



Notes from San Augustine County Judge, Samye Johnson  
“January in San Augustine County”  
*January 5, 2012*

January is generally a very good time to count blessings, openly express personal feelings of optimism and talk positively about plans for a successful new year. However, given the events over the past twelve months, the casual observer might be tempted to be a bit more than cautious in proclaiming unbridled expectations for success in 2012.

It is true that our county has just suffered through a record breaking drought that created new “beach front” property around our beloved Sam Rayburn Reservoir. But old-timers remind us that deep, sustained rains will once again return to East Texas, just as they have done for hundreds of years. They also assure us that Sam Rayburn Reservoir will most certainly resume her rightful place as a preferred getaway destination of sportsmen everywhere.

By the grace of God and the diligent efforts of our volunteer fire departments, San Augustine County successfully escaped the horrific 2011 fires that plagued counties across Texas. Our forests remain intact and green. Hunters have returned to their woods and are grateful to be enjoying their annual commune with nature as per usual!

It is true that our county endured additional (and unusual) water challenges in 2011. In May, the bottom floor of the courthouse flooded. Adding insult to injury, the city was under a stage three drought alert at the time. County residents were dismayed to see torrents of water pouring out the courthouse doors in every direction; watering the concrete driveways and streets.

To finish out the year 2011 with a bang, a major 16” water main ruptured on Friday, December 30th. Brand new SA City Manager, Kerry Lacy got to show us his true grit in a yet another water crisis. This year we have discovered that Mr. Lacy has plenty of grit (with some to spare), and that he and the city water crew can work magic when we need them to! Not bad for the new guy in town, not bad at all!

It is true that the median income in San Augustine County is ninth lowest from the bottom slot in the state of Texas. We have known it was bad for some time, but now it is official. A huge percentage of our unemployed and underemployed workers lack the job skills and training that are needed to successfully compete for jobs. An excellent example of this is the number of high paying oil and gas positions in our county that have been lost to better trained workforces from Louisiana and surrounding Texas areas.

In 2011 San Augustine County was given the opportunity to secure funds for a countywide vocational training school / program. We have been working with Angelina College, the county’s independent school districts, Texas WorkForce Solutions, DETCOG, and a myriad of professional entities to design a comprehensive program that will afford our unemployed and underemployed workforce the opportunity to obtain the life and job training skills they need to secure, and be successful in, good paying jobs. We are very close to signing the final paper work for this project, and will be discussing the details of the program in upcoming Commissioner’s Court meetings and town hall style gatherings throughout the county.

Perhaps, surviving natural disasters and learning hard lessons in 2011 has been good for all of us. Citizens and leaders across the county have continued to find and develop new

opportunities, while remembering to count blessings and be grateful for the gifts we have received. Our citizens and good neighbors have chosen to live, work, worship and love one another in this beautiful place; which may be reason enough to openly express personal feelings of optimism and talk positively about plans for a successful new year!