Wildfire at Oak Hill raises questions of area fire preparedness

Neighbors come together to support those affected by the $5 million blaze, raise money for recovery

By Kate Hull

Carol Cespedes and her husband, Benny, were traveling in Bosnia on business for her tourism company. After stopping for the night in a hostel, Cespedes checked her email to find news that her Callbram Lane house of 16 years, now thousands of miles away, was severely damaged in a massive April fire in Southwest Austin.

The couple composed themselves, felt thankful for their safety and made plans to salvage what they could from a home that was no longer livable.

“We are very blessed by the tremendous response by the community. There are so many people in Texas and the South dealing with [natural disasters.] We are just one and certainly not the only to be suffering,” Cespedes said.

On April 17, a fire spread throughout Southwest Austin, destroying 10 homes, damaging 11 and causing an estimated $5 million worth of damages across 100 acres.

Nearly 150 firefighters from area departments, including Austin, Oak Hill, Westlake and Lake Travis, were on the scene along with personnel acting in support roles, three helicopters and two C-130 aircraft to combat the fire.

Michael Bernard Weathers, 60, said he was charged with arson. Police say the homeless man allegedly started the Oak Hill fire by leaving a campfire unattended.

Tom Thayer, a neighborhood resident and president of the South Windmill Run HOA, said, “We are very blessed by the tremendous response by the community. There are so many people in Texas and the South dealing with natural disasters.”

Cespedes agreed. “We are just one and certainly not the only to be suffering,” Cespedes said.

Sunset Valley debates water options

City leaders mull future of groundwater system, plan hearing

By Joe Olivieri

Where should Sunset Valley get its water in the years ahead?

That is the question city officials will tackle this summer. Public hearings will likely be held this fall.

For years, Sunset Valley has had a dual system: The older areas draw groundwater, while newer developments and commercial properties purchase surface water from the City of Austin.

In April, the Sunset Valley City Council took no action on a work order for roughly $338,000 in water tank repairs. The bill raised the question of whether Sunset Valley should keep its dual system.

On May 3, the City Council compared two scenarios for future water systems and what improvements were needed to implement them.

“We will bring back information to the council, including some guiding assumptions,” City Administrator Clay Collins said. “Assuming everything is okay on the assumptions, [staff] will start pulling data together.”

He added that city committees will review the data this summer and “the ball will be back in council’s court in October.”

“Whether it is financial or operational information, we want to make sure we are not kicking the bee’s nest here,” Councilman Bruce Smith said. “Someone might be afraid that all of Sunset Valley is going to go to well water or vice versa. Do we keep our dual system or go to a single system? Let’s get a decision tree from staff so we can determine the years and what improvements were needed to implement them.

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Pictured above: Margaret Landwehrmeyer, MD, Ob/Gyn Surgery (Harborside Ob/Gyn Associates); Jeff Johnson, MD, General & Laparoscopic Surgery; Nicole Cole, RN; Rocco Piazza, MD, Plastic Surgery (Piazza Center for Plastic Surgery and Advanced Skin Care); Scott Welsh, MD, Orthopedic Surgery (Central Texas Orthopedics); Ann Kobish, RN

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General Manager’s Note

I have dealt with fire more in the past month than in my entire life. A few weeks back, my wife and I decided to take our daughter on a hike through the Greenbelt. As we came off the trail, I noticed that the pillar of smoke we saw towering in the air looked eerily close to our neighborhood. Our intersection was closed and the reason we were allowed into the neighborhood was to rescue our two dogs in the backyard. Sure enough, our neighborhood had undergone voluntary evacuations for the Oak Hill wildfire. I’ll never forget how my neighbors were gathered that day in their front yards watching to see if the wind was going to shift.

If that was not enough, I got a call two weeks ago that my parents’ place near Junction was in danger. A fire had started on the other side of the highway and was consuming land rather quickly. Thankfully, the fire never jumped the highway, and my parents’ place was spared.

I remember the feeling of helplessness both times. It was not a good spot to be in, and I do not wish it on anyone. Recently, the fire department has gone door-to-door to help educate people on preventative measures they can take to reduce the risk. From someone who has been closer to this than he ever wished, I highly encourage you to do what you can now.

For more on fire threats in Southwest Austin, be sure to read Kate Hull’s cover story in this month’s issue.

Reader Feedback

City: residential development surges on south I-35 corridor

more.impactnews.com/12357

“Fantastic! It’s pretty convenient having that development near us. Has anyone eaten at the Green Mesquite yet?”

— “SW Austinite”

Correction—2011 Healthcare Directory

On Page 9 of the 2011 Healthcare Directory, the ProMed North and ProMed South clinics in Central Austin were incorrectly listed as walk-in clinics. The two facilities are urgent care clinics.

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March employment trends

Central Texas unemployment—6.8% Down from 6.9% in February
State unemployment—8.1% Down from 8.2% in February
National unemployment—8.8%* Down from 8.9%* in February

In Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, trade, transportation and utilities added 2,400 jobs. Leisure and hospitality also added 2,400 jobs. Professional and business services added 2,100 jobs, and government added 1,100 jobs.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas Workforce Commission
*Seasonally adjusted numbers
Now Open

1 Beth and Michael Robertson opened Community Renaissance Cafe inside Community Renaissance Market, 6800 West Gate Blvd., in late April. The coffee shop eatery offers coffee, tea, smoothies and homemade baked goods. 522-6161, www.communityrenaisscancemarket.com

2 The West Gate Shopping Center location of Genghis Grill-The Mongolian Stir-Fry opened in late March. The restaurant, located at 4477 S. Lamar Blvd., Ste. 400, offers customizable stir-fry bowls among its selections. 891-0152, www.genghisgrill.com

3 Owned by award-winning jiu-jitsu instructor Joao Crus, a third Central Texas location of Joao Crus Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is now open in the Oak Hill Shopping Center located at 6705 W. Hwy 290, Ste. 501. Offering men’s, women’s and children’s self-defense courses, the martial arts studio offers a variety of skill level programs for the community. 644-4560, www.joao crusbjj.com

4 La Vida Massage Austin held a grand opening for its 7010 W. Hwy. 71, Ste. 160 location May 4. The business, which opened in late February, offers deep tissue, relaxation and prenatal massage among its selection. 288-2455, http://austin.tx.lavidamassage.com

5 Broker Mike Jones opened a new Re/Max LLC franchise at 5501 W. Hwy. 290, Ste. C, on May 2. Jones, a local Realtor for eight years, joined Re/Max a year ago. He has been in the Southwest Austin area for 25 years. Re/Max is a locally owned and operated offices. nativenomnom@gmail.com

6 Owned by Chris Rios, new commercial kitchen space and eatery Native Nom Nom is opening at Community Renaissance Market at 6800 West Gate Blvd. in June. Led by internationally trained chef Paolo Mascio, the restaurant offers kitchen space rentals, locally grown food and cooking classes. Rios hopes to cater to local food trailer owners by providing a space to safely and healthily cook food. nativenomnom@gmail.com

7 The Sunset Valley Artisan Market opened May 14 at the Toney Burger Center, 3200 Jones Road in Sunset Valley. The market will operate year-round next to the Sustainable Food Center Farmers Market at Sunset Valley on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. It will feature local art and handicrafts from more than two dozen artisans. www.sunsetvalleyartisanmarket.org

