

The Senior CHIT★CHAT



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

Winter 2006

Things to Know

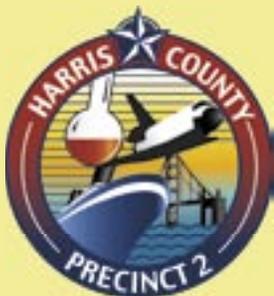
Veterans County Services Relocates Office

Harris County Precinct Two Veterans Service has relocated its offices from Baytown's County Courthouse Annex to the Highland Community Center at 604 Highland Woods Drive. The phone number now is 281-426-2832 or 281-843-2019.

Fun at the Fish Fry

The East Harris County Senior Citizens program is having a Fish Fry fund raiser on Friday, March 31, from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Flukinger Community Center.

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A Gathering Place for Seniors in Bay Area

In the early 1990s, seniors living in Harris County Precinct Two's Clear Lake area didn't have a community center that was readily accessible to them. The South Channel Seniors joined forces with Precinct Two to build the Bay Area Community Center. When it opened in 1997 in Clear Lake Park, the senior community had access to a 14,000 square foot facility



that includes a main room that can hold 500 people, a conference room, commercial kitchen, computer lab and an outdoor activity area.

The Bay Area Community Center is unique in the fact that over the past nine years, it has become a multicultural center.

"One of the best examples of the multicultural aspect of our Center is in our watercolor class," said Elizabeth Williams, acting director of the Bay Area Community Center. "Students in this class are from Taiwan, China, Venezuela and Germany and they all are learning from each other."

Williams also believes that the seniors who utilize the Bay Area Community Center are very open to giving back to the community as they've developed partnerships with other non-profit groups. "Our participants are very active, independent seniors who really want to live life to the fullest and enjoy giving back through volunteerism in the Bay Area community."

Currently, 12 senior groups meet monthly at the Bay Area Community Center. The Center also has opened its doors for Girl Scout meetings and other neighborhood associations' events. Classes offered to seniors include ballroom dance, line dance, tap dance, Tai Chi, Yoga, ping pong, watercolor, craft classes, basic Spanish class and Hawaiian dance.

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★ DIRECTORY ★

Department of Community Centers & Senior Programming

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713-455-4869
Executive Director: Sylvia Medina

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281-843-2019
Director: Gil Sosa

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

Inner City Program
P.O. Box 231554, Houston 77223
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Coordinator: Mary Guerrero

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Community Centers
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Crosby 77532
281-328-4713

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

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

Director: Malcolm Barrett

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Community Centers
604 Highland Woods Dr.
Highlands 77562
281-426-7561
Director: Julie Connella

Bay Area Community Center
5002 East NASA Pkwy.
Seabrook 77586
281-326-2955

Acting Director: Elizabeth Williams

Nursing Home Program
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Pasadena 77505
281-479-4232
Coordinator: Barbara Cowart

East Harris County Activity Center
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281-479-4232
Director: Colleen Hipps

Walker Community Center
7613 Wade Rd.
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South Channel Program
7340 Spencer Hwy.
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281-479-4232
Coordinator: Colleen Hipps

Flukinger & Ramsey
Community Center
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Director: Toni Drews

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

Commissioner's Message



"Golf is a good walk spoiled," Mark Twain once said. With the utmost respect for a literary giant, I must disagree on several counts, and not only because I enjoy playing.

First, any activity that gets us moving is good for the body and mind.

I have learned from our very active seniors in Precinct Two that finding a physical activity which is as fun as it is beneficial will make it that much easier to exercise. That is one of the reasons why we work so hard to provide the sort of programs that make it fun for our seniors to stay active.

Second, golf has proven to be a very good way to raise money for our senior programs. On Mon-

day, Feb. 27, I will be hosting a tournament at Timber Creek Golf Club with proceeds benefiting the East Harris County Seniors Program as well as youth programs in Precinct Two. We have had a lot of success with this event in the past, and I appreciate the fact that so many have again committed their financial support for our seniors.

Finally, ol' Mark probably never had a chance to walk around a beautiful golf course in February. This is one of the great perks of living in our part of Texas: being able to enjoy nature and outdoor exercise when most of the country is still huddled indoors waiting for spring.

So whether it's a leisurely round of golf, a nice walk through one of our many Precinct Two parks or some other activity you enjoy, I encourage you to get outdoors on our nice days, take advantage of our unique climate and amenities, and stay physically active.

