



USA Gymnast Simone Biles gold medal performance  
See Story below & on page 4.

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## North Channel Chamber Celebrates 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala Chamber Honors Community Leaders, Hears Plans from Commissioner Garcia

By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

CHANNELVIEW, Texas — The North Channel Area Chamber of Commerce hosted its 49th Annual Installation and Awards Gala, gathering business leaders, educators, and public officials to celebrate community achievements and chart a course for the year ahead.

The event, held Friday evening, featured the installation of the 2026 Chamber Board and recognized outstanding contributions from local businesses, organizations, and individuals. Ramon Garza, Chamber Board Chair Elect and a Farmers Insurance agent, served as master of ceremonies, welcoming members and

guests to an evening focused on promoting business and quality of life initiatives in the North Channel Area.

The gala opened with a moment of silence in memory of Dr. Gerald Cobb, a longtime community leader who served as Superintendent of GPISD for 17 years and was a founding director of Woodforest National Bank. “Dr. Cobb’s lasting contributions to our community will not be forgotten,” said Dr. Tory Hill, superintendent of Channelview ISD.

Keynote speaker Adrian Garcia, Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner, addressed the audience, highlighting his “Revive2Thrive” initiative aimed at revitalizing the precinct through strategic



Bill Palko Scholarship presented to Jasmine Lopez of North Shore HS, Sinai Hernandez of CE King, Sasha Ve Paz of North Shore HS, Raymon Garza Farmers Insurance, Ken Wimbley KNCS Services LLC, Margie Buentello NCACC

investments in infrastructure, public safety, and economic opportunity. Garcia detailed ongoing projects, including a \$6 million reconstruction of the South Sheldon and

Market Street intersection to improve traffic flow and safety, and a \$50 million partnership with the Texas General Land Office to protect 1,800 homes from flooding in the Pine Trail

Subdivision.

Garcia also spotlighted efforts to combat illegal dumping through the “Keep2Clean” program, which combines education, community engagement,

and enforcement. “If you keep the community clean, it becomes absolutely more attractive for families to come in, businesses to be built, and for kids to be able to walk and play in the neighborhoods,” Garcia said.

The commissioner emphasized support for small businesses through the “Biz to Empower” accelerator, which has graduated 123 entrepreneurs since 2022, generating more than \$12 million in economic impact. He also encouraged local residents to prepare for the economic opportunities expected from the upcoming FIFA World Cup, projected to bring \$2 billion to the region.

Continued. See NC CHAMBER  
INSTALLS 2026 BOARD, Page 5

### IN THE STARS

Gold Medalist  
Simone Biles  
Black History  
Month Honoree

1<sup>st</sup> of a series...

By Allan Jamail

February 3, 2026 – this year 2026 marks a century of national commemorations of Black history. Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson, George Cleveland Hall, William B. Hartgrove, Jesse E. Moorland, Alexander L. Jackson, and James E. Stamps institutionalized the teaching, study, dissemination, and commemoration of Black history when they founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) on September 9, 1915.

Continued. See BLACK  
HISTORY MONTH, Page 4

## UIL Realignment for 2026-2028 Football Districts Released

By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

The football gods in Austin have spoken and change is a comin’.

Each biennium, the University Interscholastic League in Austin gathers the enrollment figures for every high school in the state of Texas called ‘Snapshot Friday’ and then goes to work on realignment. The aim of the changeup every two years is fairness and addressing growth or the lack thereof in schools across the state. Some schools move up a division, some move down.

Region 3, District 23-6A was one of the most well-known districts around the state drawing such nicknames as the ‘Little SEC’ and ‘District of Doom’ (DOD). The district included powerhouses in North Shore, Summer Creek, C. E. King, and Atascocita, all



of whom have achieved the Regional Finals, and some on to the state semi-finals and title games. The Mustangs secured their sixth state championship last year, while cross-channel rival C. E. King reached the state finals for the first time in program history. This marked only the third occasion that teams from the same district with North Shore competed in both the Division 1 and Division 2 title games: NS and C. E. King (2025), NS and Summer Creek (2023),

and NS and West Brook (2018).

Thus far, two coaches have left the DOD over the last two years: Craig Stump, Atascocita, 2025; and George Young, C. E. King. It’s a pressure-cooker environment and tough to compete in week after week.

There was speculation that the DOD would break up this time around moving the Humble schools out and the Pasadena schools in, but that didn’t happen. The DOD lives.

Goose Creek Memorial (GCM) moved into the district two years ago but dropped down into Conference 5A Division 1 and will join sister school Baytown Sterling, Beaumont United, Beaumont West Brook, Galveston Ball, La Porte, Lufkin, New Caney, and Port Arthur Memorial.

The District of Doom has moved from District 23-6A and reformed into District 17-6A. Channelview, North Shore, Humble, Atascocita, Kingwood, Summer Creek, and C. E. King all remain in the district. Moving in to take the place of GCM will be Crosby who moved up into the 6A Division this year by a mere three students—2218 with a cutoff for 6A at 2215.

It couldn’t be a rougher introduction to the more fast-paced, physical play of 6A than joining the DOD. Enrollment in Crosby is

booming with approximately 10,000 new homes to be built in the east Harris County area over the next 10 years.

The Cougars’ new head coach Jabara Williams feels like they will be ready.

“We report the numbers and the UIL gives us our district,” he said.

Williams biggest concern was depth. North Shore’s enrollment almost double that of Crosby, giving them an advantage with a deeper pool to draw from.

“I see our numbers growing and that’s the biggest difference between 5A and 6A,” he said.

Williams said he saw the move up as a challenge.

“The work that we put in day in and day out that’s what we work for. It might

Continued. See UIL REALIGNMENT  
RESHAPES DISTRICT, Page 5

## Barge Industry Commandeers San Jacinto River; raises health concerns



By Salina Arredondo  
Public Health Watch

Over the past three decades, the San Jacinto River east of Houston has seen a dramatic increase in oil and chemical barge traffic, rising from about 100 barges in 1990 to at least 600 today. This growth, driven by the needs of Houston’s

refineries, chemical plants, and pipeline terminals, has transformed the river into a critical extension of the Houston Ship Channel—one of the nation’s busiest shipping corridors for petrochemicals and related products.

However, for the 54,000 residents of Channelview and Highlands, this indus-

trial expansion has brought significant environmental and safety concerns. Air quality in these unincorporated communities ranks among the worst in the country. While industrial facilities along the Ship Channel are often

Continued. See BARGES  
COMMANDEER RIVER, Page 2

## KEENEY’S KORNER Will Seattle’s defense end Patriots Dream season in Super Bowl 60?

And now, there are two left standing!