 Coming Soon

8 La Familia Mexican Restaurant owners Esbeida Lopez and Carolina Haygood, along with their husbands, Randy Lopez and Joel Haygood, are opening a sister trailer to their Mexican restaurant, La Familia Tacos & More, at the new Trail Park Eatery at 1009 W. Slaughter Lane. The trailer is expected to open in June. www.lafamiliaaustin.com

9 A second Austin location of the Dickey’s Barbecue Pit chain is coming this summer to the 5700 block of Brodie Lane. The first Austin location is at 5350 Burnet Road. www.dickeys.com

10 Owned by Chris Rios, new commercial kitchen space and eatery Native Nom Nom is opening at Community Renaissance Market at 6800 West Gate Blvd. in June. Led by internationally trained chef Paolo Mascio, the restaurant offers kitchen space rentals, locally grown food and cooking classes. Rios hopes to cater to local food trailer owners by providing a space to safely and healthily cook food. nativenomnom@gmail.com

11 Paloma’s Nest plans to open its flagship boutique at 4402 S. Congress Ave. in mid-June. The boutique features handmade gifts such as bowls, cuff links, wedding keepsakes and ornaments. 800-396-0654, www.palomasnest.com

Relocations

12 The Along Came a Slider trailer moved from its downtown Austin location to 3600 S. Lamar Blvd. and held a grand re-opening April 1. The eatery...
serves locally sourced, hormone- and antibiotic-free meats in its signature slider entrees. Popular selections include The Natural with ground beef, lettuce, tomatoes and pickles. Open Mon. noon–3 p.m. and Tues.-Sat. noon–9 p.m. 522-8284, www.alongcameaslider.com

Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin Graduate School of Integrated Medicine moved into a new 20,000-square-foot facility located at 4701 West Gate Blvd. in April. The facility includes classrooms, a student intern clinic, faculty and administrative offices, an herbal medicine center and other amenities. AOMA was accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in December 2009. www.aoma.edu

Argus Cidery relocated April 30 from 21604 Longhill Drive, Leander, to 12346 Pauls Valley Drive, Austin. Owned by Wes and Mary Mickel, Argus Cidery produces and bottles a hard cider for distribution. It opened in Leander in May 2009. www.arguscidery.com

Downstairs Apparel has moved from 2110 S. Lamar Blvd. to 3100 S. Congress Ave., Ste. D. The store sells clothing and accessories with an emphasis on independent designers and local jewelry. 687-0489, www.downstairsapparel.com

Reel Popcorn is relocating from 9600 1-35, Ste. C-500, to 8708 S. Congress Ave. in April. The business offers many flavors of popcorn in bags, boxes, tins and buckets. 280-7335 www.reelpopcornaustin.com

School notes

In light of the current $94.4 million budget deficit and in anticipation of continued challenges in later fiscal years, the Austin Independent School District has put up for sale the district’s West Sixth Street headquarters and a Hyde Park administrative facility. Potential buyers have until Aug. 15 to make pre-bids. The minimum value for the two properties is slated for $39.5 million. The district board of trustees will make the final decision on the possible sale of the two properties after the August pre-bid date. For more information on packets for prospective bidders, visit www.swsg.com.

Expansions

Vicki Chazan, owner of Austin-based online store Fresh Produce Toys, announced that a new Peas in a Pod toy is now available. Last year, Chazan founded the home-based business, which sells crocheted dog and cat toys and accessories catering to the Austin community. www.freshproductoys.com

Real estate group The Gill Agency launched its new website, http://thegillagency.com. The site specializes in searching for Austin residential properties for potential homeowners or individuals looking to lease. 992-2515

Name Change

Oak Hill Acupuncture has changed its name to Oak Hill Healing Arts to reflect the variety of treatments it offers. It has also begun hosting monthly informal information exchanges. Future topics may include heart health, allergies, weight loss, bone health and immune system function. 7413 Old Bee Caves Road. 796-4012, www.oakhillacupuncture.com

In the News

Adam Garibay, a senior at Crockett High School, 5601 Manchaca Road, was named as a Gates Millennium Scholar. The Gates Millennium Scholars program selects 1,000 students nationwide to receive a good-through-graduation scholarship based on financial need. “The award will be based on the cost of tuition, fees, books and living expenses for the 2011–12 academic year, as well as the availability of grants and other scholarships reported on the financial aid award letter,” according to the program’s website.
Have you been diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis?

Psoriatic arthritis is a persistent condition characterized by inflammation of the skin (psoriasis) and joints (arthritis). Right now, physicians in your area are conducting a local research study of an investigational oral medication for psoriatic arthritis. Study participants must be 18 years of age or older, have been diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis for at least six months, and have at least one psoriatic lesion. The time commitment for this study is approximately 5 years. Initially, you will be asked to visit the study centre monthly; and then every 3 months for the remainder of the study.

There is no cost to participate and study medication will be provided.

For more information, please contact

Dr. Daniel Carrasco
Austin Dermatology Associates
866-960-7575

*Annual Percentage Rate. Rate applies to 1st lien commercial real estate loans with a loan to value of 80% or less; construction/development loan rates/terms may be vary. Rates and terms are subject to change without notice. Austin Telco Federal Credit Union is federally insured to at least $250,000 per member by the National Credit Union Administration.
May

28 Woof Gang Bakery adoption event
Woof Gang Bakery, which offers wholesome and natural treats for pets, is hosting an adoption event benefiting Southwest Austin’s no-kill shelter, Austin Pets Alive. Customers can spend the afternoon checking out the bakery’s newest treats and visit the animal shelter’s dogs available for adoption. Noon–3 p.m. • Free • Woof Gang Bakery, 1204 N. Lamar Blvd. www.austinpetsalive.org

June

2 OHBPA Meeting
The Oak Hill Business and Professional Association, which meets the first Thursday of every month, is hosting a talk with Rep. Paul Workman, R–Austin, for the June meeting. Workman represents District 47, which consists of the south and southwest regions of Travis County. • 11:30 a.m.–1 p.m. • $15 • Jack Allen’s Kitchen, 7720 W. Hwy. 71 • www.ohbpa.org

3 Grey Rock Live Music Series
The Grey Rock Golf Club is hosting monthly summer concerts with local talents benefiting area schools. Proceeds from the June concert will go toward Gorzyski Middle School, and the featured act is the Dave Madden Band. 6 p.m. • $5 • Grey Rock Golf Club, 7401 SH 45 • 288-4297 • www.thegolfclubatcirclec.com

6–10 Community Appreciation Week
In celebration of its three year anniversary, Discover Chiropractic is having a Community Appreciation Week at the Oak Hill clinic. All new patients will receive a free consultation, exam and necessary x-rays during the entire week. Dr. Brian Clark has served the Oak Hill community through his practice and as president of the Oak Hill Business and Professional Association. Mon.–Fri., 9 a.m.–1 p.m., 3 p.m.–6 p.m. • Free • Discover Chiropractic, 7500 W. Hwy. 71 • 288-7000 • www.oakhillchiropractor.com

9–12 Republic of Texas Biker Rally
The Republic of Texas Biker Rally makes its annual appearance in Austin this June, as more than 50,000 bikers are expected to attend the event. As the biggest motorcycle rally in Texas, the event, held at the Travis County Exposition Center, will include a bike show, custom bike builders, comedians, bands, the Paradise Bar, a tattoo expo and more. Headlining musical acts include The Doobie Brothers and Eddie Money. • Check website for event schedule • Four-day registration purchased onsite ($70) • Travis County Exposition Center, 7311 Decker Lane • www.roteally.com

