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NORTHEAST NEWS

Serving the Neighborhoods of Aldine, Greenspoint, US59 Eastex, Beltway 8 and North Forest for over 45 Years
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NEWS NOTES

Update: Threat level raised to RED

Sheriff's Storefront CLOSED to the public due to COVID

Effective immediately the HCSC Storefront at the East Aldine Town Center is CLOSED to the public per the Harris County Sheriff's Office until further notice due to COVID threat level at RED. For non-emergency please call 713.221.6000.

Con efecto inmediato, la Oficina del HCSC en el East Aldine Town Center estará CERRADA al público hasta nuevo aviso, por indicación de la Oficina del Sheriff del Condado de Harris, debido a que el nivel de riesgo de COVID está en ROJO. Para llamadas que no estén relacionadas con una emergencia, llame al 713.221.6000.

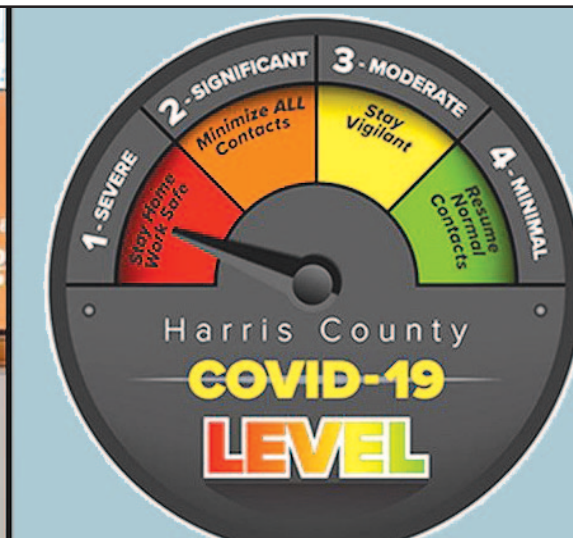
GFCC Block Walk postponed

Civic club President, Ruben Salazar, has decided that it's best that we postpone the Bertrand Block Walk until further notice due to the COVID threat.

INCREASE IN COVID-19 HOSPITALIZATIONS TRIGGERS INCREASE IN HARRIS COUNTY COVID-19 THREAT LEVEL

Harris County, Texas - January 10, 2022, Judge Lina Hidalgo today announced that she is raising the county's COVID-19 Threat Level Indicator from Level 2: Orange to Level 1: Red. A surge of the highly contagious Omicron variant has contributed to an increase in COVID transmission across Harris County.

Level 1 signifies a severe and uncontrolled level of COVID-19 transmission in Harris County. Residents experiencing symptoms should get tested and avoid con-



tact with others, assuming they have COVID until they confirm otherwise. Any gatherings should be held outdoors and ideally

with masking. Unvaccinated residents should avoid all gatherings and get vaccinated immediately. "We're finding ourselves

again at a point in this pandemic where hospital staff are being stretched way too thin," said Judge Hidalgo. "We owe it to our

nurses, doctors, and teachers to take steps to protect ourselves and give them a break. If you have been on the fence about getting vaccinated, now is the time to roll up your sleeve. We are in the midst of a COVID-19 tsunami and our best defense are vaccines and booster shots. We've been here before, but this time we have more tools available and a better understanding of this virus."

The COVID-19 vaccine and vaccine booster continues to be available at no charge for all Harris County residents. To find out more information, locations and hours, click ReadyHarris.org.

Continued. See COVID Threat Level, Page 2

Woman killed, Deputy injured in Chase Crash

NORTHEAST HOUSTON — An innocent driver was killed and two children and a deputy are in the hospital after a chase on Wednesday night involving a robbery suspect ended in a violent crash. The chase was the result of a man committing two robberies along the Eastex Freeway, one at an Exxon Station and the other at a CVS.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said that at about 10:42 p.m. deputies were responding to a call of an aggravated robbery at a CVS in the 10800 block of the Eastex Freeway and Tidwell. A sheriff's deputy saw a man leaving the CVS wearing a



The Sheriff's Deputy's car burns and smokes after the collision with another car at Laura Koppe. It lost control and smashed into a store's parking lot.

mask and getting into a car that matched the description he heard on the scanner. When the deputy tried to stop him, the man kept going, sparking the pursuit.

Gonzalez said that at 10:49 p.m., the deputy called in that they were chasing someone, possibly in a Lincoln town car. By 10:52 p.m., the deputy's radio went silent.



Seven cars were involved in the crash. At left, the black car which contained the family and the woman who was killed.

According to Houston police, the deputy chasing the suspect got into a crash with a black car on Laura Koppe and Lockwood in northeast Houston. Five more vehicles

were hit. Authorities said the deputy's lights and sirens were on. After the crash, the deputy's patrol car briefly caught fire.

Continued. See CAR CRASH, page 2

NORTHEAST NEWS' OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF YEAR

Sanders' strong finish helps Nimitz earn playoff spot for first time since 2015

By Mike Keeney
Contributing Writer

Joseph Sanders didn't have a fast start to the 2021 season, but he more than made up for it when it counted the most, which was just fine with Nimitz High School head football coach Richard Slater.

Sanders, a junior, rushed for 949 yards on 123 carries (7.7 yards per carry) in just nine games for the Cougars, who earned a playoff berth for the first time in six years. He averaged 105.4 yards per game, had four 100-yard rushing games and two 200-yard rushing contests. He scored six touchdowns and had a long run of 86 yards to help the Cougars advance to the Class 6A playoffs.

For his effort during the 2021 season, Sanders has been named the Northeast News' Offensive Player of the Year.

Slater said the 5-11, 175-pounder is a

punishing runner who runs hard and came through with two huge performances when it mattered the most for his team.

"Joe is not track fast, but he's a powerful runner," Slater said. "He runs like he's 6-1, 215 pounds."

Slater said he shared time in the backfield as a sophomore but claimed the job for himself early in the 2021 season.

In Nimitz's 38-31 win over Eisenhower, Sanders erupted for 261 yards and three touchdowns, and a week later he gashed Davis High for 211 yards and three touchdowns in the Cougars' 35-13 victory over the Falcons.

"He played well in district when we needed him too," Slater said. "He runs the ball really, really well."

