



ONE TO ONE

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

NFL YET continues its run to provide youth services in Fifth Ward area

The colorful handwriting – or more precisely, handprints – on the walls gives visitors a clue that this is the fine-arts room. On one table, a girl paints an orange- and black-striped paper-mache ball while others use water colors to bring athletic characters to life.

In the center of the room, three girls – each using different colors to illustrate their own version of the same picture – get helpful painting tips from Fine Arts Director Mary Jacobs. “It’s a basketball player,” 8-year-old Emily Criswell explains after proudly showing her masterful work to Jacobs and the others at the table.

This is just a sneak peek inside one of about six rooms and a gym bustling with youth activity in the NFL Youth Education Town (YET) at Finnigan Park, which is in its sixth year of operation. YET – sponsored by Harris County Pre-

cinct One, NFL Charities and operated by the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Houston – provides educational and recreational activities year-round for youth ages 7 through 17.

As in other Super Bowl host cities, the National Football League donated \$1 million to build the 16,500-square-foot YET. Other funding comes for local and private support with the intent of impacting youth living in underserved neighborhoods. The Boys & Girls Club of America manages the YETs.

At the YET at 4900 Providence in Houston’s Fifth Ward, youth pay a \$15 membership fee that entitles them to various activities from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday during summer months and evening hours during the school year.

Shawn Rouege, Branch Director for YET Boys & Girls Club, said



Students practice their artistic crafts in the YET fine arts room. Other activities include dancing, athletics, leadership development, finance training and job-search skills.

the five-core program consists of character and leadership development; education and career development; health and life skills; arts; and sports, fitness and recreation.

“The impression a lot of people get of the Boys & Girls Club is

that it’s recreation,” Rouege says. “We don’t just do recreation. We are trained to make our programs fun and engaging.”

Every program is designed with the children in mind.

The Fine Arts Department,

(Continued on page 2)



Manny Escontrias offers his dog Gretchen water from a canine fountain in Deussen Park.

Area of Deussen Park now dog friendly

The 90-plus-degree weather obviously was a little uncomfortable for 3-year-old Gretchen during her evening playtime at Deussen Park. But she still tolerated it for the freedom to roam a section of the park without a leash.

Gretchen is a Weimaraner dog who is among the first canines to visit Deussen’s dog park, which opened Aug. 8. And if you think she’s excited, then talk to her owner Manny Escontrias, who lives in nearby Lakeside Terrace.

“We couldn’t be any happier,” he said. “It really turned out nice.”

The dog park, the first for Precinct 1 parks, is divided into two sections – about 4 acres for large dogs and 2 acres for small dogs, both separated by a chain-link fence. In fact, the entire dog park is surrounded by a fence that has separate entrances to the large and small dog areas. A parking lot at the southern end of Sonnier Drive was added for visitors.

Before the park opened, Escontrias walked his dog at middle schools in the area.

“But she had to be on this,” he said,

(Continued on page 5)



Notes from Commissioner El Franco Lee

Comments on past and future activities

Public Defender's Office

As chairman of the Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, I am pleased to announce that the county has received a \$4.1 million state grant to start a public defender pilot program. The program will operate in most district and county criminal courts with the long-term goal of developing into a hybrid indigent defense system that will enhance effective legal representation for adult, juvenile and mentally ill defendants. It will also provide appellate defense counsel in most courts. The county plans to re-apply for the grant every year during the four years the funds are available. After that, the Public Defender's Office likely will request funding from Commissioners Court. The County anticipates the Public Defender's Office will be fully operational by the end of the second grant year.

Harris County Toll Road Authority Projects

Motorists who travel in northeast Harris County may have noticed that construction crews are working to complete a 13-mile stretch of the Sam Houston Tollway between U.S. 59 and U.S. 90. The project, expected to be completed in April, will consist of three lanes in each direction. If you don't have an EZ Tag, you might want to consider getting one because no cash will be accepted, only electronic transactions. However, the service road in both directions will remain free. Once opened, this will complete the tollway main lanes that circle the Houston area.