18 The Camp Ben McCulloch 5K and Kids 1K Run
Located in the Texas Hill Country, the Camp Ben McCulloch 5K and 1K will benefit Camp Ben McCulloch Park. Winners will be awarded in each competition level, including men and women in various age brackets. 7:30 a.m. • $20 for early registration, $25 race day • Camp Ben McCulloch off FM 1826, across from the Salt Lick in Driftwood. www.campben.org

18–19 City-Wide Garage Sale
Browse through collectibles and vintage items at the City-Wide Garage Sale. Anyone who wishes to sell any second-hand or vintage items may also participate. • Sat. 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m., Sun. 11 a.m.–4 p.m. • Adults ($5), children 12 and younger (free) • Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Road • www.cwgs.com

Ongoing
June 5, 19 Sunset Valley free concert series
Every other Sunday night, the City of Sunset Valley is hosting a free concert at City Hall for residents and families to gather and enjoy local talents. • 7:30 p.m. • Free • Sunset Valley City Hall, 3205 Jones Road • www.sunsetvalley.org

May 28, June 4, 11, 18 Sunset Valley Farmers Market
Every Saturday, rain or shine, the Sunset Valley Farmers Market is held at the Toney Burger Center as part of the Sustainable Food Center farmers’ markets. • Sat., 9 a.m.–1 p.m. • Free • Toney Burger Center, 3200 Jones Road • www.sfcfarmersmarketsunsetvalley.org

June 2, 9, 16, 23 Music on the Patio
Every Thursday, the southwest location of Santa Rita Tex-Mex Cantina restaurant will host local talent during the new Music on the Patio event with live music and all-night happy hour specials. The scheduled music will be announced prior to each event and can be found online. • 6–8 p.m. • Free • 5900 W. Slaughter Lane • 288-5100 • www.santaritacantina.com

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City of Austin

Place 1

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Michael “Max” Nofziger</td>
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<td>Randi Shade</td>
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<td>Kathie Tovo</td>
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<td>Eric J. Rangel</td>
<td>5,598</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toby Ryan</td>
<td>2,468</td>
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Total City of Austin

Registered voters: 444,139
Total ballots cast: 32,300
*Runoff election scheduled for June 18

City of Sunset Valley

Place 1

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Forrest Arnold</td>
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<td>Rose Cardona</td>
<td>124</td>
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<td>John Moore</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudi Rosengarten</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>26.54%</td>
</tr>
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Total City of Sunset Valley

Registered voters: 465
Total ballots cast: 182

Travis County

County seeks $18.7 million from dormant state road projects

Travis County is trying to access $18.7 million in funds from de-prioritized state road projects, but the county would have few places to spend it should it get the money.

Steve Manilla, executive director for Travis County’s Transportation and Natural Resources Department, told the Travis County Commissioners Court that there is money tied up in 2001 bond projects—$18 million in savings from a SH 45 project, and $700,000 from an FM 1826 project—but funds from one cannot be released until the other is completed.

“The FM 1826 project is one we have been speaking to [The Texas Department of Transportation] about for some time now,” he said. “They have indicated to us they have no plans to do that project at least within a 10-year horizon. So we have asked them to provide us a release on that project.”

Assistant Budget Manager Jessica Rio told the court that there are “not a lot of options the court could use the funds for” should it succeed.

“It was part of Proposition 2 back in 2001, which states that it could be used for the SH 45 and FM 1826 rights of way,” she said.

She added that the county has been waiting for the debt to be released to determine if the funds could go toward debt.

Manilla said that the court owes TxDOT $2.63 million because the cost of acquiring rights of way for a MoPac North project was higher than expected. He said the county would most likely pay off that debt by issuing certificates of obligation in 2012.

Draft budget to increase tax rate

Central Health, the former Travis County Healthcare District, is considering a tax rate increase as part of its draft 2012 budget.

Christie Garbe, chief communications and planning officer, said that the draft budget assumes a tax rate of 7.97 cents per $100 of assessed value, an increase from the current 7.19 cents.

Central Health Chief Financial Officer John Stephens told the board of managers May 18 that the base budget is larger than total current revenue and staff is proposing to make up the shortfall through additional property tax revenue and $12.5 million in reserves.

Garbe noted that it is early in the budgeting process and that Central Health will hold public hearings in September.

Meetings

- **Austin City Council**
  Austin City Hall, 301 W. Second St.
  874-2497, www.ci.austin.tx.us/council
  June 9, and 23, 10 a.m.

- **Travis County Commissioners Court**
  314 11th St., Austin,
  854-9425, www.co.travis.tx.us/commissioners_court
  Meetings are every Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.

- **Sunset Valley City Council**
  Sunset Valley City Hall, 3205 Jones Road. 892-1363, www.sunsetvalley.org
  June 7, and 21, 6 p.m.

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Compiled by Staff
The State Legislature comes to a close

By Marcus Funk

A number of essential issues remained unresolved as the Texas Legislature entered its final two weeks, including dueling budget plans and a sight-unseen Congressional redistricting map. Local representatives scrambled against the clock, along with the rest of the Lege, to meet their goals before time runs out May 30.

What had passed were Gov. Rick Perry’s emergency issues, a number of conservative initiatives like eminent domain restriction, mandatory sonograms for abortion-seekers and hyper-partisan Voter ID legislation; each had passed both the House and Senate, in most cases along party lines, and were floating through various conference committees to negotiate a final version. That left spartan budget and financing debates looming at the end of the session, particularly concerning public school districts. Adding to the time crunch was an impromptu announcement by Republican Comptroller Susan Combs that tax revenues may increase as much as $1.2 billion from original projections, with additional increases to the rainy day fund.

“In terms of how the session has gone so far, I’m disappointed that we’ve had to spend so much time on controversial issues that the governor declared as emergencies that really, in my opinion, were not,” said Rep. Donna Howard, D-Austin. “That has taken a huge amount of time and kept us from focusing on the serious challenges of our budget.”

While the budget consumed much of the Legislature’s time in its final days, local legislators had some success in moving their own agendas. Democrats typically filed and passed fewer bills than Republicans this year, in part because they were outnumbered more than 2–1 in the House, but legislative agendas still granted a look into each representative’s priorities.

Rep. Mark Strama, D-Austin, passed a bill requiring consistency in policy and punishment concerning the expulsion of public school students; the bill passed the House, and Sen. Kirk Watson, D-Austin, was shepherding it toward a Senate committee vote in mid-May.

Howard authored a bill requiring the University Interscholastic League, or UIL, to attach a “fiscal impact statement” to any new actions or rules that could raise costs to member schools; the group provides extracurricular activities to public and charter school students, including academic and athletic events. It passed both the House and Senate, and Senate amendments were under discussion in the House.

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Sponsored bills

- Rep. Donna Howard, D-Austin
  HB 1286 Requires the University Interscholastic League to include financial impact statements to new rules or actions that could raise costs to member schools
  HB 555 Increases the minimum property damage requirement for a reportable boating accident
  HB 1829 Gives law enforcement legal authority to transfer mental health patients under emergency detention to a psychiatric hospital; passed by House and Senate
  HB 3342 Amends current law requiring county attorneys to be present for certain mental health court proceedings; passed by House and Senate
  HB 3309 Transfers the authority to set maximum vehicle weights and loads from the Texas Transportation Commission to the Texas Department of Transportation; passed by House, pending approval in Senate
  HB 906 Requires consistency in policy and punishment for public school expulsions
  HB 3255 Encourages the inclusion of multiple racial and ethnic groups in the state demographer’s estimates and projections
  HB 1 Plays a key role in crafting the budget, a time-consuming task
Neighborhood Association, said he was walking in a nearby park when he saw clouds of smoke near his house. After calling the fire department, he climbed on his roof and began to spray his house down with water to protect it from the fire.

