

The Senior CHIT★CHAT

Winter 2008



A Publication for Precinct2gether from Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia

Precinct2gether Expands Social Services Program

Harris County Precinct Two and Precinct2gether provides numerous opportunities for seniors to not only socialize, participate in classes and go on trips but also helps seniors in need through programs such as Transportation Vouchers, Congregate Meals and Veterans Services.

“Within Precinct2gether, we are continually looking at the programs and services we offer and determining how we can better meet the needs of our seniors,” explained Chara Bowie, LPC-S, superintendent of senior programs for Harris County Precinct Two. “In speaking with our center directors and staff who work daily with our seniors, we realized there is a need for more social services within our department. This past spring, we created the position of program social worker to provide critical information and resources to our seniors.”

Sharon Carter, LMSW, joined Precinct2gether this past summer as program social worker. With the help of two interns, Monica Webb who is working on her master’s degree in social work and Lisa Hernandez who is studying for her bachelor’s degree in social work, Carter is developing the social services area in order to benefit all seniors in Precinct Two.

“I am lucky to work with some of the greatest people I have ever known,” said Carter. “Even though my position is new, we have been providing social services and resources to seniors for many, many years. Through my position, we’re not only consolidating information to make it more readily available to our seniors in need but we’re aiming to broaden our services. For example, a senior may have been a part of our homebound meals program for

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years but it’s during a visit to bring the meal where we may find out that there is another problem that we can help with.”

Almost every day, Carter receives numerous phone calls on an amazing array of topics. The variety of calls increased with the

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Texas Silver-Haired Legislature: A Voice for Senior Texans



Members of the Texas-Silver Haired Legislature are dedicated advocates for senior Texans.

Texas seniors looking out for and advocating for the needs of their fellow seniors is the focus of the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature (TSHL). This hard-working group of 116 seniors became a reality when the 69th Texas Legislature adopted the legislation that authorized the TSHL with the group having its first legislative session in September 1986.

A non-profit organization, the TSHL provides seniors an opportunity to become directly involved with the state’s legislative process. The TSHL’s vision is “that the applied wisdom, energy, and experience of aging will improve the lives of Texans through education, knowledge, and involvement in legislation and governmental affairs.” Members of this group are not lobbyists, pay all their own expenses and work extremely hard for those they represent.

The 12th TSHL legislative session was held this past September giving representatives the time needed to prepare for the 81st Texas Legislature that convenes on Jan. 13, 2009.

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▶ Mark Your Calendar

The following are some major events for seniors taking place at Harris County Precinct Two community centers during December 2008 and January and February 2009. The name of the community/activity center that is hosting the event follows the name of each activity:

December

- Dec. 1** South Channel End-of-Year Senior Group Leader Meeting, Bay Area
- Dec. 2** Holiday Decorating Party, North East
- Dec. 4** Gospel Night, Flukinger
- Dec. 5** Dinner Dance, North East
- Dec. 9** Dinner and a Movie, EHCAC
- Dec. 9** Winter Party/Senior Birthdays, San Jacinto
- Dec. 10** Prescription Drug Plan Meeting, Baldree Building
- Dec. 12** Precinct2gether Holiday Celebration, Bay Area
- Dec. 17** December Celebration/Senior Birthdays, Walker
- Dec. 19** Hometown Opry Christmas Show, EHCAC

January

- Jan. 5** South Channel Council Meetings, Bay Area and EHCAC
- Jan. 9** Lunch and a Movie, Bay Area, EHCAC
- Jan. 12** Healthy Living Nutrition Class, North East

- Jan. 13** Gospel Night, San Jacinto
- Jan. 14** Forum with Texas Silver-Haired Legislature representatives, Baldree Building
- Jan. 15** Inner City Network Meeting, Martinez Annex
- Jan. 15** Senior Tea, San Jacinto
- Jan. 20** Gospel Night, Grayson
- Jan. 22** Precinct-wide Domino/"42" Tournament, Baldree Building
- Jan. 23-24** Annual Fund Raiser and Garage Sale, North East
- Jan. 30** Hometown Opry, EHCAC

