

# NORTHEAST NEWS

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VOL. 44, NO. 06 TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2020 HOUSTON, TEXAS www.nenewsroom.com

## VALENTINE'S DAY

- SAY IT WITH FLOWERS
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- SAY IT WITH CHOCOLATES
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## NEWS NOTES

### Upcoming Events at High Meadows Library

•Program Changes: The Senior Games will be postponed to March due to meeting room availability. More information will be provided as the library gets the availability for dates.

•ESL Class has been changed to English Practice and only occurs on Tuesdays at 11 am.

•Teen Dungeons & Dragons: Every Monday at 3pm, Teens that love Dungeons & Dragons can come to the library and play with other D&D fans in the afternoons.

•Teen Crafternoon: Every Friday at 3pm we will have a fun craft for teens.

•College 101: Every Friday at 4pm we will have a college preparedness program. Learn about enrolling in college, financial aide, and programs that best fit you!

•Family Time: Saturday, February 8th is Family Time. The whole family is invited to come to the library, enjoy snacks, and games.

•Citizenship: We offer free citizenship classes on Tuesdays at 10am, Wednesdays at 10am, and Thursdays at 6pm.

•Spanish Conversation Club: Conversational Spanish will be every second Monday of the month. Our first class is Monday, February 10th at 5pm.

For more information about these events or more, please call High Meadows at 832-927-5540 or stop by 4500 Aldine Mail Rt., Houston, TX 77039.

### Free Tax Preparation Assistance for Eisenhower Families

Lone Star College-Houston North is partnering with Beyond Careers to provide free tax preparation assistance for Eisenhower families. Due to limited spots, families are encouraged to RSVP at [www.beyondcareers.org/current-events/](http://www.beyondcareers.org/current-events/) and selecting "Eisenhower" as the location. Financial Aid staff will be available to assist families following tax preparation sessions.

## Aldine High students begin work on METRO's design challenge



A group of Aldine High School students pose with METRO employees as they visited METRO to get advice and hands-on experience as they and seven other teams from Aldine ISD participate in METRO's design challenge.

METRO Houston, in partnership with Aldine ISD, is providing students with a real-world design challenge.

Students in grades 9-12 have been given the opportunity to redesign the

Greenspoint METRO Transit Center. Teams from across Aldine will be submitting their design proposals to a panel of reviewers for a chance to earn a spot as one of the

top eight teams. Each of the top eight teams will present their design ideas to a panel of experts at

See Metro's Design. Page 6

## Davis High School hosts TXDOT's 'Click it or Ticket' press conference

Officials from the Texas Department of Transportation chose Davis High School to hold a press conference to kickoff its "Teen Click it or Ticket" campaign on Tuesday, Feb. 4. The press conference was held in the student parking lot and attended by a group of Davis High students.

TxDOT is holding press conferences across the state to make teenage driv-

See Teen Click it Campaign, Page 2

Pictured to the right: Aldine ISD police officer Mike Smith delivered remarks during the Texas Department of Transportation's press conference to kickoff its "Teen Click it or Ticket" campaign at Davis High School on Tuesday, Feb. 4.



## Pan Riko: Aldine's sweet bread destination



Pan Riko Bakery located at 5216 Aldine Mail Rt.

By Christina Autry

Looking at the online reviews of Pan Riko in the East Aldine District, I quickly got the message that this Mexican bakery is well-loved not only by people in the surrounding community, but from all over Houston. Customers extol the virtues of this modest panaderia and are willing to drive from all corners of Houston once they have experienced these delectable and affordable baked goods.

Coming from Aldine Mail Route Road at I-45, you'll know you've arrived when you see large red letters on the strip center facade which read "Pan Riko," meaning "tasty bread," which you'll find to

be an accurate description. Upon walking in, you follow the same protocol as in any panaderia: pick up a round, plastic tray, and make your way around the many shelves of baked goods protected by glass doors. Tongs in each section are provided for you to snag any items that catch your eye.

Though not a large store, Pan Riko offers all of the traditional Mexican breads sweets that a panaderia aficionado would expect to find, as well as tres leches and other specialty cakes made to order. Not a panaderia aficionado yet? Don't worry, piling your tray high with good-looking treats will never be

See Pan Riko, Page 2

## Aldine ISD, Spring ISD to remain in Region II after UIL realignment

Aldine ISD's five high schools will continue to compete against Spring ISD in the new District 14-6A, the University Interscholastic League (UIL) announced on Monday, Feb. 3 during the UIL's biennial realignment.

Aldine ISD schools will compete with DeKaney High School, Spring High School and Westfield High School in athletics, performing arts and extra cur-

ricular activities beginning in the fall of 2018.

District 14-6A will consist of Aldine High School, Davis High School, Eisenhower High School, MacArthur High School, Nimitz High School, DeKaney High School, Spring High School and Westfield High School for the next two years.

Aldine ISD and Spring ISD will compete in Region II for the next two years.

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# SCHOOL & COMMUNITY NEWS

## Young Audiences of Houston selects Superintendent Goffney as 2020 Arts Education Awardee

The nonprofit Young Audiences of Houston named Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney as the 2020 Arts Education Awardee. Goffney will be honored at the 64th Anniversary Gala Benefiting Young Audiences of Houston. The event will take place on Thursday, April 23, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the St. Regis Hotel.

According to Mary Curry Metterbrink, executive director for Young Audiences of Houston, the organization's board selected Goffney for her many years of support for education, the arts, children, and during her tenure in Aldine, with Young Audiences of Houston.

"Dr. Goffney's work in supporting area children through a whole-child approach to education is inspiring to our board and community leaders," Metterbrink stated. "We rarely find individuals so deeply dedicated to the arts and education and being an ambassador for something that so often becomes secondary as budgets are cut. You understand first-hand the importance of creativity in the classroom and a part of the curriculum. You grasp how learning through arts integration can be trans-



Dr. Goffney

formative in helping children become great human beings and well-rounded future leaders of our city."

Under Goffney's administration, the district arts program earned honors. The Texas Art Education Association, earlier this school year, named Aldine ISD a District of Distinction. Aldine was one of only 20 school districts in Texas to earn this honor.

Goffney has also shown support for the district's performing arts. She worked with Refugio Rodriguez, director of music education, to establish the district's first mariachi ensemble. The group, known as Aldine's Mariachi Ace-

ro, is only in its second year. Acero will perform at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo at Go Tejano's Mariachi Invitational at the Arena Theatre on Saturday, March 7.

The YA Award is one of several honors Goffney has earned since taking the helm of Aldine ISD. In 2019, VYPE magazine named Dr. Goffney Administrator of the Year. Later that same year, Sam Houston State University presented her with the Distinguished Alumni Award. In fall 2019, AASA, The School Superintendents Association, named Dr. Goffney, a finalist for the 2020 Superintendent Award. The National Superintendent of the Year will be announced on February 13 during the AASA National Conference on Education taking place in San Diego.