The New England Patriots and Seattle Seahawks will meet in Super Bowl 60 after winning their respective conference titles in decidedly different ways.

The Patriots, who finished 3-14 a year ago, won a hard-fought defensive struggle in the snow in Denver advanced to an NFL-record 12th Super Bowl with a 10-7 win thanks to cornerback Christian Gonzalez’s late interception against Broncos back-up quarterback Jared Stidham late in the fourth quarter, while Seattle road the hot hand of journey-man QB Sam Darnold to a thrilling 31-27 win over the Los Angeles Rams in the NFL title game.

While the Patriots will be playing in their 12th



KEENEY’S  
KORNER  
BY  
MIKE KEENEY

Big Game, Seattle will be playing in its fourth.

Both teams took different routes to reach SB 60, which will be played Sunday in Santa Clara, CA (home stadium of the San Francisco 49ers) at 5:30 p.m. local time on NBC (Channel 2).

After finishing 4-13 for the second straight season, New England owner Robert Kraft fired head coach Jared Mayo and brought former Patriots linebacker Mike Vrabel in to turn things around, and boy, did he

ever.

Vrabel, who won three Lombardi Trophies playing for legendary head coach Bill Belichick, did one of the best coaching jobs in recent memory as he turned his team around in just one year. In those three SB wins, Vrabel caught two touchdowns passes (during his career, he caught 12 passes, which were all touchdowns).

Seattle head coach

Continued. See SUPER BOWL  
PREVIEW, Page 6

# Barges commandeer river, raise health, safety alarms for ship channel communities,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

blamed, data from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) indicates that barge operations released 5.1 million pounds of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in 2023—28% more than the county's largest refinery. VOCs such as benzene and toluene are linked to increased cancer risks, with some neighborhoods facing cancer rates up to three times the national average.

Regulatory oversight is limited. Barges are not required to obtain air pollution permits or directly report emissions; instead, the TCEQ relies on self-reported data from industrial sites. Emissions from barges while traveling or moored are not systematically monitored by any agency, despite evidence that these releases are substantial. Experts and former regulators have noted that the true scale of emissions is likely underestimated, and the issue remains largely unaddressed.

Beyond air quality, the concentration of barges poses physical risks. Barges must navigate near an underwater Superfund site contaminated with dioxin and pass under the low Interstate 10 bridge. Past incidents include a 1994 barge collision that caused a gasoline fire, a 1997 dredging accident that released dioxin, and a 2019 storm that sent multiple barges crashing into the

bridge and Superfund site. These events highlight the potential for environmental disasters, especially during severe weather.

Despite these risks, the Port of Houston continues to expand barge access, citing economic benefits. The Ship Channel generates \$439 billion annually, representing 20% of Texas' GDP. Barges account for 90% of vessel traffic, and further growth is expected as the channel is widened and new petrochemical plants are built. Local officials acknowledge the industry's importance but express concern about inadequate risk management.

Harris County Commissioner Adrian Garcia, a Democrat who represents parts of Channelview and Highlands, sees the barge industry's growth as a sign of progress.

"Let me just give a shout-out to the barge companies," Garcia told Public Health Watch. "When I see barge activity and the growth of barges in the area, it just says our industry is still strong and it's growing and they're needed there."

Garcia said he'd like barges to use cleaner technology, but "in the meantime, you know, I can't regulate industry."

County Commissioner Tom Ramsey, who also represents the area, is more cautious in his support.

Ramsey, a Republican, worked for decades as an engineer for companies along the Ship Channel. He knows how valuable Houston's industry is to Texas and the U.S. economy. But he also knows a looming disaster when he sees one.

"I like economic development ... but it ought to be done with an understanding of what the impacts are," Ramsey said. "When you put barge traffic north of I-10, knowing you've got a Superfund site, knowing that the bridge is probably lower than you would feel comfortable with ... well, you just have created a catastrophe."

Residents have limited influence over barge approvals, as Channelview and Highlands lack municipal governments. The Port of Houston controls leasing and exclusion zones, with little transparency or opportunity for public input. Recent efforts to restrict barge access have not addressed the most vulnerable areas near the I-10 bridge and Superfund site. Community advocates continue to push for greater oversight and protection, emphasizing the need for regulatory reform and public engagement.

Public Health Watch reporters David Leffler, Shelby Jouppi and Savanna Strott contributed to this article. The entire story may be found on our website.

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

# SHELDON ISD NEWS District Spelling Bee Winners Crowned



Sheldon's elementary and middle schools put forth their best spellers in the District Spelling Bee contest. The top three champions emerged after fierce competition. First place winner Niko Martinez, from Garrett Elementary, advances to the regional contest in March. Congratulations to our SISR spelling bee winners!

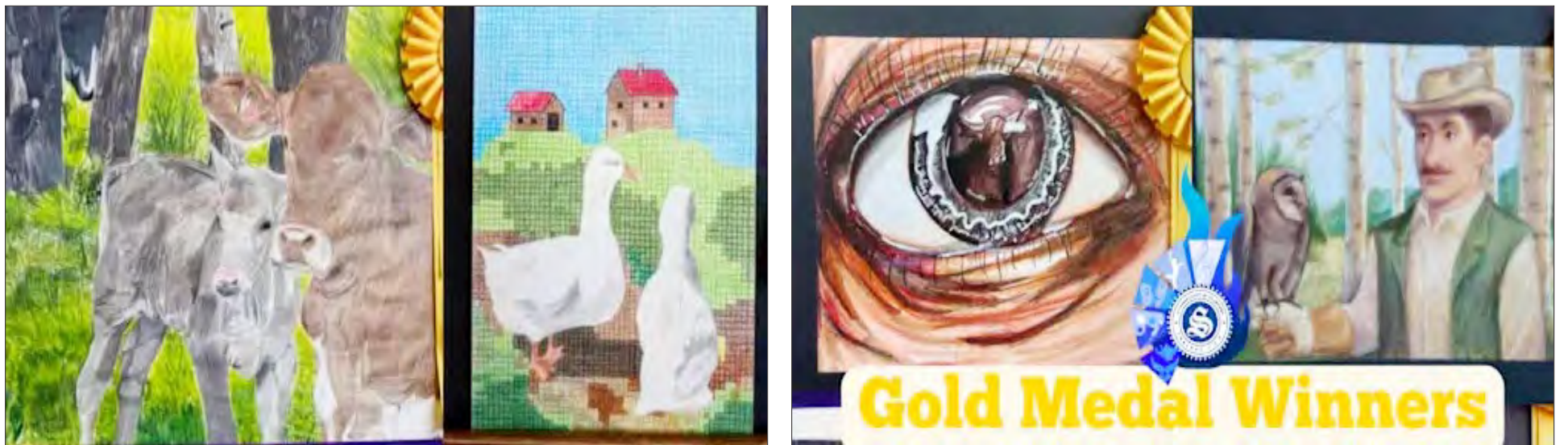
The atmosphere was filled with focus and determination as Sheldon ISD hosted its annual District Spelling Bee. The event brought together the top spellers from every elementary and middle school in the district, each competing for the chance to represent Sheldon at the regional level. Having already secured victories at their home campuses, these students demonstrated elite literacy skills, composure, and academic dedication throughout several rigorous rounds of competition.

