galveston and Central Texas and will expand to Houston, Dallas, El Paso and the Brazos Valley within a year.
- Community First Health Plan will offer a new coverage for small employers in Bexar County and seven surrounding counties in January.

STIMULUS FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY

Some \$17 million in federal stimulus funding is available for transportation efficiency projects for Texas cities, counties, public school districts and other local and state entities through grants administered by the State Energy Conservation Office (SECO). The competitive grants will be awarded in the following categories:

- \$11 million for alternative fuels projects for government vehicles - funds can be used to buy alternative fuel vehicles, purchase alternative fuel vehicle conversions and buy equipment for alternative fuel stations. The alternative fuels eligible include natural gas, propane, hydrogen, ethanol, electricity and biodiesel.
- \$6 million for traffic signal projects - funds can be used to synchronize traffic lights on major routes and to replace bulbs in traffic signals with light emitting diodes (LEDs).

As with most Recovery Act funding, one of the criteria and guidelines provides that priority will be given for ready-to-go projects that can begin immediately. Application requests for alternative fuels projects opened today, Friday, and traffic signal project requests will be posted next week. Entities have approximately 30 days to submit applications once application request are posted. For more information, visit <http://www.seco.cpa.state.tx.us/arra/>.

SECO will also administer stimulus funds for other public sector energy conservation programs. Application requests will be released soon for renewable energy efficiency projects and a loan program for energy retrofits for state and local government buildings.

DISTRICT NEWS

COLLIN COUNTY PREVIEWS COUNTYWIDE ELECTION PROGRAM

In addition to the constitutional amendment election voters will participate in on November 3, Collin County has been selected to participate in the countywide election program. Collin County applied to the Secretary of State's office for this pilot, and was selected, with the election including not only the constitutional amendments, but also the City of Farmersville Local Option and Wylie ISD Bond Propositions. According to the Collin County Elections Division, this special election will be a trial run for the countywide concept to ensure voters are not confused, and that polling places are able to close and report totals in a timely fashion.

The initial pilot program for countywide elections was created in 2005 and continued in 2007 with legislation co-sponsored by Senator Shapiro. During the 81st session this year, the program was permanently placed into state statute for counties wishing to participate.

On November 3, voters will be able to cast ballots at any of 57 vote centers, rather than precinct-specific locations. The idea is to make voting as convenient as possible, thereby increasing voter turnout. Collin County has more than 407,000 active status registered voters across 163 precincts. In last year's election the county supported 127 polling places with a turnout of about 76,000 on Election Day, plus 220,000 early voters.

The countywide program will also include some added technologies to help voters find a ballot box regardless of their location in the county. Those who register with the County's Elections Department will be sent a phone number that voters can text in their Zip Code and will receive addresses to the nearest vote centers. You can register for this service by visiting the County's website at www.collincountytx.gov and searching for "Elections Distribution List."

STATE FAIR OF TEXAS UNDER WAY

If you've driven down I-30 and seen a new addition to the Dallas skyline in the shape of a ferris wheel, you must know the State Fair of Texas is currently under way. What began as the Dallas State Fair & Exposition back in 1886, has grown to the 24-day showcase of entertainment, exhibits and competition spanning the 277-acre complex at Fair Park. This year's fair runs through October 18, culminating in the historic Red River Shootout between The University of Texas and Oklahoma University on Saturday, October 17. Fair ticket and parking information, as well as entertainment schedules can be found online at www.BigTex.com.

TEXAS COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AWARDS GRANTS TO COLLIN COUNTY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) has invested \$90,240 in grant awards to arts and cultural organizations in Senate District 8. Specifically the District received:

\$68,500 in Arts Create Grants - These grants provide operational support enabling arts and cultural organizations to conduct business. These grants represent a statewide investment in the Texas' creative economy and are provided by the Texas Commission on the Arts in response to feedback from arts organizations statewide expressing the need for operational support.

\$5,306 in Arts Respond Project Grants - These grants provide project assistance grants on a short-term basis and may include administrative costs directly related to the project. Projects must directly relate to the state's priorities by addressing one of the following:

- **Education** - projects that impact K-12 students in a school setting or during the school day in conjunction with school officials. Must be TEKS aligned (public schools).
- **Health & Human Services** - projects that focus on health related topics, serve specific populations, or occur in a health care or human service setting.
- **Economic Development** - projects that focus on job growth or cultural tourism.
- **Public Safety & Criminal Justice** - projects that focus on at-risk youth or incarcerated populations.
- **Natural Resources & Agriculture** - projects that occur in rural counties or focus on natural resources.

