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THE WATER SOURCE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE EDWARDS UNDERGROUND WATER DISTRICT

July 1995

The Spirit of the West: An Endangered Economy

Mike Saathoff and Joe Fohn believe their sentiments on the Edwards Aquifer are very clear. Water is essential to their livelihoods. Their bottom line ... their way of life ... is directly affected by what they can and cannot get.

Mike and Joe are farmers in Medina County who are facing an uncertain future. They are wondering if their lives will change drastically pending the outcome of the battles surrounding their water supply, the Edwards Aquifer.

Joe Fohn is a sixth generation farmer whose land is in the Verde Creek area where the old Vandenberg settlement was located. He drilled his first well in 1967 "because we always lacked that one rain which made a good crop." So, he decided to "supplement the good Lord's rainfall" and currently irrigates 500 acres. He waters by the furrow method, but has purchased his first center pivot this year.

Mike Saathoff took over his father's farming operation along the Hondo Creek in 1979. Like Joe, the family began irrigating in the late 1960's and he currently irrigates 1,500 acres. Last year Mike expanded, which he admits with a smile, "probably wasn't too

smart." He doesn't regret his action, but thinks about its implications all the time.

When Mike purchased the additional property, the bank would only lend him its dry land value, not the irrigated value (dry land farming depends solely on rainfall). In a relaxed drawl, he states "It hurt a lot. I had to put up other property as collateral." Joe recently refused an opportunity to buy land because he did not want to pay irrigated land prices and then have his water supply capped.

Both men argue that they don't waste water. Joe flatly states, "We're not going to be running that water down the road because it's costing us money." Mike estimates it costs him \$3.50 to \$4.00 per acre-inch (therefore, an acre-foot of water on 100 acres would cost between \$4,200 and \$4,800). Add that amount to the \$57,000 he paid recently for one of eight center pivots he uses. According to Mike, the pivots have cut his water use almost in half.

Everything is invested in the land they own. With that in mind, water assumes a new importance.

(continued)

Editor's Note: So often we hear about the diverse uses and users of the Edwards Aquifer. The region has been grappling with the problem of fair and equitable treatment for decades. The Edwards Aquifer issue, in part, is difficult to solve because the users all have very different needs.

As public information officer for the District, I talk to many people who cannot understand why the farmers and the residents of San Marcos and New Braunfels are so passionate about their water supply. While it may be easier for us to understand what the uses and needs are for a city with over a million residents, we are not as familiar with the other uses and needs of those who are also dependent upon the aquifer.

When putting together this issue of The Water Source, I searched for residents who are not involved in the politics surrounding the Edwards Aquifer. Those whose viewpoints are reflected agreed to be a part of this edition because they too felt it was important that these two sides be understood. The following articles are designed to give us all some perspective and a greater understanding of other points of view.

Comal Springs: The Heart & Soul of New Braunfels

Iris T. Schumann, C.A.

Editor's Note: Iris Schumann was born in Guadalupe County in 1930 and has spent most of her life in New Braunfels. Since 1976, she has been the Archives Chairman and Archivist at the Sophienburg Museum and Archives in New Braunfels.

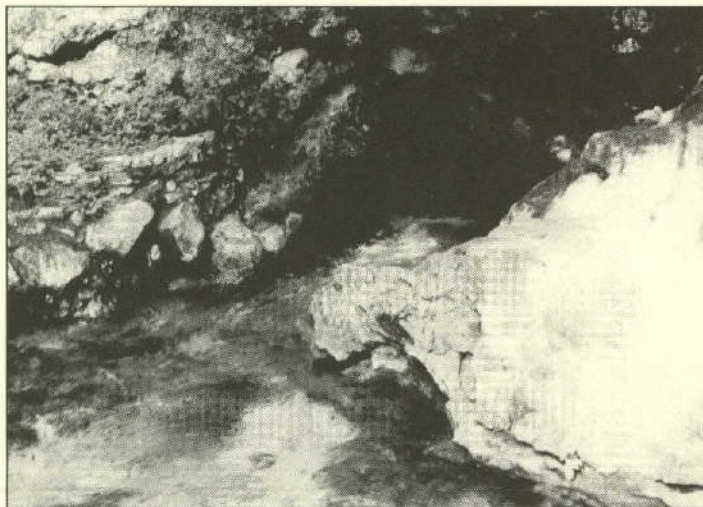
I was a very little girl when I first saw the sparkling waters of the Comal Springs in Landa Park. So young in fact, that I cannot visualize the very first time that our extended family picnicked in the park in the 1930's. It was a weekly ritual to prepare a picnic supper at my grandparents' home in downtown New Braunfels and join other families who sought the beauty of the rippling Comal Springs water.