The Young Audiences Gala benefit dinner provides strategic support for the organization, and more than 21,000 children served each year. In addition to Goffney, Linda and W. Carl Glaw will also be recognized. This year's theme is "A Night in Oz."

Individuals seeking to attend or support the gala can visit the Young Audiences of Houston website.

## 6 Magnet schools honored with National Recognition

The Magnet Schools of America (MSA) National Merit Awards program has named a total of six Aldine Independent School District magnet schools as either Schools of Excellence or Schools of Distinction.

Three schools have been named Schools of Excellence, and three have been designated Schools of Distinction by MSA.

To receive a national merit award, members of Magnet Schools of America must submit a detailed application that is scored by a panel of educators. These schools are judged and scored on their demonstrated ability to raise student academic achievement, promote racial and socioeconomic diversity, provide integrated curricula and instruction, and create a strong family and community partnerships that enhance the school's magnet theme.

There are two categories of awards that have been established by MSA:

- The Magnet School of

Excellence Awards are given to only a select group of magnet schools that have demonstrated the highest level of excellence in all facets of the merit award application.

- Magnet School of Distinction Awards are the second level of awards and are given to magnet schools that have met all the basic requirements outlined in the merit awards scoring rubric.

The following is a list of those magnet schools recognized this year.

### Schools of Excellence

- Kujawa Educational Center
- Kujawa Early Childhood/PreK/K School — International Baccalaureate® Primary Years Program

- Principal: Andrea Davis
- Kujawa Elementary School (Grades 1-5) — International Baccalaureate® Primary Years Program

- Principal: Kimberly Jenkins

- Reece Academy for Montessori, Direct Instruction & Fine Arts (Grades PreK-K)

- Principal: Sharla Rogers

### Schools of Distinction

- Carter Academy for Performing & Visual Arts (Grades 1-5)

- Principal: Lee Wold
- Drew Academy for Math, Science, Technology & Fine Arts (Grades 7-8)

- Principal: Earnest Washington
- Shotwell Academy (Grades 6-8) — International Baccalaureate® Middle Years Program

- Principal: Denise Winchester

The principals will be recognized and receive a National Magnet School of Distinction Merit Award on behalf of the school during an awards ceremony held at Magnet Schools of America's 38th National Conference hosted by Clark County School District in Clark County, Nevada, April 13-17, 2020.

## Pan Riko Bakery,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a mistake, especially at these prices.

I started off by grabbing a "concha" (meaning shell), one of the most iconic and recognizable "pan dulces," (sweet breads). It does resemble a bun-like shell, with stripes of icing forming a radiating spiral. The one I got used vanilla-colored icing, though a variety of bright colors are available. Next up was the "campechana," a triangle-shaped flat pastry with apple filling, deriving its name from the Mexican city of Campeche.

Like the concha, many of the pastry names are simply a description of their appearance, such as the "cono relleno de crema," a flaky cone-shaped pastry stuffed with cream, the "sandia," (meaning watermelon, as the shape and color of the shortbread cookie resemble), or the circular "ojo," (meaning eye). The small round cinnamon

sugar cookies called "hojarasca" are popular in northern Mexico, and are named after crunchy leaves scattered on the ground during Fall.

The classic "cochinitos," the pig-shaped gingerbread cookies, the large sugar-topped "caracol" bread (named after its snail-shell shape), and the "rebanada de mantequilla," (bread slice with butter) found their way onto my tray before I finally hung up my tongs.

All twelve baked goods that I collected totaled about \$8 at the register. If you're used to handing over \$3-4 per item at other bakeries, this is the place for you. Despite the low prices, quality and taste are not skimmed on. The twelve items that I tried are only a fraction of what tempted me from behind the glass, and all were enjoyed — though the

toughness of the "piedra" (I later realized means stone) caught me off-guard until I read that these large biscuit-cookies are usually made with day-old bread, and topped with sugar, and meant to be eaten with a hot beverage.

Next time you're in the East Aldine area, stop by Pan Riko to satisfy a sweet tooth or to bring your co-workers a heap of treats without breaking the bank. For those familiar with Mexican baked goods, you're sure to be satisfied — and those less familiar will be pleasantly surprised. Their 6AM-10PM hours every day will give you the opportunity to squeeze in a pan dulce run before or after work. Even if next time is your first time to Pan Riko, it definitely won't be your last.

5216 Aldine Mail Rte Rd.  
Houston, TX 77039

## District Celebrates National School Counseling Week

National School Counseling Week was celebrated in Aldine ISD Feb. 3-7, 2020. The event highlighted the tremendous impact school counselors can have in helping students achieve school success and plan for a career.

According to Kwok-Sze Wong, Ed.D., executive director of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors work with all students to remove barriers to learning.

"School counselors address students' academic concerns, postsecondary

options, and social/emotional skills," said Wong. "School counseling programs help to increase student achievement and provide a much-needed resource for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. School counselors are integral to student success."

Many Aldine schools celebrated to call attention to the countless benefits of a comprehensive school counseling program.

"There are not enough words to express my gratitude to school counselors for the work they do each

day for our students," said Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney. "Our school counselors are actively engaged in helping students. They examine students' abilities, strengths, interests, and talents to guide them toward reaching their full potential."

The theme this year was "School Counselors: Helping Build Better Humans." Along with preparing students and their families for life outside the classroom, they also offer guidance through difficult situations and pointing them toward additional resources.

## State Sales Tax Revenue Totaled \$3 Billion in January

(AUSTIN) — Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar today said state sales tax revenue totaled \$3.08 billion in January, 8.9 percent more than in January 2019.

"Growth in state sales tax revenue was led by re-

ceipts from the retail trade and information services sectors, while receipts from oil- and gas-mining were down from a year ago," Hegar said. "January retail trade sector collections were higher than a year ago in part because

more Christmas shopping days fell in December. Collections also were slightly boosted by marketplace providers and remote sellers, who first began collecting Texas sales taxes in October."

The majority of January sales tax revenue is based on sales made in December and remitted to the agency in January. Total sales tax revenue for the three months ending in January 2020 was up 6.6 percent compared to the same period a year ago. Sales tax is the largest source of state funding for the state budget, accounting for 57 percent of all tax collections.

In January 2020, Texas collected the following revenue from other major taxes:

- motor vehicle sales and rental taxes — \$471.0 million, up 10.6 percent from January 2019;
- motor fuel taxes — \$308.9 million, up 1.3 percent from January 2019;
- natural gas production taxes — \$131.0 million, down 14.4 percent from January 2019; and
- oil production taxes — \$395.7 million, up 44.1 percent from January 2019.

said. "They keep you inside a vehicle in the event of a crash. Wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of dying in a crash by 45% in a car, and up to 60% in a truck because there is a greater likelihood that pickup trucks roll over in a crash. We urge all young Texas drivers to buckle up. It could save their lives."