\$16,434 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds - These grants are one-time federal stimulus funds intended to preserve jobs.

TCA received 737 eligible applications from 436 organizations in 105 Texas cities for consideration. Grants from TCA support programs throughout Texas that stimulate the economy, enhance education, create social benefit, and attract tourists to the state. All grant recipients are required to make a minimum dollar for dollar match in order to receive state funding.

The organizations that received grants within District 8 include:

- City of McKinney/McKinney Performing Arts Center
- Cross Timbers Youth Orchestra
- McKinney Repertory Theatre
- Metropolitan Winds
- New Tang Dynasty Television Dallas
- Plano Children's Theatre
- Plano Symphony Orchestra
- Repertory Company Theatre (RCT)
- Rover Dramawerks
- Town of Addison/Special Event Department
- WaterTower Theatre

Over the course of the coming fiscal year, TCA will invest additional funding statewide. For detailed information on TCA's grant categories and how to apply, please visit www.arts.state.tx.us.

DALLAS CHAMBER NAMES 2009 ATHENA AWARD RECIPIENT

The Dallas Regional Chamber recently announced that Catherine Rodewald, President, Prudential Asset Resources and Managing Director/Chief Information Officer, Prudential Mortgage Capital Company, is the recipient of the 2009 ATHENA Award. The ATHENA Award is a national program that recognizes the accomplishments of a Dallas businesswoman.

The presentation of the award will take place at the 2009 Women's Business Conference luncheon on November 6, 2009 at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel

The ATHENA Award is open to individuals who strive toward the highest levels of professional accomplishment, excel in their chosen field, devote time and energy to their community in a meaningful way and forge new paths encouraging others to follow. Administered today through the non-profit ATHENA Foundation, more than 5,000 awards have been presented in over 500 communities throughout the world. By honoring exceptional leaders, the ATHENA Award Program seeks to inspire others to achieve excellence in their professional and personal lives.

Previous ATHENA Award recipients include Senator Shapiro, as well as Wanda Brice of The Women's Museum; Becky Sykes, Dallas Women's Foundation; Camille Keith, formerly of Southwest Airlines; Grace McDermott, US Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce; and Tegwin Pulley, Texas Instruments.

The Women's Business Conference is an annual, day long business education conference and networking opportunity for businesswomen and men at all levels in their careers. For more information on the ATHENA Award or the Women's Business Conference call 214-746-6776 or womenbiz@dallaschamber.org.

FRISCO ARTS FESTIVAL SHOWCASES LOCAL TALENT

The Frisco Arts Festival is being planned for October 16-18, featuring more than 100 juried visual artists along with visual, musical and performing art talent from North Texas and around the country.

The Festival will showcase not only artists, but attendees will experience a variety of art forms from oil on canvas to live music and fantastic food from local restaurants. Stage headliners on Friday, October 16, include the Grenadines and Diane Hart Experience. On Saturday, October 17, the featured performers will be the Frisco Community Band, Frisco Jazz Band, The Art of Belly Dancing, Ronny Spears Band, Stacy Arnold, 8-tracks and the Bluestem Grass. Sunday, October 18, the first featured musical artist is the Frisco All City Choir, and the featured performing band will be Urban Renewal.

On the Community Stage and Music Conservatory of Texas Stage, Wakeland High School, Roach Middle School, Griffin Middle School, Pioneer Middle School, Staley Middle School, Ashley Elementary and Collin County Ballet will perform.

The Frisco Area Children's Theatre, Barre Dance Studio, Studio Dance Centre, Corbell Elementary, Younger Generation Choir, Word of Mouth, Next Step Dance, Texas Dazzlers, Dance Unending, New Element, One Week, Ballet de Force and Next Step Dance will also be showcased.

Visit www.friscoartsfestival.org for more information and ways to volunteer. Admission is \$7 at the gate for adults, \$6 for seniors and free for 18 and under. Advance discount tickets are on sale online for \$6. Proceeds go to Frisco Arts, which grants funds to more than 20 art groups in Collin County.

THRIVING MINDS IN DALLAS

The City of Dallas, in partnership with the Dallas Independent School District, and more than 100 arts, cultural and civic organizations, has undertaken an groundbreaking initiative called Thriving Minds that is working to improve the quality of education for every Dallas child. Managed by Big Thought, a leading nonprofit creative learning organization, Thriving Minds is a citywide system of well-coordinated, robust creative learning opportunities, and other academic support services available to students and their families in neighborhoods across the city.

