

THE OBSERVER/ ENTERPRISE

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Friday, August 2, 2013

Coke County Sheriff's Office participates in manhunt

Coke County Sheriff Deputies were deployed Sunday evening, July 28, 2013, on roads in Coke County searching for the suspect in a double homicide which had occurred earlier in Tom Green County.

Brian Jones Berry, a graduate of Concho Valley Law Enforcement Academy, is accused of

killing Keri Berry, 36, and Brandon Block, 31, and seriously wounding Susan Block, 26, at a home in Wall, Texas. Following the shooting an Amber Alert was issued for his two children, ages 7 and 9.

The suspect was taken into custody in Andrews County and the children were recovered unharmed.

COKE COUNTY COMMENT

It is again budget time for Coke County Commissioners Court and once again, the Court has failed to recognize the importance of law enforcement within our county.

At the proposed salary for the 2013-2014 budget year, it will be almost impossible to hire qualified personnel should we lose another deputy to an area department or the oilfield. Last year alone, two deputies left to take positions with another department in our area with salary hikes of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year. In the 2012-2013 budget, no salary increase was given. Currently the Court is looking at a salary increase. However, even with the proposed increase, Coke County is still vastly under the salary schedules of other small departments in our area.

Currently, two of the deputies have ties to Coke County and have chosen to live and work where they

or their families are from. As it is, though, even the Sheriff has been receiving job offers with huge salary increases from neighboring counties. They are even offering to provide a car where the men won't have to move from Coke County.

There have been many times over the last few years when employment advertisements were issued and no one put in an application. After the loss of one deputy last year, there was an applicant. During the reference check, Sheriff McCutchen chose to continue running the employment ad rather than hire the man who applied. **If he had hired this applicant, we would be facing this week what Wall is currently facing following the double homicide and manhunt last Sunday night.**

Currently, Coke County has a good Sheriff's Office and we've avoided falling victim to the truth "you get what you pay for". However, no one knows how

long we can beat the odds.

As the oilfield traffic continues to grow on our county's roadways, deputies are kept increasingly busy working accidents, oilfield theft cases, residential burglaries and issuing citations. When asked about the increase in tickets, Sheriff McCutchen attributed the uptick in citations to the increase in oilfield traffic and remarked that if the traffic kept increasing, he could need additional personnel. Will our Commissioners Court take this probability seriously and try to consider possible options to deal with this problem or will the men of the Court refuse to address this issue? Our Coke County Law Enforcement officers are trained professionals with years of education and experience under their belts. These are not minimum wage positions, nor should they be. The safety of Coke County's citizens and property is what is at stake. Unfortunately, it's not 1950 and we no longer live in Mayberry.

However, it's not just Coke County's Law Enforcement that is significantly underpaid. Our County Clerk is responsible

for all of the legal filings (deeds, licenses, etc.) done in Coke County. Our Treasurer and Tax Assessor are responsible for the County's finances, both incoming and outgoing. Do we really want these officials able to qualify for public assistance? We are incredibly fortunate to have the quality of individuals we have in these offices. But, it won't be long before retirement will look better to them than feeling like they are not appreciated for the sacrifice they are making. The County Judge and Attorney are not mentioned here because of the state supplements they receive. The County Auditor is also not mentioned because this position is not elected, but totally under the control of District Judge Barbara Walther.

It's time for citizens of Coke County to determine what they want, need and expect from their county government. Do you want to maintain the status quo we've had for so many years? Or do you want to express to the Court that they are elected to keep the best interests of the citizens of Coke County at the top of their priorities.

Law enforcement and

other salaries are only one budget area in which the Court fails. Recently, many citizens have been told the roadways leading from the state maintained highways could not be repaired because the budget was completely depleted from salary expenditures. If this is the case with the budget, would it not make sense for our county to institute a unit road system leaving our commissioners to focus on budget concerns instead of potholes?

If you want to express your concerns, please call County Judge Roy Blair and your County Commissioner.

Precinct 1 Gene Montgomery
Precinct 2 Wendell Lee
Precinct 3 Gaylon Pitcock
Precinct 4 Bobby Blaylock

Hot Dog Supper gives first look at new stadium

Robert Lee's 2014 Project Graduation will hold a Hot Dog Supper Thursday, August 15, 2013, immediately following the Steers' final two-a-day practice.

This community wide celebration and fundraiser is the first opportunity for the public to get a look at the new stadium.

... Not Just Livestock Calls!

• **Texas Seven Manhunt & Roadblocks - 2000 & 2001**
(Sheriff's Office sets up numerous roadblocks and make a number of traffic stops over a period of months searching for the seven dangerous escaped convicts.)

• **Robert Lee Hostage Situation -2002**

(Man takes hostage on Highway 208 in Robert Lee.

After negotiations, hostage released and suspect taken into custody.)

• **2011 Fires**

(The Sheriff's Office was responsible for discovering routes for firefighters leading into the fires.)

• **Bronte ISD Bomb Threat - 2012**

(Sheriff's Office accompanies bomb squad in search of school.)

• **Pickup Theft & Recovery - 2013**

(Pickup stolen from Stripes in Bronte recovered 15 minutes from the initial report called in. Suspect in custody.)

• **Berry Double Homicide & Kidnapping Manhunt - 2013**

(Deputies deployed to cover roads leading into Coke County in search for suspect and kidnapped children.)

These are just a few of the highlights since 2000 showing there are real threats to our safety here in Coke County and we need to ensure our law enforcement is given all they need to continue protecting our citizens.

School Supplies!

School Supply Lists for
Blackwell, Bronte &
Robert Lee Elementary
Schools begin on page 4!