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VOL. 50, NO. 32 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2026 HOUSTON, TEXAS www.nenewsroom.com

MacArthur Teacher Earns Prestigious Award



Teacher Alexis Ayala was surprised with his selection as one of 12 recipients of the 2026 Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award. See story in page 8.

NEWS NOTES

East Aldine District: Futbol Para Todos Soccer Camp

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Aldine Board Recognizes Students, Staff

By Gerardo Hernandez
Staff Writer

ALDINE — The Aldine ISD Board of Trustees recognized outstanding employees and students, celebrated recent district accomplishments and approved several action items during its Aug. 18 meeting.

The board presented several **Aldine Impact Awards**, which recognize employees and community members who go above and beyond in their roles within the district.

Assistant Board Secretary Angela Williams recognized **Dexter Arkadie**, an AgriScience teacher at MacArthur High School.

Board President Dr. Kimberley Booker recog-



The Aldine Board of Trustees recognized outstanding employees and students. (Photo credit Aldine ISD webpage)

nized **Dr. Jacqueline Moton**, assessment and data specialist, along with **Allen Hampton** and **Johnny Kelley**, students at Carver High School.

Chief Communications Officer Sheila Adams also highlighted several recent district

accomplishments:

The Aldine ISD welcomed employees back for the 2026-27 school year during its annual Convocation on Aug. 10. The event introduced the district's new **#ChooseAldine** hashtag and highlighted academic progress and the

district's commitment to student success.

MacArthur High School teacher **Alexis Ayala** was selected as one of 12 recipients of the **2026 Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award**. Representatives of the Kinder Foundation surprised Ayala with the

award Aug. 11. The honor includes a \$30,000 prize.

Students returned to campuses Aug. 12 for the start of the new school year. Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney and members of the Executive Leadership Impact Team visited campuses to welcome students and staff.

District leaders also made surprise visits to Hoffman Middle School and Nimitz High School to recognize improved campus ratings. Hoffman Middle School earned a C rating, while Nimitz became the first comprehensive high school in Aldine ISD to receive an A rating.

The district also re-

Continued. See TRUSTEES HIGHLIGHT ALDINE'S, Page 3

Insurance Fee Funds Thousands of Flock Cameras Across Texas

By Gerardo Hernandez,
STAFF WRITER

A \$1 increase added to Texans' annual auto insurance costs to combat catalytic converter theft has helped fund thousands of Flock license plate-reading cameras across the state, according to an analysis by The Texas Tribune.

The Motor Vehicle Crime Prevention Authority has directed at least \$30 million from the fee toward expanding the state's network of Flock cameras, which use artificial intelligence to identify and track vehicles.

Since the fee increase was approved by the Texas Legislature in 2023, the



Flock Camera installed at the intersection of John F Kennedy Blvd and Aldine Mail Rte Rd.

authority has awarded at least 95 grants that helped law enforcement agencies

purchase and maintain about 2,000 Flock cameras. Another \$15.9 million is being used by the Texas Department of Public Safety to install nearly 1,200 additional cameras.

The authority approved another \$3 million in August to help DPS install 583 more cameras along Texas tollways during the next year.

The \$1 annual fee increase has generated an estimated \$81 million. Overall, the authority has directed about \$50.8 million into 234 grants supporting law enforcement efforts involving vehicle-

Continued. See INSURANCE FEE PAYS FOR FLOCK CAMERAS, Page 2

Walle Welcomes Martinez to Capitol

By Gerardo Hernandez
STAFF WRITER

AUSTIN — State Rep. Armando Walle recently welcomed longtime community leader and neighbor Coco Martinez to the Texas Capitol during a visit for a committee hearing.

Walle gave Martinez a tour of the House floor and recognized her continued involvement and service to the community in House District 140.

"Thank you, Mrs. Coco, for all you do for our community," Walle said, expressing his appreciation for Martinez's dedication to local residents.

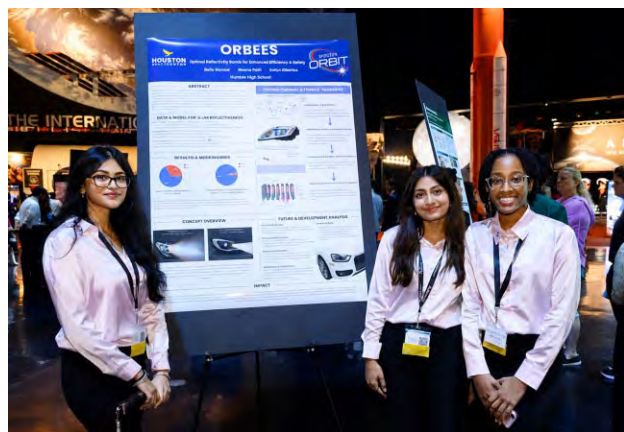


State Rep. Armando Walle posed with community leader and neighbor Coco Martinez at the Texas Capitol

HCC students place among nation's top 20 in NASA Challenge

HOUSTON — Three Houston City College (HCC) Honors College students transformed a NASA-developed technology into a proposed automotive safety system designed to reduce nighttime headlight glare, earning a spot among the nation's top 20 teams at the 2026 NASA ORBIT Challenge.

The NASA ORBIT Challenge invites students from colleges and universities across the country to develop new applications for NASA technologies. The team from HCC included Kayla Millender, Sofia Waheed and Malexa Patel, who advanced to the final round and earned a \$15,000 team prize for their innovation, OR-BEES, which is Optical



(L-R) Malexa Patel, Sofia Waheed and Kayla Millender represented HCC at the 2026 NASA ORBIT competition and placed among the top 20 finalists

Redirecting Beams for Enhanced Efficiency & Safety.

"Our students were competing against mainly four-year institutions," said Robin Reagler, Ph.D., Honors College director and advisor. "Students

were asked to select NASA-developed patents and scale them up. The HCC students chose innovations for Earth."

The OR-BEES project fo-

Continued. See HCC STUDENTS FINISH AMONG NATION'S, Page 3

FOOTBALL SEASON WEEK 1:

Labor Day weekend ushers in official start of college football season: AISD's five varsity programs enter 2nd week of non-district games

Labor Day Weekend is here and along with a three-day break for many, it also means the 2026 college football season will kick off in earnest. Sure, there were a handful of games in Week 0, but nothing to get that excited about, unless you're a TCU or North Carolina fan.

Week 1 brings with it games from Thursday until Monday night and is shocked full of interesting intersectional matchups from Lambeau Field (No. 4-ranked Notre Dame vs. Wisconsin), to Baton Rouge for Lane Kiffin's debut as No. 11-ranked LSU's head coach against Dabo Swiney and Clemson to Atlanta where Baylor will take on Auburn.

Also on the first real weekend of college action, No. 7 Miami, heads west on Friday night to take on a Stanford team that has not had a winning season since 2018. Former



KEENEY'S KORNER

By
MIKE KEENEY

Stanford great and Indianapolis No. 1 draft choice Andrew Luck is now in charge of the football program in Palo Alto. It will be interesting to see how much, if any, the Cardinal are improved heading into their game with last year's College Football Playoff runnerup.

Speaking of the CFP, the reigning national champion, No. 6-ranked Indiana opens the season at home against a North Texas State team that finished 12-2 a year ago, but lost its head coach, Guy Morris, and star QB

Drew Mestemaker (4,379 yards, 34 TDs) to Oklahoma State. Morris and Mestemaker joined a number of former NTSU players who followed Morris to OSU.

Other interesting games in Week 1 will feature No. 24-ranked Louisville taking on No. 9-ranked Ole Miss on Sunday and the long football weekend will conclude on Labor Day night when No. 19 SMU takes on Florida State in both teams'

Continued. See KEENEY'S KORNER, Page 5

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COMMUNITY

WATCH

Wrong-Way Crash Closes Eastex Freeway



Emergency responders investigate the scene of a fatal wrong way collision early saturday morning on the northbound Eastex Freeway near Hartwick Rd.