Harris County Flood Control Projects

The 2010 Hurricane Season has been slow so far. But remember it continues through November 30. Precinct 1 residents are reminded to be prepared! The Harris County Flood Control District's 2010 Hurricane Tracker is available for download via the District's website - www.hcfdc.org. You can also find fact sheets on Family Flood Preparedness, and Hurricane and Flood Safety.

Also, the District continues to identify opportunities to implement flood improvement projects designed to reduce flooding risks and damages to property throughout Harris County. Particularly in Precinct 1, there are multiple planning studies in various stages that involve partnerships with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Comprehensive plans to reduce damages due to flooding are being evaluated for Buffalo, Clear Creek, Halls, Hunting and White Oak watersheds. Residents may recall similar studies that took place in previous years in the Brays and Sims watersheds that are now projects under construction. For more information on planning studies and construction projects, contact the District at 713-684-4000.

YET: Continued from page 1

for example, not only teaches art skills, it also prepares students to participate in national art competitions. The Drama Program, in collaboration with T&T Drama, helps to improve reading comprehension and to break down barriers of low self-esteem.

Healthy Habits program teaches fitness and healthy eating, which involves instructions on preparing meals.

There's also a program, in collaboration with Charles Schwab Group, that teaches teenagers how to balance checkbooks, make investments and plan a financial portfolio.

Career Launch, a partnership with the Gap Corp., provides

instructions on how to prepare a resume, get ready for a job interview and to dress.

John Robinson II, the Athletics Director, says all daily events are organized. On the hour, the youth rotate from one room to another to participate in athletics, computer lab work, fine arts, dancing and structured games.

"We are not just running around and playing," Robinson says. "Everybody is engaged. The teachers are up talking and coaching."

Camden Thornton, 14, who has been a club member for three years, says he likes the computer instructions. Also, he loves to play pool and dominoes. "Yes," he concedes about his pool skills, "I'm pretty good at it."



Intern Britney Mitchell, standing, assists students in the computer lab at the NFL Youth Education Town at Finnigan Park. YET provides youth programs in the summer and during the school year.

Eryka Sidney, 12, who has been coming to the YET for about three years, says she likes spending her time in the pre-teen room, where she listens to music and plays table games. She is also an excellent basketball player. "I'd rather be here than at home," she says, adding that she loves the learning experience and the recreation.

Earth Day activities teach students to help save the planet

Plastic bottles, aluminum cans, cardboard and newspaper were scattered over a portion of a Challenger Seven Memorial Park parking lot. It definitely wasn't the work of a litterbug gone amuck.

Let Megan McInnis, a Naturalist Assistant at the Challenger Seven Learning Center, explain:

"So you have four (recycle) bins on each side," she tells about a dozen children at the Precinct 1 Earth Day Celebration on April 24. "We're going to split up into two teams. All you're going to do is run and pick up one item and put it in the appropriate bin, and then you're going to run back and the next person is going to go."

At McInnis' command, one child from each team dashed toward the litter, picked up an object and then sprinted back to toss it in the appropriate bin – be it for plastic, aluminum or trash.

This was just one of several Earth Day activities that were



Megan McInnis, left, a Challenger Seven Learning Center naturalist assistant, leads students in an Earth Day recycling game.

designed to be exciting and well as educational.

It was indeed a learning experience for Berek Jackson, 11, who was with a group from the Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club, Irvington Branch.

"If you recycle a lot of stuff," Jackson said, "they won't have to keep using all the energy or the oil to make plastic."

That's exactly what David Matthews, the Challenger Seven Learning Center's Program Director, wanted the children to learn. Matthews told them they were going to see how important it is to reduce, re-use and recycle.

