

The Senior CHIT★CHAT



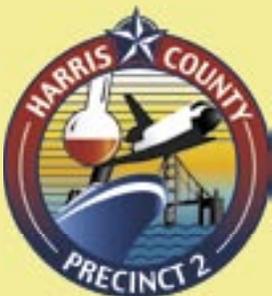
A Publication for East Harris County Senior Citizens from Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia

Summer 2006

Preparation Is Key for Evacuation

One of the key lessons learned during the last hurricane season is that being prepared for what may happen is critical, especially when an evacuation is necessary. To ensure the safety of Texans, the Governor's Office, the Department of State Health Services, UT Center for Space Research and Texas 2-1-1 Information Referral Network have created a program that will assist those who require transportation or special assistance during an evacuation. The objective of this program is to

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Everyone has a great time at the South Channel Senior Olympics.

East Harris County Activity Center (EHCAC) located at 7340 Spencer Hwy. EHCSC members actually contributed a great deal to this center becoming a reality in that an agreement was made with Precinct Two that if the seniors raised half of the monies necessary to construct the facility, the Precinct would approve Harris County financing the other half. Not only did the area seniors meet the agreed-upon amount, they surpassed their goal!

Today, EHCSC members and South Channel senior groups have access to a premier facility. The main room can hold up to 500 people and has a 290 square foot stage which is perfect for special events. A smaller conference room can be used for meetings and classes. The 7,000 square foot assembly room is available for rental by the general public for special occasions.

"As we plan for activities at our Center, we try not to duplicate what other local facilities are offering," explained Colleen Hipps, center director of the East Harris County Activity Center and South Channel senior coordinator. "Some of our ongoing activities include dance classes, aerobics and computer classes in our new computer lab. We also are 'home' to a dozen or so senior groups who were instrumental in raising funds for the building of our Center." *continued on page 2*

Serving Seniors in the Pasadena Area

Since August 1994, members of the East Harris County Senior Citizens (EHCSC) living in the Pasadena area have had a place to meet, learn and socialize thanks to the

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Numerous events are held at the East Harris County Activity Center. Once a month, the Center hosts "Dinner and a Movie," where a movie is shown to approximately 100 seniors and a free lunch is available courtesy of the South Channel Program. EHCSC hosts two fund raisers at the Center each month: a Country-and-Western Dance on the third Thursday which benefits the Nursing Home Program, and the Hometown Opry show which benefits the South Channel Program.

Throughout the year, East Harris County Activity Center is the site for numerous special activities including the Senior Olympics, the Ms. Golden Years Pageant, Lasagna Luncheon and the Hot Dog Extravaganza. This year's Hot Dog Extravaganza is set for June 14 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. For just \$5, attendees receive a plate of food and some terrific entertainment.

Housed at the Center is the EHCSC Nursing Home Program, coordinated by Barbara Cowart. This program focuses on improving the quality of life for residents of long-term care facilities by



Frenchie Burke entertains seniors at the EHCAC Hometown Opry.

bringing the community into the nursing home via ongoing activities and special events. The South Channel Program also operates from the Center, serving more than 150 seniors groups including community centers, churches, senior clubs and retiree groups.

If you are a senior who lives near the East Harris County Activity Center and have yet to become a part of this enjoyable community, please stop by to take a tour or call 281-479-4232 for more information.



Take Me Out to the Ballgame

One of the most popular uses for the Precinct Two buses that are available to the East Harris County Senior Citizens is to attend Astros games. Almost every week during baseball season, seniors are headed to Minute Maid Park to root on the hometown team. Pictured are seniors from St. Mark's Methodist Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church on their way to a game.

Chit-Chat info:

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

Commissioner's Message



Is it already time to start thinking about Hurricane Season again? I'm afraid so. I realize a lot of folks may still be suffering from "hurricane fatigue," but the hot weather months seem to have arrived early, and that may portend

another active summer storm season. We are gearing up here in Precinct Two, and several members of my staff have already participated in full-blown hurricane drills.

In this issue of **Chit Chat**, you will find a short but important article on a new system which has been devised to make sure everyone who needs assistance with evacuation gets it. But to provide this help, we need help from you. It's as easy as dialing 2-1-1 on your phone, so please take the time to learn about the system and make sure you register.

