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CHANNEL CURRENTS

EVENTS

Waste Pits Meeting 1/23

The San Jacinto River Coalition will hold an important update meeting Tuesday, Jan. 23 at 6:30 pm at the Highlands Community Center. THEA will announce changes in the Superfund Clean-up.

TXDOT I-10 East Public Meetings Jan. 23-31

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is engaging the community in a study to identify current and future transportation needs along I-10 East from I-69/US 59 to SH 99 (Grand Parkway). TxDOT is hosting a VIRTUAL public meeting with IN-PERSON options in multiple locations to share project information and receive input from the community.

In-Person Open Houses are from 5 – 7 p.m.
TUESDAY, JAN. 23
Houston Food Bank
Conference Center
535 Portwall St.
Houston, TX 77029

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 24
Lee College PAC
805 W. Texas Ave.
Baytown, TX 77520

TUESDAY, JAN. 30
North Channel Branch Library
15741 Wallisville Rd.
Houston, TX 77049

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 31
Barbers Hill ISD
Leadership Support Center
9600 Eagle Drive
Mont Belvieu, TX 77523

The public meetings will be conducted in English and Spanish.

View the Virtual Public Meeting and take the online survey beginning Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024 at 5 p.m.:
www.txdot.gov/projects/hearings-meetings.html
Or scan the QR code
Questions? Please contact:
(713) 802-5837 |
Stephan.Gage@txdot.gov

EPA set to take over Waste Pits remediation

County Commissioner Ramsey calls work “incompetent,” vows to push for Action

HIGHLANDS – County Commissioner Tom Ramsey joined THEA Executive Director Jackie Medcalf at a news conference last Thursday, to announce that the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) had issued a warning letter to the PRP (Potential Responsible Parties) that their Remedial Plan for cleanup of the Northern Waste Pits site was “deficient” and gave them 20 days to provide corrective date. After that date the EPA said they were prepared to take legal action to assume the responsibility for the cleanup, at the PRP’s expense.

Ramsey, in a heated talk, said “I’m done with waiting. I’m done. It’s not complicated. You have toxins in the river. Get rid of them.”

THEA’s Jackie Medcalf said the EPA has taken a big step that could result in the agency taking over the cleanup planning at the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund Site.



PCT. 3 COUNTY COMMISSIONER TOM RAMSEY and THEA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JACKIE MEDCALF ANNOUNCE THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE EPA WARNING THE WASTE PITS RESPONSIBLE PARTIES THAT THEIR REMEDIAL PLAN IS DEFICIENT, AND EPA MAY TAKE OVER THE REMEDIATION WORK.

BACKGROUND

This month, the EPA’s regional office sent a “Notification of Serious Deficiency” to International Paper Company and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corporation, the two companies that are

legally responsible for cleaning up the decades-old Superfund site. This rarely used regulatory tool gives the companies 20 days to come up with a plan that meets the EPA’s requirements, or the government has the power to take over the planning process,

order the cleanup and require the companies to pay the costs. This comes after the companies failed repeatedly to comply with the EPA’s request for a plan that would remove all of the contaminated material, including dioxin, from the Northern Pit of the

site.

NEXT STEPS

The EPA notified the responsible parties on January 5th that they had 20 days to address the agency’s concerns. At that point, the EPA has the power to develop its own cleanup plan, known as the Pre-Final (90%) Remedial Design, take over the cleanup and require the companies to pay all costs. If the EPA determines that the companies are not complying with its orders, it also has the power to require them to pay triple damages.

STATEMENTS

Statement from Commissioner Tom Ramsey, Harris County 3rd Precinct 3: “I know as a registered Professional Engineer with over 40 years of experience, it should not take five years to develop a quality plan to remediate the site. This

Continued. See WASTE PITS
REMEDIATION, Page 5

GEORGE AND BARBARA BUSH FOUNDATION

Galena Park’s Library Family Place Addition Opens

By Allan Jamail

Galena Park, TX. ~ Galena Park Library has good news for the area’s children and parents. They became a recipient of a new George and Barbara Bush Foundation Family Place addition.

Sisi Medina, GP Librarian and Branch Manager said, “Having our children’s department transformed at the Galena Park Branch Library into a George and Barbara Bush Foundation Family Place has added enormous value to the space. When we received our furniture and new toys in January 2023, the positive response was immediate. Children and their caretakers love that we have an area specifically dedicated to early childhood development. It has increased repeat visitors and has helped us establish strong relationships with the families that visit our library.”

“Library visitors can use the



L – R: Noreen Stackpole (Family Place Libraries), Daisy Torres (Harris County Public Library-Financial Services Division Director), Jennifer Schwartz (Harris County Public Library-Programs, Partnerships and Outreach Manager), Juan Torres (East Harris County Empowerment Council), Kathy Deerr (Family Place Libraries), Sisi Medina (Harris County Public Library- Branch Manager), Dedra York (Harris County Public Library-Youth Program Specialist), Adriana Flores (Baylor College of Medicine), Sandra Zamarripa (Harris County Precinct 2-Community Liaison), Nancy Hu (Harris County Public Library-Programs, Partnerships and Outreach Media Manager) Photo by Allan Jamail

Family Place during the library’s business hours. While here, they have the opportunity to take free educational handouts about parenting. They can also check out books from our Parenting Collec-

tion. Everything is available in English and Spanish. We gently approach parents and share our other resources such as our free Growing Readers Activity kits, our 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten pro-

gram, our weekly Story Times, and our events calendar that is full of exciting and educational programs and events for all ages, Medina said.

“We had an opportunity to hold

a Family Place Workshop that we called “Stay and Play”. We invited 12 children ages 1-3 and their caretakers to attend a play workshop 1 time a week for 5 weeks. The children played and explored with their parents. Each week a different resource professional visited the workshop and parents had an opportunity to ask questions about their children’s development in the areas of nutrition, child development, speech and language, literacy, and movement and play. The Stay and Play Workshops will be held every Spring and Fall, she continued.”

