

February 2019

WEST FORT BEND
Living

TERRI SABOL

releases

SECOND BOOK

in a unique

CHILDREN'S SERIES



Plus

Valentine's Day Luncheon supports autism awareness

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Terri Sabol once again features Oscar and Emmy in her second children's book.
[Cover photo courtesy of Country Park Portraits]

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FEATURE

Oscar & Emmy remain the stars in Terri Sabol's second children's book

by MARQUITA GRIFFIN | mgriffin@fbherald.com



Writing feels second-nature to Terri Sabol, and the entire process — from developing an idea and peer-editing to completing the story and searching for an illustrator — brings her immense satisfaction.

Even as a child she found a joy in writing. In fact, she preferred writing letters to her parents instead of arguing whatever point she was trying to make.

“That’s how I expressed myself,” Sabol said. “Instead of just saying what I wanted to say, I would write it out and hand it to them.”

Sabol feels that writing — even to communicate with one’s parents — can help a person filter their emotions, organize thoughts and offer a sound way to entertain or educate.

While in college, Sabol mastered journaling and writing techniques which served her well during her years as an elementary school teacher.

And it was in the classroom where Sabol began to develop an interest in writing, specifically for children.

“As a teacher I loved reading picture books to my students,” said Sabol. “I loved finding that perfect book and if I couldn’t find that perfect book I would say: ‘I wish they had this book available.’”

But one day Sabol stopped wishing and started writing.

In 2016 Sabol released her first book “Oscar and Emmy Get Rescued,” which explored the topic of pet adoptions in the way an elementary-aged child could understand.

The characters in her book — Oscar and Emmy — were based her own experience adopting her beloved kittens (named Oscar and Emmy) from Sugar Land Animal Services. “It was an impactful experience,” Sabol said in a prior interview discussing her first book. “I want to educated people on the process of rescue and adoption.”

“After watching them interact with each other, I realized how many videos and pictures I take of Oscar and Emmy and I was thinking that other people would probably think they were cute, too,” Sabol said. “They get along so well together, spending every waking moment together and sleeping next to each other. I then started exploring the publication aspect of books.”

This past summer, Sabol continued her Oscar and Emmy series with her newly released book: “Oscar and Emmy Weather a Hurricane.”

The book debuted in September and covers importance of natural disaster emergency preparation kits for animals. “Oscar and Emmy Weather a Hurricane,” is based on Sabol’s experiences with the record-breaking destruction caused by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

The 32-page book, which is available on terrisabol.com and Amazon.com, includes three pages of Hurricane Harvey facts as

well as a pet-centric disaster kit checklist.

“I was looking to not just entertain, but to inspire and inform,” Sabol said of how she chooses topics for her books. “I wanted to write a series where the main characters were pets in realistic situations.

“Although each book stands alone, but with common characters and nods to the other books, the series shows the compassion elementary-aged children have for their pets and how the family unit works together to support and care for their pets in a variety of situations.

“Even though the pets in my series are cats, the same themes apply to dogs,” she noted with a light laugh.

A SPECIAL MEET

Sabol’s book couldn’t be complete without keen illustrations, and since her first illustrator, Greatwood resident Anna Edwards, was away at college, Sabol found Natalie Merheb through a Facebook group for writers and illustrators that boasts more than 20,000 members.

“I loved the style of her artwork,” Sabol said. “She kept standing out to me, both with her art she posted, and how she responded to other people’s posts. She was very knowledgeable and professional in her answers and feedback.”

Merheb illustrates digitally with Kyle brushes, which Sabol said is extremely appealing.

“She did a sample illustration of my cats, and I hired her,” Sabol said, adding that Merheb lives in Dubai.

As chance would have it, Sabol was able to meet face-to-face with Merheb while on a cruise that stopped in Dubai overnight. It was a rare, but special, meet for the Dubai illustrator.

“Natalie told me she never gets to meet an international client in person,” Sabol said. “We met up for the day and went to the Safari Park Zoo with her twin girls.

“We have a more special connection now. I was very fortunate to be able to meet her in person.”

COMBINING TWO PASSIONS

Sabol, doesn’t stop when her books are published. She eagerly offers author visits, traveling around Fort Bend County, the nation and even other countries to read the adventures and lessons of Oscar and Emmy to students.

To date she has visited more than 250 classes in four states and four countries, reading to children as young as a year old to students in 12th grade.

“As an indie author, I wear many, many hats,” Sabol said. “I book my own visits by I contacting people I know, librarians and even PTO members. Sometimes I even know a parent at the school.”

With her first book, Sabol secured a reading in Dallas, Texas because of friends who live in the area. Another time, she turned





a road trip to visit family and friends as a chance to reach children along the East Coast.

“It’s all about networking,” she said. “And taking advantage of opportunities.”

She laughs at a fond memory.

“I even did, what I like to call, my ‘European Tour,’” Sabol said. “I have an American friend who lives in Paris and another who lives in London. I also have a cousin who lives in Frankfurt, so while I was visiting them last year I made appointments to read to 22 English-speaking classes.”

And the reception is always welcoming and warm, she said.

“The main feedback is that both children and adults — the teachers and librarians — are surprised by how much they learn about the adoption process. During author visits, the students really love when I show them pictures of the real life Oscar and Emmy.”

“Traveling is such a huge passion of mine,” she added. “Now I combine my trips with my other passion, which, of course, is being an author.”

BOOK NO. 3 IN THE WORKS

With her second book in circulation, Sabol is currently revising the next book in her Oscar and Emmy series — “Oscar and Emmy Visit Grandma.”

The book is set to release by Summer 2019.

“This book is to showcase what to do with your pets when you go on vacation,” Sabol said. “It also highlights the importance of the elderly being careful around pets and how they can be a tripping hazard.”

Following the third book, Sabol plans to write a Christmas story featuring her favorite felines, which is set to debut next Fall.

“My purpose is to share with people and I don’t think I can stop writing,” Sabol said with a laugh. “I’m inspired by so many things. While cats are my favorite topic, I have a bunch of ideas that have nothing to do with cats.”

In addition to signing up for Terri Sabol’s monthly newsletter at bit.ly/terrisabol, people can follow Oscar and Emmy on Instagram: [@oscar_and_emmy](https://www.instagram.com/oscar_and_emmy) or Facebook: [@OscarandEmmy Books](https://www.facebook.com/OscarandEmmyBooks). Terri Sabol can be followed on Twitter: [@terrisabol](https://twitter.com/terrisabol). For more information visit terrisabol.com or oscarandemmybooks.com





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"For the Kids We Love" Valentine's Day autism awareness luncheon

"It's not what I can't do, but what I can do that makes a difference,"

said Grant Maniér, an author, public-speaker and Eco-Artist phenomenon who is diagnosed with autism.

Through his work, Maniér is changing perceptions of how to reduce, reuse and recycle. He uses thousands of pieces of recycled paper products, shredded puzzle pieces and more to create extraordinary masterpieces of art. He is an award-winning artist and self-advocate who shares his visual art exhibits and literacy program to schools and organizations to teach the importance of environmental responsibility and inclusion through his art and new children's book: "Grant the Jigsaw Giraffe and Friends."

On Valentine's Day, Maniér will share his experiences at a special Hope for Three Autism Advocates event — the "For the Kids we Love" luncheon — where he is scheduled as a guest speaker.

Hope For Three, a local nonprofit focused on supporting children diagnosed with autism, will hold the "For the Kids We Love" luncheon from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Texas Safari Ranch in Richmond.

The luncheon, presented by Mary and Tom Solcher and guest speaker Maniér, encourages support in raising awareness, ac-

ceptance and inclusion for local families and children living with autism.

It is an opportunity to engage the public in the nonprofit's cause, build partnerships, resource donations and share information on the many ways Hope for Three can provide help and create hope for local families.

The CDC reports that 1 in 59 children in the United States are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. However, a recent study indicated the tally may be as high as 1 in 40 children. A child is diagnosed every 11 minutes.

Autism is more common than Aids, cancer and diabetes combined, and the annual cost of care for one child with autism is estimated to extend up to \$60,000.

Luncheon sponsors and supporters THINK Neurology for Kids, Behavioral Innovations Sugar Land, OCuSOFT and Texas Safari Ranch, believe when you give, and live for something greater, the gratification becomes a labor of love.

Funds raised from the mid-day affair provide children on the spectrum access to much-needed therapies and treatments. Individual tickets (\$50), table (\$500) sponsorships available.

To give a gift of hope or serve as a sponsor, visit hopeforthree.org or call 281-245-0640.



Grant Maniér



2019 Luncheon Presenting Sponsor Mary and Tom Solcher with the Montgomery triplets, the inspiration for Hope For Three.



More Valentine's Day Highlights

Feb 4th

Folded-Book Hearts

The University Branch Library will host "Folded-Book Hearts" at 7 p.m. in Conference Room 1. Library staff will demonstrate how to take an old book and make words and images by folding the pages. No cutting, gluing, or special equipment are needed for this simple craft project. The project is a fun way to re-use old books and give them a new purpose. The resulting piece of art can be a great gift for someone who loves to read. Reservations required.

Feb 9th

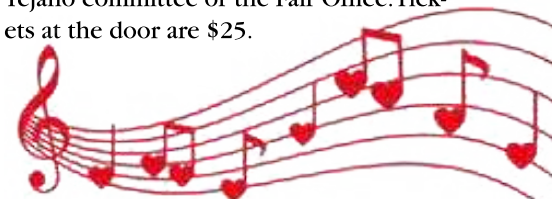
Flower Arranging

The George Memorial Library will host "Flower Arranging" at 10:30 a.m. in the meeting room. Charmanie Amaratunge will demonstrate different techniques to use in making decorative flower arrangements for Valentine's Day or the spring season.



Go Tejano Valentine's Dance

The Fort Bend County Fair Go Tejano Committee will host the 8th Annual Valentine's Dance at 7 p.m. at the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds in Building C. Doors will open at 7 p.m. for a great night of music. Zamorales, Solido & DJ Mario will really heat up your Valentine's night. Advance tickets are \$20 and can be purchased online from a member of the Go Tejano committee or the Fair Office. Tickets at the door are \$25.



sentiments that the colors of roses are meant to convey

Roses are a popular gift on Valentine's Day. When accompanied by a box of chocolates, a bouquet of long-stemmed roses is sure to make a sweetheart smile on February 14.