By Gerardo Hernandez
STAFF WRITER

HOUSTON — A fatal wrong-way crash involving a suspected intoxicated driver temporarily closed the northbound lanes of the Eastex Freeway early Saturday morning, according to the Harris County Sheriff's Office.

The crash occurred around 2 a.m. near Hartwick Road when a white Chevrolet Silverado

do traveling south in the northbound lanes collided head-on with a Honda Accord.

The driver of the Honda was killed in the crash. The driver of the Silverado was transported to a nearby hospital and later charged with intoxicated manslaughter, authorities said.

Investigators determined the pickup had traveled approximately two miles in the wrong direction before the collision.

Authorities also reported the driver's blood-alcohol concentration was approximately three times the legal limit.

The northbound Eastex Freeway was closed for several hours while deputies investigated the crash and cleared the scene. The roadway has since reopened.

The investigation remains ongoing.

Source: Harris County Sheriff's Office.

Insurance fee pays for Flock Cameras,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

related crimes, including personnel, crime analysts, prosecutors, drones and surveillance equipment.

The Tribune's review found grants ranging from \$7,000 for two cameras in Bellmead near Waco to nearly \$1.7 million for 201 cameras in Dallas. In some communities, including Laredo and El Paso, the grants paid for entire Flock camera networks.

The authority does not separately identify how much grant funding goes toward Flock cameras. The Tribune reached its estimate by reviewing agency records and documents from local governments that considered or approved Flock-related grants.

Cameras draw support and criticism

Supporters say Flock cameras have become an important investigative tool, particularly for crimes in which a suspect vehicle may be the primary lead.

Motor Vehicle Crime Prevention Authority Chairman Miguel Rodriguez, who is also Laredo's police chief, said the cameras can help law enforcement disrupt criminal organizations and investigate crimes involving vehicles.

Police agencies have reported using the technology to investigate catalytic converter thefts, stolen vehicles, hit-and-run crashes and other crimes.

The authority reported that license plate-reader data was searched about 62,000 times in 2025, contributing to approximately 1,660 cleared catalytic converter theft cases.

However, the rapid expansion of the camera network has prompted growing concerns about privacy and how the information is collected, stored and shared.

Flock cameras record license plates and other vehicle characteristics, including make, model, color, dents and bumper stickers. Participating law enforcement agencies can share and search information through a nationwide network.

Some Texas lawmakers

said they were unaware that the \$1 fee approved in 2023 would be used to finance license plate readers.

State Sen. Carol Alvarado, D-Houston, and Rep. Jeff Leach, who authored and sponsored the legislation, said license plate surveillance was not discussed when the bill was considered.

"I did not have that in mind when we passed the bill," Alvarado told The Texas Tribune.

Rep. Mitch Little, R-Lewisville, has raised constitutional concerns about the amount of information collected by the cameras. Rep. Brian Harrison, R-Midlothian, has also criticized the use of the fee for what he described as warrantless surveillance.

Both lawmakers have indicated they intend to pursue legislation addressing Flock cameras during the next legislative session.

Governor pauses state grants for Flock cameras

The controversy intensified after Gov. Greg Abbott's office said the governor was pausing state funding for local grants that would be used to purchase Flock cameras.

Abbott spokesperson Andrew Mahaleris said most funding for local cameras comes from federal sources and that Texas agencies were clarifying that their funds could not be used for Flock cameras.

The announcement came after The Texas Tribune asked Abbott's office about its findings.

The exact number of Flock cameras operating in Texas is unclear. DeFlock, an anti-surveillance organization that tracks camera locations through crowdsourced information, estimates there are about 13,000 Flock cameras in the state.

That would mean the insurance fee has helped fund roughly one out of every four Flock cameras identified in Texas.

The growing network has also faced opposition from residents and community groups. Several Texas communities have ended Flock contracts

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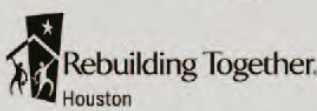


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THIS WEEK IN FOOTBALL

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MACARTHUR VS. CHANNELVIEW, 7 P.M., THORNE STADIUM

FRIDAY
ALDINE AT CLEVELAND, 7 P.M., INDIAN STADIUM
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 Audien Hearing

SCHOOL NEWS

Trustees highlight Aldine’s recent achievements,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



ceived a score of **96** and the highest **“Superior Achievement”** rating through the Texas Education Agency’s School FIRST financial accountability system for the 25th consecutive year.

Aldine ISD hosted its Athletics Jamboree Aug. 13, bringing together student-athletes, coaches, bands, cheerleaders, dance teams and fans to celebrate Aldine pride and launch the 2026-27 athletic season. Texas Southern University’s Ocean of Soul also made a surprise appearance.

The district also celebrated its summer graduates Aug. 20 at the M.O. Campbell Educational Center.

Staff appointments

Trustees also announced two administrative appointments.

Andrew Francis was

named assistant general counsel after previously working as an associate attorney with Spalding Nichols Lamp Langlois in Houston.

Tudon Martinez was named assistant superintendent of secondary schools after serving as executive director of instruction at Houston ISD.

Board approves action items

Trustees approved the previous meeting minutes and an interlocal agreement between the Harris County Department of Education and Aldine ISD for the Specialized Academic Behavior School (AB) West.

The board also approved the 2026-27 certification of provision of instructional materials, a memorandum of understanding for preventive dental health services with the Texas

Department of State Health Services, and the district’s 2026-27 Student Code of Conduct.

Other approved items included contracts and purchases of \$100,000 or more, as well as renewals for purchasing cooperatives and interlocal agreements.

Before the Aug. 18 meeting, the Eisenhower High School JROTC presented the colors and led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance and the Texas Pledge. Performing arts students from Carver High School also provided entertainment.

The next Aldine ISD Board of Trustees meeting is scheduled for **7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 15**, in the boardroom at the Donaldson Administration Building.

HCC Students finish among nation’s top 20 after reimagining NASA tech,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cused on a NASA patent originally designed for optical solar fiber conversion. Inspired by widespread complaints about bright headlights, the team explored how this technology could be adapted to improve automotive safety.

Millender, Patel and Waheed, all from the Fort Bend area, proposed adapting the fibers into an add-on layer for headlights. Rather than relying on cameras, sensors or complex software, the design would passively control the direction of visible light instead of increasing brightness.

Headlight glare has become an increasing safety concern as brighter LED headlights become more common on roadways. Traditional headlights disperse light, causing glare. ORBEES would create a precise, focused beam toward the road instead of directly into the eyes of an oncoming driver.

“ORBEES takes a high-

angle straight light and reduces that,” said Patel. “You could still see the road without the glare going off to the side.”

Waheed added, “The goal was to make something that wasn’t super complicated. We wanted something that could be integrated into everyday vehicles and remain adaptable and cost-efficient.”

The concept took about seven months to complete and included a 15-page technical paper, a pitch presentation, a video and extensive research. The team surveyed about 200 people and interviewed experts from the University of Texas at Austin and Rice University.

Beyond automotive applications, the students identified potential additional uses for ORBEES, including smart roadway and street lighting, emergency vehicle visibility systems and aviation runway lighting.

Millender, Patel and Waheed credit the Honors

College with helping open doors that led to the NASA competition.

“If it weren’t for the Honors College, I wouldn’t have had this opportunity,” said Millender, who is headed to Prairie View A&M this month to pursue a mechanical engineering degree.

In addition to earning prize money, the team gained valuable research, presentation and networking experience.

“We really enjoyed listening to the other teams present their ideas and seeing their processes,” said Patel, who is heading to the University of Oregon in Eugene, OR this month to continue her studies. “This project strengthened my research and technical writing abilities.”

