

Urbina receives maximum punishment

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

An Austin County jury gave a local man the maximum punishment in court action before District Judge Jeff Steinhauser last Friday, May 21, for indecency with a child.

The jury of eight women and four men sentenced Cesar Urbina, 38 of Industry, to life in prison for the crime that occurred in 2018. The jury also assessed a \$10,000 fine.

The jury deliberated about 15 minutes before returning the guilty verdict. After hear-

ing punishment evidence, the jury took 30 minutes to give the longest sentence possible.

Testimony showed that Urbina had sexual contact with an 11-year-old girl at a party near Shelby.

First Assistant District Attorney Brandy Robinson also presented witnesses who said that Urbina had improperly touched a six-year-old girl on a separate occasion.

Family members and school officials also testified how Urbina's actions affected the victims. Therapists

from Children's Advocacy Center in Fort Bend County also presented evidence.

Jury selection was held at Christian City Fellowship on Monday to provide for proper spacing and pandemic-related precautions.

Evidence started Tuesday, May 17, in the Austin County Courthouse where the District Courtroom was rearranged. The jury sat in the gallery of the courtroom to allow for spacing. Witnesses testified from the jury box.

The public was able to watch the trial in the basement meeting room of the courthouse on a TV that had

a Zoom link to the proceedings.

Assistant District Attorney Ben Nystrom and paralegal Lisa Tobola were instrumental in presenting the evidence and witnesses during the week-long trial.

Robinson said she was pleased that the jury returned the long prison sentence.

"We showed the jury that Urbina had been to prison before for felony drugs and bail jumping," Robinson stated. "More importantly, the young victims in this case came forward to say what happened and how it has affected their lives. ... I'm so proud of these two girls who

overcame tremendous fears to testify against their abuser.

"Their courage, along with the support of their family members, made all the difference in this case," Robinson added.

District Attorney Travis Koehn also said he was pleased with the outcome of the trial.

"We'd had to modify the facilities and procedures for trials due to COVID-19 restrictions," Koehn said. "Christian City Fellowship, the Austin County Sheriff's Office, the District Clerk, and the County Clerk all worked together for this trial to take place."



CESAR URBINA

Austin County granted \$46 million from GLO

By VALERIE REDDELL
SPECIAL TO THE SEALY NEWS

Last Friday's announcement by the Texas General Land Office of grants to local governments for flood mitigation prompted a victory dance by Austin County officials while the huge city lying to its east is singing the blues.

Austin County Judge Tim Lapham said Friday that the nearly \$46 million for drainage improvements couldn't come at a better time, with hurricane season fast approaching.

The GLO earmarked \$36,937,293.90 for Austin County to fund the Allens Creek Watershed Project. Another \$5,748,125 was awarded to the City of Wallis for a Wastewater and Drainage Infrastructure Project and San Felipe received \$3,209,122 for its drainage improvement project.

Lapham pointed out that the south end of Austin County has seen devastation from six major flood events in the last four years. Of those, four merited state and federal disaster declarations.

"We know by now that it's not if another storm will hit our community, it's when," Lapham said.

The grants will fund construction of a stormwater diversion channel between Sealy and Wallis. Drainage corridors upstream from the channel will also be enlarged to expand storage capacity there.

Also, 10 smaller local projects will be built to drain stormwater away from Wallis. Other local projects will alleviate the navigation problems on city streets when these flood events occur.

Lapham believes these improvements to wastewater pipes and drainage ditches, manholes, culverts and streets will prevent future tragedies caused by first responders' inability to travel down these streets.

Also, improving drainage and eliminating ponding will reduce the land area flooded as well as the number of mosquitoes and other pathogen-carrying pests that thrive after heavy rain events.

Judge Lapham thanked the GLO and Commissioner George P. Bush for their help funding these large-scale projects to protect the health and safety of Austin County residents.

Allens Creek Watershed Project

With a budget of nearly \$37 million, Allens Creek will drain the southern

portions of the county more efficiently. Impacted areas include Sealy, Wallis and San Felipe.

The land acquisition for this project will be divided into two phases. The north sector includes the city of Sealy and undeveloped areas between Sealy and Wallis. Lapham defines the south sector as roughly corresponding to the City of Wallis.

NORTH SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS REACH 1:

1. The storage and detention capacity of the northwest tributary for Allens Creek will be increased.
2. The slopes and bottom of the channel will be regraded.
3. Culvert capacity will be increased under Gebhardt Road, under Hwy. 36 and under the railroad trestle.

REACH 2:

1. The existing channel of the northwest tributary will be converted to a naturalized corridor.
2. The existing section of channel from Stockholm Road to the point where the northeast tributaries meet will be rerouted. The channel will be replaced with 3,000 linear feet of naturalized corridor.
3. Construction of a 10-acre detention area.

REACH 3: Allen's Creek Northeast Tributary will be converted to a naturalized corridor.

REACH 4:

The main channel of Allen's Creek will be converted to a naturalized corridor.

A diversion channel will be built between Sealy and Wallis that will drain excess stormwater into the Brazos River Authority's reservoir. Three diversion options are being considered.

SOUTH SECTOR

Ten localized projects to drain stormwater runoff from Wallis away from the town in all directions.

Water will be directed to the bottom reach of Allens Creek, toward the San Bernard River or toward the Brazos River south of Wallis through the following improvements:

1. Excavate 7,500 linear feet of channel at the Columbus Road outfall.
2. At FM 1093 and Blazek, a detention facility will be created by constructing a 2,000-foot berm, a ditch, and two culverts.
3. At Lakeview, a 3,200-foot berm, a

See GLO, page 6



COLE McNANNA

Barrels line the side of a frontage road near Beckendorff Road earlier in the day May 19. That night, a Sealy resident died in a wrong-way, single-car crash on a frontage road three miles west of Sealy.

Fatality reported on frontage road of I-10

By COLE McNANNA
EDITOR@SEALYNEWS.COM

A fatality was reported last Wednesday night, May 19, on a frontage road of Interstate 10 three miles west of Sealy. Patrick Ratcliffe, 36 of Sealy, was pronounced deceased on the scene.

Sergeant Stephen Woodard of the Texas Department of Public Safety confirmed Ratcliffe's 2019

Chevrolet pickup truck was traveling eastbound on the frontage road on the north side of I-10, opposite of the direction of traffic.

The only reported injury was Ratcliffe's.

Woodard said the truck struck barrels that direct traffic, and ultimately ran into a piece of heavy equipment in a portion of the highway that was closed due to construction.



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