February

- Feb. 1** Super Bowl Party, EHCAC
- Feb. 2** Black History Program, Walker
- Feb. 2** South Channel Council Meetings, Bay Area and EHCAC
- Feb. 3** Inner City's Valentine Party, EHCAC

- Feb. 4** Black History Month Speaker, North East
- Feb. 4** North Channel Network Meeting, Flukinger
- Feb. 5** Gospel Night, Flukinger
- Feb. 6** Lunch and a Movie—"Be My Valentine," Bay Area
- Feb. 9** Healthy Living—Heart Healthy Class, North East
- Feb. 10** Gospel Night, San Jacinto
- Feb. 10** Senior Day in Austin, State Capitol
- Feb. 10** Lunch and a Movie, EHCAC
- Feb. 11** Sweetheart Banquet, Flukinger
- Feb. 11** Valentine Party, North East
- Feb. 12** Valentine Parties, Grayson, San Jacinto
- Feb. 13** Nursing Home Olympics, EHCAC
- Feb. 13** Valentine Party, Barrett
- Feb. 17** Ballroom Valentine Dance, Bay Area
- Feb. 17** Gospel Night, Grayson
- Feb. 18** Mardi Gras Party, North East
- Feb. 19** Inner City Network Meeting, Martinez Annex

- Feb. 19** Black History Program, Barrett
- Feb. 23** Swing Thing Golf Tournament, Timber Creek Golf Club
- Feb. 27** Hometown Opry, EHCAC
- Feb. 28** Rodeo Parade, Downtown Houston

Monthly Birthday Celebrations

Second Tuesday:

San Jacinto

Third Wednesday:

Walker

Third Thursday:

Barrett

Last Wednesday:

Flukinger, Grayson, North East



Chit-Chat info:

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Community Center Dances:

Proceeds benefit Precinct2gether:

Second Thursday:

Grayson

Third Tuesday:

Bay Area (ballroom dancing)

Third Thursday:

East Harris County (EHCAC) (country-and-western dancing)

Fourth Friday:

San Jacinto - no charge to attend (Pick 'N Grin Band)

A Message from Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner

Sylvia R. Garcia



With all due respect to Dwight D. Eisenhower, since the week-end of Sept. 13 "Ike" has entered our vocabulary of unforgettable names in a different way.

One thing I will never forget is the way our community came together. And we didn't have to wait for the storm to pass to witness the strength of our

community. We saw neighbors helping neighbors when it came to evacuating prior to the arrival of the hurricane. How many of us saw neighbors working with other neighbors to board windows and put away loose objects before the winds came?

Documented more thoroughly through pictures and words are the events following Ike. All these weeks later, we continue to deal with Ike's effects. There still are homes and businesses to be rebuilt and repaired. Yet, each of these structures represents something more important.

They represent the people in them and the communities we have refused to give up on.

"Our" generation has many watershed moments we have lived through. From world wars to economic crises and a storm named Carla. Now, a new generation has what is perhaps their first moment to remember and tell their grandchildren about. While the destruction that nature brought is a part of that story so is our survival and our resolve.

Every time that you participate in one of our Precinct2gether programs, you are continuing to build the foundation for what our children and grandchildren will remember and tell future generations.

As we go through this holiday season, I continue to be grateful for your wisdom, leadership and "can do" spirit. Those of us who have been through an "Ike" or two know that it is by relying on each other that we can enjoy these holidays and look forward to what will come in 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia R. Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Precinct2gether Expands Social Services Program

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destruction caused by Hurricane Ike. "As soon as we were back after Hurricane Ike, it seemed like every phone call we had was different," explained Carter. "Some seniors were in dire need of assistance while others simply needed reassurance that they were not going through such a hard time alone."

An important project being tackled by the department's interns is creating several databases of local social service agencies that can be easily accessed by Precinct2gether. "There are an enormous amount of organizations that can provide assistance in addition to what we have here in Precinct Two so my team is working to develop specific, up-to-date databases that will make it much more efficient for us when we meet with seniors and are looking for the best way to help them," said Carter.