Slater hopes Sanders will run track in the spring to improve his speed and if he

Continued. See OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF YEAR, page 5

Bates, HCDE provide new cars to two Head Start families

Dec. 17, 2021 — Two wishes for wheels came true this week as Bates Collision Centers and Harris County Department of Education's Head Start division presented two special moms with rehabbed vehicles filled with presents as part of their annual Responsible Parenting Award.

In its 23rd year, Bates Collision Centers presented cars No. 41 and 42 to Destini Rhodes, a teaching assistant at Sheffield Head Start, and Alionuska Montalvo Perez, a Pugh Head Start mom. Both were nominated by Head Start staff.

Twenty-eight-year-old Rhodes is a full-time employee and student at San Jacinto College pursuing an associate's degree in



Destini Rhodes received her newly rehabbed car from Lee and Leila Bates above.

East Aldine District's Assistant Director, Richard Cantu, is also a board member of HCDE.

early childhood education. She currently relies on a borrowed vehicle to shuttle her kids and her-

self to and from school and work. After unwrapping her new vehicle, a 2011 Chevy Equinox, she expressed disbelief over the generous gift.

"I feel very grateful," **Continued. See New Cars for 2 Families, Page 5**

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HIGH MEADOWS LIBRARY NEWS

By Jennifer Nandlal Sr Adult Program Specialist

LIBRARY HOURS EXPANDING:
The High Meadows Library will be expanding our opening hours. Beginning in January, our new hours will be:
Mondays: 11am to 8pm
Tuesdays: 10am to 6pm
Wednesdays: 10am to 8pm
Thursdays: 10am to 6pm
Fridays: 1pm to 6pm
Saturdays: 10am to 5pm
Sunday: Closed

LIBRARY CAPACITY UPDATE:
The library capacity has been reduced to 25% due to the growing spread of CoVid-19. Masks are required while in the library building.

1,000 BOOKS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN:
Harris County Public

Library invites parents and caregivers to participate in the 1000 Books Before Kindergarten program! Beginning at birth, children can participate in this ongoing program by signing up through the Beanstack website and app (<https://hcpl.beanstack.org/>). Log books that you read together or during story time programs and receive a reward when you reach reading milestones. Register today and pick up reading logs when you stop by the library.

GROWING READERS:
HCPL is Growing Readers! We have a 5-week Early Literacy activity kit program specially designed for Little Buds (toddlers) and Little Readers (preschool). Each week, pick up a fun and free activity kit that will focus on one of the 5 Early Literacy practices (Talk, Sing, Read,

Write, and Play). Kits have step-by-step instructions that grow readers through books and play. Participants must register at the High Meadows Library. Registration begins on January 10, 2022. Spaces are limited.

ESL & CITIZENSHIP CLASSES:
Our ESL and Citizenship Classes are beginning. If you or someone you know would like to attend an ESL or Citizenship Class for free, stop by the library or call us. Space is limited.

For information on any of the above events or programs, please call us at 832-927-5540 or stop by the library.

HIGH MEADOWS LIBRARY
4500 ALDINE MAIL RTE
HOUSTON, TX 77039

AIRLINE LIBRARY NEWS

English Language Classes - starts Jan. 18, 6pm
Learn basic English in-person at the Aldine Library! This beginner class starts on Tuesday, January 18 at 6pm. Register here: <https://bit.ly/3sqhoTB> or pick up a registration form from the front desk at the library. Call 832-927-5410 or email for info: ald@hcpl.net

POUND Workout - Jan. 22, 11am
Come rock your workout at the Aldine Library with POUND fitness instructor Momo Foster. POUND channels your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session inspired by the infectious, energizing, and fun of playing the drums. It's so fun you'll forget you're working out! Bring a yoga mat or use one of ours. Drumsticks provided. Register online at <https://forms.office.com/r/CZF9c0NRLN>, call us at 832-927-5410, or email us - ald@hcpl.net.

Wills and Estate Planning - Jan. 25, 6pm
Interested in learning how to manage your af-

fairs & prepare your assets for loved ones? Legal experts from Lone Star Legal Aid will answer your questions about Wills & Estate Planning on Tuesday, January 25th at 6:00pm. Please register for the program to attend in person. Register here: <https://bit.ly/3FjxRfX>

You can also join us virtually on Teams using this link: <https://bit.ly/329z9Md>

Lectores avidos - Jan. 29, 10am
Join us for this adult book club as we read and discuss non-fiction book selections in Spanish.

Call for Literacy Tutors
Would you like to be a part of making an impact on people's lives? If you are interested in becoming a literacy tutor at the Aldine Branch Library, we want to talk to you! We are looking for volunteers to teach English language classes in person and virtually. Call 832-927-5410 or email for info: ald@hcpl.net

U.S. Citizenship Classes - Feb. 3, 10am
Citizenship class starts on February 3rd. We meet every Thursday at 10 am. We'll help you prepare for

the civics portion of your Naturalization interview! Study Materials included. Registration is on first day of class. For more details, call 832-927-5410 or email ald@hcpl.net or visit tinyurl.com/AL-DCTZclasses.

LENA
LENA Start is coming to Aldine Branch Library this spring! LENA Start is a 10-week program that teaches parents and caregivers of children 0-3 years how to "build babies' brains" and make a difference in their future success through early talk and interactions! Orientation is Tuesday, February 8 at 10:30 a.m. in the Aldine Branch Library Meeting Room. For more information on how to participate call (832) 927-5410 or email ald@hcpl.net.

Michelle Pichon
Library Program Specialist
Harris County Public Library
A l d i n e Branch Library
11331 Airline Dr.
Houston, TX 77037
832-927-5410

Scarborough Elementary receives 100,000th My Home Library from Barbara Bush literacy foundation


NORTHEAST HOUSTON – Scarborough Elementary helped the Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation hit a major milestone. All 620 students received a My Home Library from the foundation. The library features six new books for students to start their own collection at home. A third-grade student officially received the foundation's 100,000th My Home Library.

To commemorate the milestone, the school hosted a reading celebration. The foundation's My Home Library program aims to empower children to become competent and confident life-long readers through book ownership which proactively helps students achieve their grade appropriate reading achievement level.

The ceremony was held Friday, Dec. 10 in the morning. Present for the ceremony were Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation President and CEO Dr. Julie Baker Finck, Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation Chairman Neil Bush, HISD Superintendent Millard House II, and

aims to empower children to become competent and confident life-long readers through book ownership which proactively helps students achieve their grade appropriate reading achievement level.

