



Eighth-graders Zachery Thompson (left) and Taylor Delehanty (sitting on table) launch a rocket at the Old Kingsbury Aerodrome Airport as Marilyn Tongue (from left), Shay Patel and Fernando Cadena watch.

ANGELA GRANT/agrant@express-news.net

An exercise in flying high, landing gently

Five middle school students from the Krueger School of Applied Technologies practiced launching rockets in preparation for the Team America Rocketry Challenge national finals. One-hundred finalists will compete May 17 in The Plains, Va., near Washington, D.C. The goal is to launch the rockets 750 feet in the air and have them come down within 45 seconds, all while holding two eggs without breaking them.



MUSA.COM
Keyword:
EN Video
 For more on the rocket launches.

Lawyers unsure about sect kids' shots

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"What do we do?" said Polly O'Toole, a Dallas family law attorney who represents one of the children.

Some parents worry that even if they don't want their children immunized, they will appear uncooperative with the state and risk losing their child forever.

"That's a really hard question," O'Toole said about parents who want to refuse. "If you refuse to allow your child to be inoculated, are you — the mother — going to be branded by CPS as non-cooperative? Are you going to be considered as not having the best interests of your child?"

Susan Hays, who represents a 2-year-old child, said parents are

upset they are not able to be there with their children or offer documentation that they have been immunized.

"They would like an opportunity to get records from Utah and there's not a line of communication to do that yet," Hays said.

The immunization issue surfaced shortly before CPS sent an e-mail Wednesday to foster care providers who now house the 464 children in facilities across the state.

"Attached are guidelines prepared by the Department of State Health Services concerning immunization of children from FLDS," wrote Heather Shields, the state's manager of residential foster care contracts.

"The children should be immunized according to the Department of State Health Services harmonized schedule. . . . Please review the schedule, share with foster parents and child care staff and follow the guidelines accordingly."

No child will be forcibly immunized, insisted Patrick Crimmins, a CPS spokesman.

"If a child refuses to be immunized, we're not forcing any children to be," he said.

But he emphasized that for the safety of the children, who are now unprotected against serious diseases, they do need to be inoculated.

Crimmins said he has heard no reports of anyone objecting to being immunized.

David Miller, executive director of Hendrick Home, said

there have been no problems at his Shackelford County facility, one of about 16 across the state caring for the children. Immunization appointments for the children from Eldorado in his care have been made and no one has objected.

"It's just not an issue," he said.

But calls are being made by older children to their parents at the ranch and one state source familiar with the issue, but not authorized to discuss the matter, confirmed that some older children are refusing shots.

Express-News Staff Writer Lisa Sandberg reported from the Austin Bureau. Houston Chronicle Staff Writer Terri Langford reported from Houston.

Connolly faces new charges in separate donation case

CONTINUED FROM 1B

against him in January, when he was charged with funneling money to Blanche Atkinson, a candidate for the Bexar Metropolitan Water District, which had put him on its payroll.

Councilman Cortez said prosecutors told him earlier this week about the new case against Connolly.

The allegation "was a shock to me, and I'm very disappointed," he said, adding that he hadn't noticed anything unusual about the donations at the time.

"They were just general contributions," he said. "I've received many contributions from

a lot of different constituencies, and I accepted them and reported them as required by law."

The contributions, he said, were made long before charges surfaced that Connolly funneled money to Atkinson through surrogates.

"Keep in mind, two years ago, (Connolly) hadn't gone through the BexarMet stuff," he said. "There wasn't a cloud over him."

Two months ago, Councilman Cortez faced a different kind of controversy after he led the City Council to grant a rezoning request near Toyota's South Side truck plant, against the recommendations of city staffers, the planning and zoning

commissions, and City South Management Authority.

Cortez said he became acquainted with Connolly when they both worked on then-Councilman Julian Castro's mayoral campaign in 2005. Connolly, he added, offered to help with fundraising and media relations as Cortez ginned up his campaign for the Southeast Side council seat in 2006.

"Basically, he offered to help and then he had these contributions," Cortez said. "It was nothing different from others offering to help with fundraising."

The contributions turned up in Cortez's campaign finance report for the last six months of

2006. Three of Connolly's employees contributed \$500 each on Oct. 29 and 30, alongside Connolly's \$500 on Oct. 30. Overall, Cortez raised \$14,260 in that reporting period.

Cortez said he returned the contributions to Connolly and the employees — Erin Klingensmith, Matthew McReynolds and Lindsay Smith — earlier this week.

Connolly's first trial for the first two indictments of five counts each is scheduled for May 27. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison on each count.

Herberg said he could not discuss the new indictments in detail because of the pending case.

S.A. man in 'Texas 7' first to get death date

BY MICHAEL GRACZYK
 Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE — One of the infamous "Texas 7" convicts who escaped from a state prison more than seven years ago and killed a Dallas-area police officer while on the lam now has an execution date.

Michael Rodriguez has been set for lethal injection Aug. 14, Kim Schaefer, a Dallas County assistant district attorney who handles capital cases, said Wednesday.

Rodriguez, 45, ordered his appeals dropped and had been asking the courts for nearly two years to give him a death date.

A federal judge signed off on Rodriguez's request Sept. 27, two days after the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to consider a Kentucky challenge to lethal injection as a means of capital punishment.

That case stalled executions around the nation. But in a decision last month, the high court ruled lethal injection wasn't unconstitutionally cruel, clearing the way for capital punishment to resume.

An inmate in Georgia on Tuesday became the first to die since Texas executed killer Michael Richard on Sept. 25. The

first Texas inmate set to die now is Derrick Sonnier, scheduled for injection in Huntsville on June 3 for a double slaying in suburban Houston.

At the time of his escape, Rodriguez was serving a life term for hiring a hit man to kill his wife, Theresa, 29, to collect her \$250,000 life insurance. She was gunned down in 1992 getting out of her car outside their San Antonio home.

Rodriguez and six other inmates overpowered workers at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Connally Unit near Kenedy in South Texas on Dec. 13, 2000, grabbed 16 guns from the prison armory and fled in a stolen truck.

On Christmas Eve, while robbing a suburban Dallas sporting goods store, they shot Irving Police Officer Aubrey Hawkins 11 times, killing him. The gang, subject of a nationwide manhunt, was caught a month later in Colorado.

Rodriguez received a death sentence in May 2002 for his part in Hawkins' slaying.

Five of Rodriguez's companions also got death sentences. The seventh killed himself before he could be recaptured with his comrades in Colorado. Rodriguez would be the first of the group to be executed.

Longs' gifts are described as 'transformational'

CONTINUED FROM 1B

dents from the oft-forgotten border region, where poverty and poor health are endemic, said Teresa Long. By supporting students from this region, she said, they hope to improve the supply of doctors, nurses and other health professionals who live and work in these communities.

"I hope this will alleviate the pain, the disease and the misery that goes with the border region," she said. "I think we already are making great strides."

About 400 business leaders and university supporters attended the ceremony held in a large white tent decorated in a Fiesta theme with purple, green and orange streamers.

Joe Long said he and Teresa

will be honored and humbled to see their name grace the main entrance on Floyd Curl Drive.

But that is not the most lasting impact they hope to have on San Antonio's medical school, he said. They want the students who receive scholarships to someday be prosperous enough to make philanthropic gifts of their own to the university.

"We feel like this is a gift that will keep on giving, and to us that will be our real legacy," Long said.

Oh, and one more thing, Long said as he turned to leave the dais.

"There are plenty of people in South Texas, and some of them are here today, who can make a larger gift," he said. "I hope one of you does so quickly and takes that honor away from us."

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