

CITY SAVVY

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New collective bargaining agreement gives HOPE for a stronger workforce

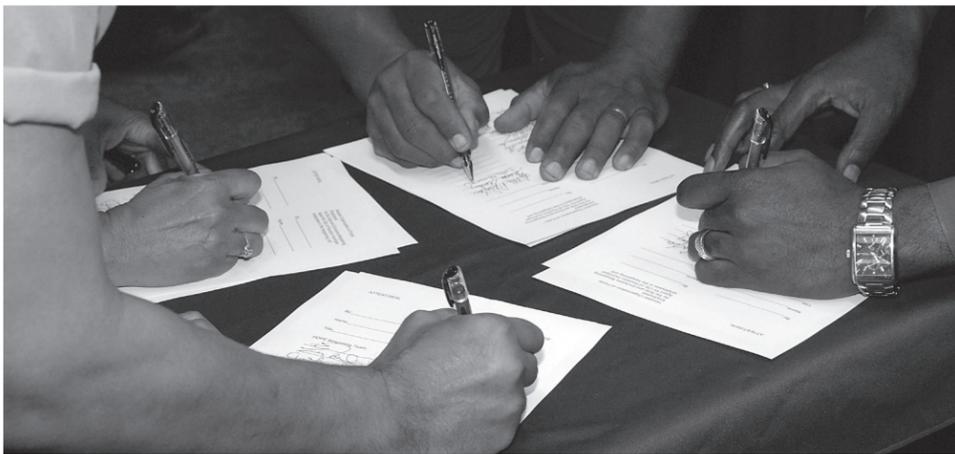


Photo by Julie Keeton

HOPE and city representatives sign the meet-and-confer labor agreement for municipal employees. The agreement went into effect March 26 after being ratified by union members and City Council.

By Dave Schafer

With 13-2 approval by City Council March 26, Houston municipal employees became the first in Texas to be covered by a meet-and-confer agreement. Members of the Houston Organization of Public Employees had ratified the contract March 20 by a 3,202 to seven margin.

The contract, which covers all 13,000-plus municipal employees except directors and elected officials, runs through June 30, 2011.

"It's a proud day for me personally and

for the whole negotiating team," said Damon Russell, Public Works & Engineering, one of 38 city employees who negotiated on behalf of employees. "The whole nation was watching this process. Employees should bask in what they've accomplished and enjoy it.

"This contract gives all city employees a living wage and a voice as to how things are done."

Both sides worked long and hard to come to the agreement, which will cost the city \$179 million, Mayor Bill White said.

"We think it gives employees some certainty about the future, while being responsible and

fair to both our hard-working employees and to our taxpayers," he said.

"This represents probably win, win, win," said Anthony Hall, White's chief administrative officer and one of five who represented the city in negotiations. "It is important that the contract retains all of the city's management prerogatives."

More money

On April 5, municipal employees received a 3 percent pay raise, and the 541 employees making less than \$9.50 an hour saw a bump to \$9.50, with that rate going to \$10 an hour in September 2009.

Meagan Jones, a librarian assistant, liked that.

"It's good. I could always use more money," she said. The \$9.32 an hour she was making helps pay for college. "And the union is fighting for a great cause."

Municipal employees will also receive 3 percent raises in July 2009 and July 2010.

Over the next three fiscal years, 1.25 percent of the payroll budget will be set aside for merit pay. Departments must have plans for how they'll divvy up that money by July 1.

Katie Tomfohrde, librarian II, said the higher pay rates might attract more quality

See HOPE on page 2.

A HERO for those left behind

Nonprofit aids dependents of employees killed on the job

By Dave Schafer

In her hours of greatest devastation, Lisa Norwood met some new best friends.

They knocked on her door three days after a car struck and killed her husband, Public Works & Engineering employee Harold Norwood, while he was cleaning debris from Sabo Street near Almeda Mall.

These strangers at her door introduced themselves as members of the Houston Employee Relief Organization, a new nonprofit that helps the survivors of municipal employees killed on the job. It's like a 100 Club for nonclassified employees.

"We understand that you've had a devastating loss and it's impacted your life," they told her. "We want to see what we can do to assist you."

Within a week of her husband's death, HERO gave Norwood \$2,500, which, along with money from workers' compensation and his life insurance, she used for his funeral.

"We give money, but that's not just what we're here for," said David Miller, HERO's secretary and a Public Works & Engineering assistant real estate manager. "We offer

comfort and are a resource to help grieving spouses navigate the system and their loss. Not just right when it happens, but for a long time afterwards.

"We don't just put down the money on the table and say, 'See ya.'"

"When you're going through something like that, you need someone there to help you," Norwood said. "You're not thinking clearly about what you need to do. So having that help meant so much."

Over the last 20 years, 22 municipal employees have been killed on the job. In workers' comp benefits, their dependents receive 70 percent of the deceased employee's pay. If there are children, half that amount would be divided among them until they are no longer dependents. The spouse will receive the other half, or all 70 percent if there are no children, until death or remarriage.

If the deceased employee was a member of pension groups A or B, the spouse also receives 100 percent of the employee's pay for the rest of her life or until she remarries.

"The city does take care of its own," said

See HERO on page 7.

HPD cadets no more



Photo by Dave Schafer

Elizabeth Blanton shakes Officer Durrell Dickens' hand before walking on stage to get her officer's badge pinned on by Police Chief Harold Hurtt. After six months of training, 54 members of cadet Class 193 graduated at the police academy Jan. 9.

By Dave Schafer

This is the last in a series of stories chronicling the cadets of police academy Class 193.

They ran this floor countless times over the past six months, pumping closer to realizing a dream with each step. Running circles in the academy gym, once, twice, thrice, until sweat dampened the gray T-shirts that stated their last names above the numbers 193.

See CADET on page 6.

WiFi “bubbles” will bridge technology gap



Mayor Bill White

Kaye Marvins Photography

Q. Now that the Earthlink Wi-Fi deal is dead, what's next? Will the city try for another contractor?

A. When Earthlink defaulted on the deal, it paid the city \$5 million in penalties. We're

going to use \$3.5 million of that money to build a wireless network for low-income areas. Our Digital Inclusion Project is a public/private partnership to construct 10 Wireless Empowered Community Access Network “bubbles” that will provide Wi-Fi access to low-income areas.

Residents will tap into these bubbles at community access locations, such as schools, community centers, and multi-service centers. The community access locations will be staffed by volunteers and members of the community organizations where the access is located. Those people will provide computer training and help using online resources. Our goal is to have 15 community access locations for each bubble.

The first bubble is being built in the Gulfton area of southwest Houston. We'll use the rest of the \$3.5 million on nine more locations to be built over the next two years. Library's Nicole Robinson is heading this project.

This is just one of many ways the city is being proactive in improving residents' lives. Look at the topics covered in this issue of City Savvy: the Office of Veterans Affairs to help our underserved veterans; the first express libraries in the nation, smaller libraries that bring all the library's resources, including computers, into areas not being served by a local branch; and more police officers to help keep our neighborhoods safe.

We encouraged the creation of the Houston Employee Relief Organization to help the dependents of municipal employees killed at work. And we worked to get a meet-and-confer labor agreement for municipal employees. An improved work environment makes the city a more attractive place to work and creates a stronger workforce to serve our residents.

I took office pledging to make City Hall more responsive and efficient. These many proactive initiatives are extensions of that pledge and show that the efficiencies stretch well beyond this office and this building.

Do you have a question for the mayor? Send it to hrenewsletter@cityofhouston.net.

New office helps veterans with their affairs

By Dave Schafer

During his 20 years in the Army, retired Maj. Buddy Grantham took care of fellow soldiers. Now, he's doing that for the city of Houston.