Sheldon ISD is proud to announce the top three performers from the 2026 District Spelling Bee:

- \*1st Place (District Champion): Niko Martinez – Garrett Elementary School
- \*2nd Place: Naia Iniguez – Sheldon Elementary School
- \*3rd Place: Melissa Jimenez – C.E. King Middle School

As the first-place winner, Niko Martinez will officially represent Sheldon ISD at the Houston Community College Regional Scripps Spelling Bee in March 2026. This prestigious competition brings together the most talented spellers from throughout the Greater Houston area.

# 7 Sheldon ISD Artists Earn Places at Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo




Sheldon ISD is proud to announce that seven student artists have earned distinguished honors in the 2026 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR) School Art Program. Following a rigorous selection process, these students were awarded either Best of Show or Gold Medal distinctions for their exceptional talent and creative vision. Artwork will also be featured at the district Winter Art Show on February 3rd.

Sheldon ISD is proud to announce that seven student artists have earned distinguished honors in the 2026 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR) School Art Program. Following a rigorous selection process amongst 150 public and private schools in the Houston area, these students were awarded either Best of Show or Gold Medal distinctions for their exceptional talent and creative vision.

As a result of this prestigious recognition, these seven artworks will be professionally curated and displayed in the Hayloft Gallery at NRG Center during the duration of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. We encourage families visiting the Houston Rodeo this year to view these outstanding works of art.

- Best of Show Honors**
- Braelynn Adams, Sheldon Lake Elementary – "Rodeo World"
  - Sofia Zuniga, M.R. Null Middle School – "A Horse's Light"
  - Angelina Ruiz, C.E. King High School – "Old Texas"
- Gold Medal Honors**
- Lael Silva, Sheldon Lake Elementary – "Reflections"
  - Rodrigo Roa, C.E. King Middle School – "Hazel and Fawn"
  - April Phat, C.E. King High School – "Barny and Nathan"
  - Maria Mendoza, C.E. King High School – "Granny Ducks"



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## CHARLOTTE'S WEB

By Charlotte Jackson



### Loving Life, Celebrating Relationships

January ended with some amazing events and February is following at an even higher speed. On Friday, January 30, the North Channel Area Chamber hosted their 49<sup>th</sup> Installation and Awards Banquet and to say that a great time was had by all would be an understatement. With a packed house, there were few empty seats and plenty of smiles. To look around the room and see some of the founding members, plenty of former Chairmen and many long-time members was filled with great memories. And to see so many new members representing agencies, businesses, non-profits and individuals was amazing. There were attendees such as Bill and Debbie Palko who have impacted thousands of lives with their dedication to the Chamber and the community, as well as guests such as Jonathan Rodriguez and Sambo Juardo who just recently accepted positions with Harris County Public Health as Creditable Messengers to the community was awesome.

Guest speaker was Commissioner Adrian Garcia and as he explained the current and planned improvements, you could feel optimism as never before. He recognized Luz Lopez, who serves as a Community Liaison for the North Channel Area on many of the projects she has been involved in and continues to expand. Perhaps one of the most impactful projects has been the Adopt-a-Road where she has enlisted community volunteers to clean our roads.

Moving into Saturday, it was a day of political events starting with a breakfast hosted for Precinct Chairs by Candidate Audrie Lawton Evans, who is making history and campaigning as the first woman and first Black woman for Harris County Attorney. Her passion for serving has spread like wildfire as former County Attorney Christian Menefee had announced his intention for running for US Congressional District 18. And the day ended with him winning that seat which had been vacant since the untimely death of Congressman Sylvester Turner.

Saturday evening, legendary North Shore Basketball Coach Randy Weisinger returned to his roots and spoke to a large crowd not only of his former players, but many of his friends from North Shore Class of 1978 and more. He was the guest speaker at Fellowship of the Nations, sharing how amazing God has been to him and his wife, the former Leigh Ann Kilgo, also from North Shore. Over their journey, he has defeated cancer, lost two young grandchildren and was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, yet throughout it all, God has proven himself faithful and their faith has been tremendously impacted. He shared with friends and family about how he knows he has an even greater testimony to share now and this will not be his last engagement in North Shore.

On Sunday, Next Generation Church kicked off an amazing service featuring Gospel performer Robert Hawkins, special guest Dr Leticia Plaummer, candidate for Harris County Judge and special recognition from US Congressional District 18, Congressman Al Green and State Senator Borris Miles recognizing Mrs. Lurlean Dixon for her unending dedication to East Harris County.

I concluded the weekend by attending Houston Interfaith Ministries Dinner to kick off Weekend of Welcome. Over 200 guests of many faiths joined together to find the similarities between the attendees.

## Former Student Arrested After Online Threats Target North Shore Sr. High

By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

GALENA PARK, Texas – An 18-year-old former student of Galena Park ISD, James Manuel Tamez, was arrested Friday morning after allegedly making violent threats online to attack North Shore Senior High School, according to Harris County court records.

Authorities say the threats were posted on January 14 via Roblox, an online gaming platform, where Tamez allegedly wrote messages threatening a mass shooting at the school, referencing nail bombs and expressing intent to harm students. The alarming posts were reported by a concerned citizen who contacted school administrators, prompting an immediate investigation.

Screenshots of the messages, which included explicit threats and disturbing language, were shared with law enforcement.

Two particular screenshots of the threats were captured and presented to North Shore Senior High School Deputy Principal Dayne Robins.

Tamez allegedly wrote, "I will shoot up the school (NSHS) on 1-18-2026. I am dangerous someone stop me. There are nail bombs in the rotunda. I will pop the kids." "I will kill minors and rape dead bodies LOL," he is alleged to have written in a second screen shot.