At the GP Library I had the pleasure of meeting Kathleen Deerr, the first National Coordinator for Family Place Libraries. Deerr made a presentation of how important the Family Place addi-

Continued. See GALENA PARK
LIBRARY, Page 6

Ravens Eliminate Texans Playoff Run 34-10

By Allan Jamail

Saturday, January 20, 2024 playing in 20 degrees temperatures at M&T Bank Stadium the home of the Baltimore Ravens the Houston Texans lost their AFC divisional football playoff game 34 – 10. The outdoor open roof frozen playing field was hard as a brick according to reports yet 70 plus thousand fans braved the frigid cold to root for their team.

Sunday morning after the game, back in their hometown of Houston Coach DeMeco Ryans and wife Jamila was sitting in their normal pew at the Fifth Ward Church of Christ. They were greeted and congratulated by members for having



Raven defense stopped Texans QB for most of the game.

turned the year after year losing Texans into a playoff contender in DeMeco’s first year as head coach. They have three children, two sons named MJ and Micah and one daughter named Xia and Jamila is expected with another.

The Texans appeared to be in contention for a victory having held the Ravens to just one touch-

down and a field goal with the momentum in favor of the Texans. With the game tied 10 – 10 and 1:40 left in the half quarterback C.J. Stroud moved the Texans to within a 47 yard field goal attempt which would have given them the lead

CONTINUED. SEE TEXANS OUT
OF PLAYOFFS, PAGE 6

Sheldon ISD FFA Students raise \$64K at Annual Livestock Show



SHELDON FFA SHOW & SALE: Grand Champion Steer, exhibited by Aniyah Weaver, Courtesy Roofing Buyer; Reserve Champion Steer, exhibited by Joe Flores, North Shore Rotary Buyer.

Sheldon ISD’s FFA students completed their 67th Annual Sheldon FFA Livestock Show January 11-13. Overall, the Sheldon FFA Livestock Show raised \$64,000 in scholarship money for the students who exhibited an animal or project in the show, with 47 lots sold and 11 Grand

and Reserve Champions.

Each year a Volume Buyer is recognized as the one who spent the most on student projects. This year the Volume Buyer was Courtesy Roofing. Grand Champion Steer raised and shown by Aniyah Weaver purchased for \$5,170 by Courtesy Roof-

ing. Followed by Reserve Champion Steer raised and shown by Joe Flores, purchased by North Shore Rotary for \$3,900. The Sheldon FFA would like to thank all of the show sponsors, volunteers, supporters as well as those who contributed to buying at the auction.

CHANNELVIEW ISD NEWS

Bragging on The Bold Employee



There's no better way to start this new year than with this week's Bragging on the Bold Employee! Congratulations Mr. George Rivera, Warehouse Supervisor! We would like to thank Gulf Coast Educators Federal Credit Union for sponsoring Bragging On The Bold.

Congratulations Will Le



We want to give a HUGE shout-out to Will Le (8th Grade, Anthony Aguirre JH) for being selected in this year's Youth Art Month Spring Art Exhibition! Only 100 artworks were chosen across the state to be exhibited, and Will's was chosen. This is a tremendous honor for Will and his family, Anthony Aguirre Junior High, and Channelview ISD. YAM is a nationally recognized program that emphasizes the value of art education for all children. It encourages support for quality school art programs and promotes the importance of art appreciation for all people. Will Le's art will be displayed at the Bullock Museum in Austin, Texas from February 26, 2024 - March 30, 2024.

School Board Recognition Month



Mr. Cedillo was elected to Position 7 in November 2022 for a four-year term which expires in November 2026. He is a business owner in the financial industry. Mr. Cedillo currently serves as the Board Vice President. THANK YOU Mr. Cedillo for your dedication, passion, and hard work.



Mr. Granados serves in Position 4. He was first elected in November 2022 to a four-year position which expires November 2026. He is a business owner in the housing industry. Mr. Granados currently serves as the Board Secretary. THANK YOU Mr. Granados for your dedication, passion, and hard work.



Mr. Ybarra is a 1992 graduate of C.E. King High School and later moved to Channelview in 2003. He began his welding career at Right Machine, which is now Innovex, and is in his 29th year of employment. He is married to Gabby and they have five children and five grandchildren. Mr. Ybarra enjoys fishing, riding his motorcycle, and hanging out with his grandchildren. He is an active member of the Texas EquuSearch Search and Recovery organization and on two different occasions, he received the Channelview Outstanding Citizen Award. Thank you Mr. Ybarra for your dedication, passion, and hard work.

GALENA PARK ISD NEWS

Recognizing Bee Winners

By Dr. Tommie L. Smith

Galena Park ISD recognized Geography Bee and Social Studies Bee winners. The Geography Bee elementary overall top scorer was Galena Park Elementary School's Jared Resendez, and the middle school overall top scorer was North Shore Middle School's Elias Nieto. The Geography Bee is an annual competition designed to encourage the study of geography, and students are selected by their campus to compete among their peers. During the competition, participants were asked geography questions and earned points for correct answers. The Social Studies Bee and Ruby Gresham Scholarship winner was Hector Umana, from North Shore Senior High School. The Social Studies Bee is a competition that focuses on history across the United States. This annual competition emphasizes what students are learning in the classroom and extends their application of knowledge. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and Dr. John Moore, superintendent of schools, Resendez, Nieto, and Umana were present with a medal and certificate.



Hector Umana (Photo Credit: Christopher Gause)



Jared Resendez & Elias Nieto (Photo Credit: Christopher Gause)

CHARLOTTE'S WEB

By Charlotte Jackson



Community

When you see an issue in the community, how do you oversee it? Do you ignore it? Do you complain about it? Do you reach out and find a solution? How do you know who to change happen.

East Harris County Empowerment Council offers a variety of FREE training programs to help you take a more active role in improving the quality of life in the unincorporated areas of Sheldon ISD, Galena Park ISD, Crosby ISD and Channelview ISD. Some of the opportunities also qualify for a stipend for completing the program and taking steps to improve their community.