Few people may know that the color of a rose is meant to convey a certain message. As a result, even the most head-over-heels-in-love man or woman may not be saying what they mean to say when giving roses. If that special someone has a favorite color of rose, then it might be wise to give that color regardless of what tradition suggests. But when sweethearts have no such preferences, it might be best to keep this guide, courtesy of ProFlowers®, in mind.

♥ **Red:** Red roses say "I love you." Red is symbolic of love, especially romantic love. Red also symbolizes beauty, courage and respect.

♥ **Pink:** Pink is a popular color on Valentine's Day, but sweethearts should know that pink roses say "Thank you," which makes them a better choice for friends than lovers.

♥ **White:** White roses say "I am the one for you." White symbolizes true love, purity, innocence, reverence, humility, youthfulness, and charm.

♥ **Yellow:** Yellow roses say "We're friends and I care about you." Joy, gladness, friendship, delight, and remembrance are just a few of the sentiments yellow conveys.

♥ **Yellow with red tips:** Yellow roses may be best for friends, but yellow roses with red tips say "I'm falling in love with you."

♥ **Orange/coral:** Another awe-inspiring color, orange/coral roses say "I want you in my life." This color indicates desire, enthusiasm and fascination.

♥ **Red and white together:** A mixed bouquet of red and white roses says "We are a great match."

♥ **Peach:** Peach symbolizes intimacy, telling a lover, "Let's make this a memorable Valentine's Day."

Different color roses say different things, meaning Valentine's Day celebrants can find a rose to convey any message they hope to send this February 14.



Countdown to Valentine's Day with week-long fun

Millions of people eagerly await the arrival of the shortest month of the year for the opportunity to show their spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, companions, and many other special people in their lives how much they are loved. Even though Valentine's Day is just one day a year, that doesn't mean it should be the only time one expresses his or her love for a special someone.

With this in mind, individuals can count down the days to Valentine's Day with these daily events that precede the day of love.

February 7: Rose Day

Celebrate love with a vase filled with roses. Red symbolizes love, and many other colors represent heartfelt emotions. The flowers will add to home decor and ambiance.

February 8: Proposal Day

Couples ready to tie the knot can use this day as an opportunity to propose. Those already engaged or married can spend Proposal Day celebrating the events that led up to their own engagement or betrothal, and toast how their relationships have evolved.

February 9: Chocolate Day

Lavish a loved one with all the decadent treats they enjoy. These can include store-purchased chocolates, chocolate fudge sundaes or warm brownies fresh out of the oven.

February 10: Teddy Day

This day can be interpreted in different ways. Couples adding spice to their relationships can celebrate Teddy Day with the lingerie of the same name. Those looking for a more G-rated experience can gift each other with an adorable stuffed bear. Make-your-own stuffed animal retailers at nearby malls are a place to turn for customizable teddy bears.

February 11: Promise Day

Promise Day provides an opportunity to make promises to each other that are specific to couples' relationships. These can include being more patient, traveling more or spending more time together.

February 12: Hug Day

On this day the world celebrates the uplifting and comforting power of hugs, which can be powerful expressions of love.

February 13: Kiss Day

Couples can pucker up and spend a few extra moments showing their affection with some kisses. The lips are quite sensitive to touch, and kissing is one of the more renowned expressions of intimacy.

Show love all week long leading up to Valentine's Day.

Choose wisely when selecting Valentine gifts

As the clock ticks down to Valentine's Day, the pressure is on to find the ideal gift. While some sweethearts may provide some clues to help with Valentine's Day shopping, many gift-givers are on their own.

The National Retail Federation predicts that, in 2019, shoppers may match Valentine's Day spending from a year ago, when lovebirds spent a total \$18.2 billion on gifts for their sweethearts. With so much money invested, shoppers no doubt want to find the best gifts possible. When shopping for Valentine's Day, try to avoid these common mistakes and choose gifts that are creative and heartfelt.

♥ Skip the gas station flowers, candy or last-minute gifts. Valentine's Day is a time to show you care. If you've left gifting to the last minute, you may make the situation worse by giving something impersonal you picked up on an errand. If you forgot or ran out of time, simply admit you goofed or time got away from you. Then ask your sweetheart what he or she wants and go shopping together.

♥ Avoid attention-getter antics. Sure it may seem like a good idea to send 20 helium balloons and a boatload of flowers to a sweetheart's office. But what if he or she really doesn't like being in the limelight? Are you gifting this way for the attention you'll receive rather than doing so to make your sweetheart happy?

♥ Eschew overly personal gifts. If your relationship is in its infancy and you haven't both mutually expressed interest to take it to the next level, avoid gifts that suggest moving in together (appliances), personal fragrances, couples massages, or other intimate activities. Wait until the relationship has reached certain milestones before getting too personal with gifts.

♥ Stop trying to be helpful. If your sweetheart has expressed a desire to make certain lifestyle changes, you may think a gym membership or a subscription to a new wardrobe mail service makes a great gift. But such gifts may send the wrong message, inadvertently, and even falsely, indicating that you don't like your partner the way he or she is.

♥ Pass up practical gifts. Valentine's Day is a time to cater to fantasies and wishes more so than necessities. Even if your sweetheart needs that new electric shaver or a snow scraper for the car, go for something more special on Valentine's Day.

Valentine's gifters should focus on presents that will be meaningful to the recipient and something he or she may see as an indulgence.

dinner for two: Lovely date night meals for your special day



lobster Colorado

by **TINA NICOTERA**

Prep: 10m | Cook: 30m | Ready In: 40m

INGREDIENTS

- 4 (8 oz) fillet mignon (beef tenderloin)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 4 slices bacon
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1 tsp OLD BAY(R) Seasoning
- 8 oz lobster tail, cleaned and chopped

DIRECTIONS

Set oven to Broil at 500 degrees F (260 degrees C).

Sprinkle tenderloins all over with salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Wrap each filet with bacon, and secure with a toothpick. Place on a broiling pan, and broil to desired doneness, about 8 to 10 minutes per side for medium rare.

While tenderloins are cooking, melt 1/4 cup of butter over medium heat with 1/2 teaspoon Old Bay(R) seasoning. Stir in chopped lobster meat, and cook until done. Spoon lobster meat over cooked tenderloins, and return them to the broiler until the lobster meat begins to brown.

While the lobster is in the oven, heat the remaining 1/4 cup of butter in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, cook until it browns, turning the color of a hazelnut. To serve, spoon the browned butter over the steaks, and sprinkle with the remaining Old Bay(R) seasoning.



filet mignon with rich balsamic glaze

INGREDIENTS

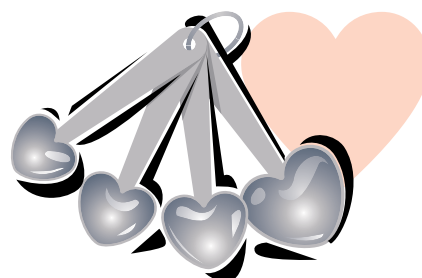
- 2 (4 ounce) filet mignon steaks
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper to taste
- salt to taste
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup dry red wine

DIRECTIONS

Sprinkle freshly ground pepper over both sides of each steak, and sprinkle with salt to taste.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Place steaks in hot pan, and cook for 1 minute on each side, or until browned. Reduce heat to medium-low, and add balsamic vinegar and red wine. Cover, and cook for 4 minutes on each side, basting with sauce when you turn the meat over.

Remove steaks to two warmed plates, spoon one tablespoon of glaze over each, and serve immediately. Serve with steamed asparagus and baby red potatoes.



Simple Sweets & Valentine's treats

Romantic Drinks

chocolate cardamom truffle cake

Serves 10 to 12

AMARETTI BASE INGREDIENTS

5 ounces amaretti
1/2 stick (4 tbs) unsalted butter
5 tbs sugar

TRUFFLE FILLING INGREDIENTS

2 1/3 cups heavy cream
4 to 6 green cardamom pods, lightly bruised
to open them
25 ounces dark chocolate (60-70% cocoa
solids), grated
1/2 stick (4 tbs) unsalted butter, cubed
4 tbs chocolate liqueur



CARDAMOM COCOA SUGAR INGREDIENTS

3 green cardamom pods
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa
1 10-inch cake pan with a removable base, base and sides lined with nonstick parchment paper

DIRECTIONS

To make the amaretti base, finely crush the amaretti in a food processor or put them in a plastic bag and crush with a rolling pin. Melt the butter and sugar in a pan over low heat, then stir in the amaretti crumbs. Press the mixture evenly over the base of the prepared cake pan and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

To make the cardamom truffle filling, put the cream and cardamom pods in a pan and heat until almost boiling. Remove from the heat and set aside to infuse for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the chocolate and butter in a saucepan. Strain the infused cream through a fine strainer onto the chocolate (the cream will be warm enough to melt the chocolate). If it doesn't melt, warm over very low heat, stirring occasionally, but do not allow to boil. Stir in the liqueur, then set aside until almost cold, but not set. With an electric mixer, beat the chocolate mixture for a couple of minutes — this will give the cake a lovely airy texture. Pour onto the amaretti base. Let cool, then cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours, or up to 48 hours before serving.

To make the cardamom cocoa sugar, remove the black seeds from the papery cardamom pods and put the seeds in a spice grinder with the sugar and cocoa. Grind to a powder. Carefully remove the cake from the pan and peel off the lining paper. Set on a chilled serving plate and sift the cardamom cocoa sugar evenly over the top. Serve immediately, cut into very thin slices.



