

TGCA RELEASES
LATEST POLLS
SPORTS | PAGE 8

Katy Times

HAPPY
NEW
Year!

VOLUME 113, ISSUE 5

THE GREATER KATY AREA'S NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1912 ■ katytimes.com

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2025

Board approves contract for design of next junior high, 2026-2027 instructional calendar

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO
PUBLISHER

At its regular board meeting on January 27, the Katy ISD board of trustees voted to move forward with various construction projects – among them, a contract for design services for junior high school #19.

That campus will be located on land which the district recently purchased in the Grange subdivision west of Katy, as previously stated by Lisa Kassman, Executive Director of Facilities, Planning, and Construction for Katy ISD, at the board's January 13 work-study meeting. In

that meeting Kassman said that the plans for the newest junior high would be "more than a modified repeat of the last two junior highs." Kassman said that the new design would increase enrollment capacity from 1400 to 1600 students and would add about ten classrooms. At Monday's meeting the board voted via consent agenda to award the contract for design services to PBK.

Also approved via consent agenda were contracts for:

- Design services for the auto program expansion at Miller Career and Technology Center.

- Contract for the expansion of the Shaw Center.
- Contracts for safety and security improvements at various campuses.
- Contracts related to renovations at Katy Junior High, Cimarron Elementary, Nottingham Country Elementary and Katy High School.

The instructional calendar for the 2026-2027 school year was also approved in the consent agenda. Key dates from the calendar include:

- First day of school – Wednesday, Aug.

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Katy ISD school board secretary Mary Ellen Cuzela (left) awards a certificate of appreciation to Creek Elementary student Grady Brezinski, who led the pledges of allegiance at Monday's board meeting.

PHOTO BY SUSAN ROVEGNO



Winter storm Enzo brought snow to the Katy area during the week of January 21. Over two inches fell in the City of Katy, as shown in this photo of a residence on Avenue B in Old Katy.

Winter storm Enzo brings snow to Katy area; one death reported

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO
PUBLISHER

Katy-area residents hunkered down during the week of January 21, as Winter Storm Enzo brought freezing temperatures to the area – along with approximately two inches of snow.

Frantic residents crowded hardware and grocery stores, obtaining materials to wrap pipes and stocking up on necessities for the multi-day weather event.

City and county officials encouraged people to stay home and

off the roads due to icy conditions.

One death was reported; the body of an unsheltered man was found near a fast-food restaurant in the 300 block of S. Fry Road in Katy. He was identified as Mark Dufur in a post on the Facebook page for Hope Impacts, a local nonprofit which provides resources to the homeless in the Katy area.

"Our hearts are broken knowing one of our sweet street friends passed away yesterday," said the January 22 post. "Mark was a well-loved member of our Hope Impacts family. We had served him on and

off for several years. He was even housed in 2021 under rapid re-housing. That program lasts for up to one year. He had spent time in a shelter, but that is only a temporary solution. Eventually you have to leave. The cycle of homelessness is a difficult one to escape from. Mark had many friends, [and] he was offered help during the freeze but like many -- refused. He did have underlying health issues that most likely contributed to his demise."

The post said that Hope Impacts would hold a celebration of life ceremony for the man.

City council approves new timeline for 10th Street Bridge, okays tourism expenses

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO
PUBLISHER

At the January 27 meeting of the City of Katy's city council, members authorized the mayor to sign a construction change order for the 10th Street bridge replacement project, extending the completion date by an additional 88 days. City Engineer David Kasper said that the project would be completed in April and that pillars had already been installed in the channel. Councilmember Janet Corte requested, "If anything can be done to speed up this project, please do so. We're dying over here."

Council also approved an ordinance calling for a May 3, 2025, election for the purpose of electing a mayor and executing a joint election agreement. Mayoral candidate Michael Payne, who is running against incumbent Dusty Thiele, spoke during public comments on his campaign agenda.

Council also approved changes to a city zoning ordinance related to special use permits. City Planner Rachel Lazo summarized the changes,

which she said were prompted in October 2024 by what she termed "contentious rezoning" for a heavy industrial use project that came forward.

"As part of that, it was identified that there were a lot of other uses that were antiquated and hadn't been looked at in a long time," Lazo said. "The mayor and council directed city staff to bring that forward in order to clean up some of our heavy industrial uses."

Lazo said that one of the changes would require heavy industrial users dealing with the processing and use of raw materials to obtain a special use permit, in order to be in the industrial district. This change would allow the city council to have more oversight over specific locations, she said. Another change specifically "calls out" battery energy storage system (BESS) uses in the special use permits section, allowing no question where these fit in and the process for approval of a special use permit. The change will enable city staff, council and the developer to have a discussion to

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January 30, 2025
8 pages | \$1

Hines acquires nearly 3,000 acres near Katy and Fulshear for residential development

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Hines, the global real estate investment manager, has acquired nearly 3,000 acres near Katy, Texas, and Fulshear, Texas, to be developed into an expansive master-planned community, making it one of the firm's largest land purchases

for single-family development. The site is located at the corner of Westpark Tollway and the Texas Heritage Parkway which bisects the tract.

The development will consist of more than 7,000 homes with a variety of lot sizes and

See HINES, page 3



Members of Katy's city council, along with the mayor, did double duty Monday night before the city council meeting – appearing at the regular board meeting of the Katy ISD board of trustees to present a special proclamation in honor of School Board Recognition Month. In the first row, representing the city (left to right): Mayor Pro Tem Chris Harris, Councilmember Gina Hicks, Mayor Dusty Thiele, and Councilmember Rory Robertson. Second row, representing KISD: Board Member Dawn Champagne, Board Member Morgan Calhoun, Board Vice President Amy Thieme, Superintendent Ken Gregorski, Board Secretary Mary Ellen Cuzela, Board Member Lance Redmon and Board Member Rebecca Fox. Board president Victor Perez (not pictured) joined the meeting after the proclamation was presented.

PHOTO BY SUSAN ROVEGNO

TXDOT provides update on Hwy 36A project at luncheon

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO
PUBLISHER

The Texas Department of Transportation is making progress on the proposed Highway 36A project, a spokesperson for the department told attendees at the Highway 36A Coalition's quarterly luncheon on January 23. The luncheon was hosted by the advocacy group at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Energy

Corridor at 11730 Katy Freeway in Houston. Sue Theiss, Director Advanced Project Development for TxDOT, gave an update on the progress for the environmental impact study (EIS) for Highway 36A, which she said must be done under an environmental policy act. The Highway 36A project is divided into two halves, she said – a north half and a south half. "Right now, we are heavily invested in getting the purpose and needs state-

ment report done for the southern portion," she said, working over the last several weeks with the Environmental Affairs Division in Austin, which must sign off on the EIS.