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SCARBOROUGH PRINCIPAL MIRIAM MEDINA

Scarborough Elementary Principal Miriam Medina. Scarborough Elementary is at 3030 Trenton Rd., in the East Aldine District.

Car Crash kills woman,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The woman who was driving the black car was killed. The vehicle was carrying two children, a 2-year-old and a 5-year-old. Authorities say the 5-year-old is in critical condition, and the 2-year-old is stable.

Surveillance video also shows the deputy's unit slam into parked cars in the parking lot of a store. There's a lot of fire and smoke, and at one point, you can see a group of people appear to carry some-

one into the store.

The deputy was pulled to safety by fast-acting good Samaritans.

"The police car was on fire so me and two more gentlemen climbed over the car, got him out, pulled him, took him inside the store, checked his pulse, made sure he was breathing. Got him to stay with me, I said, 'Keep your eyes up. Stay with me. Help is on the way. And I'm just thankful that I was where

I was with those two gentlemen with me because I couldn't have gotten him out by myself," said Johnny Lee Walker, one of the people who rushed to the rescue.

The deputy was taken to Memorial Hermann Hospital. Three other adults were also transported for treatment and evaluation. Police have arrested 29 yr-old DaVonte Williams as the suspect in the robberies.

Threat Level raised,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Hidalgo said she made the decision because hospitalizations and ICU cases have spiked at area hospitals, along with the positivity rate.

"The 14-day average for COVID-positive ICU cases is now 18.1%; the positivity rate is now 35%," Hidalgo said. "For the sake of our hospitals and for the sake of our workforce, we have to sound the alarm once again."

This is the third time Harris County has been at level red, but Hidalgo said it could have been avoided this time if more people would get vaccinated and boosted.

"We owe it to our nurses, doctors, and teachers to take steps to protect ourselves and give them a break. If you have been on the fence about getting vaccinated, now is the time to roll up your sleeve."

Hidalgo also urged unvaccinated residents to mask up and avoid "all gatherings." Those who are vaccinated are asked to wear masks while indoors in public places and to avoid unvaccinated people.

UPDATE ON RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS AND PCR TESTS
Hidalgo said 120,000 rapid antigen tests will be provided to school districts across the county. She said the tests will help students and staff who are exposed to COVID-19 return to school sooner if they test negative.

She said thousands of PCR tests are still readily available at more than 10 county-wide sites. Another testing site will open Tuesday at Planet Ford Stadium in the Spring area.

NO LOCKDOWNS EXPECTED
While Monday's announcement moves Harris County to the highest threat level for the first time, the lockdowns and closings residents experienced in 2020 aren't likely to be repeated.

Under statewide orders from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, local governments cannot enforce their own stay-at-home orders, as Abbott allowed them to do in the early stages of the pandemic.

Abbott's latest executive order related to the COVID-19 response, issued in July 2021, forbids local government entities from mandating closures and vaccinations.

"Business activities and legal proceedings are free to proceed without COVID-19-related limitations imposed by local governmental entities or officials," the order states.

New cars for 2 Families,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

said Rhodes, a single mother of 3 children. "I've never been given anything in my life before. I've always had to work for everything. I can't even believe that I'm being recognized for being a good parent. It's something that you just do because you're a parent."

Throughout the year, the Bateses search for salvaged or donated vehicles that can be fixed up and given to deserving parents during the holiday season. Bates employees donate their time and skills to work on the cars and help fill them with gifts. Other community members and businesses donate gas, insurance, and materials needed to rehab the cars.

Shop owners Lee and Leila Bates have made this annual giveaway a priority because they recognize the sacrifices parents often make to provide for their children.

"Destini is an example of the kind of family that we are really searching to help with this project," said Bates Collision Centers co-owner Leila Bates. "She's not just sitting

back waiting for good things to happen. She's making good things happen for her family."

Montalvo Perez, a Cuban immigrant who arrived in Texas five years ago in search of a better life for her family, also received a vehicle this week—a 2013 Mazda 3. Her 4-year-old son, Jen-

carlos Millan, is enrolled at the HCDE Pugh Head Start center.

"I am so grateful and relieved," she said. "Now I can go out with my son and go to the grocery store whenever I want. When I take the bus, it becomes a whole-day ordeal. This car is truly a blessing."



Leila Bates with Destini Rhodes and her family, receiving their newly rehabbed automobile from Bates Collision and HCDE.

SCHOOL NEWS PAGE

Message from the Superintendent,
January 11, 2022

Dear Aldine Community,

As we settle into the new year, I know that many of you, like me, may have written your new year's resolution or you may have just committed to making a positive change in your life. Living through the past two years during a global pandemic has been more stressful than many of us could have ever imagined. While grateful that I have survived, I desperately want to thrive in 2022. Personally, I am focusing on my health and wellness. I think many of you can relate to reigniting our goals and reducing stress as the pandemic continues.

One thing I want to encourage all of you is to commit this year to **wellness**. We talk a lot about staying safe and healthy, particularly regarding COVID-19. However, I'd like for us all to work together on adopting habits that cultivate a feeling of sustainable wellness in our minds, bodies, and spirits. Below are a few tips that you can add to your daily routine:

- **Get plenty of sleep.** Getting the recommended amount of sleep (this varies by age) supports brain development, strengthens the immune system, and promotes productivity and focus.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drinking eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day is a great way to support overall body development and keep energy levels up throughout the day.
- **Move around for at least 30 minutes per day.** Staying active helps increase energy levels and supports heart and lung health. Working out together is also a great way to bond as a family!

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) TipsIn Aldine ISD, emotional development is as important as academics. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is part of our strategic plan. SEL skills help students better manage life's challenges and stresses as well as help them thrive in school, college, and work. SEL is not just for students but also adults. In a recent episode of All The Things: The Aldine ISD Podcast, we discuss how to use SEL in our everyday lives. A very effective way to ensure our emotional wellness is by practicing gratitude, which can energize and heal. Click here to access resources to help you on your gratitude journey.

I look forward to a year of health and wellness with all of you!