Many seniors have become aware of Carter's services simply by calling their local center. Carter also is working to spread the word of her activities by attending group discussions at the various Precinct Two centers. "I emphasize how we can help them and let them know we are available," said Carter. "I also strongly

encourage them to keep their eyes on their senior neighbors who don't come to our centers. Some seniors do become isolated over time and aren't aware of how Precinct2gether can help, so a more active senior is probably the best way to get our message out."

Carter is working with other local organizations, such as the Area Agency on Aging and the Elderly Service Provider Network, to ensure Precinct2gether stays abreast of what's going on in the community and what services other groups are offering. "By working together and sharing information, we're able to direct seniors to the right organizations," said Carter.

"Getting our seniors the help or resources that will make their lives better always has been at the heart of Precinct2gether," Carter added. "Through our social services work, we're doing what we can to make access to these resources just a little easier."

If you have any questions for Carter, please call her at 713-455-4869.

Things to Know

Congratulations to Ms. Golden Years

Precinct2gether hosted its 15th annual Ms. Golden Years pageant for nursing home residents in Precinct Two. This year, nine lovely seniors were contestants in the pageant held Oct. 10 at The Pointe Rehabilitation & Healthcare Center in Webster. The 130 attendees of this event watched as Fay Killough was crowned the 2008 Ms. Golden Years.

"I really enjoy hosting Ms. Golden Years because it makes each contestant feel special," said Freda Morris, director of the Nursing Home Program. "I truly love seeing each contestant as she gets a small tiara and roses. They all are winners to us."



Event focuses on answering prescription drug plan questions

On Wednesday, Dec. 10, from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. benefit counselors from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will be at the Grayson Center's Baldree Building to meet one-on-one with seniors in regards to their current prescription drug plan and possibly finding a new plan for 2009. CMS is a federal government agency that administers Medicare and works with state governments to administer Medicaid.

Seniors may be accompanied by family members for this event. Representatives from the Social Security Administration, Better Business Bureau, Texas Legal Services Center and the Harris County Area Agency on Aging also will be on hand.

Remember: the open enrollment period for Medicare prescription drug plans currently is open and closes on Dec. 31. This is the time when you can make changes to your existing plan or choose a different plan.



Celebrate the Holidays with Precinct2gether

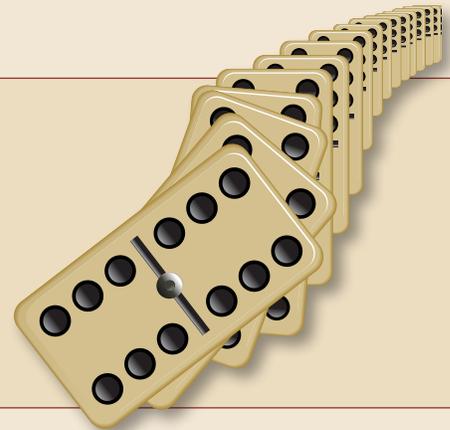
Join your Precinct2gether friends for the annual precinct-wide holiday party on Friday, Dec. 12, at the Bay Area Community Center, 5002 E. NASA Parkway in Seabrook. Two identical parties will be held this day with the first at 10 a.m. and the second at 2 p.m. The celebrations will feature music, dancing and refreshments.

Bus service will be offered from several Precinct Two community centers. Reservations are required for the holiday party and can be made by contacting your local community center or area coordinator.

Annual Domino/"42" Tournament Set for Jan. 22

It's a day of fun competition at the annual Precinct2gether Domino/"42" tournament which will take place on Thursday, Jan. 22, 2009, beginning at 9 a.m. at the Grayson Center, 13828 Corpus Christi.

Registration for the tournament closes on Jan. 16. For more information, call the North Channel coordinator at 281-452-7598, South Channel coordinator at 281-479-4232 or the Inner City coordinator at 713-514-0185.



Are You Ready for the Digital TV Conversion?

On Feb. 17, 2009, all U.S. full-power broadcast television stations will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin broadcasting only in digital. This means that if you are watching over-the-air programs on an analog TV, you will need to get a digital-to-analog set-top converter in order for the television to still work after Feb. 17.

