



# ONE TO ONE

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*A Report to the Residents of Harris County Precinct One ... from Commissioner El Franco Lee*

## Seniors help feed less fortunate with donations at Celebration

'Twas the season to be thankful.

Exactly a week before Thanksgiving, those who attended the Precinct One 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Seniors Holiday Celebration had many reasons to be thankful: family, friends, God and this country, among other things. Oh, and don't forget good food, which by the way was free and plentiful at the Nov. 17 celebration that also included dancing and fellowship.

"I'm thankful for our health, friends and blessings of God," said Johnnie B. Mayes, who was sitting with his wife, Sylvia, and other seniors from the El Franco Lee Community Center. "I'm thankful for the EFL Community Center. The exercise equipment helps keep seniors in shape."

In addition to being thankful, the Mayes couple and others were also mindful of people who have little to eat year-round. Many of the about 3,500 senior citizens who attended the event donated nonperishable food as they entered Reliant Center.

"This holiday season is particularly hard," Commissioner El Franco Lee told the



Ernestina Cantu, right, gives a canned good to Precinct One workers Joel Johnson, center, and Calvin Williams at the Seniors Holiday Celebration. The food was donated to The Beacon, a nonprofit group.



The Beacon volunteer Don Kizzee observes donated food that was delivered to the nonprofit organization's downtown facility that feeds homeless and less fortunate men, women and children.

crowd. "... Not only will you have fun today, but from what you did when you donated food as you came into this arena, you will help someone else have a better holiday."

The food later was given to The Beacon, a nonprofit organization that feeds homeless and less fortunate men, women and children.

This year was the largest attendance ever for the Seniors Holiday Celebration, which started in 1992 with about 200 seniors at Tom Bass Community Center.

*(Continued on page 2)*



# Notes from Commissioner El Franco Lee

## Comments on past and future activities

### "Happy New Year"

The Precinct One staff and I wish you a prosperous new year. This year, we will continue to provide excellent services that you've come to expect from Precinct One. We have ongoing projects as well as those on the drawing board to improve mobility, enhance our parks and decrease flooding. Also, we will continue to provide services to our seniors through our six senior centers and to our youth through our nonprofit Harris County Street Olympics programs as well as various after-school and summer services. Please allow me to update you on some of the projects that were either completed or started last year:

### Harris County Toll Road Authority Projects

- The Harris County Toll Road Authority opened the 13-mile portion of the Sam Houston Tollway northeast section that includes three lanes in each direction between U.S. 59 (Eastex Freeway) and U.S. 90. That project was the final section that marked the completion of the 88-mile Sam Houston Tollway/Beltway 8.
- Work should begin soon to widen an 11-mile stretch of the Sam Houston Tollway between U.S. 59 (Southwest Freeway) and Texas 288. The project calls for increasing the lanes from two to four in each direction.
- Also, the 4-mile Hardy Toll Road Downtown Connector project is in the design phase. It involves extending the Hardy Toll Road from its southern terminus at Loop 610 to downtown Houston.

### Harris County Flood Control District Projects

- Brays Bayou channel modification from Ardmore to Holcombe is scheduled for completion in March. The work includes excavating more than 357,000 cubic yards of material for channel widening, constructing 76,000 square feet of retaining walls, maintaining access ramps and trails, and replacing storm sewer systems, sanitary sewer and water systems' components.
- Work on Sims Bayou continues to improve 19 miles of channel modifications and replace 20 roadway bridges from the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel to the Harris-Fort Bend county line just east of Hillcroft. Channel work is complete from the Ship Channel to White Heather. The 16<sup>th</sup> roadway bridge over Heatherbrook was completed in January.
- The Flood Control District has completed right-of-way acquisition on 84 of 86 residential tracts needed for future Hunting Bayou channel modifications from U.S. 59 (Eastex Freeway) to Dabney.

## *Celebration: 19-year-old tradition* attracts 3,500 thankful seniors

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Among those who attended this year was Huong Ngo, who immigrated to the United States from Vietnam about 30 years ago.