Aldine ISD Police Officer Mike Smith also addressed Davis students. "Our concern for the safety of students in our district goes far beyond the hours they spend here on campus," Smith said. "We aim to educate students to be on alert at all times, and this extends to what they can do to be safe before they even leave the school parking lot. Buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself in a crash."

Following the press conference, Davis students had the opportunity to participate in interactive experiences. Davis student Katia Martinez, a senior, said the presentation struck home with her. "It gave me chills," she said. "I will always wear a seat belt and make sure those riding in a car with me will do the same."

## Teen Click it Campaign,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ers aware of the importance of wearing seat belts when they are driving or riding in a vehicle.

According to TxDOT, vehicle crashes are the leading cause of deaths among teenagers and in 2018 nearly half of teens killed in crashes were not wearing a seatbelt. In 2018, of the 264 teen drivers and passengers killed in crashes, 111 were unrestrained. That means more than 100 lives could have been saved just by buckling up.

In addition to hearing from a number of law enforcement personnel, and TxDOT officials, Davis students also viewed a mangled truck that was involved in a rollover crash in which two teens were able to walk away from with only minor scratches thanks to wearing their seat belts.

Texas law requires drivers and all passengers to wear a seat belt. Unbuckled drivers and passengers, even those in the back seat, face fines and fees of up to \$200.

Ugona Ughanze, TxDOT director of transportation operations, delivered welcoming remarks and reminded the Davis students of the im-

portance of wearing seat-belts.

"We want to remind teens to buckle up every time they ride in a vehicle, whether as a driver or as a passenger. Seat belts save lives," he said. "It's heart-breaking to think a bright future could be cut short because a young person chose not to wear a seat belt. A simple click is all it takes to make a difference and save a life."

Davis High Assistant Principal Dr. T.K. Davis thanked TxDOT for choosing Davis High to kickoff its "Click it or Ticket" campaign and echoed Ughanze's sentiments about the importance of students using their seat belts.

"The safety of our students, both on and off campus, is our top priority," Dr. Price said. "We are pleased to have a role in educating our students and teens across the state about the importance of wearing seat belts while riding in a vehicle."

Lt. Craig Cummings with the Texas Department of Public Safety shared that state troopers are committed to ensuring all Texas drivers remain safe on Texas roadways.

"Seat belts keep you safe," Trooper Cummings

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COMMUNITY NEWS

GET INFORMED

FEMA to host Community Outreach Workshop in Aldine

HARRIS COUNTY, Tx - Homeowners, renters, and business owners should plan to attend this workshop which will take place on Friday, February 26, High Meadows Library, 4500 Aldine Mail Rt., Houston, TX. from 6 to 8 p.m.

- What flood insurance is and why everyone should have it
- What are the advantages of flood insurance for a homeowner or renter?
- Can you obtain flood insurance if you are not in a high-risk flood zone?
- Using a model, demonstrate how development impacts communities and flood risks

- Find your flood risk by having a Floodplain Management and Insurance Specialist print you a personal Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRMette)
- What YOUR property issues are and how we (FEMA, state, other federal agencies, and local officials) can work together to act now to reduce future risk.

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

By Senator Carol Alvarado



Dear Friends,

Last week Representative Armando Walle, Commissioner Adrian Garcia and I hosted a town hall to discuss a proposed air permit in the Aldine area. This permit request through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) would have allowed for a concrete batch plant to be constructed in the middle of an East Aldine neighborhood.

Growing up in the East End I am no stranger to air pollution from neighboring chemical companies. Even before my time in public service, I fought to protect environmental quality in neighborhoods surrounding industrial facilities. I have never seen a public hearing quite like this one. I was shocked when we discovered that within just 5 miles of the proposed plant location there are already 8 other existing concrete batch plants.

Challenges from these plants including; broken roads, concrete build-ups, constant noise and air pollution. I was proud to see many residents filling the town hall to express opposition against yet another plant in their area. Wins like this one do not happen every week or even every year. At times, it can be difficult to get industrial facilities to listen to the community. This was a historic town hall and I look forward to seeing many more wins for the community.

Carol Alvarado, Texas Senate District 6

Back in Business webinar for Hurricane Harvey-affected small businesses

New economic revitalization program awarding \$50,000 up to \$250,000 to qualified small businesses damaged by Hurricane Harvey

business owners damaged by Hurricane Harvey. This webinar is especially designed for those who have not been able to attend outreach presentations being held in the 49 eligible counties. The new federally funded program is awarding \$50,000 up to \$250,000 in disaster relief and qualified Texas small business owners have until

March 2, 2020, to apply at cost online at TexasBackInBusiness.com. Visit recovery.texas.gov/tbib to access the live stream. Please register using Webex. Attendees will not need a password or registration ID.

See Webinar, Page 8

Man found dead on Elysian Street

Houston police are investigating the death of a man found at 2502 1/2 Elysian Street about 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2020.

According to Houston Police Officials, Patrol officers responded to a person down call and found an unresponsive male inside an apartment with blunt force trauma to his body. Witnesses went to check on the victim after not hearing from him. They found his apartment unlocked and the victim unresponsive. The witnesses then called 911. Paramedics pronounced the man, 55, deceased.

At this time, there is no known suspect(s) or motive in the incident.

Anyone with information in this case is urged to contact the HPD Homicide Division at 713-308-3600 or Crime Stoppers at 713-222-TIPS.

Man dies in car crash on Aldine Bender Road

Houston police are investigating a fatal crash that occurred at 400 Aldine Bender Road about 12:50 a.m. on Monday, February 3, 2020

Houston Police reported that the victim was driving a black Kia Optima southbound on Spence Road - against traffic and at a high rate of speed - when he ran the stop sign at Aldine Bender. The Kia crashed into a concrete barrier on the south side of Aldine Bender. Paramedics were called and pronounced the victim deceased at the scene. There were no other persons or vehicles involved in the crash.

The identity of the male victim, 32, is pending verification by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences.

The investigation is continuing.

Black History Month celebrated at Lone Star College-North Harris

HOUSTON (Feb. 3, 2020) - Throughout the month of February, Lone Star College-North Harris is celebrating Black History Month with various events and informative discussions to highlight the history and achievements of African Americans throughout American history. The events are designed to be educational and engaging for the attendees. All events hosted by the college are free and open to the public.

LSC-North Harris and LSC-East Aldine Center will host the following events for Black History Month:

- Wednesday, Feb. 12 Screening & Discussion of Netflix's documentary, "13th" 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Academic Building, Room 126
• Monday, Feb. 17 African Drum Circle and Black History Month Display 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., Student Center
• Tuesday, Feb. 18 African Drum Circle and Black History Month Display 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., LSC-East Aldine Center Lobby
• Thursday, Feb. 27 Closing Reception

featuring historically black colleges and universities panel Noon - 1 p.m., Academic Building, Room 126

- Saturday, Feb. 29 Sounds of Change: Protest Music and the African American Experience Library, Second Floor Display Cases

Most events are hosted at LSC-North Harris main campus at 2700 W. W. Thorne Drive, in Houston. The African Drum Circle on Tuesday, Feb. 18, is at LSC-East Aldine Center, 2430 Aldine Mail Route Road, in Houston.