The southern portion of the project goes from FM 1994 south of Needville to I-10 west of Katy, according to the TxDOT website. The proposed roadway would be approximately

See PROJECT, page 3

COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Sealy Lions Club to host dance on February 1

The Lions Sealy Dance Club is having a dance on Saturday, February 1st, 2025, at the Sealy American Legion Hall, 1630 Meyer Street in Sealy. The band Scott Wilkinson & EZ Country will be providing live music from 7:30 to 11:00 p.m. The public is always welcome.

Ring in the Year of the Snake with lion dances at Katy Asian Town on February 1 and 2

Bring your friends and family to celebrate good luck and culture as Katy Asian Town welcomes the Year of the Snake during the KAT Lunar Fest. The center will feature Katy Lion and Dragon Dance performances by Lee's Golden Dragon Lion and Dragon Dance Association at 12 p.m. on February 1 and 2 in the parking lot in front of H Mart. Katy Asian Town is located at the Grand Parkway and Colonial Parkway in Katy.

In the Attic Band to perform at Central Green on February 8

In the Attic Band, a teen rock band from Katy, will be playing a two-hour set on the Central Green stage at LaCentera on February 8 from 1 to 3 p.m. All ages welcome and the performance is free. LaCentera is located at 23501 Cinco Ranch Blvd. in Katy.

Katy Branch Library offers programs in early February

The Katy Branch Library of the Harris County Library system, at 5415 Franz in Katy, has free programs for all ages. Here are a few of the many opportunities the

library will offer in February:

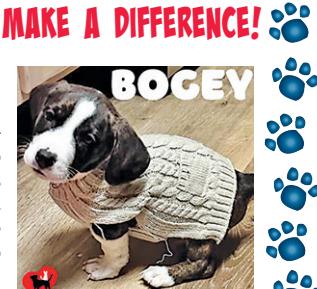
- Muses Across Katy Art Club, February 3 from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Join the team for after school for art projects & crafts. This program is for 7-11 year olds/2nd-5th graders. Pick up a free entry ticket at the front desk 15 minutes before the program begins. Entry will close at 4:50 p.m.

- Big Kid Story Time, February 10 from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. This story time is for elementary-aged children and includes books, songs, and more! Parents are welcome to attend this program with their children. Pick up a free entry ticket at the front desk 15 minutes before the program begins. Entry will close at 4:50 p.m.

- Pet Health Transformation Secrets, February 10 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Attend this class to learn four affordable strategies to help with pet nutrition, hosted by BARC. Register online through the events calendar at www.hcpd.net.

ARC of Katy to hold 'Viva' fiesta gala on February 21

Join local nonprofit The ARC of Katy for its annual gala on February 21, complete with a mariachi welcome, a delicious buffet, exciting auction items, exclusive wine pull, and more. The event will be held at Palacio Maria, 21728 Highland Knolls in Katy from 6 to 10 p.m. Fiesta honorees receiving "Volunteer of the Year" awards during the evening include the Bingo Ladies and Bonnie Holland. Funds raised by The ARC of Katy are used to develop opportunities, resources and programs for teens adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. To RSVP or for more information, please go to



CLEARLY, YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

MEET BOGEY!

This adorable 8-week-old Basset mix is ready to steal your heart! With his low-rider legs and long, floppy ears, Bogey is the definition of "too cute to handle." He's got a playful and loving personality that will win you over in no time.

Bogey and his 5 brothers are looking for forever homes where they can grow up surrounded by love and care.

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Cinco Ranch Branch Library hosts dancing lions for lunar new year

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Fort Bend County Libraries will host a Lunar New Year Celebration on Saturday, February 8, from 10 a.m. to noon, at the Cinco Ranch Branch Library in Katy. The Cinco Ranch Branch Library is located at 2620 Commercial Center Blvd. in Katy.

Activities and crafts celebrating the Year of the Snake are planned for families with children of all ages.

Dancing lions from the Katy Kung Fu Lion Dance Team (USA Shaolin Xiu Culture Center) will perform in the lobby of the library at 11 a.m. The team will explain the tradition of the dance in the Meeting Room at 10:30 a.m.

Musicians from the North American Youth Chinese Orchestra will perform a variety of traditional Chinese musical pieces on the violin and flute, as well as on Chinese instruments such as the pipa, guzheng, and zhong ruan.

Visitors may join in playing Cai Deng Mi, or "Guessing the Lantern's Riddle," and win a prize if the answer is correct. The answer to the question, "What building has the most stories?" may be simpler than one thinks, said a library spokesperson.

Visitors will also have an opportunity to learn about the art of Chinese calligraphy. A station will be set up in



PHOTO COURTESY OF FORT BEND LIBRARY SYSTEM

Celebrate the Lunar New Year with the lion dances at Cinco Ranch Branch Library, 2620 Commercial Center Blvd., Katy, on February 8. The performance is free.

the lobby, where a volunteer from the T.E. Harman Center in Sugar Land will demonstrate the art of calligraphy by writing names in Chinese.

Children may visit the library's Youth Department, where they can make their own paper lanterns to take home with them.

This event was made possible by the Friends of the Cinco Ranch

Branch Library.

The Lunar New Year activities are free and open to the public.

For more information, see the Fort Bend County Libraries' website (www.fortbend.lib.tx.us), or call the Cinco Ranch Branch Library (281-395-1311) or the library system's Communications Office (281-633-4734).

Master Gardeners offer free classes

BY FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Seventy people spent a recent Saturday morning learning about "Edible Garden Planning," thanks to Fort Bend County Master Gardeners. The free Grow Your Own class begins a new year of educational offerings by Master Gardeners, who also offer Landscape Success classes.

Master Gardeners Peggy d'Hemecourt and Dan Lawlor presented the January program. During the class d'Hemecourt told the

group at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center at 1330 Band Road in Rosenberg that success depends upon having a plan, choosing a site, preparing the soil, planting at the optimal time of year and continuous care.

Her list of possible goals included fresh fruit and vegetables for their family, engaging the entire family in an outdoor project and replacing lawn with productive garden space.

Questions to be asked by the gardeners include who will do the work, what do you and your family like to

eat and how do you plan to use what you grow.

If a vegetable garden is the goal, the attendees learned that it needs a well-drained area, a nearby water supply, visibility from the home, a site away from trees, shrubs and buildings and eight-plus hours of direct sunlight. People who don't have room for raised beds were asked to consider planting in containers.

Richmond resident d'Hemecourt also talked about successful home fruit production and what requirements need to be met to accomplish that

goal. "Begin with the end in mind!" she said. "Know before you grow."