As for Waheed, who will be attending Rice University this fall, the experience helped prepare her for future academic and professional opportunities.

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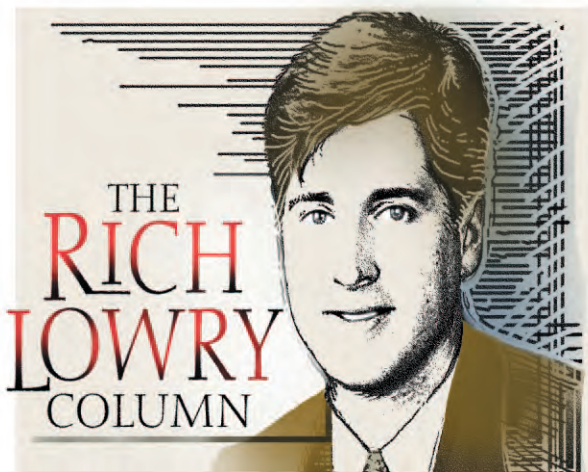
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Flock Cameras Spark Privacy Debate

We have met the enemy — and it is watching us. There’s a growing backlash against Flock cameras, the automated license plate readers that have become ubiquitous across the country.

The cameras take images of license plates, which are then stored in a searchable database that police departments can query in the course of investigations. Opponents of the cameras consider them an instrument of Big Brother, who’s not only watching, but constantly recording and tracking. Vandals have disabled and stolen the Flock cameras and even shot them. There’s a movement to get jurisdictions to cancel their contracts with Flock (the leading such company, but not the only one), and it has met with some success.

Los Angeles just let its contract with Flock lapse, citing “serious concerns around civil liberties and civil rights issues.” There’s a reason, though, that police departments so rapidly adopted the cameras — they are an extremely useful investigative tool.

It is certainly true that the technology, like any power we give the police, can be misused. According to The Washington Post, “Authorities have charged or accused at least 50 law-enforcement officers of using license-plate readers for unauthorized purposes, including to stalk their exes.” The Post calls the abuse “rampant,” but 50 documented cases isn’t a large number given the widespread use of these devices: There are 120,000 Flock cameras across the United States scanning license plates 20 billion times a month.

It is understandable that people don’t like the idea that they are, in effect, living in a panopticon. But license plate readers aren’t the only offender. There are all sorts of other surveillance cameras, many of them privately owned and operated, that the police access during investigations. We let our mobile phones and various apps track us all day long. And something like 60 million households have Ring or other security cameras that record what’s happening on their property and often in the immediate surroundings.

The only reliable way to ensure that you aren’t being recorded is to stay inside — and draw the curtains. Officers who abuse the license-plate readers deserve to be fired and, if appropriate, charged with crimes, which is often what happens. Strict rules around what constitutes a legitimate query of the system and routine audits should make it harder for rogue officers to use the cameras for nefarious purposes.

The police officials who are advocating for Flock aren’t doing it so the cops can track the average person’s trip to the grocery store or yoga studio. The cameras routinely aid in the identification and apprehension of the perpetrators of serious crimes, the location of missing persons and the recovery of stolen cars.

According to the Jacksonville, Florida, sheriff’s office, since 2024, the cameras have “helped solve 15 murders, 17 kidnappings, six forcible sex offenses, nearly 100 shootings and 172 missing-persons cases.”

A website set up by Charles Lehman of the Manhattan Institute is tracking news items about Flock contributing to successful police work. There are such stories every day, all over the country. Two recent entries related the arrest of an armed robbery suspect in Grass Valley, California, and the rescue of two kidnapped teenage girls in Bulloch County, Georgia. After getting a tip, the authorities used Flock to find the suspect in the Brown University shooting last year.

Perhaps these crimes would get solved anyway, but if even a fraction of them didn’t, Flock would be making a meaningful contribution to public safety. It used to be that America had, in effect, ungoverned spaces where malefactors could hide in plain sight. To use an extreme example, the Symbionese Liberation Army operated for a couple of years out of various safe houses in the San Francisco Bay area during the 1970s, something almost unimaginable in our technologically advanced age of constant information sharing.

Rolling back Flock won’t reverse this tectonic change that’s been decades in the making, but it will deny law enforcement a valuable asset.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders



Border Barrier Construction Halted in Big Bend

Amidst mounting public outcry, the federal government last week halted construction of border barriers through state park property in far West Texas, The Texas Tribune reported.

Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Rodeny Scott personally stopped construction until he could visit the region.

Hundreds of people showed up at the annual meeting of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, gathering outside its headquarters in what resembled a tailgate party.

The federal government already has sent bulldozers into Big Bend National Park

Among those trying to rally people to the cause was former Republican Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson. “I have yet to encounter anybody in the Big Bend area who does not oppose a wall,” he said.

While Big Bend is a national park, several state parks could be affected by attempts to build border barriers, including Big Bend State Park and Seminole Canyon State Park.

TPWD chair Paul Foster addressed the concerns of those attending the annual meeting.

“I think we agree with most of you and are working with the governor’s office and the federal government,” he said. “Our goal is to minimize damage to the ecosystem and the natural beauty of not only the parks, but the whole area.”

PATRICK THREATENS SCHOOLS WHO RETAIN ‘INAPPROPRIATE’ BOOKS

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick threatened last week to lower ratings of schools who do not pull books marked as “inappropriate,” The Dallas Morning News reported.

“We’re coming for the books,” Patrick said in a message to superintendents. “We ask that you do it on your own and remove these books.”

Patrick controls the state Senate agenda and says school districts may eventually face funding cuts if those books remain in school libraries. He did not say how that would occur.

Abbott last year signed



a bill into law that gives school boards the authority to pull books from school libraries if parents or members of the public believe they are indecent or profane. Patrick said new penalties are necessary because school districts are not complying.

Democrats have said stricter oversight over books in school libraries threatens local control and access to books.

UP TO 25,000 PLUGGED OIL AND GAS WELLS COULD FAIL, GROUP WARNS

A new watchdog group’s analysis of Texas oil and gas well data claims 25,000 plugged wells across the state are at risk of failure, threatening to contaminate the aquifers many communities rely upon for their water supply, the Houston Chronicle reported.

The number of so-called “zombie wells” — plugged wells that rise from the dead — is about 50 times higher than previously reported.

Leaking zombie wells are a growing problem in Texas oil fields as a growing number of plugged wells fail, sending toxic wastewater up to the surface and contaminating aquifers.

The group, Future Heist, has created an interactive map to identify the wells at risk.

The group scraped state websites for information. It assigned each well a score based on several factors: the well plug’s age, well construction quality, compliance history and its proximity to oil and gas wastewater injection. All the information is publicly available on websites belonging to the Texas Railroad Commission.

“I spent fifteen years reporting on what oil and gas did to Texas, and the facts were always right there in the public record — just buried where no one could use them,” Saul Elbein, Future Heist’s director, said in a statement. “Future Heist digs them out and makes them impossible to ignore, so people can see what was done to them and decide what comes next.”

TEXAS CRIME RATE FALLS FOR THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR

The state’s crime rate has declined for the past three years, according to data released by the Texas Department of Public Safety, including by 13% in 2025. The crime rate peaked in 2022 at 2,830.14 offenses per 100,000 people and has declined each year since.

Overall, the violent crime rate is down 13.19% from 2024. The property crime rate is down 13.31% for the same period.

Abbott touted anti-crime measures taken during recent legislative sessions.

“We passed the toughest bail reform package in state history, backed law enforcement, and targeted violent repeat offenders,” he said

SMUGGLED TEXAS FUEL IS BANKROLLING CARTELS

Fuel smuggling has likely surpassed narcotics as the Mexican drug cartels’ leading income source, according to DPS and reported by the Houston Chronicle. DPS reports the cartels smuggle fuel worth \$12 billion to \$17 billion a year from Texas into Mexico.