In October, Mayor Bill White created the Office of Veterans Affairs in the Mayor's Office and tapped Grantham as its director.

“We must eliminate the red tape and lack of knowledge that creates huge gaps between available services and the men and women who sacrificed so much to earn that help,” White said.

There are more than 304,000 veterans in the greater Houston area, Grantham said.

“As a city, it's our job to help people no matter who they are,” he said. “But for the veterans of this city, to know that the city understands their unique issues and will address them is really something.”

Requests all around

When veterans' spouses need to know about burial benefits, they can call Grantham. When vets are treated unfairly, they can call Grantham. When the Paralyzed Veterans of Texas want to provide tax



As director of veteran affairs, retired Army Maj. Buddy Grantham helps military veterans and their families get the services they're entitled to.

help to members, Grantham gets the call. When military.com or the Texas Veterans Land Board want to hold a jobs workshop for vets, they call Grantham.

“It's coming at me from all directions,” he said.

He never says no to vets, spouses, widows, children, parents, hospitals, or organizations, Grantham said. Most of the questions from veterans are about their benefits.

When he can't solve the problem, Grantham puts them in contact with someone who can.

“I'm not looking to duplicate resources,” he said. “When people don't know where to go, I work on getting them into the right hands. And if the first one doesn't solve their problem, I find someone else.”

Not waiting around

Of the approximately 12,000 homeless in Houston, 4,000 are veterans. That proportion is “out of whack” with population

ratios, Grantham said.

He's working with the American G.I. Forum, WorkSource, U.S. Veterans Initiatives and others to find homes for those veterans.

“There is a lot of help out there,” he said. “Our job is to find out how we can expand those organizations' capacity or encourage new ventures. There has to be more pieces for the puzzle, so we try to

grow more puzzle pieces and make the existing ones stronger.”

He's also working with the Affirmative Action Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs to help disabled vets start small businesses. That would give vets a source of income and something to do while providing the city with more MWDBE contractors.

“That would elevate everyone,” he said. “And vet-run businesses tend to hire vets.”

Health & Human Services has a VA-funded internship program for disabled vets. Through this program, vets gain a new skill and focus on something other than their disability.

“It would allow them to focus on their ability,” he said.

Grantham, who joined the Army right out of Texas A&M, understands veterans' problems. He served in Desert Storm and was a member of the cavalry and the logistics branches before retiring in August 2005.

“This office lets veterans know that someone cares,” he said. “They're so happy that there's someone out there who understands what they're going through. We speak a common language and have a common understanding.”

HOPE continued from page 1.

employees.

“We just can't keep a lot of positions filled because of the lower rate of pay,” she said. “We have people trying to raise families on \$10 or \$12 an hour, and that's not enough.”

Just as importantly, this agreement won't have an adverse financial impact elsewhere, Hall said. The Mayor's Office has run the numbers in its five-year financial forecast.

“Our hope is that because of some of the changes, we'll achieve greater productivity. So, frankly, we ought to see some increased service,” Hall said.

“This will help make us a world-class workforce to go along with a world-class city,” Russell said.

Stronger voice

George Guy, a painter with Parks & Recreation, likes employees having a chance to use their job knowledge to improve how things are done through the new municipal employee consultation committee and departmental employee consultation committees. (See “What you get” box.)

The committees, made up of equal numbers from the union and the city, will meet to discuss employee concerns. They have no decision-making authority.

“We think that having an organization to articulate issues benefits both us and them so we can respond to it by either agreeing or not agreeing and explaining why it is that we do what we do,” Hall said.

“Municipal employees didn't have a voice before,” said Pam Burch, Human Resources. “Now there's hope that things will get better for the next generation.”

Amicable negotiations

For eight years, the city supported state legislation that would make it legal for cities to negotiate with an employee association. That legislation passed two years ago.

Union members and city representatives met 44 times over eleven months to hammer out the deal. Russell characterized the negotiations as “extremely amicable.”

But there were differing views. HOPE pointed out that there were no across-the-board pay raises in 11 of the last 20 years. The city pointed out that, through pay programs and promotions, the average wage of municipal employees has gone up 19 percent compared to the year before White took office.

There were a few things, like a disconnect between managers and their employees, that the city wasn't fully aware of, Russell said.

“We started with the position that what we do in the way of employee relations were fair and right,” Hall said. “As it turns out, there wasn't a whole lot that was broken.”

“There were issues that were brought to our attention that we did need to fix that affected a fairly small number of employees, and we were advised of some of the economic issues that were important to employees. And we did make significant adjustments to them as a result.”

What you'll get

All municipal employees except directors and elected officials make up the bargaining unit and are covered by the new contract whether they're a member of HOPE or not. Since Texas is a right-to-work state, employees do not have to join the union to keep their job.

Some highlights of the contract:

- The split on paying for HMO health care benefits for active employees will remain the same: The city pays 79 percent, employees collectively pay 21 percent. Employees' premium increases are capped at 10 percent per year. If it goes beyond that, HOPE and the city can discuss other options.
- On April 5, all city employees received a 3 percent pay raise. On July 1, 2009, and July 1, 2010, they will receive 3 percent pay raises again.
- Differential pay for the second shift goes up to 50 cents an hour. For third

shift, it goes up to \$1 an hour.

- In FY 2009, 2010 and 2011, the city will dedicate 1.25 percent of payroll for pay raises based on employee performance and departmental pay programs.
 - Minimum pay rate was raised to \$9.50 an hour. Beginning with the first pay period after Sept. 1, 2009, it goes up to \$10 an hour.
 - A municipal employee consultation committee and department consultation committees were formed to hear employees' concerns.
 - The 25-year cap on longevity pay was removed.
 - A process was created to resolve disputes over points in the union contract. Civil Service remains intact.
- To view the contract, visit www.houston.tx.gov/hr/files/HOPE-Meet-and-Confer-Agmt.pdf.

What you'll give

- The city will deduct one hour of vacation time per year from every permanent municipal employee and give it to the Union Leave Pool in each of the three years of the contract. Employees were given a chance to opt out of this deduction in April and will have chances in May 2009 and May 2010.
- Employees can voluntarily donate vacation hours to the Community Action Leave Pool.
- Cost to join HOPE is one hour of pay per pay period up to \$35 a month, unless changed by HOPE.

The party doesn't start until Richardson arrives

Event coordinator is a gracious host at Wortham

By Dave Schafer

When Reda Richardson arrives at 7 a.m. Saturday, everything is set up according to the memos she'd sent out two weeks ago. Or, actually, according to the changes she'd made to those memos Friday, after her client had called with more changes.



Reda Richardson, Convention & Entertainment Facilities event coordinator, talks to a client from the Society for the Performing Arts. Richardson's laid-back, take-charge demeanor creates a good rapport with her clients.

“In this business, things change,” she says. “This business” is event coordinating, which Richardson does for the Wortham Center. After clients sign on for events at the Wortham, they get assigned to Richardson or Virginia Oxford, Wortham's other event coordinator. Richardson or Oxford then turn the client's ideas into reality, sitting down with them to plan each important detail: How many seats are needed? How

should the room be set up? Should they use a stage manager? What kind of food and drink should they serve?

This morning, though, all that is behind her. This is the homestretch. At 9 a.m., a pajama party for children whose parents are members of the Society for the Performing Arts begins. Then the children will go to an 11 a.m. performance by Dan Zane and

Friends, a Disney Channel performer giving two shows today. Between the performances is a SPA fashion show.

It's going to be a busy day.

Take down roadblocks

Richardson walks through the center with Aurora Martinez, lead custodian. Everything is ready and clean. Last night, the Houston Grand Opera performed, and Martinez's crew worked late tearing that set down and putting this one up.

