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NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

Home of Stephen F. Austin State University

BUSINESS

Abbott: 'It is now time to open Texas 100%'

Mask mandate, occupancy restrictions in state ending next week, governor says

BY JOSH EDWARDS
josh.edwards@dailysentinel.com

Gov. Greg Abbott announced Tuesday that he will repeal a statewide mask mandate and restrictions on

businesses related to the coronavirus pandemic beginning next week. Mandates and restrictions will end March 17, the governor announced during a luncheon with the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce.

"It is now time to open Texas 100%," he said.

The repeal of restrictions applies to all types of businesses, including bars, which were forced to operate under restaurant licenses and restrictions during the pandemic.

"For nearly half a year most, busi-



Abbott

nesses have been open at 75% or 50% and during that time too many Texans have been sidelined from employment opportunities. Too many small business owners have struggled to pay their bills," Abbott said.

Abbott's move immediately drew sharp condemnation from Democrats.

"What Abbott calls pro-business is anti-people. Make no mistake: opening Texas prematurely will only

lead to faster COVID spread, more sickness and overcrowding in our hospitals, and unnecessary deaths," Texas Democratic Party Chairman Gilberto Hinojosa said in an email. "There is no economic recovery without beating the coronavirus pandemic. This will set us back, not move us forward."

Though the state government will

COVID » 4A

Fearsome Fishing Trip (For Science)



SFA biology professor shares piranha expertise on BBC show

BY JOANNA ARMSTRONG
Contributing Writer

Surrounded by dense rainforest, Dr. Carmen Montana-Schalk, assistant professor of biology at Stephen F. Austin State University, dragged a net into the Rupununi River in Guyana hoping to catch a piranha. Having previously conducted research in the region, Montana-Schalk was the natural choice when the BBC show "Animal Impossible" needed an expert for an episode about piranhas.

Known by the locals as "Carmen, the Fish Biologist," she has worked with villagers in Yupukari Village in Guyana on several fish conservation projects. On location with "Animal Impossible," Montana-Schalk answered questions and provided insight as the hosts of the show learned how to measure the bite force of a red-bellied piranha and swam with a school of piranhas in a tank.

"This show was a great experience, not

Where to watch

BBC's "Animal Impossible" is available in the United States through Amazon. Dr. Carmen Montana-Schalk is featured in Series 1, Episode 9.



Photo courtesy of SFA

Dr. Carmen Montana-Schalk, assistant professor in Stephen F. Austin State University's Department of Biology, recently shared her piranha expertise on the BBC show "Animal Impossible."

only because I was working with the fantastic BBC team, but also because I was sharing knowledge about a group of fish that people are afraid of and helped dispel some myths

surrounding them," Montana-Schalk said. "I was excited to share with people that piranhas

Show » 3A

COURT

Students drop suit, call for an apology

BY TIM MONZINGO
tmonzingo@dailysentinel.com

The federal lawsuit filed against Stephen F. Austin State University by six students accused of filing a false police report against another student has been dropped, and a local attorney believes the university owes the accused an apology.

The lawsuit stemmed from a Sept. 14 incident in which police were dispatched to 17-year-old student Christin Evans' dorm room in what Evans' attorney called was a racially motivated confrontation. It was filed in October and dismissed on Dec. 10, according to court records.

The plaintiffs in the suit were represented by Nacogdoches-based Sean Hightower, Anthony "Tony" Malley II of Beaumont, and Tanner Franklin of Etoile.

"Had these young ladies not filed a lawsuit in federal District Court and stopped SFA's rush to judgment, the outcome could have been very

SFA » 4A



Hightower



Franklin

EDUCATION

NISD will have spring break, seeks waiver on missed days

BY JOSH EDWARDS
josh.edwards@dailysentinel.com

Nacogdoches ISD will not cancel spring break to make up for classroom time lost during last month's winter storm that closed campuses district for a week.

"Moving forward more than anything, first and foremost because we've had that call a number of times here, we will have spring break next week for our students," NISD spokesman Les Linebarger told the Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce during a conference call Tuesday morning.

Students will have the day off Friday followed by the entire week of March 8.

NISD » 3A

Spring break

NISD students will have off Friday through March 15 for spring break.

UNITED WAY

Local relief fund created for future disasters

BY NICOLE BRADFORD
nbradford@dailysentinel.com

After quickly creating a disaster fund during the frigid nightmare that visited East Texas last month, leaders of the Nacogdoches Area United Way have decided to keep

it going. "My hope is that this will become a permanent fund with a balance in preparation for future disasters," local United Way CEO Gary Lee Ashcraft said. "It's going to become one of the streams of revenue we have coming

in with hopes of building it substantially over a period of time, should we have an earthquake or God forbid it snows like that again." The disaster relief fund differs from the United Way's COVID-19 fund, which after being set up in March

brought it \$28,000 that was later divided equally among four local agencies.

"We are going to try to build a perpetual fund so we can be immediately impactful," Ashcraft said.

Fund » 3A

How to help

For more information on the local United Way, including volunteering and donation options, visit unitedwaynac.org.

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