

# Denton Record-Chronicle

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Denton, Texas

25 cents

**TUESDAY  
IN DENTON**



Scattered thunderstorms

High: 68

Low: 41

Weather report, Page 2A

## MARKET SUMMARY

▲ **Dow Jones:** Up 101.45 points to close at 13,727.03

▲ **Nasdaq:** Up 12.79 points to close at 2,718.95

▲ **S&P 500:** Up 11.30 points to close at 1,515.96

## Digital designer without strings

Todd Cave helps small cities build Web sites while not getting caught up in the Net

By Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe  
Staff Writer

AUBREY — His company name shows up in tiny print at the bottom of a growing number of official Web sites for small cities around North Texas.

By choice, that's about all that ties Todd Cave to his clients after the launch.

It's risky if a city doesn't control its Web

site, he said. Residents' expectations of the sites and new laws on content have raised the stakes for cities and towns, no matter how small.

"There's so much they have to be compliant with," Cave said.

From meeting agendas to conflict-of-interest declarations, the Texas Legislature has said what must appear and when, once a city launches a Web site.

About three years ago, Cave began translating his 17 years' experience working with small municipalities, primarily in

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grants and planning, to help his clients develop better Web sites.

"We're big proponents of transparency," Cave said. "It's important for people to know what's going on."

A city Web site also must be easy for the city employees to keep current, regardless of their computer savvy, he said.

For example, if a resident wants to build a backyard pool, he or she should be able to read the pertinent city ordinances, review the fees and download an application to build.

Some cities don't keep the typical user in mind when they build their Web sites. They err by not posting needed items — that pool builder might need to know height requirements for the fence around the pool — or by burying the information deep within the site.

"You should have the information in a couple of clicks," Cave said.

A good Web site can answer many of the questions residents usually ask of city staff. Well-organized content can improve the city's service to the community, he said.

He points to many city Web sites that have between 10 and 30 pages, while his clients' sites have 60 to 120 pages.

Moreover, when information changes, the staff should be able to quickly update the Web site.

Here, the technical people often make mistakes, he said. Some build a site with software that requires too much training before others can use it. Some seek a long-term relationship with the city, which leaves the consultants holding the keys to the city's content.

When a city is too small to have information technology employees, Cave has found that having simple steps to change content and dividing up the editing duties works best.

"We spread the update responsibilities to multiple staff," Cave said, adding that he usually gives

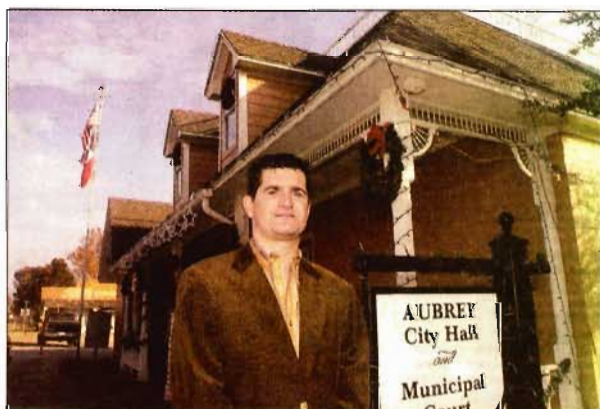
## TODD CAVE

Age: 38

Where he lives: Frisco

Where he works: Numerous small cities, as a planning, grants and Web site consultant

Where he plays: Indoor soccer at Blue Sky in The Colony



Denton Record-Chronicle/Barron Ludlum

Aubrey is the latest Denton County city to take advantage of Todd Cave's Web-site building services. Krum and Pilot Point have also built Web sites with his company. The Web sites must be easy for the city employees to keep current, regardless of their computer savvy, he says.

city secretaries the ability to edit anywhere on the site.

In Texas, city secretaries are responsible for keeping city documents. Small cities need to manage more "dead" documents than ones that are constantly being revised. A simple document management system can make those records searchable for the staff and the public, he said.

But as cities get larger, they can over-reach, especially in document management and geographic information systems, he said.

"Cities get to home-rule status, and they start feeling their oats," Cave said. "There's a lot of upfront cost, and it's a very poor investment of taxpayer money to get it before you need it."

Cave has worked with small towns all over the region, in Grayson, Johnson, Wise and Navarro counties. In Denton County, he has helped Pilot Point, Krum and Aubrey build their Web sites.

Aubrey launched its new Web site with Cave's help about two weeks ago. The Web site includes meeting information and some commonly used forms. City staff said they hope all the city ordinances will be posted soon.

City Secretary Nancy Downes said it's a little too soon to tell how Aubrey residents feel about the site and its content. The city started with meeting items, since that seemed to have the biggest demand of those residents who use the Web.

Of what content and features have been launched so far, "I think it's great," Downes said.

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 Cave Consulting