Part of that ritual included a stroll, by the grandchildren, to the Big Spring. As we stood around the bubbling waters, we speculated on the depth of the seemingly bottomless hole. We were almost overpowered by the outpouring of water that endlessly filled the basin and joined the water supplied by hundreds of other springs at the foot of Klappenbach Hill. We, as a community, were so proud of our springs that a sign was hung near the Big Spring which announced the millions of gallons that poured from its source each minute and each day.

The waters of the Comal River were a central part of our lives then, as they have been for over 150 years of our existence as a community. But long before 1845, the Indians of this region also knew the springs. They bent

marker trees, some of which remain, pointing the direction to the mighty and life giving springs. The Spaniards also recognized their abundance and named the springs Las Fontanas, or fountains, an indication of the bounty of water the springs provided.

As the first German settlers moved into this area, some residents, including the father of Texas botany, Ferdinand Lindheimer, used the Comal Springs as a return address when writing to friends. While New Braunfels was not a well known location, the springs were. Water was the reason that our founders chose this site for settlement. There



were two great sources of water coming together at this location: the Guadalupe and Comal Rivers. As the Comal provided water for the Guadalupe, the newcomers quickly recognized that the springs were a gift of life to the whole area and they have been treated that way ever since.

William H. Merriwether, the 19th century industrialist, was among the early residents to recognize the immense economic potential of that gift. He channeled the power of the springs in the 1850's for use in his mills when he created the mill race. He followed others, however, who had built water wheels along the river to run

the mills that sawed the wood, ground the grain, and helped us grow to become a community which welcomed industries as part of our economic growth.

It was water then and now which continues to be the fuel which ignites our economy. It allows healthy growth and expansion of our businesses and industries thus providing jobs for our residents. Those jobs are not only the river-related ones, but as a community, we consciously have tried to act responsibly by attracting industries that use our precious water resources in a conservative manner. We recognize water as a finite resource that must be protected and remain pure for the good of us all.

The waters of the Comal Springs are a living force to those of us who make our homes here. In our joyful times we are drawn to the springs: for small family gatherings, for weddings, for holiday celebrations, and for big events like our city's 150th anniversary. At these and many other times you will find our citizens and our guests wading, swimming, boating and gathering by the waters of the Comal. But the springs come to our rescue in our sad times too. They serve as a place for comfort and meditation where we can be alone and yet not be alone; a place where we can nurse our wounds and be renewed by the life and the purity of the waters.

The springs are the heart and soul of our community. They weave a thread of togetherness, of communion, of depth and breadth of life to a diverse group of people who call Comal County their home. They may change with the seasons, but they never abandon us. The springs are now and have always been the equilibrium that maintains the emotional and physical balance of our community. ■

Spirit of West *(continued)*

Mike believes that if it is a dry year and his water supply is capped, his crops may fail. He will have trouble making payments on the pivot, the land, the tractors, and his house. As he points out, "It won't just hurt me. It'll be like dominos." Joe is quick to agree. "Only your operating income is in the bank. We put everything we've got back into the soil." Joe also brings up the fact that costs continue to rise, and farmers have less buying power today than they did 50 years ago. "My father got \$3 per bushel for corn in 1946. Last year, I got the same."

Both wonder what the future holds

for agriculture. Mike isn't sure if his son will follow in his footsteps because of all the uncertainty. Joe looks at his nieces and nephews and says he can't blame them for not pursuing agriculture. "They can go and get a job without making a large investment, work 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, and get good retirement benefits."

But neither one of them would change the paths they've chosen. "It's a way of life. I love it ... seeing those first plants coming up ... there is nothing better," says Joe. Mike echoes his sentiments. "I like doing it. It's my life and my livelihood."

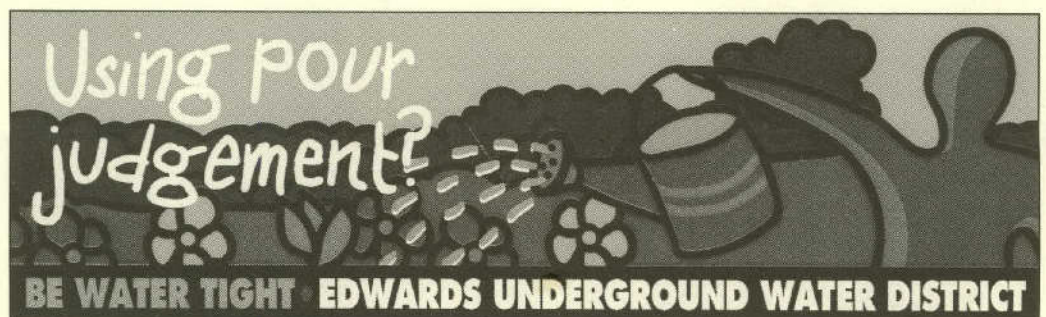
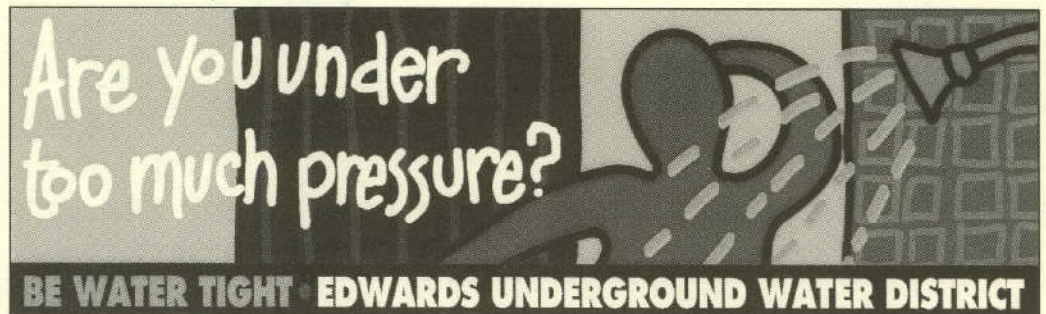
He also makes another argument.