The EHCEC Community Builders Academy brings together thirty individuals who want to learn how to get involved. Over the course of the program, they meet involved community members, elected officials, business leaders and representatives of various non-profit organizations. They offer a Community Organizing Academy as well as a Community Health Academy. Graduates of these programs help bring much needed resources to residents. There is also a Community Entrepreneurship Academy which works partners with the graduates of the other programs.

Some of the alumni of these various programs have gone on to work with projects from community clean ups, creating a community communication tool to gather all community events to one central calendar, to founding Little Sisters Empowerment, a mentoring program which works with middle school and high school girls to boost not only their self-confidence but their ability to network with others. Other projects have included providing opportunities to gain experience in leadership skills as well as working with government agencies to propose a safer environment for those who have no transportation to walk along the eastern side of the Beltway. This Spring, we will see those renovations begin to happen.

Graduates of the Community Builders Academy have become active in local politics by becoming Precinct Chairs, candidates for local school boards and others have become business owners by purchasing a franchise of the National Basketball League. (History is being made as this new franchise is female owned team.)

The Precinct Chairs recently organized a community breakfast for over sixty guests which also had speakers which included Congresswoman Sylvia R. Garcia, State Senator Carol Alvarado, State Representative Harold Dutton, and local Judges including Lucia Bates and Julia Maldonado. Shumona Collins, Board Member of Channelview ISD and HCDE Board Member Dr John McGee were also present to answer questions from constituents.

There are many ways to become involved in the community, take the initiative to seek out leaders such as Bill Palko, Carolyn Stone, Curt Williams, Wanda Heath Johnson, and others to learn how to get involved and have influence. As the community ages, there is a need for younger adults to step up and get involved. Our community is diverse, and all the organizations are looking for participants who contribute their individual experiences to make the communities stronger and better.

As always, if I can be of any assistance, please reach out at charlotte.jackson@yahoo.com

Send your Love a Special Message in our Valentine Issue

♥ LOVE ♥



Send your favorite Valentine a Greeting in our VALENTINE ISSUE, Feb. 14th. Send a photo and greeting to NORTHCHANNELSTAR@GMAIL.COM. Only \$20, include credit card info with email. or call 713-266-3444 for more info.

Valentine's DAY

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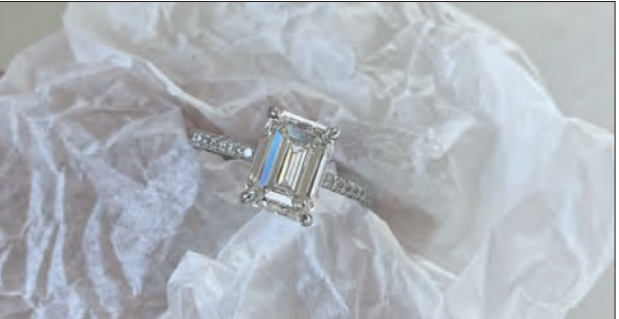
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ASK DIAMOND JIM

Diamond Jim: “Finding the Perfec Diamond for an Engagement Ring”

Despite more choices and variety than ever before, diamonds remain the most popular main stone in engagement rings. Timeless and classic, a diamond is the center gem that is most durable and full of romance and tradition. With so many custom ring designs, many people are looking for tips for finding the perfect diamond for an engagement ring. It can be overwhelming for first-time shoppers—which most people are—so read on to find out more.



An engagement ring is one of the greatest purchases you will ever make, and hopefully only once in your life, so you would like to make sure that you are doing it right. Expense-wise, an engagement ring is often the third most expensive purchase that you will make, after a home and car, but more importantly, you want the ring to reflect your love for your partner.

Before making your decision, here are some tips you need to consider to ensure you purchase the perfect ring for your partner—one that they will treasure forever.

Diamond Shape

When selecting an engagement ring, the shape is where you should start. All else aside, this is where you should try to gauge your partner's preferences. Carat, color, and clarity are less obvious, but the wrong shape can wreck a piece in someone's eyes. Round diamonds are still the most popular due to their maximum sparkle, but other shapes that follow in popularity are princess, cushion, oval, pear, and emerald. Again, since it's such a matter of preference, try your best to find out the shape your partner loves.

Size

After shape, size is one of the most visually apparent aspects of a diamond. Be fair with yourself and set a budget. If size is the most important thing to you, then maybe you compromise a little bit on clarity and color in order to get a higher-carat diamond. While most buyers approximate the weight of the diamond based on the carat, you can inquire for more indications of the actual dimensions to get a certain look, depending on the shape.

Color and Clarity

Color and clarity are the often-understated characteristics that you need to consider before making a purchase. Although individuals have varying levels of ability when it comes to being able to distinguish color differences with the naked eye, the most common color grades for engagement rings are F-H color. Generally, they are broken down into ranges: D-F is colorless, G-J is near colorless, K-M is faint, N-R is very light, and S-Z is light ('colorless' being the highest quality and most expensive and 'light' being the lesser quality, least expensive).

Ask a Professional

We hope these tips for finding the perfect diamond for an engagement ring have helped, but if you are starting to feel overwhelmed about finding the perfect ring that will truly represent your love and commitment to your partner—don't worry. Pineforest Jewelry has you covered! We have a variety of high-quality diamonds that are ethically sourced, and we can meet various customer requests. We carefully select diamonds based on your desired shape, size, color, and clarity to ensure you get the greatest value for your hard earned money. Contact us today if you are looking for more advice!

Credit to K. Rosengart for this article

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

Diamond Jim is a master jeweler, diamond dealer and precious metals broker. Pineforest Jewelry has been a proud member of the Independent Jewelers Organization (IJO) and the Retail Jewelers Organization (RJO) for many years. 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 jmills@pineforestjewelry.com.

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OPINION

By Dillon Baxter
CEO of PlantSwitch

Reimagining Plastic for the Future of Our Earth

Plastic has wrapped itself around everything we do. It keeps our food fresh, our medical supplies sterile, and gadgets affordable. It has provided immense value to the world, but like all of us, it is far from perfect. The plastic waste crisis has become increasingly worse, and plastic itself has caught the ire of environmentalists across the world. But is plastic bad, or are we just using the wrong resources to make it?