Speaking of registering, I want to thank our Precinct Two staff for the excellent work they did in making sure as many of our seniors as possible signed up for the Medicare Part B prescription drug program before the May 15 deadline. I have heard wonderful comments about the sign-up events we organized. Unfortunately, I am afraid there are still thousands of eligible participants in East Harris County who did not register. Ask your friends if they did, and if not, encourage them to become familiar with the program so they will be ready when the next enrollment opportunity arrives.

Finally...you know how much I enjoy visiting with our seniors. I particularly value the feedback about county services you gave me at our recent Town Hall meetings in Galena Park, Highlands and Pasadena (May 23). After a summer break, we will resume community meetings with a Town Hall on Sept. 21 in the Bay Area. Until then, stay cool and be well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia R. Garcia".

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have every citizen come forward **now** who may need help and register within the system.

Texans without any means of transportation or who know they will require special assistance during an evacuation are strongly encouraged to register with the 2-1-1 system as soon as possible. All operators on this system have received extensive training and are ready to register those who will need transportation should a hurricane or other natural disaster mandate an evacuation.

To register for this system, simply **dial 2-1-1** and an operator will ask you a series of questions to complete your registration over the phone. Some of the information they will need pertains to your location, medical needs, if you have a pet that will need

transportation and other emergency contact information. All information that is provided to the 2-1-1 Information Referral Network is fully secure and only will be accessed by emergency officials.

If there comes a time when you do need to evacuate, it is imperative that you are ready to go when transportation arrives at your home. It is important to bring only one suitcase and a purse or backpack. Items that you should pack include medications and medical supplies including a two-week supply of prescriptions; personal identification papers, family and physician phone numbers and copies of prescriptions; personal items; comfort items; extra clothing; special dietary food; and a flashlight with fresh batteries.

Keeping Seniors at Ramsey & Flukinger on the Go!

The Chit-Chat's Featured Employee: Toni Drews

"I really live for this job," explained Toni Drews, center director for the Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center. "I have such a passion for my work plus I'm so lucky to get positive affirmation for what I do every single day."

For the past six years, Drews has brought a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and dedication to the seniors she serves in Harris County Precinct Two. Before joining Precinct Two, Drews was a frequent traveler with her husband of 20 years, Roy, and their four children. As her husband was in the military, the family often found themselves moving, including a stint in Germany where Drews started a daycare service for other military families.

The family returned permanently to the Houston area in 1998 and Drews began her career with Precinct Two as an aide at the San Jacinto &



Toni escorts Mr. Holland, the Ramsey & Flukinger Center Volunteer of the Year, at the Volunteer Banquet.

Highlands Community Center. She then moved to the Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center as an aide and was promoted to assistant director and then center director. As center director, Drews is responsible for the Center's budget, facility management, rentals and all programs, including the many daily and special events provided to members of the East Harris County Senior Citizens (EHSC).

Each weekday, Drews and her staff of nine provide meals at lunchtime at the Center for approximately 15 to 20 seniors as well as deliver meals to 50 other seniors through the Home Delivered Nutrition Service Program. She has created daily classes at the Center that attract many seniors including crafts programs, ceramics classes, two different exercise programs and four line dancing classes. "I started the line dancing here because when I was at Highlands, seniors from Flukinger often came over to take my class," said Drews. "Today, we have our own line-dancing club, the 'Flukinger Boot Scooters,' who entertain at nursing homes and assisted living centers as well as participate in the Senior Olympics."

In addition to the daily classes, Drews and her staff plan and host numerous special events for the seniors. A weekly senior meeting is followed once-a-month by a covered dish luncheon or a seasonal party. She also started a Bunco group that has become so popular that groups have sprung up at the San Jacinto and the Grayson Community Centers so seniors can travel from one center to another for this fun game.

"Our seniors are on the move and they always want to go, go, go!" explained Drews. "For example, we've created a supper club and every month we take a Precinct Two bus to a different restaurant that our seniors normally wouldn't get to go to. We've also started going to the Wortham Center for Senior Day. It's a program that combines both music and art, and we get to have a meal in the Grand Foyer."

One of the most popular special events that Drews oversees is Gospel Night, which has been a monthly



Toni Drews

free program since March 1997. Seniors have the chance to come and see a different gospel group perform for an evening of community and entertainment. More than 100 seniors attend this program each time it is held. She also has created an annual "Murder Mystery Lunch" that she hosts with two other centers. "This year's program will be titled, 'Cruise to Italy' and we're having Murder by Chocolate in Kemah help us put together this fun program," said Drews.

