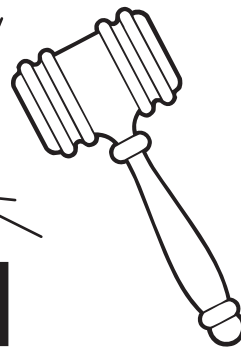


The

FORUM



Editor: Cathie Carr
Publisher: Krystina Evans

Escapees Mail and Voice Message Newsletter
Volume 11, Number 6, June 2002

Postal Rate Increases

Effective June 30, 2002:

First-class letter	\$0.37
Postcard	\$0.23
Priority Mail (1lb)	\$3.85
Certified mail	\$2.30

In addition to Priority Mail increases, the U.S.P.S. has added and changed their "zone charges." One-pound parcels are now \$3.85 no matter which zone is used, but heavier parcels vary. A two-pound parcel, for instance, could be as low as \$3.95 or as high as \$5.75. A three-pound parcel ranges between \$4.75 to \$8.55, and so on.

These Postal Service increases may make Escapees special FedEx Express Saver (3-day guaranteed delivery excluding weekends) rates an even more viable option for you. If you are interested in this special FedEx delivery option, simply ask the Escapees mail service operator for details, or specify the "FedEx Express Saver" when you e-mail or voice mail your instructions.

Judge declares Escapees votes legal!

After 17 months of limbo, Polk County Commissioner (Precinct 1) Bob Willis, who was formally elected in November 2000, was finally declared the winner of that race!

This lawsuit was filed by the defeated former Precinct 1 commissioner, B.E. "Slim" Speights, who claimed that the votes cast by Escapees RV Club members were illegal. This suit followed on the heels of a previous challenge initiated by three Polk County residents who alleged that Escapees did not meet residency requirements. Although the Federal Court stopped that process in time for Escapees to vote, they did not rule on whether they considered the Escapees members in question legal residents or not.

The lawsuit brought by Mr. Speights had a different face, but the questions were almost identical to the previous challenges. Can full-time RVers be legitimate residents? If someone does not own land and spends very little time in their home area, are they still allowed to vote?

The judge listened to Escapees witnesses who testified about their actions and their intentions. He heard from retired teach-

ers, nurses, and missionaries who all selected the full-time RV lifestyle after retirement. He heard the county registrar affirm that he felt these folks were legitimate. In fact, the court did not hear from a single witness or official who contradicted these opinions!

When the judge declared Mr. Willis the winner in the election, his message was clear. Rainbow's End is an adequate physical description of residence for purposes of voter registration, and a member's mail-forwarding address on Rainbow Drive represents a legitimate residence in Polk County. Therefore, Escapees were validly registered and their votes are rendered legal!

Unfortunately, Mr. Speights has already filed for an appeal. It is likely to take several months, but the appeal will be heard by the State Court of Appeals in Beaumont.

If you would like to contribute to the defense fund, please send your donations to Escapees Legal Defense, 100 Rainbow Dr., Livingston, TX 77351.

Update on PBS national channel issues

After much difficulty, Escapees has been successful in penetrating the front line at both Pegasus and DirecTV. We have been able to speak with persons who understand the issues facing RVers and have finally gotten some definitive answers.

Many mobile customers lost access to PBS this spring when the national feed was dropped. Currently, DirecTV is unable to offer PBS to their mobile customers, but Dish Network is providing a solution by offering the PBS feed associated with your local networks as an "a la carte" channel. For RVers who have submitted the mobile waiver and are currently receiving distant locals, you can add the PBS feed for about \$1 a month.

Both DirecTV and Pegasus have agreed to exempt mobile and RV customers from the requirement that a phone line be continuously attached to any mirrored receiver. RV users will be required to submit another waiver form to qualify for this exemption. Representatives of both companies have made the waiver forms available to us, and the forms can be downloaded from our Web site. Links are provided in the complete article on our "What's Hot" page at www.escapees.com/website/hot. Dish Network does not currently require any of their customers to keep a phone line connected to mirrored receivers.

