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CHANNEL CURRENTS

COVID-19

Cases as of August 5, 2020

HOUSTON AREA

19 COUNTIES

122,745 POSITIVE
1,307 DEATHS
69,272 RECOVERED

TEXAS

474,420 POSITIVE
7,494 DEATHS
315,652 RECOVERED

UNITED STATES

4,818,328 POSITIVE
157,930 DEATHS
1,576,425 RECOVERED

WORLDWIDE

18,710,668 POSITIVE
704,869 DEATHS
11,284,150 RECOVERED

COVID-19 RESOURCES

CITY OF HOUSTON

832-393-4220

HARRIS COUNTY

713-634-1110
ASK A NURSE

MOBILE TESTS
713-439-6000

PRE-SCREENING

HARRIS COUNTY
832-927-7575
readyharris.org

METHODIST
HOSPITAL BAYTOWN
Download mymethodist app.

MD MEDICAL
1-888-776-5252

Galena Park Police prepared for Hurricane season

By Allan Jamail

Galena Park, TX. — Tuesday, August 4, 2020 — The 2020 hurricane season has begun and researchers say this year may be especially active. Galena Park's Police Chief Rodney Chersky and Fire Chief Tom Ehlers have their departments ahead of the game. Their departments constantly monitor the weather conditions and they plan together for the possibility of responding to emergencies if the city's streets become flooded.

Police Chief Chersky said "Galena Park has two Light Medium Tactical Vehicles (LMTV's), one for the police and one for the fire department. The High Water Rescue Vehicles cost a p p r o x i m a t e l y \$140,000.00 each, however the city purchased them in 2017 during Hurricane Harvey from the state surplus with a military grant for just \$5,000.00 each, one only has 900 miles on it."



Galena Park police with one of the city's two high water rescue vehicles. The \$140,000 vehicle was purchased for \$5,000 through a military grant. L – R: Chief Rodney Chersky, Sergeant Tim Frantz, Administrative Sergeant – Drew Scroggins and Administrative Assistant – Anabel Reyna (Photo by Allan Jamail)

Chersky said, the main purpose of the LMTV's is for high water rescues, but they're also helpful when called upon to go on utility right of ways or other areas where a patrol vehicle or other emergency vehicle may not be able to get without being damaged or getting stuck.

The police and fire department has emergency

backup electrical generators to supply all normal operations of the department as well as the stations emergency telephone and two-way radio communications. In the event flooded roads prevent the normal shift changes requiring the on-duty personnel to work extended hours, the two chiefs plan ahead and stock up with extra supplies of food and

drinking water.

Hurricane season began June 1st and runs through November 30th. Its important citizens keep up with weather conditions and stock up now with emergency supplies before weather conditions hampers getting out.

FOOD ITEMS: water, powdered milk, dry cereal,

rice, beans, pasta, canned fruits and vegetables, canned juice, canned beans and pasta, ready to eat canned soups and meats, bread, crackers, fresh fruit and energy bars.

SUPPLIES: medicines, important phone numbers and insurance papers, credit cards, cash, first aid kit, toilet paper, moist towelettes, garbage bags, dish soap, aluminum foil, paper towels, paper plates and cups, plastic utensils, food storage bags or containers, flashlight, spare batteries, tool kit, mosquito repellent, rain gear, plastic sheeting, rope, duct tape, grill, charcoal, lighter fluid, manual can opener, fully-charged cell phone, spare gasoline and strike-anywhere matches.

PET SUPPLIES: pet food (canned and dry), leash and collar, water and food bowls and carrier.

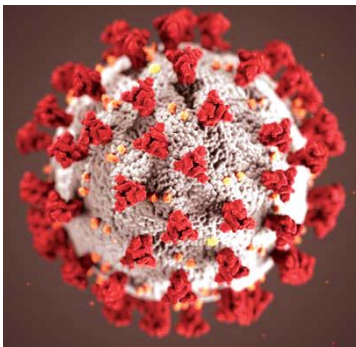
BABY SUPPLIES: diapers, wipes, formula or baby food, bottles, rash ointment and medicines.

