Founded in 1959

Hometown newspaper of Roy O'Donnell

Local unemployment claims stabilize, remain low

Workforce economy experts discuss 'recession proof' jobs

By Richard Zowie Special to the Highlander

Even as politicians and media commentators debate whether or not a recession is here and, if it is, who's to blame, fewer local residents are filing unemployment claims.

Judging by employment fig-

ures in Burnet and Llano Counties, it's feeling like all is still

well. Acc number Texas Commi County

last vear.

significantly lower than this time

"Thanks to the diversification of our local industries, the economy of the Highland Lakes region continues to strengthen."

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital

HSB begins look at flood-prone crossings

By Phil Reynolds **Staff Writer**

Horseshoe Bay embarking on an ambitious \$550,000 project trol the



tractor will be Walter P. Morre and Associates Inc., of Austin.

Koska told council members the study will attempt to identify floodprone areas and identify needed improvements to

Flood... see Page 2



parties in a lawsuit

Llano County and

nty library system to

ng on a preliminary

on in the case. The

is set for Friday, Oct.

the library board in April,

library pa-

trons sued the county and removed the OverDrive elec-

28, at 11 a

on the fift Courthous

Seven

Austin.

Police, schools meet on safety

By Connie Swinney Associate Editor

Marble Falls area first responders spent half a day Aug. 30 with Marble Falls Independent School District officials to plan, streamline, reinforce, discuss and plan protocols and practices that keep students, educators and visitors safe on

"We have They get all the p safety partners from the area - the county, Granite Shoals, us fire, everybody," Marble Falls Police Chief Glenn Hanson said. "We go over it to keep it fresh in everyone's mind.

"These meetings just make sure everybody is on

Safety... see Page 3

et in Inno County libraries lawsuit

claiming the county and library, saying it was the only board members had removed an Wednesday called because they disagreed with out books. ideas the books contained. They said the actions were taken in secret and without

public input, and claimed that violated their First (free-

dom of speech) and Fifteenth ments of the Constitution The plaintiffs also said the board should not have

tronic book system from the

way some elderly or handi-District Judge Rob- books from library shelves capped patrons had to check

The injunction asks for replacement of the books, a prohibition against removing more, and reinstatement of the OverDrive system.

Pitman has not ruled on a request from the Texas Attornev General's Office asking that the office be part of the defense in the case. That request claimed Llano County had insufficient resources to defend a suit in federal court.



Contributed photo

Granite Shoals Police Capt. John Ortis, pictured here with his wife Samantha, was sworn in by outgoing Police Chief Gary Boshears during an Aug. 31 ceremony at Granite Shoals City Hall. At that time, Boshears was also recognized by city officials for more than 16 years of service to the municipality. Boshears has accepted the police chief position in Lago Vista.



office,

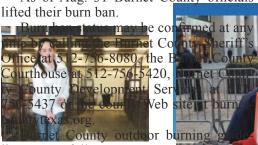
905 Third St. in Marble Falls, will be closed in observance of Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 5.



Counties lift bans on outdoor burning

Burnet County and Llano County both are now allowing residents to conduct outdoor burns, as rainfall amounts and moisture levels in recent weeks have reduced the fire danger.

As of Aug. 31 Burnet County officials



lines are as follows:

• Notify the Burnet County Sheriff be-

Burning see Page 2



Martelle Luedecke/Luedecke Photography Austin Cowan (30) is the first to get to the more for the Mustangs. Marble Falls will kickoff at 7:30 p.m. Friday versus Brownwood. See story about the high school football matchup on