Thayer, along with other neighborhood group leaders, have organized multiple community meetings with Austin’s fire and police departments, code compliance department and other City of Austin groups to assess damages and discuss what happens next.

Residents have expressed concern at neighborhood meetings that burned and unburned brush are too close to their homes.

To address this concern, Mike Lewis with the City of Austin’s Solid Waste Services Department announced that the city would pick up all debris from the fire each Friday with trash pick-up if it is placed by the curb.

**West Park PUD**

A majority of what burned in the fire falls on the 130-acre piece of land slated to be the new West Park Planned Unit Development project. Residents have expressed concern about the future of the land because it rests on the top of a slope that backs up to neighborhood homes. Multiple residents at the April 28 neighborhood association meeting asked what will happen if it rains on the revegetated hillside and causes a mudslide.

Instead, Belton had two silt fences installed at the bottom and midpoint of the hill in early May.

Shaunessy said Belton is also addressing the residents’ concerns regarding homeless persons living on the property, which was a factor in the cause of the fire. Belton hired crews to go through his property, find areas where homeless individuals were living and remove the sites. They have also placed “no trespassing” signs throughout the property.

“We will file a blanket trespass order with the City of Austin Police Department,” Shaunessy said. “That means if someone sees a homeless person on the property or they see someone appearing to go on the property, they can contact the APD to arrest anyone on the property who cannot establish reason to be there.”

The trespass order is meant to empower the residents to take control of the situation, Shaunessy said. He also wants them to be mindful that this means residents cannot wander the property, either, because APD can arrest anyone based on a phone call.

**Preparedness for wildfire season**

The Oak Hill fire was the first large fire in Central Texas during one of the earliest severe wildfire seasons Texas has seen in recent years.

Since fire season started Nov. 15, 2010, the Texas Fire Service and area fire departments have responded to more than 10,000 fires that have charred more than 2.5 million acres. The dry season began in November, and critical weather conditions of low humidity, high heat and strong winds have continued.

The AFD is in the process of an after-action review of the fire to help decipher what was done well and what could have been improved. The Insurance Council of Texas has estimated the damage to be approximately $5 million in the structures and contents lost.

“This was not a wake-up call for the AFD,” said Lt. Josh Portie with the AFD. “We have seen the studies, we have done the training and we have purchased equipment in the past.”

Portie said that because of the fire, more Austin residents are taking the opportunity to educate themselves on fire preparedness to ready their individual homes.

The AFD has attended neighborhood meetings and passed out fliers to help encourage homeowners to take appropriate actions to protect their homes against wildfires.

Residents are also encouraged to participate in Firewise, a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) effort to promote local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, firefighters and others to protect people and property from the risk of wildfire, according to the website.

“It is a great way for them to be proactive about what they can do to protect their home, their family and make sure they are prepared in the event that something like this happens again,” said Michelle DeCrane, AFD public information officer.

**Neighborhood response**

The residents of the Oak Hill neighborhoods have rallied together in support of their fellow neighbors who either lost their house or had property damaged. To help offset the extremely high costs—some of the properties were uninsured—Thayer and other residents have set up a committee to handle the fundraising affairs.

More information about how to give to specific fundraising efforts will be announced at neighborhood meetings.

“The primary thing that the neighborhoods have been working on is trying to do things for the people whose houses burnt down,” Thayer said.

Residents are encouraged by the City of Austin to call 311 with questions dealing with the fire and cleanup. Visit www.cityofaustin.org/fire or www.firewise.org for more information on fire safety tips.
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Well versus city water
Sunset Valley’s groundwater plant serves 113 homes and City Hall, according to an April staff presentation. Sunset Valley is permitted to draw about 17.5 million gallons of groundwater annually. That water comes from the city’s 6-inch wide, 360-foot deep well, which was drilled in 1974.

The city’s water plant has two 45,000-gallon steel storage tanks—a “heavily corroded” 1974 tank that still holds groundwater and a 1980 tank that is “corroded beyond repair,” the presentation states.

The city stopped using the water plant in February 2009 during a drought, but it stayed out of service due to water tank failure, City Administrator Clay Collins told the council in April.

Sunset Valley purchases roughly 100 million gallons of treated surface water from the City of Austin each year, according to an October council report. The system serves 116 homes and all commercial areas.

An emergency City of Austin connection was upgraded in 2006.

Background
In the last five years, Sunset Valley has studied groundwater system improvements, but funded few actions.

City Council agenda items show that in March 2009, the council approved a site and groundwater storage with sufficient capacity for fire protection if a new well was built and funded.

Water plant costs were not funded in the 2009–10 and 2010–11 budgets. The council funded $350,000 to replace a storage tank in the 2010–11 budget.

Earlier this year, Civil Land Group LLC submitted a proposal to design two steel ground storage tanks with sufficient storage capacity for fire safety.

The public works committee did not vote on the work order, however, and asked the council to determine a long-term plan. The council took no action and asked for more information.

To discuss all long-term water options, the City Council had to amend a 2007 ordinance barring discussion or action on any option that did not keep the current water service areas.

Scenarios
Earlier this month, Sunset Valley Public Works Director Katy Phillips presented two major scenarios: keeping the current system or switching to City of Austin water.

Keeping the dual system means upgrading the existing groundwater treatment plant—drilling a new well shaft, getting a new ground storage tank and constructing a new pump house.

Upgrades would include installing a filtration system to reduce sediment and improve taste, she said.

It would not remove calcium content because of the size and expense, according to her presentation.

Keeping the dual system would also mean establishing an automated fire protection connection with the City of Austin and improving the distribution system for emergencies.

“If our sole source of water was the purchased water system, we wouldn’t have a water plant at all,” Phillips told the council.

Relying on Austin water would require improvements to infrastructure and operations and maintenance, she said.

Staff did not research less popular scenarios, such as moving the entire city to well water, using a blended water system that uses groundwater and City of Austin water or using well water solely for irrigation, the public works director continued.

“One suggestion we have heard is, ‘Can’t we just blend the water and store it in one tank?’” Phillips said. “This option requires more elaborate testing than the current system. It isn’t being considered for scenario development.”

Mayor Barbara Wilson said she hoped that a new system would include more frequent and stringent water quality testing.

“The standard water tests are not testing for new carcinogens,” she said. “Whatever the decision, we need to look into this.”

“Besides carcinogens, they are not testing for hormones and pharmaceuticals,” Helen Besse, a former Sunset Valley mayor, said during public comment. “You can’t filter them out. Whatever you do, alert us. We could go to bottled water, or give us an option.”

Resident Melissa Gonzales said that filtration is a topic of concern for longtime residents and well-water consumers.

“It is wonderful to have a well. We should look into if there is a way to have filtration perhaps on a house-by-house level,” she said.

Gonzales said she has reservations about giving up on groundwater entirely.

“I think we should keep it. I think it’s good to have an alternative to the City of Austin,” she said. “I think it’s good for a small city to secure all of the things that are important, and water is one thing we can do for our citizens.”

She added that it is difficult for a small city to “open the Pandora’s box” of filtration.

“Certainly a lot of cities are finding things in the water and that’s a concern everywhere,” she said.

The council charged staff with assembling some preliminary data and cost estimates by June 7, and including the two major scenarios in its financial analysis.

From there, the staff report will go to committees, which will make recommendations to the council.