Lawlor talked about soil, its physical characteristics, improving its structure, soil water, plant nutrients and soil pH, fertilizers and soil testing. Examining soil volume, he said half is pore space and half soil solids. Components are air, water, minerals and organic material. "Soil is alive," he said.

Attendees picked up soil sample forms and bags in which to send their soil samples to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension testing laboratory.

Grow Your Own is a seven-class series about creating a productive edible home garden and is offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Fort Bend County and Master Gardeners. Other classes in the program include Fruit Trees, Feb. 1; Setting Up a Raised Bed/Planter, March 1; Warm Season Vegetables & Herbs, April 5; Vegetable Disease & Pest Management, May 10; Composting, June 14; Cool Season Vegetables & Herbs, Aug. 9. Learn more at fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/

Landscape Success also is a seven-class series. Learn more at <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/>

For questions and information, contact: Brandy Rader at 281-342-3034 or brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu.

Katy Bengal Brigade and Cheerleader's Semi-Annual Heart of Katy Market

Over 100 vendors with clothing, food, treats, arts, and so much more! Have lunch from the concession stand to support KBBC!!

FREE ADMISSION

Location: Katy High School

February 1st 10:00 am - 5:00 pm

February 2nd 12:00 pm - 5:00 pm

FOR VENDOR INFORMATION EMAIL: HEARTOKATYCRAFTSHOW@GMAIL.COM



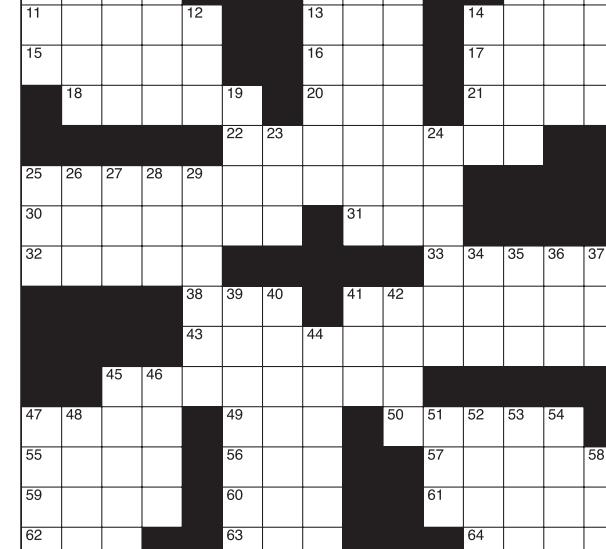
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

CLUES ACROSS

- Loud cheer
- Defensive nuclear weapon (abbr.)
- Type of cell
- Oblong pulpits
- Pitching statistic
- Uncommon
- Liabilities
- Thin, straight bar
- Oh goodness!
- Competitions
- Jima, WW II battlefield
- Professional assn. (abbr.)
- Italian mountain range
- Taking possession of
- Used in cooking and medicine
- Water (French)
- Parent a child
- Sun-dried brick
- One point south of due east
- Female fashion accessory
- A way of making a copy of
- A way to debilitate
- Wings
- Social insect
- Dull brown fabrics
- Indian musical pattern
- N. England university
- Portable stands for coffins
- Iranian district
- Envision

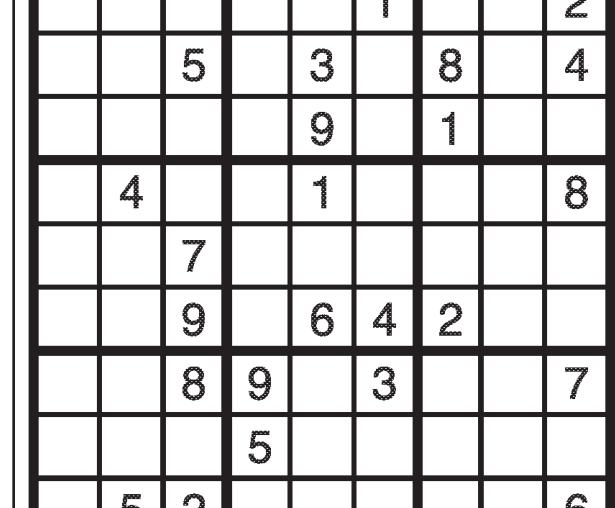
CLUES DOWN

- Cool!
- Passover offering
- Swedish rock group
- Collegiate military organization
- Large nests
- Beloved baked good
- 1980s pop legend
- Finger millet
- Hillside
- Surrender
- Midway between south and southeast
- Long, narrow strap
- Discount
- A type of cast
- Large, tropical lizard
- Half of "Milli Vanilli"
- Single
- Big truck
- Midway between east and southeast
- Et __: indicates further
- Insecticide
- Luke Skywalker's mentor __-Wan
- Cast out
- Passerine bird genus
- Container
- Falter
- Tunisian city
- Cool!
- Passover offering
- Swedish rock group
- Collegiate military organization
- Large nests
- Beloved baked good
- 1980s pop legend
- Finger millet
- Hillside
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- Midway between south and southeast
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- A type of cast
- Large, tropical lizard
- Half of "Milli Vanilli"
- Single
- Big truck
- Midway between east and southeast
- Et __: indicates further
- Insecticide
- Luke Skywalker's mentor __-Wan
- Cast out
- Member of a Semitic people
- Monetary unit of the Maldives
- Run batted in
- Makes publicly known
- Disagreement
- Soluble ribonucleic acid
- Single-reed instrument



Answers will be provided in next week's edition.

SUDOKU



Level: Intermediate

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test.

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

Answers will be provided in next week's edition.

HINES

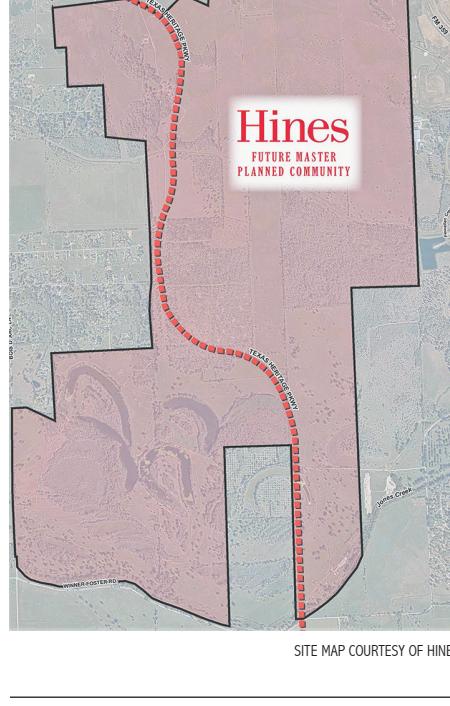
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numerous estate lots to accommodate diverse preferences. Hines has partnered with multiple best-in-market builders to acquire this land, including Toll Brothers, Perry Homes, Highland Homes, Village Builders/Lennar, Dreamfinder Homes/Coventry Homes, Westin Homes, Newmark Homes, and Beazer Homes. Construction is expected to begin in early 2025, with the first lots delivering in 2027 and homes from builders to follow thereafter.