So, what is a typical week like for seniors at the Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center? Busy! "During the first week of April, we took a bus trip to Harwin Street so our seniors could go shopping for jewelry; went to an Astros game; had bingo and bunco; attended a Little Day of Music at the Wortham; had Gospel Night; went to Brenham to the Antique Rose Emporium; and saw the play 'Run for your Wife' plus we had all our normal classes," explained Drews.

Even with an extremely busy schedule that keeps her always on the move, Drews never seems to run out of energy. "I love being here with my seniors," said Drews. "It's so wonderful when they tell us how our program really impacts their lives. I recently had a senior tell me that she didn't know what she'd do if she couldn't come up to our center. How could I ever have a more rewarding job than this?"

Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Centers Director Earns Degree

Recently, Malcolm Barrett, center director for Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Center, earned a bachelor of science degree in Christian Leadership. All of us associated with the Chit-Chat congratulate him on his achievement. We've also asked him to write a few words about this accomplishment:

I hope this message will encourage anyone who has put off going to college or has not been able to get around to it due to hectic schedules to give college a try.

In fall 1996, I enrolled at the College of Biblical Studies in Houston with the intent of acquiring information that would prepare me for a quest I felt a strong need to pursue. I started with one class a semester and then two classes, then back to one class. After eight years passed—and it only seemed like a few months—I received an associate's degree in theology. Still desiring to be more prepared, I enrolled in a special program where I could receive an accelerated bachelor's degree in two years. Even though I worked a full-time job, served as youth minister at my local church and had my husbandly responsibilities at home, I am overjoyed to share that at age 46, on April 29, 2006, with a 3.81 GPA, I received a bachelor of science degree in Christian leadership.

It is my firm belief that persistence pays off. It is unfortunate that we are living in a time where many expect everything in a hurry. Nothing worthwhile comes overnight. My mother always said, "Haste makes waste," encouraging me to take my time and do whatever I did right the first time so I wouldn't have to do it over again.

As I work with seniors every day, I am constantly reminded of the moral principles and sound advice that helps one stay focused. I encourage you to pursue your goals no matter your age, social status, advantages or disadvantages. With patience, you can make it!



Congratulations Malcolm!

A Message from the Director of Community Centers and Senior Programming

I recently celebrated my second anniversary as director of community centers and senior programming for Harris County Precinct Two. This time has truly been an amazing whirlwind with a mix of varied experiences. When I joined the Precinct Two family, I never dreamed I would be part of such a wonderful group of people, not to mention have the opportunity to work with one of the most successful, hardworking women around, Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia.

I want to thank each of you for allowing me to represent you through the East Harris County Senior Citizens. Commissioner Garcia has some wonderful plans for the Precinct and our program. It is an honor to play a role in anything that will benefit this program. As they say, it takes a village, and in Precinct Two, it takes dedicated, hardworking staff and a Commissioner with great vision.

Our coordinators, directors and staff are the cornerstone of this 31-year-old program. For the staff, it's much more than a job – it's a way of life. It is for this reason that we come to you regularly with important messages, such as Medicare updates or hurricane preparation announcements. You have come to rely on us as people you can count on, not only for planning that special trip or event, but, more importantly, to provide you with critical information especially as it pertains to your health or safety.

As you may recall, we had a chance to experience nature at its very worst or what we thought would be its worst, the 2005 hurricane season. More than 1 million people evacuated this area last year.

Another hurricane season is upon us and we must prepare for what could happen.

Precinct Two played an important role in ensuring seniors had necessary information and resources to be able to make informed choices last hurricane season. As we enter another hurricane season, I urge you to prepare now, and listen and read all information you receive. Precinct Two staff will again be here to relay information as we receive it and we encourage you to share this information with neighbors and friends. If you know of anyone who may need help evacuating, encourage them to register now for evacuation assistance (*see story on evacuation registration on page one*).

We cannot take Mother Nature for granted. Listen and take precautions to ensure your safety and the safety of your loved ones. Commissioner Garcia has been a vocal proponent for her constituents to ensure Precinct Two has all resources needed should such an emergency occur.