“We're graded on appearance, and Miss Aurora and her crew do a great job of making me look good in that area,” says Richardson, Convention & Entertainment. In her left hand she holds a paper cup half-full of Bengal Traders coffee and

a small walkie-talkie that chatters softly under her words. Her right hand is free to accent her words or to grip a friend gently by the wrist.

And they're all friends here. Richardson knows almost everyone, including her clients, by their first names. “Good morning, Mark,” she says, or “Just a few more minutes, Gail.”

“I have a good rapport with my clients,”

she says. “I like taking care of them. If they're happy, I'm happy. I especially like first-timers, those people whose hands I have to hold.”

Taking care of them isn't always so easy. She and Oxford split up the galas, weddings, city functions, birthday parties, and other one-off events at the Wortham. But the SPA, like the Houston Grand Opera, is a regular customer, so today is going to be routine. Except when the unexpected pops up.

Like when, at 9:30, she discovers police barricades at the Smith and Bagby intersections of Pierce blocking access to valet parking. Richardson calls Reginald Randolph, assistant facilities manager. He calls back and tells her the police forgot to pick up the barricades at 8:15.

Before he calls back, though, the barriers are removed.

Provide a calm presence behind the scenes

The pajama party is in full swing, with balloons and a clown entertaining the children, who are eating fruit and French toast sticks. It's frantic in the room, but outside, Richardson is calm.

For 10 years, Richardson has planned events at Wortham, including for Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, and both George Bushes. Clinton's camp liked her so much they asked her to help with a census meeting at the Magnolia Multi-Service Center a month later.

“It's windy in the orchestra level of the three-a-ter, Mike,” she says, pronouncing theater as a phrase. Mike, the engineer, says he'll turn up the temperature just a bit.

“After this breakfast, it's smooth sailing,” Richardson says.

Jennifer Spriggs, who handles food and beverages for food vendor Aramark, asks



Richardson is a pro at multitasking, a must in her job. Leading up to the start of an event, Richardson is in the background lining up the details that make her clients' events at the Wortham Center run smoothly.

Richardson if they can add a table in the party room. A mother is insisting, even though Richardson has carefully mapped it out so that there is plenty of seating. And no more room for another table.

“It's a fun event,” Richardson says. “They're in pajamas. They can sit on the couches, on the floor. Trust me, they can.”

Try to please everyone

At 10:30, the doors to the three-a-ter open. At 10:58, someone calls for “Miss Reda” on the walkie-talkie. “A few mothers are complaining the theater's too hot,” the walkie-talkie reports.

Richardson sighs. “You can't please everyone.”

A cheer rises in the darkened theater, and a lithe body skips across the stage and up behind the drum kit. It bangs out a beat.

“Ahhhh, we made it one more time,” Richardson says, then turns to get ready for the next event.

Goloby pipes up about the dangers of dumping grease

PWE project manager unclogs public knowledge

By Paul Beckman

Standing near the stage before his audience arrived, Bill Goloby popped in a CD. The familiar hit tune “Ghostbusters” started jumping through the speaker.

“I wrote the words to this song,” he said.

But in this version, lyrics about busting ghosts were out. Busting grease was in.

“The High School for the Performing and Visual Arts did the singing,” he added.

Goloby, a project manager for Public Works and Engineering, doesn't fancy himself a rock star. The jamming he's most concerned with is the kind that plagues pipes and sewer lines.

When people dump grease, fat, and oil into kitchen sinks and down toilets, the system clogs.

And taxpayers pay millions of dollars every year for expensive trucks with special equipment and skilled people to operate the equipment that cleans up the sewer lines.

So Goloby is pulling out all the stops to rope people into the city's Corral the Grease program.

Grease on stage

For the past three years, Goloby has been the city's squeaky wheel. Now he

spends a few evenings each month speaking to civic groups, environmental organizations, and Super Neighborhood gatherings.

The Acres Home Multi-Purpose Center was the most recent stop on his Houston tour.

As Goloby set up his presentation, his looping “Greasebusters” serenaded people to their seats.

Empty food cans on a display table looked like props for a comic skit. But by adding a universal lid, a lid that fits any can, Goloby converted a pork and beans can into one of the greatest weapons against the grease problem.

He encouraged his listeners to put their fat, grease and oil in the cans, seal it with the universal lid, and put it in the garbage.

When grease accumulates in the sewer system, it reduces water flow. In warm weather the grease floats. When cold, it solidifies. Sometimes it even blocks pipes completely.

Clogs in the sewer lines cause that water to back up, overflow, and spill into creeks, bayous, and the storm drain system.

“So that goes directly to the bayou untreated,” Goloby said. “Beach closures

sometimes happen because of these problems, even a contamination of drinking water.”

Glut of weapons

Another handy weapon in the drain game is the fat trapper. The city purchased 15,000 fat traps in September 2006 and another 15,000 this past January.

The fat trapper is a plastic box with a foil-lined, heat-resistant bag inside. Grease or fat goes in the bag until it is full. Then it is tossed in the trash.

“We're targeting some apartment complexes to get these distributed,” Goloby said. “So I've been coordinating the process with the Houston Apartment Association.”

At his presentation, he conducted a raffle where a lucky audience member also walked away with a fat trapper.

Marketing blitz

The Corral the Grease message competes for public attention with a number of other good causes. To make his message stand out, Goloby uses typical marketing techniques: pamphlets, Web site, presentations, staffing booths, and giveaways.

But Goloby also found low-cost marketing products.

The Greasebuster singers at the Houston School for Performing Arts cost the city nothing. He also arranged for two interns from the Art Institute of Houston to create a 30-second animated piece where the Corral the Grease logo lassos a meddling grease spot and prevents it from entering the drain.

The city gave each intern a \$500 stipend.

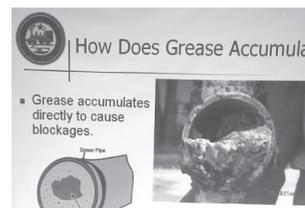
The animation is now part of his presentation. The Acres Home audience showed their approval of the piece with chuckles and requests for an encore.

“That's what our public education is about,” Goloby said. “Prevention is the best cure. Getting people not to put it down the drain, but in the trash instead.”

But even with all his marketing and clever ideas, Goloby is a realist.

“We're never going to totally stop it,” Goloby said. “It's like litter. There will always be litter. But if we can reduce it, it can make a big difference.”

Corral the Grease Web page: www.corralthegrease.org.



Goloby uses a multimedia approach and other gimmicks to get the audience interested in his presentation.

What's goin' on in the city?