Converter boxes will be available from both local and national retailers. These boxes cost between \$40 to \$70 per unit. From now until March 31, 2009, all U.S. households are eligible to request two coupons (valued at \$40 apiece) that can be used to purchase up to two digital-to-analog converter boxes.

To receive a converter coupon, call 888-388-2009 or go online to www.DTV2009.gov. Keep in mind that coupons expire 90 days after they are issued.

Many Precinct2gether seniors enjoy the monthly arts and crafts classes that are offered at the Precinct Two community centers. Classes may meet on a regularly scheduled basis giving seniors the chance to develop their skills in a specific hobby or specialty classes will be offered for the chance to create a one-of-a-kind project.

This fall, holiday art has been the theme of several one-day programs. At the Bay Area Center, October brings the annual Halloween/fall art craft. "This year, our assistant director, Toni Varnell, offered a one-day scarecrow-in-a-clay-pot class," explained Elizabeth Williams, director of the Bay Area Community Center. "The ladies who took this class had such a fun time. There was a lot of laughter as they created their 'scarecrow babies' and each finished project was both original and beautiful complete with birth certificates."

At the Flukinger/Ramsey Community Centers, yard art is a favorite holiday project. Over a period of several weeks, seniors gather together at the center to create these eye-catching projects. "Last year, we created beautiful 4-foot tall angel yard art," said Toni Drews, Center director. "This holiday class is always much fun because everyone is in the holiday spirit, sharing stories and past experiences. Toward the end of the class, our crafters become more excited as they see their piece evolve."

Wreaths are a popular holiday project at the Barrett Community Center. "We recently had a Christmas wreath craft class and our seniors really enjoyed making their own wreaths for their homes," explained Bobbi Yarbrough, community center aide. "We've offered a lot of specialty wreath classes for different holidays and our members always are so proud of the finished pieces."



Craft Classes Focus on Holidays

Just For the FUN of It!

The "Golden Girls" Bring Joy with Their Costumes



"No one would believe me now but when I first started coming to the Grayson Center, I was really shy," said Nita Collins, founder and member of the "Golden Girls," three friends who take great pleasure in putting a smile on everyone's face. Their love of laughter and the pure joy they take in dressing up in costumes for almost any occasion is the spirit behind the Golden Girls.

It's been more than 10 years since the Golden Girls, which today consists of Collins, Jewel McAfee and Joyce Latour, decided that costumes would make senior events even more fun. From that first Easter bunny costume at the Grayson Center all those years ago, the Golden Girls have amassed a collection of costumes ranging from Thanksgiving turkeys to leprechauns to Raggedy Ann.

"I just love going to the dances and parties," said Collins. "Sometimes we'll go to as many as four dances in a week and Jewel and I really enjoyed the murder mystery lunches. We've been to activities at all the centers and when there is a theme, we pull out the costume that would work."

Collins encourages other seniors to really embrace life and find an activity they enjoy. "Every day truly is a blessing and if I can find a way to make someone else laugh, I will!" exclaimed Collins.

Texas Silver-Haired Legislature: A Voice for Senior Texans

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"One hundred sixty-one resolutions were submitted by members of the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature and we passed 74 of them," explained Steve Coycault, TSHL representative for Harris County Precinct Two. "Currently, we are working to prioritize the top 10 resolutions. Hurricane Ike did slow us down a bit but we will have the resolutions in order before the next legislative session begins."

Deciding the resolutions is only the start of the work of the TSHL members. "We will work diligently and tirelessly to convince the Texas state legislators of the importance of these resolutions to the senior population of this great state," said

Betty Streckfuss, deputy speaker pro tem of the TSHL and the at-large representative from Harris County. "Our resolutions will be published and distributed to the governor and all of the state legislators as well as county judges and commissioners and each of the directors of the Area Agencies on Aging, to name a few."

Before their September session, the five Harris County TSHL representatives met with many senior groups for input. "Since our session, I have been meeting with seniors to discuss our resolutions and the next legislative session," said Streckfuss.

Both Coycault and Streckfuss will be on hand for a meeting with Precinct2gether seniors on Jan. 14, 2009, beginning at 10 a.m. in the Grayson Center's Baldree Building. Seniors are encouraged to attend this forum to learn more about the work of the TSHL as well as provide input on the resolutions.

