

IN BRIEF

Forestry Dept. says fire conditions ripe

Spring fire season — and its prohibition on outdoor burning before 4 p.m. — officially ended Monday but the threat of wildland fires still is very real, according to the state Department of Forestry.

Dry weather has caused a delay in the “green-up” of vegetation in some parts of the state — particularly the Shenandoah Valley and the southwestern mountains, said John Miller, the department’s director of resource protection.

“Virtually the entire commonwealth is in a rain deficit situation,” he said in a news release. “So, just because the calendar says spring fire season is over doesn’t mean the threat of wildland fires has ended.”

Debris burning is the No. 1 cause of wildland fires in Virginia, Miller said.

He advised people who want to burn trash to make sure the area around the burning area is cleared, they have sufficient water and hand tools to douse the fire and that they burn only in conditions of high humidity and low wind speed.

The department has responded to 878 wildland fires that burned 7,423 acres this year as of April 30, according to the release.

In addition, the department announced that 383 people from Virginia and 10 other states will gather next week at Fort Pickett in Blackstone for training on fighting wildland fires.

Many of the participants are firefighters, but some work for other agencies, including the department, the military and federal agencies, according to the release.

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

FARM & GARDEN

Townpeople come together to create great community in Mississippi

There is an old saying that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

No where is that more evident than in our latest location — Houston, Miss.

From now on, whenever anyone mentions Houston, I will only ever think of Mississippi.

There are, in fact, 13 Houstons in the United States, and despite the boasts of one of them in particular — oilfields, space centers, the biggest this, the biggest that — I reckon after this week, there is one that stands head and shoulders above them all, and I along with the Best of America by Horseback team have been privileged and delighted to spend time there.

As “Brits,” Anita and I had very little prior knowledge of Mississippi, other than having been taught in school how to spell it, and that it was a place in that far-off land called America that apparently we once owned as part of the old Empire (ah, those were the days.).

Our minds were open and pleasantly surprised to see how green and beautiful the landscape was around here — a drive along the Natchez Trace Parkway is highly recommended and a great way to get from one major town to another, as long as you don’t mind popping off the route every so often for gas.

But beautiful countryside is only one aspect of the entire Houston experience; we found the hospitality of the townfolk to be second



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

to none. That legendary “southern hospitality” is certainly evident in Houston, and they went out of their way to be as friendly and helpful as they could be.

More importantly, they had a genuine desire to do so. There was none of the false graciousness you can sometimes find in “cultured society,” and the people we met were as pleased to meet and be with us, as we were to be with them.

I hate to use the word again for fear of it becoming a cliché, but we all felt like we knew each other well and were part of one big happy “family.”

We’ve witnessed firsthand the astounding success that Schools Superintendent Dr. Steve Coker has achieved within the education system — they run it on an inverted principle where the students needs come first, then the teachers, then the community, etc. not the other way around as is often the case.

Steve has worked for pro-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tom Seay joins students from Houston (Miss.) High School who built a solar-powered race car. The map at right shows the location of Houston in Mississippi.



gressive international companies such as Mercedes-Benz, and as he talked with enthusiasm about the school’s achievements, I was sure I could spot some Project Management methodology in there.

Remember, this is not a rich area. On a per capita basis, this is one of the poorest areas in one of the poorest states, yet, the high school has achieved level 5 superior ratings for a number of years now. Not only that, but the students have created a solar-powered race car that has won the national championships six times in a row. It can run all day long at 25mph, and achieve a top speed of 75mph. This year, it is racing across Australia from Darwin to

Adelaide in the World Championships — all funded and inspired by the local community.

Mayor Stacey Parker is a young, go-getter and let it be said the proprietor of the local funeral home. As with Joyce East, executive director of the Chickasaw Development Foundation, he is a boundless source of energy, enthusiasm, optimism and love for his home town and the people within it.

Joyce, in fact, was almost like our mother — ushering us around from place to place, a mine of local information, and ensuring that nobody was left out of the festivities. Besides the Best

of America Grand Tour Ride, those festivities included a very big annual event for Houston — the Flywheel Festival.

Rather than create a fuss and postpone one or the other, the folks of Houston just made it into one big party, provided a shuttle service between the two sites and ensured everyone had fun.

What it all comes down to is how well the people and the elected representatives of the town (one in the same in many cases), all work together. There are many remarkable individuals who are inspiring, admirable and who achieve great things, but put them all together with the same vision and the same purpose, and you get a much greater, stronger, and cohesive “whole” that produces even better results.

Similar in many ways to the success of the Best of America by Horseback team — a bunch of good people who when brought together become great, and produce more than just a TV program — they bring out the best of America.

David and Anita Hasbury-Snogles are British residents riding across the United States on horseback to raise money for charity. Visit [HorseQuestUSA.org](http://HorseQuestUSA.org) for more information. David can be reached at [david\\_hasbury@yahoo.com](mailto:david_hasbury@yahoo.com).

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