

## A FULL PLATE: Huge shrimp cocktail caps Brazoria County Day

By JOHN TOMPKINS | Posted: Wednesday, March 9, 2011 2:00 am

AUSTIN — The Texas Capitol had a distinctive Gulf Coast flavor Tuesday as legislators, state officials and others munched on shrimp during the 19th Brazoria County Day.

Almost a ton of chilled shrimp was served to several hundred people during the “world’s largest shrimp cocktail” at Fiesta Gardens.

Texas Juvenile Probation Commission Executive Director Vicki Spriggs sat down with a full plate as people lined up near a boat to get their food.

“Brazoria County does it right,” she said. “That’s a lot of shrimp.”

Spriggs works in Austin, but her husband and his children still live in Sweeny. Tuesday’s event gave her a little taste of her family’s home.

“This is very nice,” she said.

Brazoria County Day is a biannual event aimed at building recognition for the county among Texas legislators and state agencies. Brazoria County Day co-chairwoman Vicki Melass said the event again succeeded at mixing area residents with state officials.

“The agency visits were great,” she said. “I’m pleased with the turnout.”

Brazosport College President Millicent Valek joined the throngs of Brazoria County residents Monday and Tuesday. Sitting at a table with others dining on shrimp, Valek said she spoke with area legislators over the past two days about the proposed budget in the House, which eliminates the college’s state funding. Valek has had many previous meetings with officials making the case against the move.

“This is one more conversation,” she said.

Officials said Tuesday the House Appropriations Subcommittee is expected to recommend funding be restored to the college in the proposed budget.

“I will feel better when I see a number that’s not zero,” she said.

Brazoria County Day events began Tuesday with a legislative update over breakfast followed by resolutions on the Senate and House floors.

During the breakfast meeting, Brazoria County legislators said lawmakers still are working to pare the budget to close

the gap on a shortfall

that could be more than \$15 billion.

Whatever happens with the budget, higher state taxes almost certainly won't be part of it, said state Sen. Joan Huffman, R-Southside Place, whose district includes parts of Brazoria County.

"There's no appetite for that," she said. "On the other hand, we have this situation with the budget."

Cuts will not be limited to one area, the legislators said.

"We have to look at every single expenditure," Huffman said.

State Rep. Dennis Bonnen, R-Angleton, spoke about several pieces of legislation, including voter identification and addressing illegal immigration. One bill Bonnen filed on illegal immigration will give police authority to hold a suspected illegal immigrant to allow federal officials to start deportation proceedings, he said.

The measure will reduce the number of illegal immigrants, Bonnen said.

Brazoria County Day attendees shuffled from the Hyatt Regency in Austin to the Texas Capitol.

The gallery floors rumbled when Brazoria County residents stood up to be recognized by the House and Senate.

Area legislators invited everyone in both Houses to the shrimp cocktail as they adopted the resolutions. While things might be bigger in Texas, Brazoria County has to take it one step further with its shrimp event, state Rep. Randy Weber, R-Pearland, said on the House floor.

"In Brazoria County things are especially bigger and better," he said.

Bonnen also offered House resolutions Tuesday recognizing Angleton physician Dr. Benjamin Weiner and the 25th anniversary of the Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic School.

The school was created in 1986, when it opened its doors to 67 students, Bonnen said. Today it has more than 250 and the school ranks in the top 20 percent in the nation for achievement testing, he said.

Our Lady Queen of Peace student Jessica Santos banged the gavel in the House to adopt the resolution.

In 1969, Weiner opened his practice across the street from Angleton Danbury Medical Center, which then was under construction. Weiner treated the first patient at the hospital and also trained other physicians.

"He's a legendary member of our community," Bonnen said.