

# Comal officials make less than neighbors

By Chris Cobb | Posted: Wednesday, March 18, 2009 1:00 am

Comal County's elected officials make significantly less money than most of their counterparts around the state, according to a recent study.

A salary survey commissioned by Hays County in January reported that of 13 Texas counties — many that are similar in size — Comal's elected positions fall almost universally at the bottom of the pay scale.

Out of nine surveyed elected posts, Comal County's commissioners, constables, justices of the peace, treasurer, county and district clerks are paid the least out of all 12 other counties that participated in the study for doing the same jobs.

Further, taking into account the average overall salary for all nine surveyed positions in each county, Comal's wages were nearly \$25,000 less.

The survey, which was done by Ray Associates, did include larger counties like Montgomery, Fort Bend, Denton and Brazoria, whose elected officers all made significantly more than Comal's officials. The county's wages, although still lower, were comparable to neighboring counties like Hays, Guadalupe and Bastrop.

The relatively low pay in local counties did not come as a surprise to area county judges or commissioners.

"We're growing counties, but we tend to be more conservative counties," Hays County Judge Liz Sumter said. "Even though we're transitioning from rural counties into urbanized counties, you can't jump to those urban salaries overnight."

In some instances the discrepancy between salaries in neighboring counties also was great. For example, local constables make around half as much as their Hays County counterparts, and a Comal County treasurer makes more than \$15,000 less than the treasurer in Guadalupe County.

But although elected salaries are low, Comal County Judge Danny Scheel said he doesn't plan on giving out raises, given the current economy.

"With the economic crisis we're growing through, it's unfortunate because I do not have any pay raises planned this year for elected officials," said Scheel, who himself makes around \$12,000 less than Sumter. "I know that puts us farther behind the curve, but I just feel that with people losing jobs and businesses closing down, I just can't justify giving tax-funded individuals raises."

Comal has one of the lowest tax rates of any county that was in the survey, and although county officials said they might deserve a more competitive wage, they still need to look after the taxpayer.

"We like to make sure that we manage our money wisely, and while we do believe our elected officials need to be paid, we think it's necessary to keep those costs to a minimum," Comal County Commissioner Greg Parker said. "The salaries are low compared to the number of things we do and given the education level of some of our elected officials, but we got into this to serve the community, not to serve ourselves."