More COVID test sites open in county

Houston Health Department, partners announce free COVID-19 testing schedule for week of August 3

HOUSTON - The Houston Health Department and its agency partners are announcing the schedule for sites offering free COVID-19 tests the week of Aug. 3, 2020. **Houston Health Department** The department offers free drive-thru testing at two mega sites in Houston, located at Delmar Stadium and Butler Stadium. Each site is open Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. or until reaching daily capacity of 650 tests. People wanting to get tested at Delmar Stadium, 2020 Mangum Rd, can call the department's COVID-19 Call Center at 832-393-4220 between 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. to receive an access code. Butler Stadium, 13755 S Main St, no longer requires an access code, commonly referred to as an appointment. The department will also open its mobile unit for drive-thru testing August 7-8 at the Consulado General de El Salvador, 8300 Bissonnet St. The site doesn't require

and the department will operate drive-thru testing sites at: Crump Stadium, 12321 High Star Dr., HCC-Northeast Campus, 555 Community College Dr., and HCC – South Campus, 1990 Airport Blvd.



appointments and is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or until reaching daily capacity of 250. **Texas Division of Emergency Management** The Texas Division of Emergency Management

844-778-2455 or visiting txcovidtest.org. TDEM will also operate a walk-up site that doesn't require appointments at the Merfish Teen Center, 9000 S. Rice Ave, weekdays

from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. **United Memorial Medical Center** United Memorial Medical Center (UMMC) will offer weekday testing at drive-thru test sites at Mt. Hebron Baptist Church, 7817 Calhoun Rd., Plaza Americas Mall, 7500 Bellaire Blvd., Houston Community College-Southeast, 6815 Rustic, and Houston Community College-Felix Fraga, 301 N. Drennan St. The sites don't require appointments and offer testing from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. or until reaching daily capacity of 250 tests. Other UMMC drive-thru sites opening weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. are:

See TEST SITES, page 6

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Bee wrangler at work

By Bob Bartel

Smoke filled the air as the colony rushed home to save their family and treasure. The queen was rushed off to a safe location, and the soldiers stood guard over her, each willing to give their life to protect her. As the intruder breached the outer defenses, there was a swarm of activity inside their fortress. It seemed like their world would soon come to an end, but in reality, it was just Jennifer Scott, the Bee Wrangler, going about her work removing an unwanted hive from the wall of a home. They would soon be relocated to a farm on the outskirts of town to live happily ever after.

'Spring is the busiest time to remove colonies,' Scott commented, as she carefully removed the siding covering the bee's elaborate home. 'I'm booked up three weeks in advance right now.' For her, bee removal was not just a job, it was a calling. Saving wild colonies and moving them



Jennifer Scott vacuuming up bees.

PHOTOS BY BOB BARTEL

to remote areas where they can thrive is saving what may become an endangered species.

As she worked, Scott explained the process. She used a little bit of paper and some bark from a nearby tree to create the smoke in her pot that she placed close to the hive entrance. 'The bees smell the smoke, and rush back to the hive, where they gorge themselves with the honey they have made in case they need to move the hive away from a fire.' As the siding is removed, exposing the hive, they cluster around the queen and the combs of honey and those containing the baby bees. The lighter colored combs contained the honey, and the darker ones are the nursery.

Some bee removal people only vacuum up the bees and the queen, and save the honeycomb, but not the part of the nest with the larvae, but accord-

(AUSTIN) — With the Texas economy slowly awakening from effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Comptroller Glenn Hegar reminds shoppers they can save money on clothes and school supplies during the state's sales tax holiday on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 7-9.

The law exempts sales tax on qualified items — such as clothing, footwear, school supplies and backpacks — priced below \$100, saving shoppers about \$8 on every \$100 they spend. The date of the sales tax holiday and list of tax-exempt items are set by the Texas Legislature.

"Even though significant uncertainty remains for our public and private schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sales tax holiday is a perfect opportunity to save money on school supplies and other tax-free items at a time when many Texans are carefully monitoring their family finances," Hegar said. "Online shopping is covered, so I encourage all Texans to shop online or practice social distancing when making in-store purchases. We want folks to stay safe while saving money."

See Bee Wrangler, Page 6

"Looking for General American Transportation/GATX employees who worked in Galena Park, TX from 1965-1983. Please call (618) 973-2090"

See Bee Wrangler, Page 3

Pct. 3 deputies capture alligator in Summerwood

HOUSTON – A few Harris County Precinct 3 deputies and some local authorities in northeast Harris County had an exciting Tuesday.

According to a YouTube video shared by Landon McDonald, with Precinct 3, Earl the 9-foot gator was found in the Summerwood neighborhood.

Earl put up a good fight and it took the “gator patrol” a while to get him out of the water. In the end, the video shows they were able to secure Earl and put him safely into a truck.

Harris County Precinct 3 Constable Sherman Eagleton said Earl was released to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for rehoming.



Congressman Brady: Federal Ruling on Texas High Speed Rail Wrong; Fight not over



CONROE, TX – July 16, 2020 - Congressman Kevin Brady (TX-08) released the following statement after the Surface Transportation Board released a new ruling on Texas Central Railroad's (TCR) petition for exemption:

“While I strongly disagree with this decision, the good news is this doesn't give TCR eminent domain authority to seize property without landowners consent – and finally forces TCR to publicly disclose their shaky financial projections to the Surface Transportation Board in any future bid to gain authority to construct the project.