"This is my present country and I thank this country for letting me come in as a refugee," said Ngo, who has family in other parts of the country who she enjoys seeing during holidays.

Horst Britsche said he enjoys being with friends and family. Then he added with a smile: "And good food, too."

Betty Sims said she is

thankful that she can help others with little or no food. She said she feeds the homeless on weekends throughout the year as part of a volunteer group that reaches out to people in the downtown and the Eastex Freeway corridor.

"When the holidays come up," she said, "we feed them the same thing that we eat in our homes. My sister does the cooking."

When asked what she is thankful for, Ernestina Cantu replied simply: "life itself."



**HOLD THE LINE:** Precinct One senior citizens enjoy line dancing at the Seniors Holiday Celebration on Nov. 17. The event attracted about 3,500 seniors who enjoyed a free holiday meal, dancing and socializing. Some also donated nonperishable food that later was given to The Beacon, a nonprofit organization.



### 180 children cast lines to catch the big one at annual Fish Fest

In addition to fisher Mikaela Powell's line being tangled at the top of her rod, she was almost out of the sliced wieners she used for bait.

The 11-year-old Powell didn't get discouraged during her second fishing trip because Naomi Sims — a 16-year-old Dobie High School student — was there to assist.

Volunteers like Sims were an added element to the fun and the educational experiences shared by Powell and about 180 other children at the Precinct One Annual Fish Fest on Oct. 22 at Challenger Seven Memorial Park.

"Actually I love it. I love catching a fish," said Powell, who at that point had no luck hooking the big one.

Fish Fest is designed to give urban children in Precinct One a chance to experience fishing.

"Today's experience will stay with them for the rest of their lives, so let's make it a great experience," David Matthews, Precinct One Challenger Seven



Naomi Sims, right, untangles the line on Mikaela Powell's rod during Fish Fest at Challenger Seven Memorial Park. Sims was one of the 36 high school students who helped the 180 younger children fish.

Learning Center's Program Director, told volunteers before the children's arrival.

Thirty-six students from Dobie, Memorial and Jones high schools were assigned to help the chil-

dren with their fishing. And like Sims, the other high school students assisted the youth with baiting hooks, untangling lines, casting and carrying fish to cleaning stations.

"It's been awesome," said Sims. "The two girls

are just wonderful. And it feels good outside, too."

Before the children cast into the water, they had an educational experience. They visited the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's educational

fish and aquatic-life kiosk, which provides information and pictures about safety, tackle and types of fish. Then they had to answer five questions before getting raffle tickets.

Other organizations that participated were the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and America's Promise Alliance, which helped fund the event.

Precinct One employees and other volunteers not only taught the children how to cast, they also cleaned the fish that were given to the children.

At the end of the day, there was a raffle for small tackle boxes and Zebco 202 rods and reels. Michelle Koy and her younger sister, Susan, were among the lucky 11 winners.

When asked if she plans to go fishing again, Michelle said yes.

"It's because our uncle loves fishing and we do too," she said.

### Houston Texans spread holiday cheers at NFL Youth Education Town



Houston Texans players and cheerleaders visited the NFL Youth Education Town at Finnigan Park on Nov. 22. They served food to the children, and passed out Texans T-shirts and mementos. Left photo, cheerleader Kelli, right, hands a T-shirt to Adrian Shaffer. Cheerleader Lilana and cornerback Jason Allen also pass out items. Right, fullback Lawrence Vickers signs an autograph for Alyssa Jolley, right, and Jakyla Cleveland.





## Ghouls and goblins come out for Precinct One seniors' Halloween party

Jason from "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>" was there. So was Ghostface from "Scream" as well as several witches, ghouls and other scary creatures.

Then there were the pleasant characters like Elvira, Lucy Ricardo, a woman from "The Lord of the Rings" and a colorful clown.

Those were just some of the costumes donned by about 120 Precinct One senior citizens who attended the fall festival held on Halloween at the Hardy Seniors Center.