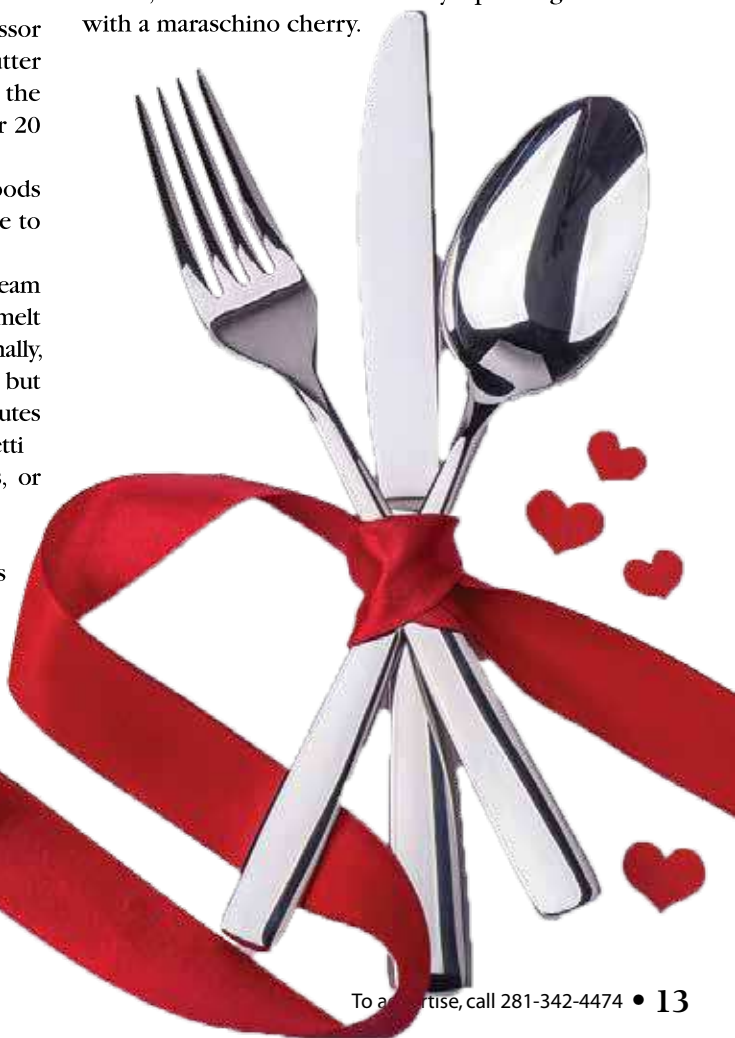
chocolate coffee kiss

INGREDIENTS

3/4 fluid ounce coffee liqueur
3/4 fluid ounce Irish cream liqueur
1/2 fluid ounce creme de cacao liqueur
1 tsp brandy-based orange liqueur (such as Grand Marnier®)
1 cup hot brewed coffee
2 tbs whipped cream
1 1/2 fluid ounces chocolate syrup
1 maraschino cherry

DIRECTIONS

In a coffee mug, combine coffee liqueur, Irish cream, creme de cacao and Grand Marnier. Fill mug with hot coffee. Top with a dollop of whipped cream, drizzle with chocolate syrup and garnish with a maraschino cherry.



George Takes The Gavel

New Fort Bend County judge reflects on journey to America, his campaign promises and first week in office

Story & Photos by **Tyler Johnson** | sjohnson@fbherald.com

It's called the American dream. Fort Bend County Judge KP George knows it well.

He grew up on the other side of the world in a village in southern India called Kakkodu.

George lived in a farmhouse where his family raised cows while his father earned a living as a truck driver, providing for his family with little pay.

But he always envisioned himself doing greater things with his life. He would go on to do historic things.

In November, citizens of Fort Bend County elected George, 53, to become the first Democrat county judge in 24 years and the first Indian-American to win a countywide office.

"I give a lot of credit to God for my life's journey," George said. "I believe it was God's plan. I believe He has a real purpose in me.

"Coming from an immigrant background, we all come here and get involved. America is a wonderful place. People can come from all over and accomplish things, like I did."

While in India, George earned his high school and college degree. He then found a job in Bombay, now known as Mumbai.

He came to the United States in the early 1990s when he got the opportunity to move to New York where he spent six years working for a financial firm.

In 1999, George got a call to move to the Houston area for a job opening. At first, he declined the offer. But after much consideration, praying and consulting with his wife Sheeba, he accepted the job.

"This is my home. I can't imagine myself living anywhere else."

In the 1970s, Fort Bend County had a population of about 70,000 people. Since then, it has grown to about 780,000 people.

"Why are people coming here? Because there is something unique here.

"I understand why they come here because I came here for the same thing: good schools, a wonderful place to live, good community and good jobs."

He also said that the county is one of the most diverse in the entire country, which he believes helped him defeat longtime county judge Bob Hebert.

"This is a melting pot. Nearly 104 languages represent Fort Bend County," he said.

After winning the election, George, 53, and his transition team spent six to eight weeks working in the upstairs conference room of the historic Fort Bend County Courthouse, which he said Hebert was kind enough to lend.

"[Hebert and I] have good relationship," George said. "The day after the election, I came in and visited with him. He welcomed me to the office and gave me his cellphone number.

"He said, 'KP, if you need anything, call me.'"

George has always been a man who believes in community service, which is a trait he has passed on to his three children.

"I realized giving back to the community is so important. When you go out and do things for others, God will never let you starve.

Prior to getting into politics, George was involved in the school system and active in the community. He served on school booster clubs, Parent-Teacher Association, rotary clubs and chambers.

Then he served as a board member for Fort Bend ISD for five years.

Now as the county judge, George feels like he is in a better position to get things done now.

"As a Fort Bend ISD board member, you are one of seven members so you can't just go and do anything. Here, we can make decisions."

Since taking office on Jan. 1, he said he and his staff have worked tirelessly to make the county a better place to live for everyone.

"We are working anywhere from 12 to 16 hours a day," he said. "I know being county judge is great responsibility. "There is an expectation and we intend to fulfill that expectation to the fullest."

During his campaign, George made revitalizing and modernizing the Office of Emergency Management, better community engagement and youth empowerment, his top priorities.

"These are just some of the things we would like to get done in our first year," he said.

He has already begun his work in the Office of Emergency Management by naming county Fire Marshal Mark Flathouse as interim coordinator of the office.

"He's a well-respected man within Fort Bend County and is doing a great job," George said. "It was a well-thought out decision."

Flathouse's first duty is to develop a comprehensive report of the Office of Emergency Management within the first 100 days.

"Based on that report, we will start molding that department into our expectations," George said. "When I make a decision, I just want to make sure it fact-based — not based on how I feel."

To bring more engagement with the community, George and his staff have already begun scheduling a listening tour, which will allow residents in every precinct an opportunity to voice their opinions.

"I think it's something necessary we have to do," he said.

George said he has already begun talking to the different chambers of commerce in the county about developing a youth leadership program.

"Youth empowerment is actually a top priority," he said. "Everything we do is for our children and young people."

George said he is a man of Christian faith. Every decision he makes is made after spending time in prayer.

He noted how although most of the people in India are either



Fort Bend County Judge KP George stands in the historic courtroom. He gavelled for the first time on Tuesday, Jan. 8.

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Hindu and Muslim, his village is Christian because in A.D. 52, Saint Thomas, who was a disciple of Christ, sailed to the southern tip of India, the same area where George grew up.

He established Christianity there.

“I read so much about that came to find out that Christianity came to India long before it came to Europe,” George said. “When you go to the state I grew up in 20 percent are Christians, but overall Christianity in India is less than one percent.”

“I pray every day to keep me humble. This is an enormous responsibility [as county judge] so I ask for strength to make smart decisions to help the people in Fort Bend County.

Because of his faith and desire for community service, George said he gives back to his home village in India out of his own pocket. He said his charitable work has provided 20 homes over the year and he provides nearly 15 to 20 kids scholarships to study.

He often looks back on his journey and God’s plan that has brought him to the United States.

“I came from a farmhouse in India to a Fort Bend County

judgeship. That can only happen in the U.S. and that is why this is an amazing place.”



With his hand on the Bible, KP George took the oath of office as the first Democrat county judge in Fort Bend County in 24 years. He is also the first American of Indian descent to win a countywide office in Fort Bend County. At left, District Court Judge Brenda Mullinix reads the oath of office to George while his wife Sheeba holds the Bible.

Get income-tax-preparation assistance at local libraries

The University Branch Library will offer income-tax-preparation assistance on Saturdays, Feb. 2 through April 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Conference Room 1. The George Memorial Library will offer the same service Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays, Feb. 2 through April 15 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Representatives from the AARP will provide free income-tax-preparation assistance for low-income taxpayers.

Patrons should bring the following information to the session if possible: photo ID; Social Security card(s) for self, spouse, and all dependents; last year’s tax return; W-2, 1099s, and any other

compensation received in 2018; unemployment compensation statements; and any other documents that are necessary to complete your return.

This service is free and open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis. Income-tax forms will no longer be available at the libraries, but patrons may use the libraries’ computers and printers to download and print out the forms from the IRS website, www.irs.gov, during regular library hours.

A library card is needed to use the printers, and the cost to print is 10 cents per black-and-white page.

THE FORT BEND WOMEN’S CENTER BOASTS NEW PLAYGROUND BUILT BY VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers from the Fort Bend Women’s Center and the community joined KaBOOM! in December to transform an empty site into a kid-designed, state-of-the-art playground in just six hours at Fort Bend Women’s Center.

KaBOOM!, a national nonprofit dedicated to giving all kids – especially those living in poverty – enjoyable and safe places to play.

In October children in the Women’s Center’ Emergency Shelter, which was impacted by Hurricane Harvey, came together to draw their dream playground.

“This project has literally been a dream come true for the children in our programs, particularly the Emergency Shelter,” said Vita Goodell the chief executive officer of the Fort Bend Women’s Center. “Our outdoor play area suffered greatly in last year’s storms and was no longer fit for use.”

The playground, she noted, is based off their drawings and will be used by more than 100 kids in Fort Bend Women’s Center’s programs.

“For the children in our programs to have had the opportunity to be involved in designing this state of the art play space and to see so many volunteers come out to make it a reality sends a

From left, Fort Bend Women’s Center Development Coordinator Stephanie Hoffman, Fort Bend Women’s Center Chief Development Officer Leslie Wendland, and Fort Bend Women’s Center CEO Vita Goodell.



Volunteers and staff celebrate at a ribbon cutting for the finished playground.



powerful message to them - it is telling them that they do matter, their voice matters and that they matter to this community,” Goodell added. “Understanding that is so important to them moving beyond the abuse they have experienced.”

