



Happy New Year from the Taylor Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center, our Board of Directors and our Ambassador group.

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Sales tax revenues up in 2012

MIKE EDDLEMAN
publisher

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs announced state sales tax revenue in November was \$2.34 billion, up 13.1 percent compared to November 2011, meaning December sales tax disbursements also increased.

December local sales tax allocations

totalled \$552 million to cities, counties, transit systems and special purpose taxing districts, up 15.5 percent compared to December 2011.

In Taylor, December allocations were \$250,488, up 13.22 percent over December 2011. That brings the calendar year total to \$3,213,443, an increase of 9.08 percent. In 2011 Taylor received \$2,945,826 in sales

tax disbursements.

This year was only the fourth for Taylor to exceed \$3 million in sales tax revenues, the other three being 2006-2008 before ERCOT gained its tax exempt status in 2008, four years after applying for it.

City staff did not budget for sales tax increases during the last budget cycle which began in October,

but told the council it may come back following the first quarter – which ends in December – with some items that some of the extra revenues can be used for. Capital items mentioned throughout the budget process included vehicle purchases as well as computer needs.

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Roy Carroll, Paul Schlesinger, and Bill Dowdy accept their "stars" as the newest members of the Country Music Hall of Fame in Gatesville on Nov. 16. In addition to being inducted to the Hall of Fame, all three were recognized as "Entertainers of the Year."

Schlesinger inducted into Hall of Fame

CHRISTINE BOLAÑOS
staff writer

Paul Schlesinger, who plays fiddle, rhythm guitar and sings and lives in Taylor, was inducted into the Gatesville Country Music Hall of Fame on Nov. 16. The honor is a culmination of a huge portion of his lifetime that has been dedicated to what he refers to as "old" country music.

"I'm very proud of it. There are certainly a lot of musicians that are deserving of recognition. It's just my good fortune and those of the others that were inducted on the same night that it was our time to happen. I think it's a blessing. I just hope that I and my musical companions can continue to grow and achieve in the music business," said Schlesinger.

Rhythm guitarist Bill Dowdy of Lexington and steel guitarist and vocalist Roy Carroll of Round Rock were also inducted at Gatesville City Auditorium the same night.

"They exemplify country music in a way that's truly outstanding. They've paid their dues, and have given many, many people lasting memories," explained Roger Vierser, director of the Hall of Fame, of the selection of the three musicians.

Vierser discovered them while watching them perform at the Thorndale VFW Jamboree.

Fellow band members bassist J.C. George of Buda and drummer Jim Bowles of Austin were installed as honorary members.

The journey

The journey to eventually landing a place in the Hall of Fame is in large part due to networking.

While earning his photojournalism degree at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 1990s, Schlesinger became immersed in the world of traditional western swing and Texas honky-tonk music.

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Photos courtesy of Rita Baughman
Paul Schlesinger performs one of his signature fiddle tricks during the stage show prior to the induction ceremony.

Hutto alters YMCA plan

ELIZABETH PAGE
staff writer

A revised design option for the new Hutto Family YMCA was approved by the city Dec. 20, after construction cost estimates came in higher than expected.

Council members chose a design that maintains the exterior integrity of the original KA Hickman Architects design, yet has a smaller overall square footage due to the elimination of a 3,750-sq. ft. mini gym.

Cutting out the mini gym should not hinder Y programming or discourage membership, according to Sheri Yerrington, district executive director of the Chasco Family YMCA. She is on the project team to complete the Hutto facility.

"I believe this community has a great relationship with your school district," Yerrington told the council earlier this month. "If it was not for that, that would probably bring us more concern that we could not operate programs. I will tell you right now, we are already operating programs in the gyms with your local school district, so that is not as much concern to the YMCA because there's those established relationships that are already there. In some of our communities, we're not as fortunate to have those great relationships with the school district."

Harsh soil conditions and a lack of infrastructure are driving up costs for the facility approved by voters in 2009 with a \$5-million price tag. That cost was based on an initial 25,000-sq. ft. building.

The council approved spending \$550,000 more than the \$5 million in voter approved bonds to cover unanticipated site development work, such as infill of the site and extensive utility and concrete work.

Of the additional \$550,000 that will be allocated to the project, the council specified \$400,000 to be issued as certificates of obligation and the remainder will come from city reserves.

Bonds for Y construction will be issued as part of an estimated \$9.8-million bond issue likely to take place in February 2013, according to Assistant City Manager Micah Grau.

Grau gave details of the bond issue at the Dec. 20 meeting. About \$5.7 million in new bonds will be issued and the remainder likely will be refinanced 2003-4 series bonds.

These bond funds will pay for a variety of projects, including: Construction funds for the YMCA facility and paving of CR 165, the road leading to the YMCA facility; FM 685 road and bridge improvements; a variety of utilities infrastructure projects; and \$509,000 to purchase the Hutto Economic Development Corporation's offices.

The tax impact of moving forward with these projects, including but not

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limited to construction of the YMCA, could be around 1.5 cents beginning in 2016, according to Grau. However, residential and/or commercial growth could offset that increase.

While these projects will not impact next year's tax rate, Grau doesn't anticipate that the city will have to raise taxes for 2014.

