

The Senior CHIT★CHAT



A Publication for East Harris County Senior Citizens from Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia

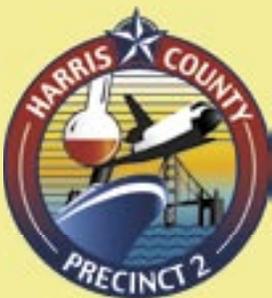
Fall 2005

Centers to Administer Flu Shots

Several of the Precinct Two Community Centers will have flu shots available for seniors. The schedule is as follows:

- Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Centers: *Friday, Oct. 7*
- Bay Area Community Center: *Thursday, Nov. 3*
- East Harris County Activity Center: *Tuesday, Nov. 1*
- Flukinger & Ramsey Community Center: *Monday, Oct. 24*
- Grayson Community Center: *Wednesday, Oct. 12*
- North East Community Center: *Friday, Oct. 14*

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For nearly 30 years, local residents have been able to utilize the Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Center. When the doors first opened in 1977, the center was the Riley Chambers Community Center named for an active community member, Riley Chambers. The original 5,600 square foot center was housed on 37 acres and provided numerous services to the community including meals on wheels, meals provided at the Center, the Texas Department of Human Resources and a Harris County Health Clinic.

Over the years, the Center became increasingly popular and was running out of space to house the growing requests for programs. Using funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to cover the \$1.2 million cost, the new Barrett Station Community Center was developed. This 9,250 square foot facility on the grounds of Riley Chambers Park at 808½ Magnolia in Barrett Station has a seating capacity of 400 which allows for many more activities to be held at the Center. The Center's current director, Malcolm Barrett, and his team of eight employees oversee the operations and activities at the facility.

Each week, eight scheduled groups hold meetings at Barrett as well as numerous groups who use the facility for special events, programs and classes. The senior nutritional program still operates out of the Center and is utilized by many residents. Activities available at Barrett Center for seniors include table games, ceramics, crafts, computer classes, quilting and sewing.

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Barrett Community Center Meeting Seniors' Needs

★ DIRECTORY ★

Department of Community Centers & Senior Programming

Department of Community
Centers & Senior Programming
13828 Corpus Christi
Houston 77015
713-455-4869
Executive Director:
Sylvia Medina

Barrett Station &
Riley Chambers
Community Centers
808-1/2 Magnolia
Crosby 77532
281-328-4713
Director: Malcolm Barrett

Grayson Community Center
13828 Corpus Christi
Houston 77015
713-455-3660
Director:
Shelly Cooper

Inner City Program
P.O. Box 231554
Houston 77223
713-514-0185
Coordinator: Mary Guerrero

Bay Area Community Center
5002 East NASA Pkwy.
Seabrook 77586
281-326-2955
Acting Director:
Elizabeth Williams

North East
Community Center
10918½ Bentley
Houston 77093
281-442-7950
Director: J. P. Zepeda

North Channel Program
P.O. Box 1614
Baytown 77522
281-452-7598
Coordinator: Stacey Bush

East Harris County
Activity Center
7340 Spencer Hwy.
Pasadena 77505
281-479-4232
Director: Colleen Hipps

San Jacinto & Highlands
Community Centers
604 Highland Woods Dr.
Highlands 77562
281-843-3045
Director: Julie Connella

Nursing Home Program
7340 Spencer Hwy.
Pasadena 77505
281-479-4232
Coordinator: Barbara Cowart

Flukinger & Ramsey
Community Center
16003 Lorenzo
Channelview 77530
281-457-1810
Director: Toni Drews

Walker Community Center
7613 Wade Rd.,
Baytown 77521
281-426-3551
Director:
John Kennedy III

South Channel Program
7340 Spencer Hwy.
Pasadena 77505
281-479-4232
Coordinator: Colleen Hipps

Transportation Voucher Program
281-326-2955
Senior Specialist: Velia Tudon

Veterans Services
701 W. Baker Rd., Suite 108
Baytown 77521
281-422-7911
Director: Gil Sosa

Chit-Chat info:

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Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia East Harris County Senior Citizens President

Commissioner's Message

"KatrinaRita." Sounds like a new sophisticated cocktail, doesn't it? Unfortunately, they were two monster storms that not only devastated lives, but which impacted us right here in Precinct Two.

We were lucky in that only a couple of our community centers suffered very minor damage during Rita. In the case of Katrina, our bus fleet played a vital role in helping our friends from Louisiana once they made their way to Harris County. I know this caused some disruption for a few of you, but I also know you join me in recognizing that any inconvenience to us was dwarfed by the need.

Our bus drivers deserve a hearty "thank you" for the service they rendered to the evacuees. Their primary assignment was to provide transportation at the Astrodome complex to those with serious health conditions. After the initial start-up of operations at the Dome, we were able to develop a schedule and allocate resources in an effort to reduce as much as possible any impact on our Seniors programs.