Parks & Recreation

On March 8, a new and improved version of Herman Park's 50-year-old mini-train opened. It had been closed since January. The new train runs on a wider-gauge track and accommodates wheelchairs and strollers. Work continues on the second phase, which includes a new depot at Lake Plaza and more track with stops in other parts of the park ... Mother Nature scored a victory when the last five acres of West 11th Street Park were transferred to the city, bringing park acreage to 20. A dedication ceremony for the park, one of the last pieces of wild forest in the 610 Loop, was Feb. 21 ... On Feb. 19, the department kicked off a capital campaign for Memorial Park renovations. The renovations will include a pedestrian overpass crossing Memorial Drive, another jogging trail, a center for runners, and a plaza in front of the tennis center ... Sabine Street has been the scene of busy workers putting together the Lee & Joe Jamal Skate Park. This 30,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility will open in June and catapult Houston to the forefront of the skating world ... Elementary school students in Parks community center programs in northeast Houston watched hundreds of trout move into the pond at Herman Brown Park. Then they were introduced to angling. The fish didn't have much to fear from the students' first efforts with a fishing pole ... The Alief Community Center hosted the Youth Health & Wellness Rally Jan. 19 ... The Robert C. Stuart Park will be transferred to the city from the Houston Parks Board and will become part of a chain of parks linked by a hike-and-bike trail along the bayou. One improvement will be a canoe launch site ... Anyone driving along Main Street and Montrose Boulevard got a treat Feb. 29 when the Mecom Fountain was relit. New lighting will keep this landmark glowing for years ... Check out the "Activities in the Park" catalog at www.houstonparks.org and at community centers. — *Don Whitaker*

General Services

Welcome new team members **Genaro Rangel, Olga Gonzalez, Broderick Grissett, Richard Castorena, Jose Guillen, Webb Mitchell, Irma Sierra, Rocky Martinez and Judd Dibrell** ... Congratulations to **Shalia Mason**, promoted to management analyst III, and to **Jessie Moore**, promoted to maintenance mechanic I. — *Jacquelyn L. Nisby*

Health & Human Services

The Texas Council on Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke awarded gold-level recognition to Houston for a perfect score during an assessment of policy and environmental supports important to reducing heart disease and stroke ... The department conducted its fourth assessment, intervention and mobilization project in April. Staff, community organizations, and volunteers visited Near Northside homes to identify health issues. They distributed information packets featuring community resources and provided referrals for health care and human services. AIM helps the department evaluate and improve residents' management of their health and well-being. It also helps the department get statistical information to determine a community's health status and needs and improves readiness for disasters ... In February, the Bureau of Community and Children's Environmental Health launched the Bringing Reduction and Education of Asthma Triggers in the Home Environment program. The grant-funded project trains health care professionals and residents, mostly mothers, to recognize asthma triggers and other environmental hazards ... Also in February, the department opened Sharpstown Health Services, 6201 Bonhomme Road. The 17,000-square-foot facility allows the department to add another Women, Infants and Children clinic and to relocate its sexually transmitted disease clinic to an area with increasing demand for both services. The department also plans to offer comprehensive dental health services at the site ... Welcome to **Celina Garza Ridge**, new assistant director of the administrative services division. — *Porfirio Villarreal*

Public Works & Engineering

Mike Marcotte, director, and **Jeff Taylor**, deputy director, made a presentation to City Council on the department's efforts at reducing sanitary sewer overflows through a rehabilitation program. The plan includes replacement or rehabilitation/renewal of the city's wastewater collection system, totaling 950,000 feet of wastewater pipe per year and 9.5 million feet over the next 10 years. This also includes cleaning 2 million feet of wastewater lines per year ... The city's community rating in the National Flood Insurance Program was upgraded from a class 6 to a class 7, which will reduce rates property owners in and outside of the 100-year floodplain pay for flood insurance ... Several dignitaries from Salamanca, Mexico, paid a visit to the department. The group met with city leaders and discussed a variety of topics. They were given a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the basic techniques PWE uses in wastewater treatment and water production. Marcotte provided a detailed overview of the department and how it operates. Taylor and his executive staff answered questions about water and wastewater operations. Topics included use of new energy-conserving technology, operations support, utility maintenance, wastewater operations and water productions ... Congratulations to administrative specialist **Ruth Bocanegra**, who in December graduated Summa Cum Laude from LeTourneau University with a bachelor's in business administration. Then, on Jan. 9, Bocanegra was sworn in as a U.S. citizen ... Public Works Lunch Bunch Toastmasters once again took prizes in area and regional competitions. In the Toastmaster spring contest, **Vale Mussio** won first and **Linda Williams** captured second in the evaluation category. Mussio also won first in the international category, while **Betzi De La Rosa** grabbed second. In the Dress for Success group, De La Rosa won first in the evaluation category, and **Michael Williams** took first and **Yolanda Bynum** won second in the international category. Mussio then took third place in the international category at the 0-10 and 0-11 joint contest March 1. De La Rosa also won third in the evaluation category for Dress for Success ... PWE won first place in division one for large departments in the first Mayor's Cup, a wellness challenge developed by the Employee Wellness Advisory Council. — *Alvin Wright*



Algie Grant, Public Works & Engineering, drives a tractor during right-of-way maintenance division's Parade of Champions at the rear of the Houston Rodeo and Livestock parade.

Houston Emergency Center

Elizabeth Padilla, 911 PSAP supervisor, is the first recipient of HEC's Director's Award recognizing her for outstanding service. Padilla was nominated by her peers. Criteria for selection include customer service, initiative, leadership, professionalism, and contribution to teamwork ... The most recent group of co-op students from the High School for Law Enforcement will graduate May 31. The students work part-time and handle nonemergency phone calls. The graduating students are **Victoria Alamos, Josh De La Cerda, Trayveon Gilmore, Gabrielle Gomez, Carlisle Johnson, George Lozano, Rosemary Reyes, Sergio Rodriguez, Lisa Rodriguez, Ivon Telon, Brandon Williams**, and **Edward Reyna**. Thank you for your hard work and good luck in your education. — *Joe Laud*

Housing & Community Development

On March 7, Mayor **Bill White**, Director **Richard Celli**, Councilwoman **Jolanda "Jo" Jones**, Covenant Neighborhoods board members, and residents of Kingwood Senior Village Apartments participated in a ribbon cutting at the newly constructed 193-unit affordable senior facility. HCDD provided \$1.85 million in Home Investment Partnerships Program funds toward the \$16.5 million project, which received a tax-credit commitment from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs ... Welcome **Shantel Atkins, My-Hang Nguyen, Ha Nguyen, Brandon Jackson, Olaolu Kasunmu, Tracy Beavers, Ada Edwards, Will Guajardo, Deirdre Williams, Eric Williams, Donald Sprayberry, Caroline Gamble**. — *Lester Whiteing*



Residents Gertrude Ely and Robert Vincent cut the ribbon at the grand opening of the Kingwood Senior Village Apartments while Councilwoman Jolanda "Jo" Jones, back row left, and Richard Celli, director of Housing & Community Development, back row middle, look on. HCDD contributed \$1.85 million to the construction of the 193-unit, \$16.5 million affordable senior facility.

Fire

During open houses at stations 36 and 25, residents met their neighborhood firefighters, learned important fire and safety tips, saw a fire truck up close, toured the fire station, and got fire smoke detectors ... On Feb. 6, Chief **Phil Boriskie** accepted \$19,635 from Houston-based Wortham Insurance & Risk Management and Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. The donation will be used to buy more than 80 high-voltage electricity detectors, otherwise known as AC HotSticks. The HotSticks are sensitive AC voltage detectors that can detect exposed and dangerous wires or voltage-carrying surfaces from a safe distance ... On March 1, EMS personnel held a reunion with a cardiac arrest survivor who was resuscitated in late February. Richard Teeters thought he was having indigestion as he waited to board a plane at Hobby Airport. Fellow travelers saw a pale Teeters suddenly slump in his chair. They called for help, and several paramedics and physicians waiting to board a plane rushed to his side and determined he had no pulse. The bystanders called 911, moved him to the floor, applied one of Hobby's public access defibrillators, and administered CPR, returning Teeters' heart to a normal rhythm. EMS members arrived soon and administered additional treatment, including clot-busting drugs ... On Feb. 28, training Class 2007F graduated. Class 2007D graduated March 6 ... From January to March, second graders at Shlenker School read books and raised \$5,303 to create bears at Build-A-Bear Workshop. The bears were donated to HFD to comfort children during a stressful event or ambulance transport. Each bear includes a special wish for the child who receives it. Firefighters carry the toy bears in their vehicles and ambulances ... On March 15, more than 200 members of the department, family, and friends attended the annual memorial ceremony at the Houston Firefighters' Memorial Garden, 4225 Interwood N. Parkway. **Mariana Oyaguren Stanley**, program supervisor for HTV, the city's municipal television station, was the master of ceremonies, and Mayor **Bill White** and U.S. Rep. Kevin Brady spoke. A presentation by Councilman Rick Sala of Grand Prairie honored retired deputy chief L.O. Martin, who died recently. Martin was instrumental in developing the life-flight program. — *Alicia White*