The Texas Department of Public Safety's Fusion Center traced the origin of the messages to an IP address linked to Tamez's residence. When confronted by investigators who knocked on his door, his father answered and investigators told him why they were there. When Tamez was summoned to the door, they asked Tamez if he had been playing Roblox the previous night with the reportee and he answered he had.

Investigators then wanted to know if he had made the threat regarding shooting up the school. According to court documents, James denied making the threat and said that he did not know who authored it.

Even after James was shown screenshots of the online conversation between himself and a reportee, he continued to deny authoring the threatening message.

One of the investigators told him that the Fusion Center had identified his residence as the source IP address for the threatening message. Court records show that James responded in a cocky manner and requested to see the IP address for comparison. The agent declined and reiterated that the threat had been traced to James's residence.

James continued to deny responsibility and stated that if he admitted to the offense, he would be arrested.

Deputies presented the case to the Harris County District Attorney's Office who accepted the charges and a warrant was issued.

Tamez was arrested the next morning.

A judge set bond at \$25,000 and imposed strict conditions, including no contact with North Shore Senior High School students or staff, and a prohibition on accessing online messaging platforms. Tamez is required to comply with supervision by Harris County Pretrial Services and must appear in court as scheduled.

The case remains under investigation, and authorities emphasize that all threats against schools are taken seriously and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Galena Park ISD was contacted for comment, but school has been out because of the weather.

## ASK DIAMOND JIM



### Diamond Jim: "Is it possible to turn lead into gold?"

Physicists at the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland accidentally produced gold while smashing lead atoms together at near-light speeds, according to a report in *The Independent*.

The feat was achieved by creating an extremely powerful electric field, strong enough to strip protons from lead nuclei, effectively transforming them into gold.

This was, of course, the dream of Medieval alchemists. Today, we know that lead and gold are different elements, and no amount of chemistry is going to turn one into the other. But our modern knowledge also tells us the basic difference between an atom of lead and an atom of gold is a matter of protons: the lead atom contains exactly three more protons. So, to create a gold atom, it simply requires pulling three protons out of a lead atom. Simple, right?

Not quite, and there's no need to fear the price of gold is about to crash.

The physicists working on the ALICE experiment at the Large Hadron Collider were trying to smash lead atoms into each other at extremely high speeds in an effort to mimic the state of the universe just after the Big Bang. But when they miss during such experiments and one lead nucleus zooms by another, the electric field between them is huge. The rapidly changing field between the nuclei makes them vibrate and occasionally spit out some protons. If one of them spits out exactly three protons, the lead nucleus has turned into gold. But extremely small amounts, in fact: a total of some 29 trillionths of a gram.

Given the multi-billion-dollar cost of building a collider, the hundreds of millions it takes every year to run one, and the output — a handful of gold atoms — it's probably the most-expensive, least-efficient gold production method imaginable — and makes gold at \$5,000 an ounce look like a bargain.

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](http://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 [jimills@pineforestjewelry.com](mailto:jimills@pineforestjewelry.com).

## Legendary Coach Randy Weisinger Returns to North Shore to Share Faith Journey Amid Health Challenges

By Charlotte Jackson,

North Shore, TX – On Saturday, January 31, the North Shore community welcomed back a beloved figure, Coach Randy Weisinger, a 1978 graduate and former basketball coach of the NS Mustangs. Known for his remarkable coaching career, Weisinger achieved an overall win/loss record of 328-96 and was honored as one of the UIL's Top 100 Basketball Coaches in 100 Years. His tenure at North Shore was marked by 11 consecutive Post-Season Playoff Appearances.

Despite his achievements, Weisinger returned to his roots with a deeper mission. He shared his testimony of faith, highlighting God's faithfulness throughout his life, which has been marked by significant challenges, including cancer, the loss of two young grandchildren, and a recent Parkinson's Disease diagnosis. His determination to reach others for Christ remains unwavering, even more so than during his basketball days.

The event was attended by long-time friends, Pastor Johnny Brady and Pastor Robert Dix-



Coach Randy Weisinger and many of his friends and former players who showed up for the event at Fellowship of the Nations on 01/31/2026 to hear his testimony



Mrs. Lurlean Dixon receiving awards from US Congressional District 18, Congressional District 9 and State Senator Borris Miles. Pictured are Yrobia Harris, Mrs. Dixon, Pastor Robert Dixon and Mrs Anita Dixon

on, along with numerous former classmates, colleagues, and players. In a testament to his lasting impact, Galena Park ISD named the gymnasium "The Randy Weisinger Gymnasium" in August 2021. Although Weisinger and his wife, Leigh Kilgo Weisinger, have since moved away from Houston, North Shore continues to hold a special place in their hearts.

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OPINION PAGE

Gold medalist Simone Biles,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Simone Biles, USA gymnast with record breaking

a seven-time champion on vault, balance beam, and floor exercise, a two-time uneven bars champion, and the only woman to win all five gold medals in a single championships twice.

Simone is the sixth woman to win an individual all-around title at both the Olympics and the World Championships and the first since 1996 to hold both titles simultaneously. She is the tenth female gymnast and first American female gymnast to win a World medal on every event, and the first female gymnast since Daniela Siliva in 1988 to win a medal on every event at a single Olympics or World Championships.

Biles is the originator of the most difficult skill on women's vault, balance beam, and floor exercise and the only gymnast to attempt each skill to date. In 2022, President Joe Biden awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2023, she won her eighth U.S. Gymnastics title, breaking the 90-year-old U.S. Gymnastics title record previously held by Alfred Jochim. Biles has won the Laureus World Sports-woman of the Year four times and Comeback of the Year once (2024).

Biles was born on March 14, 1997, in Columbus, Ohio, the third of four siblings. Her birth mother, Sharon Biles, was unable to care for Simone or her other children. All four went in and out of foster care.

In 2000, Biles's maternal grandfather, Ron Biles, and his second wife, Nellie Cayetano Biles, began caring temporarily for Sharon's children in the north Houston suburb of Spring, Texas, after learning his grandchildren were in foster care. In 2003, the couple formally adopted Simone and her younger sister Adria. Ron's sister, Sharon's aunt Harriet, adopted the two oldest children. Simone holds Belizean citizenship through her adoptive mother and considers Belize to be her second home. Biles and her family is Catholic.