Traditional plastic is made primarily from petroleum, which takes over a million years to produce. We then turn that plastic into single-use products that we use for just a few minutes. After we're done, we throw that product away, where it lasts in the environment for hundreds of years and then breaks down into microplastics.

A million years to create, a few minutes of use, and hundreds of years to go away.

This is one of the worst examples of resource efficiency that we as human beings have managed to create. That's why about four years ago, I realized that there has to be a better way to do this. And so, I dove down a rabbit hole, researching the various ways we have tried to fix this problem. What I found was highly disappointing.

Why Recycling Isn't the Silver Bullet We Hoped For

Recycling seems like the logical fix, right? If we could just reuse all plastic for eternity, that would effectively fix the problem. Unfortunately, the 50-year recycling experiment we've conducted has proven that this solution just doesn't work.

Despite blue bins peppering curbsides across America, our recycling rates for plastic were under 5% in 2021 according to a report from Beyond Plastics. It turns out, not all plastics are created equal—or I should say, equally recyclable. The sorting process is complicated, the economic return is often lacking, and the quality of plastic degrades with each recycle. So, instead of an infinite loop, we've got a system that's more leaky sieve than full circle.

To make things worse, recycling is also exacerbating the microplastics problem. A recent study on a UK recycling facility showed that their wastewater contained up to 75 billion particles of microplastics per cubic meter. That translates to up to 6.5 million pounds of microplastics emitted from this single facility every year. It seems that we may have inadvertently created a worse problem in our attempt to find a solution.

The Not-So-Great Alternatives

Paper straws are one of the most hated products in recent memory. I have yet to hear a single person say they like them. But consumer dissatisfaction aside, are they actually more sustainable than plastic? A 2014 study by NC State University showed that when comparing the environmental impact of paper vs. plastic bags, paper was significantly worse. Paper bags use double the fossil fuels, create over four times as much waste, emit double the greenhouse gas, and use seventeen times as much water.

Glass is another alternative material with a much worse carbon footprint. It is much heavier and uses more energy to produce, making its overall carbon impact about 5 times worse than plastic. Additionally, the mining of the silica sand used to make glass can cause significant environmental damage.

The Obvious Solution

If the aforementioned alternatives don't work, and recycling doesn't either, what do we do? The solution lies in using renewable resources to create plastics that naturally compost or biodegrade quickly, and don't leave behind microplastics or natural chemicals. However, it is important that these natural resources don't create more problems than they solve: they can't compete with food sources, they must be available at a great enough scale to make a dent, and they can't be more expensive than petroleum.

Agricultural byproducts are the discarded materials left over from processing our food. Examples include rice husks, wheat straw, corn stover, and more. These materials are very inexpensive as there are very few uses for them, and they are also rich in cellulose, which can be the building block for bioplastic polymers. It is estimated that we generate 998 Million tons of agricultural waste every year. Globally, we produce 400 Million tons of plastic every year. We have more than enough of this feedstock to revolutionize the way the plastic supply chain is constructed and create the circular model that recycling was supposed to be.

Let's not demonize a material that has done a lot of good for the world. Instead, let's reimagine the way plastic is made. The fastest and most effective way to solve the plastic problem is to transition to agricultural byproducts instead of petroleum, creating zero-waste materials. We can go from petroleum plastics taking millions of years to create and thousands of years to get rid of, to plant-based plastics taking mere months to create, use, and disappear.

This isn't a pipe dream; it's science, it's economics, and it's a more thoughtful way to coexist with the stuff we make. At the end of the day, the plastic issue is a human issue—it's about how we value our resources, our planet, and ultimately, each other.

Dillon Baxter is co-founder and CEO of PlantSwitch, a company whose proprietary technology upcycles agricultural residues into a plant-based resin that is being used to make plastic products for publicly traded and Fortune 500 companies nationwide.



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STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders

Voter Registration Deadline for Primary Approaches

The deadline to register to vote in the Texas Democratic and Republican primary elections is Feb. 5. Voters on March 5 will choose their nominees for president, U.S. Senator, all 38 U.S. House members from Texas, and a number of other state and local offices, from the Texas Supreme Court to district attorneys, sheriffs and county commissioners.

Any registered voter can cast a ballot in either party's primary election, but not both primaries in a single election cycle. Successful nominees in the primaries advance to the general election. Early voting begins on Feb. 20 and ends on March 1.

Anyone who wants to confirm their voter registration status can go to votetexas.gov.

RAZOR WIRE CASE GOES TO SUPREME COURT

The U.S. Justice Department last week asked the U.S. Supreme Court for an emergency ruling to allow Border Patrol agents to resume cutting razor wire installed by the state along the U.S.-Mexico border, The Dallas Morning News reported.

"Texas's placement of the wire near the riverbank in Eagle Pass has proved particularly problematic for Border Patrol agents," the justice department wrote in its plea. "By preventing Border Patrol agents from reaching noncitizens who have already entered the United States, Texas's barriers in Eagle Pass impede agents' ability to apprehend and inspect migrants under federal law."

Gov. Greg Abbott has accused President Joe Biden of impeding immigration enforcement.

"Americans and courts will reject Biden's hostility to immigration laws," Abbott posted on X. "Texas will continue to deploy National Guard to build border barriers and repel illegal immigrants."

COMMUNITY COLLEGES GET MILLIONS IN ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The state's community colleges are receiving millions in additional funding under a move to merit-based funding and a departure from funding based strictly on enrollment numbers, the Austin American-Statesman reported.

House Bill 8 was signed



into law by Abbott in June. Community colleges now are receiving state money based on how many degrees, certificates, transfers and "credentials of value" are awarded. The state budget is allocating \$683 million in additional funds to the state's 50 community college districts.

"It's a game changer, not just for bottom line revenue that will come to our colleges, which is sorely needed, but it is a game changer again because it will really allow us to focus on what we're really there for and that is to serve the students that grow in our colleges," Ray Martinez, CEO of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, said.