"This submarket has been ranked the second-fastest growing city in the U.S. for the last two years, making it a prime market to deliver high-quality and unique housing options," said Rob Witte, Senior Managing Director, Head of Residential Land Development and Self-Storage, Americas, Hines. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime piece of land, and we worked tirelessly with our builder partners to ensure we had the opportunity to build what is one of the best sites in Texas."

Amenities in phase one are expected to feature a five-acre recreation center with a resort-style water feature, a large playground, clubhouse, and other top-tier amenities. Additionally, well-designed hiking and bike trails will be incorporated throughout the community alongside over 800 acres of natural oxbow lakes, greenspace, and mature trees. The development has immediate access to major thoroughfares and excellent schools and is a short commute to Houston's major employment hubs, including Sugar Land, the Energy Corridor, Texas Medical Center, and Downtown Houston. Hines will also be responsible for the completion of the Texas Heritage Parkway Parkway from its current terminus at Westpark Tollway to the Southern boundary at Winner-Foster Road.

Hines has over 65 years of development experience in Texas and nearly two decades of expertise in developing single-family communities. Since 2005, the firm has completed 26 communities across the southwest, with 13 currently under construction. Houston communities include Brookewater, Creekhaven, Raburn Reserve, Grayson Woods, Somerset Green, Laurel Glen, and Wildrye, which recently started construction.



SITE MAP COURTESY OF HINES

CITY

from page 1

tailor project design for a specific location, Lazo said.

Councilmember Corte said that, as far as BESS projects were concerned, she did not think the changes went far enough, calling them "a good stopgap." Councilmember Dan Smith agreed, asking if there were any additional steps that could be taken. Lazo said that the question would be hard to address in light of evolving technology. Smith said that it needed to be clearer what kinds of studies would be required. Councilmember Gina Hicks agreed, saying that she and Councilmember Rory Robertson

had sent an email to the mayor and city administrator requesting an advisory committee be formed, finding people who are experts in emerging technologies who can help determine what future city ordinances may be appropriate. Smith moved to direct city staff to come back to council with more information on BESS projects and possible next steps including the formation of an advisory committee. Corte asked that this be done within three months; the motion passed.

In other actions via consent agenda, council moved forward with marketing and tourism

initiatives:

- Approved additional official City of Katy events for December 2025, including the annual Christmas Tree lighting on December 4 and the Katy Christmas Nutcracker Exchange on December 6.
- Approved hotel occupancy tax grant applications for video production and drone photography to enhance Katy's historic town square, for \$107,500.00 for advertising expenses for the Rice Harvest Festival scheduled for October 11-12, and \$12,500.00 for a festival production agreement for the Rice Harvest Festival.

• Updated the job description of the marketing and tourism event coordinator by amending the employee classification and compensation plan.

The mayor and council members, during the "council member reports" portion of the meeting, thanked city staff - including Katy police, fire and public works departments as well as support staff - for their efforts during the winter storm which struck Katy in mid-January.

The next meeting of city council will be held on February 10 at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, 901 Avenue C in Katy.

TRIBUTE
WILLIAM 'BILL' ROBERT KYSER
1945-2025

William "Bill" Robert Kyser, 79, of Katy, passed away peacefully on January 21, 2025, after a long battle with Parkinson's Disease.

Bill was born on November 8, 1945, to Madelyne and John Kyser in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. He grew up with two brothers, John (Lockport, IL) and Michael (Tulsa, OK). After graduating from high school, he earned a degree in business from the University of Nebraska. Bill served in the United States Army and was stationed in Giessen, Germany where he met and fell in love with his beautiful wife, Mary. They returned to the States, married in 1971 and settled in Houston, Texas.

While serving in Germany, Bill developed a passion for transportation, which led him to pursue a master's degree from the University of Houston at Clear Lake. He spent the majority of his career in public service as the Assistant Director of Transportation for Houston ISD and the Director of Transportation for Katy ISD, jobs he found gratifying and fulfilling.

A loving and devoted husband, father and grandfather, Bill is survived by his daughter, Kristen Azari and her husband Scott (Palm Beach Gardens, FL) and his son, Kevin Kyser and his wife Carol (Richmond, TX). He is the proud grandfather of five grandchildren: Lillian, Emma, Maya, Kira, and Clark, all of whom cherish him deeply.

Bill had a zest for life and a wide range of passions. He loved travel and Rick Steves, creating stained glass, was an avid Francophile, and found joy in riding trains and building models of them. He was a passionate supporter of public broadcasting and our national parks. Bill was known for his love of cold beer and breweries, key lime pie and dark chocolate, war movies, Westerns and politics. He knew something about everything and always had a story to tell. Above all, he adored his family and always put them first.

Known for his gentle nature, Bill was described by all who knew him as one of the kindest,

most generous souls with not a mean bone in his body. His light shone brightly, and he will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date to honor Bill's memory. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research or the National Parks Foundation.

Bill leaves behind a legacy of love, kindness, equality and honesty. This world is a better place not only for those who love him, but for the community and country he served.



PHOTO BY SUSAN ROVENO

Katy ISD Superintendent Ken Gregorski (left), board secretary Mary Ellen Cuzela (center) and board member Lance Redmon (right) look on as members of the Taylor High School orchestra perform the national anthem at the January 27 meeting of the school board.

KISD

from page 1

12, 2026

- Last day of school for seniors - Friday, May 14, 2027
- Last day of school - Thursday, May 20, 2027

Earlier this school year, the district surveyed parents, students and staff seeking feedback on two calendar options. As a "District of Innovation," Katy ISD is able to incorporate flexible scheduling into its calendar, most notably starting the school year ahead of the traditional late-August start date, the district said in a subsequent press release. The approved calendar also reflects a balanced approach to instruction, including 83 instructional days in the fall semester and 89 instructional days in the spring semester, as well as district holidays for Independence Day, Labor Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Memorial Day. The district will continue providing a full week off for Thanksgiving, two weeks for winter holiday and New Year's, as well as a full week for spring break.

The board also approved an amendment to the instructional calendar for the 2025-2026 school year, incorporating new guidance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) regarding the use of flex days. The

approved change retains the flex day option for staff while allowing the district to count all applicable professional development waiver minutes toward the required instructional minutes.

The calendar may be viewed at katyisd.org/cms/lib/TX50010808/Centricity/domain/4/documents/Instructional_Calendar_2025-26.pdf.