Biles attended Benfer Elementary School in Harris County, Texas. In 2012, Biles switched from public school to home schooling, allowing her to increase her training from about 20 to 32 hours a week. She earned her high-school diploma in mid-2015. Biles verbally committed to UCLA on August 4, 2014, and signed a National Letter of Intent in November 2014, planning to defer enrollment until after the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Instead, on July 29, 2015, she announced that she would turn professional and forfeit her NCAA eligibility to compete for UCLA.

She began dating professional American football player Jonathan Owens in August 2020. They met through the dating app Raya. Biles announced her engagement to Owens on February 15, 2022, and they were married on April 22, 2023.

In September 2017, Biles spoke about having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) after her medical records were leaked online, revealing that she had been taking Ritalin (methylphenidate) to treat the condition during the Olympics. Having been diagnosed as a child, she had previously disclosed her condition to the World Anti-Doping Agency and obtained a medical exemption, allowing her to take the medication during competition. Biles said that ADHD is "nothing to be ashamed of and nothing that I'm afraid to let people know."

Biles underwent a breast augmentation in June 2025 and have openly discussed details of the procedure. She has also disclosed receiving other cosmetic plastic surgery procedures including a lower blepharoplasty and earlobe surgery.

Black History Month, a month long commemoration of African American history and achievement that takes place each February in the United States. It began in 1976. From February 1, 2026 – March 1, 2026 people in the United States will celebrate the achievements and history of African Americans as part of Black History Month.

This week NC Star writer Allan Jamail selected USA Gold Medalist Gymnast Simone Biles Owens for his first of a series recognizing Black History Month/ African Americans and their achievements.

She's the most decorated U. S. female gymnast, holding a record of 11 Olympic medals- 7 gold-2silver-2bronze as of the 2024 Paris Games. She is also the most decorated gymnast in history overall, with 30 World Championship medals (23 gold).

Simone Arianne Biles Owens (née Biles; born March 14, 1997) is an American artistic gymnast. She is widely regarded as one of the greatest gymnasts of all time and one of the greatest female athletes in history. With 11 Olympic medals she has the most Olympic medals ever earned by a U.S. gymnast.

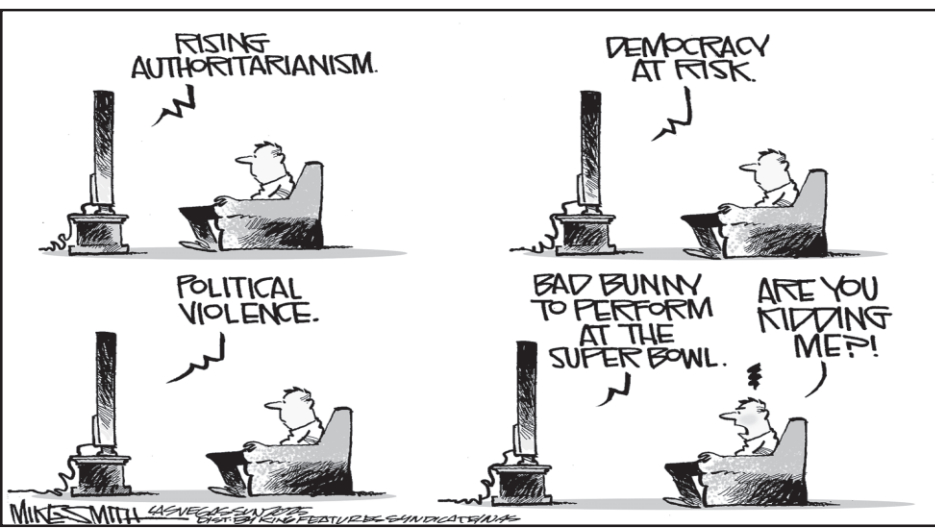
Biles is known for performing extraordinarily difficult skills well. Her 2023 routine on vault and her 2024 routine on floor exercise are the most difficult ever performed in women's artistic gymnastics. As of 2024, she is the sole gymnast to have competed four skills valued at H or higher in the 2022–2024 Code of Points on floor exercise.

At the Olympic Games, Biles is a two-time gold medalist in the individual all-around. She is also a two-time champion on vault, the 2016 champion and 2024 silver medalist on floor exercise, and a two-time bronze medalist on balance beam. Biles led the gold medal-winning United States teams in 2016, dubbed the "Final Five," and in 2024, dubbed the "Golden Girls".

At the 2020 Summer Olympics, where she was favored to win at least four of the six available gold medals, she withdrew from most of the competition after the qualification round due to "the twisties", a temporary loss of air awareness while performing twisting elements. She won a silver medal with the United States team nicknamed the "Fighting Four".

At the World Championships, she is the most decorated - male or female - artistic gymnast of all time with 30 total medals in which 23 of them are Gold. Biles is a six-time individual all-around champion, six-time floor exercise champion, and four-time balance beam champion, all record-high totals. She is also a two-time vault champion and a member of a record-high five gold medal-winning United States teams. She is also a four-time World silver medalist on vault, on uneven bars, a three-time World bronze medalist on vault, on balance beam.

Domestically, Biles has won a record-high nine United States national all-around championships; her win in 2024 made her the oldest female gymnast to ever win the title. She is also



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Gary Borders



Power Grid Holds up During Wintry Blast

The electricity grid that covers most of Texas was holding up as of Sunday during the latest winter storm, although localized power outages were reported in Deep East Texas and far West Texas.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas dashboard indicated demand was running comfortably below available capacity. As of Sunday, more than 128,000 customers were without power, according to poweroutage.us, with the most being reported in Nacogdoches, Cherokee, and Rusk counties.

"Based on expected weather conditions, ERCOT anticipates there will be sufficient generation to meet demand," a spokesperson for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas said. "ERCOT will continue to deploy all available resources to manage the grid reliably and coordinate closely with the Public Utility Commission, generation providers, and transmission utilities."

Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration just prior to the storm for 134 Texas counties to ensure adequate resources were available to Texans.

CROCKETT, TALARICO HOLD FIRST DEBATE

U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett and state Rep. James Talarico both presented themselves as fighters during their first debate in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate, held in Georgetown last Saturday. The two are competing to face the GOP primary winner. Incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn faces challengers Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt.

The two Democrats debated for an hour, The Texas Tribune reported. Crockett pitched herself as a political brawler who could expand the electorate, while Talarico emphasized his Christian faith and record fighting "tooth and nail" in the Texas House.