Once again, I thank you for your support and wish you and your family a safe summer.

Sylvia Medina

Sylvia Medina (standing) enjoys her time with seniors.



Community Centers Prepare for National Night Out

On Aug. 1, the 23rd Annual National Night Out will be celebrated across the United States. This event was created to heighten crime and drug prevention awareness as well as strengthen neighborhood spirit.

In 2005, more than 34 million people located throughout all 50 states, U.S. territories, Canadian cities and military bases worldwide took part in National Night Out. In fact, the city of Houston and Harris County received the second place award for most participation in areas with more than 300,000 residents!

Several Harris County Precinct Two Community Centers have events planned for National Night Out. They include:

Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Center: Held at the City of Refuge Edu-Care parking lot, the Center is partnering with the Barrett Station Ministers Alliance for a community rally which will feature music provided by a DJ, mini sermon and refreshments.

Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center: This Center's activities will begin with opening remarks and a prayer. Hot dogs, chips, popcorn, snow cones and drinks will be served. A mariachi band and some local



Seniors enjoy line dancing at last year's National Night Out festivities.

musicians will perform. Games, face painting and a moonwalk will be available. Everything is free to the community courtesy of the Channelview Senior Citizens, Ramsey/Flukinger Advisory board members and Food Fair.

Grayson Community Center: The Center is finalizing plans but is looking to have refreshments, face painting, a visit from members of the local fire department and the K-9 unit.

North East Community Center: The Center will hold a community gathering from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. with free sweet bread and music.

San Jacinto & Highlands Community Center: The Center's Third Annual Ice Cream Social is set for National Night Out from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Walker Community Center: The McNair Volunteer Fire Department is joining with the Walker Community Center for a night of fellowship. Hamburgers, hot dogs and refreshments will be served courtesy of the McNair VFD. Entertainment will be provided by local talent. A membership drive will take place to help line up new volunteers for the fire department.

If you have questions about activities planned for your community center, please contact the center directly.

Mark Your Calendar

The following are some major events that will take place in June, July and August 2006 for East Harris County Senior Citizens:

June 1 Gospel Night: Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center

June 2 Mother's & Father's Day Brunch: North East Community Center

June 13 Garden Party & Luau: Grayson Center

June 13 Gospel Night: San Jacinto Community Center

June 14 Hot Dog Extravaganza: East Harris County Activity Center

June 16 Father's Day Lunch: Walker Community Center

June 30 Hometown Opry (Legends Night): East Harris County Activity Center

July 6 Gospel Night: Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center

July 11 Uncle Sam Party: Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center

July 11 Gospel Night: San Jacinto Community Center

July 14 & 15 Christmas in July Arts & Crafts Show: Bay Area Community Center

July 15 Health Fair: Barrett Station & Riley Chambers Community Center

July 20 Breakfast with the Guys: San Jacinto Community Center

July 28 Ice Cream Social: Grayson Community Center

July 28 Hometown Opry: East Harris County Activity Center

Aug. 1 National Night Out: Barrett, Flukinger, Grayson, North East and San Jacinto Centers

Aug. 8 Gospel Night: San Jacinto Community Center

Aug. 11 Nursing Home Party: Ramsey & Flukinger Community Center

Aug. 18 Bingo Party: Grayson Community Center

Aug. 21 Gospel Night: North East Community Center

Aug. 24 Pasadena Health Fair: Pasadena Convention Center

Aug. 25 Hometown Opry: East Harris County Activity Center

Aug. 29 Murder Mystery Party: Grayson Community Center

Monthly Dances – These dances are fund raisers for the East Harris County Senior Citizens:

Second Monday: North East Community Center

Second Thursday: Grayson Community Center

Third Tuesday: Bay Area Community Center (Ballroom Dance)

Third Thursday: East Harris County Activity Center (Country-and-Western Dance)

Fourth Friday: San Jacinto Community Center (Pick 'N Grin Band), no charge to attend

Last Tuesday: (summer months) & May 26 East Harris County Activity Center (Latin Rhythm Dancing)

** Last updated May 5*



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Seabrook, TX 77586

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The East Harris County Senior Citizens welcomes all new participants!

EHCSC 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.

★ **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
281-479-4232

South Channel Program
281-479-4232

Transportation Voucher Program
281-326-2955

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

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