For more information about these Black History Month events, email Aliya.Muhammad@lonestar.edu, or visit LoneStar.edu/BlackHistoryMonth.

Harris County Rides program celebrates its one millionth trip

The Harris County RIDES program recently celebrated its 1 millionth trip. In October 2003, Harris County launched the pilot program known today throughout the community as Harris County RIDES.

Harris County RIDES is a great option for people, meeting the criteria, for whom public transportation is either unavailable or inaccessible. Harris County RIDES operates in all areas of the County, for 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Rider 1 million is Ms. Peggy Huse who said, "The program allows me to be independent and not bother my daughter with my doctor's appointments and grocery shopping." Ms. Huse has been a client of the RIDES program for 14 years, and is one of the original riders. She uses Harris County RIDES up to twice a day, travelling from where she lives in San Jacinto City to her appointments on the East Freeway.

Individuals who are 65 or older, or who are disabled (regardless of age) are eligible to use the program. If one is over 65,

there is no need to prove disability. The disabled who are under 65 must get proof of disability from their doctor. Those who are qualified can go to the website to fill in a one-page application that can be returned by email, regular mail, or by going to the Harris County RIDES office at 8410 Lantern Point Drive.

Harris County Community Services Director, Joshua Stuckey said, "Harris County RIDES is an integral part of the services we provide for the County as it allows individuals who are not able to access public transportation to do the things they need to do on a daily basis. It provides members of our community with a sense of independence and freedom that they otherwise would not have."

The program currently partners with over 30 agencies and provides transportation to seniors and people with disabilities. Harris County RIDES is a curb-to-curb subsidized program that allows eligible customers and participating agencies to purchase transportation services at a significant discount.

Fifty-percent of the cost of the trip is split between the RIDES program and the individual users, or the various partner agencies that sponsor their clients. Funding sources include FTA 5307 Urban Formula Funds and FTA 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and People with Disabilities.

RIDES currently has an active client base of 24,853 and provides more than 10,000 trips per month. Inter-local agreements between Harris County and neighboring counties allow Harris County RIDES to serve the same specialized population in those counties. Harris County RIDES has become known for its regional coordination of transportation services. This provides the unique opportunity to fulfill the state mandate for regional coordination by creating efficiencies and expanded capacities in transportation services.

For more information on how to qualify for Harris County RIDES please visit rides.harriscountytexas.gov/Pages/default.aspx or call 713-368-7433.

Premiere Cinemas advertisement for Friday-Wednesday 2/7-2/12. Lists movies like Downhill, The Hedgehog, The Photograph, Fantasy Island, Birds of Prey, Gretel & Hansel, The Rhythm Section, The Turning, and Frozen II with showtimes and ratings.

Keep East Aldine Clean & Green! logo featuring a person recycling.

Diaz Insurance Agency advertisement featuring Farmers Insurance logo and contact information for Carlos Diaz.

Deborah Florus advertisement for Constable PCT. 3 2020. Includes photo of Deborah Florus and the slogan 'FLORUS IS FOR US!'.



OPINION PAGE



# Social Security Matters

by AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor Russell Gloor  
Association of Mature American Citizens

## Ask Rusty – What happens to my Social Security if I die at age 62?

**Dear Rusty:** I have worked my entire life and contributed to Social Security. I have been single my entire life with no children. What happens to all that money I have contributed to Social Security if I die at age 62? Signed: Curious Worker

**Dear Curious:** From its inception in 1935, Social Security has always been a “pay as you go” program where current workers contribute money from which current beneficiaries are paid. That’s the way it has worked since the first Social Security payroll withholding occurred in 1937 and the first Social Security benefit was paid in 1940. And it works the same way today.

Social Security FICA payroll taxes collected from current workers are used to pay all those who are currently receiving benefits. Any excess collected which is not paid out in benefits is deposited into a special Trust Fund and held in reserve for the future. My hope is that understanding this will dispel a far too widely held myth that the money you pay into the Social Security program from your paycheck is deposited into a personal account for you - it is not. Rather that money is used to pay benefits to all those who are already collecting Social Security. And the extra money in the Trust Fund is invested in special interest-bearing bonds which contribute further to the Trust Fund’s reserves (more about the Trust Fund in a minute).

If you were to pass away at, or before, age 62, all the money you paid into Social Security via FICA payroll taxes will have already been spent to pay benefits to those

already collecting Social Security. With no surviving dependents, there are no benefits to be paid from your lifetime work record. True you will have paid a great deal over your working career, but the system is designed so that when you retire your benefits will be paid for by those who are still working and paying into the system. Of course, it’s a game of averages and Social Security says the “average” longevity for a male today is about 84. So, unless you’re already in poor health, chances are pretty good you will live beyond age 62. Chances are also pretty good that if you do, you’ll get back much more in benefits than you have contributed. In fact, if you start collecting benefits at your full retirement age you will get back benefits at least equal to what you contributed within about 5 years (we’ve studied this carefully). Which brings us back to the Trust Fund.

The Social Security Trust Fund held about \$2.9 trillion in reserves at the end of 2018. But over the years the ratio of workers to beneficiaries has declined from 16.5 to 1 in 1950 to less than 3 to 1 today, so there are far fewer workers paying for beneficiaries who are living much longer. Starting in 2019, Social Security will pay out more in benefits than it received from FICA payroll taxes, which means the excess paid out in benefits will come from the reserves in the Trust Fund. That will continue, according to the most recent Social Security Trustees’ Report, until the Trust Fund is depleted in about 2035, at which time Social Security will only be able to pay out about 80% of benefits due - unless Congress acts soon to resolve the issue. And the solutions are well known; what’s lacking in Congress is a serious bipartisan effort to fix the problem.

*This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation’s staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.*

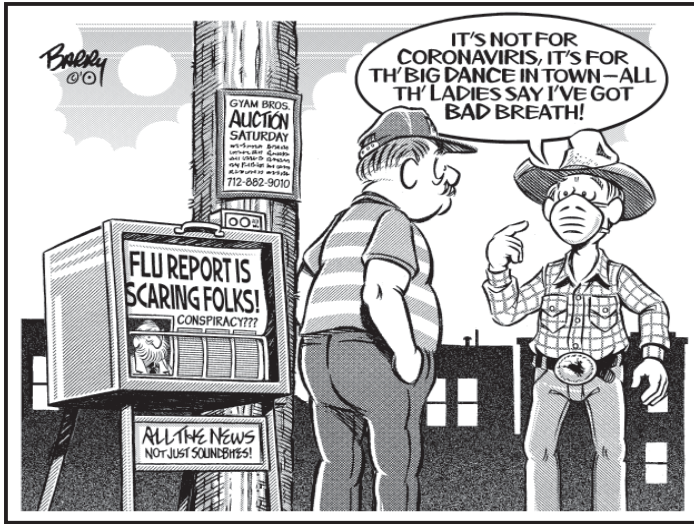
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## Abbott joins officials in response to virus originating in China

AUSTIN — Gov. Greg Abbott on Jan. 30 commented on a White House briefing about actions to stem the transmission of novel coronavirus in the United States.

