

Williamson

recreation for the county. The Hill Country Cricket Association will pay about 16,000 to build the new court as well as three concrete cricket wickets, one for the playing field and two practice or "tuition" wickets on one side of the field. The tuition wickets could be compared to a batting cage or a putting green, for practicing. The club, which has been in existence since 1992, has about 100 members, about 80 of whom live in Williamson County. Mr. Rodgers said most of the money will be spent on ground clearing, leveling, top soil spreading and seeding. They have identified two areas for the

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ISSUE



County still considering touch-screen voting

By REBECCA ROBBINS

The Williamson County Commissioners on Tuesday postponed buying electronic touch-screen systems for early voting because only three of the five commissioners heard the hour-long presentation.

"As important as this issue is, I think the full court should be here. [If we approve the touch-screen system], we are locking ourselves into a system for the next 15 to 20 years," said Commissioner Greg Boatright.

Commissioners David Hays and Frankie Limmer were not present for the meeting.

The 110 machines would be used only for early voting in the party primaries, which will run from February 23 through March 5. Election Day is March 9.

Each of the nine early voting locations around the county would have up to 10 touch-screen machines, which means there would be no paper ballots, no pencils and no coloring of boxes.



Mark Ashley

County Election Administrator John Willingham demonstrates how to use the touch-screen voting system the county is considering using at early polling sites.

The machines could be used by the visual-and hearing-impaired. Here's how the machines would work: Election workers will provide a small rectangular cartridge to each

voter with their specific precincts' candidates listed.

Voters will put the cartridge into the machine, then simply select a name in each race by touching the screen with their finger.

Users also have the option to review their selections and change their vote if desired.

Voters return the cartridge to election workers after voting. The ballot information is transferred electronically from the units on a diskette that is loaded into software at a central counting location.

Also, to satisfy regulations of the Help America Vote Act, the county expects to have at least one touch-screen voting system by 2005 at each of the county's 81 Election Day polling places for disabled people to use.

The county's election administrator, John Willingham, said about 40 to 45 percent of the registered voters in Williamson County's 92 voting precincts vote early. In fact, he

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Jonah water rates go up whopping 80 percent

By D.ANN SLAYTON SHIFFLER

Water rates for residents living in the Jonah Special Utility District will increase more than 80 percent in 2004, with the average customer paying approximately \$16 more a month for water.

"It's a substantial increase and it's due to the needs of the district to replenish and replace some of the system," said Joe Williams, general manager of the Jonah water district.

In a letter to customers dated December 5, the district's president, Gene Raesz of Taylor, stated that the system is approaching 30 years of continuous service and that it is "deteriorating rapidly."

The letter also stated that rate increases will be needed for several years "in order to rehabilitate the system, provide adequate service and to meet regulatory requirements."

Jonah Water serves approximate-

ly 3,700 customers in a 500-square-mile area that lies east of the Georgetown, south of the Bell County line and north of the Travis County line.

The new rates are based on usage with the base rate of \$3.62 per thousand gallons, for customers who use 0 to 10,000 gallons per month, as compared to \$2 per thousand gallons in 2003.

The customer that uses more than 50,001 gallons or more will be

charged \$11.62 per thousand gallons, up from \$10 per thousand gallons in 2003.

The average single-family home customer uses about 10,000 gallons a month, Mr. Williams said.

The average customer can expect a water bill of about \$36.20 per month, plus the \$20 service charge, for a total of \$56.20 per month, he said. This spring, the Jonah water district will be moving to new offices at 4050 FM 1660.