With Aldine Pride,

Dr. LaTonya M. GoffneySuperintendent

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Jan. 13:** In-person ceremony for district winners of HLS&R School Art Contest starts at 5 p.m. For more information, click here.
- **Jan. 13:** Talk Saves Lives Community Webinar on Mental Health & Suicide Prevention, hosted by Teague Middle School Counselors, starts at 5:30 p.m.
- **Jan. 24- Feb. 17:** Black History Oratory Campus Competition

OBSERVATIONS

JanuarySchool Board Recognition Month

Jan. 17: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Jan. 24-28: Holocaust Remembrance Week

February

Black History Month

Feb. 7-11: National School Counseling Week

Feb. 18: Student Holiday

Feb. 21: Presidents Day (Student Holiday)

Feb. 22: School Bus Drivers Appreciation Day

Feb. 25: Wellness Day — Theme is Love Your Heart Month

Aldine ISD COVID-19 UPDATESThe district leadership team is committed to doing all we can to increase the safety and health of our students, staff, and families while implementing measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community. We want all our students healthy, learning, and thriving in our classrooms. I ask for your continued support as we tackle the Omicron variant.

- **Face Masks:** As we have done throughout the pandemic, we will continue implementing COVID mitigation protocols. While we had hoped to lift the mask mandate after



the midwinter break, we decided to maintain the mask requirement until further notice with rising numbers of COVID-19 cases in the Houston area. The district will require students, staff, and visitors to wear face masks at all district facilities — schools, buildings, facilities, school buses — and events.

- **Symptoms:** We strongly encourage you to please keep your child home if they have COVID or any other communicable disease (.e.g. flu, whooping cough, measles, chickenpox) symptoms. Have your child tested if you suspect it is COVID-19. Here is a link to our Health Alerts web page regarding when to keep your student/child home.
- **Reduce Spread of Any Communicable Disease:** Please continue to protect yourself and others by taking precautionary measures to prevent infection of all viruses, including COVID-19: wash your hands often, cover your coughs and sneezes and keep a safe distance from others.
- **Protocols:** Our district administrative leadership team has been, and is, in constant communication. Based on CDC recommendations, we updated our protocols and guidelines. Our COVID reporting procedures have not changed. We will continue to monitor local and school cases to further adjust health and safety protocols as appropriate.
- **District Dashboard:** Families can always check the COVID-19 dashboard for an overview of the active cases by school.
- **Testing Sites:** Please get tested if you exhibit symptoms, have been exposed to someone with the virus, have been with groups of people, or travel. Click here for a list of testing sites and to register online.
- **Vaccinations:** The district continues to work with local officials, including Harris County Public Health (HCPH), to communicate the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine is available to individuals five and older. On January 3, 2022, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) expanded the emergency use authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 booster vaccine in adolescents from 12 to 15 years. Booster doses are now available to everyone over the age of 12. The FDA also shortened the time to receive the booster after completing the two-dose schedule. It went from six months to five months. The FDA also authorized the third dose as part of the primary series for certain immunosuppressed children between 5 and 11. The CDC announced on January 10 that at-risk Americans are eligible for the fourth COVID dose.

REMINDERS

- Aldine's Family and Community Engagement Department launched the Family and Community University. It aims to provide knowledge and resources to empower families to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. All programming is free and open to all Aldine families. Learn more and register today.
- The state requires high school seniors to apply for financial aid to graduate. The FAFSA application opened on October 1.
- Aldine ISD's top priorities continue to be all students' safety and academic success. The district will post all information related to operations along with any updates at www.aldineisd.org/healthalerts.
- Please **stay connected** by visiting the District News and District Podcast pages to stay up to date on all the great things happening in our district. You can also connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



Elected Officials Honor Aldine ISD Trustees At January Board Meeting



Houston City Council Member Tarsha Jackson, center, presented the Aldine ISD Board of Trustees with a proclamation in recognition of School Board Recognition Month at the Jan. 11 Board meeting. A number of other elected officials also honored the Board at the meeting.

In honor of School Board Recognition Month, a number of elected officials honored the Aldine ISD Board of Trustees for its leadership and commitment to the community during the Jan. 11 Board meeting. U.S. Congresswoman **Sheila Jackson Lee** was represented at the meeting by aide **Yuroba Harris**, who presented each Board member with a Congressional certificate. Congresswoman Lee called in to personally thank AISD's Trustees for their service. Houston City Council Member **Tarsha Jackson** of District B presented Board members with a proclamation, while **Kent Clingerman** of Precinct 4 County Commissioner **Jack Cagle's** office presented Trustees with a certificate of appreciation. **Selina Valdez** of County Commissioner **Adrian Garcia's**

office, also presented Trustees with a certificate of appreciation. **Abel Garza**, Assistant Superintendent of Government Relations and Constituent Services, announced that certificates of appreciation were also provided U.S. Congresswoman **Sylvia Garcia**, State Senator **Carol Alvarado**, State Reps **Armando Walle** and **Senfronia Thompson** and County Commissioner **Rodney Ellis**. The Aldine ISD Board of Trustees consists of President **Randy Bates**, Vice-President **Dr. Kimberley Booker**, Secretary **Rose Avalos** Assistant Secretary **Connie Esparza** and Members **Dr. Viola M. Garcia**, **Steve Mead** and **Paul Shanklin**. A video of students and staff thanking the Trustees for their service was also shown during the Jan. 11 Board meeting.

District Names New Principal for Hall Success Academy

Aldine ISD is pleased to announce that Cierra Nickerson has been selected as the new principal for Hall Success Academy. Nickerson assumed her new role as the principal of Hall Success Academy the week of Nov. 8. In her new role as the campus leader, she will be meeting with Hall Success Academy staff to develop plans for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year.

Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney, Superintendent of Schools, stated, "Leadership matters. Cierra is amazing. Her experience, commitment to student success, understanding of how to support teachers, and their skills to build strong relationships, are evident in her work. These skills are crucial for effective change and improved outcomes. We are looking for these characteristics in leadership as we continue to build on our strategic plan to ensure our students have access to high-quality schools and learning experiences."

Nickerson received her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a Master's in Educational Administration from the University of Houston. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership at Baylor University.

