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Caddo Lake State Park Interpreter Kelsey Johnson explains watercoloring to visitors from Dallas, Eric, John Mark, Nora and Ellie Martinez on New Year's Day. Martinez said he enjoys camping on the New Year to get out of the city, but this was his first visit to Caddo. It was "refreshing," he said.

Caddo Lake State Park Reopens After Makeover

By **BOB PALMER**, *Jimblecute Editor* Fresh hot mix provided a smooth ride through the towering trees and along the water-lapped shore.

Brilliant white lines marked spaces in the parking lots.

Cabins appeared clean and ready.

After three months of refurbishing, Caddo Lake State Park reopened last week.

"Every campsite was full last weekend," Park Interpreter Kelsey Johnson said.

It seemed the three-month wait created a pent-up demand, even in winter.

Texas Parks and Wildlife schedules a First Day Hike at every state park to kick off the New Year, but Johnson opted for watercolors, instead.

"Parts of the easy trails are under water," Johnson explained. "The other trails are steep and slick. I walked them myself this morning and slipped several times."

Johnson offered watercolor kits to park visitors Tuesday. She provided instructions, paper and colors, then turned the new artists loose.

Johnson has worked at Caddo for two years. She splits her time between Caddo and Atlanta State Park.

Social Security, Medicare, Post Office Safe During Shutdown; Little Impact Seen Here Over Trump-Congress Standoff

By **BOB PALMER**, *Jimblecute Editor* With more than 800,000 federal employees sent home until Congress and President Donald Trump can reach a funding agreement, the much touted "government shutdown" has caused barely a ripple in Marion County.

"We haven't felt anything, as of yet," County Judge Leward LaFleur said. LaFleur speculated the holidays could have delayed some actions, "or it could be we don't have that much to do with them."

Agriculture, Commerce, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, State, Transportation and Treasury departments are closed under the shutdown.

Some major federal departments like Defense, Education, Veteran Affairs and Health and Human Services have funding secured, so they won't be affected by a shutdown, according to the Austin American Statesman.

Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security benefits will be processed and issued as usual, and veteran hospitals will operate normally. The U.S. Postal Service also is not affected.

Executive Director David Cleveland of Region VII Education Service Center said one of the federal jobs training programs he administers is protected at least for a few more weeks.

"Workforce training programs and related programs are federally funded," Cleveland said. Cleveland noted, however, preparations had been made in case of a shutdown.

"When this occurred last year, one of our largest funding sources is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act," Cleveland explained. "The (Texas Workforce Commission) indicated they have reserve funding for four or five weeks."

Region VII has not received notice from TWC that the reserve has kicked in, but Cleveland expects one if the shutdown extends into next week.

"The expectation is we are in good shape for about a month," Cleveland said.

Six counties in Region VII have brick and mortar facilities for workforce operations, while mobile centers travel to places like Marion County.

"Marion County is still being served," Cleveland said. "Normal training operations are continuing."

While federally funded Natural Resource Centers in Marshall and Linden did not answer the telephone on Monday and most National Parks are closed, Sean Brailey reported normal operations at Lake O' The Pines.

"Buckhorn Creek Park is open," Brailey said. "The other parks closed for winter. The Corps of Engineers is funded through middle of February."

Jefferson Mayor Charles (Bubba) Haggard said the shutdown has not impacted the city.

"We don't get anything from them," Haggard said.

Marion County Sheriff David McKnight has not seen any ill effect.

"We don't deal with the feds much, anyway," McKnight said. "Anything we did need is still available."

The Marshall Social Security office is also still open.

"We've not been impacted by it at all," District Manager David Cunningham said.

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, which relies on funding from the federal housing agency to help connect low-income Texans to housing, among other duties, has an assortment of plans in place to prepare for any cut in federal funding. State officials anticipate maintaining normal functions for up to 45 days of a government shutdown.

IRS employees are also furloughed, although the shutdown is not expected to last so long as to impact refunds.

Marion County Real Estate Activity Shows Promising Signs

By **BOB PALMER**, *Jimblecute Editor*

A strong national economy coupled with the addition locally of a new truck stop, new manufacturer and a new downtown winery outlet bode well for 2019 real estate sales in Marion County, some believe.

2018 finished strong with the announcement of the CEFCO truck stop on US 59 and Queen Wood Products in the Jefferson Economic Development industrial park.

Remodeling has also begun on two Polk Street buildings where Enoch Stop will open a winery, tasting room and internet cafe soon.

Laurel DeWare with Jefferson Realty believes the national economy also plays a role.

"People buy property in Jefferson from all over the United States," DeWare said. "It's a national market place."

The upward trend is seen elsewhere in Texas.

"Statewide, the demand for homes priced over \$200,000 remained robust as the DOM balanced at a record-low 57 days," James P. Gaines writing in "Texas Housing Insight" stated. "This cohort accounted for the largest proportion of sales through an MLS at 38 percent but was remarkably lower than its 72 percent share in 2011."

Demand was strongest in the \$200,000-\$300,000 range (54 DOM), which encompasses more activity in the major metros. Demand for homes priced above \$500,000, however, inched above 86 days after sinking below 80 days in June.

"We've been very fortunate to have people, particularly younger people, interested in locating in Jefferson or Marion County," DeWare said.

DeWare said homes on rural tracks seem to

sell well.

Matt Whitfield with Century 21 agrees.

"Tracts and houses under \$150,000 move best in our rural area," Whitfield said.

DeWare observed that "nicer properties" appeared to move quicker.

"The best sales are houses in very good condition," DeWare said, "and new homes and buildings with architecture that resembles historic Jefferson properties."

While DeWare is optimistic about real estate sales in 2019, Whitfield and Gaines remain cautious.

"It all depends on the federal reserve and how they are going to handle interest rate hikes," Whitfield said. "If rates are left alone then more buyers will be looking to purchase. Any rate hikes tend to slow down buyer inquiries. But real estate is always a solid investment."

Gaines was also concerned about the impact of interest rates.

"Interest rates jumped to a seven-year high amid a booming national economy and rising inflation-expectations," Gaines wrote. "The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation's 30-year fixed-rate elevated to more than 4.8 percent. Higher interest rates disproportionately affected Texas refinance mortgage applications, which slid 38 percent since January."

"I do believe that 2019 will be a good year for real estate," DeWare said. "All the indications are here. We have received many calls during the holidays from people who are interested in buying real estate in the area."



Officials Begin New Terms

Marion County officials elected in November were sworn in Wednesday morning. 276th District Judge Robert Rolston administered the oath to County Judge Leward LaFleur and County Auditor Shanna Solomon. LaFleur then swore-in Commissioner Precinct 4 C.W. "Charlie" Treadwell, Commissioner Precinct 2 Joe McKnight, County Clerk Vickie Wray Smith,

District Clerk Susan Anderson, County Treasurer Terrie S. Neuville, Justice of The Peace Precinct 1 Lena Pope, Justice of The Peace Precinct 2 JoAnn Nutt. 3.

Pictured following the ceremony are: (Back row) Treadwell, Rolston, LaFleur and McKnight. (Front row) Solomon, Anderson, Neuville, Smith, Nutt and Pope.

NEWSbriefs

A Chili Supper will be held at the Excelsior Hotel on Monday, January 7th, 5-8. The price will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 10 and under. Take-outs are available. We suggest you call the hotel to reserve your take-out order. This fundraiser is sponsored by the Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club.

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120 North Vale St • Jefferson, TX 75657
PHONE (903) 665-2462 FAX (903) 705-4326
Editor@Jimblecute1848.com



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