"We shouldn't have any tax rate increase [next year] as long as our property values hold steady," Grau said. "The way it's looking right now, the rate that we adopted this last year will be sufficient to maintain us through this next year."

If residential and commercial property tax values drop again, however, an increase could be necessary, he said.

The budget for the recreational facility project does have a built-in \$250,000 contingency, and YMCA officials have said they likely will bring a couple of partners to the project to share costs on items like a warm water therapy pool and kitchen space.

Grau is ensuring the city is conservative with its estimates, however, and is not banking on those funds just yet, he said.

The Y project is now slated for completion in January of 2014.

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Countywide, cities in Williamson County were up 6.12 percent in December over the same month last year and finished the year with \$104 million in sales tax revenues, up 3.89 percent over last year.

Hutto received \$189,805 in December and finished 2012 at \$2,350,934 for the year. Hutto had an annual increase of 11.19 percent.

All but two of the county's 13 cities - Round Rock and Weir - saw an increase in revenues in 2012. Round Rock led the way in total revenue at \$62.8 million, followed by Georgetown and Cedar Park at \$15.9 million each. Jarrell had the largest percentage increase at 63.82 percent, up to \$779,736 for the year.

Taylor Annual Sales Tax Revenues

2012	\$3,213,443	2005	\$2,768,356
2011	\$2,945,826	2004	\$2,675,397
2010	\$2,932,031	2003	\$2,121,091
2009	\$2,988,872	2002	\$2,258,508
2008	\$3,896,109	2001	\$2,336,160
2007	\$4,170,664	2000	\$2,339,286
2006	\$3,729,585		

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Had he not been introduced and fallen in love with the sound of Jimmy Heap and the Melody Masters, a Taylor band that operated from 1946 to 1977 and achieved national recognition, the musician within Schlesinger may never have been inspired to come alive.

Jimmy Heap died before Schlesinger had a chance to meet him but as fate would have it, he met his widow while they both worked at a local grocery shop. Through her, Schlesinger met with the other band members who would further inspire him and help him secure his destiny as a musician.

Though dying of cancer, Perk Williams—who performed on the Melody Masters' 1954 top five hit recording of "Release Me"—gave Schlesinger his first fiddle instructions in 1993.

He also befriended Arlie Carter, a fiddler and pianist; and Bill Dowdy, a guitarist and bassist, who became his mentors.

Upon Carter's passing, Schlesinger obtained his favorite fiddle among other treasures, which he uses to perform to this day.

Schlesinger joined Dowdy with the Lexington Senior Citizens Center's Down Home Country band and they continue performing together today.

His first paying gig, for \$100, was in 1998 with Bill and the Jim Siegler Orchestra of Giddings.

"I thought, 'Man, I got paid for playing a few songs. It sure is a lot better than trying to make a living as a photographer,'" Schlesinger remembered.

For years, he played with a variety of musicians and bands and in 2001, he joined the Texas Pioneers, a country swing band featuring both younger and veteran players.

Schlesinger made appearances with different groups including with James Edds, A.T. Shuffield's monthly Star of Texas Jamboree in Cameron, Joe Boyd Reynolds of Lexington, 29th Street

Band, the Walburg Boys and the Stardusters. He also managed to assemble his first western swing band, the Little River Playboys from 2002 through 2006.

He is a staff fiddler for the Thorndale VFW Jamboree. In 2005, Schlesinger released his first nationally distributed CD, "Our Way," featuring fiddle and guitar instrumentals with Dowdy.

In 2006, Schlesinger began using the "Knights of Texas Swing," as the name for his personal band bookings.

He plays with Glen Collins and his Honky Tonkin' Buddies, the Milam County Cowboy Church band and Joe Boyd Reynolds' Second Chance band.

In 2011, he became a regular member of the Comal Country Music Show's house band.

Plans

Schlesinger plans on releasing a second CD in 2013, tentatively titled, "Paul Schlesinger and his Knights of Texas Swing."

He has taken content from his scrapbooks to make a pamphlet book that will be included in the CD case.

He said the CD will feature a revamp of some old Jimmy Heap numbers.

The reason

While Schlesinger is humbled to receive the recent recognition, when it comes down to it, he is a musician simply because he loves music, he wants to keep old country music going and preserve it as best he can.

"It just gets in your blood. If you're home on a Friday night, which is a rare thing, you feel like you're missing out. I want to keep older music alive. There's just so much that goes into it," he shared.

"Especially when I first started, it was the thrill of playing with the people who made these hits; they're my musical idols."

Induction night

The recent inductees were the main act at the Gatesville Country Music

Hall of Fame awards show.

"We had put together what we thought would be a really good showcase to feature each one of us," Schlesinger said.

"I [did] my fiddle tricks, like behind my back, on my knee, on the floor behind my back," he continued, adding that Carter probably never imagined he would be using his fiddle in that way.

The night was one to remember.

"It was exhilarating. The crowd was very receptive," he said, adding that all the people from Taylor and surrounding areas who came out to show their support, including his mother Donna, was the best part.

"That right there is as important to me as getting a paper certificate or a plaque. That was the heartwarming thing about it for me. The support of family and friends made the night special."

Schlesinger and the others join the likes of Tracy Lawrence and Clifton Jansky in the Gatesville Country Music Hall of Fame.

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