Nickerson has teaching and leadership experiences at the school, district, and county levels. She began her educational career 12 years ago in Aldine ISD. She started as a Teach for America at Shotwell Middle School. Four years later, Nickerson joined Houston ISD as a teacher selection specialist centered on elementary talent. In 2015, she began working as a magnet coordinator at a school before serving as an assistant principal leader recruiter at the district level two years later. A few months later, Nickerson moved to the Wraparound Services Department as a manager. In 2019, she left HISD to work as a school climate and culture specialist at the Center for Safe and Secure Schools with the Harris County Department of Education.

Hall Success Academy is redefining what is possible for non-traditional, at-risk students in Grades 8-12. The school



CIERRA NICKERSON

gives non-traditional students an opportunity to take control of their learning. The campus offers a student-centered blended learning experience while maintaining the pace for graduation.

"I am looking forward to the new challenge and my new family at Hall Success Academy," said Nickerson. "I will take my skills in strong leadership, effective teaching, and high expectations to build on the success at Hall."

Nickerson will report directly to Dr. Xochitl Rodríguez, associate superintendent of schools. Chief of Schools Katy Roede, who provides leadership over school administration, is looking forward to working with Nickerson in her new position. She lauded Nickerson's experience in students' holistic wellbeing and academic achievement as crucial for the work at Hall Success Academy.


"Cierra is an advocate for educational equity," said Roede. "She has experience providing professional development and support to reduce exclusionary practices and establish safe and secure schools. I know that she and every leader and educator is committed to offering high-quality instructional opportunities and ensuring that resources and supports are in place to give every student an equitable education."

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OPINION

By U.S. Senator JOHN CORNYN



What We Got Done in 2021

‘Despite the partisanship that has gripped Washington, I’ve found countless opportunities to get things done for Texas, but a great deal of work remains.’

WASHINGTON — With the start of a new year, U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) authored the following op-ed in the Austin American-Statesman about what he has accomplished in Congress for Texas in 2021 and shares his outlook on what work remains for 2022:

The first year of a government completely controlled by Democrats is quickly drawing to a close. I began 2021 with this promise to Texans: to push back against Democrats’ dangerous proposals when needed and to work together wherever possible. The year brought a heavy dose of both.

Despite President Joe Biden’s pledge to be the dealmaker-in-chief, Democrats have unleashed a parade of partisan bills. At the start of last year, they went around Republicans to spend nearly \$2 trillion billed as “pandemic relief,” even though less than ten percent of the funding was directly related to COVID-19 and only one percent supported vaccinations. They’ve made repeated attempts to seize states’ constitutional power to manage their own elections and skew all future elections in Democrats’ favor. And despite the fact that families are footing the bill for the highest inflation in nearly four decades, Democrats are trying to go on a nearly \$5 trillion reckless tax-and-spending spree. Fortunately, they don’t have the votes to write a check that big, thanks to members of President Biden’s own party joining the unified Republican opposition.

I’ve been clear in my fierce opposition to each of these bills, but I know that Texans did not send me to the Senate to simply vote “no.” While I will continue to fight legislation that harms families, the economy, or our national security, there are plenty of issues where Republicans and Democrats can work together, and I was proud to act on those opportunities in 2021 and get critical legislation signed into law.

After years of fighting alongside advocates in Texas, including my friend Ms. Opal Lee of Fort Worth, I was proud that, we succeeded in making Juneteenth a federal holiday. For generations to come, folks across the country will celebrate the significance of the day Major General Gordon Granger’s troops arrived in Galveston and declared that all slaves are “forever free.”

Another new law strengthens the policies and procedures for reporting missing service members. The need for this legislation became clear after the tragic murders of Spc. Vanessa Guillén, Sgt. Elder Fernandes and other service members across the country. Military installations are now required to increase security and protection protocols for reporting service members missing or AWOL, and improve information sharing with local, state and federal law enforcement if a service member goes missing. This isn’t a silver bullet, but it’s a big step toward preventing similar tragedies in the future.

Bills to modernize and increase staffing at our ports of entry without spending taxpayer dollars. To ensure anyone who attacks federal officers and employees serving abroad will be brought to justice. To close a loophole abused by companies fueling the opioid epidemic. To help victims of human trafficking regain their financial independence. All of these bipartisan bills I introduced were signed into law last year.

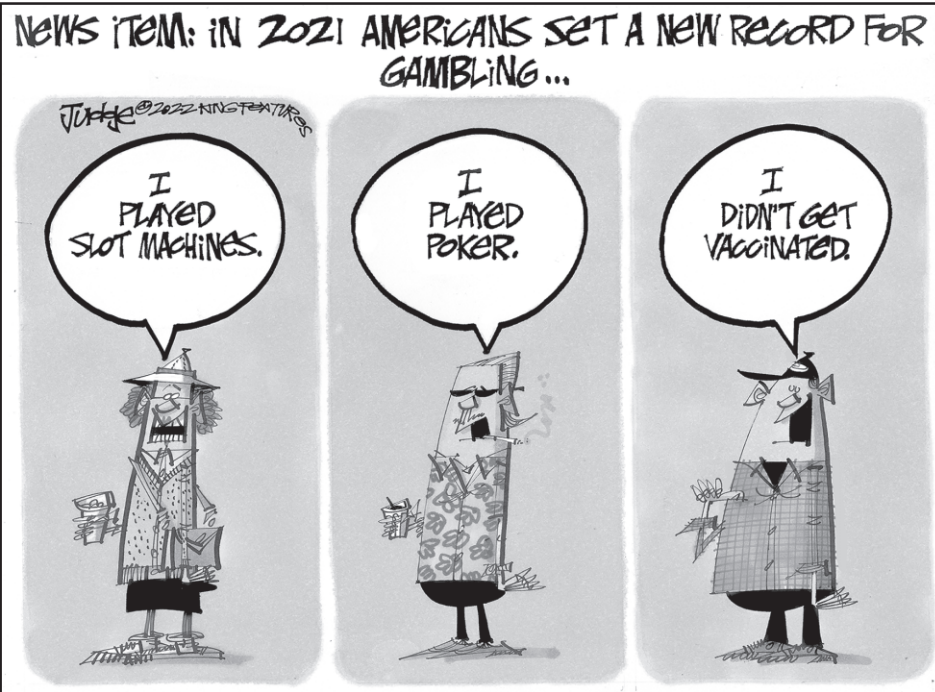
Despite the partisanship that has gripped Washington, I’ve found countless opportunities to get things done for Texas, but a great deal of work remains.