There were eight speakers during the public comments portion of the meeting. One spoke on concerns about the upcoming school board elections in May, alleging that she had observed "violations" during the last election. A Katy ISD fourth grade teacher spoke about the lack of planning time for teachers, while another Katy ISD employee asked that compensation for all staff - not just teachers - be added to the district's list of legislative priorities. Five speakers spoke in support of the addition of an Advanced Placement Physics C course, which several said was necessary for entry into universities such as the University of Texas and Texas A&M.

February meetings for the board will be:

- Board work study meeting, February 17
- Regular board meeting, February 24

PROJECT

from page 1

41 miles in length and would serve Fort Bend and southern Waller counties. The new project would include:

- Two main lanes in each direction separated by a grassy median
- Two frontage road lanes in each direction
- Dedicated pedestrian and bicycle accommodations
- Drainage elements

Revisions are being made to the general scope of the 36A project, Theiss said, adding in a big enough footprint to allow for future frontage roads. This does not mean that there will be frontage roads in the whole corridor, but they will be built in certain areas, she said. Theiss said the project needs to allow for future requested additions such as drainage projects, noise barriers and sidewalks, among other items.

TxDOT is working on the "purpose and

needs" document which she said she hoped would be approved very quickly; it must be approved along with other documents prior to the "notice of intent (NOI)," which is the official start of the EIS. There must also be meetings with other agencies as well. Theiss said that they were hoping that the NOI would be approved by April. Then scoping meetings, in which the public may provide formal input in a public meeting setting, would probably follow in early summer, she added.

Theiss said that the next briefing on the 36A project that she was aware of would take place at the February 18 meeting of Waller County Commissioners Court.

Andy Meyers, Fort Bend County Precinct 3 Commissioner, gave a brief history of the 36A coalition.

For more information on the Highway 36A coalition, visit 36acoalition.org.

CITY

from page 1

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Katy Christian Chamber of Commerce begins fifth year

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO
PUBLISHER

A shared vision became a reality almost five years ago.

Friends Joe Menslage and Erica Scardino both dreamed of bringing Christian-owned businesses together – not only to help them practice their faiths in the workplace Monday through Friday – but also to defend religious freedom and constitutional rights. So, in February 2020, the Katy Christian Chamber of Commerce was born.

"The chamber formed out of a need to represent the voices of Christian-owned businesses and like-minded professionals to defend religious freedom in the workplace and town square per constitutional rights and freedoms," said Executive Director Erica Scardino in an interview with the Katy Times. Scardino and Menslage are each listed as "executive directors" on the organization's website.

Although the group includes "chamber of commerce" in its name, it is very different from other chambers.

"Traditional chambers of commerce exist to be a collective voice of local businesses to the government," Scardino said. "Most focus efforts and resources upward to reach and influence elections, rub elbows with elected officials, and lobby for or against what serves their interests as local business owners collectively. We have flipped the traditional chamber model on its head -- focusing first on the individual members, and their need to connect with growth opportunities that make sense for their services and products within a like-minded community."

"We are changing the culture of commerce from a 'what's in it for me?' to a 'how can I help you grow?' approach," Scardino continued. "As a member of the Katy Christian Chamber of Commerce you will understand your religious freedoms under the law



PHOTO BY SUSAN ROVEGNO

Joe Menslage (left) and Erica Scardino (center), executive directors of the Katy Christian Chamber of Commerce, listen as member Karen Kurt addresses attendees at the August 16, 2024, meeting of the organization at the Church on the Rock, 433 Barker Cypress Road in Houston. The chamber celebrates its fifth birthday in February.

and how to exercise your faith at work, know what God says about work and how it applies to your specific calling, apply professional development tools designed to grow your faith and business, and connect with like-minded leaders, businesses, professionals to grow your network."

The chamber – colloquially known as "KC3" -- now has 220 members and 337 individuals currently active. Prominent members include Gallery Furniture (Mattress Mack), Katy Area Economic Development Council, GOYA Foods, Shottenkirk Nissan of Katy, YMCA, Katy Christian Ministries, Sid Miller (TX Agriculture Commissioner), Memorial Hermann, Johnson Development Group, Hope Media (KSBJ Radio), and more. The membership consists of a wide variety of businesses across many industries, all serving the greater Katy area.

As it begins its fifth year, the group has not wavered from

its original mission to provide Christian professionals and organizations a platform to network, connect and grow, personally and professionally, to serve their communities and fulfill their calling. But it has evolved to meet the needs of its membership.

"Though our mission and focus remain the same, we have grown in our approach to providing a platform that serves a broader member base," said Scardino. "When we first started meeting as an organization, we hosted one networking event per month. Now we have grown into three well-attended events monthly: a networking breakfast, a luncheon and an after-hours mixer. As we have grown, we have listened to learn more about what local business owners actually need, how they connect best, and how to pivot our approach accordingly. Each chamber connection event is unique in its approach, how it is structured to meet the needs of that particular

demographic. Our breakfasts are speaker-focused, our luncheons are member-focused, and our mixers are fellowship-focused. Each offers networking and new connection opportunities for both members and non-members."

The monthly breakfast meetings have featured national speakers like boxing champion Terelite Watkins and U.S. Congressman Troy Nehls and local speakers like Mattress Mack of Gallery Furniture, Wayne Dolcefino of ABC News), State Representative Mike Schofield, former Harris County Precinct 4 Commissioner Jack Cagle, and Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, among others.

But there have been challenges along the way. Following the chamber's very first meeting with over 110 businesses in attendance – COVID struck, forcing the organization to suspend all meetings until it was safe to again gather in person. "We resumed operations in October of 2020, eight full months after our launch, with a networking breakfast," Scardino said. "Only 20 people attended that morning, but it felt amazing to see people in person once more. We slowly grew into the member base we support now."

In its short history, the chamber has accomplished a lot, Scardino said, listed the top three achievements as:

- Bringing together chamber members, Bob Unanue (CEO of Goya) together with Steve Ives (CEO of Greater Houston YMCA) to connect Goya Cares anti-trafficking programs with Greater Houston YMCA resulting in mass distribution in training and support for kids, parents and employees all over Houston.

- Being asked to facilitate a gift for a lucky local high school football team to receive new brand-name sports clothing and gear through a generous donation by Houston Texans and DICKS House

of Sport. "Watching Will Anderson give his time and attention to the Royal High School football team of Brookshire was an amazing experience," she said.

• The annual Katy Community Expo hosted each August at the KISD Merrell Center has seen over 12,000 residents each year connect with donation and volunteer opportunities, and local business owners that can serve their needs. The Expo gives over 35 local nonprofits a free platform to be seen and to connect their message to thousands of local residents looking to donate or volunteer.