Ensuring kids have safe places to play is critical to helping families and communities heal during times of recovery, as they continue to deal with the stress of lost homes, lost loved ones and lost routines. By creating and providing playspaces, children and families can continue to regain a sense of normalcy.

This playground project is part of a broader effort led by the RebuildTexas Fund and KaBOOM! to serve communities affected by Hurricane Harvey. It is the tenth build by the partners.

Overall, the partnership will lead 15 community-designed playground projects, and award 20 creative play products - Imagination Playground™ and Rigamjig - to organizations across 41 counties in Southeast Texas, providing new opportunities to play for more than 87,500 children over the next generation.

For more information about the Fort Bend Women’s Center visit For more information, visit www.fbwc.org or @fbendwomensctr on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For more information about the Rebuild Texas Fund visit www.rebuildtx.org. Visit kaboom.org to learn more about the KaBOOM! effort.

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FRIENDS OF NORTH RICHMOND SEEKS VOLUNTEERS

Friends Of North Richmond relies on volunteers to help it create a better North Richmond for all.

“We have some of the most positive, dedicated and committed volunteers that give their time and energy teaching GED Tutorial Preparation classes to families in the community,” organizers said.

Two loyal volunteers are Barry Bores-Koefoed and Ned Merchant, who are helping Friends of North Richmond introduce a GED program to the community.

Visit attackpoverty.org/locations/friends-of-north-richmond for more information.



Barry Bores-Koefoed and Ned Merchant.



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To make an appointment for your pet or for more information, please call us at (281) 342-7770 or visit us at 401 Crabb River Road in Richmond.

TEXAS BAR FOUNDATION GRANT HELPS INCREASING NUMBERS YOUNG CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE

The Texas Bar Foundation recently awarded Child Advocates of Fort Bend a \$5,000 grant to support the agency's Positive Parenting Project to address the advocacy needs of babies and toddlers.

Children, 5 years old and younger, are among the most vulnerable victims of child abuse and represent the largest age cohort served by CAFB's Court Appointed Special Advocates Program. A total of 125 infants and toddlers were served as of November 12. As new children enter Texas Foster Care daily, the most basic needs for care and safety are in high demand and so are the needs pressed upon the networks of child welfare, judicial, law enforcement and other systems.

“The greatest needs are to prevent abused and neglected children from falling through the cracks of any system, to advocate for their best interests in court and reduce their chances of returning to the system,” said Child Advocates of Fort Bend CEO Ruthanne Mefford. “A short-term goal is to continue to serve 100 percent of abused and neglected children ages 5 and under to ensure their safety and permanency. New program enhancements will help children reunite with family or identify and connect with previously unknown family members when possible using Collaborative Family Engagement and CAFB-sponsored Family Reunification Celebrations.”

Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than \$19 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, the Texas Bar Foundation is the nation's largest charitably-funded bar foundation.

Child Advocates of Fort Bend is the only agency in Fort Bend County exclusively dedicated to providing critical services, all free of charge, to abused and neglected children and their non-offending family members.

For 27 years, CAFB has provided a voice, healed the hurt and broken the cycle of abuse and neglect in Fort Bend County. Through its Court Appointed Special Advocates Program, Children's Advocacy Center and more than 200 trained advocates, CAFB has served more than 15,500 children since opening its doors in 1991. New Volunteer Advocates are continuously needed to help sustain its programs. For more information about CAFB, or to learn how to volunteer, visit www.cafb.org or contact Lindsey Castellanos at lcastellanos@cafb.org or 281-344-5259.

Life Scout places Little Free libraries around his neighborhood

by Tyler Johnson | sjohnson@fbherald.com

Greatwood Boy Scout Caleb Degeyter has been in scouting since the first grade and before the end of the year, he moved a step closer to achieving the Eagle Scout honor when he built a couple of Little Free libraries around his neighborhood for his project.

“It was just to help the neighborhood and provide another aspect to Greatwood,” he said. “The neighborhood loves it. We have books showing up on our doorstep. The idea was that it would be a constant flow of books and you wouldn’t have to go that far.”

“For most people in the neighborhood, these are walking distance from their houses.”

Degeyter said he got the idea from a passage in the STAAR test he took a few years ago. It explained how a Little Free Library has provided books to communities around the world that don’t have easy access to them.

Degeyter is a junior at George Ranch High School and is also a Life Scout, which is the rank just ahead of the desired Eagle Scout.

The Eagle Scout Project is required for all scouts to complete before becoming an Eagle Scout. It’s a way for the scouts to demonstrate leadership while performing a project for the benefit of the community, Degeyter explained.

One of the requirements for the project is to be leaders for younger scouts, so Degeyter had a few lower ranked scouts help him, including his brother Hayden.

“He listened a little more than the others did, but it was nice being a leader to the younger scouts,” he said.

Before the project could begin, Degeyter needed to jump through some hoops.

He filled out paperwork for the project, more paperwork for the Eagle Scout rank, and then once that was completed, Degeyter went before the board of Troop 1630 to present the project.

He created a model out of sturdy poster board to demonstrate

what the Little Free Libraries would like.

Once board members reviewed the project, they went before the council, which ultimately decided that Degeyter was ready for the Eagle Scout rank.

“It’s like an interview to see if you’re qualified, but everyone has to do a project,” said Caleb’s mother Monique Degeyter.

Once the Little Free libraries were finished, Degeyter placed one at a park across the street from Campbell Elementary and the other at one of the neighborhood pools. Since then, the Degeyter family has received hundreds of donated books from neighbors.

“I learned a lot from doing this project,” he said. “Especially with the construction and logistics. There was a lot of trial and error.”

“But let me tell you, the second one we built was a lot better than the first.”



Photo by Tyler Johnson | Troop 1630 Boy Scout Caleb Degeyter from Greatwood replaces books in the Little Free Library he built and places in his neighborhood.



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ART I BECOME' EXHIBIT SHOWCASES FAMILY'S TALENT



Claire Payne and her daughters Kathryn Payne Bright and Terri Payne-Bieber.

Fort Bend County Libraries' George Memorial Library is reminding the public that its special exhibit, "Art I Become," will be on display through Feb. 28 in the Bohachevsky Gallery of the library, located at 1001 Golfview in Richmond.

The exhibit, which showcases the artwork of Claire Payne and her daughters Kathryn Payne Bright and Terri Payne-Bieber, may be viewed during regular library hours. For more information, call the library system's Communications Office at 281-633-4734.

Claire Payne and her daughters all discovered and explored their passion for art through their own personal life-journeys. As often happens, the journeys took them through good times as well as bad, and art gave them a means to survive, conquer, and rejoice in the celebration and joy of life.

Many of these life-battles are reflected in their work - both on canvas and in the poetic lines of verse.

"When confronting hardships along my path, I started to turn to art as a way to express my disappointment, feelings of rejection, confusion, and dismay," said Terri Payne-Bieber.

"I found I could separate myself from negative feelings, and in an act of self-expression, I could extrude those bad feelings out of myself and directly onto canvas."

Payne-Bieber admits that these paintings were not pretty, but they were a visual depiction of the physical and emotional pain and turmoil that she was battling.

"These paintings were dark, but this overall process made my spirit feel lighter, and in that lightness, I could move on," added Payne-Bieber. "This process would eventually lead me to dive deeply into a wonderful career in art and social service."

She and her sister, Kathryn Payne Bright, credit their forays into artistic expression to their mother's love of art. Throughout her daughters' childhoods, Claire encouraged them to have fun with

art as a means to discover their own personal identities.

"She showed me that creating art is a personal journey to connect your self to your soul - and that's something you do for yourself, not for other people," explains Payne-Bieber.

"Expressive art is fun and, to this day, a refreshing lifesaver in turbulent times!"

Kathryn Payne Bright is the poet of the family, but she also finds satisfaction in expressing herself through mixed-media collages.

The joy the women found in artistic expression would help each one of them through personal struggles they encountered in their lives. It was the death of her husband, Pat, that led Claire to turn to art as a means to deal with the sense of grief and loss that she felt. Watercolor is her favorite medium, but she also enjoys trying her hand at collage and abstract textures.

"Painting on different surfaces is a happy new challenge each time," said Claire. "You will see watercolor on paper, on a synthetic surface called YUPO, on clay board, and gesso surfaces."

Claire's work has been accepted into international juried shows as well as the International Society of Experimental Art. She has been recognized at the Watercolor Art Society-Houston, and she has won numerous 1st-place awards in local art-league shows.

A cancer survivor, Payne-Bieber found physical and emotional healing through her artwork. As an extension of the healing process, Payne-Bieber was inspired to share that gift with others who were experiencing personal battles or troubling times. In 2003, she founded ARTreach as a means to bring arts to underserved communities in Fort Bend County, such as children at risk, victims of crime, and children and adults with special needs.

DOZENS FLOCK TO FIRST-EVER BOBWHITE QUAIL WORKSHOP

Story & Photo by **Tyler Johnson** | sjohnson@fbherald.com

Over the last 30 years, the bobwhite quail population has decreased by 70 percent, according to Amber Leung, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent.

Leung presented to a crowd of over 60 local residents and fellow master naturalists in January at the Rosenberg Civic Center about how to preserve the bobwhite quail population, the life of a quail and why quails are important to the ecosystem.

To demonstrate the decline in quail population, Leung handed out 20 quail-shaped cards for people to hold up for a portion of the presentation.

She then asked 15 of them to put down the cards, illustrating the sudden scarcity in quails.

"Where have the quail gone?" she asked the crowd. "There are a whole slew of factors."

Leung said habitat loss is the main reason, citing numerous dynamics.

Those include changing land-uses, urbanization, red imported fire ants, fragmented habitats, exotic grasses, overgrazing, monocultures, feral hogs, mowing and climatic changes.

She said the bobwhite quail often lives in coveys, which can consist of between 10 to 20 quails.

During the winter season, the coveys share warmth and protection from larger wildlife animals.

However, during the spring season, the coveys break up and form pairs for mating.

The summer season is the peak-nesting season and then the coveys reassemble in the fall.

Quails are important to the ecosystem, Leung noted. They're a food source for a variety of different animals and critters, including fire ants.

"But that's OK," Leung said. "It's their niche in wildlife."