"And in the end we hope that you have a lot of fun learning about recycling and about re-using and about reducing our

waste," Matthews said, "but you also will learn how important it is to the water that we drink."

The children, ages 5 to 12, then rotated to activities that also included lessons on water conservation, pollution control, the importance of plants, and how pollution affects animals and humans.

"We don't have to throw away trash in the woods because it harms the animals," said Ashley Martinez, 8, with the Boys & Girls Club.

Debbie Mitchell, the club's Branch Manager, said the activities reinforced what the students are taught at the club, where recycle bins are placed for the children's use.

"They know the difference in what can be recycled and what can't," Mitchell said. "They are learning that. They have to separate the plastic and the aluminum."

Precinct One and 2 other elected officials sponsor 2 early Easter egg hunts



Children anxiously await the start of the egg hunt at Judson Robinson Sr. Park in the Clinton Park subdivision.

Like runners at the starting line, hundreds of children and their parents – many clutching Easter baskets and plastic bags – stood on the soccer fields' sidelines with their eyes glued on the plastic Easter eggs in the grass.

Once given permission to go, they dashed onto the field, picking up eggs as quickly as possible at the March 27 Precinct 2 Annual Easter Egg Hunt at El Franco Lee Park.

Heather Derosse – who helped her two youngest children, Micah, 1, and Adam, 2, in their search on the field used for smaller children – said it was an exciting family outing.

The egg hunt, also held that same day at Judson Robinson Sr. Park in Clinton Park, is sponsored by Harris County Precinct 1 Commissioner El Franco Lee, Precinct 2 Constable Gary L. Freeman, and Precinct 2, Position 1 Justice of the Peace Jo Ann Delgado.

At Robinson Park, Alejandro Jasso and his wife, Veronica, brought their two children – Alezandro, 6, and Hillary, 4 – early to enjoy the popcorn, snow cones and hotdogs before the egg hunt. "I had fun," said Alezandro.



Heather Derosse talks to Adam and Micah before the egg hunt at El Franco Lee Park.

Seniors walk 5K as part of a fitness day to 'Age Strong; Live Long'



Beverly Wallace walks strong.

Beverly Wallace broke away from the pack early during the Precinct 1 Seniors Walk Along, a 5-kilometer (3.1-mile) exercise event at Tom Bass Park. It wasn't long before she was about a quarter of a mile ahead of everyone.

"I've been doing some type of cardio and strengthening training ever since I turned 50," said Wallace, as she paced herself along the course. "So I'm 60 now."

It goes without saying that she went on to the finish first. Then again, it wasn't exactly a race. This was the first year Precinct 1 hosted the 5K walk – with the theme "Age Strong! Live Long!" – for seniors who participate in the Precinct's six senior centers. About 70 seniors walked in the May 14 event, which also featured a yoga demonstration, health tips from a fitness trainer and a box lunch.

The walk, which will become an annual event, is just another Precinct 1 effort to keep seniors physically fit. Each of the six senior centers has exercise rooms. And the centers also offer exercise classes such as yoga, aro-



Huong Ngo, left, and her husband, Thang Nguyen, finish the 5K walk.

bics and tai chi.

Thang Nguyen and his wife, Huong Ngo, said they walk every day. This event, they said, motivated them to get more active.

"This is very good," the wife said. "That's why we came here. We learned a lot about eating something good."

Esequiel Tijerina and his wife, Rosa, who both proudly point out that they have been married for 55 years, also said they will start exercising more.

"We are going to try, anyway," conceded Esequiel Tijerina. "We do some ballroom dancing at El Franco Lee (Park.)"

SENIOR CENTERS' LOCATIONS

Deussen Park, 12303 Sonnier
El Franco Lee Park, 9500 Hall
Finnigan Park, 4900 Providence
Hardy Senior Center, 11901 W. Hardy Rd.
Lincoln Park, 979 Grenshaw
Tom Bass Park, 15108 Cullen

Kashmere Gardens gets a taste of Paris in the springtime during Precinct 1 seniors' event

When Margienell Bailey attended Precinct 1's April in Paris event last year, she didn't know there would be a tea-cup judging contest. This year, however, she came prepared with an award-winning cup that dates back two generations.