Aviation

Middle Eastern carrier Qatar Airways nonstop flights between George Bush Intercontinental Airport and Qatar's Doha International Airport are scheduled for takeoff in November. The flights, which will be three times a week, will become daily in December. Qatar Airways will become the second Middle Eastern carrier to offer nonstop passenger flights to Houston ... As of March 20, Singapore Airlines operated four weekly nonstop flights from Bush to Moscow with continuing service to Singapore, adding two new destinations to the nearly 70 international destinations already served from Bush. These are the first scheduled passenger flights from Houston to Singapore and Moscow. To celebrate, the air carrier will unveil an eye-catching display at Bush's Terminal D ... Aviation registered another record-setting year of passenger and air cargo traffic. More than 387,000 metric tons of air cargo and 52 million passengers were served by Aviation in 2007. Of those travelers, more than 7.7 million were on their way to international destinations — marking an increase of 4.2 percent compared to 2006. Total air cargo shipments to and from Houston increased by 5.4 percent compared to 2006. International air cargo traffic grew by 3.5 percent ... Better parking spots and easier terminal access will be part of the more than \$42 million of upgrades at Bush. Terminal C's parking garage will be the primary facility affected by the renovations, which are expected to take place over three years ... As of this February, all international travelers arriving at the airport with non-U.S. passports or visas are undergoing the Department of Homeland Security's new 10-fingerprint initiative. U.S. Customs and Border Protection replaced all of their two-print scanners with 10-print models at the airport's federal inspections services facility. With help from the department's US-VISIT program, this change provides more accurate data, less false identification, and enhanced security. In addition, collected fingerprints are checked against the FBI's criminal master file ... For the fourth year in a row, an "Air Cargo World" survey named Bush Intercontinental the number one airport for excellence in air cargo among North American airports handling 499,000 tons or less annually. Each year, "Air Cargo World," one of the most widely read air cargo industry publications, asks its readers to evaluate the performance, value, facilities, and operations of air cargo facilities around the globe ... In January, Bush's new business center opened in Terminal A ... Through a partnership with the Houston Independent School District and airport tenant Flying Tigers, students enrolled in the aviation magnet program at Ross Shaw Sterling High School will have access to the Hobby Airport airfield. These students are enrolled in a specialized curriculum to get their pilots license before or shortly after graduating from high school. About 160 teenagers are enrolled in the program, now in its 16th year. — *Juan Alanis*



Bill Roach, executive director of the Wings Over Houston air show, talks to visitors about a Stinson airplane during the Ellington Field Salutes Our Veterans fundraiser April 12. During the fundraiser at Ellington Field, participants got up-close views of a variety of aircraft. Proceeds from the event benefited Helping a Hero, a nonprofit foundation that supports severely injured military personal and their families.

Convention & Entertainment Facilities

Carlos Medel and **Tim Smith** were honored as department employees of the month ... Welcome **John Klumb, John Flores, Nidia Gonzalez, Thomas Smyer, George Martinez** and **Ashley Wilson** ... Farewell and best wishes to **Keisha Lopez**, who transferred to Aviation, and **Linda Hunter**, who retired. — *Pete Radowick*



Dawn Ulrich, Convention & Entertainment Facilities Department director, left, and Liliana Rambo, assistant director of parking management, prepare to cut a cake at a farewell reception for parking management employees. On March 1, parking management was transferred out of CEF into Public Works & Engineering.

Legal

Kudos to **Michael Martin** from **Ray Haley** with the Shepherd Forest Civic Club for his professionalism and efforts in working with the deed restriction enforcement team and the deed restriction hotline; to **Katherine Sacra** from **Emily Burton** in appreciation for the hard work and determination she rendered at the trial of J. Span; to **Paulette Wolfson** for her presentation on the nuisance ordinance at the Mayor's Youth Council Meeting; to **Susan Taylor**, deputy city attorney, and **Larry Schenk, Michele Austin, and Raced Gambrell** for serving as panelists on the Mayor's Ethics in City Government: Boards & Commissions presentation, and **Arturo Michel**, city attorney, for moderating the panel; **Denise Miller** and **Cora Garcia**, with technical assistance from **Erica Schwam** for winning the virtually "unwinnable" Adventures in Birds n' Pets lawsuit; and to **Trudell Eldridge** for being a recent recipient of the Celebration of Life award from the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center for her outstanding contributions and volunteerism ... **Kelly Shoemate** and **Paula Slaughter-Harris** won second place, and **Rico Davis** and **Slaughter-Harris** third place in the Mayor's Cup co-ed team bowling competition. **Aaron Jaso** and **Alexander Cruz** won eighth place in the male team bowling competition ... Celebrating Milestones are **Randy Zamora** and **Wynetta Chaney**, 10 years; **Mary Mckeral** and **Tanja Hunter**, 5 years ... Welcome new hires **Dimple Joseph, Paul Apple, Susana Sosa**, and **Elida Ortuno**. — *Vachel Henry*

Human Resources

Welcome **Angel Barnhart, Andrea Banks**, and **Alisa Franklin-Brooks** ... Goodbye to **Shantel Atkins**, who accepted a promotion with Housing & Community Development, and to **Cesar De La Rosa**, who accepted a promotion with Library ... As it has done for the past several years, temporary services is helping place 100 temporary laborers in city parks to work through the growing season. — *Dave Schaffer*

Affirmative Action

Congratulations to **Juan Padilla**, promoted to affirmative action specialist ... The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, the Internal Revenue Service, and the National Disability Institute provided free tax preparation assistance to families who earn less than \$40,000 a year. — *Patsy Jackson*

Obituaries



Judge **Jay Hirsch**, Municipal Courts Judicial, died March 26, 2008. He was 70. Hirsch was also a senior partner with the firm Kroger, Myers, Frisby & Hirsch, and had earned the nickname "Junk Yard Dog" during his 45-year legal career. He spent 27 years with the U.S. Army

Reserve Judge Advocate General before retiring as a colonel. He was appointed a city associate judge in 1999. He's survived by his wife of 40 years, Susan, sons Michael, Phillip and Zachary, and grandson Adam.