“This will reveal why private investors have abandoned the project and why taxpayers should not be on the hook when it ultimately fails.”

BACKGROUND:

Today, the Surface Transportation Board ruled that the proposed Houston to Dallas High-speed rail line is subject to Board jurisdiction. This is a change from previous ruling, in which the STB found TCR's project was not subject to the Board's jurisdiction and therefore did not require Board approval.

However, the Board denies Texas Central's petition for exemption and finds that, should Texas Central wish to request Board authority for its project, an application process under 49 U.S.C. § 10901 would be required. The Board also notes that issues pertaining to eminent domain authority are matters of state law, and that the finding does not confer any federal power to take privately owned property.

COVID MASKS new policy for Houston

HOUSTON - Mayor Sylvester Turner announced today that he has directed the Houston Police Department to issue warnings and citations to anyone not wearing a face mask or face covering required by the state's mandatory mask order. Police will not ticket those who are not wearing a mask if they meet the exemption criteria. The citation carries a \$250 fine.

“We know that wearing a mask or face-covering in public is one of the most effective methods to slow the spread of COVID-19,” said Mayor Sylvester Turner. “Lives are at stake, so I am taking this step to save lives and slow the virus from spreading in August.”

Houston police will not respond to 9-1-1 calls about people not wearing masks.

The mayor's announcement happened on the same day the Houston Health Department reported 1,104 new cases of COVID-19, bringing Houston's total to 50,896. There are six newly-reported deaths, bringing the city's total to 478.

“For months, we have focused on education and not citations. But now, I am instructing the Houston Police Department to issue necessary warnings and citations to anyone not wearing a mask in public if they do not meet the criteria for an exemption,” Mayor Turner said.

Job opportunity for people 16 years and over. Work the polls during the November 2020 election season.

If you are interested in becoming an election worker, call 713.755.6965. (Houston, TX) — The Harris County Clerk's Office is looking for election workers to staff more than 800 voting centers that will be open for the November 3, 2020 General Election. Election workers are also needed three weeks prior to the election to work at approximately 100 voting centers during the Early Voting period, October 13-30.

“We expect a high turnout for the upcoming general election. Early predictions indicate that more than 65 percent of the 2.4 million registered voters in Harris County will cast a ballot in November,” said **Harris County Clerk Chris Hollins**. “We need more than 1,000 election workers for the Early Voting period – which has been extended to three weeks – and more than 8,000 election workers for Election Day. I highly encourage all civic-minded residents of Harris County to consider serving our communities as election workers.”

To serve as an election worker, you must be a registered voter in Harris County, have transportation to and from the polling location, and be able to attend training. Bilingual election workers are needed and encouraged to apply. Students 16 years of age and older can apply to work as student clerks. **All of these positions are paid.**

“We will take every possible measure to keep voters and election workers safe, from keeping voting centers sanitized, to enforcing social distancing, to providing personal protective equipment to all election workers and voters,” said **Clerk Hollins**.

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CROSBY'S HOME TOWN HOME CARE

COMMUNITY NEWS



Monthly Update

Dear Friend,

The impact of COVID-19 is very real and it’s up to all of us to take this seriously. I know that the opening of restaurants and other businesses can give you a false sense of normalcy but our state continues to face imminent risks from COVID-19 and we continue to see cases increase. This virus has already taken the lives of too many Texans and every day we are seeing more people hospitalized because of complications from COVID-19.

Help stop the spread of COVID-19 by following simple daily precautions. Wear face coverings correctly when you leave your home, wash your hands constantly, stay home as much as possible and avoid gathering in groups, even with family members. If you must go out, always stay 6ft. away from other people. If you have felt sick, do not wait for your condition to worsen and get tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible.


Below you will find some important COVID-19 updates, information and resources on a wide range of issues. We remain ready to assist Texans with unemployment, SNAP benefits, connecting them with social services and answering any questions they may have in these uncertain times. As always, if we can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to reach out.