MORE THAN A THIRD OF STATE AGENCIES USING AI

More than one third of state agencies are using some form of artificial intelligence, according to a 2022 report from the Texas Department of Information Resources. The Texas Tribune reported agencies such as the Texas Workforce Commission are using chatbots to serve patrons. In the TWC's case, the chatbot was designed to help Texans sign up for unemployment benefits after the pandemic in March 2020 vastly increased the number of jobless claims.

"This is going to totally revolutionize the way we do government," said state Rep. Giovanni Capriglione, R-Southlake. Capriglione wrote House Bill 2020, which is aimed at helping the state make better use of AI technology. It creates an AI advisory council to ascertain how state agencies are now using AI and whether a code of ethics is needed.

Some of the current uses of AI by state agencies include translating languages

into English, enhancing cybersecurity and fraud detection, and translating speech into text at call centers.

TEXAS ECONOMY STILL BOOMING

New data released by the Bureau of Economic Analysis indicates the Texas economy continues to grow faster than the nation as a whole for the fifth quarter in a row. During the third quarter of 2023, the state's gross domestic product – the value of all goods and services produced – grew in Texas at an annual rate of 7.7%, considerably higher than the national GDP's growth of 4.9%.

"Texas is America's undisputed economic leader, outpacing the nation in economic expansion and job growth," Abbott said.

Kansas posted the highest percentage increase in the nation at 9.7%

NOVELTY PLATE SALES ON THE RISE

Whether it is buying a personalized plate, supporting one's alma mater or opting for a plate with a black background, Texans spent more than \$10 million on novelty plates in 2023, The News reported.

While plates with black backgrounds have been the top sellers for the past three years, there has also been an increase in personalized plates.

"More people are wanting to add their own personal message on their plate that means something to them," said Steve Farrar, CEO of My Plates.

The maroon plate purchased by Texas A&M University fans dominated the school-related novelty plates, followed by Texas Tech University plates.

CEDAR POLLEN CLOUDS CAUSING MISERY FOR MANY

It's that time of year when many Texans suffer from itchy, watery eyes, sneezing fits, and runny noses, caused by pollen from mountain cedar trees and commonly called "cedar fever." As the Houston Chronicle noted, while cedar fever is most often associated with the Ashe juniper common in Central Texas, red cedars in the eastern part of the state also pollinate around this time.

Pollen production peaks in mid-January and tapers off by spring.

"During cold fronts, it gets very dry and windy and the pressure changes very rapidly," said Jonathan Motsinger of the Texas A&M Forest Service. "This triggers the opening of pollen cones and the release of pollen grains. When the conditions are right, you can actually see the pollen blowing off of some trees." Allergy medications can provide some relief, and it is advisable to keep doors and windows closed until the pollen dissipates.

FERAL HOGS SPOTTED ON GALVESTON BEACH

It is not exactly peak tourist season on Galveston beaches, but a group of feral hogs have decided to visit Galveston Island State Park, officials reported.

Photos released by park officials show the hogs traipsing along the beach at night, leaving hoof prints in the sand. Roughly half of all the feral hogs in the United States take up residence in Texas.

★

THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

Making Progress

"Perfection is the enemy of progress," according to Winston Churchill.

It's the time of year when we try to do too much, change too quickly. Already expectations are lowering, and reality is setting in. The sky is gray, the temperatures cold, and I am coming to grips with the fact that I cannot eat toffee every day. (At least, not a lot of toffee every day.)

It's the mid-January new year letdown.

More people die this time of year than on average. I imagine they make it through the holidays, finish off the toffee, take down the tree, look out at the gray weather, decide the New Year is not looking significantly better than the previous one and give up the effort to keep on living.

I spoke with my grouchy friend yesterday. This is the same grouchy friend who has cursed my cheerfulness in the past—and is a source of unflinching pessimism—so I should have known what was coming. He says there is no cause for rejoicing in the new year. He says the days are growing longer, and that means intolerable heat is around the corner. He says any promises he makes to himself will be broken. "I gave up goals and dreams in the summer of 1971," he says.

He thinks I am a fool. I think he's right. And I believe this may be one of my best qualities.

Because the older I get, the less seriously I take myself. I used to obsess over not looking my best, walking around with spinach in my teeth or toilet paper on my shoe or a tag hanging out the back of my shirt. I used to beat myself up (usually hours later, while doing the dishes or trying to fall asleep) for some dumb thing I said—something that someone could have taken the wrong way.

"Ack!" I'd yell aloud while washing my vegetable steamer. "Why did I say that?!"

Accepting that I'm foolish removes this burden. If I don't take myself too seriously, I can't expect anyone else to. If I accept that I am imperfect and just treat myself with love, I can hope folks will follow suit. I might wonder (as I did last night), what I am doing in the kitchen at 1 o'clock in the morning eating the last of my sister's homemade toffee.

"Should I really be doing this?" I might ask myself.

But now I answer, "Who wants to know?" And there is silence.

It turns out that no one cares if I stay up too late eating toffee. There is no editorial committee reviewing my statements from the previous day, informing me of how they might have been more clever or less embarrassing.

As a result, I feel a lot more free.

I can make that phone call, not knowing what I will say until I say it. I can have a conversation with a stranger—not caring so much about what they think of me, but letting them know that I am interested in them. But the key to all of this—to any of this—is action. I have to forgive my gaffes and blunders in advance and do something rather than nothing. I have to do something imperfectly if I am to make any progress at all.

Today, I am doing situps. I can only do a few. My form is terrible. I cannot see how this will ever make me stronger. But I'm doing them anyway. And, while it's much too early to tell, it's possible that I'm making progress.

Till next time,
Carrie

HIGHLANDS

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Katy ISD will start heart screenings with help from North Shore Rotarian Scott Stephens and GBOGH

KATY, Texas – For more than a decade, KPRC 2 and Bill Spencer have partnered with the Cody Stephens Foundation to offer life-saving heart screenings that are free of charge.

Now, the Katy Independent School District is launching a new program with the foundation’s help to test student-athletes and staff for hidden heart defects.

The foundation is providing the district with the machines. Spencer says the screenings are critical to help save lives.