Planning & Development

Steve Stelzer, program director of the Code Enforcement Green Building Resource Center, and other members of the department are hosting a workshop teaching Super Neighborhood and community leaders how to save hundreds of dollars by reducing the annual carbon dioxide output in their homes by at least 15 percent. As part of the Grassroots Residential Energy Efficient Now program, the leaders are trained to present the information to other members of the community. At the end of the workshop, they received certification as a Super G.R.E.E.N. Neighbor ... Kudos to **Gwen Tillotson** from **Jun Chang**, Public Works & Engineering, for her "invaluable contribution and assistance" to PWE's negotiations with municipal utility districts. — *Suzy Hartgrove*

Library

Welcome **Maria Ortiz, Sheila Jackson, Crystal Velez, Natalie Schun, Kenneth Hailey, Aaron Gabaldon, James Chavez, Eric Marques, Joseph Gordon, Mark Hall, Andersen Phan, William Barnard, Edmon Loville, LaQuinta Pierre, Megan Lowry, Jessica Branch, Olevia Kennerson, Samira Jenkins, Erin Norris, Cyntril Waller, Natana Gill, Laura Edwards, Jared Jefferson, Alisa Baker, Tega Zoma, Te'Rone Eaglin, Michaela Watson, and Charlene Collins** ... Congratulations on well-earned promotions to **Laura Costila, Joan Agumano, Jonathan Bisso, Patricia Bustamante, Natasha Dunn, Angelia Rose, Candace Sawyer, Hellena Stokes, Brittney Walker, Valla Phillips, Mary Hoffman, Dimitri Revada, Alice Jackson, Antonio Ruiz, Tanishia Gray, Adalina Gonzales, Eugene Green, Marla Garza, Thuy Vo, Rudy Robinson, Saima Kadir, Julia DeBerardinis, Mary McMillen, Ronnie Denson, Vick Martinez, Patrick Atkins, and Timothy Siegel** ... Farewell and best wishes on your retirement to **Nicholas Garofalo, Kim Cochran, Tamara Barnes**, and **Andeberhan Tensae** ... In May, branch libraries will offer fun and educational programs and activities for the entire family in celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. All programs are free. For more details visit www.houstonlibrary.org or call 832-393-1313. — *Blanca Quezada*



The 300-square foot Houston Public Library Express Discovery Green opened April 15. Patrons can check out laptops, use a desktop computer, or request books for pickup. Discovery Green is the second express library in the city and the country.

Library branches out to serve patrons

By Dave Schaefer

Celia Lopez didn't go to the library. It was too far away, too inconvenient.

Then, in January, an express library opened in the Southwest Multi-Service Center near her home. The 3,600-square-foot Houston Public Library Express Southwest holds only about 5,000 books. But there are 30 computers that her children can use to play educational games and Lopez can use to learn about the world and take free Word classes.

Since then, she's been taking her 5-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son to the library three or four times a week.

People like Lopez are why the city created express libraries, the nation's first high-tech, full-service breeze-through libraries.

"Express locations fill a need in areas not served by a branch library, and we can customize them to the area," said Sandra Fernandez, Library's manager of public relations.

Libraries are becoming more inviting, more high-tech, and more customer-oriented. And for those residents who still can't make it to the library, Library is bringing the computers to them.

How's that for access?

A 21st century book mobile

"Libraries are becoming more than just a place to go to check out books," said Roosevelt Weeks, assistant director.

CADET continued from page 2.

This time, though, they march over the carpet in crisp precision, taking the final steps to becoming the newest members of the Houston Police Department.

It's graduation day for Class 193.

"For our cadets, tonight marks the end of civilian life and the beginning of a new life as a Houston police officer," says Capt. Mary Lentschke. "The journey to this point was not easy. It wasn't meant to be easy."

The cadets leave training in pomp and circumstance, the gym overflowing with friends and family in their Sunday best.

"Over the past six months, we tested their knowledge, we challenged their endurance, and we worked to instill a sense of pride and commitment in their service to our community," Lentschke says.

Fifty-four finish the journey, 10 fewer than started it. One who didn't make it was Anne-Marie Pearson, featured in the summer and fall '07 City Savvy issues. She dropped out for personal reasons.



Cadets run the track during physical assessment on the third day of academy training. Cadet Ramon Escamilla and 53 other cadets graduated in January.

"While law enforcement is still an interest, I have realized that it is no longer something I need to fulfill or define me," she wrote.

"Class 193's exceptional performance can be attributed to not only the instruction, training and support they received at the academy, but also to the character and commitment of each member of the class," Lentschke says.

The cadets range in age from 21 to 42. Fifteen are from the military. Fourteen have family in law enforcement. Twenty-five have a bachelor's degree and six an associate's degree. Three are from Mexico, four from Vietnam.

"There aren't that many ways that you can make a living and make as much of a difference as in law enforcement," Mayor Bill White says. "This is a special opportunity."

In the second row of cadets facing the stage, her back to the audience, Rolanda Johnson sits with her hat in her lap. All her 23 years she's dreamed of being an officer. She's overwhelmed and nervous, but that's good, she thinks.

"When you put on that uniform, you're an authority figure, no matter your age," White says. "The people around you will see the uniform and expect you to be an authority figure. If you try to meet their expectations, you will be an authority figure, and it will have nothing to do with the uniform."

When she came to Houston three years ago, Megan Lares began noticing how the community treated its police officers, like they were special.



The Hernandez family checks out books at Houston Public Library Express Southwest. The express library, the first of its kind in the county, offers computers and resources in an area not served by a branch.

Photo by Dave Schaefer

"The library provides access to information," Fernandez said. "More and more, we're doing that electronically. We want to make sure as many Houstonians have access as possible."

Everyone's so darn busy these days

The modern-looking HPLX Southwest was the first of four express libraries that will be open by early next year. Although they'll have fewer books, patrons can reserve books that will be delivered for pickup.

No other library system in the nation has created these types of libraries before, Fernandez said.

HPLX Southwest has 20 laptop computers and a Wii attached to a 42-inch flat panel television.

In April, 300-square-foot HPLX Discovery Green opened at Discovery Green Park. HPLX Frank, an express/branch hybrid, will follow in the fall, replacing the structurally unsafe Frank branch.

The tentatively named HPLX Vinson will open across the street from the Vinson branch library next year, offering more computers and librarians.

Each library will fill the needs in that neighborhood, Fernandez said. HPLX Southwest is heavy on technology because the residents in that area have lower-educational achievement levels, and this technology can help them attain minimum skills.

"With the express libraries, we're adjusting to busy people, who want easy access and to get in and out," said Edward Melton, administrative manager for HPL Express.

A branch library can take five to 10

years to complete after it comes up on the Capital Improvement Plan and is designed and built. Express libraries cost up to 75 percent less, so they get funded sooner and often take just two years to go through the same process.

Central to the library

But full-service libraries aren't going the way of the 8-track tape player. In fact, Central Library will reopen May 31 after a \$17 million renovation.

Improvements include an additional 30,000 square feet of public room on the fourth floor for children and teen rooms, a grand staircase replacing the escalators, five self-checkout counters, a small-business center, an expanded world languages section, new wiring for the library system's Internet access, and a meeting room overlooking Sam Houston Park. The first floor will resemble a retail store featuring best-selling novels, the music collection, and a cafe.

"This renovation makes the Central Library an easier experience for patrons," said Mike Van Campen, chief of central services. "It will be more of a community center."

"We aim to create a proactive customer-friendly atmosphere. We're going to get out from behind the desks and interact with the customers."

During the next year, the library will host programs targeted at specific age groups. They will include computer classes, more book clubs, and daily lunch programs to attract nearby professionals.

"We want to be a flagship destination for people coming to Houston and downtown," Van Campen said.

chief. "Your life will never be the same. For most of us, it's gotten into our blood."

After 20 years in the Air Force, joining the police department seemed a natural next step for Richard Araiza. There were some tough times during training, but determination and inner strength kept pushing him.

"Treat everyone, no matter who they are, as you would want someone to treat your brother, sister, husband, wife," Nuchia says.

Family. That's important to James Butterfas. Thoughts of his family pushed him through six tough months of mental and physical tests. He's always wanted to help people, and he now feels that he'll be doing that on the best police force in the world.

"There are many temptations in the world, and it may seem like we make no difference. But we, Class 193, promise to remain true to our mission," says class president Brandt Owens.

Robert Watson spent years working in retail monotony. Here was a chance to do something different each day, something exciting.

After the badges are pinned on – most by Hurtt, some by family members in HPD or other police departments – the cadets recite the oath of office.

Then Noah Dancer takes the stage. After a short career in the Marines, he became a corrections officer. Then he heard HPD's call.

