

# news

## Headlines

- ▶ Can't we all just get along? Ten prominent Hispanic citizens made their displeasure with City Manager **Marc Ott** public last week, inspiring much hand-wringing, hemming, hawing, and odes to "diversity"; see "City Hall Hustle," p.16, and "City Hall Firestorm," p.24.
- ▶ After a logjam of a meeting last week, City Council is backed up again this week, taking up decisions on **Austin Energy's** wood-burning biomass plant (see "AE Defends Biomass Plant," p.22), the **Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan**, and an ordinance putting teeth in local **campaign finance** laws.
- ▶ A crazy week for **Capital Metro**: A major route overhaul was implemented, the board confirmed that increased fares will take effect Oct. 13, and the potential for a bus driver strike loomed. See "Bus Drivers Back at the Table," p.19.
- ▶ The **Democratic National Convention** closes today (Thursday) with Barack Obama's acceptance speech. The Republican Convention begins Sept. 1 in Minneapolis, home to Sen. Larry Craig's men's room shenanigans. Tap, tap!
- ▶ **Green Party** nominee **Cynthia McKinney** and independent **Ralph Nader** have submitted their paperwork to be included as write-in presidential candidates. (You have to file to be a write-in? Only in Texas.)

## Naked City

- ▶ **JUSTICE FOR WOULD-BE SUICIDE VICTIM**  
Foiled again, Williamson County has failed its latest attempt to stamp out the use-of-force lawsuit **Richard Graves v. Don Zachary**. In 2004, Zachary, a WilCo sheriff's deputy, nearly killed Graves by shooting him twice as Graves held a gun to his own head, threatening to kill himself; the deputy has argued in numerous motions that he believed Graves might have turned the gun on him. But, on Aug. 12, New Orleans' 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld for a second time a 2007 decision by U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks denying Zachary's motion for summary judgment, which, if granted, would have ended the case. Now, the lawsuit is most likely headed back to Sparks' court for trial. "This makes my week," said a jubilant Graves. "All Graves has ever asked for," said attorney Jeff Edwards, "is a jury of his peers to decide whether Zachary used excessive force. [WilCo's] done everything in their power to prevent this." Though Zachary may appeal yet again, Edwards doubts that the U.S. Supreme Court would consider his appeal because "the 5th Circuit has applied the law correctly in this case." Assistant County Attorney Steven Ackley, who's defending Zachary, could not be reached for comment. (For more, see "WilCo Follies," June 27.)  
— Patricia J. Ruland

- ▶ **TRIGGER-HAPPY TEACHERS** The **Harold Independent School District** school board, just west of Wichita Falls, voted last October to approve a policy allowing teachers to carry **concealed weapons** onto the district's single K-12 campus. The policy didn't go into effect until Monday (thus giving teachers time to get their concealed carry permits and complete required training before the new school year began), and the news has brought mixed reviews. In a guest editorial in the Wichita Falls *Times Record News*, Sen. Craig Estes, R-Wichita Falls, applauded the board for its "visionary approach toward student safety." But the policy

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This 2006 photo, taken at Danny Young's Texicalli Grille restaurant, exemplifies Young's zest for life. The local restaurateur, musician, and political junkie died Aug. 20. On Tuesday, friends and family gave the "Mayor of South Austin" a proper send-off, followed by a reception at Antone's. Friend and U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett of Austin recalled a favorite Young mantra: "Never trust a skinny cook." "He was never shy with the fries, the chicken fries, and the catfish, all washed down with at least one original formula Dr Pepper," he said. In a similar vein, Doggett said, Young's restaurant "was always the place to get the skinny on what was happening in South Austin." The Texicalli, in fact, was the venue for one of Doggett's political ads about the need to support "folks like a Texicalli waitress" with federal student financial aid.

## Denver Stakes

What Obama signifies for the rest of us

BY MICHAEL KING

This week I'm on the road, where I get worse food, less exercise, and more cable TV news. I can survive the first two, but each time out, I wonder just how many more self-important blow-dried blowhards I can endure before my head explodes. At the moment, they're all full of the week's designated narratives: "The Anointing of Joe Biden" and "The Melodrama of Hillary Clinton." Obama choosing Biden (whatever his merits) pleased the pundits, because his "experience" — that is, his sheer official familiarity — validates their own sense of entitlement to public wisdom. On Clinton, they've been fantasizing a thousand sinister Denver backstage maneuvers, the next chapter of a collective Gothic novel they've been writing for two decades. When the actual events fail to play out according to their superheated scenario, it doesn't matter — they'll move on to the next fantasy chapter without taking a televised breath.

However painful the experience, it's useful to be reminded of the corporate culture within which our elections are decided. People are puzzling why, in a year otherwise so favorable to Democratic issues and Democratic candidates, the presidential campaign is nearly a dead heat. Despite all the defensive denials, race is certainly one reason. But equally important is the pop-cult of personality imposed on our politics

by the institutions and people who "mediate" our public information. They want a horse race between isolated, archetypal individuals, and they will do whatever they can to define the terms of our community politics as though most of us are simply onlookers in a slightly more respectable version of *American Idol*.

In that trivialized morality play, it's Barack Obama the Young Prince vs. John McCain the Old War Hero, a faux-symbolic battle that not only obscures the actual differences between the candidates but removes the rest of us to the gallery to cheer or boo on cue. Most importantly, that fiction completely obscures the national interests represented by the two men and their two parties. And it hides what is really at stake in an election that could mean the difference between four more years of hard-right domination of public policy — or the return of the large majority of the population to seats at the political table.

### What We Believe

Consider just a handful of the most important public questions of the last decade:

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## QUOTE of the WEEK



JANA BIRCHUM

"All of us [are] driven by the simple belief that the world as it is just won't do, that we have an obligation to fight for the world as it should be."

— Michelle Obama, addressing the Democratic National Convention