### 'Make people happy'

Baldemar Rios — dressed as a clown with skeleton faces on his outfit, a rainbow-colored wig and a painted face — normally uses the Hardy Center to exercise. This day he came to have fun, which included singing to his friends in Spanish.

He said he purchased the outfit, but his facial makeup was his own creation.

"Oh yeah," he said, "I like to make people happy."

There was enough happiness to go around at this

festive event.

The festival had a carnival-style atmosphere complete with cards and checkers games inside along with basketball free throws, apple dip, ring toss, darts and golf putting outside.

### 'Hula Girl'

This Halloween season, Lucy Heathman, aka Hula Girl, got a lot of mileage out of her colorful costume and long, blond wig. Three days earlier, she and her outfit were a big hit at a senior's fall fest at Lincoln Park Community Center, where she won first place for best costume.

### 'The Lord of the Rings'

Lady Arwen Legolas Wilson, wearing a dress similar to characters in the movie "The Lord of the Rings," said her husband sewed her costume. She said he's made her some more elaborate outfits in the past.

"We go to the fabric store and pick out a pattern," she said. "This is an \$8 costume. It's one of my cheaper dresses."



Baldemar Rios, dressed as a clown, serenades the crowd at the Fall Festival.



Lady Arwen Legolas Wilson poses in her "The Lord of the Rings" outfit.

## Seniors get hooked on fishing at annual trip to Challenger Seven Park

Lottie Harvey had never been to a Precinct One senior citizens' fishing trip. In fact, she hadn't been fishing at all prior to the Oct. 24 outing at Challenger Seven Memorial Park.

Her reason for going: She wanted to see what fishing is all about.

### Urged husband to fish

"I used to tell my husband to go fishing because it's relaxing," she said. "My husband would say, 'The only fishing I will do is in the grocery store.'"

For Harvey and the other 100 senior citizens, the annual trip —

regardless of whether they caught fish — provided some excitement. There was of course the fishing, not to mention the camaraderie especially between those who could and couldn't fish.

### Largest-fish contest

Also there was a fish fry — not the fish they caught — and a contest for the largest fish. Grady Massie took that prize — a rod-and-reel set and a chair — with a catfish he hooked.

"That was nice," Massie said later of his big catch. "I gave him to one of my friends."

There was no prize catch for Harvey. However, she did find the answer to a question she had been asking for years: Is fishing relaxing?

"It's relaxing just coming out here," she said.

### Waited for break in the heat

C.D. Curtis loves the sport. But Houston's extremely hot weather had kept him away from fishing earlier in the year.

"This is my second time this year because it's been so hot," he said. "So I tried to wait till it got a little cooler."



**BIG CATCH:** Grady Massie holds his prize-winning catfish.

# Birders flock to EFL Park to view native and migratory species

Bird photos by Stephan Lorenz

Stephan Lorenz – a tripod with a spotting scope resting on his shoulder and binoculars hanging around his neck – abruptly stopped his conversation in mid-sentence after hearing birds chirping along a wooded trail between the El Franco Lee (EFL) Park wetlands and Clear Creek. He paused in silence, stared into the leafless brush and started making bird sounds in an effort to lure the feathered fowls into the open.

Lorenz warned beforehand that his actions may appear strange. But for him, it's part of his normal walk while searching for native and migratory birds at EFL Park that – coupled with the 100-acre, protected wetlands and Clear Creek – has become a popular attraction for birdwatchers around the state.

"I can usually walk through here and hear (the birds)," Lorenz, a biology professor at San Jacinto Community College North Campus, said as he started to



Stephan Lorenz observes birds in the El Franco Lee Park wetlands.

rattle off bird species simply by hearing their calls. "These are your usual winter birds."

Lorenz said ornithologists have documented more than 240 bird species in the park.

He and others have been promoting the park on the birding community's Listserv. Adam Wood, the Houston Ornithology Group's field trip coordinator, said EFL Park was included in a bird-watching field trip on Nov. 19.