“Fuel trafficking is a threat that is operating in plain sight,” Col. Freeman Martin, the department’s director, told the state Senate Select Committee on Homeland and Border Security. “They’re loading fuel trucks or any container you can think of and hauling it south.”

Cartels have been known to drive empty trucks into Texas and fill them up with legally purchased and tax-free fuel from licensed terminals. The trucks are then driven to unregulated fuels sites, where cheaper products are blended into the fuel. Customs documents are forged or changed, and the fuel is taken to Mexico, Martin said.

One possible solution is to make it illegal for trucks carrying hazardous materials to deviate from pre-planned routes or to carry more than 80,000 pounds, according to state and industry officials.

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, Lufkin and Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.



Bright and Shiny



My closet is full of sequins. No one knows how many sequins I own. Not even my husband, Peter, even though we share a closet. He gets one side and I get the other, which seems to me a little unfair, since I have so many more clothes than he does. He points out that if I were allowed use of his side of the closet, he would have no closet space at all—and I agree there is some truth to this.

So all my sequins are squashed into a surprisingly small area. Peter does his best to ignore the shiny territory, and even he does not know how many sequin-covered dresses and jackets I own.

The answer is: a lot.

And the surprising thing about owning so many sequins is that I never had a single item with sequins on it until quite recently.

I worked as an actor and never wore sequins. I acted so long ago that I played the “ingenue,” the young love interest. I had a lot of lovely clothes to wear on stage—but none of them had sequins. In real life, I wore very ordinary clothes. I don’t remember getting dressed up being something I wanted to do.

But now that I am in my sixties, I am no longer the “young love interest.” (Except to Peter. Peter is 10 years older than I am, so I will always be Peter’s ingenue.) And now I wear sequins—at least when I am presenting myself as a writer. I have been buying up sequin-covered clothing at my favorite consignment shop as if I were trying to corner the market.

Because I think writers can be kind of boring—and I don’t want to be.

Writers tend to be introverts, and a lot of them don’t really want to be out in public much; when they are, they often fade into the background until they are asked to read something. They will read and then do the skedaddle at the first opportunity.

I am not like that. I have the misfortune of being an extroverted writer.

Now that my first book has been out for six months and the second is on the way, I am starting to do some presentations, and unlike a lot of writers, I am really looking forward to this. I love talking to readers, and I can’t think of anything more exciting to talk about than stories. So it seems to me that the appropriate attire for doing anything this exciting is sequins.

Sequins set an expectation. When I am wearing sequins, whatever happens has to be memorable and fun. Sequins on a person my age are a sign that I do not take myself too seriously. But they also say that I don’t mind shining when the occasion is right. Sequins tell the audience that, yes, this is a special occasion. We are telling stories, and that is always special.

Every so often, if I’m not feeling particularly glamorous, not anything like an ingenue—I’ll wonder, “Are these sequins over the top?”

The answer is “Yes.”

My sequins are over the top. They are too bright and a little silly and totally inappropriate for a serious-minded person giving a dignified presentation.

And that is exactly the point.

I am going to wear sequins every chance I get, just to let everyone know from the moment they see me that what we are going to do is special and fun, bright and shiny.

Till next time,
Carrie

NORTHEAST NEWS

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Published each Tuesday by GrafikPress Corp. Any erroneous statement which may appear will be corrected when brought to the attention of the publisher. Liability for errors is limited to the reprinting of the corrected version. Submissions are encouraged, in person, by mail, by Fax, or by email, to nenewsroom@aol.com
Founding Member North Houston Chamber (now Houston Intercontinental)
Member Texas Press Association

FOOTBALL SEASON WEEK 1: Labor Day weekend ushers in official start of college football season: AISD's five varsity programs enter 2nd week of non-district games

ACC opener in prime time on ESPN.

Aldine ISD's five varsity programs will play their second non-district games of the 2026 season. A year ago, Aldine ISD had three teams earn playoff spots in District 14-6A as Davis High and Nimitz High (both 6-1 in league play) shared the district title. Eisenhower earned the league's fourth playoff spot. All three teams appear ready to contend with Spring Westfield for playoff spots in 2026.

Aldine High has a new head coach in Charles Black. Black comes to the Mustangs from Mayde Creek High School, where he served as associate head coach and defensive coordinator. He has head coach experience at HISD's Sam Houston High School, where he ended the school's 100-game losing streak. Aldine High, and Aldine ISD are hoping he can turn things around for a team that has lost 72 straight district games and finished 0-10 a year ago.

AISD games kick off on Thursday night when Davis plays at Cy-Lakes and Channelview visits MacArthur at Thorne Stadium. The action continues on Friday night when Black takes his Mustangs to Cleveland and Eisenhower hosts Klein at Thorne Stadium. Week 2 concludes on Saturday evening when Nimitz hosts Jersey Village at Thorne Stadium.

So, without further ado, let's take a look at what this weekend's schedule has to offer.

HIGH SCHOOL

Davis at Cy-Lakes - Kelvin Chatman's Falcons visit Cy-Lakes on Thursday night at 7 p.m. in Cy-Fair. Davis finished 7-4 a year ago and return a nice nucleus led by wideouts David Richardson (27 receptions, 324 yards, 4 TDs) and Loveland Lee-Pugh (12 receptions, 240 yards, 6 TDs), and running back Bryderick Robbins (258 yards, 2 TDs) on offense. The defense will be led by defensive lineman Uriah Jackson (25 tackles, 3 sacks) and defensive back Kaihas Johnson (52 tackles, 2 interceptions). Cy-Lakes returns eight lettermen, which includes two offensive and three defensive starters from last year-s 6-6 team. My pick, Davis 26, Cy-Lakes 20

Channelview at MacArthur - Blake Ware's Generals host Channelview on Friday night at 7 p.m. at Thorne Stadium. Ware is entering his third year as the Generals head coach and returns eight offensive starters and two defensive starters from last year's 2-8 team. Lance Nero returns at QB for the Generals, along with running backs Trinidad Espinoza (359 yards, 3 TDs) and Korey Fisher. The defense will be anchored by defensive lineman John McFarland and linebacker Josh Morales (46 tackles). Channelview is coming off a 1-9 season and returns 26 lettermen, including eight offensive and five defensive starters. My pick, MacArthur 23, Channelview 16

Aldine at Cleveland - Black's Mustangs head to Cleveland on Friday night for a 7 p.m. contest. Both teams are coming off of 0-10 seasons. Aldine returns 15 lettermen including five offensive and two defensive starters. The offense will rely on running backs Tariq Gary and Jayden Williams and quarterback Christian Watts. The defense will be led by defensive lineman Matthew Salazar (69 tackles, two sacks). Cleveland, out of District 133-6A, returns 26 lettermen including six offensive and five defensive starters. My pick, Aldine 13, Cleveland 10

Klein at Eisenhower - Padriac McGinnis' Eagles host Klein on Friday night at 7 p.m. at Thorne Stadium. In his first year at Ike's head coach, McGinnis led the Eagles to a 6-5 record and a playoff spot. The Eagles return 28 lettermen including nine offensive and six defensive starters. The offensive line will be anchored by Kordae Norris (6-4, 290 pounds) while veteran running back Elijah Dixon (500 yards, 5 TDs) will be called on to lead the offense. The defense will be led by linebacker Isaiah Curry (43 tackles, eight tackles for loss, four sacks). Klein returns 35 lettermen, including seven offensive and five defensive starters from last year's 6-5 team.