Speakers at the briefing concerning the outbreak of the new respiratory illness that originated in Wuhan, China, included U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health.

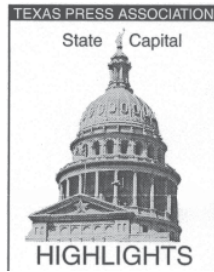
“The State of Texas is continuing to collaborate with our local, state and federal partners as updates come in on the status of the coronavirus,” Abbott said. “Our local communities will have the resources they need to respond to any potential cases of the coronavirus in their area, and we remain committed to ensuring the health and safety of all Texans.”

On Jan. 27, Abbott met with state health and emergency management officials for a briefing on the same topic. “The Lone Star State will remain vigilant to protect the health and safety of all Texans,” Abbott said.

The Texas Department of State Health Services is working with local health departments to assess people with respiratory illness and recent travel to the province of Hubei, China, for possible 2019 novel coronavirus testing.

The DSHS said travelers should monitor themselves for symptoms and contact their health care provider if they develop fever, cough or shortness of breath within 14 days of being in Hubei. The agency urged Texas health care professionals to ask patients with respiratory symptoms about their travel history and contact their local or regional health department if they think a patient may have novel coronavirus. The state had not posted the

## STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Ed Sterling



number of diagnosed cases of the disease in Texas as of Feb. 2.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the best way to prevent infection is to take precautions to avoid exposure to novel coronavirus — precautions which are similar to those the agency recommends to avoid influenza.

### Abbott attends signing

Gov. Abbott on Jan. 29 joined President Donald Trump for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement ceremonial bill signing in Washington, D.C.

The agreement, Abbott said, modernizes the 25-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement “and will support mutually beneficial trade leading to freer markets, fairer trade and robust economic growth in North America.”

It is estimated that the USMCA will have a positive impact of \$17.6 billion on Texas’ annual gross product and create 164,700 new jobs in the state, according to December 2019 projections from the Waco-based Perryman Group. The USMCA also allows Texas increased access to trade with Mexico and Canada, the state’s two largest export partners, according to the governor’s office.

### Law aids in unsolved cases

The Texas Department of Public Safety on Jan. 30 said law enforcement agencies have identified suspects in more than 45 unsolved cases thanks in part to the implementation of House Bill 1399, the Krystal Jean Baker Act.

The new law, which took effect Sept. 1, 2019, authorizes the collection of DNA samples from individuals charged with certain felonies and compares the samples through the Combined DNA Index System database in an effort to clear unsolved cases.

“By allowing us to collect and enter DNA evidence from offenders in a much quicker time frame, we are able to make a critical connection to previous crimes committed by the same offender. We are aiming to stop these criminals from committing any other violent acts against innocent people,” said DPS Director Steven McCraw.

According to the DPS, Baker was 13 years old when she was abducted, sexually assaulted and killed in 1996. DNA evidence was collected at the time of her death but no arrests were made. In 2010, the perpetrator was arrested on an unrelated charge in Louisiana. DNA taken at the time of the arrest linked him to Baker’s murder and he ultimately pleaded guilty.

### New tax guide is released

The Texas Comptroller’s office on Jan. 27 announced its release of “A Field Guide to the Taxes of Texas” — a report providing an overview of Texas’ major state taxes.

Every year, the state collects billions in state taxes and fees, federal receipts and other sources of revenue. The funds are used to pay for all of the responsibilities of state government, including the education of more than 5 million public school students and the provision of health insurance for more than 4 million low-income Texans, said state Comptroller Glenn Hegar.

The publication, which can be downloaded free of charge from the website, comptroller.texas.gov, shows:

—How major taxes have contributed to state revenue during the past 10 years;

—Future revenue estimates, exemption value estimates and tax allocations; and

—Links to other resources about state taxes.

### AG: Letter to school districts

School districts must refrain from spending public funds to advocate for or against political candidates, said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in a Jan. 28 mailing to school districts across the state.

Included in the mailing were educational materials detailing the importance of the role of educators in the civic process and providing guidelines for legally and effectively leading both employees and students through the 2020 election.



with Slim Randles

“This is ‘bout the best time of year,” said Steve, “to get out and do something fun, like go to a rodeo.”

“Awful cold out there right now, Steve,” said Doc, who has more degrees than a thermometer. “I guess it’s a good thing they have all those building rodeos these days.”

“Well, that would take all the sport out of it, wouldn’t it?” Steve said. “Dud, pass the sugar please.”

Dud passed the sugar. “Don’t know what you mean, Steve. Why would it take all the sport out of rodeo if the folks in the stands were comfortable?”

“Cold factor,” he said. “What?”

Now Steve was our resident cowboy here at the Mule Barn truck stop’s philosophy counter. He still worked on ranches and lived in bunkhouses and saddled his horses one at a time, but his rodeo days were far behind him. It’s a sport with a very short career ... one way or another.

“You see,” Steve said, “when it’s cold, the rough stock bucks harder ... ‘specially the broncs. Not sure why, but you can see it even with broke horses. On a cold morning, they’re liable to hump their backs and hop a few times just for fun, or to shake out the kinks. Same with rodeo broncs. With them, I think it’s just more fun, though.”

“Well, I can see where watching broncs in cold weather would make it more fun to watch,” Doc said.

“That’s only half of it,” Steve said, grinning. “Those poor cowboys who ride them are cold and stiff, too. Doesn’t help much with riding rank stock. And that’s the reason it’s more fun to watch a rodeo in cold weather. It tends to rain frozen cowboys.”

Brought to you by Ol’ Jimmy Dollar, Slim’s children’s book about a happy hounddog man and his “kids.” See it at riograndebooks.com.

## VETERANS POST

by Freddy Groves

### OIG Is VA’s Watchdog---

Since 2012, the Office of Inspector General for the Department of Veterans Affairs has saved us \$1.4 billion. They do this by showing up unannounced to do inspections, audits, reviews, assessments or investigations. They scrutinize paperwork, conduct interviews and get to the bottom of what’s going on.

The recent inspection of a facility estimated that the VA was about to spend \$261 million over the next five years on sleep apnea devices that veterans weren’t using. Veterans were given the devices and only half were being used, with no staff follow-up.

The OIG recommendation was to loan the devices to veterans instead and keep track of the usage. This move is expected to save \$39 million per year for the sleep apnea devices and \$12 million per year for the supplies.