The council will make its decision after it holds a public hearing.

Comment at more.impactnews.com/12844
the Local Tax Policy Working
Group to study local and regional
exemptions.

“We were tasked with looking
at tax equity,” Knight said.

Knight said that compared with
other counties, Travis County was
offering generous exemptions
indefinitely instead of smaller
exemptions for seven years or less.

In a March 28 memo, working
group co-chairs Knight and Bud-
get Director Leroy Nellis wrote
that the group felt the county
should protect historic structures
not already represented by a his-
torical society. Exemptions help
offset the additional maintenance,
they wrote.

The working group found that
the taxes of homestead owners
age 65 and older or with disabili-
ties “have increased dispropor-
tionately during the past 17 years”
as compared with other home-
stead owners, the memo states.
“Unfortunately, these taxpayers
are less likely to be able to
afford the increased property
taxes, ” it said.

It recommended that all his-
toric residential and commercial
structures be designated historic
by a recognized organization;
they have a substantial portion built
before 1930; have its exemption
determined by the Commissi-

oners Court; and only receive the
exemption for 10 years, beginning
Jan. 1, 2011.

Following a public hearing, the
working group recommended
keeping the current exemptions
for commercial properties.
“We believe that there was a case
made that commercial properties
were at an economic disadvantage
when compared with more mod-
ern buildings and retail space,”
Nellis told the court May 17.

Resident reactions
Marlene Romanczak told the
court that homeowners would
seek to remove their historic status
if exemptions were removed.
“With the proposed changes,
why would anyone want to keep
their [historic] zoning without any
benefit?” she said. “When we sell
our houses, who would buy them?
They would be costly to maintain,
unable to be developed and have
an extremely small tax savings.”

Albert Stanley said that many
historic homes are under-
appraised and getting dispropor-
tionately large exemptions.
“When giving a tax benefit in
perpetuity, you should look at
that as the cash value of a 30-year
treasury note,” he said.

He went on to call the current
program “welfare for the well-off”
and urged officials to distinguish
between places such as the Bre-
mond Block Historic District—
a collection of Victorian-era
homes—and houses where “not a
single tourist passes.”

An owner’s story
The Old Rock Store has
dominated by James White’s fam-
ily since 1898, and White said he
intends to keep it that way.

His great-grandfather, James
Andrew Patton, built the stone
building at 6266 W. Hwy. 290 and
ran a general store there. It has
housed a steakhouse and a nursery
before its current tenant, Austin
Pizza Garden.

“When I got the place, the
wooden floor was run-down and
the ceiling was sagging upstairs,”
he said. “When I got it, there were
no indoor facilities—they had an
outhouse.”

After becoming owner in 1970,
White fixed the second floor and
put in new electrical wiring and a
septic tank before connecting to
the city sewer. He also fixed the
roof and the parking lot drainage,
and installed a phone line and
drinking water.

White suggested that public
buildings that can be toured be
placed in a different category
than private homes.

“If I had my druthers, I would
like to conserve Austin,” he con-
tinued. “I love the old buildings.
Let them all be historic. But give
them an exemption only if they
are worthy of it.”

City of Austin and AISD
On May 12, the Austin City
Council voted to postpone
voting on changes to historic
 designation criteria until May 26.

The proposed changes
included capping owner-occu-
pied landmark exemptions and
creating an index to modify the
cap based on property tax values.

AISD cut its historic property
exemption last August. CFO
Nicole Conley-Abrams said the
district included a partial res-

toration of the exemption in
next year’s budget assumptions
because of its “minimal impact”
on the district’s finances.
The AISD board of trustees is
scheduled to discuss it June 20.

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Proposed changes (using 2010 property values, tax rates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic landmark</th>
<th>Current exemption</th>
<th>Proposed exemption</th>
<th>Properties affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Improvement, 100%</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial/non-</td>
<td>Improvement, 50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>residential</td>
<td>percent, land, 25%</td>
<td>abled, over 65 and surviving spouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 65, disabled person

1. $65,000 for dis-
2. over 65 and surviving spouse
3. $75,000 for disabled; over 65 and surviving spouse

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Exemptions
Continued from 11

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Jon Hockenyos
Austin economist shares views on recession recovery

By Tiffany Young

Editor’s note: Coffee with Impact is a monthly forum at our headquarters featuring leaders in various sectors who are making a difference in Central Texas and beyond.

Jon Hockenyos, president and founder of economic consulting firm TXP, has made a name for himself in Central Texas for his annual economic outlook and forecast presentations to the City of Austin as well as his positions on several area boards. From working with cities to see how the economy affects their operations to analyzing how public policy affects organizations, Hockenyos said his job is to "tell stories with numbers."

Hockenyos has an undergraduate degree in philosophy from the University of Illinois and a graduate degree in public affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas. Projects he is undertaking include working with the City of Austin on its 2011–12 fiscal year budget and developing a finance plan for the Dallas/Fort Worth area on an approximately $2 billion transit rail expansion.

In 10 years, do you see Williamson, Travis and Hays counties as a metropolitan area similar to the Dallas/Fort Worth area?

I don’t think it’s any secret that culturally, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties kind of have different paths. I think the interesting challenge as a region is to say, ‘What are the common issues we all have to deal with?’ It fundamentally comes down to natural resources, water and transportation. It will be interesting to see if we can deal with those problems regionally, what the implications of that are naturally over time—over 10 or 15 years. I would say that’s the best way to go. If you put that infrastructure in place, maybe someday we’d have a regional rail system. Maybe we’d have the capacity to see where we develop and where we don’t in terms of natural resource considerations ...

Is the public’s perception of teachers’ and administrators’ jobs being cut realistic?

The reality of the consequences of what sounds great—at least in ‘We’ve got to cut waste and fraud.’ Who’s going to disagree with that? But when cutting waste and fraud means your teacher isn’t working anymore, then it takes on a slightly different tone. I think, if that comes to pass, it will then prompt us as a community and as a state to say, ‘OK, now we really get it.

Now we’re moving past the rhetoric into this is what it really means.’ It’s moving into an adult conversation about adult choices.

What can suburban areas, such as Round Rock ... learn from Austin’s growing pains?

I think the biggest things suburban areas could learn is [that] what makes suburban areas viable is thinking about their build environment so it’s not just single-family housing and commercial. I think the challenge for suburbs is to put in a mixing of different land uses—to have some employment centers, to have some retail and maybe some lodging in the mix—to be accessible to each other so that they can feed off of each other.

How do increased taxes affect ... small-business owners from a historical aspect?

A lot of that is about perception. The top marginal income tax in 1960 was 90 percent. I think that’s going to be one part of the adult conversation. Somewhere along the road we’re going to have to have about [what] level of government revenue is required to support things we really care about and what portion of that is each one of us going to be asked to pay.

---

Victor O’Brien

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Austin ISD approves land buy for arts center

By Joe Olivieri

The Austin Independent School District board of trustees agreed to purchase land for a new performing arts center at its April 25 meeting. The motion passed 8–1, with trustee Robert Schneider opposing.

The district approved the purchase of 4.46 acres along Mueller Boulevard between 51st Street and Barbara Jordan Boulevard at a cost of $4,093,448, according to documents provided with the meeting agenda.

Superintendent Meria Carstarphen said that construction could begin after the board approved the purchase and work could be completed by June 2013.

“It would have uses for all schools and all grade levels,” district spokeswoman Roxanne Evans said.