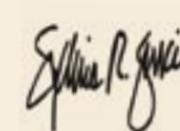
I thank you for your patience and understanding.

During Rita, our staff made heroic efforts to contact as many of you as possible to ascertain any special needs you might have had, both before and after the event. We contacted many of you enrolled in our programs, encouraging you to prepare and eventually evacuate. We also put together a call program using volunteers to reach over 1,600 senior homes, while an auto dial service we initiated reached over 26,000 senior homes, all in Precinct Two.

The call gave instructions on how those with special needs could reach us for assistance. The staff members working on these efforts deserve special thanks, as well.

We learned a lot of lessons thanks to these two "ladies." These lessons extend not only to the issue of making effective use of our bus fleet and other resources, but more important lessons related to our overall preparations for the next "Big One." If you have any suggestions as to how we can better communicate with you before or after an emergency, please let us know.

Hopefully, you and your families fared well in the storms. I look forward to seeing you soon at many of our wonderful senior events.




Veterans Benefit from Precinct Services

Operating out of an office at the Precinct Two County Courthouse Annex in Baytown, a team of four dedicated individuals works tirelessly to assist veterans and their dependents obtain VA benefits and services. Currently, Precinct Two's Veterans County Service Office has more than 4,000 active veterans, widows, children and other claimants' benefits files.

Services:

- Registering military discharges
- Transportation to and from VA Medical Center and VA Regional Office
- Personal Appointments
- Filing VA claims:
 - Service compensation
 - Non-service pension
 - Widow's benefits
 - Waivers and compromises
 - Medical
 - Education
 - Burial and headstones

Gil Sosa, service officer for Veterans Services, and his staff focus on assisting veterans and claimants acquire VA entitlements. This includes registering military discharges and DD-214's with the County Clerk as well as filing VA claims for service connected compensation, non-service connected pension, widow's benefits, waivers and compromises, medical, education, burial, headstones and other VA-related paperwork.

One of the most utilized services that Precinct Two Veterans Service provides is transportation to the VA Medical Center and VA Regional Office in Houston. "Without this transportation service, many veterans would not be able to keep their VA medical appointments," explained Sosa.

"The shuttle service is really a Godsend to our Precinct's veterans." For details on the transportation service, please call 281-452-6071.

Sosa encourages all veterans upon discharge from active military duty to contact his office for possible enrollment with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans also are encouraged to make appointments as early as possible. Currently, it can take several weeks to schedule an appointment. Sosa does visit several community centers each month as well as nursing homes, assisted living centers and private homes when veterans and claimants are not physically able to visit at the Veterans Service office.

Harris County Precinct Two's Veterans County Service Office looks forward to working with all veterans and dependents in the precinct. Their office at Baytown's County Courthouse Annex at 701 West Baker Rd. is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appointments can be scheduled by calling 281-422-7911 or e-mailing gil_sosa@co.harris.tx.us.



Gil Sosa, Precinct Two Veterans County Service Officer (fourth from the right) is joined by several veterans who use the Precinct Two Veterans County Services transportation program.

Barrett Community Center Continued

A senior gospel choir has been organized that performs at various community functions and a drama club also has performances at the Center.

This holiday season, Barrett Station is planning a nursing home party. On Nov. 11, residents of Harris County Precinct Two's Nursing Home Program will be transported to Barrett Station for a banquet and a musical program put on by the Center's seniors. On Dec. 15, the Center's drama group will be performing "The Old Fashioned Christmas Returns."

Flu Shots Continued

At this time, both San Jacinto & Highlands Community Center and Walker Community Center are planning to transport seniors to other centers to get flu shots.

To learn more about a center's specific details on flu shots, please call the center directly (a phone list is on page one of this newsletter).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that any senior 50 years old and older get a flu shot. The CDC also has several good health habits that may help you avoid the flu, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

Precinct Honors Former Commissioner

On Aug. 5, 2005, the second Black & White Ball was held at the Bay Area Community Center as a major fund raiser for East Harris County Senior Citizens. More than 300 people attended this event including local elected officials, representatives of Precinct Two's community centers, supporters and senior groups. Approximately \$27,000 was raised for EHCS



Former Precinct Two Commissioner Jim Fonteno and his wife JoAnn are congratulated by Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia.

via the Ball.

During the program, the annual Service to Seniors award was presented by Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia. The 2005 recipient of the award was former Precinct Two Commissioner Jim Fonteno. In her speech, Commissioner Garcia said, "Tonight I want to talk just a bit more about all that Jim Fonteno has done for seniors. Nearly 30 years ago, there was nothing more than a campaign promise to do more for seniors in East Harris County. Jim Fonteno knew at that time that our seniors were still an overlooked segment of our society. And just look at what that campaign promise has turned into."

To continue to recognize the tremendous impact that Commissioner Fonteno has had on seniors in Precinct Two, beginning in 2006, this award will be called "The Jim Fonteno Service to Seniors Award."