Grandmother's cup

"This time I made a point to bring one of my grandmother's," Bailey said, holding her cup in one hand and her prize in the other. "And I'm glad it won."

Bailey shared the April in Paris



Mickey Leland Memorial Park became a Paris sidewalk café.

best tea cup honors with Arlene Hunter, Victoria Williams and Unive Brown. They were among

the more than 100 seniors who participated in this year's annual event held April 28 at Mickey

Leland Memorial Park, which was transformed into a Paris sidewalk café complete with tables covered with white linen and colorful centerpieces.

Best hat contest

To add to the décor, the mostly senior female attendees brightened up the park with their elegant, colorful dresses and hats. Also, there was competition for the best hat.

The winners were Rosie Flagg, Victoria Walker and Evelyn Williams.

Gator sighting gives hope for EFL wetlands' rebound



An alligator nesting in El Franco Lee Park is the first sighted in the wetlands in two decades.

For some El Franco Lee Park visitors, a 7-foot alligator hissing with its mouth open on the 100-acre wetlands' banks can be a frightening. Park officials and wildlife experts, however, view it as a significant sign that the wetlands' ecosystem is rebounding to where it was before the land was drained 20 years ago.

"Last year, we really started seeing some of the first signs of how ecosystems restore themselves," said David Matthews, Challenger Seven Learning Center Program Director at Challenger Seven Memorial Park. "Bald eagles started hunting there for the first time last year. This year

for the first time an alligator is seen nesting in the park."

Park officials have placed alligator-warning signs and temporary fencing to keep the public away from the reptile's nest. When the eggs hatch, the mother and her babies will head to more secluded, deeper waters for fertile hunting.

Matthews said the original land owner drained the wetlands more than 20 years ago to sell the property, which was a rice farm with the wetlands used as a reservoir to hold water that flowed to rice canals.

The City of Houston purchased the property in 1984. The city and Harris County entered into an inter-local agreement in

1987 that called for Precinct One to build and manage a park.

Parks Division officials worked for years to restore the wetlands' integrity. Repairs were made to all breaches in the levees. In 1989, workers started flooding the area annually. Also, invasive plants and animals species were eradicated.

Monique Slaughter with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Alligator Program said the presence of a nesting alligator is a good indicator of a healthy and diverse wetland system. "Her presence here can also provide a significant learning opportunity of how important alligators are to wetlands," Slaughter said.

Park Improvements

- A 60-space parking lot with lighting is being designed for **Eisenhower Park** on Eisenhower Park Road. The lot, which will give users access to existing hiking trails, will also have a kiosk to show the trail's layout as well as other park amenities. Construction is expected to start later this year.

- Repairs to the Hurricane Ike damaged boardwalk and T-head pier at Lake Houston waterfront in **Deussen Park** have been completed. All public boat ramps are open.

- A back-up generator has been installed at the El Franco Lee Community Center in **El Franco Lee Park**.

- Workout enthusiasts who use Hutcheson Park now can enjoy a 38-by-38-foot outdoor fitness court.

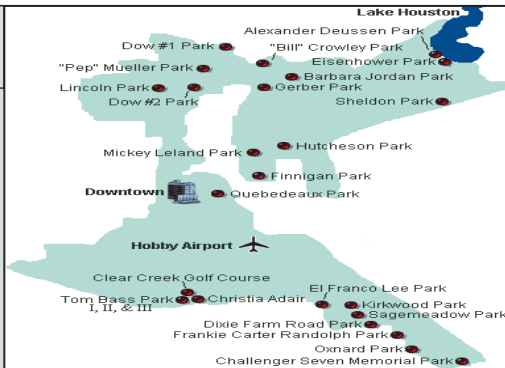


John Tardy and his wife, Mildred, background, work out on exercise equipment at Hutcheson Park.