The chamber also encourages collaboration between its business and nonprofit members, such as hosting a year-long canned food drive where members brought food items to support Katy Christian Ministries' food pantry and received \$5 off their event admission.

What does the next five years look like for the chamber?

"We have plans for tremendous growth in years to come," said Scardino. "We have established the United Christian Chamber of Commerce (United C3) – our 501c6 organization -- to house future chapters of the chamber such as the Houston Christian Chamber of Commerce (HC3) launching in 2025-2026 fiscal year. We are currently creating programs that will benefit members by supporting youth scholarships and creating senior internships and mentoring opportunities in our communities. We are creating incentive programs with marketing rewards like eblasts up to free membership for members who donate their services and products at no cost to a member in need. We are collaborating in building a complete resource directory to assist residents connect with help in real time in their local area."

"We aim to do the 'town' better and put the 'unity' in 'community,'" she concluded.

Piada grand opening to benefit Katy HS

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Piada Italian Street Food, located in the Grand Morton development at 2710 W Grand Pkwy N #150, will hold its grand opening on February 11, according to a Facebook post from Katy High School in mid-January. The restaurant will donate 50 percent of their opening proceeds back to Katy High School, the post said.

Piada Italian Street Food is a fast casual Italian cuisine restaurant chain with 57 locations in 7 states (Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas), according to Wikipedia.

The restaurant features custom-rolled wraps (piadas) in a stone-grilled, thin-crusted dough made from organic flour and extra virgin olive oil, as well as chopped salads and pasta bowls.

Image360 Katy marks one year under new ownership

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Image360 Katy, the local visual communications leader, is celebrating its first year under the ownership of Jennifer LaFleur.

Originally established in 2007, Image360 Katy has built a reputation for delivering tailored signage and graphics solutions. Since taking over in 2023, Jennifer, a Katy native, has focused on giving back, forming meaningful connections and fostering a vibrant team. Her efforts have revitalized the Center's mission to support the greater Katy area and its surrounding neighborhoods.

"Reflecting on this past year, the most rewarding part has been building relationships with our clients and giving back to the community that means so much to us," said LaFleur. "From helping new connections made through networking events to donating auction paddles for local charities and banners for new business openings, it's been incredible to see the positive impact we can have."

Over the past year, Image360 Katy has made strides in building strong relationships with local schools, exploring ways to better align with their needs. Involvement in the Katy Chamber of Commerce and the Fulshear



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMAGE360

Jennifer LaFleur and her team at Image360 are celebrating their first anniversary since LaFleur took ownership. The graphics company is located at 21733 Provincial Suite 120 in Katy.

Chamber for Commerce has further established the Center as a valued resource.

• Image360 Katy composed and donated approximately 62 banners to support the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce's ribbon cuttings throughout 2024.

• The firm has also partnered with Seven Lakes High School and Tompkins High School on menu projects and announcement signs, enhancing their communications.

Additionally, Image360 has supported Katy ISD's graduate programs and student recognition initiatives by providing approximately

1,105 Senior Graduation and Student of the Month signs to schools across the district in 2024.

• The company also created sturdy and attractive "auction paddles" which were used at the first annual gala for the nonprofit group HerWell in Brook-



Image360's innovative graphics solutions include these durable, easy-to-read auction paddles, which the company provided for the HerWell gala in Brookshire in October 2024.

shire in October 2024.

Looking ahead, LaFleur aims to expand the Center's reach by enhancing collaborations with existing partners, including the Katy Independent School District, while pursuing larger-scale initiatives.

"Our team has been instrumental in our success," said LaFleur. "Their dedication and expertise have been key to delivering outstanding results."

We're energized and ready for 2025 as we continue to grow and support even more endeavors."

Image360 Katy provides custom graphic solutions to businesses, organizations and institutions in the area. From the simplest signage projects to the most complex, trained graphics specialists work closely with clients to maximize the creativity and visual impact of environmental graphics, mobile graphics, wayfinding solutions, ADA signage and promotional displays.

Located at 21733 Provincial Blvd Suite 120, Image360 Katy is independently owned and operated and a member of the Alliance Franchise Brands network, a world leader in marketing, graphics and visual communications, linking more than 550 locations in North America.

For more information, contact Image360 Katy at (281) 829-1400 or visit the company's website at image360.com/katy-tx.

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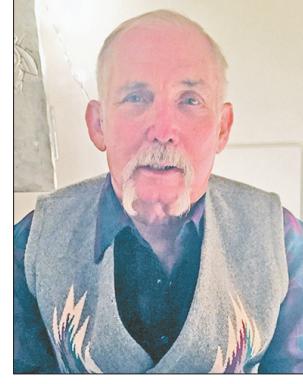
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TRIBUTE

James Arthur Williams, known to those who loved him as "Yogi" or "JA," was born on July 26, 1952, in Richmond, Texas, to Frank E. and Annie L. Williams. A proud graduate of Katy High School, Class of 1970, James' journey through life was one of curiosity, dedication, and boundless adventure.

He began his career with Fort Bend Telephone Company, where he worked for 23 years and honed his expertise in telecommunications. This foundation of technical skill and passion for the field led him to travel the world, working in Saudi Arabia, Italy, Tanzania, and Zambia. He retired as a Senior Technical Project Manager, leaving behind a legacy of hard work, commitment, and a deep respect for the power of communication.

Beyond his professional achievements, Yogi had a rich and fulfilling personal life. He was an active volunteer with the FFA and 4-H programs and was proud to serve as a Texas Hunter Education Instructor, sharing his knowledge with future generations. His love for animals was matched only by his adventurous spirit. Yogi's travels were not just about work—they were a reflection of his love for immersing himself in



JAMES ARTHUR 'YOGI'
WILLIAMS
1952-2025

new cultures, experiences, and the natural world. He managed to spend R & R time in Paris, London, Honduras, the Highlands of Scotland, Spain, and Turkey.

A man of many passions, James was fortunate enough to receive the Johnnie Walker Golf International Hole-In-One Award at the Green Meadows Golf Links in Scotland, a moment he cherished dearly. He also found peace and joy underwater, especially while scuba diving in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, where he spent countless hours exploring the mysteries of the ocean's depths.

From the mid 1990's through 2017, he shared a succession of small ranches and organic farms with his wife in Central Texas where he loved to share his love of animals and farming with his grandchildren. When retirement called, he retired to the mountains of Northern New Mexico to relax and fulfill his dream to fly-fish and walk the beautiful mesa with his loyal companion, Nesim.