Jersey Village at Nimitz - Cornelius Harmon's Cougars host Jersey Village on Saturday night at 6 p.m. at Thorne



Stadium. Nimitz returns 26 lettermen from last year's 8-3 team including four offensive and nine defensive starters. Nimitz will have a new QB in Elmer Brown, whose brother Albert was the Cougars starting QB for the last three years. Brown will get help from running back as he settles into the starting role. He did start three games a year ago when his older brother sustained an injury. The defense could be scary good led by linebacker Jamari Bondi, who was a first-team All-District pick in 20-25. Jersey Village returns 30 lettermen from last year's 3-7 team. My pick, Nimitz 31, Jersey Village 16

NCAA

Miami at Stanford - No. 7-ranked Miami, the national runnerup in 2025, opens its 2026 season on the road with a visit to Palo Alto, CA to take on a Stanford team that has not had a winning season since 2018. Former Stanford great and Indianapolis Colts QB Andrew Luck is in charge of the football program and serves as General Manager. If anyone can turn its fortunes around, it's Luck. His team has a tough task in the opener when it takes on Mario Cristobal's loaded Hurricanes who finished 13-3 a year ago. After losing QB Carson Beck to the NFL, Cristobal brought in former Duke QB Darian Mensah (3,973 yards, 35 TDs). Miami also returns star running back Mark Fletcher (1,192 yards, 12 TDs) and speedy wide receiver Malachi Toney (109 receptions, 1,211 yards, 10 TDs). Toney also excels as a return man. Look for the Cardinal to hang around for at least a half, but Miami's overall talent will take over in the second half. My pick, Miami 34, Stanford 16

North Texas at Indiana - No. 6-ranked Indiana begins defense of its 2025 national title by hosting North Texas on Saturday in Bloomington, IN. Curt Cignetti's team finished 16-0 a year ago and lost a lot of talent, including Heisman Trophy-winning QB Fernando Mendoza. Cignetti is a master of using the transfer portal to restock his team and he worked his magic once again bringing in former TCU QB Josh Hoover (9,629 yards, 71 TDs in three years in Fort Worth). The Hoosiers return four starters on both sides of the ball, but you can be sure Cignetti has added enough talent to make another CFP run in '26. North Texas lost its head coach, Eric Morris, to Oklahoma State, along with their starting QB in Drew Mestmaker, along with a host of other Mean Green players. Neal Brown is the new head man in Denton and brought in former Central Florida QB Tayven Jackson (2,151 yards, 10 TDs) to run the offense. My pick, Indiana 34, North Texas 14

Auburn vs. Baylor - Auburn and Baylor meet in Atlanta in the Mercedes Benz Dome on Saturday in an important opener for both programs. Both teams are coming off 5-7 seasons and Auburn has a new head coach in former South Florida head man Alex Goleish (9-3 a year ago). He brought with him one of the country's top dual-threat QBs in Byron Brown (3,158 passing yards, 28 TDs/1,008 rushing yards, 14 TDs). Baylor head coach Dave Aranda is definitely on the hot seat and probably needs a winning season to save his job. He will count from former Willis star QB DJ Lagway, a transfer from Florida (2,264 yards, 16 TDs), to have a big year leading the offense. Lagway will get help from running back Dawson Peredegrass (671 yards, 6 TDs) and wide receiver Dre'lon Miller (20 receptions, 158 yards, 7 TDs). Look for Auburn's SEC style defense to be the difference maker in this one. My pick, Auburn 24, Baylor 18

Clemson at LSU - Lane Kiffin makes his debut as LSU's new head coach as he will lead the No. 11-ranked Tigers against Dabo Swiney's unranked Clemson team. Both teams finished 7-6 a year ago, which does not sit well with

either team's fan base. Swiney could also be on the hot seat, but he has two national titles in his hip pocket. Kiffin's move from Ole Miss prior to the start of the CFP playoffs caused a lot of bad vibes in Oxford, but brought smiles to those in Baton Rouge. Kiffin can be a polarizing character, but he's a darn good football coach and recruiter. He brought in former Arizona State QB Sam Leavitt (1,628 yards, 10 TDs in seven games last year). LSU returns running back Caden Duram (505 yards, 3 TDs). Clemson will break in a new QB in Christopher Vizzina, who will be tasked with replacing three-year starter Cade Klubnik, who departed for the NFL. This game will be on prime time on ABC starting at 6:30 p.m. Look for Kiffin to have a successful debut come Saturday night. My pick, LSU 30, Clemson 23

Louisville vs. Ole Miss - No. 24-ranked Louisville heads to Oxford to take on No.9-ranked Ole Miss on Sunday at Nissan Stadium in Nashville in prime time on ABC at 6:30 p.m. Jeff Brohm's Cardinals finished 9-4 a year ago and will break in a new QB in Lincoln Kienholz. He will have a veteran running back to count on in Isaac Brown (884 yards, 7 TDs) and a veteran wideout in Tre Richardson (46 receptions, 806 yards, 7 TDs). Ole Miss head coach Pete Golding took over after Kiffin bolted for LSU and led the Rebels to an upset of Georgia in the second round of the CFP before losing a tight one to Miami in the third round. Golding's team returns one of the top QBs in the nation in Trinidad Chambliss (3,937 passing yards, 22 TDs/527 rushing yards, 8 TDs), one of the most productive running backs in Kewan Lacy (1,567 yards, 24 TDs) and a dependable wideout in Deuce Alexander (44 receptions, 684 yards, 2 TDs). This should be a fun, high-scoring game to watch, but look for Chambliss and Lacy to be the difference makers for the Rebels on Sunday night. My pick, Ole Miss 36, Louisville 27

Notre Dame vs. Wisconsin - No. 4-ranked Notre Dame takes on Wisconsin at Lambeau Field in Green Bay on Sunday night in prime time at 6:30 p.m. on NBC. Marcus Freeman's Fighting Irish finished 10-2 a year ago, but did not earn a CFP berth. ND lost its first two games to Miami and Texas A&M then ripped off 10 straight wins behind QB C.J. Carr (2,741 yards, 24 TDs). Carr looks like the real deal, but will be without running backs Jeremiah Love and Jadarian Price, who accounted for an astounding 2,046 yards and 35 TDs in '25. Aneayas Williams and sophomore Nolan James Jr. (224 yards, 5 TDs) will get first cracks at leading the running game. Carr does get back big-play wide receiver Jaden Greathouse (42 receptions, 592 yards, 4 TDs in 2024) and Jordan Faison (49 receptions, 640 yards, 4 TDs). Wisconsin head coach Luke Fickel's seat is definitely hot after going just 16-21 in his first three years in Madison. He will count on Old Dominion transfer Colton Joseph (2,624 yards, 21 TDs) to lead the offense. My pick, Notre Dame 31, Wisconsin 14

SMU at Florida State - The long Labor Day Weekend football fest concludes on Monday night with an ACC tilt as No. 19-ranked SMU visits Tallahassee to take on a Seminoles program that has struggled under head coach Mike Norvell. FSU finished 5-7 a year ago and Norvell has had just two winning seasons in his six years at FSU. He will face a SMU team that will contend for the ACC title and is led by QB Kevin Jennings (3,641 yards, 26 TDs) and running back Chris Johnson (479 yards, 4 TDs). The 'Noles will pin their turnaround hopes on quarterback Ashton Daniels and running back Quintrevion Wisner (597 yards, 3 TDs), who transferred from Texas. SMU picks up a hard-fought road win, but look for FSU to play a competitive game. My pick, SMU 26, Florida State 23

Retooling for New Heights: 2026 Davis Football Preview

When head coach Kelvin Chatham arrived at Davis High School, he set out to build more than a football program. He wanted to create a culture centered on community, accountability and developing young men. That vision has produced results.

The Falcons have reached the playoffs in each of the past two seasons and finished tied for first place in district in 2025 with a 6-1 record. Now, the belief surrounding Davis isn't that it's entering a rebuilding year — it's retooling for another run.