Unfortunately, when you call your satellite provider, the front line is often unaware of these mobile customer waivers. Even though you may be told that the waivers we have available are not "official," the forms were provided to us by corporate officials and are definitely valid. We recommend that you download the forms provided on our Web site and mail them in. The address on the waiver form will direct it to the correct department for processing. If you are unable to get on-line, for a small service fee of 50 cents we will place a copy in your mail upon your request. Please tell us which provider you are with, as the forms are not interchangeable.

If you are traveling and wish to receive network programming via satellite, it will become almost mandatory for you to submit the RV/mobile waiver form for the satellite provider that you use. Recently initiated Spot Beam technology restricts the broadcast of local networks to a specific geographical region. If you receive your networks from a specific local market and move your satellite receiver outside of the allowed region, you will no longer be able to receive those channels. As Spot Beam becomes universal, your only option for dependable network programming will be to apply for distant locals via the RV/mobile waiver.

Texas travel trailer tax

In May, appraisal notices were mailed to Texas residents who had a travel trailer registered in the state on January 1, 2002. Owners had one month (May 1 until May 31, 2002) to appeal the taxable value indicated on their tax statement. With photos or other supporting documentation, travel trailer owners had an opportunity to reduce that value, thereby reducing their tax.

We were very pleased that our county voted to exempt all trailer owners from the county portion of the tax. Unfortunately, the Polk County Appraisal District felt legally compelled to continue mailing tax statements that reflect the school district's portion of the travel trailer tax.

Escapees RV Club has joined hands with the Texas Recreational Vehicle Association (TRVA) and the Texas Association of Campground Owners (TACO) to pursue every possible option available to stop this unfair tax. We have NOT given up!

We recommend that members not rush to pay their tax invoices when they arrive. In Polk County, payments will not be considered delinquent until February 1, 2003. So, even if one of the state government agencies doesn't step up to the plate and stop this tax before it goes into effect, we would expect an emergency order to be placed on the bill so that, as soon as legislation reconvenes in January, the tax can be rescinded prior to the February payment deadline. If we are unsuccessful, you would need to have your payments in the mail and postmarked by January 31, in order to avoid any penalties.

Remember, even if your travel trailer was out of state on January 1, 2002, if you are a legal resident of Texas and your

travel trailer was registered in Texas on January 1, 2002, then your trailer is subject to this current tax. If you became a Texas resident and registered a travel trailer in the state at any time **after** January 1, 2002, your trailer will **not** be on the tax rolls at all this year, and you should not have received an appraisal notice.

Watch for updates in upcoming *Escapees* magazines, as well as on the Escapees Web site (www.escapees.com) and through Escapees E-news bulletins. If you have not signed up for E-news, please consider doing so. All we need is your name, SKP #, and e-mail address. You can send that to e-news@escapees.com.

Be an informed voter!

Please do not rely on Escapees RV Club to keep you fully updated on elections or candidates. While we do our best to alert you to elections and issues that could significantly impact RVers, we cannot, and should not, be your sole source of information.

Voters Resource Information

Polk County voting information line 936-327-6852
Polk County ballot applications fax line ... 936-327-6874
Polk County clerk's office 936-327-6804

National League of Women Voters 202-429-1965
1730 M Street NW, Suite 1000 www.lwv.org
Washington, D.C. 20036-4508

Project Vote Smart 888-868-3762
One Common Ground www.vote-smart.org
Philipsburg, MT 59858

League of Women Voters of Texas 512-472-1100
1212 Guadalupe, Suite 107 lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org
Austin, TX 78701

Polk County Republican Party 936-327-8683
401 N. Washington
Livingston, TX 77351

Polk County Democratic Party 936-327-5911
705 N. Jackson St.
Livingston, TX 77351

Polk County Libertarian Party 936-685-4992
RR 14, Box 5560
Livingston, TX 77351

2002 General Election Information

September 6, 2002 First day to apply for ballot by mail
October 7, 2002 Last day to register to vote
October 21, 2002 First day of early voting (in person)
October 29, 2002 Last day to apply for ballot by mail
November 1, 2002 Last day of early voting
November 5, 2002 Election day