

THE SECOND FRONT

Man Faces Rape Charge

A 19-year-old Houston man is charged with statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl.

Authorities said Christopher Willard is held on \$50,000 bond on the charge. The incident was alleged to have occurred off Forrest Street in a wooded area.

Police said Willard came to the girl's home and forced her across several yards into the wooded area.

Willard also is charged in a door-to-door scam.

Willard and another teenager are charged with soliciting funds fraudulently by conducting a door-to-door campaign in the community.

Charged are: Willard and Joshua D. Bruton, 17, of Houston. Each is held on \$10,000 bond on the stealing charge.

Willard, police said, also was involved with the theft of items taken from a pickup parked at 777 W. Highway 17. Taken on Feb. 1, was a CD player and a case containing about 30 CDs.

Pastor Russell Kane of the

Houston Assembly of God Church said last week he had been notified that funds were being raised in the church's name. No fund-raising drive was under way, he said.

Part of the money collected may have been destined for drugs, police said, noting prescription narcotics are also missing from the man Willard lived with.

Bruton also was arrested Jan. 31 for failing to comply with Cabool Municipal Court orders.

In other matters, police: —Investigated a burglary at Houston Middle School on Feb. 3-4. Nothing was reported taken.

—A runaway vehicle owned by Charles Evilsizer of Raymondville crossed U.S. 63 near Hocker Oil Co. and into the path of a Salem woman's car on Feb. 2.

—Charged Glen D. Williams, 45, with DWI, driving while revoked and failed to drive on the right half of the roadway on Feb. 1.



A section of the Tony Hogan Ford bridge nearly collapsed, causing the Missouri Department of Transportation to declare it unsafe. Piney Township will make repairs. The structure is on Cleveland Road over the Big Piney River.

Block Grant Sought

Texas County is seeking a \$400,000 block grant to aid in needed work at the Texas County Courthouse to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A hearing on the matter is set for 1 p.m. Feb. 20 at the USDA Service Center on South U.S. 63.

The county is proposing to contribute \$20,000 in cash, with grant

funding making up the difference.

Under the program, at least 51 percent of the funds must be used to benefit low- and moderate-income persons.

Earlier, the county put a sales tax issue on the ballot with a portion of the proceeds going to the needed courthouse work. Voters defeated the measure.

Municipal Court Holds Session

Houston Municipal Court met Monday before Judge Brad Ellsworth.

Cases heard:

•Mary Ann Davidson, stealing under \$150, \$100 fine and court costs.

•Ernest Miller, careless and imprudent by failing to drive on the right half of the roadway, \$300 fine plus court costs.

•Michael S. Nickell, minor in possession of alcohol, \$100 fine and court costs.



Bailiff Sworn In

Circuit Clerk Phyllis Staley administers an oath to Loyd Mitchell, bailiff. He began deputy duties with the department in May 1965 and retired in August 1993. At one time, Mitchell was Summersville's marshal. He has been bailiff since January 1997.



Road Deputies

The Texas County Sheriff's Department road deputies who recently received their oaths from Texas County Circuit Clerk Phyllis Staley. From left: Sheriff Dean Belshe, Kevin McGowen, Joey Moore, James Sigman, Glenn Buckner, Kevin Dunlap and Staley.

Stolen Property Recovered; Investigation Spreads

Stolen property recovered in Texas County has resulted in the recovery of vehicles in other counties, said Texas County Sheriff Dean Belshe.

Sheriff's deputies recovered a 16-foot van type trailer here that had been reported stolen Dec. 8 from a Christian County business.

Further investigation by the Texas County Sheriff's Department and Missouri State Highway Patrol resulted in the recovery of another van-type trailer and a 1988 Ford pickup also believed to be stolen.

Belshe said the investigation spread to other counties and resulted in more than 20 other believed stolen motor vehicles being recovered in Christian and Greene counties, including a \$26,000 motor

home.

Members of the sheriff's department and Missouri State Highway Patrol executed a search warrant Saturday at a residence on Highway HH.

Four persons were taken into custody at the home, Belshe said. Three were arrested and released on bond. Misdemeanor charges of possession of marijuana will likely be filed. All three have Willow Springs addresses.

A fourth person was taken into custody on a parole violation warrant, and a possession of a controlled substance/methamphetamine with intent to distribute charge will likely be filed.