Despite losing several key starters to graduation, the Falcons still have a ton of young talent, with all five offensive line starters returning, anchored by versatile guard Jonathan Giles. With the right mindset, the program seeks to continue growing to even greater heights, grounded in the belief that if you put the work and effort into being the best and stay disciplined, all goals will be accomplished.

"We might've lost a good bit of starting seniors, but the players we have coming up all have varsity experience," Chatham said.

Chatham emphasized that every projected defensive starter for the 2026 campaign has varsity experience, so youth is not an excuse.

The goal is to take care of unfinished business, and it will take a hands-on approach to reach those goals. It takes the community, the custodial staff, teachers, players, and coaches. Chatham believes everyone needs to be on the same page to accomplish their goal this season.

The goal is simple: Win district. Making it out of the first round.

The players believe in Chatham and everything he's building, largely due to his ability to relate, teach and connect with his players on a personal



level. Building his program hasn't been about just winning on the football field; it's been about building young men.

"The goal was never just about winning 100 games; the goal was always to come to Davis and change 100 lives. I do that by teaching them (student-athletes) how to win the day, teach them how to be better young men, how to win the community, and how to win in the classroom. If they win in those phases, then they'll win on the field."

Davis won't ease into the season.

The Falcons open with a challenging non-district schedule against Waller, Cypress Lakes and Fort Bend Bush. Those games should provide an early measuring stick while preparing Davis for district play and another postseason push.

Offensively, much of the excitement centers around one of the area's top receiving tandems and what they'll provide in the passing game. Prairie View A&M commit Courtland Lee-Pugh and David Richardson, who holds offers from New Mexico State and Army— expect Richardson to be a leader on offense and make a massive leap in his senior year.

The Falcons believe the duo has the potential to stretch defenses and create explosive plays throughout the offense.

Richardson has worked hard

Big Ike Has Big Goals: 2026 Eisenhower Eagles Football Preview

Coach Padriac McGinnis made a promise to the Eisenhower community in his first season as head coach last fall. He promised the Eagles would compete and run the ball at a high level. Eisenhower finished the 2025 season as the No. 2 rushing team in the district.

McGinnis also promised the Eagles would compete for the fourth and final playoff spot in district play. They delivered, earning a postseason berth.

So when McGinnis says this team has the makings of a district championship contender, there is little reason to doubt his program.

Big Ike has plenty to be excited about heading into the 2026 season.

The majority of the Eagles' defense returns after allowing just 60 points last season and recording three shutouts. The unit, coached by respected defensive coordinator Robert Toomer, will be physical and experienced. The entire secondary returns, along with four players who earned all-district honors in 2025.

Eisenhower believes the defense can take another step forward in Year 2 of Toomer's system.

The entire offensive line also returns, led by highly recruited senior tight end/offensive lineman Dez'Meyon Randle. Randle holds offers from Texas State, Tulane, Grambling, UTSA and Texas Southern.

The veteran offensive line will block for speedster Elijah Dixon, who averaged 8.5 yards per carry in 2025, the best mark in the district. Eisenhower will lean on Dixon's experience and big-play ability in an offense tailored to his strengths.

The Eagles are positioned for what could be their most dominant season since 2015, when they finished 6-1 in district play and claimed the top spot.

"I think we can win district," McGinnis said. "When I made that bold statement, referring to securing the fourth playoff berth last season, if you look back at last season, we were three points away from finishing the season 8-3 and 6-1 in district, in a year where I started with 19 kids in



the program."

McGinnis believes Eisenhower's experience, size and physicality can help the Eagles make a significant jump. His players are a year older, stronger, faster and more mature, giving the Eagles a competitive edge as they enter Year 2 under McGinnis.

That experience should help Eisenhower continue to establish itself as a physical, run-oriented team. The Eagles plan to play complementary football: establish the rushing attack, control the clock, play stout defense and execute on special teams.

McGinnis, who jokingly refers to himself as a dinosaur when describing his coaching style, understands the game has changed. He calls the current era the "Instagram era," where "everybody wants to score 30-40 points and throw the ball around."

Eisenhower will have a new offensive coordinator in Zachary Castelluccio, whom McGinnis trusts to bridge the gap between his old-school coaching style and the modern game. Castelluccio's college coaching experience will help bring that balance to the Eagles' offense.

Wide receiver Drew Young is expected to play a major role in the passing game, with quarterback Dawnte McClure will lead the offense.

There is no shortage of confidence in Eisenhower's offensive line. McGinnis routinely praised the unit, describing the linemen as "large human beings" who will make life difficult for opposing defenses.

to become stronger and proudly shared that he recently set a personal record by bench pressing 260 pounds, breaking the school record for receivers. He is also focused on improving his speed and overall performance as a receiver, emphasizing his commitment to refining his route-running abilities.

DB Keithas "Pop" Johnson, who is one of the defensive leaders, sees this season as a year he can prove himself as one of the best defensive backs in the district, regardless of size. The nickname "Pop" was given to him because of his physical nature and the play he brings to the game despite his size.

"I shock people with the way I play," Johnson said. "I'm really a dog."

Johnson's production backs up the confidence.

He led the Falcons in tackles (52) and pass breakups (7) last season while tying for the team lead in interceptions (2). His instincts, football IQ and physicality allow him to impact games against both the run and the pass.

The Davis Falcons begun their season with a lost 41 - 6 on Aug. 28 against the Waller Bulldogs, marking their first non-district matchup of the year. District competition kicks off for the Falcons on Sept. 9, when they face the MacArthur Generals.



Gal Gadot star in 'The Runner.'

The Runner.

“Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu” (PG-13) — Sometimes a film can have a notable director such as Jon Favreau (“The Lion King”), popular lead stars like Pedro Pascal (“Fantastic 4: The First Steps”) and Jeremy Allen White (“The Bear”), and even a score composed by an Oscar winner like Ludwig Goransson (“The Odyssey”) — and still not meet box-office expectations! It certainly didn’t meet Disney’s, as it was the lowest-grossing live-action “Star Wars” film of all time. This sci-fi film is a continuation of the three-season series “The Mandalorian” (2019-2023), which follows bounty hunter Din Djarin (Pascal) and his foundling, Grogu. Instead of a fourth season, its creators decided to move toward a feature film about the duo, who get recruited by the

New Republic to rescue Rotta the Hutt (White). Stream it on Sept. 2! (Disney+)

“Mayday” (PG-13) — Ryan Reynolds is back on our screens after the successful third installment of his “Deadpool” franchise! Trading in his skintight red suit for a United States Air Force uniform, Reynolds plays pilot Troy “Assassin” Kelly in this action-comedy film out on Sept. 4. After ejecting himself from his plane to survive a head-on collision, Troy lands in the Russian wilderness and quickly encounters ex-KGB carpenter Nikolai Ustinov (Kenneth Branagh). Nikolai, who greatly admires the American government and culture, agrees to help Troy get outside of enemy lines. Of course, even with their combat skills and the power of their two heads combined, it won’t be an

easy feat. (Apple TV)

“The Runner” (PG-13) — Having gone under the radar for a bit after the catastrophe that was “Snow White” (2025), Gal Gadot has found herself in a new lead role for an action thriller that’s way more up her alley. Gadot portrays Maia, an attorney, mother and running enthusiast. In the middle of her normal run after dropping her son, Noah, off to school, she receives what she assumes is an ordinary call from him, until she hears a man on the other end of the line. Startled, Maia listens intently as the caller tells her that he has abducted Noah, and only if she follows each of the caller’s rules will Noah get to live. Damian Lewis (“Pressure”) and Alfred Enoch (“The Critic”) co-star. Premieres Sept. 2. (Amazon Prime Video)

In Case You Missed It

“The Man Will Burn” (TV-MA) — This four-part documentary series that’s out now on streaming takes on the radical week-long desert festival known as Burning Man. Originating in 1986 on Baker Beach in San Francisco, Burning Man has since evolved into a large-scale event consisting of more than 70,000 participants. Now held at its iconic venue of Black Rock City, Nevada, the festival brings together people from around the world with a foundation of 10 main principles: radical inclusion, gifting, deconstruction, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, and immediacy. The series explores its history, the nonprofit that organizes the festival, and how celebrity culture has infiltrated Black Rock City. (HBO Max)

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Q: When is the new comedy series with Amy Poehler coming out? I loved “Parks and Recreation” and hope the new show is just as clever.