The Cody Stephens Go



ABOVE: Scott Stephens at Katy ISD LEFT: Student athletes in the process of testing for heart defects at several locations. The Cody Foundation has assisted school districts to implement the screening program.

Big or Go Home Memorial Foundation was founded by Scott Stephens in memory of his beloved son, Cody Stephens, who died from an undetected heart condition just weeks before graduation from Crosby High School.

Under the new program announced by Katy ISD today, the district will begin testing all student athletes in middle and high school, who want to be tested, for hidden heart defects, a normal school sports exam just can’t identify.

The district will also give these in-depth heart screenings to all staff and

teachers who wish to have one.

The idea is to find hidden heart defects that go undetected and can kill you without warning.

Through this program, which will begin in the spring of 2024, the district will test teachers, staff and student athletes using the electrocardiogram machine, a device that can detect what is actually going on inside a person’s heart and can detect abnormalities that can kill.

As for our next free heart screening, The Cody Stephens Foundation and KPRC2 will be offering the next free teen heart screen on January 20th in Missouri City at the Missouri City Recreation Center and Tennis Courts on January 20th.

For more information on the program, go to <https://www.codystephensfoundation.org/>.



ROTARY CLUB NEWS



Our guest speaker today was Mr. Scott Stephens, who is our mutual friend, fellow Rotarian, business owner, and founder of the CODY STEPHENS FOUNDATION. Mr. Stephens lost his son Cody on May 6, 2012 to Sudden Cardiac Arrest, also known as SCA. House Bill 76, also known as Cody’s Law, was enacted on March 26, 2019, and grants every student an opportunity to have an ECG heart screening as part of his or her athletic physical exam. Mr. Stephens created the CODY STEPHENS FOUNDATION to share Cody’s story and to help raise awareness of this silent killer. He doesn’t want any family to experience the loss and heartache of losing a child to SCA. <https://www.codystephensfoundation.org/>



Waste Pits Remediation,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

site has been impacting the area since the 1960’s and is a danger to the entire bay area region. Two-thirds of the original volume has already washed away making any further delay unacceptable. It’s time to get this site cleaned up for good.”

Statement from Jackie Medcalf, Founder and CEO of Texas Health and Environment Alliance: “This is an important decision that we hope will jumpstart the effort to protect public health and our environment. The community has been clear in saying the dioxin and other chemical waste need to be fully removed from our river. The EPA has been clear in ordering the companies to come up with a plan that accomplishes that. However, the planning process has dragged on for nearly five years and the companies still have not produced a plan that meets the EPA and community’s requirements. We fully support the EPA issuing this order.” Texas Health and Environment Alliance (THEA) has led the fight to remove the health threat that the toxic waste site poses to the community and the Galveston Bay watershed.

Statement from Representative Dan Crenshaw (TX-02): “The health and safety of the citizens across TX-02 is of utmost importance to me. Over the past year, I have been monitoring the situation at the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund Site, as we move forward my office will continue to communicate with the EPA to ensure they are taking all appropriate steps to make certain the clean-up is done in a safe, effective, and timely manner.”

Statement from the PRP, Potential Responsible Parties: “The two respondent companies for the San Jacinto Waste Pits Superfund Site - International Paper and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp. (MIMC) - have informed EPA that while they believe some aspects of the characterizations made in Region 6’s recent notice to the companies are not accurate, they are committed to working cooperatively with the Agency to achieve progress at the site.”



Highlands Rotary Club's 49th Annual CHILI FEAST



Raffle & Auction

St. Jude's Catholic Church
808 S. Main Street, Highlands
11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Live Auction Noon-3
Saturday, February 3, 2024

Win a new Vehicle. Your choice of
2024 CHEVY TRAILBLAZER or 2024 CHEVY TRAX
from Turner Chevrolet



Raffle Tickets \$100.00 Donation
Meal Tickets \$10.00

Raffle Tickets purchased by Jan. 9, 2024 will be eligible for \$300 Gift Card Drawing.
Winners need not be Present to Win!
Payment of all local, state and federal taxes will be the responsibility of the winner.
Proceeds donated back to our Community for Scholarships & Community Programs.

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM ALL HIGHLANDS ROTARIANS



TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM MANY AREA & HIGHLANDS STORES

ADDITIONAL PRIZES:	
Early Drawing.....	\$300 Gift Card
1st Ticket Drawn.....	\$200 Gift Card
50th Ticket.....	32" Smart TV
100th Ticket.....	Portable Ice Maker
150th Ticket.....	\$200 Gift Card
200th Ticket.....	Air Compressor/Battery Charger
250th Ticket.....	Beats Solo 3 Wireless Headphones
300th Ticket.....	\$200 Gift Card
350th Ticket.....	Air Fryer
400th Ticket.....	65 Qt. Artic Cooler
450th Ticket.....	Shotgun
500th Ticket.....	\$200 Gift Card
550th Ticket.....	28" Black Stone Cooker
600th Ticket.....	Outdoor Propane Fire Pit
650th Ticket.....	22-250 Rifle
699th Ticket.....	55" Smart TV
700th Ticket.....	2024 Chevy Trailblazer or 2024 Chevy TRAX

(Color & Model may vary from Pictures)

Posters Courtesy of the Highlands STAR-Crosby COURIER

SALUTE TO BUSINESS & INDUSTRY EDITION



Star ☆ Courier NORTH CHANNEL ☆ STAR

GET TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE!!

This special edition will run the week of February 27-30 and salutes the strength of the east Harris County area economy with local business and industry. With features and a history of area iconic work, the community can learn about your business/industry and how it contributes to the success of the area—Highlands, Crosby, Huffman, Dayton, Barbers Hill, North Shore, Channelview, Sheldon, Galena Park, and Jacinto City. With one of the three sizes listed below, your business can submit a photo and article (dependent on the size of the ad) to go with your ad.

FULL PAGE AD	B&W	\$900 + half page editorial/photo*
	COLOR	\$1,100 + half page editorial/photo*
HALF PAGE AD	B&W	\$495 + quarter page editorial/photo*
	COLOR	\$695 + quarter page editorial/photo*
1/4 PAGE AD	B&W	\$250 + eighth page editorial
	COLOR	\$350 + eighth page editorial
1/8 PAGE AD	B&W	\$140
	COLOR	\$245



*Online information will be added the week of Feb. 27-30

AD DEADLINE IS FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16 AT NOON—NO EXCEPTIONS.