The completed performing arts center would have 1,200 seats and 400 parking spaces. It would serve “not only the band, orchestra, theater, dance and visual arts students, but also accommodate events such as assemblies and commencement ceremonies,” district spokesman Robert Albritton said.

The facility’s operating costs would have to be paid through the district budget, Chief Operations Officer Lawrence Fryer Jr. said.

The district is considering how operating the arts center will affect future maintenance and operations funds.

“If there is a decision to delay the construction of the PAC, purchasing the land now ensures the district is able to secure a centrally located site and allows the district to acquire the site at a more advantageous cost than will likely be available at a later time,” according to the statement.

Carstarphen said the district hoped to centralize already-budgeted arts personnel at the facility to reduce costs and to rent out the facility to outside groups to bring in revenue.

Prior to the vote, Schneider said while he had voted to support the arts center in the referendum as a private citizen, he would not support the motion to purchase the land. He said it was “not the right time or place” in light of the recent staff position cuts and cited operational costs and location choice among his reasons.

“From our last demographic report, most of the future growth in the district will occur south of William Cannon Boulevard and east of FM 1826,” he said. “This site is central only as relative to Georgetown or San Marcos.”

Trustees Christine Brister and Lori Moya said they would support the land purchase. Brister said the time was right for a performing arts center.

“We do understand that this is not the best for some portions of the district, it’s the best we can do,” she said.

“I want to make sure again—can we take money for the performing arts center and hire teachers?” trustee Sam Guzman asked. Fryer replied no.

According to documents provided with the meeting agenda, the Austin community supported the creation of a performing arts center in 2004 and 2008. In 2004, bond funds were contingent on matching donations and the district could not raise enough money to fund construction. In 2008, voters approved $40 million for land acquisition and construction of a district-wide facility.

“Following a comprehensive site selection process and evaluation of 28 proposed sites, AISD staff and the real estate consultant recommended the site because it best fits the site selection criteria developed by the Performing Arts Center Task Force and the district’s own site selection criteria,” according to the statement. That criteria includes location efficiency, centralized location and availability of utilities.

Comment at more.impactnews.com/12838

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A 4.46 acre site on Mueller Boulevard is the proposed location for a new AISD performing arts center.
ga ga
Child boutique go-to place for new parents
By Kate Hull

When Caroline Hernandez was pregnant with her son Cash, she began searching for fun and playful items she did not necessarily need to have, but wanted. When the search proved unsuccessful around town, she resorted to online shopping and decided that was not nearly as much fun.

Hernandez opened ga ga, a baby and children’s boutique, in March 2010, hoping to give new and seasoned parents an opportunity to shop and find new, playful items—and talk about their babies, of course.

“I thought it would be really cool to have a store of the things I bought for our son that you can’t find locally,” Hernandez said.

Inside the shop, bright yellow paper balloons hang from the ceiling and an array of fanciful gifts line the shelves. Multi-colored, cow-shaped bouncy-seats called Howdy Cows sit in a row next to cuddly plush dolls. Hernandez, who has an interior decorating background, wanted to make the shop as appealing as the products she sells.

The store manager, Lacey Richter, is also a new mom and enjoys shopping at the store as much as she does talking to customers about their new baby experiences.

“That is why I love working here,” Richter said. “I do not have to try and sell anything because I love the stuff and it is all the items that I would search for online, but you cannot find them everywhere in a physical store.”

Ga ga has also evolved over the past year as Hernandez receives feedback from regular customers. She personally picks and orders each new line of products, and takes the customers’ suggestions to heart.

“Originally I did not set out to sell cloth diapers, but the community kept coming to us and asking if we sold them,” she said. “I researched it and asked what lines they wanted us to pick up, so we now have FuzziBunz diapers.”

Hernandez likes to keep the store fresh and current by adding the latest baby products and clothing lines regularly like Little Maven and Kids Ink.

“I will research it and take it all into consideration and see if it is right,” Hernandez said. “If it is, I will bring it in. It has to work, be well-made and be safe.”

Richter said one of the most enjoyable parts about working at the boutique is getting to know parents and their babies that live in the neighborhood.

Ga ga is geared toward newborns and children up to 4 years of age. The clothing lines feature colorful patterns and playful shapes for both boys and girls. Hernandez wanted to make sure the boys’ outfits were just as cute and fun as the girls’.

New parents can register for showers and parties at the shop as well.

Most popular baby brands

- Fore!! clothing: Golf-inspired clothing for boys with collared shirts and matching hats
- Decaf Plush clothing: Sundresses printed with bright flowers and animals for girls
- BlaBla dolls: Plush antique-inspired dolls and stuffed animals

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Sweet Treets Bakery Cafe
Variety of flavors, creative appetite drive baker’s passion

By Taylor Short

No matter the occasion or idea, Jackie McGrath, owner of Sweet Treets Bakery Cafe, can handle the order. She was recognized as a professional baker long before she opened a storefront at 6705 W. Hwy. 290, when strangers would try to place orders after McGrath made cupcakes for a friend’s party.

“They would ask me, ‘What do you charge?’ I told them, ‘Let me get back to you on that,’” she said.

The self-taught baker started working in October 2010. She used a rental kitchen at first, but the fast flow of orders pushed her to make a decision about going bigger.

“It was one of those things where I just had to make a choice,” she said. “It had grown so big that I had to either just stop or find a permanent space.”

By March, she found a storefront, purchased pans, ovens and mixers and stepped into a crowded Austin bakery market.

Starting out was slow, but to set Sweet Treets apart, McGrath said she swears by fresh, high-quality ingredients and bakes as if it were for her family.

“I’m more interested in putting out a quality product than figuring out ways to increase my profit margin,” she said.

Festive custom cakes for weddings, birthdays or other events are available in various sizes, decorations and styles, no matter what the occasion.

In addition to custom orders, the bakery offers coffee, teas, juices and smoothies and produces lemon bars, brownies, cookies and other sweets. The display case holds several colorful cupcakes, but dozens of different flavors are available each day, such as chocolate chip cookie dough, Strawberry Bliss and Voluptuous Red Velvet.

On slower days, the kitchen can become a science lab where McGrath and her crew experiment with different and new flavor combinations to add to the growing list like Nutella banana and cinnamon churro cakes and cupcakes.

“I’m always mixing up the different fillings, seasonally,” McGrath said. “I get bored of the same thing every day, so I mix it up a lot.”

The popularity of cake balls, golf-ball-sized balls of cake dipped in chocolate, has exploded across the South. Sweet Treets offers 15 types, all color-coded with green, red or caramel ribbons of icing on top.

McGrath’s passion for baking and decorating, adventurous palate and willingness to experiment with flavors drive customers to Sweet Treets for all their sweet tooth needs, from celebrating birthdays to picking up a few extra treats.

Now, the backlog of custom orders reaches into next year, giving McGrath plenty to decorate—her favorite part of the job, she said.

“Every single cake is different, so it’s always a challenge,” she said. “And it’s amazing to me the ideas people come up with.”

Sweet Treets Bakery Cafe
6705 W. Hwy. 290, Austin
892-2233
www.sweettreetsbakery.com

Cakes and cupcakes
Custom cake orders range from 6-inch round cakes to full sheet cakes ($25–$149).