5-8-2021

5-15-2021

5-22-2021

5-29-2021

6-5-2021

6-12-2021

6-19-2021

6-26-2021

7-3-2021

7-10-2021

7-17-2021

7-24-2021

7-31-2021

8-7-2021

5-8-2021

5-15-2021

5-22-2021

5-29-2021

6-5-2021

6-12-2021

6-19-2021

6-26-2021

7-3-2021

7-10-2021

7-17-2021

7-24-2021

7-31-2021

8-7-2021

Burnet County

5-7-2022

5-14-2022

5-21-2022

5-28-2022

6-4-2022

6-11-2022

6-18-2022

6-25-2022

7-2-2022

7-9-2022

7-16-2022

7-23-2022

7-30-2022

Llano County

8-6-2022

5-7-2022

5-14-2022

5-21-2022

5-28-2022

6-4-2022

6-11-2022

6-18-2022

6-25-2022

7-2-2022

7-9-2022

7-16-2022

7-23-2022

7-30-2022

8-6-2022

Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Jobless claims

11

5

9

10

10

11

19

18

7

14

7

9

11

Jobless claims

6

4

6

6

3

2

4

New

Jobless claims

19

21

12

16

13

17

11

19

34

29

2

28

18

Jobless claims

18

2

8

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14

13

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9

13

18

4

13

12

Claims

From Page 1

the double digits. However, from May 7, 2022 to August 6, 2022, the county has seen five weeks of single-digit unemployment filings. The most in a week was 19 on June 25. The fewest was five on May 21.

Llano County's weekly unemployment filings since May have been in the single digits. This time last year, the county saw only five weeks in the single digits while seeing filings reach 18 twice (May 15, 2021 and July 17, 2021).

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, Burnet County had 49,130 residents. Llano County had 21,243 residents.

Christian Fletcher, executive director of the Marble Falls Economic Development Corporation, said that according to TWC historical data, Burnet County unemployment dipped to 2.3 percent, compared to the 3.1 percent now. However, as he pointed out, the county's total employment base has grown.

The executive director saw two primary reasons why Burnet County residents are returning to

"The overall health of the economy through and after the pandemic kept people employed," Fletcher said. "Migration since the pandemic has added our normal retirees, but remote workers have been moving to Burnet County in droves. From July 2019 to July 2022, Burnet County has grown by 11.3 percent, with 5,774 net new residents overall. Of those, 1,227 came from Travis County and 2,360 came from Williamson County."

The construction has added the most jobs at 515 from the first quarter 2019 to the first quarter of 2022.

People are also fueling the food service industry in Burnet County by going

out to eat again. "In Marble Falls through June 2022, limited-service restaurants had total sales of \$34.8 million over the last 12 months, up 13.2 percent over the previous year," Fletcher said. "Full-service restaurants had total 12-month sales of \$25.5 million, up 15.2 percent over the prior year. Generally speaking, limited-service restaurants have been more stable over the last couple of years, whereas full-service restaurants have seen deeper valleys and higher peaks based pandemic-related mandates and pent-up demand, respectively. The last two months have been

down a little bit from the prior year because May and June of 2021 enjoyed an unusual influx of activity due to the reopening of full-service restaurants."

TWS Perspective

Brian Hernandez, chief storyteller with Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area, explained why the unemployment rates are lower in Burnet and Llano Counties, compared to last

"Thanks to the diversification of our local industries, the economy of the Highland Lakes region continues to strengthen," he said. "With the retail trade and hospitality industries rebounding, and the healthcare and manufacturing sectors continuing to expand their operations in our communities, local career opportunities are nearby and plentiful. Between Burnet and Llano counties this month almost 14,000 alone. open positions have been posted online, with great local employers eager to tap into the skills of our workforce for immediate employment.

Plus, average annual wages per worker have increased over the last few quarters, helping to fuel a return to the workforce. With our continued investments in free "upskilling" opportunities, such as the Rural Healthcare Initiative, and no-cost access to over 20,000 online training courses on LinkedIn Learning and Metrix via our Rural Capital SkillUp program, we're helping residents earn nationally recognized credentials, to help them boost their competencies, skills, and education to become self-sufficient and live a

quality life. "Another big factor in our recovery is that our public workforce system in Texas is employer led and demand-driven, meaning employers play an active role in our strategic planning in each county by providing input on the skills and competencies they need and give feedback on the quality of workforce training programs and services provided locally."

Hernandez said Burnet County's largest industry sector continues to be retail trade, with construction and healthcare and social assistance close behind.

As for Llano County, the largest industry accommodaremains tion and food services with retail trade and then construction.