In addition, Lorenz has written articles about the park in Texas Birds Annual, a Texas Ornithological Society's publication, and the local

South Belt-Ellington Leader newspaper.

"It went from maybe one person coming once a week ... to some 20 or 30 people on some weekends. I think our record was 60 people once," Lorenz said.

More than 23 species of waterfowl have been found in the wetlands, he said, including Canvasback, Redhead and Cinnamon Teal. Throughout the year, wading birds such as 13 species of heron, egrets and ibis are at the park. A bald eagle hunts ducks in the wetlands in the winter.

During the spring migration, American Golden Plovers, Pectoral Sandpipers and Upland Sandpipers can be found in the

short grass. The rest of the year there are the normal birds such as the Northern Mockingbirds, great-tailed Grackles, European Starlings and Brown-head Cowbirds.

However, on some occasions this year birdwatchers flocked to the park to get two separate species in the sight of their cameras' and binoculars' lens. A Ruff, which was first seen in the wetlands Oct. 31, has attracted hundreds of birdwatchers.

Lorenz said the Ruff is found in Europe and Asia, but it has been spotted in Texas a few times.

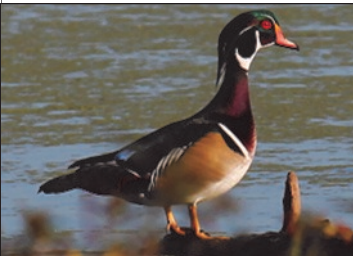
Ron New, a retiree who photographs wildlife, was taking pictures of the Ruff. "There is so much wildlife out here to photograph – so many birds," he said.

In June, a Snail Kite was sighted by Lorenz, but was seen for only one day. He said this is the

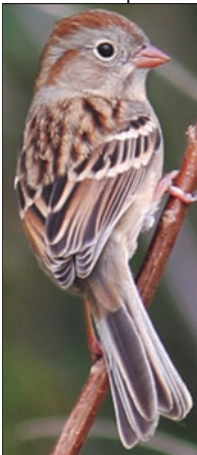
fourth documented record of the raptor in Texas. The closest Snail Kite population is in the Florida Everglades, and Central and South America.



Snail Kite



Wood duck



Field sparrow

## 11 bison once kept at Deussen Park now roaming freely at North Texas ranch

The 11 bison that once called Deussen Park their home have been permanently relocated to a ranch in North Texas.

Precinct One gave the animals to the Summerlee Foundation, whose officials on Nov. 1 loaded the bison into two trailers for a ride to the 6,400-acre Medicine Mound Ranch near the Texas-Oklahoma border at no expense to the county.

The bison, which had been at the park since 1973, were in a fenced, 9-acre area. The drought, however, dried up the vegetation that the animals usually ate. The statewide drought also drove up the price of hay and feed.

It was costing the county about \$8,500 annually to care for the animals, including feed, hay and routine veterinary check-ups.



Chris Henry with Summerlee Foundation helps load bison on trailers.



## CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

### Precinct One construction projects

- Plans to widen a one-mile section of **Cullen Boulevard** from Almeda-Genoa to Beltway 8 are in the design phase. The project includes widening **Cullen** from a two-lane, asphalt road with ditch drainage to a four-lane, concrete road with storm sewers.
- Construction is under way on an 8-by-132-foot pedestrian bridge that will span a Harris County Flood Control District ditch on **Constitution Lane**.