This past year, annual border crossings hit an all-time high, and law enforcement, nongovernmental organizations, and border communities are being overwhelmed by the scale of the humanitarian crisis. The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in our supply chains that need to be addressed. Families are struggling to cover high costs at the pharmacy – even for medications that have been available for decades. I’ve introduced bipartisan bills aimed at these and countless other challenges facing our country. I hope we can make progress on those bills this year and notch even more bipartisan wins for Texas.

In 2022, I’ll keep searching for opportunities to reach across the aisle on legislation. I hope my colleagues will make an effort to do the same no matter if there’s an “R” or a “D” after their names.

Senator John Cornyn, a Republican from Texas, is a member of the Senate Finance, Intelligence, and Judiciary Committees.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Opinions expressed here are not necessarily that of this newspaper or its staff. YOUR OPINION is welcome. Send a letter for possible publication to Grafikpress Newspapers, 5906 Star Lane, Houston TX 77057 or an email to GRAFIKSTAR@aol.com. Please limit your words to about 200. Letters will be subject to editing. Thank you.*



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STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders



Emergency SNAP benefits again extended

EMERGENCY SNAP BENEFITS AGAIN EXTENDED

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is again extending emergency food benefits this month, with more than \$307 million in emergency allocations expected to help more than 1.5 million Texas households.

“As Texans ring in the new year, this additional support will help families start 2022 with food on the table for themselves and their children,” said Wayne Salter, HHSC deputy executive commissioner.

The agency received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to extend the maximum allowable amount of benefits provided through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. That means recipients will receive at least \$95 in emergency SNAP allotments by Jan. 31, in addition to their regular allotment.

Texans in need can apply for benefits at YourTexasBenefits.com.

FORMER HOUSTON NFL PLAYER PLEADS GUILTY TO FRAUD

A former linebacker for the Houston Texans has pleaded guilty to taking part in a scheme to defraud a player health care reimbursement fund by submitting false claims totaling more than \$129,000.

Shantee Orr is one of eight former NFL players accused in a case led by Texas Department of Insurance investigators working with prosecutors from the Harris County District Attorney’s office.

“Those claims were for rehab therapies and medical treatments that were never actually provided,” TDI prosecutor Rick Watson said. “The players and the trainer would each get a cut of the money that was reimbursed by the fund.”

Orr pleaded guilty to a third-degree felony, paid restitution and will serve five years’ probation.

INSURANCE COMPANIES LINE UP TO SUE ERCOT

As the one-year anniversary of the winter storm that left millions without



power approaches, more than 100 insurance companies are suing the state’s main power grid operator and a number of electricity providers, the Austin American-Statesman reported.

Defendants are the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, as well as companies that supply power through ERCOT. The power failure caused more than \$10 billion in property damage, primarily to residences.

The suit claims ERCOT “failed to adequately prepare for the 2020-2021 winter season, and in fact, planned to fail,” noting that the agency had projected the state would end up in the highest state of emergency in the event of an extreme weather event, the Statesman reported.

ERCOT controls nearly all the state’s power grid.

ABBOTT SUES FEDS OVER VACCINE MANDATE FOR GUARD

Gov. Greg Abbott last week announced he will sue the federal government to fight a COVID-19 vaccine requirement for members of the Texas National Guard.

In a letter released last week, Abbott prohibited the Texas National Guard from punishing any service member who does not receive the vaccine.

“Unless President Biden federalizes the Texas National Guard in accordance with Title 10 of the U.S. Code, he is not your commander-in-chief under our federal or state Constitutions,” Abbott wrote. “And as long as I am your commander-in-chief, I will not tolerate efforts to compel

receipt of a COVID19 vaccine.”

The Biden administration maintains the secretary of defense has the legal power to require vaccines. In a mid-November press conference, Pentagon press secretary John F. Kirby said, in part, “When (guardsmen are) called up for their monthly training, they’re still federally funded. So (the secretary) has those authorities. And he believes, and this is a larger point, that vaccinated forces are a more ready force.”

COVID-19 CASES MORE THAN TRIPLE IN PAST WEEK

The omicron variant of COVID-19 has sent cases skyrocketing throughout the state, with a record-high 413,994 new cases reported by the Coronavirus Resource Center at Johns Hopkins University in the past week — nearly four times the number reported the previous week.

A total of 717 new deaths were reported, up 70% from the previous week.

The Texas Department of State Health Services reported 9,803 lab-confirmed COVID-19 hospitalizations as of Sunday, an increase of 77% from the previous week. Just a month ago, hospitalizations had dropped below 3,000, according to DSHS. The number of new cases this past week is more than ten times the total reported a month ago.

SECOND ROUND OF VACCINE FUNDING BEGINS

A second round of funding for the state’s COVID-19 vaccine outreach program has begun. Organizations can apply for grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$1 million “to engage in vaccine education and outreach with the goal of increasing the number of fully vaccinated Texans against COVID-19.”

Money will be awarded for projects that increase access to COVID-19 vaccines or provide outreach to populations disproportionately affected by the virus.

“As with the first round of funding, DSHS is confident that community-based organizations are perfectly positioned to offer local support for those who seek access for and information about COVID-19 vaccine services,” said Imelda Garcia, DSHS associate commissioner for laboratory and infectious disease services.

To learn more about the program, go to: [https://health.tamu.edu/vaccinegrant/round-2.html](https://health.tamu.edu/vaccinegrant/round-2.htmlhttps://health.tamu.edu/vaccinegrant/round-2.html)

Gary Borders is a veteran award-winning Texas journalist. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches and Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.

★

THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

Fancy Dress

I was excited to wear my new dress.

It was slimming, I thought: all black and covered with flounces from the neckline to the hemline. I wore it with high heels—which I rarely wear—and red drop earrings. I was feeling much more sophisticated than I usually do when I went over to my sister’s house for dinner.

“Nice dress!” my mother said.

I gave my new dress a little twirl and set the ruffles flying in all directions. “You look like a car wash,” my sister said.

This is why it’s good to stay close to family.

My husband, Peter, and I moved across the country to the Midwest in large part so we could be closer to family. It’s good to see my parents on a regular basis. Peter’s oldest sister is battling cancer, and we can now be near her. We have dozens of cousins, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, and now most of them live nearby.