EHSCS Transportation Voucher Program Provides Vital Service

Did you know that the East Harris County Senior Citizens program takes part in a special transportation program that helps transport the elderly (60+ years old) and the disabled? Participants of this program have access to door-to-door transportation to get to medical, social services and essential care appointments as well as essential shopping with transportation from an approved provider list. The transportation program is sponsored by EHSCS, Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia, Harris County Community and Economic Development, the United Way of the Gulf Coast and the Harris County Coordinated Transportation Program.

To take advantage of this program, you must meet specific requirements which include:

- Living in Harris County Precinct Two
- Being elderly (60+) or disabled. To prove your disability, please show either your SSI award letter or a letter from your doctor.

- Completing a passenger application and participating in an eligibility intake interview with a member of the EHSCS staff.
- Living outside the Metro service area and unable to access alternate transportation. These areas may include not only geographic areas outside of Metro, but also may include areas where Metro service is unavailable or inaccessible to people who are disabled and/or elderly.
- Not eligible for Metro Lift.
- Complying with all customer guidelines.
- Only using providers from the approved provider list and cannot be used for any other service.
- Any companion traveler must be at least 18 years of age.

To learn more about this program, call Velia Tudon or Sheila Baker at 281-326-2955.

Precinct to Celebrate Holidays December 7th

For the first time, Precinct Two's East Harris County Senior Citizens (EHSCS) will hold a precinct-wide Christmas party. This year's event also will be a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the East Harris County Senior Citizens program.

"Over the past 30 years, the East Harris County Senior Citizens program has grown into a unique project that is used by thousands of seniors throughout Precinct Two," explained Sylvia Medina, executive director of EHSCS and the community centers. "We're very excited to celebrate our anniversary with the first precinct-wide Christmas party."

The party is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 7, at the Pasadena Convention Center at 7902 Fairmont Pkwy. The City of Pasadena has graciously

agreed to waive some fees associated with holding an event at the Center. There actually will be two parties on the same date to accommodate our large senior community. The first party is from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. and the second is from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

"We're very excited to celebrate our anniversary with the first precinct-wide Christmas party."

Refreshments will be served at the parties and a DJ will be on hand to help create a festive atmosphere. There is no cost to attend the party but you must obtain a ticket for the event. To find out more about signing up for the Christmas party, check with your center's program director or area senior coordinator.

Do you travel the information superhighway?

If you have a computer with Internet access at your home or community center, there's a whole world of Internet sites that are designed with seniors in mind. The following are a few Web sites that have useful information for seniors:

BenefitsCheckUp (National Council on the Aging)

<http://www.benefitscheckup.org>

The National Council on the Aging created BenefitsCheckUp as a free, easy-to-use service that identifies federal and state assistance programs for older Americans.

Elderhostel

<http://www.elderhostel.org>

A non-profit group, Elderhostel provides access to educational programs for adults aged 55 and older at universities, national parks, museums, conference centers, and other learning sites in the U.S. and around the world.

FirstGov for Seniors

<http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Seniors.shtml>

As part of the U.S. government's official Web portal, FirstGov for Seniors provides information on numerous federal government agencies and services.

Grandparenting Today

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grandparent>

Produced by the University of Wisconsin-Extension in Madison, Wis., this site has resources on grandparenting and for grandparents raising grandchildren.

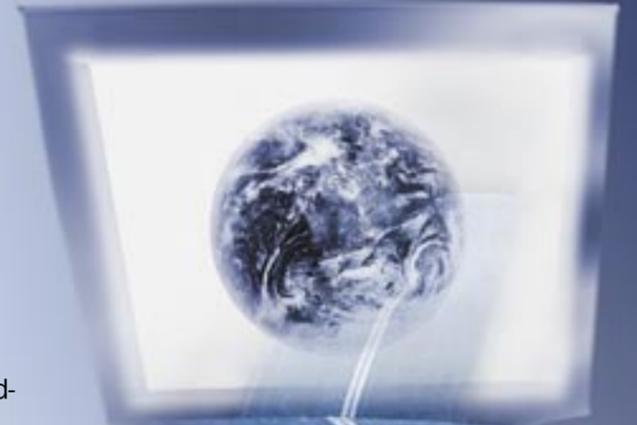
Mayo Clinic Senior Health Center

<http://www.mayoclinic.com> (select the health living tab and then the senior health tab)

This Web site has information on many topics on aging, health conditions, and treatments.

If you haven't become familiar with the Internet or want to learn how to use a computer, check out your local community center. Most Precinct Two Community Centers currently offer or will soon be offering computer classes and/or access to computer labs.

Note: Neither Harris County Precinct Two nor East Harris County Senior Citizens endorses these Web sites.



The East Harris County Senior Citizens welcomes all new participants!

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

East Harris County Senior Citizens is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

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5002 NASA Road One
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The Annual Greater Baytown Area Senior Olympics Week was held Oct. 4-6. Olympians participated in 30 events including volleyball and basketball. About 400 seniors took part in the event.