For ad specs and additional information, please call 713-266-3444 and speak to Gil Hoffman or David Taylor at 832-453-6737.



Austin Butler, left, and Callum Turner star in "Masters of the Air."

“Masters of the Air”

“MASTERS OF THE AIR” (TV-MA) — Based on the 2007 book by Donald L. Miller, this war-drama miniseries features Academy-Award nominee Austin Butler (“Elvis”) and Callum Turner (“Fantastic Beasts”) as Air Force Majors Buck Cleven and John Egan, respectively. The two majors were the first pilots assigned to the 100th Bomb Group during World War II, which was given the name “Bloody Hundredth” due to the incredibly difficult missions and heavy losses incurred. But no matter the ruthless conditions, Buck and John are determined to lead their men through these missions. The cast is hefty, with over 50 actors noted in the main cast, but make sure to watch out for a few familiar faces like Barry Keoghan (“Saltburn”) and Anthony Boyle (“Harry Potter and the Cursed Child”). (Apple TV+)

“TRUE DETECTIVE: NIGHT COUNTRY” (TV-MA) — After several decades, Jodie Foster is making a great return to television by leading the newest season of the anthology crime drama series “True Detective.” Foster plays Detective Liz Danvers, making this her first adult TV role and first starring role in a TV series since 1975! Opposite of Foster is Kali Reis as steely Detective Evangeline Navarro, who partners up with Liz to close out one last case before they go their separate ways. The case centers around the disappearance of eight men who operated a research station in the cold and rough Alaskan night country. The first two episodes are out now, with subsequent episodes releasing every Sunday until Feb. 25. (Max)

“GRISELDA” (TV-MA) — Crime dramas abound this week! Hail-

ing from Eric Newman, the showrunner of the series “Narcos,” comes a new crime-drama miniseries led by none other than Sofia Vergara (“Modern Family”). Vergara sheds her usually cheery persona to portray Colombian drug lord Griselda Blanco, nicknamed “the Black Widow” and “the Godmother of Cocaine.” After being introduced to the drug industry by her second husband, Blanco based her drug trade business in Miami during the 1980s and kept it bustling with profits of \$80 million a month. Alberto Guerra and Vanessa Ferlito co-star in main roles, while Colombian singer Karol G stars in her first on-screen role ever! All six episodes release on Jan. 25. (Netflix)

In Case You Missed It “BOTTOMS” (R) — Produced by Elizabeth Banks (“Cocaine Bear”), this film stars comedian/writer Rachel Sennott (“The Idol”) and Golden Globe winner Ayo Edebiri (“The Bear”) as two unpopular lesbian high school students. This hormonal pair of best friends are desperate and mortified that they’re seniors who haven’t had sex yet, so they hatch a plan to create a feminist self-defense club to help them cozy up to the girls they have crushes on. Rooted in hysterical juvenile chaos, this club escalates into somewhat of a girl gang, even exacting revenge on the conceited quarterback of the football team. Kaia Gerber (“Babylon”) and Nicholas Galitzine (“Red, White & Royal Blue”) co-star. Out now! (MGM+) (c) 2024 King Features Synd., Inc.



Q:Is that Demi Moore I see in the new “Feud” series? Is this her first acting role since she deserted Hollywood a few years ago? — K.H.

A:When Demi Moore (“Indecent Proposal”) and her husband at the time, actor Bruce Willis (“Die Hard”), started their family in the late 1980s, they would eventually escape Los Angeles for the peaceful mountain town of Hailey, Idaho. They had three daughters, but ended up splitting a decade later. Moore stayed in Idaho and took a break from acting, especially after starring in back-to-back box-office disappointments — “Striptease” and “G.I. Jane.”

When Moore tried to ease back into acting, the roles were few and far between. In an interview with Red magazine back in 2007, Moore said that “there aren’t that many good roles for women over 40. A lot of them don’t have much substance, other than being someone’s mother or wife.”

But if you look at Moore’s list of credits, there really isn’t that much of a gap between projects. She has had numerous roles over the past two decades; it’s just that they’re not very high-profile.

Her autobiography, “Inside Out,” was published in 2019. During the pandemic, she quarantined in Idaho with her girls and Willis. It was eventually revealed that Willis was suffering from a neurological disorder. He and Moore remain close, along with Willis’ current wife, Emma.

Now Moore is part of a terrific ensemble group of women over 40 in the new FX series “Feud: Capote vs. The Swans,” based on a true story set in the 1960s. Moore plays one of the socialites that author Truman Capote (“In Cold Blood”) betrayed in a tell-all book. Molly Ringwald (“Sixteen Candles”), Naomi Watts and Calista Flockhart co-star, with Tom Hollander playing Capote.

Q:Where have I seen football commentator Kyle Brandt before? I read that he was on the MTV reality show “The Real World,” but I didn’t watch that. He looks familiar to me. — Z.I.

A: Kyle Brandt, one of the hosts of “Good Morning Football” on the NFL



Demi Moore (Upcoming in “Feud: Capote vs. The Swans”)

Network, was part of “The Real World: Chicago” on MTV in 2001. My guess is that you recognize him from his brief acting career where he played Philip Kirakis on “Days of Our Lives” from 2003-06.

He’s definitely found what he’s good at, which is talking about football. His high-energy, hilarious segment called “Angry Runs,” in particular, will definitely jolt you awake on “Good Morning Football” weekday mornings.

Q: Is “Bridgerton” returning to Netflix anytime soon? I’ve read all the books, so I know there is more story to tell. — B.P.