Cupcake: ($2.75 each or buy 11, get 12th free)
- Chocolate chip cookie dough—made with real cookie dough
- Black & White—Valrhona chocolate fudge with Madagascar vanilla frosting
- Voluptuous Red Velvet—with cream cheese frosting
- Nutella Banana—banana cupcake with Nutella buttercream
- Strawberry Bliss—with fresh strawberry swiss meringue buttercream frosting
- Cinnamon Churro—filled with dulce de leche

Cake balls
$1.75 each or $19.99 per dozen
- Chocolate fudge
- Pumpkin
- Red velvet
- Roasted banana
- Mexican chocolate
- Italian cream
- Strawberry
- Peanut butter
- Coconut
- Carrot
- Pink champagne

Sweet Treets offers a variety of cupcakes, including chocolate chip cookie dough.

The bakery offers 15 types of cake balls, including Red Velvet.

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Richard Rhodes
Austin Community College president/CEO

Interview by Joe Olivieri

On May 2, the Austin Community College board of trustees named Richard Rhodes the lone finalist for its president and CEO.

“I am honored for the opportunity,” Rhodes said a few days after the announcement. “My first priority will be building contacts and relationships, meeting people in the community—faculty, staff and students—and listening a lot.”

Rhodes has been president of El Paso Community College since December 2001. According to his resume, he presided over a 62 percent enrollment increase and a 145 percent increase in the number of graduates from 2001 to 2010. He also implemented five early college high schools and a dual credit/concurrent program by partnering with area school districts.

Prior to joining El Paso Community College, Rhodes served as vice president of business services at Salt Lake Community College in Utah and vice president of financial and administrative services at El Paso Community College. Rhodes has a doctorate in community college leadership from The University of Texas.

Rhodes talked with Community Impact Newspaper in April to discuss finance, his leadership philosophy and being active in the community.

What attracted you to Austin Community College?

I have been a strong believer and admirer of Austin Community College since I did an internship back in 1993. I worked here as an intern while I was working on my doctorate at The University of Texas at Austin. Ever since that time, I have kept my eyes on ACC and what ACC is doing.

It is a leader as a community college in the state and the country, so I have been using ACC as a benchmark institution at other institutions I have been at.

The other thing that ACC has going for it is its location in the state capital and the opportunities that avail themselves because of that.

What do you see as the district’s biggest challenges going forward?

Like community colleges across the country—especially in the state of Texas right now—the declining state revenues. In the $27 billion revenue shortfall in the state and the impact that’s going to have on financing in the future.

At the same time we’re experiencing some of the strongest growth we’ve seen in years. So more students, higher demand for our services, less money from the state. A tax base that is tapped, so there is no flexibility at the property tax level.

So you only have one other revenue stream and that’s tuition and fees, and you try for access purposes to keep your tuition and fees at low levels so that you get the students in the door.

Challenges in developmental education and looking for accelerated pathways through developmental education are going to continue to be challenges.

An opportunity is to look at the momentum points I talked about [colleges would earn greater funding as student achievement rises].

What results do you point to at your current college to see how your district is doing?

First and foremost, taking a look at student success—during the past decade, we have grown about 62 percent in our enrollments. Our numbers of graduates have grown by 191 or 192 percent. So it has tripled, percentage-wise, the number of new students.

So first and foremost is student completion, which means that what we [at El Paso] are doing in our work through Achieving the Dream, with developmental education, initiatives with the [Bill and Melinda] Gates Foundation, early college high schools, early enrollment, redesign of curriculum, redesign of developmental education. We have still have a long way to go but we are very happy with the results to date.

Where do you see the district going in the next five to 10 years?

Continuing to expand. We have a large, growing, thriving community in Austin and those demands, those needs for training, retraining, for integration relationships with K–12, with UT, with Texas State, with other universities. It’s growing those relationships so we can leverage those resources with each other and provide more efficient, more accelerated pathways for all of our students.

How would you describe your leadership style?

Open leadership with passion. If people are going to share the vision, they have to understand the passion behind it. Trying to be an example of passion for leadership success.

How should ACC engage its community stakeholders?

There are a lot of stakeholders in the community. It is outreach and communication. It is inclusion. It is making sure that we continually evaluate our performance and make our performance a message to the entire community.

So that it means we are building relationships with business and industry, with all sectors of education, with nonprofit organizations, with grassroots organizations.

It is being a player at the table at every venue. So that the community has a hard time saying, “Where was ACC?” They are saying, “They are always at the table.”

How do you think community colleges can deal with budget cuts and higher tuition rates?

We don’t have any choice. We can become more and more efficient. We can do things differently, but you cannot make up for that kind of budget shortfall through efficiencies. So we have no choice but to raise tuition. That is unfortunate but that’s the state of the economy today.

So we do the best we can. [Raising tuition] is the last thing you want to do and there comes a time and a place where if the state is not going to raise revenues, and we’ve done all we can to become a more efficient organization, then unfortunately the pendulum [between whether higher education is a personal benefit or a public good] is swinging.

Comment at more.impactnews.com/12835
UNHAPPY with his job, Neil Goldman made a life-changing decision to move from San Diego to Austin in 2007. Goldman, then a hotel sales manager, had become fed up with having to turn away large charitable groups from booking rooms because of full hotels.

Shortly after the move, he founded Austin Hospitality to work with local charities to facilitate bookings and prevent these large groups from being stranded without accommodations.

“We got started with Special Olympics Texas in 2008,” said Goldman. “They’re an event-driven company and didn’t want to worry about the hassles of dealing with the hotels.”

This work with several local charities brought about new ideas on where to take the still young company. Borrowing a concept from TOMS Shoes (for every pair of shoes sold, one pair is donated to a child in need), Goldman came up with a new concept and name. The idea for Hotels for Hope was born in October 2009. The headquarters is located at 2525 S. Lamar Blvd.

Goldman recently added Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Inc., the oldest mentoring program in the United States, that works with children ages 6 through 16 by developing positive relationships with adult role models. This is the fifth nonprofit to join forces with Hotels for Hope.

“We could do more than just book hotels for people,” he said. “We were going to ask every major hotel brand to donate $1 per room night that we book with them.”

The organization receives a small commission from the hotel and matches the hotel’s $1 contribution. The client also gets to choose which one of the five charities the donation is sent to.

“We’re all about the childhood advocacy and helping youth grow into people that have the opportunities we have today,” he said, adding that his nonprofit operates under the Corporate Social Responsibility business model, a relatively new idea. The model embraces accountability for a company’s actions by encouraging a positive impact on the community and the environment.

“We’re taking the action of booking a hotel room and turning it into a social good,” he said. Goldman has lofty goals for the young organization: Hotels for Hope has raised more than $20,000 in less than a year, a number he hopes to grow to $1 million by the end of 2015.

“It’s very rare that you find in business the opportunity to give back,” Goldman said. “All of us, as a team, are appreciative of what we’re doing here.”

The nonprofit works with hotels all over the United States but also has partnerships with Austin venues including the Marriott South Austin located at 4415 S. I-35 and Omni Southpark located at 4140 Governors Row.

Visit www.hotelsforhope.org for more information.
The Memorial Day flood of 1981
Austin remembers lives lost during 30th anniversary of event

By Amy Deis

May 24, 1981, marked one of the worst flash floods in Austin’s history. Thirteen people died, mostly in cars swept away by floodwaters.

About 11 inches of rain fell in just a couple of hours, causing Shoal Creek, Walnut Creek and Little Walnut Creek to overflow their banks and leave dozens homeless.

By 3 a.m., most of the floodwaters receded. Shoal Creek and surrounding neighborhoods were left with the debris of broken furniture, cars from a nearby dealership on Lamar Boulevard and pianos and other musical instruments from Strait Music.

The flood caused more than $35 million worth of damage, but several families, like Shaela Leggett-Wilson’s, lost more than material possessions. Leggett-Wilson was 16 years old when her grandmother, Carolyn Grove, and her uncle, Jeff Grove, died in the flood.