If we all do our part, together, we can overcome this health crisis!
Kind regards,


Ana Hernandez

SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19


cdc.gov/coronavirus



Wear a cloth face covering in public spaces




Stay at least 6 feet from other people




Frequently wash your hands

Symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19)


Know the symptoms of COVID-19, which can include the following:




Cough




Fever




Chills




Muscle pain



Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing*



Sore throat



New loss of taste or smell



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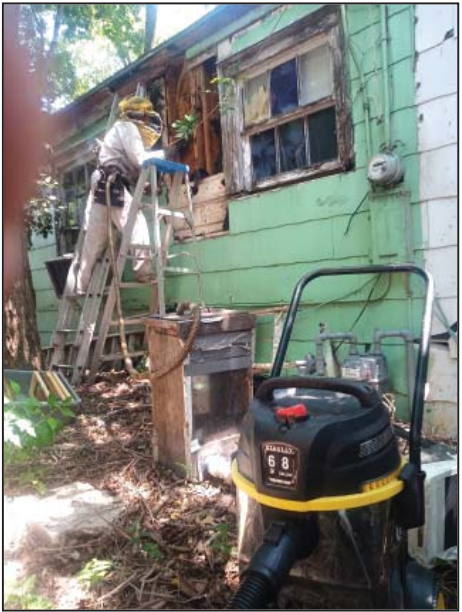
Bee Wrangler at work,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ing to Scott, ‘It’s all about the babies.’ If you don’t take the brood, the bees have no reason to stay in the special boxes you set up for them in an aviary. She carefully removes all of the brooding combs and puts them in frames to keep the bees busy and stable in their new home.

When asked about the dangers of colony collapse disorders that are often sited in the news, Scott said, ‘It’s a problem, but one that man has created through the use of pesticides, often right in the hive to kill a beetle that can get in the honeycombs. These beetles can damage the honeycomb, but according to Scott, the bees can normally deal with the beetles on their own, and don’t need the use of pesticides to help them. Use of pesticides is so prevalent in bee keeping Scott said that most of the honey you buy commercially in the store has some in it. When she sells honey at local farmer’s markets, it is all natural with no pesticide. To be sure that any beetles are killed in a honeycomb, Scott recommends freezing the honeycomb for 24 hours. After that, you can keep it in the refrigerator if you like it crunchy, or keep it at room temperature if you like it soft. Honey is a natural preservative and will not spoil.

Scott also maintains



Bee capture equipment.

that the problem of Africanized ‘Killer Bees’ that we hear about in the news is overstated. These aggressive honeybees can live in large colonies and are very protective of their nest, but Africanized bees have been in the USA for about 30 years, so most colonies are a hybrid with the European honeybee, and not super aggressive.

Once Scott removes the hive, she suggests to the

property owner that they coat the infested area with shellac that you can buy in a spray can at Home Depot to cover any scent that might entice the bees to return. You can then cover the area with siding to repair the area where the nest was removed. For a ‘normal’ hive removal at a single story house, she charges \$300. Second story removal can double the cost.

Fatal Crash at 12400 East Freeway


Houston police are investigating a fatal crash at 12400 East Freeway (East Interstate Highway 10) about 12:25 a.m. today (July 29).The male victim was pronounced dead at the scene. His identity is pending verification by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences.HPD Vehicular Crimes Division

Sergeant D. Griffiths and Officer G. Anderson reported:The victim was driving a gray Chrysler Sebring eastbound at the above address when he failed to maintain a single lane and struck the median. The now-disabled Sebring then came to a stop facing westbound in the eastbound moving lanes of

traffic. The victim got out of his vehicle and was struck by a silver Ford Taurus traveling eastbound.The driver of the Taurus remained at the scene, showed no signs of intoxication, and was questioned and released without charges.The investigation is continuing.


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NEWSPAPERS

By Texas Press Association

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP

In a buyer's market for weeklies, where are the buyers?

By Al Cross

Director and professor, University of Kentucky Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues

Most days this summer, I have written a story about goings-on in Midway, a small Kentucky town where my students and I publish the Midway Messenger. When students aren't around, I pick up the slack, but it's a labor of love to provide coverage for a proud community that once had a paper of its own and has adopted ours, even though after 11 years I'm still something of a parachute publisher.

I've been in the newspaper business most of my life, but never as an owner, and our mainly online, non-commercial enterprise is as close as I am likely to get. But there are plenty of opportunities out there.

"It's a buyer's market right now for weekly newspapers," former weekly publisher Gary Sosniecki writes, in a package of stories that we're publishing to attract potential owners to community newspapers. This article introduces that package.

You might have chuckled at the "buyer's market" line, since all the bad news about metropolitan newspapers may lead you to think that a newspaper is no longer a good investment. That's not true of most community newspapers, because they are the sole, reliable source of news about their communities, and most of them "are doing fine financially," says Kevin Slimp, the leading consultant to community papers.

"In areas where decreased population, diminished area businesses and other forces beyond our control are at work, it might not be viable to sustain a local newspaper," Slimp acknowledges. "Having said that, I've worked with many newspapers in the past year in towns with fewer than 600 residents who are finding ways to be successful."