Thriving Minds helps City departments such as the Office of Cultural Affairs, parks and Recreation, and Dallas Public Library system to provide a coordinated system of learning opportunities for students in grades K-12 and their families in a variety of creative disciplines, including visual art, dance, creative writing, cooking, photography, chess, gardening, music, etiquette, science, technology and more. Offering free, year-round programming, Thriving Minds strives to stimulate imagination and support the development of essential learning skills such as problem-solving and decision-making in youth.

For more information about this partnership, visit www.bigthought.org/thrivingminds.

McKINNEY WASTE SERVICES GO GREEN

The North Texas based leader in the U.S. solid waste industry, IESI has unveiled its new 28,000 square foot Material Recovery Facility (MRF) in McKinney. Upon the U.S. Green Building Council's approval, this facility will be the first privately funded single-stream LEED certified Material Recycling Facility in North America.

The 28,000 square foot facility will annually process more than 144 million pounds of non-hazardous materials including glass, plastic, paper, aluminum, tin and cardboard. The facility itself incorporates sustainable features such as certified wood, building materials containing recycled content, low-emitting materials, water-conserving fixtures and features to reduce the heat-island effect.

Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council in 2000, and regulated by the Green Building Certification Institute, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of green commercial structures.

The IESI McKinney MRF also houses a second-floor community room and observation deck overlooking the recycling operations area. Here, IESI invites area schools, scouting groups, after-school programs, chambers of commerce and other organizations to tour the MRF and learn about the importance of recycling. The education room also contains a time capsule filled with items individuals and businesses currently recycle.

FLORENCE'S FOCUS

OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Unfortunately, all of us know someone who suffered through the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, the second most deadly cancer among women, after lung cancer.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, when the American Cancer Society and other organizations intensify efforts to encourage early detection. Nothing is more important to the decline of breast cancer deaths than discovering the disease early. When diagnosed before the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, breast cancer is 98 percent curable.

Although breast cancer death rates among women have been decreasing steadily since 1990 due to earlier detection and better treatments, mammography rates are now declining. This is alarming given the importance of early detection in the survival of breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends an annual mammogram for women 40 and over; and for women with a family history or at an increased risk, the Society recommends magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) screening starting at age 30. Women at very high risk of breast cancer can be diagnosed much earlier when combining the two technologies rather than mammography alone. Women should discuss options with their doctors.

Each one of us can do our part by asking the women in our lives to get an annual mammogram. As a past board member of the Susan G. Komen Foundation, I encourage all women to seek early detection. If you know someone who is 40 years old or above - or younger but at a higher risk - ask her if she's had a mammogram this year. Friends and family members are powerful motivation and Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a good time to provide that friendly reminder.

For more information visit www.cancer.org.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

STATE POSTS UNCLAIMED PROPERTY FOR THE TAKING

State law requires the Texas Comptroller's office to hold abandoned and unclaimed property reported by businesses and financial institutions until its owners or their legal

heirs claim it. The agency attempts to find the rightful owners of unclaimed properties through annual newspaper advertising, direct mail notices and the agency's Web site. Last year, a record \$147 million was returned to its rightful owners. This year, the list will be available at the Comptroller's exhibit during the State Fair of Texas, through October 18 in the Grand Place Building. To see if you have unclaimed property waiting for you, log on to www.claimtexas.org.

TPWD OFFERS CHANCE TO WIN LIFETIME HUNTING LICENSE

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is offering hunters and anglers a chance to win a Lifetime Super Combo hunting and fishing license - normally \$1,800 - for only \$5.

Two drawings will be held Dec. 30, 2009, and June 30, 2010, and applicants must have registered by Dec. 27 to be eligible for both drawings. Entries can be purchased anywhere fishing and hunting licenses are sold or online at the www.tpwd.state.tx.us. Proceeds from the drawing will help fund conservation efforts.

COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE TO HOLD TAX-HELP SEMINARS

The Texas Comptroller's Office is set to hold 19 seminars throughout October, outlining beneficial information for taxpayers, including sales tax forms, filing and paying taxes electronically, taxable goods and services and e-services to help taxpayers manage their accounts online, among other items. For a complete list of dates and times the seminars will be held, visit <http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/seminars.html>. For those unable to attend a seminar, call the Comptroller's tax assistance line at 800-252-5555.

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If you do not wish to receive Direct from Shapiro, please reply to this email with "REMOVE" in the subject line. Thank you!