For those who are interested in seeing the legislative process in action, consider joining other Precinct2gether seniors for the biannual Senior Day event in Austin on Feb. 10. Several Precinct Two buses will be transporting seniors to the Texas Capitol to experience the state legislature while in session and meet elected officials. For more information on this event, check with your local community center.

Learn More About Texas Silver-Haired Legislature

Wednesday, January 14, 2009, at 10 a.m.

Grayson Center's Baldree Building

13828 Corpus Christi, Houston, 77015

Reps. Coycault and Streckfuss will be on hand to talk about the 81st Texas Legislative Session

A Night of Celebration at the 2008 Black-and-White Ball

The Bay Area Community Center was transformed into an extraordinary setting for the fifth annual Black-and-White Ball. This signature fund raiser for Precinct2gether attracted 350 attendees including local elected officials, area business people, friends and supporters. The Black-and-White Ball featured a catered dinner, silent and live auctions, a band and dancing into the night.

Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia presented the Jim Fonteno Service-to-Seniors Award to John Phelps of State Farm Insurance in recognition of his long-time support of the senior program. Since its inception, Phelps has given of his time and resources to help the program grow, including co-signing the note for the very first bus and serving for many years on the board of directors.

Precinct2gether wishes to thank everyone who generously supported our annual Black-and-White Ball fund raiser.



Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia listens to remarks from John Phelps, recipient of the Service-to-Seniors award.



Guests danced the night away at the Black-and-White Ball.

Useful Resources on the Web

Following are some Web sites that provide information or services that may be useful to you:

FDIC's 75th Anniversary

<http://www.fdic.gov/anniversary/>

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) has been around for 75 years but understanding exactly what the FDIC does for consumers can be confusing. This anniversary Web site explains the FDIC and how it works with local banks.

National Do Not Call Registry

<https://www.donotcall.gov>

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) created the National Do Not Call Registry to give consumers the opportunity to not receive most telemarketing calls. Though you still will receive calls from charities, political organizations and companies you already have a relationship with, the amount of telemarketing calls you receive will be greatly reduced.

TexasOnline

<http://www.texasonline.com>

TexasOnline, the official eGovernment Web site for the State of Texas, includes information on more than 800 online state and local government resources.

Home Safety Council

<http://www.homesafetycouncil.org>

The Home Safety Council is the national nonprofit organization solely dedicated to preventing home-related injuries. This Web site provides usable information to make your home a safer place.

Volunteer HOUSTON

<http://www.volunteerhouston.org>

Since 1974, VOLUNTEER HOUSTON has helped connect local residents with organizations that need their help.



Precinct2gether, Inc.
 13828 Corpus Christi
 Houston, TX 77015

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**Precinct2gether, welcomes
 all new participants!**

Precinct2gether serves Harris County Precinct Two seniors in Barrett Station, Baytown, Channelview, Clear Lake, Crosby, Deer Park, El Lago, Galena Park, Highlands, Houston, Jacinto City, La Porte, McNair, Morgan's Point, Nassau Bay, North Shore, Pasadena, Seabrook, Sheldon, Shore Acres, South Houston, Taylor Lake Village and Webster.

Precinct2gether, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

★ **DIRECTORY** ★

Department of Community Centers & Senior Programming

Department of Community
 Centers & Senior
 Programming
 713-455-4869

Inner City Program
 713-514-0185

North Channel Program
 281-452-7598

Nursing Home Program
 281-479-7199

South Channel Program
 281-479-4232

Barrett Station &
 Riley Chambers
 Community Centers
 281-328-4713

Bay Area
 Community Center
 281-326-2955

East Harris County
 Activity Center
 281-479-4232

Grayson Community Center
 713-455-3660

North East
 Community Center
 281-442-7950

Ramsey & Flukinger
 Community Center
 281-457-1810

San Jacinto & Highlands
 Community Centers
 281-426-7561

Walker Community Center
 281-426-3551

**Harris County Precinct Two
 Transportation Department**
 281-452-6071

Voucher Transportation
 281-326-6013

Veterans Services
 281-426-2832 or
 281-843-2019