Park reservations start Nov. 8

Precinct One will begin accepting 2011 park reservations on Nov. 8. Make your reservations early for park facilities.

For reservations and information, please call 713-440-1587. Also, check out the Parks Division online at www.co.harris.tx.us/comm_lee/parks.htm.



Dog Park: Continued from page 1

holding up his right hand to show the leash. "But when you got an active dog like Gretchen, that can be challenging because she pulls you all the time."

And for dog owners who live in southern Precinct 1, construction on a canine park – 4 acres for large and 2 acres for small dogs – recently started in Tom Bass Regional Park. The dog park,

which includes parking improvements, is scheduled to open at the end of the year.

For now, all the tails are wagging at Deussen.

Nicole Nelson and Alese Bowers brought their three dogs to let them stretch their legs.

"It looks really great. It's big. You know I have a really small back yard, so this is perfect," Bowers said.



Alese Bowers brings her dogs, Kobie and Skye, into the dog park at Deussen Park.

CONSTRUCTION UPDATES



Precinct One's Jerry Lee clears dirt from a ditch on East Mount Houston to improve drainage in the northeast Harris County area.



A 2,186-square-foot office building, left, and 3,457-square-foot restroom/concession facility with a pavilion are being built at Sheldon Park. Construction is expected to be completed in November.

HCHD opens MLK clinic in Precinct One

The Harris County Hospital District has opened the Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center in Precinct One.

The 64,000-square-foot center at 3550 Swingle will provide care for about 100,000-patient visits a year. It replaces the 15,050-square-foot center in the Hospital District's Quentin Mease Community Hospital, which is now an outpatient rehabilitation center.

Clinic services

The MLK center has 60 exam rooms and will provide a wide range of health-care services,

including primary care for both adults and children, dental, ophthalmology, obstetrics, psychiatry, pharmacy, laboratory and other services.

Scott Street improvements

To provide better vehicle access to the clinic, plans are under way to improve Scott Street from Orem to Almeda Genoa. Scott, now a two-lane street in that .8-mile stretch, will be upgraded to two lanes in each direction.

Scott also will be improved to four lanes south from Almeda Genoa to Beltway 8.

Ongoing construction work in Precinct One

- Plans are under way to improve a 4.5-mile portion of **Beamer Road** between Dixie Farm Road and West Bay Area Boulevard. The work includes a four-lane, concrete divided roadway with traffic signal upgrades, storm sewer and drainage improvement. In these early stages, an environmental document is expected to be completed next spring and then submitted to the Texas Department of Transportation for review and approval. If approved, the work is expected to be complete by September 2012.
- Construction of a left-turn lane has been completed on

Blackhawk at Beltway 8. The design of a right-turn lane is expected to be completed by the end of the year, with construction scheduled to start next spring.

- Pedestrian bridges are being designed for **Constitution Lanes** and **Heritage Park**.

- A .70-mile stretch of **Imperial Valley** from Rankin to Harvest Time Lane is being converted from a two-lane road to a four-lane, divided concrete roadway with a grassy median. Construction activities should be completed next summer.



The Challenger Seven Learning Center Animal Lab building and outdoor animal pens and flight cages are being constructed at Challenger Seven Memorial Park.



Adriana Montemayor, center, MLK Health Center pharmacy supervisor, talks to Commissioner El Franco Lee and center Director Carolyn Bell during a recent clinic tour.

Street Olympics spark fun and education for youth



Doris Crisp, left, and Victoria Frias were the last two jumping in a Street Olympics' Final Event competition at Reliant Arena Aug. 6.

Doris Crisp, 9, and Victoria Frias, 10 – the last two standing – each had their own jump-rope style.

