

December 4, 2023.

Jeff is survived by his parents, Autry and Dianna Hardy of Era, Texas; one brother, Shawn Hardy and wife Stepheny Hardy from Blackwell, Texas; two nephews, Drew Hardy from Abilene, Texas, and Douglas Hardy and wife Cambrey Hardy, and their children, Bauer and Brecklyn from Bronte, Texas; cousins, Nathan Cradduck from San Angelo and Deanna Pheffer from Mountain Home, Texas, Michael Boil, Nickolas Boil, and Peyton Boil from Sweetwater, Texas, Judy Tidwell and Amy Mann from Round Rock, Texas; aunts, Janice Boil of Sweetwater, Texas, Sherry Cradduck, San Saba; uncles, Tommy Self of Round Rock, Texas, and Billy Boil of Sweetwater, Texas, also survived him.



Resilience

By James M. Decker

This week was something of a challenge in Stamford. For the second time in six months, our brand-new, state-of-the-art, multimillion dollar water treatment plant suffered a rapid slowdown in water treatment capacity that compromised our ability to meet our local water needs. Thankfully, due to some extremely hard work and good fortune, the problem was resolved in just over 24 hours. We'll be dealing with the root causes of that problem but that's not the point of today's newsletter.

During the moment, I was thinking about the word "resiliency."

Over the last four years, our communities have been punched repeatedly: the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated fallout, a historic winter storm and failure of the Texas power grid, and skyrocketing inflation. Locally, we can add our struggles with our new water treatment plant. Then there's the multi-decade decline in rural and farm economies brought on deliberate government policy choices and the unintended consequences of other policies. It's been a lot. Even as good things are happening in our local communities, it can feel like one step forward and two steps back.

Sunday morning, I set out for College Lake for my usual Sabbath kayaking. It was chilly—about 40 degrees, but still a full 10 degrees warmer than the prior week—so I layered up, grabbed my Stormy Kromer hat, and persevered. I use these trips to clear my head,

ready myself for a new week, and commune with the natural world at sunrise. This week, I was particularly eager for that respite.

For the last several weeks, I've taken Wendell Berry's "The Mad Farmer Poems" for my reading. These poems are centered around the character of "The Mad Farmer." Like many Berry poems, they stand up well to re-reading and each new reading or recitation provides new layers and insight. This time, while reading a poem called "Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer," I ran across this verse:

"Don't pray for the rain to stop.

Pray for good luck fishing when the river floods."

It would be nice if the world became calmer, more peaceful, and more conducive to the prosperity of rural places. Yet, what evidence suggests that is even a possibility? Hoping for such a thing is just hoping against hope. Chaos and disruption are the order of the world. They always have been. We are more aware of it today, thanks to our systems of communication. We are also more susceptible to it, thanks to our systems of economics.

In 1988, country music group Alabama had a number one hit with Bob McDill's "Song of the South." It is something of an ode to rural life in the Great Depression and there's a line that I have always found particularly powerful: *Well, somebody told us Wall Street fell, but we was so poor that we couldn't tell.* I think about what those lyrics mean. I think about how, for much of human history, larger catastrophes and world events mostly did not affect individual people who were deeply connected to their place. They were certainly not impacted as we



Changes! Construction continues on the housing project near the water tower in Bronte on the afternoon of Monday, December 11.

are today, with those events pushed onto us through our phones, through our televisions, and through global economics and supply chains.

To be clear, those lyrics did not boast of local prosperity despite the stock market's crash. The baseline was poverty. But those lyrics tell a story of people who made it work and whose communities were more resilient and self-sufficient than communities are today.

I'm no doomsday sort, nor am I a conspiracy theorist. But over the last four years, I have seen our people beset with a variety of disasters that imperiled "normal" life. If our places are to thrive, and if our people are to prosper, we must not count on the course of world events to calm down. We must not count on someone else to help us or to bring us prosperity. Much like the Mad Farmer, we must not even pray for the rain to stop. Instead, we should consider how to build resilient communities,

like our forefathers before us, so that we can withstand the shock of world events. The river is going to flood, so let's see to it that we have good luck with our fishing pole.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and the Rural Church and State and West of 98 podcasts. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to him wherever podcasts are found.

Friends of the RLCC meeting held

The November meeting of the Friends of the Robert Lee Care Center was held on Monday, November 27, at 10 am in the West Side lobby of the Care Center with 7 members and 2

visitors present. The meeting was called to order at 10:06 am by President Della Alexander. Secretary Harriett Ann Demere presented the minutes of the October meeting. Minutes were corrected and approved. Della Alexander presented the Treasurer's report, which was accepted as read. President Alexander gave an update on the success of the Brown Bag Fundraiser which was held on November 9th. A motion was made and approved to give a \$50 donation to the Methodist Church for the use of the Family Life Center for the fundraiser. President Alexander also gave an update on additional fall and Christmas yard decorations which have been purchased this month for the RLCC.

(Continued on next page)

FREE CHRISTMAS DINNER
December 25, 11 am to 12:30 pm
or until we run out

We will not take reservations.
Plates will be served on a first come, first served basis. Drive through, to go plates only.
We will only give out plates to those present in the vehicle.

Meal to include ham, mashed potatoes, gravy, dressing, green bean casserole, and a roll.

NOEL & Co.
11200 W. St. Hwy 158, Robert Lee
 Approximately 6 miles west of Robert Lee on the right.

For further information, call 763-8890.

Merry Christmas from our kitchen to you!

That's Quick!

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