Senate Votes To Kill Tax Increase On Farm Land In Missouri

The Missouri senate on Monday gave strong approval to a resolution killing a State Tax Commission order increasing the assessed valuation of farm land. The move would have resulted in higher taxes for farmers.

The senate voted 26 - 4 to block the order, duplicating the strong support demonstrated earlier by house members in approving the resolution. The measure was sponsored in the upper chamber by Sen. Sidney Johnson, D-Agency.

If the tax agency's order had been allowed to stand, the proposed revisions in assessments would have raised taxes on farm land in 1999.

State law allows members of the general assembly to reverse a commission order by passing a nullifying resolution in the first 60 days of an annual legislative session, which this year began Jan. 7. Rejection of the tax commission's order allows current rates of assessed valuation to remain in force.

Under Missouri tax codes, taxes on residential and commercial property are based on the market value of the property itself.

Tax assessments of farm land, however, are based on productivity values of land, which involve soil surveys, soil productivity indexes, production costs, crop yields, capitalization rates and other factors.

The assessments are applied to

grades of soil, of which there are eight, with the quality of the best soil being the first grade and the worst farmland being the eighth.

Under existing tax laws, agricultural land now is taxed at 12 percent of its assessed valuation.

Assessment increases proposed by the commission would have raised the assessed valuation of top-quality farmland 13.2 percent.

Soil grades two and three would have been increased 13.5 percent and 13.2 percent respectively. Soil grade four's assessed valuation would have been raised 12.7 percent, and grade five would have increased 13.3 percent, grade six 12.7 percent and grade seven 17.3 percent. No increase in the assessed valuation of grade eight, the lowest-quality soil, was proposed.

The tax commission had acted on recommendations of an agricultural economist from the University of Missouri-Columbia, who reportedly raised the assessments by factoring in the rent farmers could charge for crop and pasture land.

Many Missouri farmers, who are not expecting profit increases on crops or livestock of 12 percent to 17 percent, were dismayed by the proposed higher assessments. Some farmers even speculated they would be forced to sell their farms and equipment and turn to a different method of earning a livelihood.

County Selected for National Pilot Project

JEFFERSON CITY — State lawmakers on Wednesday set to discuss whether to allow a small group of Missourians who live overseas to vote in the November elections — via the internet.

Secretary of State Bekki Cook said the Department of Defense will assign a special identification code to 100 overseas voters registered in Texas and Howell counties to protect against voter fraud.

At a news conference, Cook said she was confident the names and

votes of the participants would be kept secret and that hackers could not infiltrate the system.

"We feel we are under the protection of the very best programmers," she said.

Non-military people who live abroad, such as Peace Corps volunteers, would also be eligible.

The pilot program would include Texas and Howell counties, as well as two counties in Florida and one in Utah — 250 voters in all.

"We are pleased to have two

highly respected and experienced county clerks on board to be part of this effort. They and their staffs will receive training provided by the Department of Defense," Cook said. Sen. Joe Maxwell, D-Mexico, Rep. Charles Fritts, D-Butler, and Rep. Kelly Parker, D-Salem, are pushing bills authorizing the program.

Under the present system, military personnel request an absentee ballot on a special form they get from their commanding

officer. The voters send the form back to Missouri with a signature.

The elections office processes ballot requests from military personnel.

It often takes two weeks for a ballot to reach service men and women overseas. The voters then sign an oath on the ballot and send it back to County Clerk Don Troutman.

The office then matches the two signatures to check for voter fraud.

COLUMN 6

The fight concerning COS telephone service continues: Rep. T. Mark Elliott, R-Carl Junction, said last week that he was preparing a bill to drop the words "Public Service" from the PSC's name. The panel would be called "Commission."

"They don't even get a 'The,'" Elliott said in an interview. "They don't call, they don't write, they don't care."

The program provides cut-rate calling between Houston and Cabool.

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Houston native Josh Burch, a senior at Drury College, is one the starting basketball players there.

Burch, a point guard, attended junior college at East Central College, Union, and walked on at Drury.

Drury, 12-9 late last week, plays at home Feb. 14 and 24.

Burch is set to graduate in May with a business administration degree. He is the son of Butch and Beth Burch.