Helen and Gary Sosniecki
Gary and Helen Sosniecki found success with weeklies in three Midwest towns, the first with only 900 people. "If the population is stable, if most storefronts on Main Street are filled, if the town has its own school and the all-important sense of community, the prospects for a weekly newspaper succeeding long-term are good," he writes.

But this is a buyer's market with not enough buyers. When the West Virginia Press Association voiced concern that some newspapers in the state might close because their owners couldn't find buyers, Maryanne Reed, then dean of the West Virginia University College of Media and now the university provost, got some foundation money and started a program called NewStart to develop the next generation of community newspaper owners.

The program's director, Jim Iovino, writes in this package about the success that Michael E. Sprengelmeyer found in a New Mexico weekly, the Guadalupe County Communicator, after the closing of the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, where he was a political correspondent and had the byline M.E. Sprengelmeyer.

Jim Iovino says his first group of fellows in the program are expected to start in June 2020.

That will be none too soon for the Texas Press Association, which has seen a rash of closures and mergers, and hears talk of more. As in West Virginia, buyers are hard to find. We suspect it's much the same in most of the country. "Many owners of our generation waited too long to sell and — unable to find buyers — are shutting down their papers," Gary Sosniecki writes.

Those of us in this informal group see at least two potential groups of buyers who need to be recruited: local business people who never thought about becoming publishers, but know their communities and the value of a newspaper, and know how to make a profit; and the thousands of journalists who have been laid off by metro newspapers.

"It's a conundrum that independently owned weekly newspapers are closing for lack of buyers at the same time that journalists who would make good weekly-newspaper owners are being laid off in record numbers by metro newspapers and national newspaper groups," Gary writes. "The challenge for our industry is to convince these unemployed journalists to explore the joys and rewards of owning a small-town newspaper."

Helen Sosniecki gets down to the nitty-gritty of that in another article, giving advice on how to go about buying a newspaper and testifying about the experience.

"It won't be all fun and games," she writes. "The hours are long. The financial payback may be less than your corporate salary. But the rewards in your accomplishments as a community newspaper owner can overshadow those drawbacks. . . . You live there. You chronicle the town's history. But you're also one of them. It's your town, too. It will fill you with pride when the school basketball team wins that first state championship. It will bring you to tears when you and your neighbors bury that young volunteer fireman with the pregnant wife who died along with another volunteer on the way to a brush fire. It will be your job, your business and your life — and you'll likely love it more than anything you've ever done."

Kevin Slimp and I agree that the keys to success as a community newspaper publisher are the right market, the right management and the right content. "Job number one is to put out a good product," he told The Washington Post recently. He told me in an email, "It's time we began to focus on publishing the best newspapers we can."

There are thousands of Americans who could put out a good newspaper. They need to give themselves the chance. We're here to give advice if you need it.

Al Cross edited and managed weekly newspapers before working 26 years for the Louisville Courier Journal and serving as president of the Society of Professional Journalists. For 15 years, he has directed the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky, where he is professor of journalism.

This article is one of a series distributed by the Texas Press Association for its members. If you wish more information, call 713-252-8000 or email grafikstar@aol.com



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STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Chris Cobler

COVID-19 surge in nursing homes worries editor

Thank you for all the well wishes after my first "Capital Highlights" column last week. I also appreciate the emails suggesting topics of high interest. Agriculture, oil, education and health care top the list so far, but please keep the conversation going about what's happening in your corner of our big state and what is of highest interest to you. One editor emailed to say he was highly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes in his community. The data at the Texas Department of State Health Services for his county is about two weeks old, he said, even though the state website promises daily updates. Last week, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission released its first list of COVID-19 cases and deaths with details about individual Texas nursing homes. The initial release showed nursing homes accounted for about one-third of Texas' COVID-19 deaths and the number of cases in the health care facilities had more than doubled during July. In July, Texas reported 3,315 COVID-19 deaths and 252,884 cases. Both totals were more than all other months of the pandemic combined.

Don't plant those mystery seeds.

Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller urged Texans to take extreme precaution if the mail brings mysterious seeds from China. The packets, mailed to multiple states, including Texas, are falsely labeled as jewelry. The seeds could contain harmful invasive species or be otherwise unsafe. The mailings could be part of an online scam to bolster product ratings, Miller said. People shouldn't throw away the packets because the seeds could grow in the landfill. Instead, email STTCMail@thisustd.gov for more information. In an interview with the Texas Tribune, Miller planted more seeds of doubt about China. "I'm getting sick and tired of these surprises coming out of China," Miller told the Tribune. "First, it was a China virus, then it was murder hornets. Then we had closed down their embassy because of espionage and spying. And now we, you know, we've got all these mysterious seeds." Doctors not on the front lines.