"What would other businesses do if they were told they couldn't expand? If I can't have any more water, I can't expand. In other businesses, all they have to do is raise their prices of whatever they're selling. We're just trying to make it." Joe summarizes, "Sure, recreation brings in money, but we need farming too. We need food on the table."

On average, irrigation accounts for 30% of the water used from the aquifer. Both hope that if cutbacks are implemented, everyone will be squeezed. But until then, both men will keep on harvesting the corn and cotton, and wait and see. ■

1995 Summer Campaign: "Be Water Tight"

You may have noticed some colorful billboards with a water conservation message scattered throughout San Antonio, New Braunfels and San Marcos. They are part of the Edwards Underground Water District's annual summer campaign which reminds the public to "Be Water Tight". During the hottest part of the year, it's important that we all use our water efficiently. That means watering landscapes in the cool of the day and only giving your lawn what it needs: about an inch a week. The Edwards Underground Water District has free information on how you can Be Water Tight — indoors and out. Call 222-2204 or (800) 292-1047 between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



News Briefs

□ This summer, the Edwards Underground Water District Board of Directors agreed to implement voluntary emergency withdrawal reduction measures as set out by a panel of attorneys appointed by Federal Court Judge Lucious Bunton. The plan would only be in effect this year, temporarily changing the District's current Demand Management Plan until January 1, 1996.

The reductions are triggered when water levels in the Bexar County Index Well (J-17) reach 655, 648 and 644 feet above sea level. The plan affects water suppliers, municipalities and other non-industrial and non-agricultural water users in Bexar, Comal and Hays Counties. Reduction goals are as follows:

- Stage I 1.8 x base usage
- Stage II 1.6 x base usage
- Stage III 1.2 x base usage

Base usage is calculated by taking the average of the lowest three

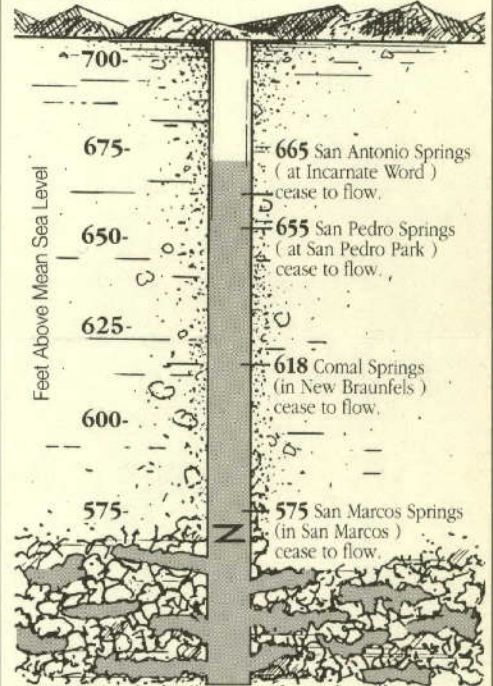
months, from November, 1994 until February, 1995. ■

□ Aquarena Springs located in San Marcos, Texas is refocusing its vision to become an environmental interpretative center. Southwest Texas State University purchased Aquarena Springs in 1994 and envisions the park as an environmental and cultural center, educating the public about the history of the area, as well as native life found at the springs.

As part of this new emphasis, an endangered species exhibit opened in June. The exhibit houses five endangered species in specialized aquariums and tanks built to protect them. These species are at the heart of the Edwards Aquifer controversy. The park hopes to teach visitors about the plants and animals, as well as have them leave with a better understanding of the relationship between humankind and the springs. For more information, call 1-800-999-9767. ■

The Water Level

This reading reflects the daily high artesian water elevation at the Bexar County Edwards Aquifer Index Well. The bottom of the graph represents the depth of the well which is 143 feet below mean sea level.



Current Status: On July 10th, 1995 the elevation was recorded at 668.1. Average for July is 667.3

THE WATER SOURCE

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