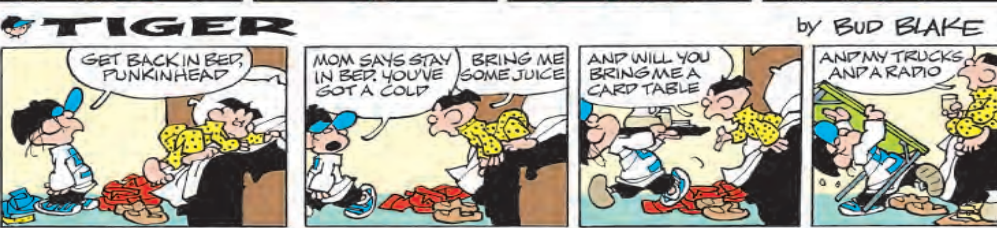
A:Yes, “Bridgerton” will be back on Netflix on May 16 with part 1 of the third season. The second part of the season will premiere on June 13.

New cast members include Daniel Francis (“Once Upon a Time”) and Sam Phillips (“The Crown”). Phoebe Dynevor, who starred as Daphne in the first two seasons, will be sitting this one out, but hopes that her character will return in the future.

Send me your questions at NewCelebrityExtra@gmail.com, or write me at KFWS, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



Weekly SUDOKU
by Linda Thistle

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

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. His full name is Kenneth Sean Carson; 2. Scrambled letters; 3. Cap is different; 4. Cup is missing; 5. Cabinet is wider; 6. Flower picture is reversed; 7. IV (Four); 8. Desney's Child; 9. Through the Looking-Glass; 10. 1924.

January 22, 2024 Posting Date
King Crossword

ACROSS
1 Hot tub
4 Pack (down)
8 Honeycomb division
12 Joke
13 Teen fave
14 Celestial bear
15 Capote nickname
16 Difficult problem
18 Celery unit
20 Pantheon member
21 Morays
24 Twilight, poetically
28 "Bravo!"
32 Wry
33 Raw rock
34 Begets
36 Melody
37 Actress Meg
39 Maintains
41 Wheel connectors
43 Bake sale orgs.
44 — Victor
46 Dugout seating
50 Sociable and lively
55 "Caught ya!"
56 Medicinal plant
57 Vogue rival
58 Singer Phair
59 Reporter's quest
60 Workout count
61 Mimic

DOWN
1 Boot camp
2 Section
3 Water, in Mexico
4 Hearts, slangily
5 Big fuss
6 Calendar abbr.
7 Advertise
8 Get cozy (with)
9 Blunder
10 Baton Rouge sch.
11 Felon's flight
17 Egg yolk
19 Triathlon segment
22 Secular
23 Razor sharpener
25 Algerian port
26 During
27 Red planet
28 Mrs. Dithers of "Blondie"
29 African antelope
30 "Hud" actress Patricia
31 Faxed
35 Equine homes
38 Butterflies
40 Language suffix
42 High school subj.
45 Declare
47 "The Lion King" lion
48 Intel product
49 Visibility hindrance
50 Fire
51 Flamenco cheer
52 At once
53 — de-France
54 Jungfrau, for one

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Answers
King Crossword

Weekly SUDOKU

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

Solution time: 24 mins.

Trivia test
by Fifi Rodriguez

- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What is the last name of Ken, who was Barbie’s boyfriend?
- TELEVISION: In the sitcom “The Office,” the company is in which U.S. city?
- GEOGRAPHY: In which country is The Matterhorn located?
- MUSIC: Which 1990s group was the singer Beyonce a part of?
- U.S. STATES: In which state is Monument Valley located?
- LITERATURE: In which children’s book do the characters Tweedledee and Tweedledum appear?
- MATH: In Roman numerals, what is XLVIII divided by XII?
- MEDICAL: What is a common name for polythelia?
- CHEMISTRY: How many elements are listed on the Periodic Table?
- MOVIES: What is the year of the Olympics in the movie “Chariots of Fire”?

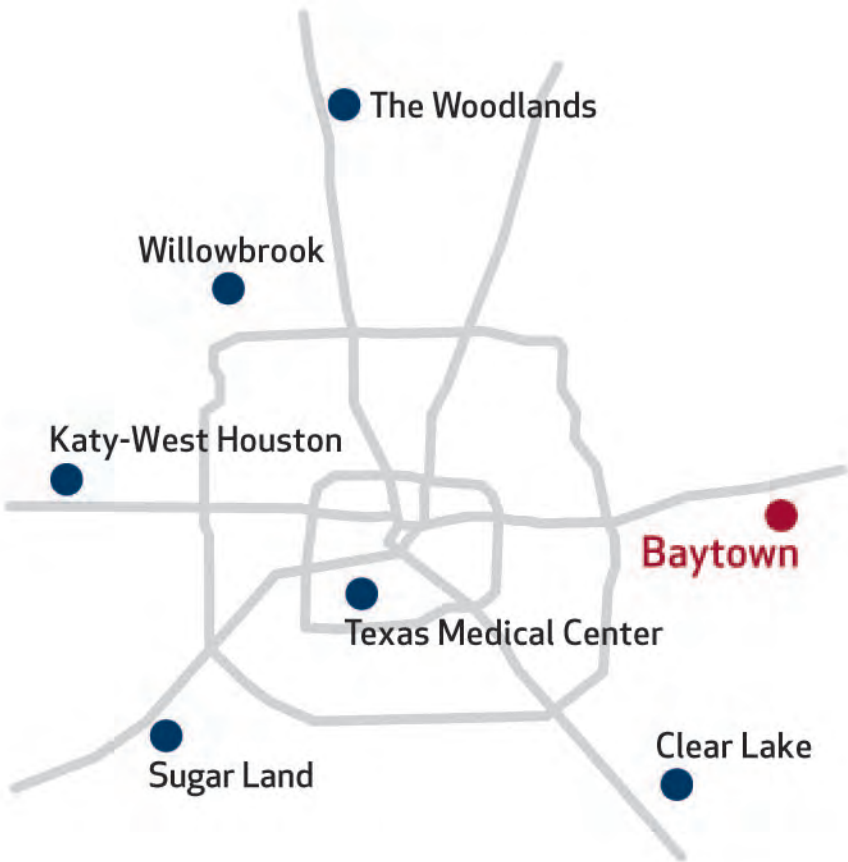
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