The VA has been spending \$450 million, split between four vendors, on contracts for medical and surgical supplies on the East coast. Because supplies of this nature must be delivered on time every time, the OIG dug around to see if anybody in the VA was keeping an eye on what was being delivered. In addition, the supplier was to report monthly about the order fulfillment levels. So what did the OIG discover: that nobody in VA was watching and the vendors were using funny math to report their deliveries. Correct orders only were received 40% of the time. This calculated to \$16.8 million in incorrect payments made to vendors in one year.

The OIG also looked at undelivered orders in a different investigation. Specifically, had prices changed between ordering and the delivery? Were the items still needed? Should the orders be canceled? Could the money be spent elsewhere? If budgeted money isn’t spent in a fiscal year, it gets erased and vanishes. OIG discovered that \$132 million could have been spent elsewhere had anyone been paying attention to undelivered orders.

I still say, whatever the OIG’s budget is, double it. We’ll still come out ahead.

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SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# Twenty-four Aldine ISD student-athletes earn athletic scholarships



Eight Eisenhower High School student-athletes signed national letters on intent with various colleges and universities across Texas and the country on National Signing Day on Wednesday, Feb. 5. Pictured with the student-athletes are Aldine ISD administrators and Eisenhower High School administrators.



Ten MacArthur High School student-athletes signed national letters on intent with various colleges and universities across Texas and the country on National Signing Day on Wednesday, Feb. 5. Pictured with the student-athletes are Aldine ISD administrators and MacArthur High School administrators.

Twenty-four Aldine ISD student-athletes received scholarships to continue their academic and athletic careers in college when they signed national letters of intent on National Signing Day ceremonies held at their respective schools on Wednesday, Feb. 5.

MacArthur High School led the way with 10 signings, as six football players signed scholarships and four softball players signed scholarships.

Cornerback Joshua Eaton, one of the Houston Chronicle's Top 100 recruits, signed with the University of Oklahoma. Linebacker Eric Mixon signed with Eastern Kentucky University, tight end/defensive lineman Bryce Nollkamper signed with Angelo State, wide receiver Brodrick Starnes Jr., signed with Southwest

Minnesota State University, cornerback Avante Keeton signed with Angelo State, and wide receiver/defensive back Joedrick Lewis signed with Trinity Valley College.

First baseman/third baseman Angela Morales signed with the University of Houston, pitcher Alexia Garcia signed with Laredo College, shortstop Angela Olivo signed with Galveston College and outfielder Alyssa Castellano signed with Laredo College.

Eisenhower High wide receiver Anthony Isom signed with Kilgore College, wide receiver Damon Dosewell signed with Kilgore College, defensive lineman DeWayne Jackson signed with Navarro College and running back Sevan Guidry signed with Texas A&M Kingsville.

Sprinter Kiana Rollins signed with Texas State University, sprinter Tytania Morrison signed with Sam Houston State University, sprinter Hannah Simmons signed with Texas A&M Commerce, and sprinter Darnee Williams also signed with Texas A&M Commerce.

Davis High offensive lineman Keeymon White signed with Stephen F. Austin State University, defensive back Tremayne Evans signed with East Texas Baptist University, wide receiver JJ Clebourn signed with McPherson College (Kansas) and defensive end KirkKevin Palmer signed with Palmer Trine University (Indiana).

Davis High shortstop/pitcher Mark Lopez signed with Clarendon College.

Aldine High and Nimitz High will hold signing ceremonies in the spring.



Six Davis High School student-athletes signed national letters on intent with various colleges and universities across Texas and the country on National Signing Day on Wednesday, Feb. 5. Pictured with the student-athletes are Aldine ISD administrators and Davis High School administrators.

We have been creating fun... ...Valentine cards for our classmates! Kids: color stuff in!

## Newspaper Fun!

www.readingclubfun.com Animills LLC © 2019 V11-5

We've taken out all of our colored pencils, markers and crayons to design our Valentine's Day cards. We are using art supplies we have around the house to make cards and adding little items like buttons, lace or stickers to make them interesting. You can, too!

**Valentine's Day!**

Read the clues to fill in the puzzle using the words inside the dot-to-dot:

**What Did Cupid Do?**

1. paper trim with fancy designs  
2. sweets  
3. feeling  
4. red + white  
5. month  
6. Roman god of love  
7. rhyming words  
8. Saint  
9. pair of small parrots  
10. when people care about each other  
11. roses, daisies  
12. symbol of love; pumps blood  
13. paper messages  
14. a gathering of friends  
15. ruby-colored

glitter, poems, glue, envelopes, lace, pencils, scissors, paper, friendship, February, love, poetry, cards, party, lace, heart, cupid, candy, red, lovebirds, flowers, pink, Valentine, cupid, candy, red

E-Mail or Snail Mail, get that Valentine note off to grandparents or other family and friends!

To see what Cupid did with his bow and arrow, start at #1 where the heart is and follow the other numbered hearts.

**Secret Valentine Message** Use the code to fill in the blanks with the letters to see the secret Valentine message:

. . . . . ! . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . .

A B C D E F G H I  
 . □ ♥ △ ✕ ▽ ▭ ▯  
 J K L M N O P Q R  
 ○ ∅ □ × △ ⊙ ⊞ ⊠ ×  
 S T U V W X Y Z  
 ? ○ ! ♥ ✕ ○ ∅ ▽

Find solution on page 7

Newspaper Fun! Created by Animills LLC © 2019



# LIFESTYLE

## METRO'S design,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Metro's headquarters downtown.

A group of Aldine High School students in Patrice Craft's Architecture Design II class are involved in this year's partnership and had the opportunity to meet with members of the construction and planning department from METRO Houston.

This year's challenge will be using urban design concepts to re-imagine the Greenspoint Transit Center. Mike Martinez, Public Affairs Director for METRO, provided the students with METRO's System Map and explained how the bus routes are color-coded based on service frequency. The service frequency for the red route is every 10 - 15 minutes, the blue route is every 20 - 30

minutes and the green route is every 60 minutes. Understanding how the bus routes work will help the students understand the customer's needs. This knowledge will help the students design their projects with the needs of the customers at the forefront.

Brandie Lockett, Urban Designer for METRO, shared her passion for urban design with the students and discussed how urban design could play into the role of the METRO Transit Center at Greenspoint. She stated,

"Look all around you. Urban design is everything, from the shelters to the lighting, to the plants and shrubs," Lockett said. "Use your imagination and

put yourself in the role of a patron." The students were excited to be able to converse with her and asked pertinent questions. One student team asked Lockett, "We have researched sustainable plants that can be used to both protect the area and used for protection, is this something viable?"

She told the students there are many indigenous plants that would do very well in the area for that use and would add to the "green" design.

Students also spoke to Tim Mills, METRO's Universal Accessibility Director. When asked about working with Aldine students, Mills replied, "I think this is a great opportunity for students to get

some hands-on experience. It offers them a real-world opportunity that I never had as a high school student."