Other animals that prey on quails are coyotes, bobcats, foxes, cooper hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, crows, grackles, western rat snakes, rattlesnakes, bullsnakes, coachwhips, raccoons, opossums, striped skunks, ground squirrels, cotton rats, mice and parasites.

"This is not the complete list of species that enjoy eating bobwhite quails," Leung said.

Needville resident Julie Foytik was shocked to learn that fire ants weren't the only reason for the population decline.

Leung also said increasing popularity in quail hunting has been a factor in the quail population decline.

"It's a big source of income and tourism throughout the state of Texas," she said.

Leung mentioned several ways to preserve the bobwhite quail community.

"Let's begin with education, cooperation and restoration," she said.

As far as education goes, several groups focus on the preservation of quails, such as the Texas Wildlife Association, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, which has started the reversing the quail decline initiative, bobwhite brigades and quail appreciation days.

The next quail appreciation day is scheduled for March 21 at Long Acres Ranch in Richmond. Visit <https://longacresranch.org/> for more information.

"Cooperation and restoration can be tied together," Leung said.

She said that 95 percent of Texas land is privately owned so it's important for landowners to manage their land for quail and other wildlife and for them to work together to reconnect fragmented habitats.

A healthy habitat for quails is a diversity of native plants, such as early successional forbs like sunflower and ragweed, native prairie grasses like little bluestem, and seed and fruit bearing woody plants like oaks, hackberry mesquite and sumac.

Leung also said that the bobwhite quail is one of the few species of bird that do not migrate south for the winter because they need food all year long and struggle with climate change, much like canaries.

"That's why we call them the canaries of the prairies," she said.



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent Amber Leung carries her female quail on her shoulder while she educates a large crowd about the preservation of bobwhite quails.

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SEABOURNE PARK ANNOUNCES MONTHLY BIRD HIKE

On Wednesday, Feb. 6 from 8 to 10 a.m., bird watchers are welcome at Seabourne Creek Nature Park for a monthly bird hike.

All ages and levels of birders are encouraged to come and meet in the parking lot by 8 a.m. Binoculars and weather-appropriate clothing and footwear are recommended.

The monthly series of these free guided bird hikes are led by members of the Coastal Prairie Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

Seabourne Creek Nature Park is located on Hwy 36 South across from the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds and next to the Rosenberg Civic Center. Turn in at the Texas Parks & Wildlife brown sign marking Seabourne Nature Park on the Texas Coastal Birding Trail with the park's 200-plus bird list.

Special thanks to organizers, Bob and Carol Schwartz. The hikes are usually led by recognized birding expert, Mark Scheuerman, E-bird compiler for our area of Texas.

The Texas Master Naturalists program is sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. For additional information call 281-633-7033, email mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu, or visit website txmn.org/coastal.



Photo by Wayne Poorman | Red Bellied Woodpecker at Seabourne Park.

CELEBRATE CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR WITH LANTERN FESTIVAL

In recognition of the Chinese Lunar New Year, Fort Bend County Libraries will celebrate with a Chinese Lantern Festival on Sunday, Feb. 17, from 2 to 4 p.m., in the lobby of George Memorial Library, 1001 Golfview in Richmond.

Dancing lions from the Soaring Phoenix Dragon & Lion Dance



Association will entertain visitors at 2:30 pm, following the welcome and introductions.

Crafts and activities celebrating the Year of the Pig are planned for families with children of all ages. Max Nguyen, a paper-crafting volunteer with the Chinese Community Center, will demonstrate the art of origami, which involves folding and twisting pieces of paper to create whimsical works of art.

Visitors may also join in playing Cai Deng Mi, or "Guessing the Lantern's Riddle," and win a prize if the answer is correct!

The celebration at the library will feature authentic red lanterns that were presented to Fort Bend County by representatives of Chancheng District, of Foshan City, China. The lanterns will hang in the lobby of the library for the day's festivities.

In 2012, county and business leaders from Fort Bend County signed a Memorandum of Understanding with delegates from the City of Foshan, signifying an alignment between Fort Bend and Chancheng District on mutual economic, cultural and environmental issues. In November of 2012, representatives from the two entities signed a Friendship Agreement, which is in essence a contract stating that the two sides will work together to promote exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, sports, environmental protection, science, technology, education, medical research and culture, in an effort to promote mutual prosperity and development.

Foshan is a city in central Guangdong province, located in southern China, with a population of 7.2 million. Chancheng District was chosen for the Memorandum of Understanding because of the similarities it shares with Fort Bend County, including population growth, business growth, and a focus on education, medical, and cultural amenities.

The Chinese Lantern Festival marks the culmination of the Chinese Lunar New Year celebration. The festival is part of an ancient ceremony welcoming spring, and the lantern symbolizes the lengthening days of the season. It is also thought to ward off evil spirits.

The Chinese Lantern Festival activities are free and open to the public. For more information, call George Memorial Library at 281-342-4455 or the library system's Communications Office at 281-633-4734.

MORE ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT HAPPENINGS NEAR YOU

DARK SKY - SAVE THE NIGHT

Texas Master Naturalist Coastal Prairie Chapter will host "Dark Sky - Save the Night," on Feb. 7 from 6:30 a.m. to 8 a.m. at the Rosenberg Civic Center, 3825 Highway 36 S in Rosenberg. Dark Sky will be presented by Deborah Moran and Steve Goldberg. Debbie and Steve will explain why darkness at night is important and what we can do to bring back natural darkness. Visit txmn.org/coastal.

CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION!

The University Branch Library will host "Chinese New Year Celebration!" on Feb. 9, from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Meeting Rooms 1 and 2. The library will have a lively festival celebrating the Year of the Pig, featuring a special Chinese New Year Story Time, traditional Chinese riddles, craft activities, and culminating with a performance by the North American Youth Chinese Orchestra. Materials and refreshments for the event are provided through the generous support of the Friends of the University Branch Library.

FOR THE LOVE OF ART

The public is invited to this free event featuring live art show, poetry, various vendors, and free food. Hosted by Collab Event Group, the even will be held from noon to 4 p.m. Feb. 9 at the Center Stage Gallery 3527 Hwy 6, Ste. 250 in Sugar Land. This is a family friendly event with plenty of parking. If you would like to become a vendor visit www.1collabeventgroup.com/event-bookings for more information and to register. If you're interested in performing poetry live send us a message: www.1collabeventgroup.com/sell-with-us

BOOK CLUB

The University Branch Library's Book Club will meet in Conference Room 1 on Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. The book to be discussed is "Same Kind of Different As Me: A Modern-Day Slave, an International Art Dealer, and the Unlikely Woman Who Bound Them Together," written by Ron Hall and Denver Moore. New members are invited to attend.

HEAVY INKS GRAPHIC NOVEL BOOK CLUB

Feb. 16 at 11 a.m. in room 2B of the George Memorial Library, readers of all ages who enjoy illustrated novels and comic books are invited to join this book club specifically for graphic-novel enthusiasts. The book to be discussed is American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang.

FAMILY CRAFT TIME

The University Branch Library will host "Family Craft Time," Feb 18 from 4 - 5 p.m. in Meeting Room 1. Families with children of all ages are invited to enjoy an afternoon of crafting together. There will be crafts to assemble, glue, and color. Materials for this program are made possible by the Friends of the University Branch Library.

OPEN-MIC NIGHT

The George Memorial Library's popular Open-Mic Night will be held, once again on Feb. 20, from 6-8 p.m. in the Meeting Room. Open-Mic Night is a casual event for amateur performers to take the stage and express themselves. Step into the limelight to share original poetry, music, comedy, or one-act plays, or to showcase any other unique talents. Performances are limited to five minutes or less, and they must not contain any profanity or other insensitive topics. This event is for adults and teens aged 14 and above. Registration required to perform only.

CULINARY BOOK CLUB

The theme is "Presidential Favorites" at the University Branch Library's Culinary Book Club meeting set for Feb. 20 at 1:30 p.m. in Meeting Room 1. Cooking enthusiasts of all ages and experience

levels — from beginners to advanced — are invited to join. Those attending are welcome to bring their own cookbooks and recipes, or they may browse the library's collection of cookbooks. Share tips, get ideas and enjoy the camaraderie of other individuals who have an interest in cooking and good cuisine. The club meets on the third Wednesday of every month and different cooking genres are explored each month.

STORY SPINNERS WRITING CLUB

The George Memorial Library's Story Spinners Writing Club will meet Feb. 21 from 5:30 - 8 p.m. in room 2C. This month's topic will be "Viewpoints." From beginning blogger to published novelist, writers of all genres and experience levels are welcome to write, share, learn, support, network, and critique each other's work. Writing prompts, brainteasers, and brief exercises will be available to ignite the imaginations of any and all wordsmiths who wish to hone their craft. This program is recommended for adults and teens aged 14 and up.

BOOK BREAK

On Feb. 21, at noon in room 2A of the George Memorial Library, the book to be discussed is "Dear Life: Stories," written by Alice Munro. Readers are encouraged to bring their favorite book for discussion. Those attending may bring a lunch.

LET'S GROOVE TO THE DISCO BEAT GALA

The Fort Bend Boys Choir of Texas will host its "Let's Groove to the Disco Beat Gala" on Feb. 23 from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Safari Texas Ranch, 11627 FM 1464 in Richmond. Music, food, as well as silent and live auctions will be featured. Visit fbbctx.org.



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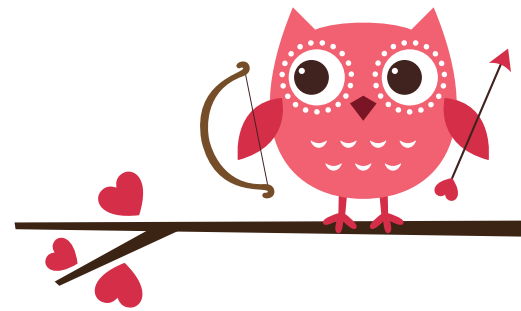
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SEVENTH

UP & OUT: TEXAS WORKFORCE MANAGING STRESS

Richard Prather from Texas Workforce Solutions will talk about ways to reduce stress while searching for a new job from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the George Memorial Library in the Meeting Room. Learn how to control stress, time, and finances to help build resilience.