"For the last time, Class 193, DISMISSED," he barks. The crowd erupts in cheers and surges forward to embrace their family members, their newly minted figures of authority, the newest members of HPD. Their heroes.



Members of HPD academy Class 193 eat lunch together in the academy cafeteria.

Photo by Dave Schaefer

She wanted to be a part of that.

"More than most jobs, the police officer can be under a microscope," White says. "How you conduct yourself on this job, and often how you conduct yourself when you're off duty, will be subject to a level of scrutiny that you have not experienced. If you allow yourself to meet the high expectations placed on you, you'll find that this day is not just transformational in your career, but also in your life. And we will all benefit because of that."

Carlos Ayala always felt the need to help others. When he heard HPD was hiring, it fit.

"This is not just any job," Chief Harold Hurtt says. "This is your life. This is a way of life. The only way you will gain respect is by your behavior, conduct and professionalism."

Scott Nguyen also has always wanted to help others. Early on, the academy's military-type style, the saluting, the marching, the rigid at attentions, annoyed him. It was laughable. Now, he doesn't find it funny. Now, he sees a change in himself. It's called discipline.

"Life as a police officer is different," says Justice Sam Nuchia, a former HPD



Featured events

Through May 4

Genome: The Secret of How Life Works, Health Museum: Scientists have mapped the human genome, a person's entire set of genes. These are the codes that make us who we are and influence what we might become. They give us a clue about how our descendants might look, and show us what we have in common with a potato. For more information, call 713-521-1515 or visit www.thehealthmuseum.org.

May 23-25

Houston Symphony Pops - Pink Martini, Jones Hall: This blend of classical, jazz, Latin and Parisian cabaret music might sound familiar. Pink Martini has scored numerous films and television shows, including "The Sopranos" and "The West Wing." Now, it's making its Houston debut. For more information, visit www.houstonsymphony.org or call 713-224-7575.

June 3-15

Broadway in Houston - Sweeney Todd, Hobby Center: See the play based on the hit movie. No, wait, that's the other way around. In this chilling and unique production, no one leaves the stage and each of the actors plays at least two instruments. For more information, visit www.broadwaycrossamerica.com/houston or call 713-622-7469.

July 15-20

Disney's When You Wish, Miller Outdoor Theatre: A new song-and-dance extravaganza featuring some of the best-loved Disney songs presented by Theatre Under The Stars. And, like all summer shows at Miller, it's free! For more information on this or any other show, call 281-373-3386 or visit milleroutdoortheatre.com.

July 17-20

World Series of Dog Shows, Reliant Center: During the dog days of summer, go see the dogs of summer in action. For more information, visit www.reliantdogshows.com or call 832-667-1400.

Other events

Check out upcoming events at www.houstontx.gov.

May 4

Roger Waters, Woodlands Pavilion: 281-363-3300.

May 10

Art Car Parade, downtown: 713-926-6368.

May 6-18

Broadway in Houston - The Wedding Singer, Hobby Center: 713-622-7469.

July 4

Chevy's Freedom Over Texas July 4th celebration, Buffalo Bayou Park: 713-247-3500.

July 16-27

Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Reliant Park: 713-629-3700.

10 acres of land: \$800 Historic symbol of achievement: priceless

By Paul Beckman

At first glance, Houston's Emancipation Park doesn't seem different from any other park. But its history makes the park's value immeasurable.

In 1872, former slaves bought the 10-acre Third Ward park. Less than a decade earlier, they had learned of their liberation from slavery on June 19, 1865, or Juneteenth. Now, their newly purchased land gave them a place to celebrate that historic date.

"It is one of the first parks in Texas to be created by former enslaved African-Americans specifically for this event," said Debra Sloan, Harris County Historical Commission member.

Landing a deal

When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, slavery was officially dead in the Confederacy. But it took another couple of years for it to become a reality in Texas.

In 1872, former slaves, the Rev. Jack Yates, Antioch Baptist Church, the Rev. Elias Dibble, Trinity Methodist Episcopal, and politician Richard Allen, led fundraising efforts to buy land for the Juneteenth celebrations.

The congregations came through. On July 10, 1872, "Lot 25" was purchased for \$800, and Emancipation Park was born.



On the baseball diamond, Third Ward residents practice for the park's adult softball league.

"The park is an important symbol of achievement," Sloan said. "Black ministers preached land ownership, and trustees



In 1872, former slaves bought the 10-acre Emancipation Park. Today, the Third Ward park features picnic tables, park benches, basketball and tennis courts, a gazebo, playgrounds, a swimming pool, and a community center.

purchased the land within a few years after emancipation."

Park Growth

Not only had Juneteenth celebrations occurred annually at the park, but the park also became a hub for the black community.

"Other than church, it was really the first place African-Americans could meet and do outdoor activities," said Dorris Ellis, president of the Friends of Emancipation Park. "Many people went to learn. There was a library there where people could read or learn to read."

The Protected Landmark Designation Report for the park prepared by the Planning & Development Department offers a glimpse of what the park was like in the early 1900s.

Elderly residents described it as "being enclosed by a six-foot high privacy fence and encircled by a racetrack, with the remainder of the property containing two dance floors, a stable, and a beer tavern."

The city acquired Emancipation Park

in 1918. Because of segregation, blacks were limited to Emancipation Park until Finnigan Park opened in 1940.

Emancipation Park continued to thrive. In 1938 and 1939, the Public Works Administration added a recreation center, swimming pool, and bath house.

Modern Park

Last year the park received a protected landmark designation from the city.

But knowing Emancipation Park's history, Ellis said she feels a strong obligation to keep "the precious site" as an indispensable fixture in Houston.

"Those who first had the idea made it come true," Ellis said. "What I tell people is we should work to maintain it and continue to build something that benefits the community."

The Friends of Emancipation Park continues to improve the park. Buildings have been painted, and some Houston Rockets players helped plant trees.

Ellis said her organization is submitting proposals to the Parks & Recreation Department for more improvements.

"We want the park to be a destination," Ellis said. "When people come to Houston, we want them to experience its age and its history."

HERO continued from page 1.

HERO, which is an independent organization funded by donations, got 501(c)3 status in November. City employees and the public can contribute. (See "How to contribute" box.)

"HERO is for city employees, and we need their support," Lawrence said. "It could be as easy as contributing a dollar to HERO out of every paycheck."

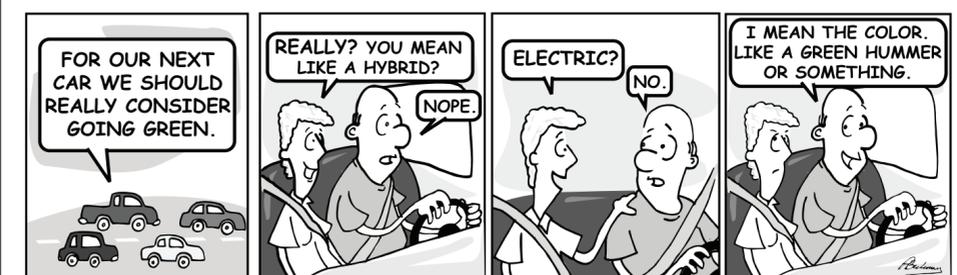
"We hate it when HERO has to come into play," Miller said. "But if it has to, we want to be there, and to have the money to help."

Norwood was grateful for that help. "It's the best thing they could have done for city employees," she said. "I can't imagine what it would have been like to not have HERO there to help me."

How to contribute

The Houston Employee Relief Organization accepts donations through its HERO Survivor Fund at the Houston Municipal Employees Federal Credit Union. Checks should be made payable to HERO. Donations are accepted by mail or in person at 698 E. Tidwell, Houston, TX 770022 or 611 Walker, fifth floor, Houston, TX 77002, or by credit card through PayPal at www.hmefcu.net. Employees can also donate through the Combined Municipal Campaign.