After their conversation with Mills, students were able to get their hands dirty, with that real-world opportunity he spoke of, measuring the areas that they are planning to submit their ideal urban plans.

The students spent an hour on the site of the transit center in teams trying to gather as much data as possible. Each team had specific tasks and responsibilities while on the site. Several students were taking pictures, while others were taking measurements and others were talking with the patrons.

The students made the best of their site visit and all walked away with additional knowledge. According to Brad Kaplan, who has assisted in creating this partnership, "Projects such as this help create strategic partnerships with community and corporate entities. Students have the opportunity to experience real-world scenarios and create a project that may actually impact a part of their own community."

Martinez spoke highly of the recent collaboration between Aldine ISD students and METRO.

"METRO is very excited to partner with Aldine ISD again this year" Martinez said. "Last year's project was amazing. To watch the

students present and to see their excitement was a positive experience for myself and everyone involved."

According to Mills, the winning project from last year is in the prototype design phase and should be in fabrication later this year.



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### Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps

I HATE THIS TIME OF YEAR. THE HOLIDAYS ARE ALL OVER WITH.  
THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO LOOK FORWARD TO.  
I SUPPOSE THERE IS VALENTINE'S DAY.  
ALTHOUGH I'M PRETTY SURE THAT IS RESERVED ONLY FOR BOYFRIENDS.

### R.F.D.

by Mike Marland

CLEAN YOUR ROOM  
WASH THE DISHES  
SWEEP THE PORCH  
WHAT TH' HECK KIND'A VALENTINE IS THIS!!  
GAG GIFT. I GAVE HER A BOX OF CHORECLATES.

### The Spats

by Jeff Pickering

I'M GOING TO DONATE MY BODY TO SCIENCE.  
SCIENCE FICTION?

### Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

3				1	2			
	9	7	8	6				
5	4	2				7		
	5	9	6					
1		3	5	9				
6		7				2		
	4		6			9		
9	2	5	3					
3	4			8				

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK:** ♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

### HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTIHOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

### King Crossword

ACROSS

- Docket entry
- Heidi's range
- One's years
- Greatly
- Inquisitive
- Present
- Madison's place
- Exist
- Ardor
- Cuts into cubes
- Extra
- Rover's friend
- Difficult
- Hawk trainer
- Carte lead-in
- Eliot's Marnier
- Rotation duration
- Outwardly curved on both sides
- X rating?
- Bouquet holder
- Reed instrument
- Essential points
- Prenatal test, for short
- morgana
- Island neckwear
- Grayish metallic element
- A Gershwin
- Author Hunter
- Medicinal

DOWN

- Crow's call
- Clay, now
- "Help!"
- Left an impression
- Actress Paquin
- Missing
- Omega precursor
- Municipal magistrates
- Huge snakes
- Bush opponent
- Rams fans?
- U.K. ref. bk.
- Altar affirmative
- Moby-Dick's pursuer
- "The Persistence of Memory"
- Severe
- Linen source
- Basketball team
- Brewery product
- Right on the map?
- Deli loaves
- Took a nap
- Japanese sash
- Food
- Classic muscle car
- Settled down
- Unembellished
- Drescher or Lebowitz
- Zits
- Poison —
- Charged bit
- Portion of N.A.
- "Family Guy" daughter

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### Trivia Test Answers

- Antarctica; 2. Aluminum; 3. Venice, Italy; 4. Thomas Kinkadee; 5. 7; 6. A leap; 7. Chloe Ardelia Wofford; 8. "The Spy Who Loved Me"; 9. Nicaragua; 10. A fight between three people

### Trivia test

by Fifi Rodriguez

- GEOGRAPHY: Which is the least-populated continent?
- GEOLOGY: What metal is produced by refining the ore bauxite?
- EXPLORERS: Where was explorer Marco Polo born?
- ART: Which popular American artist referred to himself as "Painter of Light"?
- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What is the pH value of pure water?
- ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a group of leopards called?
- LITERATURE: What was the birth name of author Toni Morrison (a pseudonym)?
- MOVIES: In which James Bond movie is the character of Jaws introduced?
- HISTORY: Which country was home to the Contras guerilla force in the 1980s?
- LANGUAGE: What is a truel?

Solution time: 21 mins.



# CHURCH PAGE

## BIBLE TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey—

1. Is the book of Lamentations in the Old or New Testament or neither?
2. Which book could be summarized, "By human standards you're looking OK, but by God's, you're failing"? Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah
3. From Genesis 41, who had the vision of seven fat cows coming out of a river? Adam, Moses, Pharaoh, Abraham

4. Who was suspended by a lock of hair between heaven and earth in a vision? Samson, Esau, Elijah, Ezekiel
5. What church did John describe as one with an "open door"? Sardis, Philadelphia, Antioch, Smyrna
6. From Acts 10, where did Cornelius encounter an angel? Temple, Well, House, Field

ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) Amos; 3) Pharaoh; 4) Ezekiel; 5) Philadelphia; 6) House

**THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE**

*But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand. Do not be furious, O Lord, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look we all are Your people!*

ISAIAH 64:8,9

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Wanda Lee Curlee  
Olga H. Simmons

John David Maxwell  
Manuel Green Jr.  
Robyn B. Ross  
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## Aldine ISD student artwork available for purchase at Livestock Show

Each year, high school students from across the district have an opportunity to create western artwork for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and the Aldine ISD FFA exhibition. The students are tasked with researching the culture of Houston, agriculture, and animals. Participating visual art students submit their artwork for the FFA art contest and the artwork is then judged by professional artists.

The top six art pieces are selected to be sold during the live auction at the Buyer's Dinner at 5 p.m. on Friday, January 31. Bidding will take place during the livestock show. All of the artwork submitted will be on display at the M.O. Campbell Educational Center, 1865 Aldine Bender Rd., in room 104 during the FFA Livestock Show.

The Aldine ISD FFA community is always supportive of students pursuing their choices and opportunities, whether it's through the sale of an animal, welding project or artwork. The money the students receive from the sale of their artwork helps fund their college or university dreams.



Place No. 5 - Yazmin Vazquez, Aldine HS; teacher Birgit Langhammer

### Congratulations to the 2020 FFA Visual Art Winners!

- 1st Place: Dolce Torres, MacArthur HS  
Teacher: James Voss
- 2nd Place: Daniela Ventura, Blanson CTE HS  
Teacher: Chris Peel
- 3rd Place: Montserrat Mireles, MacArthur HS

- Teacher James Voss
- 4th Place: Kimberly Hernandez, Nimitz HS  
Teacher: Jorge Vazquez
- 5th Place: Yazmin Vazquez, Aldine HS  
Teacher: Birgit Langhammer
- 6th Place: Christina Duong, Eisenhower HS  
Teacher: Lacey LeBlanc

## Webinar,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

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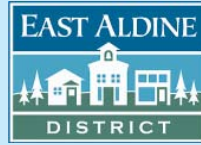
For persons needing special accommodations, email [cdr@recovery.texas.gov](mailto:cdr@recovery.texas.gov) for assistance.