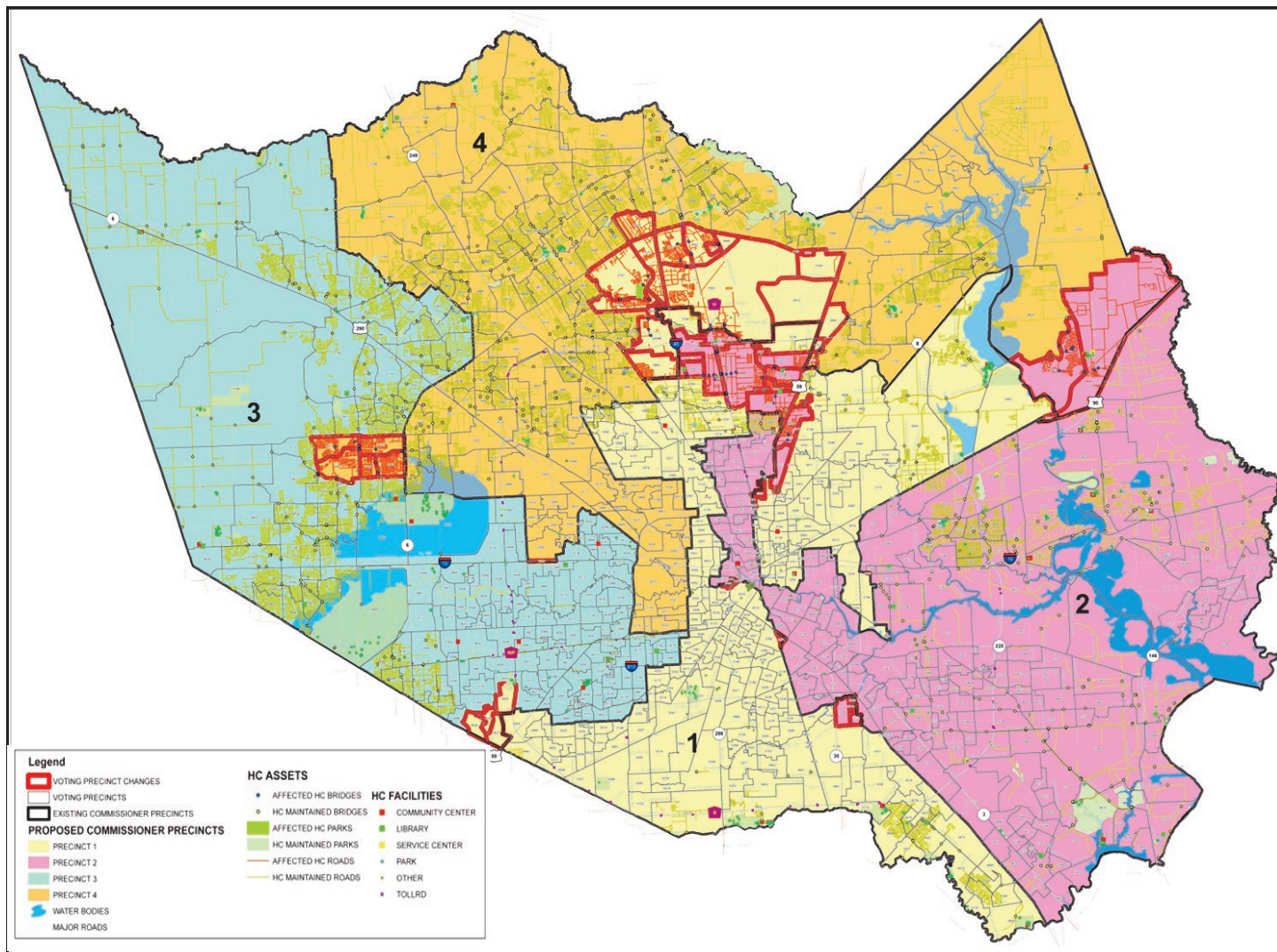
#### MAINTENANCE

**BUILDING:** Precinct One construction workers Pierre Ouzenne, right, Harry Smith and Steve Jackson work on the frame for the maintenance building at **El Franco Lee Park**. The structure, about 1,000 feet south of the Community Center, will replace the maintenance building that abuts the Community Center. The existing space will be used for the Community Center's operations.



**ROADWAY PARTNERSHIP:** Commissioner El Franco Lee, right, with north- and southbound traffic flowing on a reconstructed section of **South Gessner**, talks to Missouri City Mayor Allen Owen, center, and Councilman Bobby Marshall after a ceremonial ribbon cutting Dec. 9. Precinct One, Fort Bend County and Missouri City shared in the cost of the .45-mile section of the four-lane, concrete roadway and a new traffic signal just west of Beltway 8.