— M.D.

A: Not only is Amy Poehler returning to television in a new comedy, she’s teaming up with “Parks and Recreation’s” co-creator, writer and director Mike Schur in said project! All 10 episodes of the first season of “Dig” will be available for your viewing pleasure on Peacock, beginning Nov. 23.

“Dig” is based on a novel called “Excavations” by Kate Myers. Poehler plays an archeologist at a dig site in Greece who, along with a group of women, stumbles on an artifact that leads to an international conspiracy. The show also stars Hugh Laurie (“House”), Geraldine Viswanathan (“Miracle Workers”), Antonia Thomas (“The Good Doctor”), and Fina Strazza (“Paper Girls”).



Amy Poehler (Upcoming in “Dig”)

Q:Is it true that Tom Selleck is returning to TV? Will it be on the “Blue Bloods” spin-off? — G.G.

A:Yes, one of television’s biggest stars Tom Selleck (“Magnum P.I.”) is returning to television, but not in the CBS spin-off “Boston Blue.” Instead, he’ll be in a guest-starring role for a new comedy. According to a recent article in TVLine, Selleck will appear in an upcoming Apple TV series, co-starring Elizabeth Banks (“The Miniature Wife”), and he’ll be reuniting with his “Three Men and a Baby” co-star Ted Danson. A title for the show hasn’t been announced yet, however.

The 81-year-old Selleck led all 14 seasons of the CBS hit series “Blue Bloods,” but has understandably taken a break from the busy schedule that the show entailed. However, according to his IMDb page, he’s also reportedly going to star in another “Jesse Stone” project — a franchise that has already consisted of nine TV movies. So, apparently, Selleck isn’t averse to hard work!

Q: Did the actor who plays Kyle on “Lioness” used to be on a soap opera? I think it was “The Young and the Restless”? — D.I.

A:Yes, Thad Luckinbill is best known to daytime television audiences as J.T. from the CBS soap “The Young and the Restless.” He first departed from the show in 2010, but returned briefly up until 2023. This is the year that he became part of the Taylor Sheridan universe by joining the Paramount+ series “Lioness.”

Luckinbill has also carved out an impressive career as a Hollywood producer. In 2013, he teamed up with producer Molly Smith to form the production company Black Label Media. While he hasn’t personally won an Oscar in this role, the films that he helped produce have won many Oscars — most notably “La La Land,” starring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone. Additionally, he produced two films that were written by the prolific Sheridan — “Sicario” and its sequel “Sicario: Day of the Soldado.”

Luckinbill is still married to his former “Y&R” co-star Amelia Heinle, who plays Victoria on the soap. The two separated in 2017 but are reportedly back together.

Send me your questions at NewCelebrityExtra@gmail.com.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



Weekly SUDOKU

				9	2	5	8		
8	9				4				
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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!

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HOCUS-FOCUS BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Arm is not showing. 2. Hammer is longer. 3. Box on sleeve is smaller. 4. Cap is tilted back. 5. Lightbulb is smaller. 6. Stripe on sleeve is smaller.

August 31, 2026 Posting Date

King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Actor Sharif

5 "Humbly"!

8 JFK guesses

12 Cape —, Portugal

13 In the style of

14 Seniors' gp.

15 Manhattan, for one

17 China (Pref.)

18 "The Sopranos" restaurateur

19 Brunch fare

21 Thick chunk

24 TV spots

25 Ancient invader

28 Uber competitors

30 Mas' mates

33 Chef Garten

34 Bo of "10"

35 Pen filler

36 — chi

37 Location

38 — B'rith

39 Young fellow

41 "Absolutely!"

43 Texas city

46 Caravan stops

50 Big rackets

51 Pulled-back hairdo

54 Icelandic epic

55 Chang's brother

56 "Andor" actor Diego —

DOWN

1 Sea predator

2 Heath

3 Ad agcy. client

4 Debonair

5 Sheep call

6 Boxer Laila

7 Angelic light

8 Allayed

9 Severe decline

10 "Rule, Britannia!" composer

11 Espy

16 Aviv preceder

20 Mardi Gras wear

22 Computer brand

23 Exposes parts

25 "Shoo!"

26 — tear (ragging)

27 Hindmost

29 Boyfriend

31 Comic Gaster

32 Enjoy Aspen

34 June honorees

38 Ringo, for one

40 Analyze

42 Trigger's rider

43 Baltic feeder

44 Queen of Carthage

45 Pinnacle

47 Biblical king

48 Aachen article

49 Serb or Croat

52 Musician Yoko

53 Private aid gp.

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Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

1. HISTORY: When did Labor Day become a federal holiday?

2. ANIMAL KINGDOM: Which animal can hop from side to side but can't walk forward or backward?

3. MOVIES: What is the only international (non-English) movie to date that has won the Best Picture Oscar?

4. LANGUAGE: What does the Latin word "alibi" mean in English?

5. FOOD & DRINK: Which country is known for the soup called pho?

6. GEOGRAPHY: What is the largest bay in the world?

7. MUSIC: What 1996 song by Los del Rio became an international dance phenomenon?

8. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Who is the only president to be elected unanimously by the Electoral College?

9. SCIENCE: How many times does the average human blink per minute?

10. TELEVISION: What is SpongeBob's pet named in the animated series "SpongeBob SquarePants"?

Solution time: 24 mins.

King Crossword

Answers

1. 1894; 2. Kangaroo; 3. "Parasite"; 4. "Elsewhere"; 5. Vietnam; 6. Bay of Bengal; 7. "Macarena"; 8. George Washington; 9. 15 to 20 times; 10. Gary

MacArthur High Teacher Alexis Ayala Wins \$30K Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award

By Leticia Fehling

EAST ALDINE - For Alexis Ayala, excellence in teaching means showing up — every day, for every student.

That philosophy has guided Ayala throughout his four years at MacArthur High School, where he has taught biology end-of-course (EOC), AP Environmental Science, and physics. This year, he is teaching chemistry. He also contributes to the campus as a soccer coach.

On Aug. 11, representatives from the Kinder Foundation surprised Ayala with news that he had been selected as one of 12 recipients of the 2026 Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award. The honor includes a \$30,000 award.

“I was in complete shock,” Ayala said. “It was so unexpected, and I just couldn’t believe that this was actually happening. I am so thankful for this award.”

The recognition, however, is about much more than a single moment of surprise.

According to Tiffany Cuellar Needham, executive director of Teach For America Houston, what distinguished Ayala was his deep care for students and commitment to ensuring they can access and master rigorous content.

“Alexis does not simply teach content; he makes learning visible, relevant and meaningful for students,” Needham said. “His genuine heart for students, paired with his commitment to instructional excellence and continuous growth, makes him an educator who truly embodies the spirit of the award.”

From Biology Teaching Assistant to Aldine Educator

Ayala did not initially set out to become a teacher.

After earning his bachelor’s degree in May 2021, he served as a teaching assistant for an introductory biology course. He quickly discovered that he enjoyed helping students learn.

“I didn’t expect to enjoy teaching this course as much as I did,” Ayala said. “This experience

is ultimately what led me to apply for TFA and pursue a career in teaching.”

He was accepted into Teach For America’s Houston program in spring 2022 and said he was fortunate to obtain a teaching position with Aldine ISD.