Texas small business owners can still apply for the program at no cost online at [TexasBackInBusiness.com](http://TexasBackInBusiness.com).

Potential applicants can review the FAQ section of the website to learn more about the program requirements and what will be needed to successfully complete the application process. If their business meets the basic qualifications, applicants will be entered into a random selection process to give all applicants an equal opportunity for the program. If selected, applicants will then be contacted via email to schedule an office or site visit with a grant officer to confirm the business's qualifications for

funding approval and the amount of grant qualification.

This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR). In the state's Hurricane Harvey CDBG-DR action plan, the Texas General Land Office allocated \$100 million for an economic revitalization program to help small businesses impacted by Hurricane Harvey. For more information, please visit [TexasBackInBusiness.com](http://TexasBackInBusiness.com).



## East Aldine District COMMUNITY

### Spotlight on Connie Esparza

By J.D. Herman

Connie Esparza has an activist's heart. An East Aldine resident since 1979, her work in the community has helped transform the quality of life for everyone living in the district. Extensive volunteerism—including stints at MacArthur High School, Bonding Against Adversity, VISA (Volunteers In the Schools of Aldine)—and community activism have resulted in deep relationships with local decision-makers, enabling Connie to push for bold, measurable results. Most notably she, alongside Rep. Armando Valle, State Senator Sylvia Garcia, and a handful of Castlewood residents, got the votes for HB2945 in the 85th Texas Legislative Session. This critical bill addressed the chronic and continual water outages suffered by East Aldine residents. Intermittent outages, sometimes up to 3 days a week, became status quo and typically no explanations were given. "Now, you try living like that," she says. "Try doing the wash, cleaning, taking a shower, and you can't finish!" This was a great accomplishment and huge benefit for area residents and businesses alike.



Not one to rest on her laurels, Esparza is inspired by the district's richness of history, and frames her perspective around the new opportunities she sees coming to the area. "We have tremendous support from organizations like the East Aldine Management District and Baker-Ripley," she says. "With so many partners and shareholders—including the schools—there is so much progress we can make."

A retired educator from Houston Community College (HCC) Northeast, where she served as Program Manager of Dual Credit, Ms. Esparza believes in the power of education to shape the future. As Vice President of the Aldine ISD, she has witnessed the community slowly starting to buy into its potential after years of neglect. Corporations like McDonald's and Amazon have begun to show interest in becoming community partners. These donations help improve and restore neighborhood schools, honoring the needs of both students and educators.

Her 50+ years in corporate America give her the drive and understanding of how to get things done but it is her respect for the community that motivates her. "I live here," says Connie. "I take ownership." When the neighborhood needed a spokesperson, Connie stepped up and was elected to the Castlewood Civic Club as President. She worked to encourage neighbors to start talking on NextDoor and currently has over 200 of 322 homeowners participating online. She's also fearless about directly asking for things. When fellow churchgoer Adrian Garcia was elected Harris County Commissioner of Pct 2, she knew she needed to act fast, even though they had worked together on the then sheriff's DARE program. "I got on his calendar before everybody started asking him to do things," she laughs. It was a bold move that generated interest and improved civic club attendance. The evening before the meeting, Esparza took Garcia on a drive through the district, including Castlewood, taking time to point out specific issues to put on his radar. Finding solutions to the many homes in critical disrepair and unchecked trash dumping are high on her list of priorities.

This one-woman whirlwind knows she can't do it alone though. While she has "so many ideas" she values partnerships and wants everyone to feel valued and appreciated. "Just come to the table, see what we have to offer," she says. "We all have something to offer." The East Aldine Management District is lucky to have Connie Esparza on our team.

## Kinship Care: The Changing Role of Grandparents

By Jeff Herman

Waking at 6 am each morning, Shirley P. Reed knows how to hustle. This force of nature works to balance getting her grandkids and great-grandkids out the door every day while also managing to lead Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group of Aldine-Harris County (GRGSG), the 501(c)3 non-profit organization she founded in 2004.

Shirley has a long history of community activism. Originally from New York, she had experienced the benefits of having a police presence in her old neighborhood. "I knew my local officers because I saw them every day walking the beat," she says. "That level of familiarity offered some stability." Trusting her experience and intuition, Shirley was able to convince a commercial landlord to provide a space for a Harris County Sheriff's Storefront in the East Aldine Management District. "We were without any law enforcement here," she remembers. "Our businesses were being robbed and leaving the area." The storefront brought law back to the community—which was one of the biggest needs. The storefront opened in 1996 with a specific focus on "training deputies to be effective in the community." Soon after businesses returned and thrived.

People took notice, including Arlene Nichols, an aide to Former State Representative Kevin Bailey, who encouraged Shirley to expand her vision for improving her community into what would eventually become GRGSG. Nichols, a community champion in her own right, recognized a need to support the grandparents upon which the responsibility of raising their grandchildren had fallen. At the time, Shirley was supporting her own grandchildren, following the death of her daughter, murdered during a home robbery. The idea clicked and GRGSG was born, created around the mission to "support positive understanding of reparenting with love by empowering and strengthening the family."

"People don't see the need," says Shirley, "but the need is very great." She is right. Over 2.4 million grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren, based on previous U.S. Census reports. To put it another way, 1 in 10 children are living with a grandparent—roughly 7.7 children. This new trend in childrearing isn't confined to one demographic. "People have a stereotype that grandparents raising grandchildren are all African American or Hispanics," she explains. "According to a recent Pew report, 24% of Caucasian children are being raised by a grandparent."

GRGSG supports this growing community of seniors with its annual "Family Strengthening Conference" which helps provide information and resources that multigenerational families need most. Free health screenings and lunch are provided, and attendees can sit with representatives from social services (Medicaid, CHIP), college preparation counselors and social security to better understand what support may be available to them. Back-to-school supplies are also distributed. The event typically serves 250 families, each with 3-4 children. "People came from all over—Baytown—everywhere to hear our speakers," notes Shirley. "We had judges and lawyers discussing legal aspects involved, and how to get people off drugs, mental health issues." Important topics, considering the percentage of the population who are raising grandchildren is higher in areas that have higher opioid prescribing rates.

While the majority of GRGSG's work is helping families navigate the hurdles involved in the complicated and serious issues around custody, mental health and addiction, Shirley feels it is also important to recognize and reward grandparents for their sacrifice. Each December, GRGSG shifts focus to Christmas gift donations to needy families and the annual Senior Citizen Gala, which has seen attendance soar to over 700 people in past years. "We invite pioneers in the area, those who have kept us going all of these years," says Shirley. "Retired teachers, janitors, local school board—they all come!"

You can support the efforts of GRGSG in the East Aldine Management District by making a direct monetary donation and holiday toys for needing families. Volunteers are needed as board members and to help with the annual events. Please see their website for more information and how you can help Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

<https://www.supportgrandparents.com>

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