## REDISTRICTING



## Federal court approves deal to move 2012 primaries to April 3

The U.S. Department of Justice has approved Harris County's redistricting map that was adopted by Commissioners Court in August.

Meanwhile, in a separate matter related to the statewide redistricting case, a federal court has approved a compromise between Texas Republican and Democratic parties to move the state primary elections from March 6 to April 3.

### Interim redistricting map

Because of a lawsuit filed by Hispanic citizens who oppose the county's map, U.S. District Judge

Vanessa Gilmore in Houston has drawn an interim redistricting map (shown above) for Harris County commissioners' precincts. That map is scheduled for use in the spring primaries and November general elections.

### Census required changes

The plaintiffs claim the county's map illegally dilutes Latinos' chances of electing a Hispanic in Precinct Two.

After the 2012 elections, the county can use the map it adopted. That map still will be the subject of litigation in the lawsuit.

The 2010 Census required

Commissioners Court to change the boundaries in all four Harris County commissioners' precincts to conform to the Voting Rights Act, which protects against racial, ethnic and language-minority discrimination.

The Voting Rights Act also requires the Justice Department to review voting changes in Texas and other Southern states.

### Uneven population growth

The commissioners' precincts had to change because the 10-year Census requires local governments to draw districts that are "substantially equal in popu-

lation."

Harris County had a 20 percent population growth. But the growth was uneven in the four precincts.

### 4 million county population

With Harris County's 2010 population at about 4 million, each precinct must have about a million people.

Precincts One and Two were under populated. Therefore, for the most part, neighborhoods in Precincts Three and Four had to be shifted to the under-populated districts. Precinct One and Two did exchange some areas.



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#### Precinct One Parks' Reservations

All reservations are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Please read the park rules and regulations for reserving pavilions and community buildings prior to making reservations. This information can be found on our website at [www.hctx.net/comm\\_lee/parks.htm](http://www.hctx.net/comm_lee/parks.htm).

Refer to the following schedule when making 2012 reservations:

Reservations for the months:	Reservations will be accepted on or after:
Jan. 2012 – March 2012	Monday, Nov. 14, 2011
April 2012 – June 2012	Monday, Jan. 9, 2012
July 2012 – Sept. 2012	Wednesday, March 14, 2012
Oct. 2012 – Dec. 2012	Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Our reservations office is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. We can be reached at 713-440-1587.



**BIRD'S-EYE VIEW:** This Crested Caracara and other migratory and native birds have captured the interest of bird watchers who are flocking to El Franco Lee Park. **See story on Page 7.**

#### PRECINCT ONE SITES and PHONE NUMBERS

##### REGIONAL OFFICES

El Rio Service Center	713.991.6881
Downtown Office	713.755.6111
El Camino Office Annex	713.741.1096
Kashmere Office "Annex 36"	713.675.0004
Leland Office "Annex 31"	713.697.1104
Neartown Office "Annex 1"	713.755.9300
Hardy Service Center	281.820.5151

##### COMMUNITY CENTERS

Christia Adair Community Center	713.991.6881
Tom Bass Community Center	713-733.3717
Challenger Seven Learning Center	281.332.5157
Deussen Seniors Center	281.454.4108
EFL Community Center	281.464.9708
Finnigan Community Center	713.678.7385
Hardy Seniors Center	281.260.6772
Barbara Jordan Community Center	281.591.6951
Kashmere Office "Annex 36"	713-675.0004
Lincoln Park Community Center	281.445.1617
"Pep Mueller" Community Center	281.591.6951
YET Center @ Finnigan Park	713.676.0519

##### PROGRAM INFORMATION

Aquatics Program	713.748.7333
Discovery Camp Program	281.332.5157
Northeast Adolescent Program	713.673.1655
Seniors Program	713-733.3717
Street Olympics Summer Games	713.741.0851