NINTH

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS: GREECE

In this second of three programs on different ancient civilizations, former architecture professor Sheba Akhtar will talk about the roles that topography, mythology, and science have played in the history and development of Greece at 1 p.m. in the Meeting Room of the George Memorial Library. She will talk about the country's city-states, philosophy, drama, art, and architecture of the classical period, as well as Alexander the Great, the conquest of Asia Minor, Persia, and Egypt during the Hellenistic period. She will also touch upon Mycenae, the Trojan War, and Homer.

TENTH

EARN RAILROADING MERIT BADGE

The Rosenberg Railroad Museum is offering boy scouts a chance to earn their railroading merit badge from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the museum, 1921 Avenue F in Rosenberg. By earning this badge, scouts can learn about the history of railroading, its place in modern society, careers in railroading, and hobbies related to railroading. Completion of this workshop will meet the requirements to earn the Railroading Merit badge. Visit www.rosenbergmuseum.org/scouts.

TWELFTH

RESUMÉ WORKSHOP



The George Memorial Library will host a resumé workshop at 2 p.m. in the Computer Lab. Learn the basics of putting together a resumé. Those attending this informal program will receive one-one-one help formatting a resumé. For assistance on a pre-existing resumé, please have a digital copy available on a usb flashdrive, saved to the cloud, or have access to it via email. Registration required.

FIFTEENTH

SENIOR SERIES: PREPARING TO DOWNSIZE

Liz McNeel, a senior real-estate specialist and certified senior-housing professional, will share tips on how senior citizens can downsize, remove clutter, and create a more organized and personally satisfying space in which to live at the University Branch Library at 10:30 a.m. in Meeting Room 1. Learn about the emotional and physical aspects of de-cluttering, get practical strategies for getting started, and find out how to avoid the top 10 mistakes.

GRACE BEFORE THE RACE

At 6 p.m. in the St. Laurence Catholic School, 2630 Austin Pkwy in Sugar Land, participants can enjoy a night of fun and spaghetti before the "Steps for Students Run." Adult plates are \$10, children's plates are \$5. The spaghetti generously donated and lovingly cooked by the church's Knights of Columbus. Contact Stephanie Limbacher at stephanie.limbacher@gmail.com for more information.

SIXTEENTH



FAMILY-HISTORY RESEARCH: FINDING YOUR FEMALE ANCESTORS

Female ancestors can sometimes be more difficult to trace since census records often focused on the male head-of-household, and women often had name changes so the George Memorial Library is offering tips on how to search for female ancestors despite these roadblocks at 10 a.m. in the Computer Lab. Reservations required.



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TWENTY-THIRD BUTTERFLY GARDENING

At 2 p.m. in Meeting Room 2 of the University Branch Library, discover ways to attract butterflies to one's garden by selecting plants that are sources of nectar for adult butterflies and plants that are common hosts for their caterpillars.



TWENTY-SIXTH INTRODUCTION TO CANVA

The University Branch Library will hold an "Introduction to Canva" at 2 p.m. in the Computer Lab. Canva is a free, online graphic-design tool. Canva's easy-to-use interface provides access to millions of photographs, graphics, and fonts, enabling the user to create designs for web or print. Learn how this tool can be used to create blog graphics, Facebook covers, flyers, posters, invitations, presentations, and more. Registration required.

TWENTY-FIFTH INTERNATIONAL COFFEE HOUR

Start your week off by sharing a cup of coffee, exchanging news or a corny joke, and chatting with friends during George Memorial Library's monthly social hour at 9 a.m. in the Meeting Room. Celebrate the multitude of diverse cultures found in Fort Bend County. People of all nationalities are invited to this informal gathering to get to know one another, share cultural experiences, and learn something new and fascinating about each other in a casual and comfortable environment. The International Coffee Hour will take place on the last Monday of every month.



CACHE YOUR MONEY: HOW TO FIX YOUR CREDIT

John Rebeles, Jr., will talk about credit scores. Learn how credit history can affect one's credit score, and discover ways to repair one's credit and improve a credit score at 7 p.m. in the Room 2A of the George Memorial Library.

TWENTY-EIGHTH HYPE SUMMIT 2019

The Central Fort Bend Chamber will host its HYPE Summit from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Rosenberg Civic Center, 3825 Highway 36 S in Rosenberg.

The HYPE Summit is a chance for young professionals, or those who will be entering the workforce soon, to learn from experts in the fields of communications, networking, branding, team-building, finance management, home-buying and more. Please register through the ticket link. cfbca.wliinc18.com.

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Arredondo Elementary

student teams up with former NFL player to write book about cancer survival

by **TYLER JOHNSON** | sjohnson@fbherald.com

Van Johnson has been cancer-free for 1,027 days.

When the Arredondo Elementary School student was diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma on March 12, 2015, he was only 6 years old.

“I had no idea what cancer was,” said Van, now a fourth-grader.

His parents, Stacie and Eric Johnson, simply told him it was an “icky disease.” But Van was about to undergo an ordeal that ultimately involved a former NFL player and a book about their experiences.

Van was in the hospital every single day for 340 days.

Before being diagnosed, Van had been having trouble sleeping. His parents said he was making an odd noise when he snored, saying that his nose always felt stuffy.

Van’s pediatrician simply said that it was a cold and he’d be fine, however, Stacie and Eric knew it

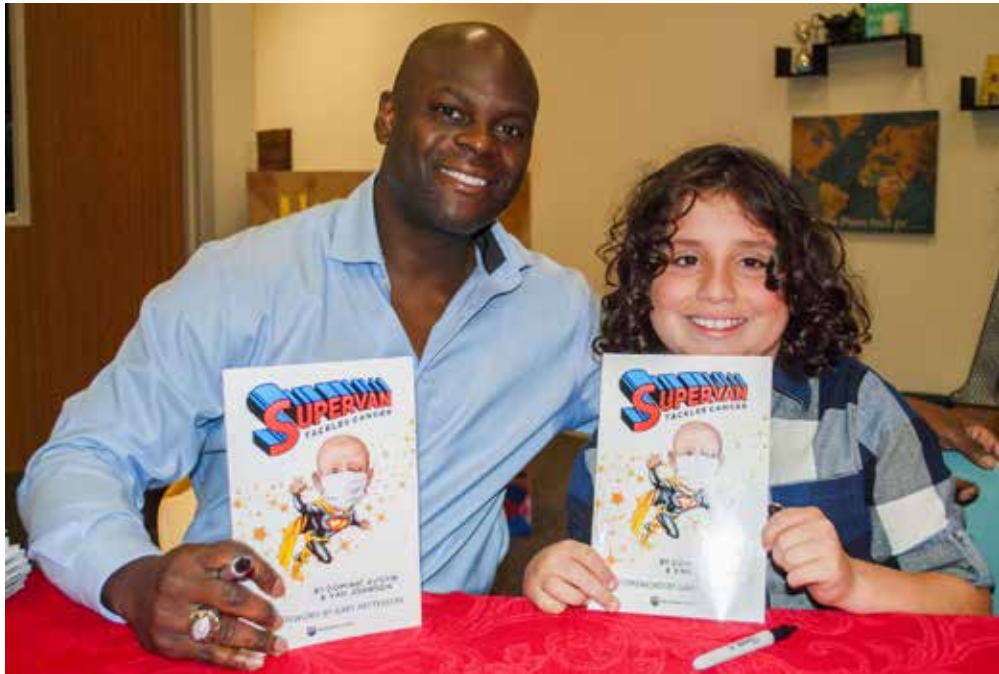


Photo by Tyler Johnson | Arredondo Elementary School fourth grader Van Johnson and former NFL player Dominic Austin co-authored a book about Van’s fight against cancer.

wasn’t just a cold. So they went on their own and found a specialist at Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital. All within a matter of two days, the doctors had discovered that the cancer had become a tumor and Van was diagnosed with Stage 3 Rhabdomyosarcoma.

“I thought we were losing a son,” Eric said.

Van has two older brothers, Zak and Xander, and for a while, Eric admittedly said, they were pushed aside to focus on Van. But they didn’t seem to mind. Their focus was on Van, as well.

“When our mom told us he had cancer, it was like a sudden BOOM sound,” Xander said. “We were in total shock.”

“You never know it’s going to happen to someone you know, let alone your 6-year-old brother,” Zak added.

Every day Van had to insert an internal port in his chest for treatments.

“It was hard,” Van said. “But the hardest part was the tape because after a while, you get used to the needles and the tape held down the needle. It hurt when they ripped the tape off my skin.”

Van underwent 42 weeks of chemo and six weeks of radiation before finally being told the cancer was in remission on Feb. 15, 2016. The family keeps count of every day that Van is cancer-free and celebrates often.

“We don’t get overwhelmed about the little things anymore,” Stacie said. “We have grown so much since this all began. But we’re not stupid. We know it could come back at any minute so we live in the good times and the healthy times. It’s an aggressive cancer that likes to come back so we cherish every single day.”

Stacie and Eric said they have always been supporters of child cancer awareness, but added it’s a different kind of realness when it’s your kid.

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Continued on page 26



Photo courtesy of Sydney Whigam | Van Johnson reads his book "Supervan Tackles Cancer" with his parents Stacie and Eric Johnson.



Photo courtesy of Sydney Whigam | Van Johnson getting a blood transfusion during chemo therapy.



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Lamar Educational Awards Foundation seeking men who can cook

The Lamar Educational Awards Foundation needs men who know how to cook to participate as “celebrity” chefs in the annual event that puts the fun and food in fundraising.

Sponsored this year by Johnson Development Corp., Men Who Cook provides community members the opportunity to sample culinary delights that the men (or their wives or favorite restaurant) create at home.

“This is a great opportunity to participate in this stirring event and share a favorite dish with the community,” said LEAF Executive Director Janice Knight.

Men Who Cook will begin at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 16 at Safari Texas in Richmond, with Ken Mondshine and the Brotherhood Band providing the evening’s musical entertainment.

LEAF helps fund Lamar CISD teachers’ dreams by providing extra money for classroom enrichment. In 2018, the organization awarded 205 educational grants totaling more than \$451,535.

“Come join us as we look forward to another successful presentation of Fort Bend’s finest chefs,” said Knight.