DATA CENTERS COULD STRAIN WATER SUPPLY

A new report says the boom in data centers across Texas could consume nearly 3% of the state's water by 2030, the Houston Chronicle reported. The Houston Advanced Research Center found the data centers, used to power artificial intelligence,



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Gary Borders

used 25 billion gallons of water in 2025. That amount could increase to 161 billion gallons annually by 2030.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas has already been warning that the data centers, which also require vast amounts of electricity, could potentially strain the state's power grid. ERCOT oversees most of the state's power grid.

"The data center surge presents a unique challenge that requires immediate attention," said HARC President John Hall. An estimated 575 data centers are already in place, concentrated in Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, Houston and San Antonio.

Texas lawmakers last year passed a law setting up a \$20 billion water fund, with \$1 billion disbursed annually starting in 2027 for infrastructure, after an initial allocation of \$2.5 billion.

ABBOTT ENDORSES MILLER'S GOP CHALLENGER

Gov. Greg Abbott has endorsed the Republican primary challenger to Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, the Austin American-Statesman reported. Abbott said he is backing challenger Nate Sheets because he is "committed to fighting for the best interests of Texas agriculture, upholding the rule of law, and restoring integrity."

Miller is seeking his fourth term to the office he has held since 2015. He has strong ties to President Donald Trump and was the first statewide elected official to endorse his candidacy in 2016. Sheets is a beekeeper and owns a honey company.

To date, Trump has made no endorsement in this year's primary.

QUORUM-BUSTING HOUSE DEMS FINED

The Texas House Demo-

crats who left the state last summer to delay a bid to redraw congressional maps each now face more than \$9,000 in fines, the Statesman reported. That includes \$7,000 in penalties for being absent and another \$2,354 to cover the costs the state spent trying to bring them back to the Capitol.

The members have until Feb. 9 to appeal. House Democratic Caucus leader Gene Wu, D-Houston, said members plan to protest to the House Administration Committee

"Breaking quorum is a constitutional right, and we will use every tool available to challenge these fines," Wu said. More than 50 of the 62 House Democrats flew to Chicago to stop the attempt by GOP members to redraw the maps in order to give Republicans a likely additional five seats. The walkout lasted two weeks.

Upon their return, the redistricting plan passed in the GOP-controlled Legislature and was signed into law. It triggered similar mid-decade redistricting attempts by both parties in other states.

ORPHANED OIL AND GAS WELLS REACH RECORD HIGH

The number of orphaned wells in Texas climbed above 11,000 by the end of last year, breaking a 20-year record, according to the Chronicle.

The Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates the state's oil and gas industry, reported about 2,000 new wells joined the list last year, bringing the total to 11,123. Orphaned wells are not actively maintained and have no operator on file at the commission. That means responsibility for cleaning and plugging them is on the state. The price of oil fell roughly 20% last year, meaning more companies have gone bankrupt or out of business. The defunct operations sometimes leave unplugged wells behind.

"While there has been a recent increase in these populations due to various external factors such as operator bankruptcies and aging wells, we are in the process of taking significant actions to increase our well plugging efforts," said Bryce Dubea, a spokesman for the Railroad Commission.

APPEALS COURT REHEARS IMMIGRATION LAW CHALLENGE

A 2023 law giving state police authority to arrest people suspected of crossing the border into Texas illegally is once again before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which blocked the law from taking effect in the initial legal challenge. The court heard oral arguments last week, The Texas Tribune reported.

The Biden administration sued to block the law after its passage, arguing that policing immigration rests with the federal government alone. A three-judge panel upheld an injunction blocking the law. Since then the state has appealed, asking for the case to be reheard by the entire 17-judge appeals court.

At the time the law passed in December 2023, the U.S. Border Patrol reported nearly 250,000 encounters with migrants along the border with Mexico. That number has plummeted in the past year, with just 4,264 migrant apprehensions reported in December.

THE POSTSCRIPT By Carrie Classon

When Animals Talk



In Sweden, there used to be a widespread belief that animals could talk on Christmas Eve.

My Swedish mother read me stories about this as a child, and it is true. Apparently throughout Scandinavia, folks would give their animals treats so they wouldn't speak badly of them. This part makes me doubtful—not that the animals got treats, but that anything I gave my cat, Felix, would prevent him from giving his opinion—with or without the ability to speak.

Felix would tell you that he thinks he should get more treats all of the year and that he has grown tired of his current cat food and that he thinks he should get brushed at least an hour every day and that—under no circumstances—does he want his nails trimmed. He says this all the time. He just says it in Cat.

But I like the reminder to treat our pets especially kindly over the holidays because, whether or not they are talking about us, I'm sure the holiday season is chaotic and confusing. People are coming and going at strange times. Strangers come to the house, and the people who are supposed to be there are gone for long periods of time. Sometimes, our pets are asked to wear silly costumes and get a bath and then are taken to strange places, which I'm sure is exciting but also rather nerve-racking.

Lately, I've been giving out dog treats on my walks. I ask the owner if their dog would like a treat and, if it's OK, I give the dog a little holiday snack. Some are skeptical until they taste it. Some won't take it from my hand but will take it from their owner. But most dogs are happy to get a treat. I wish them a happy holiday and, when I see them again, they tug on their leash and, if they could talk they'd say, "Hey! It's the treat lady!"

There isn't much that makes me happier than making an animal happy, and I'm guessing that is how the Swedes felt when they gave the dog a bone or brought an extra bucket of oats to the cows. It must have been a reminder, when they looked into those surprised cows' eyes, that this day was different. Long before there was a Christmas to celebrate, there was the longest night of the year and, in Scandinavia, that would be a very long night indeed.

That night of the winter solstice, when the sun set so early and the dark lasted so long, would be a good time to remember the animals who had no way of knowing when the sun would be closer or when the days would be warmer or when the darkness would not last so long. Those animals would see the dark and feel the cold, just as their owners did, and they would want a little reassurance. They would want a bone to chew on or a little bigger supper. They would want the backs of their ears scratched and a reminder that they were not alone and they would not go hungry.

And that is what we all need—that is really all we need—this time of year. We need to be reminded that we are not alone. We have others who care about us. We will have a meal with a little something special about it, and we will remind others that they are cared for.

I will try to do that. With all the animals in my life—and all the people, too.

Till next time, Carrie

Advertisement for Star Courier newspaper, including contact information for Gilbert Hoffman, Mei-Ing Liu Hoffman, David Taylor, Julieta Paita, Kristan Hoffman, and Gerardo Hernandez. Also includes subscription rates and address information.