My family members (and my sister in particular) absolutely do not care what I say about myself. They do not care about my New Year’s resolutions or recent accomplishments or nice things other people might have said about me.

They remember when I was 13 and wore a green felt hat all the time out of some sort of weird superstition. They remember when Dad had to drive back two hours to fetch the green hat after I left it someplace. And they will never believe that the green felt hat-wearing person has entirely changed.

I look at pictures of myself as a young teen, very shy, trying to become invisible beneath my peculiar green hat and only drawing more attention to myself in the process.

There was a lot I didn’t understand as an awkward teen. I didn’t realize that lots of people were shy. I didn’t know that, by starting a conversation with someone, I would be doing them a huge favor. I didn’t know I’d see the relief in their eyes when they realized they could talk to me and forget about feeling awkward themselves. I didn’t need a green hat to become invisible. To take the pressure off me, I just needed to direct the attention to someone else. If someone had told me that sooner, I wouldn’t have had to wear that silly hat for so long.

I like to think I’ve changed quite a bit since then, but my family knows better.

I firmly believe in the power we all have to change ourselves and follow our dreams wherever they take us. I hope to continue trying new things for quite a while. But, while chasing my highfalutin dreams, it’s good to have family around to keep me grounded. It’s good to remember that, no matter what grand schemes I take on, there are people who have known me before and know me best.

They will always cheer me on, but they will also know that I am still the same person, in a fancy dress, trying new things, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing miserably. And they still love me.

“It doesn’t really look like a car wash,” my mother said.

My mother has been saying reassuring things to me all my life. But I suspect, now that the image is in her mind, my fancy-schmancy dress will never look quite the same. And that’s OK.

My self-esteem has come a long way since my green hat-wearing days. Nowadays, I can put on my fancy car wash dress with a pair of heels and not care who sees me.

Till next time, Carrie

Carrie Classon’s memoir is called “Blue Yarn.” Learn more at CarrieClasson.com.

Harris County Unveils Latest State-Of-The-Art Tool to Monitor Pollution Levels



HARRIS COUNTY'S NEW POLLUTION MONITORING VAN

HARRIS COUNTY – Last month Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo unveiled the RAAM — the latest addition to Harris County’s environmental tools to monitor, detect, and report threats to air quality in Harris County. The RAAM can detect a wide array of pollutants, monitor weather, and even launch drones to find leaks using thermal imaging.

Judge Hidalgo said “In Harris County, it’s our job to do everything we can to keep residents safe when disaster strikes. While we may not be able to stop a hurricane from hitting our coast, we CAN take steps to help prevent petrochemical incidents that lead to explosions and fires and threaten the health of so many people.”

The RAAM is just the latest addition to a broader network of monitoring equipment already deployed across Harris County. Since 2019, Commissioners Court has allocated over \$11 million on environmental protection, the most significant enhancement of County environmental protections in at least 30 years. Efforts include the launch of a community monitoring network that brings together data from a number of sources and monitor types to provide a more complete picture of air quality in Harris County. As part of this network 11 additional monitors have been added to the previously installed 12 ozone monitors throughout the county, and 10 more will be added soon.

The county has also procured specialized thermal cameras that help detect unauthorized emissions from a distance. This is in addition to the County’s work inspecting Concrete batch plants and pursuing litigation against illegal polluters, as well as developing a risk mapping tool for residents to use to locate potential sources of air pollution. Harris County will continue working hard to ensure our air is clean and safe for all residents.

COMMUNITY WATCH

Wildland Fire burns 50 acres near Intercontinental Airport

NORTH HOUSTON – A wildland fire was burning in the area near Intercontinental Airport last Thursday, January 6th in the afternoon. The fire was located near the 5600 block of Buckow Dr. 77396.

Houston Fire Department reported damage to approximately 50 acres. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Firefighters arrived on scene to find a fire in a wooded area behind a residential street, moving rapidly towards the homes. Multiple boosters, dozers and a drone were requested. Crews protected the homes while firefighters used a drone to size up the situation. Crews contained and extinguished the fire with the assistance of the Texas Forest Service dozer. The fire damage was contained to about 50 acres with no structural loss.

HFD Arson investigators were requested to determine the cause and origin of the fire. Crews from Stations 65, 101, 103, 64, 8, 32, 34, 39, 56, 58, 63, 74, 15 and Rehab 17 responded to this incident.

Suspect Arrested, Charged in Fatal Crash at 400 Little York

Charges have been filed against a suspect arrested in a fatal crash at 400 Little York Road about 7:10 p.m. on Monday (January 10).

The suspect, Sergio A. Davila-Rodriguez (H/m, 28), is charged with two counts of intoxication manslaughter in the 262nd State District Court. A booking photo of Davila-Rodriguez is not available at this time, as he remains hospitalized with injuries suffered in the crash.

Two victims, an adult male and an adult female, were pronounced dead at the scene. Their identities are pending verification by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences.

HPD Vehicular Crimes Division Sergeants P. Lee and S. Jewell and Senior Police Officer S. Le reported:

The suspect, Davila-Rodriguez, was driving a blue Dodge Ram pickup truck westbound at the above address when he possibly lost control of the vehicle, struck a curb, and then went into the east-bound traffic lane. The Dodge struck a blue Kia Rio head-on, pushing the Kia into another lane of traffic where it was then struck by a white Ford F-450 tow truck.

The pickup truck’s female passenger was ejected from the vehicle when it rolled over. She and the male driver of the Kia died at the scene.

Davila-Rodriguez was transported to an area hospital where he was subsequently charged for his role in this incident.

5 Critically injured in Hardy Toll Road crash in December

ALDINE – Five people, including two children, are in critical condition after they were involved in a major crash in east Harris County early Saturday, deputies from Precinct 4 Constable said.

It happened at the Hardy Toll Road northbound near Rankin Road at around 1:30 a.m.

Deputies say a vehicle with a family of two was headed northbound on the tollway when the mother driving the vehicle lost control and hit a concrete barrier. The father, who was in the passenger seat, took control of the wheel and brought the vehicle to a stop.

The father then hopped out of the car and attempted to take out his two daughters, both under the age of two. That is when an oncoming vehicle t-boned the family’s vehicle.

Authorities said they had to cut the children out of the vehicle.

“There was a rapid extrication. Some of the police officers pulled two of the children out and put them in the police car just to get turn away from the scene to secure them,” District Chief Leggett, Aldine Fire Department, said.