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Texas County voters may have the opportunity to participate in a presidential primary in 2000 rather than a caucus.

Secretary of State Bekki Cook is supporting a bill to create a presidential primary.

"Overwhelmingly, the people of Missouri want a presidential primary system," Cook told the Senate Elections, Pensions and Veterans' Affairs Committee recently.

Missouri last held a presidential primary in 1988, a move designed to benefit Rep. Dick Gephardt's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination...Also on the political front...Claire McCaskill, whose family's roots date to Houston, is considering a run for the Democratic nomination for state auditor. She is Jackson County's prosecutor. Margaret Kelly, a Republican, announced earlier she would not seek re-election.

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We occasionally stumble into something with a local angle on the internet. Check out the Intercounty Electric Cooperative site at www.intercoelec.com

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Houston's Big Red Building looks great with its rubberized floor matting. And for school patrons, it was a great deal, too: Fund-raisers and the Houston Quarterback Club paid for the improvements.

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Summersville's Family/Youth Center reports it has received several donations. Monies will aid in the completion of a cabin with three areas for visitors to reside while in Summersville or for those needing temporary housing due to a crisis.

The cabin's foundation has already been poured.

Plans also call for construction of a swimming pool there.

Donations are state and federal deductible. The state write-off is 70 percent of the contribution.

Among those giving a boost: First National Bank of Summersville and its president, David and Linda Barnett, along with Van Smith, Emmett and Beth Bradford and Mike and Christy Jackson, who donated a computer system.

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Houston native Charlie McKinney's wife, Marian Lea, of Memphis, is among winners in an exhibit at the University of Memphis.

She won "best of show" for "Social Stamina," a beautifully sewn wedding dress — of black tulle over military camouflage cloth on a welded steel frame. She also shows "Poured On — Type Fit," a dress shape constructed of stacked, horizontal cardboard strips behind a steel exoskeleton.

The McKinneys plan to move here in about two years. He is a 1966 graduate of Houston High School and ships items from their blacksmith business across the country. The are currently working on a piece for actor Morgan Freeman.

The exhibit continues through this month.

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Will Rogers Tribute Set

A Chicago-area man will perform as Will Rogers in a program set for Feb. 21 at the Stained Glass Theatre.

Actor Lance Brown performs in a "Tribute to Will Rogers," a highly acclaimed program that highlights Rogers, the star of Wild West shows, vaudeville, Broadway, silent movies and finally talkies and radios.

Between performances, Rogers wrote a weekly column syndicated to more than 500 newspapers.

The local program is sponsored by the Houston Community Betterment/Arts Council and begins at 7:30 p.m.

Brown, as Rogers for more than a decade, addresses the issues facing the country today: the environment, politicians, national debt and more. Along the way, he even performs a few rope tricks.

Brown says Rogers never lost his common touch. "The thing people responded to in Rogers was that he had this delicate balance of earthiness and intellect," he says. "He was able to talk the language of the average person, but also showed himself to be the intellectual match of anyone on the public scene. He operated on two levels: One made you laugh, and one made you think."

Rogers died in 1935.

Modem Upgrades Plan Approved

The Texas County Rural Area Information Network, TRAIN, board of directors voted unanimously recently to install new modems to help alleviate busy signal problems subscribers have been experiencing.

In December TRAIN reported that subscribers numbered 533. As of Feb. 3, that number had grown to 594.

Licking has seen the biggest jump, a 30 percent increase.

When considering where modems will be installed, TRAIN looks at the total number of users per modem along with usage trends. Currently, there are modem pools at Licking, Summersville and Houston. The Houston pool also services the Cabool, Plato, Raymondville and Success areas.

The upcoming demise of COS service between Cabool and Houston is presenting a challenge to determine the best way to provide service for that area, while allowing for the Houston pool to be upgraded. Several options are being considered and will be discussed at a TRAIN board meeting Feb. 17. Meanwhile, the board has decided to order six new modem lines for Licking and three new lines for Summersville.

The new modems will be installed as quickly as possible after they are received by the TRAIN office.

BRIEFLY...

The Houston Area Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a home and garden show March 21 at the community center building at the fairgrounds.

The show will feature a variety of booths highlighting home and garden needs. Persons wanting booth space can contact Barbara Head, chamber director, at 417-967-2220.

The deadline is Feb. 20.