For more information, or to participate call 832-223-0334.



Fort Bend County Fair scholarship deadline set

The Fort Bend County Fair Association is giving back through its scholarship program and now is the time to apply.

The opportunity to earn a Fair scholarship is open to a wide range of qualifying students.

The Fair will provide \$4,000 scholarships to 50 Fort Bend County students.

Since 1979, the Fort Bend County Fair has given 871 scholarships to the county’s youth.

The deadline to submit a scholarship application is Friday, Feb. 15.

In addition, three Fair Queen Scholarships will be awarded.

The 2018 scholarship recipient, Justin Bronsell, is off to a great start for his first semester at Blinn College.

Bronsell is thankful for the Fair scholarship.

“It is a real relief to help financially. College can be overwhelming, but I know I can concentrate on my classes and continue to work towards my dream of owning my own fabrication shop.”

Bronsell is working towards a welding technology degree and passed all his first semester classes.

The proceeds from the 2018 Fort Bend County Fair and the Fort Bend County Fair Life Membership Fund provide the necessary monies to allocate the scholarships.

The scholarships are divided into different divisions depending on the applicants’ Fair involvement and their field of study.

Eligible candidates are required to submit their completed scholarship application by the February deadline.

Applicants, parents, and school counselors are urged to review the guidelines and rules carefully.

Students wanting to apply for a Fair scholarship must meet certain requirements: They must be a U.S. citizen and a resident of Fort Bend County or zoned to a school in Fort Bend County; be a high school senior and graduate by the spring semester of 2019.

“Get your applications in; this is an extraordinary opportunity for all High School Seniors. Last year we had the largest number of applicants and we are proud to be able to give back through our scholarship program,” said Cindy Schmidt, Fort Bend County Fair manager.

Selection of the recipient will be based on several qualifications including: scholastic standing, leadership, citizenship, need, and Fair participation.

During the application process, candidates will declare what type of scholarship they will be applying for: Restrictive, Non-Restrictive, Open, Vocational, or Art Scholarships are some of the classifications options that candidates will have to choose.

For more information on the 2019 scholarship rules and application, visit the Fair’s website: fortbendcountyfair.com or call the fair office at 281-342-6171.

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Continued from page 26

“Child cancer is different from adult cancer,” Stacie said. “It doesn’t come from genetics. Doctors don’t know what causes them. It’s not OK that there are only four or five drugs that have been developed in the last 20 years for childhood cancer.”

Van is a fighter and he is also a football player. He plays fullback, linebacker and defensive end, like his favorite player, J.J. Watt. He grabbed the attention of former NFL defensive back Dominic Austin, who was a classmate of Stacie and Eric at Kempner High School.

Austin is also a cancer survivor.

He had Stage 3 Hogkin’s Lymphoma and his treatment ended right around the time Van’s was beginning.

“I heard about Van’s story through his parents online,” Austin said. “I really wanted to do something to encourage him along the way.”

Like many others who cross Van’s path, Austin was moved.

“I was inspired by his strong will, determination and mentality in the fight against cancer as a kid with the understanding that I had just gone through it as an adult,” said Austin. “Needless to say, I wasn’t as stoic as he was.”

Austin was living in Los Angeles when he found out he had cancer. On the first day of his treatment, his car was stolen so he had to walk. He said there were times when he wanted to give up and quit, but knew that it would only affect the people he would’ve left behind like his parents, sisters, friends and former teammates.

So Austin kept fighting and pushing to the point where he was eventually cancer-free.

He decided to team up with Van and write a book about the struggles they both faced, but focusing on Van’s journey.

“We were able to put everything in this book,” Austin said. “It’s been a blessing and a treatment for me in ways. It has kept me humble.”

The book is titled “Supervan Tackles Cancer.”

Proceeds from the book sales go toward Austin’s cancer awareness organization Tackles 4 Cancer, which focuses on improving the quality of life for cancer patients. It’s a book about courage, hope and strength that teaches people to dig deep within themselves and find their superpowers to battle cancer. Texas Christian University head football coach Gary Patterson, who was Austin’s defensive back coach at the University of New Mexico, wrote the foreword for the book.

“A lot of adults couldn’t handle what Van went through with his sane attitude and then bounce back,” Austin said.

The Johnson family hopes Van grows up to inspire others, much like Austin did.

“We just want Van to be that person someday, to be that survivor,” Stacie said. “That’s my goal in life. That’s my wish every night before I go to bed and every morning when I wake up.”

“Supervan Tackles Cancer” can be purchased for \$20 on Kindle or Amazon.

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Meeting Times of boards, councils and committees

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ROSENBERG

- City Council - Regular Meetings first and third Tuesdays of every month at 7 p.m. (City Hall Council Chamber)
- City Council - Workshop Meetings fourth Tuesdays of every month at 6 p.m. (City Hall Council Chamber)
- Image Committee- third Monday at 6 p.m. at the City Hall council office
- Parks and Recreation Board - Fourth Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at the Rosenberg Civic Center.
- Main Street Advisory Board - Fourth Thursday of month at 8:30 a.m. downtown Rosenberg.
- Planning Commission, third Wednesday of the month at 5 p.m. at the City Hall Council Chamber
- Rosenberg Development Corporation- second Thursday at 4 p.m. at Rosenberg Civic Center

LCISD

Lamar CISD, Board of Trustees typically meets on the third Thursday of each month. A workshop session is normally held the Tuesday before each regular meeting, where Trustees review agenda items and can have their questions answered. Trustees each receive detailed information regarding agenda items the week before meetings are scheduled. Lamar CISD Board meeting videos are uploaded the following week and remain archived on the Lamar CISD YouTube channel.

FULSHEAR

- Fulshear City Council, Third Tuesday of every month, 7 p.m. at City Hall
- Planning and Zoning Commission, first Friday of the month at 8:30 a.m. at City Hall
- Municipal Court, held three times a month at 2 p.m. at City Hall

- Fulshear Area Chamber of Commerce- meetings seem to be member only
- Keep Fulshear Beautiful contact Ramona Ridge to get meeting time date
- City of Fulshear Development Corporation, second Monday of each month at 6 p.m. at City Hall
- Fulshear Development Corporation, third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall
- AARP Chapter 1772- meets the fourth Thursday of each month at the Rosenberg Civic Center at noon

RICHMOND

- Planning and Zoning Commission: Meets first Monday of the month at 5 p.m. at 600 Morton St. in the City Hall Annex.
- Parks and Recreation Board: Meets first Wednesday of the month at 5 p.m. at 600 Morton St. in the City Hall Annex.
- Richmond Historical Commission: Meets the third Tuesday morning of the month at 8 a.m. at 600 Morton St. in the City Hall Annex.
- Development Corporation of Richmond: Meets monthly, usually the second or first Tuesday of the month, at 6 p.m. at 600 Morton St. in the City Hall Annex.
- City of Richmond regular Commission meetings are held the third Monday of the month at 4:30 p.m. at 600 Morton St. in the City Hall Annex, unless determined otherwise.
- Historical Richmond Association: A non-profit volunteer group not affiliated with the city, meets the third Wednesday of the month at 5:30 p.m. at the Richmond Police Department meeting room at 600 Preston St.

FORT BEND COUNTY

- Commissioners Court- Tuesday (except third Tuesdays) at 1 p.m. at 1909 Courthouse, Commissioners Court Room
- Executive Committee meeting: Historical commission- second Monday at 1:30 at FBCHC offices, 401 Jackson St.
- Quarterly meeting: Historical commission- at 3 p.m. in Gus George Academy Auditorium (days vary) — West Fort Bend County Management District, 4:30 at 301 Jackson, first-floor conference room

PLEAK

- City council- Every other Wednesday at 7 p.m. in City Hall
- Planning and Zoning Commission- Aug 3 at 7 p.m. in City Hall

GREATWOOD

- Board meetings are on the fourth Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at Rec Center 1

PECAN GROVE

- Pecan Grove Municipal Utility District- 5:30 pm on the last Tuesday of each month.
- Pecan Grove Women's Club doesn't meet at 9:30.

NEEDVILLE

- City Council, 9022 Main Street, second Wednesday of each month.
- Needville ISD, Board of Trustees meets on the third Wednesday of each month in the library at 7 p.m. at the Needville High School, 100 Fritzella Street.

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PHOTOS



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1 Foster High School junior Megan O'Donnell is the Falcons team photographer. She photographed the regional quarterfinal game between the Falcons and Alvin Shadow Creek at University of Houston's TDECU Stadium.

2 The Fort Bend Chapter of the Czech Heritage Society has elected officers for the 2019 year. From left, Director Pat Parma, Parliamentarian Blanche Pater, Treasurer Gloria Mican, Secretary Shirley Myers, Director Carol Buchta, Past President Neal Adamcik, Director Joyce Lolley, President Linda Pavlicek, VP Leon Anhaier.

3 Chidozie Nwankwo's helmet shows the battering it has taken and given during the 2018 season. The 6-foot, 275-pound Foster High School junior is starting nose guard for the Falcons. He scored one of the touchdowns in the regional quarterfinal game against Alvin Shadow Creek.

4 George Ranch High School senior Noah Thomasson goes up for two against Alief-Hastings. The Longhorns won the match-up 50-42. Thomasson scored

28 points for the 'Horns.

5 Lamar Consolidated High School junior Dorrian Harris, No. 23, and senior Roman Punch, No. 25, attempt to block a shot by Foster High School senior Kel-echi Okpara during the district opener.

6 Aminah Muhammed cheers for her son, Shadeed Ahmed, and the Falcons during the regional quarterfinal game at University of Houston's TDECU Stadium. Shadeed, a senior, is a wide receiver for the Falcons. He is the 11th of 12 children and one of only two boys.

7 Photo by Tyler Johnson | Fort Bend County Judge KP George poses for a photo in the historic Fort Bend County Courthouse in Richmond with his administrative staff. Pictured from left are George, Chief of Staff Taral Patel, Advisor to the County Judge Alim Adatia and Administrative Assistant Xavier Hererra. Patel can be reached via email at taral.patel@fortbendcountytx.gov.



