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FROM THE OFFICE OF  
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## County Eye Newsletter

The past two months have seen several difficult jury trials at the Kerr County Courthouse. The cases involved sexual assaults of children which are very difficult cases to take to trial, not only for prosecutors and victims but also for jurors.

All of the cases have ended with convictions and lengthy prison sentences which proves the jury system does work in difficult cases but the role of a jury of peers is reinforced when trials such as these occur.

When a jury summons arrives in the mail, many of us try to figure out a way to get excused from jury duty. Luckily many also take the opposite view and show up willing to participate in the process.

So many of the basic rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights involve rights of the accused and the criminal justice process. Only in the past half century have the rights of victims become an important codified part of the process.

Victims of violent crimes now become participants rather than spectators in the plea bargain process. Prosecutors visit with victims and consider their input in plea offers and victims are notified when decisions are made.

Victims are encouraged to make victim allocutions, oral statements, at the time of sentencing. The statement is often very powerful and helps the victim or the victim's family work toward closure.

As the county continues to grow, the need for juries to hear these complex cases will also grow. Be ready to step up and serve when called. The pay isn't much but the reward can be very fulfilling.

As the national political stage continues to dominate the news, local politics will soon begin to add a chapter to the story. Candidates in state and local races in both Republican and Democratic primary races can begin filing petitions or paying filing fees on Saturday, Nov. 14. Deadline to file is 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 14.

Filing information is available from the Kerr County Clerk's office. Petitions or filing fee must be turned into the respective party chairmen at the local level. Call the respective party headquarters for more details.

Information about campaign regulations for candidates can be found on the Secretary of State's website. Especially important are the rules for wording and posting of campaign materials. The website is [www.sos.state.tx.us/elections](http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections)

El Nino, the seasonal rain event, has played havoc with several planned outdoor events in recent days but our need for rain makes it only an inconvenience. The combination of the Hill Country Swap Meet with the cancelled Kerr County Market Days from the week before meant the Hill Country Youth Event Center had large crowds on Saturday.

Hopefully the volunteers who spend long hours decorating the courthouse square for Christmas will have better weather the next two weeks to accomplish their annual task. Watch for new decorations and more improvements this year. The annual Christmas parade and lighting ceremony is set for later this month.

We learned this week that longtime court reporter Kathy Banik will be retiring from the county at the end of December. Banik has been the court reporter for county commissioner's court and for hearings done by the

county judge (mental health, probate, juvenile and other civil cases) for the past 17 years. She will be missed. Our best wishes go with her.