# NC Chamber installs 2026 board. honors community leadership at Annual Gala,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Addressing social challenges, Garcia announced the opening of the Channelview Foundation of Hope, a new facility offering workforce and youth development programs, health services, and homeless outreach. "We need to be compassionate, thoughtful, and strong," Garcia said, referencing the countywide 'Employ to Empower' program that helps individuals facing homelessness find employment and housing.

The gala also recognized the achievements of local students and organizations. The William C. Palko Scholarship, a \$5,000 award, was presented to Jasmine Lopez, a North Shore High School graduate and San Jacinto College student pursuing a degree in cybersecurity. Additional scholarships were awarded to Sinai Hernandez and Sasha De Paz for their academic and career aspirations in technology and design.

Chamber President Margie Buentello and outgoing Board Chair Ken Wimberley presented milestone awards to longstanding members, including Woodforest National Bank, Port Houston, HCA Houston Healthcare Southeast, Sheldon ISD, Houston Methodist Baytown Hospital, Arkema Inc., and Capital Bank, honoring up to 45 years of membership.

The Chamber named Courtyard by Marriott Houston Northeast as Business of the Year and recognized Sheldon Independent School District as Organization of the Year for their commitment to community engagement



New Board Chamber with Lucia Bates. Foto Credit: State Rep. Ana Hernandez Facebook



Ana Hernandez and Adrian Garcia among other attendees



Color Guard. CV Tory Hill, Steve Dennis Board.

and student success. Other honorees included Debbie Palko as Ambassador of the Year, Chad Moody of Arkema Inc. as Board Member of the Year, Erin Kerr with LyondellBasell as Committee Member of the Year, and Darnell Kimball as recipient of the Dr. Ed Lehr Chairman's Award.

As the evening concluded, incoming Board Chair Dr. Alexander Okwonna expressed gratitude for the opportunity to lead, em-

phasizing the importance of collaboration among businesses, organizations, and residents. "We need business, organizations, and our neighbors working together to ensure that we continue to be a great place to live and work," Okwonna said.

The gala closed with a silent auction and a call for continued community involvement in the year ahead.



Commissioner Adrian Garcia and Tory Hill CV Superintendent



Jasmine Lopez of North Shore HS receiving a \$5k check scholarship.

# UIL realignment reshapes district of doom, welcomes new faces,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

be a small hurdle or a big hurdle, you've just got to be ready to jump," he explained.

Edwin Egans, the new athletic director, said he's spending time evaluating the entire athletic program preparing for the move up. "Being athletic director frees me up to do an overall view of the program, to help our coaches and look at our facilities," he said.

That growth has also affected the Mont Belvieu area where Barbers Hill ISD is growing exponentially as well. Board trustees saw the growth coming and have proposed a \$98 million bond to build a new field house and updates to the stadium to accommodate a 6A Division crowd.

The Eagles move up has a softer landing than the Crosby Cougars moving into District 18-6A with

the likes of Deer Park, Dickinson, Clear Brook, Clear Lake, Clear Creek, Clear Falls, and Clear Springs. While they may have dodged a bullet evading the DOD, should the Eagles make the playoffs next year, their first-round opponent will come from the DOD.

Also on the east side, Galena Park and Baytown Lee renew their decades old rivalry as they join Region 3, 5A Division, District 10. The rivalry had some dramatic moments when on October 13, 1961, the Jackets beat the Ganders 21-15 in front of a packed stadium for the district lead. The win vaulted the undefeated Jackets into the playoffs and a trip to the state title game against Wichita Falls where they lost a nail-biter, 21-14.

One of the area teams that was supposed to move down in the classifications and a regular preseason opponent for the NS Mustangs is Spring Westfield.

The high school fell 70 students short of making the 6A Division cutoff but has opted to stay in 6A to join their sister schools in the same district. Joining Westfield in 6A, Region 2, District 14 again will be Aldine, Benjamin Davis, Eisenhower, MacArthur, Nimitz, Spring, and Spring Dekaney.

With the verification of the district teams, coaches are now inking in their preseason schedule and planning the rest of their seasons.

To see all the realigned districts in every division, visit our website at [www.northchannelstar.com](http://www.northchannelstar.com).

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# IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE 2026 TEXAS PRIMARY ELECTION

<b>JAN 1</b>	First day to apply for a ballot by mail
<b>FEB 2</b>	Last day to register to vote
<b>FEB 17</b>	First day of early voting
<b>FEB 20</b>	Last day for ballot by mail application to be received
<b>FEB 27</b>	Last day of early voting
<b>MAR 3</b>	Election day

## Keeney's Korner: Super Bowl Preview,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mike McDonald arrived in the Emerald City in 2024 after serving as the defensive coordinator for the Baltimore Ravens. McDonald has built one of the best defenses in the NFL, as evidenced by that unit's No. 3 rating (the Texans had the No. 1 rated defense) during the 2025 season.

If Vrabel leads the Pats to their seventh Lombardi Trophy, he would become the first person to win the SB as a player and head coach for the same franchise.

But picking up a seventh title won't be easy against a Seahawks team that is solid on both sides of the ball.

But they have gone 9-0 on the road this year and defeated the Los Angeles Chargers, 16-3, the Texans, 28-16 and Denver, 10-7 to reach the big game. Seattle will pose the biggest test of the season. The 'Hawks are loaded with talent on defense, but in their three playoff wins, the Patriots have beaten the No. 5 defense (LA), the No. 1 defense (Houston) and the No. 2 defense (Denver) to advance to Santa Clara.

Seattle routed San Francisco, 41-6 in the Division round, then outlasted the Rams, 31-27 in the NFC title game to reach Santa Clara. Their defense recorded 47 sacks during the season and have four players with six or more sacks (Byron Murphy, 7, Leonard Williams, 7, Uchenna Nwosu, 7, and DeMarcus Lawrence 6). They allowed just 17.2 points per game, and will look to fluster second-year NE QB Drake Maye (4,394 passing yards, 31 TDs/450 rushing yards, 4 TDs in regular season; 533 passing yards, 4 TDs/141 rushing yards, 1 TD in playoffs) early and force a turnover or two.

Maye's mobility could be a big factor in this game as it was in the AFC title game when he scored his team's lone touchdown on a six-yard run. Seattle's defensive

front will need to keep Maye in the pocket and prevent him from scrambling for big plays, but if he does get loose, the Seahawks linebackers must keep him from getting chunks of yards on the ground. Seattle's linebackers can run, and I wouldn't be surprised if they assigned one of them as a spy to follow Maye all over the field.