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If you'd like to see your photo in the next edition, email them to us! All we require is that the everyone in the photo be identified, by first and last name, left to right, and that you include a short description about what is happening in the photo. The photos can spotlight community events, efforts or just happy smiling faces. Send photos to Marquita Griffin at mgriffin@fbherald.com with "Monthly Photos" in the subject line.

1 Breaking ground on the county's medical examiner facility are, from left, Stantec Project Architect, Doug Joder; Justice of the Peace, Pct. 1, Place 1, Gary Janssen; Commissioner Precinct Four, James Patterson; Fort Bend County Judge Bob Hebert; Commissioner Precinct 1 Vincent Morales; Fort Bend County Facilities Director, James Knight; Crain Group President Brad Crain; Crain Group Vice President John Green.

2 Cub Scouts in Pack 941, sponsored by the First United Methodist Church in Fulshear, finished blankets for those in need during the holiday season during their December pack meeting. The Scouts are shown with the second place trophy they earned in the 2018 Fulshear Festival of Lights float competition. Cubmaster is Danny McRea.

3 Twenty students recently earned their Associate of Applied Science Degree in Nursing from Wharton County Junior College. Front row, left to right, are Miranda Molina of Fresno, Hanna Balcazar of Sugar Land, Karen Erevia of Deer Park, Shannon Biles of Sugar Land, Samreen Haris of Sugar Land, Lauren Hodges of Needville and Kirsten Thomas of Houston. Middle row, left to right, are Jacqueline Williams of Houston, Vanessa Rodriguez of Lake Jackson, Claire

Carter of Bay City, Serena Shelby of Richmond, Claudia Rion of Sugar Land and Rebecca Rios of Richmond. Back row, left to right, are Lauren Mills of Palacios, Michael Valencia of Sugar Land, Skylar Mitchell of Blessing, Mark Montalvo of Rosenberg, Sarah McCoy of Sugar Land, LaTasha Smith of Fresno and Ian Evans of Houston.

4 Sugar Land Mayor Joe Zimmerman presents a plaque of appreciation to outgoing Fort Bend County Commissioner James Patterson during a recent commissioners court meeting. Zimmerman thanked Patterson for his service to the city of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County during his 20-year tenure with the county. Patterson lost his re-election bid in November. He was first sworn in as Precinct 4 commissioner on Jan. 1, 1999.

5 Photo by Tyler Johnson | Rosenberg Fire Department retiree Danny Johnson and his wife Nanette enjoy chicken fried steak, green beans and mashed potatoes, which was provided by Ben's Chuckwagon of Wallis.

6 Isabella Estes shows off a lunch bag she decorated for Lunches of Love.



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1 Romeo Reyes saved his chore money to buy a special watch for a special cop — Fort Bend County Sheriff Troy E. Nehls. Romeo said he gave Nehls the gift because he knows cops do a lot for people.

2 Sugar Land Mayor Joe Zimmerman, right, presents a plaque of appreciation to out-going Fort Bend County Judge Robert “Bob” Hebert during the commissioners court meeting. Zimmerman thanked Hebert for all he did for the city of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County during his term of office. Hebert, who was defeated in November, was first sworn in to office Jan. 1, 2003.

3 Rosenberg firefighter Justin White and Battalion Chief Adam

Carlin share a laugh. Carlin was recently named the fire department’s Employee of the Year.

4 Dr. Craig Cryer of OakBend Medical Center educated the Rotary Club of Richmond on the wide range of physical therapy technology available in today’s world.

5 Veteran Frank Cempa, left, and Ken Dillon, commander of VFW Post 3903 in Rosenberg, fold a rare 48-star American flag at the VFW Hall in Rosenberg last month for Richmond resident Justine Huselton. The flag, which flew before Hawaii and Alaska joined the Union, covered the casket of Huselton’s uncle, Johnnie L. Marz Jr., who was killed while serving in the Army in Italy on Oct. 1, 1944.

6 Bunky Ward of Richmond holds an oak shadow box for the 48-star American flag that covered the casket of Johnny L. Marz Jr. of DeRidder, La. Marz was killed on Oct. 1, 1944, at the age of 21 while serving with the U.S. Army in Italy during WWII. His niece, Justine Huselton of Richmond, left, took the flag to VFW Post 3903 in Rosenberg to have it folded properly.

7 While at the animal shelter adoption event at Rosenberg police substation at Brazos Town Center, patrol officer Rivera and Assistant Police Chief Garrett Netherly noticed Anice Divin struggling to get a large box to her car. They sprang into action and got it loaded for her.

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The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is the only hospital rating focused exclusively on hospital safety. Its A, B, C, D or F letter grades are a quick way for consumers to choose the safest hospital to seek care. These grades are updated twice a year.

The information on hospital performance collected through the Leapfrog Hospital Survey is unique and unavailable anywhere else. Unlike many other data sources, Leapfrog's data is available by individual bricks-and-mortar facility, providing a robust data set unlike any other.

The Leapfrog Hospital Survey uses 28 measures so assign the

grades to more than 2,600 hospitals throughout the country. A sample of the survey includes:

- Practices for safer health care, including nursing workforce, hand hygiene policies, culture of safety, leadership pertaining to safety and teamwork training
- Computerized physician order entry implementation and effectiveness
- ICU staffing to reduce mortality
- Infection rates for hospital-acquired infections
- Hospitals' Never Events policies
- Use of bar code technology to reduce medication errors

"Leapfrog's Hospital Safety Grades recognizes hospitals like OakBend Medical System that focus on advancing patient safety. This ranking provides an important resource for patients, and a benchmark for hospitals, to determine how care at one hospital compares to others in a region," said Leah Binder, president and CEO of The Leapfrog Group. "Hospitals that earn an A Hospital Safety Grade deserve to be recognized for their efforts in preventing medical harm and errors."

HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS

WEIGHT LOSS SEMINAR

Join Nabil Tariq, M.D. on Thursday Feb. 7 at 6 p.m. for a weight-loss seminar to learn about the different programs offered at the Houston Methodist Weight Management Center, get tips on grocery shopping and meal planning, and speak with a dietitian, exercise specialist and bariatric surgeon. Registration is required. Visit events.houstonmethodist.org/weightloss-sl or call 281-274-7500 for more information or to register.

BOUNCING BACK FROM LIFE'S BUMPS

Hosted by Fort Bend Hope, this is a six week course that will examine strategies for how to recover from life's stressful situations. The three remaining courses will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Feb. 4, 11 and 18 at 927 3rd Street in Rosenberg. Class registration: <https://goo.gl/forms/zH29JAGfFbJnK0IR2>

USA FIT MARATHON

Celebrate the 11th Annual USA Fit Marathon, Fort Bend Kia Half Marathon, and Simon Spine Family Friendly 5K on Sunday, Feb. 3, 2019 from 4:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. This event is known as "Everyone's Marathon" because all athletes, no matter what their pace, should get the chance to enjoy the race experience. Visit usafitmarathon.com.

FREE YOGA FRIDAY

The last Friday of each month Iron Moms hosts a free Yoga class from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.; 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.; and 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 22. The class is for beginners to advanced. The class is kid-friendly and is held next to the playground at Lost Creek Park to keep the kids entertained. No tickets are required. Bring: Yoga mat or beach towel and water. Visit Facebook @Ironmoms

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: Losing Weight Together

Maybe it feels like you've tried everything to lose weight. But have you unleashed the power of your family and social network?

Research suggests that people have a higher likelihood of losing weight when they team up with a friend or family member to adopt healthy behaviors. More research is needed to understand the power of community and its effects on weight loss, but it's clear that friends and family have a strong influence in this area.

"When people decide to make a committed step to change their lives, it definitely has ripple effects on their relationships," said Nabil Tariq, M.D., board-certified bariatric surgeon at Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital. If you're planning to lose weight and considering weight-loss surgery or needing a new outlook on weight loss, partnering can improve your odds of reaching your goals. Weight loss with a partner provides motivation, support and even a little healthy competition.

MOTIVATION

"Motivation is often tied to experiences with our loved ones," said Tariq. "We want to be there for the big moments in life, and we want to go places and enjoy time together. Whatever your motivation to lose weight, you can put more power behind it when your loved ones know what you're fighting for."

Picture this: A busy mom wants to lose weight so she can set a healthier example for her kids. The changes she makes with nutrition and exercise have an impact on her whole family. **Try it:** Keep a visual reminder, such as a family photo, vacation destination, etc. in a special place so you can stay motivated when you need it.

A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM

"When you embark on this journey together with family members or friends, you have a built-in support system," Tariq said. "For anyone considering weight-loss surgery, it's a big decision and a lifelong commitment that affects everyone you are close with. Having a great support system can amplify the benefits of surgical weight loss."

Picture this: A husband struggling to lose weight on his own decides to explore weight-loss surgery. He signs up for an informa-

tional session. **Try it:** A spouse can provide mental and emotional support by attending the orientation session, going to appointments and committing to a mutually changed lifestyle after surgery.

EAT BETTER TOGETHER

Changing the way you eat starts with meal planning, grocery shopping and a commitment to cooking meals at home. "Food is central to our day-to-day life and family interactions, so it's vital to involve others in your life when making significant dietary changes," Tariq said.

Picture this: A mother and daughter both had weight-loss surgery about six months apart. Planning meals and cooking together helped them adjust to their new diet plan. **Try it:** Attend a healthy cooking class or nutrition class with friends or family members.

TEAM UP FOR EXERCISE

Being active together and exercising regularly is the key to success with weight loss. "Having someone else to hold you accountable might be exactly what you need to show up and challenge yourself more than you would when working out alone," Tariq added.

Picture this: Two friends who played football in high school gained a lot of weight in their 20s and 30s. After one friend started a new exercise program, the other friend joined, too and they both lost weight. **Try it:** Transform couch time into something more active. Meet at the gym to watch your favorite TV shows while walking on a treadmill, or throw a football around before watching the game on TV.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Keeping track of total pounds and inches lost as a group can be highly motivating. "Also seeing health numbers improve and high blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar go down is our top priority," Tariq said. "It's really about achieving a better quality of life and a better state of health."

Picture this: Co-workers start a weight-loss challenge to lose 500 pounds total among the group. **Try it:** Talk to your doctor about your target numbers and attend support groups, nutrition or fitness classes, or start a friendly competition among friends.



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