"However, as we learned throughout the pandemic, the need for healthcare professionals has never been greater. Employment in healthcare to grow 16 percent from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations, adding about 2.6 million new jobs nationally," Hernandez said. "Healthcare occupations are projected to add more jobs than any of the other occupational groups. This projected growth is mainly due to an aging population, leading to greater demand for healthcare services. That's why we're so proud of the Rural Healthcare Initiative program, which brings together local training providers and healthcare employers to train unemployed, underemployed, and incumbent workers for jobs focusing on direct patient care in the healthcare industry within our rural communities."

The Workforce Solutions chief storyteller added that they recently received a \$12 million Good Jobs Challenge grant by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration for their new skills development initiative, Rural Employers Infuse Vital Economic Success in Texas (REINVEST), which aims to continue expanding workforce opportunities in high-demand occupations, such

as Healthcare. "REINVEST will enable six rural counties (Burnet, Blanco, Llano in the west and Bastrop, Lee, and Fayette in the east) to generate high-quality jobs for workers across three sector partnerships: healthcare, skilled trades, and finance and information technology, in collaboration with dozens of employers and employer associations," Hernandez said. "REINVEST will directly benefit over 700 workers and more than 100 local employers and will indirectly benefit nearly 3,000 family members and support over 60,000 community members desperate for healthcare."

Getting ready for a

recession

Whether the recession is already here, on its way, or already passed, Hernandez discussed what might be in store for the iob market.

"Our nation faces a middle-skills gap between the high-demand skills employers want or need and the skills their local workforce offers," he said. "Addressing this challenge in our local talent supply chain is a primary concern for our organization and our partners at the Texas Workforce Commission.

"While our unemployment rates across the Central Texas region continue to slide down to pre-pandemic levels, un-

deremployment remains a challenge. There's a great misalignment of skills. But it's a problem we know how to fix - we're celebrating our board's 35th anniversary this year, three and a half decades of working closely with employers, training providers, and community leaders to deliver customized workforce solutions for Texans. We develop talent for employers by coaching Texans to employment, and a great deal of the work we do to support our community is done in our workforce centers. We encourage everyone to visit our Highland Lakes offices in Burnet, Marble Falls, and Llano. You'll see many of our staff supporting individuals with resources to find a job, train to build a higher-paying career, or connect them with other services such as early learning childcare

employed. "Combining that spirof innovation with a

assistance to keep them

world-class training opportunities for residents is a win-win for our communities and our workforce.

We want to be good neighbors. We live here and want to see our community succeed, and our economy flourish." Hernandez added that

if workers are looking for "recession proof" employment, they should keep in mind that the demand for skilled workers in healthcare, manufacturing and skilled trades continues to grow, and these industries have little to no barrier to entry.

"Paid training and apprenticeships are available for certifications, and opportunities for growth with employers of all sizes remain vast," he said. "Texans pursuing their commercial driver's licenses have also seen their opportunities and salaries soar, as demand for more heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers in our region expands. Throughout fluctuations

marketability and to sustainability for many workers are transferable skills, those talents, experiences, and abilities that can be used in many different jobs and career paths.

"While technical skills allow you to accomplish specific technical tasks, transferable skills, such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, multitasking, and teamwork, enable you to do your job well, whatever that job may be. Transferable skills are the foundation of all professional success. It's why we offer free career workshops daily and resources to help residents "upskill" and position themselves as the solution to a company's problems. Our free services are an economic driver for the community and continue providing our neighbors with the opportunity to achieve the American Dream."

For more information, it: workforcesolutioncommitment to creating in our economy, the key srca.com



Contributed/Marble Falls EDC

Images from 2019 show a Lake Marble Falls exposed outcroppings after the waterway was temporarily lowered at that time. The Lower Colorado River Authority is scheduled to lower the waterway again - by about 7 feet - in October, so Max Starcke Dam, which creates Lake Marble Falls, can undergo upgrades needed following damage during the 2018 flood. The drawdown begins Saturday, Oct. 1 and ends Dec. 29.