James is survived by his devoted wife, Janice Williams; his daughter, Leslie Kaye Williams Taylor, and son-in-law, Daniel L. Taylor; and his cherished grandchildren, Emma L. Taylor and Jackson T. Taylor. He is also survived by his brothers, Robert, Frank, and Van Williams, as well as his nephew, Robbie Williams.

A man of warmth, humor, and generosity, Yogi never met a stranger. His infectious laugh and kind heart left a lasting impression on all who knew him. His family, friends, and colleagues will remember him not only for his many accomplishments but for the joy and light he brought into every room he entered.

James will be deeply missed, but his spirit will live on through the memories and stories shared by those who were fortunate enough to know him.

Construction begins on Park Row Katy Living

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Palladium USA announced January 23 the construction start of Palladium Park Row Katy Living—a new \$33 Million multi-family community in Houston near Katy. This is the second multi-family development for Palladium in the area. The three-story development has amenity-rich residences featuring 93 units of one, two, and threebedroom floor plans with upgraded finishes including granite countertops, nine-foot ceilings, hard floor services, dual sinks in primary bath, and a balcony/terrace. Upscale community amenities will include a resort swimming pool, state of the art fitness center, conference center, dog park, business center, children's playroom, and clubroom containing a mini kitchen with upgraded appliances and quartz countertops.

"Construction has started, and we will be delivering the clubhouse and first units in December of 2025," said Tom Huth, President and CEO of Palladium USA in a press release from the company. Palladium Park Row Katy Living is a public-private partnership with the Harris County Housing Finance

Corporation (HCHFC) and was designed by HEDK Architects. Brownstone Group is the general contractor who is teaming up with the HCHFC on construction. Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) provided \$15 Million of 9% Housing Tax Credits, PNC Bank provided \$13.3 Million of equity and over \$12 Million of long-term debt, and Harris County provided \$5 Million of ARPA funding for this placement.

The Katy Park Row Living Project will create 93 multi-family housing units and 58 of these units will be rated "affordable." The unit mix will consist of six units for those making 30% or less of area median income, 24 units for those making between 31%-50% of area median income, and 28 units for those making between 51%-60% area median income, and 35 market rate units.

"This project represents our continued commitment to bringing high quality homes to Harris County which will provide affordability and an increased number of accessible apartment homes in this sector of the city," said Rene Martinez executive director, Harris County Housing Finance Corporation.

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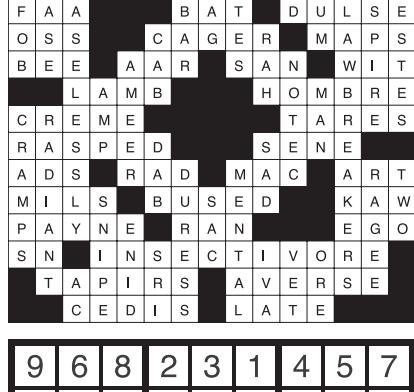
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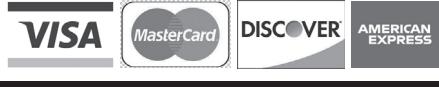
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Local students drive change for girls' education in developing countries

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Rohan and Rishabh Jha, students at Katy ISD's Cinco Ranch High School and Beck Junior High, have become dynamic advocates for girls' education in developing regions. Their research, recently published in the prestigious Oxford Open Economics journal (Oxford Open Economics, Volume 4, 2025), highlights critical barriers that hinder girls' education in rural areas. It provides actionable, data-driven solutions addressing key challenges such as the need for improved social awareness, infrastructure, qualified teachers, and an inclusive curriculum. The article may be viewed at academic.oup.com/oec/article/doi/10.1093/oec/oda041/7925799. The journal is a platform where the 2014 and 2015 Nobel laureates in Economics also shared their research in 2024.

Motivated to turn their research

into action, the brothers took their findings beyond academia. During a recent visit to their ancestral village in Bihar, India, they collaborated with local government officials and community leaders to implement several of their recommendations. Recognizing the lack of infrastructure as a major barrier, they successfully advocated for the construction of a new school building, which is set to be completed by the end of the year. Additionally, they facilitated the recruitment of two new teachers to support the growing number of students.

Understanding the importance of access to learning resources, Rohan and Rishabh established libraries in two schools, funded through crowdfunding efforts. These libraries have provided students with books and study materials previously unavailable to them. To complement these

efforts, the brothers launched a social awareness campaign, engaging families and local leaders to challenge cultural norms and encourage the education of girls. Their initiatives have led to increased enrollment and a noticeable shift in community attitudes toward girls' education.

The impact of their work has been transformative. Girls in these rural communities now have access to better facilities, dedicated educators, and an environment that supports their learning and aspirations. Families have expressed heartfelt gratitude, acknowledging the opportunities and hope these initiatives have brought to their daughters.

Rohan and Rishabh's journey showcases the extraordinary potential of young individuals to combine world-class research with practical action. Their story has been celebrated in local Indian



PHOTO COURTESY OF BALRAM SUMAN

Rohan Jha (left) and Rishabh Jha (center) of Katy join, and Anil Kumar (right), administrative head (district magistrate) of the Araria district in India at Kumar's office. Rohan Jha, who goes to Cinco Ranch High School in Katy and his brother Rishabh Jha, who goes to Beck Junior High, recently published research in the Oxford Open Economics Journal on critical barriers to girls' education in rural areas.

media, highlighting their ability to tackle global challenges with innovative, hands-on solutions.

"As these young changemakers continue their advocacy, their efforts stand as a powerful example of how education is not just a fundamental right but a transfor-

mative tool that uplifts entire communities," said Balram Suman in an email to the Katy Times. "Rohan and Rishabh's dedication inspires others to think globally and act locally, demonstrating that meaningful change is achievable when driven by passion and purpose."

KERSHNER RECEIVES 'TRAILBLAZER' AWARD



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHERREL ROGERS

Rick Kershner, Royal ISD superintendent of schools, (left) received the Trailblazer Award presented by Keith Woods, hosted at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 803 FM 1489 in Brookshire on January 16. The awards honor remarkable individuals who have made a lasting impact in the Brookshire community, according to the Trailblazer Facebook page. "These Trailblazers embody the values of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. through their leadership, service, and dedication to progress," said a statement on the Facebook page.

Mayde Creek High School named state champion in spirit competition

Katy ISD schools take top three spots

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

In a first for the district, Katy ISD earned the top three spots in the UIL 6A Division I Spirit State Championship, held this month in Fort Worth, with Mayde Creek High School earning first place, the district announced in a January 23 press release. Seven Lakes High School earned second place and Jordan High School earned third at the highly competitive event. In fierce competition, less than one point separated the three schools' cumulative scores.

Rounding out the results for the finalists, Taylor High School earned seventh place, and Cinco Ranch High School earned 10th.

