

Fortune, Lewis appointed to CVND board

By SANDRA CASON, Marshall News Messenger

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

In a stated effort to correct last year's error, Harrison County Commissioners on Monday appointed Paul Fortune to the Cypress Valley Navigation District board.

Fortune was one of two nominees submitted by CVND President Ken Shaw and was unanimously approved.

Commissioners, however, rejected the suggested appointment of Terry Echols, opting instead to approve County Judge Wayne McWhorter's nominee, retired Maj. Gen. Vernon B. Lewis.

Precinct 3 Commissioner James Greer seconded the judge's motion, with Precinct 4 Commissioner Jeffrey Thompson voting for the proposal. Precinct 2 Commissioner Emma Bennett voted against it, saying she wished to nominate Echols, and Precinct 1 Commissioner Jerry Lomax abstained.

After hearing the vote to appoint Lewis, Fortune asked the court to reconsider its action. "I think Terry Echols is more qualified to be on the CVND," Fortune said.

"If there's a choice between him and me – if there is any way you could rescind the motion – I would ask you to think about appointing him instead."

To this Greer replied: "We, as a court, made an error in not keeping you on" the board. "Today, we're trying to rectify that error."

McWhorter told Fortune that Echols could be appointed if he resigned, thus creating another opening. However, the judge urged Fortune to give some consideration to the matter.

"I would ask you to think about it, and if you still feel that is the thing to do, bring it before our next meeting," McWhorter said. "We want you (on the board) and we want you to know that."

Thompson added: "You have a great vision for Caddo Lake and you should seriously consider" any decision to resign.

"We're glad to have you back," Ms. Bennett said. "So many people on the lake wanted you" to serve.

Shaw told commissioners vacancies had been created by the resignations of Westy Meisenheimer and Bailey Moseley, with Moseley writing a letter of support for Fortune's appointment.

"He lives on the lake and works on the lake," Shaw said of Fortune. At the time he was to be reappointed last January, "there were some issues raised that he was a

controversial person," Shaw said, adding there were allegations Fortune was involved in a Caddo Lake lawsuit against SWEPCO.

"That person later wrote a letter saying he had made a mistake," Shaw said. "I don't think Paul is controversial."

The allegation was made by Lewis, who, last year, spoke in favor of replacing Fortune with Bob Yates. Lewis told the court Fortune had "a conflict of interest" in that he served as an officer of Greater Caddo Lake Association.

Lewis alleged GCLA "is a principal party in a coalition, led by Caddo Lake Institute," that is suing Marshall, the state, Texas Utilities Company and SWEPCO.

He also said SWEPCO had pledged a \$10,000 grant to CVND but believed Fortune's appointment would result in its cancellation.

Shaw told commissioners on Monday the grant was given, with \$5,000 going toward chemicals for water hyacinth destruction.

The CVND president said the plant continues to be a major problem, adding he believed Echols could help control it.

"He is a retired colonel with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and is in the process of being licensed for the spraying of water hyacinths. We will be able to spray independent of Texas Parks and Wildlife," a money-saving move, Shaw said.

He also told commissioners the board "is working hard on re-establishing" state funding for CVND. "We've had nothing in six years, but we have some things in place to work with the legislature when in reconvenes," Shaw said.

McWhorter said of Lewis: "He has some ideas of ways to raise money through the state legislature."

In other matters, commissioners:

Approved a budget amendment of \$33,000 to convert from ARS computer software in the tax office to Southwest Data Solutions.

Tax Assessor/Collector Betty Wright said the change was unavoidable, since Harrison Central Appraisal District switched a number of months ago. Work is expedited, if the two agencies are on the same system, she said.

Approved an annual contract of \$2,700 with Accurant. Sheriff Tom McCool said the computer program is "commonly used as an investigative tool to do background checks on individuals."

He said county investigators will be able to use Accurant for narcotics investigations "and an unlimited number of (other) uses."

Approved changing the name of a street in the North Marshall Industrial Park from Looney Lane to Master Craft Avenue.

Dean Searle, attorney for Gene Ponder, said his client, who intends to locate a cabinet industry there, had requested that the street have the same name as the new business.

Signed paperwork to allow Traylor and Associates to collect a grant payment of \$312,000 for construction at the Mekar USA plant.

Project Manager Sherry Tarrant told commissioners "we ended up with a very good project." While the company agreed to provide 42 new jobs in trade for grant funds, Ms. Tarrant said "there could be as many as 150."

Contact staff writer Sandra Cason via e-mail at: scason@coxnews.com.