The Texas Medical Association tweeted a MedPage Today story reporting there is no evidence the doctor group in a viral video had any expertise about COVID-19. The video went viral last week after about 10 physicians, dressed in



white coats with an embroidered America's Frontline Doctors logo, spoke for 45 minutes in front of the Supreme Court building. The MedPage Today article detailed the doctors' reported lack of credentials regarding the pandemic and the allegedly false information they spread. The Texas Medical Association represents more than 53,000 physicians and medical students.

Texas A&M climbs aboard Operation Warp Speed.

A Texas A&M University System subcontractor will mass produce COVID-19 vaccines as part of the federal government's Operation Warp Speed. A new federal task order, valued at \$265 million, reserved production capacity in College Station through the end of 2021. "The Texas A&M System is ready to save lives and help protect the country," said John Sharp, chancellor of The Texas A&M University System. Operation Warp Speed aims to deliver millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of the year if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration determines they are safe and

effective. The best in the country. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center ranks as No. 1 in cancer care in the U.S. News & World Report's 2020-21 "Best Hospitals" survey. The institution has been named one of the nation's top two cancer hospitals since the survey's inception in 1990. "This incredible honor is especially impactful during these unprecedented times," said Dr. Peter Pisters, MD Anderson president.

Keep your eyes on the road plan.

The direction of Texas roads and highways for the next 30 years will be mapped out at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 11, during a virtual public hearing. This is a key opportunity to speak about the Texas Highway Department of Transportation 2050 plan. To register in advance to talk, call 1-855-839-2750 by noon Aug. 10. The WebEx link to attend the meeting is at [TxDOT.gov](https://www.txdot.gov). The plan estimates Texas will grow from about 29 million to more than 47 million people by 2050, and its gross state product will rise from \$2 trillion to \$7 trillion by 2046. The document also predicts fast technological change in areas such as connected and autonomous vehicles. The many rural readers of this column may want to weigh in on TxDOT's strategic approach. Less than 10 percent of current state spending is on rural and multimodal connectivity. One of five options in the plan would increase that to almost 35 percent; the other four would devote considerably less to rural areas. Chris Cobler is a board member and past president of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas. He welcomes email at ccobler@texaspress.com.

★

THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

"The Blue Tarp"

I noticed my wrists were sticking to my desk. This was a gradual awareness. I spend almost all day at my desk and I don't know precisely when it started, but I finally looked down because my wrists were undeniably sticky. I had used the wrist rest in front of my keyboard for... well, forever, and I'd noticed there were a few rips in the fabric. This had apparently progressed, completely unnoticed, until the wrist rest had started to ooze some awful sticky substance, which was now stuck to my arm. "How did this happen?" I asked myself.

I have a friend whose father was a hoarder. She described the process whereby the house slowly filled with his stuff. He would conquer one room and then, almost imperceptibly, move into the next room until one day, the family found they could no longer use the kitchen range because it was piled high with stuff. "How does this happen?" I asked her.

I remember a trip across the country when my husband, Peter, and I came upon a mobile home, sitting by itself, completely covered in a faded blue tarp. I assumed the home was abandoned until I saw there was a light on. The light was kind of hard to see because all the windows were covered with the blue tarp.

"How do you get to the point where you are living under a blue tarp?" I asked Peter.

"Gradually," he said. I think this is probably true.

I'm guessing there might have been a way to fix that roof that would have allowed the occupants to see out the windows. But they probably thought this would work for a little while. Then one day turned into two, two days turned into months and, after a while, they got used to it. Who needs curtains when all your windows are covered with a blue tarp?

I am spending more time in my house than ever before and it has caused me to notice things.

One morning I was waiting for my coffee to warm up and I got to looking at the poster we have hanging in the kitchen. The poster predates our marriage. I remember how I liked it when I first saw it—a cheerful print of peppers in shades of red and green with the names of the peppers underneath. I took a good look at that poster for the first time in ages and realized there were no longer red and green peppers on it. All the peppers had faded to various shades of pale pink and baby blue.

Furthermore, the frame had come unglued and there was a giant gap where there shouldn't be. The whole thing looked dreadful, and it had been hanging there in plain sight for who knows how long without me noticing.

"Peter! The pepper poster looks awful!" Peter took a look at it.

"You're right," he agreed. "How did this happen?"

I am replacing the pepper poster with a new poster of peppers. They are brightly colored and hopefully will stay that way for a few years.

In the meantime, I am looking around the house as if seeing a newly discovered land, trying to see what I no longer notice. (Why is there a box of cookies tucked behind my printer? Why are there peat pots stacked on the washing machine?) It is a revelation, looking at my house anew.

And it's probably a good exercise. I'd like to do whatever I can to keep from waking up one morning and looking out on a blue tarp.