But Maye isn't a one-man offense. He has two solid running backs in Rhamondre Stevenson (1,037 yards, 7 TDs/32 receptions, 345 yards, 2 TDs in regular season; 194 rushing yards in playoffs) and TreVeon Henderson (911 yards, 9 TDs/35 receptions, 221 yards, 7 TDs). Henderson hasn't done much in the playoffs, but he could be a key player for New England come Sunday. Look for New England to use him in the passing game hoping he gets free where his explosive speed could be featured.

Maye will look to make plays in the passing game to veteran wideout Stefon Diggs (85 receptions, 1,013 yards, 4 TDs).

While the Seattle defense will present New England with plenty of trouble, so too will the Pats defense. In three playoff games, the New England "D" has allowed 26 points (8.6 per game) and allowed 18 points per game during the regular season. While Seattle is a sack-happy bunch, the Pats are no slouches as evidenced by their 34 sacks in the regular season.

The Seattle offense will present a big test for the Patriots defense as QB Sam Darnold (4,648 yards, 25 TDs/14 interceptions in regular season; 470 yards, 4 TDs in playoffs) is having a career year. Darnold has turned into one of the feel-good stories of the 2025 season. After being drafted third overall by the Jets in 2018, Darnold bounced around to three other teams before landing in Seattle this past offseason. A year

ago, he led Minnesota to 14 wins and a playoff spot, but the team decided not to re-sign him in the offseason and go with J.J. McCarthy as their starting QB. The Vikings loss was Seattle's good fortune as Darnold led Seattle to 16 wins, 5 NFC West title and the top seed in the NFC.

Like Maye, Darnold is not a one-man show on offense. The Seahawks have plenty of weapons in running back Kenneth Walker III (1,027 yards, 5 TDs/31 receptions, 282 yards in regular season; 178 yards, 4 TDs in playoffs) and star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba (119 receptions, 1,793 yards, 10 TDs in regular season; 13 receptions 169 yards 2 TDs in playoffs). Look for Smith-Njigba to have a big day on Sunday. He loves to play in big games and has an uncanny ability to get open. He and Darnold have developed a solid relationship. While Smith-Njigba is definitely the star of the Seattle offense, it might be a secondary player like fellow wideout Cooper Kupp (47 receptions, 593 yards, 2 TDs in regular season) to come up with a key play during Sunday's game. Kupp caught a key touchdown pass in the NFC title game and has grabbed 9 passes for 96 yards in two post season games.

If the Patriots hope to pull off the upset, they can't let Seattle jump on them early. Look for the Patriots defense to try and force Darnold into making a key mistake or two early to give NE confidence. Many think this will be a blowout, but I don't agree with that assessment. New England is a tough football team, just like their head coach, so look for the Pats to be in this one late in the fourth quarter.

But I think when it's all said and done, the Seattle defense will make one or two more key plays late to send the Seahawks to their second Lombardi Trophy. My pick, Seattle 26, New England 23

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LEGAL NOTICE

The Sheldon Independent School District will conduct a public hearing for the 2024-2025 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) on February 17, 2026, as part of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Sheldon ISD Board of Trustees. The meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Sheldon ISD Administration Building located at 11411 C.E. King Parkway, Houston, TX. Texas Education Code B39.053 requires each school district's board of trustees to publish annual performance that includes the TAPR report.

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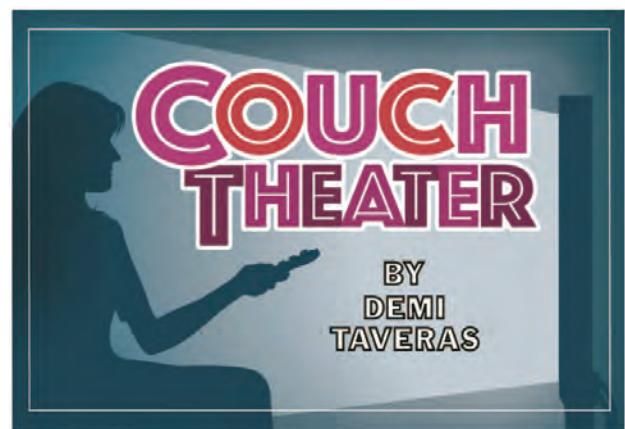
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Timothee Chalamet star in "Marty Supreme."

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"Marty Supreme" (R) — A24 scored another success, both critically and financially...

A'zion). So far, "Marty Supreme" has earned Chalamet a Golden Globe and a Critics' Choice Award for Best Actor...

Winchesters. Millie soon learns that Nina (Seyfried), the mother and wife of the family, is mentally unwell and quickly begins to suffer the consequences of being her housemaid.

"The 68th Annual Grammy Awards" (TV-PG) — CBS just won't let go of Trevor Noah as the host for the Grammys, making it the sixth consecutive time that the comedian has hosted.

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Q:I watch reruns of the old TV series "Castle" on the Lifetime Channel. I know that the actor who plays Castle, Nathan Fillion, is also in "The Rookie," but what happened to the actress who played Kate Beckett? Has she retired from acting? — M.D.

A:"Castle" was a detective-dramedy series that aired on ABC from 2009-2016 and starred Nathan Fillion and Stana Katic. Fillion went on to star in another ABC series called "The Rookie," which is currently in its eighth season.

Katic's career is still going strong, but she's starring in projects that have less of a profile. Most notably, she starred in the Amazon series "Absentia," where she played an FBI agent who was once declared dead but returns to find herself as the prime suspect in a murder.

Katic will star in a series that is currently in development called "Entangled," which is about married CIA agents. But it hasn't started filming, nor has it found a network or a streamer to pick it up once it's been completed.

Q:When is the Nicole Kidman series coming out that is supposed to be based on the Patricia Cornwell mysteries? Where will it air? — D.N.

A:"Scarpetta," starring Nicole Kidman as a forensic pathologist, will debut on Amazon Prime Video beginning March 11. Dr. Kay Scarpetta is the protagonist in almost 30 bestselling novels by Patricia Cornwell.

Q: Who is the actress with the curly hair in the new Peacock series "Ponies"? I know one of the main actresses was in "Game of Thrones," but I don't recognize the other one. I love the show, though. — F.N.



Stana Katic in "Absentia"

A:Yes, that's Emilia Clarke who you recognized; she played Daenerys Targaryen in the epic series "Game of Thrones."

Send me your questions at NewCelebrityExtra@gmail.com.

Back in 2019, she starred opposite Cole Sprouse ("Riverdale") in the coming-of-age film "Five Feet Apart," which was directed by Justin Baldoni.

ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



by Dave T. Phipps



by Bud Blake



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