"Congratulations to Mayde Creek



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATY ISD

Katy ISD claimed the top three spots at this year's UIL 6A Division I Spirit State Championship, and five teams among the top 10 finishers in the state.

for a phenomenal display of spirit and to all our district winners for their achievement," said LaKeisha McGowen, assistant director of fine arts over cheerleading in Katy ISD. "Cheerleading in Texas is very competitive, and it is quite impressive that we have the top three winners in this year's competition."

Seventy-five schools competed in the 6A Division I qualifying

round, and only the top 20 schools advanced to the final round.

The teams compete again this weekend in national competitions in Fort Worth and Orlando, FL.

UIL Spirit recognizes the vital role cheerleaders play in their school's culture. At the state meet, schools compete in three categories: crowd leading, fight song and band chant. Visit www.uiltexas.org/spirit to learn more.

Royal ISD welcomes Doreen Martinez as principal of Royal Prairie Elementary



DOREEN MARTINEZ

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Royal ISD announced January 23 that Doreen Martinez will serve as the principal of Royal Prairie Elementary School, opening in fall 2025. With previous experience in the district from June 1999 to January 2001, Martinez is thrilled to return and lead the school's opening, said the press release.

Her "why" is to inspire, empower, and positively impact the lives of the

children, staff, and community she serves, the release said, and Martinez firmly believes that all children can learn and grow, no matter the circumstances. "I believe in the importance of goal-setting and helping children celebrate their success along the way," she said. Martinez is committed to helping children achieve their dreams through effort, grit, and a growth mindset.

Her approach to the district's mission of "Investing in Our Tomorrow" is

centered around creating a nurturing and empowering environment for students, where each child is encouraged to excel. "I want to align all we do with RISD District goals and learn the Royal Way," Martinez said.

"Doreen is a perfect fit for Royal ISD, and her leadership will truly help us invest in our tomorrow," said Superintendent Rick Kershner. "We are thrilled to welcome Doreen back to Royal ISD and look forward to her

leadership as she prepares to open Royal Prairie Elementary School."

In her personal life, Martinez enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, arts and crafts, reading, and learning new skills, particularly in technology and leadership. She has three grown children and six grandchildren, with her youngest daughter living in Japan, her son working out of state, and her oldest daughter in Austin.

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TGCA releases latest girls basketball poll

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The Texas Girls Coaches Association released its latest poll for girls basketball on January 27. There were no Katy ISD teams chosen.

Class 6A

1. Converse Judson 30-1
2. Cypress Springs 24-3
3. Fort Worth Boswell 31-2
4. Grand Oaks 27-3
5. Denton Guyer 27-3
6. Pearland Dawson 28-4
7. Duncanville 22-5
8. Little Elm Braswell 29-2
9. Tyler Legacy 27-4
10. Austin Westlake 23-7
11. Garland Sachse 27-5
12. Cedar Park Vista Ridge 25-6
13. Cypress Falls 24-4
14. Clear Brook 28-3
15. Fort Bend Hightower 26-5
16. San Marcos 22-6
17. Pearland 25-7
18. San Antonio Churchill 25-5
19. Flower Mound 27-3
20. Byron Nelson 22-8
21. Pebble Hills 20-6
22. Alief Taylor 24-5
23. Austin Vandegrift 23-8
24. Frenship 25-6
25. South Grand Prairie 24-6

Tompkins, Taylor girls soccer teams rank in top 25 in new TGCA poll

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Katy ISD's Tompkins High was ranked sixth while Taylor High ranked 23rd in the latest 6A soccer poll released by the Texas Girls Coaches Association on January 27.

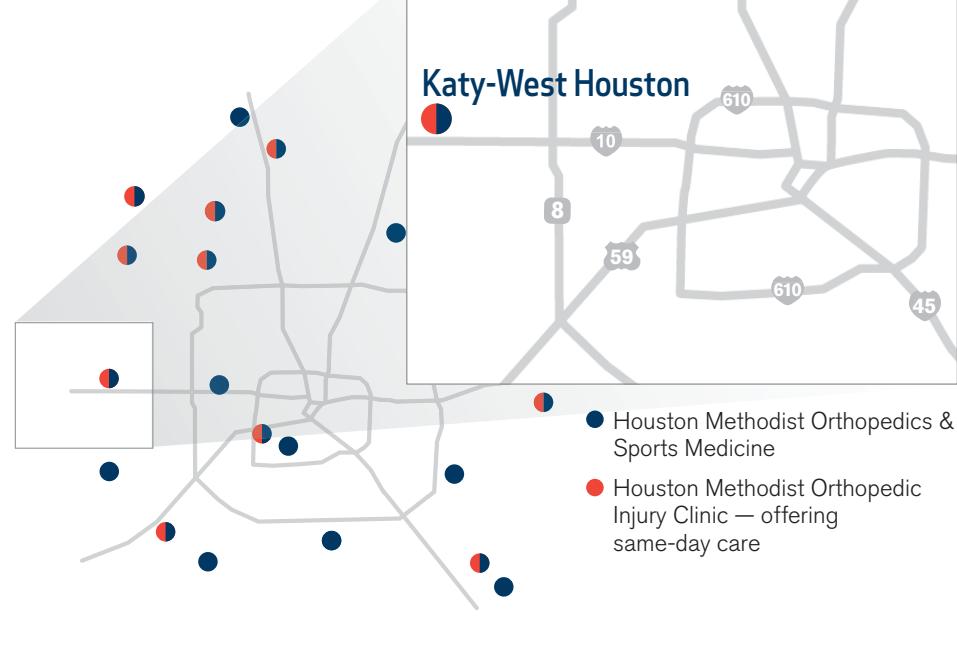
Class 6A

1. Weatherford 8-0-0
2. The Woodlands 5-1-1
3. Round Rock 8-1-1
4. El Paso Eastwood 6-0-0
5. Lewisville Hebron 4-0-0
6. Katy Tompkins 8-0-1
7. L'ville Flower Mound 3-0-0
8. Kingwood 10-0-1
9. Houston Lamar 9-0-1
10. Wylie 10-0-1
11. Round Rock Westwood 8-1-1
12. San Antonio Warren 6-0-1
13. Austin Lake Travis 8-1-0
14. Coppell 8-0-1
15. Keller 5-1-1
16. Southlake Carroll 7-1-1
17. Austin Westlake 3-0-1
18. Keller Central 6-0-1
19. Allen 6-0-1
20. San Antonio Brennan 5-0-1
21. Tomball 6-0-1
22. Pebble Hills 5-1-0
23. Katy Taylor 9-1-1
24. San Antonio Reagan 8-1-1
25. Forney 8-1-0

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