The Groves lived at 4009 Jefferson St. in a house that was 20 paces from Shoal Creek. The neighborhood was prone to flooding, but Leggett-Wilson said her grandmother had never left home when it did.

“They just learned to deal with it,” she said.

This time, neighbors told Leggett-Wilson the water rose too fast and broke the front picture window in the den. Carolyn Grove was swept away in fast-moving current. Leggett-Wilson later learned her uncle drowned after rescuing the neighbors from their attic.

Further downstream, floodwaters swept through businesses. Architect Fred Worley was watching the Indy 500 that night and was unaware his office building at 800 West Ave. was swept away.

“Someone on the Sixth Street bridge said it went over the bridge and got pinned on the Fifth Street bridge before breaking apart,” he said.

In the debris under the Fifth Street bridge, Worley found his framed architect certificate from the state, his drafting table and filing cabinet with the insurance paperwork still inside.

After floodwaters receded and families rebuilt their homes and lives, some never lost the fear of a flood occurring again.

Lou Lasher had just finished moving in to her new home on Silverway Drive. She had gotten married in February to Bill Lasher, who lived in the home with his daughters, Kristin, 7, and Claire, 4.

As the water rose in their home, the couple fought to keep their family alive. Lou Lasher said she thought for about an hour that her family might not make it. Although they all survived, the flood changed her perspective about being immune to disasters.

“We were all very jumpy for quite some time after,” she said.

Since the 1981 flood, the city has spent more than $200 million on flood control, said Kevin Shunk, supervising engineer for the city. Part of the effort involved purchasing and demolishing 450 homes that were in the flood plain. The city purchased and tore down 15 homes on Jefferson Street, a roadway close to the creek. The largest effort is the Waller Creek flood control tunnel, a $150 million project that will remove the 100-year flood plain from 12th Street to Lady Bird Lake. A 100-year flood plain is a national standard that means an area has a 1 percent annual chance of a flood occurring.
Travis and Hays counties share Hwy. 290, the border between the two is near South Oak’s and Rimrock Trail. Visitors traveling westbound will find many small businesses on the way to Dripping Springs, a town of about 2,000 residents. The area is expanding due to new housing developments.

**Dining**

1. **Chinese, American and Mexican dishes** are available at **Canyon Grill Ice House**, 399 W. Hwy. 290, 290, 858-7100, www.canyongrillicehouse.com
2. **Cartwright’s Bar B Que** serves up hot sausage, beef brisket and other Texas barbecue staples. 12005 W. Hwy. 290, 288-7879, www.cartwrightsbarbecue.com
3. **Gourmet Gals and Guys Catering and Events**, 14121 W. Hwy. 290, Bldg. 5, provides fine dining options and services for any occasion. 888-228-3789, www.gourmetgalsandguys.com
4. **Hearty Tex-Mex, Southern-inspired dishes and outdoor live music** are featured at **Nutty Brown Cafe**, 12225 W. Hwy. 290, 301-9855, www.nuttybrown.com
5. **Stadium Restaurant**, 3991 W. Hwy. 290, offers a full menu and sand volleyball facilities. 894-3311, www.stadiumaustin.com

**Business**

6. **Traditional medicine and wellness practices** can be found at **Acupuncture For Life**, 13110 W. Hwy. 290, Ste. 203. 394-9888
7. **Allstate Insurance**’s 12010 W. Hwy. 290, Ste. 110, branch sells car, life and property insurance, among other services. 894-3260, www.allstate.com
8. **Cloud 9 Design** offers interior decorating services and a combination showroom and fabrication workshop. 12010 W. Hwy. 290, Ste. 240. 301-1700, www.cloud9design.com
10. **Customizable soil blends for gardens and produce** are available at **Geo Growers**, 12002 W. Hwy. 290, 892-2722, www.geogrowers.net
11. **Harrell Funeral Home** offers funeral services, caskets and urns are available. 100 Heritage Drive, 382-6543, www.harrellfuneralhomes.com
15. **Reid’s Cleaners and Laundry** at 11907 W. Hwy. 290 is one of 17 locations in the Greater Austin area. 288-2479, www.reidsdrycleaners.com
16. **Handmade artisan pottery** can be purchased at **Sunset Canyon Pottery**, 4002 Hwy. 290. 846-6175, www.sunsetcanyonpottery.com
17. **Purchase or service home appliances** through **Wilson AC and Appliance**, 4205 W. Hwy. 290. 894-0907, www.wilsonappliance.com

**Health care**

19. **Cedar Valley Dental**’s Michael Miller, D.D.S., and staff provide dental care, X-rays and impressions. 12020 W. Hwy. 290, Ste. A. 301-9855

**Transportation**

20. **AMM Collision Center** is an auto body shop specializing in collision repair. 3990 W. Hwy. 290, 894-3888, www.austinmotive.com
21. **Tune-ups, brakes and shocks** are among the services provided at **L and L Mufflers**, 3987 E. Hwy. 290, 894-4486, www.lmuffler.com
22. **Texas Powersports Kawasaki** sells motorcycles, ATVs and watercraft. 13220 W. Hwy. 290, 301-7433, www.texaspowersports.com
23. **Todd’s Automotive** offers oil changes and car repair. 12117 W. Hwy. 290, 514-0755

This is a sample of businesses and organizations in the area. The list is not comprehensive.
REAL ESTATE

Covered Bridge
78736

Overview

Build-out year: 2002–2011
Builders: Whilshire, Drees Custom, Highland, Donovan Paul, Trinity, Structured Homes
Square footage: 1,920–4,945
Home values: $248,500–$387,500
HOA dues (estimated): $396
Amenities: Community pool, hike and bike nature trails, children’s playscape
Nearby attractions: Retail, restaurants, groceries

Property taxes:
- Travis County: 0.4658
- City of Austin: 0.4571
- Austin ISD: 1.2270
- Austin Community College: 0.0951
- Travis County Hospital District: 0.0719
- Total (per $100 value): 2.3169

Schools:
- Oak Hill Elementary School
- Clint Small Middle School
- Bowie High School

On the market (As of May 8, 2011)

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<th>No. of homes for sale</th>
<th>No. of homes under contract</th>
<th>Avg. days on the market</th>
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Home sales (April 2010–April 2011)

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<th>Selling price Low</th>
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<td>3,613 sq. ft.</td>
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Featured homes

7512 Black Mountain Drive $290,000
3 Bedroom / 2 Bath
Agent: John Brandon Faught
791-5209

7305 Black Mountain Drive $349,000
4 Bedroom / 3 Bath
Agent: John Henion
791-4404

7329 Covered Bridge Drive $299,950
4 Bedroom / 2 Bath
Agent: Steven Rosanky
426-2083

7220 Covered Bridge Drive $379,000
4 Bedroom / 4 Bath
Agent: Tara West
632-3110

Data compiled by
Bob McKenna
Austin Real Estate Partners
288-8088
www.austinsreps.com

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On the market* (As of May 6, 2011)

### Monthly home sales*

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<th>Month</th>
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<td>52/227,500</td>
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<td>62/236,500</td>
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### Property Listings

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<td>Barton Creek</td>
<td>9135 Spinning Leaf Cove</td>
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<td>4,315</td>
<td>Shannon Schmitz</td>
<td>426-9069</td>
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<td>4412 Mirador Drive</td>
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<td>Adam Walker</td>
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*Market Data includes condominiums, townhomes and houses.

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