Beckhead by Paul Beckman



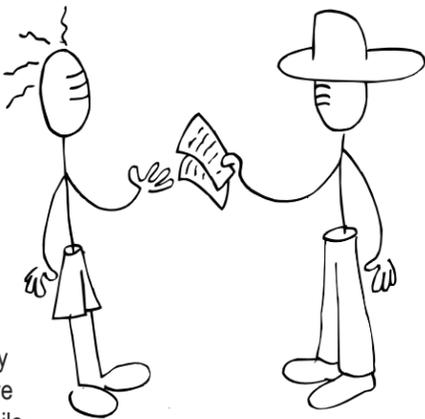
Springing a Bravo on 'em



Congratulations to **Trudell Eldridge**, Legal, **Robert Lemley**, Public Works & Engineering, and **Lois Gibson**, Police, who were named BRAVO! Award winners for excellent work and contributions to the community. Mayor **Bill White** and Councilwoman **Wanda Adams** recognized them April 15. For more, visit www.houstontx.gov.

Alvin and the firefighters

On Jan. 24, Alvin Mayor Gary Appelt recognized Houston firefighter **Roger Roda** and Capt. **Homero Ponce-Lopez** for helping canvass the area of a deadly January mobile home fire. Roda and Ponce-Lopez were off duty when they joined Alvin firefighters canvassing with smoke detectors, batteries, and bilingual fire safety literature in the area where family members died in a mobile home fire.



Talking green in the Brown Auditorium

On Jan. 24, **Joe Turner**, Parks & Recreation director, spoke at the River Oaks Garden Club's Sadie Gwin Blackburn Environmental Seminar at the Museum of Fine Arts – Brown Auditorium. His topic was "The greening of Houston – our city parks, today and in the future."

Treading water

Dannelle Belhateche, Public Works & Engineering senior assistant director, was recognized in the official newsletter of the Texas Section American Water Works Association. The article introduced Belhateche as a leader of the state's largest water utilities.

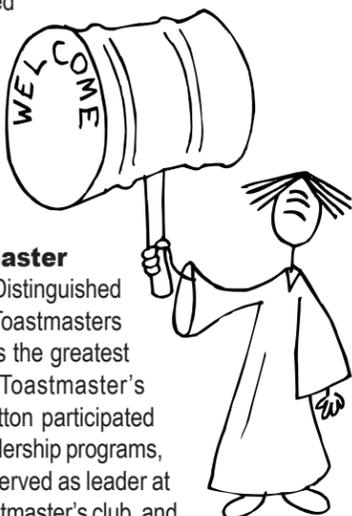
A major award for minority progress

Public Works & Engineering received the outstanding city department award at the MWBE Awards and Appreciation Luncheon, held in conjunction with the Government Procurement Connections Fair March 25. The fair brings the city's small, minority, women, disadvantaged and people with disabilities business owners in contact with representatives from the city, county, state, and federal governments plus a host of other entities.

PWE was recognized for outstanding service and success with its S/MWBE program.

Presiding judge presides over seminar

Presiding Judge **Berta Mejia** served as program director for the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center's seminar March 16-18 at the Omni Hotel. Mejia moderated the speakers, welcomed judges from all over Texas, and showcased the city.

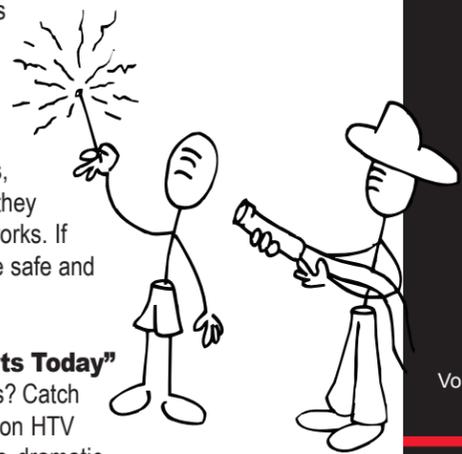


A toast for the master Toastmaster

Patricia Cotton was recognized as a "Distinguished Toastmaster" for participation in the Toastmasters International education program. This is the greatest honor earned by a member of the Toastmaster's organization. To receive the honor, Cotton participated in Toastmasters communication and leadership programs, conducted several seminar programs, served as leader at different levels, formed and rebuilt a Toastmaster's club, and completed other challenging tasks.

A public service announcement from HFD

In the city, discharging or owning fireworks is illegal. The Fire Department will also be enforcing the ban in the Harris County limited-purpose annexation areas. Fines are \$500 - \$2,000 for each firework. There are no warnings. If a minor is caught with fireworks, the parent or guardian pays the fine even if they were unaware the minor owned or used fireworks. If you want to see a fireworks display, please be safe and attend one of the area's public displays.



Spend some time at "Houston Airports Today"

Want to know more about your local airports? Catch the new episode of "Houston Airports Today" on HTV and KTBU Channel 55. The show spotlights dramatic rescues, new destinations, incredible service amenities from a new air carrier, life-saving trees, and Houston Airport System statistics. Catch it every Wednesday on HTV at 7 a.m., 1 p.m., 7 p.m., and after City Council meetings. Or, tune in to KTBU Channel 55 every Saturday at 9 a.m., or at any time at www.fly2houston.com.

Summer reading program is family fun

This year, the Houston Public Library's summer reading program is a fun family affair. Children and teens will receive cool incentives when they read 10 books or read for 10 hours. Children up to 12 and teenagers can register to participate. All events are free.

Adults, ages 19 and up, can also join the excitement of this year's program that offers workshops, book discussions, and arts and crafts. Adults will also receive a great incentive for reading three books or for 10 hours.

The summer reading program runs June 1- Aug. 1. Online registration begins May 1. More than 800 programs and events will take place during the two-month program. For more details, visit www.houstonlibrary.org or call 832-393-1313.

Join the celebration

On May 31, Central Library reopens its doors after a two-year, multi-million-dollar renovation. The celebration kicks off at 10 a.m. with a dedication ceremony featuring city officials and community leaders, followed by a weekend festival featuring library tours, author readings, musical entertainment, games, crafts, and a celebration of the new world languages collection through multi-cultural dance performances and storytelling. Author appearances include mystery writer Bill Crider and novelist Anita Bunkley.

The celebration continues at 1 p.m. June 1, when HPL kicks off its annual summer reading program with award-winning children's authors Rosemary Wells and David Wiesner. All events are free. For more information, visit www.houstonlibrary.org or call 832-393-1313.

It's easy being green

Contractors and residents now have help building greener: the Green Building Resource Center. Located in the Code Enforcement Building, 3300 Main Street, the center will educate the public about green building strategies. **Steve Stelzer**, program director, will provide optional plan review and suggest green-building strategies to the general public. Lectures and green building presentations will be scheduled periodically at the center, and residents can view displays and demonstration projects.

New programming for HTV

"Entertainment Houston," Convention & Entertainment Facility's new show on HTV, premiered March 2. Department newcomer and veteran producer **Carol Herrera** hosts the show, which offers behind-the-scenes looks at Houston landmarks such as the George R. Brown Convention Center, the new Discovery Green downtown park, the Wortham Center, Jones Hall, and the Miller Outdoor Theatre. Check www.houstontx.gov/htv/index.html for dates and times.



When half of the city's nearly 22,000 employees leave their desktop printers on at night and over the weekend, they cost the city more than \$26,000 a year. Turning off your printer reduces the city's energy usage by more than 280,000 kWh.