

# THE COLLEGIAN

SERVING THE TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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DISTRICT

## Trustees vote to approve new Tarrant tax rate

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The TCC board of trustees recently adopted a new tax rate reduction of 1.8 cents.

Ronnie Watkins, executive director of finance and administrative services, presented the tax rate plan to the board at the Sept. 13 work session.

He reiterated that he and his team worked hard to keep the taxpayers in mind, as well as the college, when developing the new tax resolution.

“We are a community college and we have listened to our community. We do understand the burden of the taxpayers,” he told the board. “I’m also reminded of the mission of Tarrant County College as well. Tarrant County College provides affordable and open access to quality teaching and learning. To me, that’s value. We have quality learning at an affordable price. That’s good value. That’s what we hold onto.”

This rate is the 2023 tax rate based on the appraised value of a property by the Tarrant Appraisal District. Each fiscal year, the board votes on a new rate for TCC.

For the 2023-24 fiscal year, it is 11.217 cents per \$100 in valuation.

Previous exemptions to this rate continue to exist for specific groups. Those with disability have \$3,000 excluded from their appraisal value, and people over 65 years-of-age have the first \$50,000 removed from the appraisal value.

The homestead exemption was added in June, as well. It excludes 1% of an appraisal value with a \$5,000 minimum.

Some taxpayers are pleased with the new change compared to last year’s tax rate. Tarrant County resident Daniel Bennett commented at the board work session Sept. 13 asking the trustees to be cautious about their tax decisions based on the “bloated” tax rates from last year.

He also urged the trustees of the Tarrant Appraisal District to take a no confidence vote due to the problematic practices he felt the chief appraiser used in moving money around to stay within budget.

“I appreciate you reviewing the board in its current state and



**Alex Hoben/The Collegian**  
 Board President Teresa Ayala talks at the board meeting.

taking that vote,” he said.

TAD’s Chief Appraiser Jeff Law resigned Sept. 1 after the Tarrant County Commissioner Court passed a no confidence vote against Law. At the Sept. 21 board meeting, a no confidence vote on TAD was moved but it did not pass.

With elections for TAD starting, the TCC board of trustees can cast five nominations.

Trustee Shannon Wood moved to nominate Vince Puente, seconded by Trustee Gwendolyn Morrison. Along with that, Trustee Laura Forkner Pritchett moved to nominate Gary Losada, seconded by Wood. Both motions carried.

To wrap up the tax talk, the board discussed replacing the previous Finance and Audit Committee with an Internal Audit Committee to increase engagement with the Internal Auditor and District’s office. It will be governed by the Internal Audit Committee Charter.

General Counsel Carol Bracken explained this topic to the trustees at the Sept. 13 work session.

“The other purpose of this is to review with the auditor substantiated reports that come in on our anonymous fraud and abuse hot line. Because a lot of the audit process – and certainly also the view of these substantiated complaints can be very sensitive – involves information about personnel,” she said to the board.

At the Sept. 21 board meeting, the motion was carried, and President Teresa Ayala appointed three board members to the committee: Leonard Hornsby as committee chair and Wood and Kenneth Bahr as committee members.

The next TCC board meeting will be held Oct. 26 at 6 p.m..

SOUTHEAST

## New play ignites excitement

Drama based on historical fire takes to the stage

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The SE theater is set to premiere “Volume of Smoke” from Oct. 4 to Oct. 6.

The play is based on the Richmond Theater fire in 1811. SE student DaShaun Ellis plays the Blacksmith who is based on Gilbert Hunt, a freed Black man who played a large role in saving countless lives.

“He is a Black man who actually became a registered blacksmith in Richmond,” Ellis said. “He saved — I believe — 36 people from the fire at the Richmond Theater. He’s just a hero.”

The fire was caused when a lamp touched a set piece.

Inadequacies of the building’s construction exacerbated the fire. Director Bradley McEntire cited that the incident created greater awareness of fire safety.

“It also started the first serious conversations about building codes and the possibility of regulating the building of much safer structures. For instance, the Richmond Theater had main doors that opened inward. It had very narrow aisles. The stairs leading down from the box seats were apparently never weight tested and constructed in a shoddy manner. All of this was quite a hazard in a fire. These kinds of things were considered more thoroughly from that point onward.”

Although the incident was 200 years ago, Director Bradley McEntire was drawn to the

humanity of the story.

“I am fascinated by how we, both as individuals and as a larger community, deal with catastrophe,” McEntire said. “This play features a real-life disaster, one of the most devastating of America’s early years as a young nation. The repercussions trickled outward.”

“Volume of Smoke” portrays vignettes of how survivors and victims responded to the fires.

“The play explores how we cope when we come face to face with big tragic events such as this,” McEntire said. “Sometimes we meet catastrophe with courage, sometimes with debilitating fear. Sometimes with outrage, sometimes with resignation. Sometimes it reveals our selfishness, sometimes our heroic side. It really does stress-

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## Moving with emotion



**Alex Hoben/The Collegian**

NE students Daequan Jones (right) and Alan Gutierrez (left) grasp each others arms as they practice with their company, Movers Unlimited, in the NHPE gym. They were preparing for the Fort Worth Dance Festival on Friday, Sept. 22. See Dance is Unlimited, page 6

TRINITY RIVER

## Search for health care insurance proves to be anything but simple

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Imagine getting into an accident and breaking an arm or a leg? Do you have health insurance to help, or would you have to choose between a broken limb or a broken bank account?

Angela Hall, TR coordinator for health services said she’s seen students injured and refusing to seek healthcare because they don’t have insurance. So, TR health services partnered with Kalondia McCain, John Peter

Smith hospital’s eligibility outreach project coordinator for Tarrant County in Medical Home 101, a presentation aimed to help students in their quest for health insurance.

“We don’t prescribe medications, we don’t diagnose, we don’t treat,” she said. “And so, we often have to refer students out to a community partner, and then they tell us they don’t have health insurance.”

Hall said that oftentimes young adults who are no longer covered under their parents’ insurance wonder what their next step for insurance can be if they’re not

employed somewhere that offers it.

“It can become expensive quickly,” she said.

An outstanding billing that comes from a healthcare provider can be more affordable with financial assistance programs, she said.

“As taxpayers, we are paying for the hospital district system so it’s good that students become aware of what their resources are.”

After the presentation by McCain, JPS put out a table giving out resources to sign up for programs such as JPS Connection, which she explained

as a financial assistance program through enrollment eligibility at Tarrant County hospitals. The JPS table included applications for the program as well as a flyer about making the most out of a doctor’s appointment.

“We assist Tarrant County residents with copays and deductibles. We know during this economic time it can be hard financially,” she said.

McCain said that the JPS program is a last resort. They want to ensure that everyone applies for any state or federally funded program that is available before

enrolling in their program.

Though JPS doesn’t have a college student specific program, they have one for anyone who resides within Tarrant County and meets their program criteria. McCain also said that they have seen an increase in applications because people want to be more health conscious. She recommended yearly health check ups for anyone without insurance.

“It’s important to have some source of health coverage resources to assist,” she said. “Hopefully, through the financial assistance

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