All occupants from both vehicles sustained injuries and were taken to area hospitals, deputies said.

The father was taken into surgery and remains in critical but stable condition.

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HCC Newly elected and reelected trustees are sworn into office



David Wilson



Dr. Adriana Tamez



Eva Lored



Dr. Reagan Flowers

HOUSTON – (January 14, 2022) Newly elected and re-elected Houston Community College (HCC) trustees were sworn into office on January 12 in ceremonies held at the HCC Administration Building.

The HCC board determines and interprets policies that govern the college system. Members are elected to staggered six-year terms and serve without compensation.

Trustee Dr. Adriana Tamez, re-elected District 3 trustee; Dr. Reagan Flowers, re-elected District 4 trustee and current interim Board Chair; David Wilson, newly elected District 6 trustee; and, Eva Lored, District 8 all took their oath of office.

“Today is a day of celebration for our institution as we honor our history and traditions and congratulate our newly elected and re-elected trustees,” said Chancellor Cesar Maldonado, Ph.D., P.E. “We acknowledge your dedication and commitment to public service and we look forward to working with you to advance the mission and vision of the College and elevating the lives of those whom we serve throughout the Houston community and region.”

Dr. Adriana Tamez, re-elected to serve District 3, said she remains focused on developing education, social, health and community institutions that empower families. She also said workforce programs must be emphasized.

“More than ever, education is in a crisis. People need jobs and they need workforce training,” the longtime educator and community leader said. “We need your help to get people through our doors – together we can transform lives.”

Dr. Reagan Flowers, interim board chair and trustee for District 4, presided over the ceremony. The advocate for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education said the governing board is well-positioned to advance its educational programs.

Dr. Flowers said she serves on the board “to make Houston Community College the most relevant community college in the country and to carry out the priorities identified for the institution and drive the success of our students.”

Formerly representing District 2, Trustee Wilson will now serve District 6. The businessman, founder of the Texas Electrical Safety Association and longtime vocational educator, is an advocate for technical education. He also called for increased student enrollment in HCC’s nursing programs, citing future demand for nurses and greater participation in automotive and new energy training programs.

About Houston Community College

Houston Community College (HCC) is composed of 14 Centers of Excellence and numerous satellite centers that serve the diverse communities in the Greater Houston area by preparing individuals to live and work in an increasingly international and technological society. HCC is one of the country’s largest singly accredited, open-admission community colleges offering associate degrees, certificates, workforce training and lifelong learning opportunities. To learn more, visit hccs.edu



East Aldine District COMMUNITY NEWS

East Aldine’s art bus receives \$100,000 gift from national TV show

The nationally televised Kelly Clarkson Christmas Special show handed out a huge gift that could end up benefiting East Aldine kids who like to make art.

The Texas-born Clarkson, comedian Amy Poehler and the H-E-B supermarket company gave a surprise \$100,000 grant to Art Bus creator Roni Cabrera-Moreno of Houston to help her obtain a building where she can expand her Bus-type programming into a “brick and mortar” art studio.

The Art Bus, which Cabrera-Moreno has been operating on a modest budget with the help of donations and T-shirt sales, has made multiple appearances at events in the East Aldine Management District.

In fact, the Art Bus will hold Free Art Day activities Saturday, Dec. 4, from 2:30 to 5 p.m., at 3405 Turner Drive. A caricature artist and free popcorn will be there, too.

The District featured Moreno’s work and vision in a February 2021 article.

Houston’s NBC TV affiliate, KPRC-TV Channel 2, picked up on the story in September. An assistant producer for Clarkson saw the TV feature story. A crew came to town and filmed Cabrera-Moreno and her work on the Houston area’s north side. Then the show offered to fly Cabrera-Moreno, her husband and their four sons to Los Angeles for a video-taping of Clarkson’s holiday program.

In 2020, the whole family had helped turn an old, broken-down yellow school bus into a moveable art studio. The teens had been responsible for ripping out the seats to install artists’ drawing boards and stools for children. All because their parents saw the bus for sale and decided it would be the start of Cabrera-Moreno’s drive to bring arts to underserved communities.

With the studio cameras rolling in L.A., Cabrera-Moreno was speechless when Clarkson and Poehler revealed the \$100,000 gift.

“We were just excited to be going on that trip, because only one of my boys had ever been on a plane before,” she said later. “We had no idea whatsoever that we were going to receive this grant.”

After the show, Moreno said she and her husband took their sons out for an Italian dinner in Los Angeles. “It took us a while just to calm down,” she said.

The funds have been deposited in a trust while Cabrera-Moreno seeks legal and financial advice about setting up a non-profit organization to develop the arts studio. In the meantime, she is continuing her efforts to so that kids can enjoy the magic of the holidays through crafts and art.

At a recent festival celebrating national Hispanic Heritage month, the Art Bus welcomed kids and their parents and they painted and decorated Halloween and Dia de Los Muertos masks. Usually, Norbert Moreno and the boys help with setting up the bus and outdoor tables with supplies. Then, they can be seen enjoying board games or listening to music while Roni works her creative magic.

Cabrera-Moreno said her permanent art studio will be located in her home community, the Eastex-Jensen area in north Harris County. It would include space for children’s art classes, as well as low-cost studio space for artists and artisans. An outdoor area, for art shows and sales, would be ideal, she added.

Meanwhile, she continues teaching art classes three days a week to children in the Houston area.

On Mondays and Wednesday afternoons, Cabrera-Moreno offers free art classes for children in the community center at Pep Mueller Park, at 14750 Henry Rd. The classes are held from 4:30 to 6 p.m. The park is located just across the street from Odom Weaver Elementary School.

On Tuesday afternoons, Moreno teaches a free art class for children at Friends of Northside, at Eccleciass Church, at 6615 Irvington, near Loop 610 North. Those classes are from 4 to 5:30 p.m.



Cabrera-Moreno said she was inundated with calls from friends and supporters after Clarkson’s show aired.

“Even though it’s been six weeks since I learned about it, I’m still in disbelief,” she said. “I keep saying to myself, ‘Has this really happened?’”

“I just feel like my dreams keep coming true,” she added. “I’m doing what I love, with the people I love. I just have to keep reminding myself that it’s real.”

— By Anne Marie Kilday