Crisp jumped with both legs simultaneously, her feet barely leaving the floor as she faced forward without looking at her competition. Frias, meanwhile, preferred sort of a skip – alternating one leg after the other – as she looked at an angle to watch her opponent's every move.

Although their styles were different, both had the same goal: win the gold in the girls Division II jump rope competition at the Harris County Street Olympics Final Event on Aug. 6.

With the small crowd sur-

rounding them getting more involved, Frias of the Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club, Irvington Branch, clipped her foot with the rope, thus ending her quest. In celebration, Crisp of Finnigan Park collapsed to the floor and put one finger up to show that she's No. 1.

Indeed she was for that particular event. However, all of the approximately 5,000 youth who participated in the 24th annual Street Olympics' summer activities were winners.

Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee founded the nonprofit Street Olympics to implement and sustain programs that provide training, support and re-

sources that lead to healthy and productive lives for youth.

The summer-only programs include Discovery Camp, 3-on-3 Basketball, the Summer Games, the Final Event, the Bright Future Fair and the Harris County Aquatics Program Learn-to-Swim activities, which culminates with an Olympic-style swim meet called Splashdown.

The 3-on-3 Basketball tournament, held July 15-16 at Fonde Community Center, brought together competitors from various youth programs. To qualify, about 400 Harris County girls and boys ages 7 to 17 played in the five-week, preliminary rounds at countywide neighborhood agencies' sites. About 188 boys and girls on 47 teams earned bids to the tournament.

Kenneth Jackson III, 11, said the 3-on-3 Basketball experience taught him that teamwork is important in other life endeavors. "I learned that when you play basketball, you have to be aggressive. Never have a bad attitude and always play hard," he said.

On July 30, Splashdown was held at the Harris County Aquatics Center. The boys and girls ages 7 through 18 participated in swimming programs at HCAP pool sites: the Harris County Aquatics Center; Kashmere, MacArthur and Carver High Schools; Attucks Middle School; and Finnigan and Lincoln Parks.

Kayla Prusmack, 14, a Drew Academy student who swims at Carver High, said she enjoyed the program.

"I love the competition and it's really fun," Prusmack said.

The Final Event was held Aug. 6 at Reliant Arena, where about 2,800 youth competed for gold, silver and bronze medals. Ath-



Kenneth Jackson III does a no-look pass at 3-on-3 tournament.

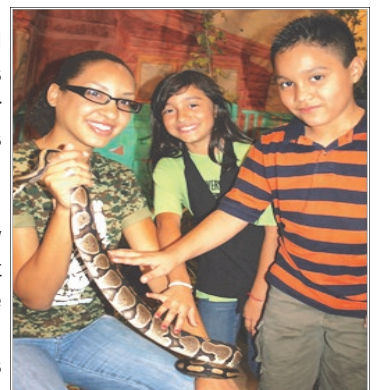
letes earned the right to compete by being the best of more than 5,000 who took part in the Summer Games at participating agencies that offer summer programs.

To sum it up in a few words, Fabian McConnell, 10, of the Greensbrook Kids, who participated in kickball, said: "It's awesome."

Street Olympics activities aren't all about athletics. Away from the basketball courts and swimming pools, the Discovery Camp taught 409 low- to moderate-income children about environmental awareness with hands-on activities. The camp, with this year's theme of "Biodiversity – the Amazing Variety of Life on EARTH" – operates at Deussen Park Discovery Camp.



Kayla Prusmack's powerful back stroke propels her to victory at the Harris County Aquatics Program's Splashdown meet July 30.



Discovery Camp teacher Aurie Galindo-Johnson, left, shows a ball python to Mia De León and Angel Cruz at Bright Futures Fair.



LIGHTING A FLAME: Mekde Negesie, left, Tiffany Hays and Kiewan Bray hold the Olympic torch after lighting the flame for the Harris County Precinct One Street Olympics' Final Event on Aug. 6. About 2,800 youth participated in various events. **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

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