“When I first stepped on campus back in August 2022, everyone welcomed me with open arms and helped me navigate my move from Delaware to Houston as best as possible,” Ayala said.

Now beginning his fifth year at MacArthur, Ayala said the campus faculty and staff have become a second family.

“The MacArthur High School faculty and staff have become a second family, and we all support one another,” he said.

Needham said Ayala has grown into a more confident, reflective, and intentional educator since beginning his TFA journey.

“He has deepened his content knowledge, strengthened his ability to differentiate instruction, and consistently pursued opportunities to improve his practice,” Needham said. “Most importantly, he has grown in his ability to translate that learning into stronger experiences and outcomes for his students.”

Creating a Classroom Where Students Are Known and Challenged

For Ayala, that growth begins with relationships.

“The most important thing is for students to feel seen, respected, and safe when they walk into my classroom,” he said. “I want students to be their authentic selves and to challenge themselves with complex scientific concepts.”

Many of Ayala’s students are emergent bilinguals, and many face economic barriers. He said every student enters his classroom with unique circumstances, making it important to understand what each student needs to learn and grow.

“Every student comes to my classroom with unique circum-

stances, and I have to make sure that they are in a position that allows them to learn and grow as students,” he said.

Needham said Ayala has created a classroom where students are “both known and challenged.”

That combination of relationships and high expectations is central to Ayala’s definition of excellence in teaching.

Students know what to expect when they enter his classroom, he said, and they also know he will maintain high academic expectations.

One of Ayala’s favorite moments comes when a difficult concept suddenly clicks for a student.

“Nothing compares to that moment where a lightbulb goes off in a student’s brain, and I get thanked for teaching something new,” Ayala said.

He especially sees that joy during hands-on activities and science labs.

“The joy and curiosity that stem from scientific labs always remind me why I chose education,” Ayala said.

Making Science Relevant to Students’ Futures

Ayala’s goal extends beyond helping students pass a science course. He wants them to understand how what they learn can connect to their lives and futures.

Needham said Ayala helps students see science “not just as a subject they take in school, but as a pathway to future opportunities.”

“His instruction gives students opportunities to apply their learning to real-world contexts and develop a stronger understanding of the many careers and possibilities within the field of science,” Needham said.

That work reflects Aldine ISD’s Accelerate strategic plan, which places students at the center of the district’s work and emphasizes instructional excellence, high expectations and preparation for successful futures.

Ayala said he tries to instill a growth mindset in his students while reminding them



Dr. Crystal Watson, school assistant superintendent of high schools; Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney, Tiffany Cuellar Needham, executive director of Teach For America Houston; MacArthur High School Principal Shauna Showers surprise teacher Alexis Ayala (l-r) with the Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award on Aug. 13, 2026. Photos by Andy Adams / Aldine ISD Communications

that the skills they develop in school can serve them well beyond graduation.

MacArthur Principal Shauna Showers said Ayala’s commitment to students and willingness to grow as an educator make him an exceptional member of the MacArthur community.

“Alexis is the kind of educator who sees the potential in every student and refuses to give up on that potential,” Showers said. “He combines strong relationships with high expectations and creates opportunities for students to engage with science in meaningful ways. His commitment to his students, his colleagues and our school community makes this recognition incredibly well deserved.”

Learning From His Students, Too

While Ayala works to teach his students scientific concepts and the skills they will need beyond high school, he said his students have taught him something important, too: patience.

As someone who likes to stay on schedule and follow the curriculum closely, Ayala said his four years at MacArthur have taught him that learning sometimes takes longer than expected.

“I’ve learned that it’s perfectly fine to spend more than one day mastering a scientific concept,” he said.

This lesson reflects Ayala’s broader approach to teaching:

meet students where they are, maintain high expectations, and give them the time and support they need to get there.

A Recognition of Excellence Across Aldine

Ayala’s recognition also marks the second consecutive year an Aldine ISD educator has received the Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award. Plummer Middle School teacher Joseph Stewart received the honor in 2025.

Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney joined the MacArthur High School community for the surprise celebration recognizing Ayala.

“Alexis represents what is possible when an educator combines high expectations with genuine care for students,” Goffney said. “He sees their potential, challenges them to grow, and helps them see possibilities for their own futures. That is the kind of teaching that gives students hope, and it is the kind of excellence we are committed to advancing across Aldine ISD.”

For Ayala, that hope is grounded in what he wants every student to understand about themselves.

From Shock to a New Chapter

Ayala said he is still processing the significance of receiving the \$30,000 award.

“I’m still over the moon, and I can’t believe this is all real,” he said.

The timing also makes the

recognition especially meaningful. Ayala got engaged to his longtime girlfriend, Helen, in July.

“I think this money will help plan the wedding,” Ayala said.

But the most important reward for Ayala remains the chance to keep making a difference in his students’ lives.

“Stay consistent and continue to push through adversity,” Ayala said, “because in the end, the impact you will have on students will be meaningful and all your hard work as an educator and coach will be worth it.”

Four years after entering the classroom, Ayala has learned that teaching is not simply about getting through the curriculum or reaching the next lesson. It is about building relationships, creating opportunities to learn, maintaining high expectations, and helping students recognize what they can become.

As Aldine begins the 2026–27 school year, Ayala’s story shows how educators help students recognize their strengths, pursue their goals, and believe in what comes next.

It is also one more reason to #ChooseAldine.

The \$30,000 contribution from the Kinder Foundation was facilitated through the Aldine Education Foundation, which served as fiscal agent for the investment supporting the Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award.

LSC–North Harris Support Boosts Student Success

HOUSTON (Aug. 25, 2026) – Whether students need a quiet place to study, research assistance or extra help preparing for an exam, Lone Star College–North Harris Library & Academic Support provides free professional services designed to help students succeed, and campus data show those resources are making a difference.

Institutional Research data show students who participate in information literacy instruction, tutoring and academic workshops achieve higher course success rates than students who do not use those services.

Students who attended academic workshops achieved an 87.5% course success rate, compared with 68.7% among students who did not participate. Students who used tutoring earned a 76.6% success rate, compared with 68.5% among students who did not receive tutoring.

Librarian-led information literacy instruction also demonstrated positive results. Students who participated achieved a 76.5% course success rate, compared with 68.5% among students who did not receive library instruction.

“Our goal is to ensure that all our students benefit from the expertise of our professional staff and the broad range of library and academic support services, resources and facilities we have to offer,” said Brandon Hodge, director of Libraries & Academic Support at LSC–North Harris.



Library & Academic Support services are available across three connected buildings on the LSC–North Harris campus. Math tutoring is in the Winship Building, Room 110; science tutoring and an open computer lab are available in the Academic Building Learning Center, Room 200; and the library occupies the second and third floors of the Library Building.

Students can access tutoring in math, science, and writing; in-person and online research consultations; information literacy instruction; individual and collaborative study areas; study rooms; presentation practice rooms; embedded librarian support; computers; printing and copying services; research databases; Makerspace; and a recording sound booth.

Students have also identified many of these resources as important to their college experience. According to the Spring 2026 library survey, the five most frequently identified resources were computers, individual study spaces, printing and copying services, assistance from library staff, and re-

search databases. These resources can support students throughout their academic journey, from researching and completing assignments to preparing presentations, studying for exams, and strengthening academic skills.

Faculty members are also encouraged to partner with Library & Academic Support by scheduling library instruction sessions, connecting students with tutoring services, and incorporating research consultations into coursework.

As a new semester begins, Library & Academic Support staff encourage students to view the department as more than simply a place to study. It is a place where students can ask questions, strengthen their academic skills, build confidence, and connect with professionals committed to helping them succeed.

For more information about the Lone Star College–North Harris Library & Academic Support, please visit <https://www.lonestar.edu/library/14639.htm>.

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