Till next time, Carrie
Carrie Classon's memoir is called, "Blue Yarn." Learn more at CarrieClasson.com.

ASK THE EXPERT

ASK DIAMOND JIM

Diamond Jim: “How do you identify Ruby quality?”



Ruby is by far a favorite gemstone for many people. Not only do they love the color red, but ruby also happens to be the birthstone for July. Many factors come into play when determining ruby quality and value, but as a gemstone, ruby does command some of the highest prices per carat. If you combine the finest color for ruby along with a clean stone, the price can climb even higher.

4 Key Factors of Ruby Quality

1. Color

Color does remain the most important factor when figuring out a ruby's value. The finest ruby color is a pure red color. You don't want the ruby to be too dark or too light, as either way it will impact the overall brightness of the stone. If the color is too light, the stone could even be considered a pink sapphire. However, as with all gemstones, I always say the most desirable color is the one that you prefer. When buying rubies wholesale, it is important to take all these things into consideration. For gem-quality materials, even the slightest differences in quality can significantly change the value.

There are different terms used to describe the many unique colors of rubies. One term you may hear the most is "pigeon's blood". These terms are useful in articulating more precisely what the color of the ruby may look like. Over the years, the trade has come up with these different terms that are helpful not only in describing a stone's appearance, but also from where it was sourced.

2. Inclusions

Typical ruby clarity characteristics are thin mineral inclusions called needles. When the mineral is rutile and needles are present in intersecting groups, it is referred to as "silk". Rubies can also have zones of color variations or inclusions that look like fingerprints.

When buying rubies wholesale, you can always expect some inclusions. Obvious inclusions lower the value of the stone dramatically. However, there are some inclusions that can actually have a positive effect on the overall appearance of the stone and can spread the color more evenly across the stone.

3. Cut

Needles that intersect can also cause a star effect, called an "asterism" - but this phenomenon only occurs when the stone has a curved surface, called a cabochon cut.

A ruby's crystal shape will determine what the final shape of the cut stone will be. The most common shapes in which you see rubies cut are ovals and cushions.

Ruby rough is very expensive, so many cutters will try to save as much weight as possible when cutting, causing the stone to have an unattractive see-through area called a "window".

4. Carat Weight

Last, but certainly not least, is the carat weight. The price per carat of a ruby goes up as the size of the stone grows.

In Conclusion

As with all gemstones, the color variations, the presence of inclusions, the cut, and the carat weight all play a significant role in identifying ruby quality and value.

Thank you for reading the "Ask Diamond Jim" column and for supporting the North Channel Star Newspaper!

Diamond Jim is a diamond dealer and precious metals broker of NTR Metals. See more at www.pineforestjewelry.com. If you have questions pertaining to jewelry, watches, diamonds, precious stones, precious metals, and other questions related to the jewelry industry, email jdills@pineforestjewelry.com.

Test Sites,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

UMMC Tidwell, 510 W. Tidwell Rd., Forest Brook Middle School, 7525 Tidwell Rd, Cullen Middle School, 6900 Scott St., and Griggs School, 801 Regional Park Dr.

People needing information about UMMC test sites can call 1-866-333-COVID or visit ummcscreening.com. **Ibn Sina Foundation** The Ibn Sina Foundation offers free tests with rapid results at two of its clinics, 5012 N. Shepherd Dr. and 11226 S. Wilcrest Dr. Appointments for the Shepherd location are available by calling 832-426-3760 and appointments for the Wilcrest location are available at 281-495-7462. **Federally Qualified Health Centers** The health department is providing test kits, lab access and equipment to local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) so they can expand their COVID-19 testing capacity. The centers and phone numbers people can call to set up testing appointments are:

HOPE Clinic: 713-773-0803
Spring Branch Community Health Center, 713-462-6565
El Centro de Corazon, 713-660-1880
Avenue 360 Health and

Wellness, 713-426-0027
Lone Star Circle of Care at the University of Houston, 346-348-1200, and Scarsdale Family Health Center: 281-824-1480.

FQHC patients pay what they can afford, based on income and family size, and are not denied services due to inability to pay or lack of insurance. The department and its agency partners may shift locations and schedules of test sites to better meet community needs. Houstonians can visit HoustonEmergency.org/covid19 for current Houston test sites and information about stopping the spread of the virus. Information obtained through testing, treatment or services will not be used against immigrants in their public charge evaluation. **Flyer: Houston Free Testing Sites: Week of Aug. 3, 2020**

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Sales Tax Holiday,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Apparel and school supplies that may be purchased tax-free are listed on the Comptroller's website at TexasTaxHoliday.org.

To promote social distancing, the Comptroller's office wants all taxpayers to know that during the annual sales tax holiday, qualifying items can be purchased online or by telephone, mail, custom order or any other means (including in-store purchases) tax free, when either:

- the item is both delivered to, and paid for by, the customer during the exemption period; or
- the customer orders and pays for the item, and the seller accepts the order

during the exemption period for immediate shipment, even if delivery is made after the exemption period ends.

Texas' sales tax holiday weekend has been an annual event since 1999, allowing Texans to save millions of dollars in state and local sales taxes each year. Uncertainty surrounding consumer activity in the retail sector coupled with a lack of clarity regarding the timing and nature of schools reopening prevents the agency from producing an estimate for dollars saved by taxpayers during this year's holiday. Last year's holiday generated an estimated \$102.2 million in savings for Texas taxpayers.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB



To Go or Not to Go

=Many of the basketball fans in the North Channel Area are faced with a tough question this week. Do they travel to see the East Houston United play in the NBL-US 2K20 Championship Series, or do they stay home and watch it on Facebook live? Back in 2018, a group of young men set out to bring a new level of basketball to the North Channel Area. They followed their hearts and purchased the rights to represent Houston in the NBL semi-pro league. They surveyed the community and they introduced East Houston United.

For the price of a parking spot at a downtown arena, two parents and two children could come out to San Jacinto College North and support local athletes who had dreams to play in the National Basketball League. The price of the concessions was certainly more affordable than the same items at local sporting venues such as Toyota Center or Minute Maid Park. And there were no fees for parking.

What made the game even more exciting was that the players had grown up locally. Not just in the Houston area, but these men had played high school basketball at North Shore, Channelview, Furr, Galena Park and CE King High Schools. These were the guys who volunteer countless hours with youth sports in the community. The owners were all home-grown as well. At any home game, you would see their former classmates, their spouses, their children, and their parents as well as many of the neighbors. The team focused on reaching out and providing wholesome entertainment for the spectators.

The opening week-

end, Nichols Gymnasium was packed with those who wanted to help support local players as well as to support the half-time entertainment. Two of the owners, Kevin Williams and Cedric Washington had reached out to former classmates who were educators in the area, and they were able to get the Sapphire Dance Team to perform. The stands were filled with family and friends. Beginning that night and throughout the season, different drill teams, cheerleader squads and even talented solo artist came to the games. Members of the North Channel Area Chamber Ambassadors were present for a ribbon cutting.

Local elected officials such as Justices of the Peace Lucia Bates and Joe Stephens were joined by Constable Sherman Eagleston to help celebrate throughout the Inaugural Season. Team members played against deputies from Constable PCT 3 as well as the Harris County Sheriff's office in a local Back to School Tournament. Team members got involved with several community projects including food distributions and supporting Judge Joe Stephens Boyz Rock Too Camps.

For the past two years, the team has continually trained, played, and represented our community against local and international teams. And then came COVID 19. The 2019-2020 has been difficult but despite it all, the team is preparing to travel to San Antonio this weekend for the NBL-US 2K20 Championship Series where they are confident that the Championship title will be won. Be sure to follow East Houston United Basketball on social media.

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Big 50 for David Mendez



Congratulations to David Mendez, general manager at Turner Chevrolet and a North Shore Rotarian, on his 50th Birthday on July 25. On top of that, he celebrated a 22 Wedding Anniversary with wife Deonicia on August 2. Best wishes to both.

Schools cope with strain of changes

By LEWIS SPEARMAN

BAYTOWN – Goose Creek Consolidated ISD is a microcosm of schools throughout Texas in the wake of COVID-19 because every activity of schools is seemingly having to spend more to deal with challenges of the pandemic and social change.

The U.S. Dept. of Education says that public school spending has been heavily skewed toward salaries and benefits for employees, making about 80% of the per pupil spending. Indicating that about 11% went to services and 7% to supplies. Now supplies will have to cut into the budgets for about 11%, cleaning services will increase and that bus services will need to expand beyond double.

Issues have been brought to light of digital learning, food insecurity, homelessness, disability services, health care and virtual internet connectivity.

According to Jessica Woods President of the Board of Trustees of Goose Creek Consolidated ISD this year in addition to concerns of when to start back classes the board is dealing with a year in which they were unable to give annual raises to teachers, they are trying to reach 100% of students virtually, and enable teachers to teach electronically.


The WebX platform it seems has failed in the task of reaching most of the public wishing to virtually attend the board members. Some would-be attendees of last Monday's meeting were unable to log in, have comments heard, or hear what was spoken.

Schools have no idea what will happen in the coming year and what the ultimate impact of the pandemic will bring and how the property tax will impact incoming revenues.

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