A Gathering Place for Seniors in Bay Area Continued from page 1

The Center has implemented an open lab computer concept in which a staff member gives instruction in the basic use of the Internet and Microsoft Works. The Precinct Two Veterans Services visits the Center on the second Thursday of every month to meet the needs of local veterans and their families.

There are two major fund raisers at this Center, "Christmas in July" Arts & Craft Show scheduled for July 14 and 15, 2006, and "Jingles Jubilee" Arts & Craft Show in the fall. The Center staff and senior volunteers work together to raise funds for Center activities and classes.

The future is bright for the Bay Area Community Center. "The sky really is the limit for what we can offer our seniors," said Williams. "With a commissioner like Sylvia Garcia, the Bay Area Community Center will continue to provide not only educa-

tional opportunities but enrichment programs that continue to bring joy and fulfillment to the lives of seniors in the Bay Area."



Seniors compete in a marbles game at the Bay Area Senior Olympics.

Love is in the Air for East Harris County Seniors

Many people enjoy sharing stories of how they met their true love. Cupid has shot his arrow at several seniors who take part in East Harris County Senior Citizens programs.

The North East Community Center was the place to be for two lucky couples. Frances and Glynn Campbell met at the Center's annual Christmas party when Frances asked Glynn to sit at her table. Glynn then

asked Frances to dance and as he held her in his arms, she knew it was real love at first dance! Glynn and Frances were married in October 2005 and still hold hands at every senior program event.

Rex and Lillie Willeford met via the North East Community Center where both were long-term members. Lillie

was looking for someone to take care of a ceramic tile remodel job in her home and a friend from the Center recommended Rex. Rex got the remodel job and a wife and both feel very blessed!

Charles and Helen Hockenjos met at the Grayson Community Center during a seniors' lunch in March 1999. Their romance blossomed over numerous games of Skip-Bo, dinners and visitations. The couple

married in November 1999 and still attends senior functions with their many friends at Grayson.

Buck and Helen Holst also attend Grayson and met nine years ago. Both had been widowed and Buck asked Helen out six months after she lost her husband. The two were married in December 1997 and have combined their families with Buck and Helen each having three children and six grandchildren.

Bill and Kay Post have been happily married for six years and began their love story at Bay Area Community Center. Bill had always been involved with various senior groups here at the Center and was a major contributor to the building of Bay Area Community Center. About seven years ago, Bill was in charge of getting a bus for the rodeo. Bill called Kay to invite her to the rodeo outing and while chatting, asked Kay to sit with him. They were married within six months of their first date. They love to travel in their RV and attend programs at the Bay Area Community Center.



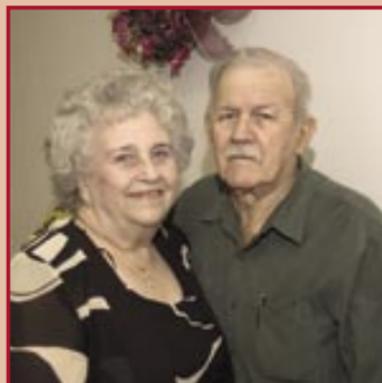
Kay and Bill Post



Frances and Glynn Campbell



Helen and Charles Hockenjos



Helen and Buck Holst



Lillie and Rex Willeford

Making Computer Classes a Reality for Inner City Seniors The Chit-Chat's Featured Employee: Mary Guerrero

Ten years ago, Mary Guerrero started her career with Harris County Precinct Two as a receptionist in the administrative offices. Within just a few months of joining the Precinct, she was promoted to community liaison for the East End. As her tenure with the Precinct grew, so, too, did her responsibilities and today she is the senior coordinator for the Inner City area.

In her current role, Guerrero is responsible for budgeting, fund raising, administrative aspects and activities for the Inner City. There are 33 groups registered in the Inner City program comprised of more than 2,300 seniors.

Guerrero always is on the lookout for new programs that her seniors will enjoy, including working with computers. In summer 2004, the Inner City Division of the East Harris County Senior Citizens program was awarded a Technology Innovation Grant from the Houston Information Technology Empowerment Consortium (HITEC). With this grant and the support of Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia, Guerrero was able to purchase computers and create a computer lab at the Raul C. Martinez Annex.

"This program became a reality because of Commissioner Garcia's vision to empower seniors to be able to communicate with their families and friends via e-mail as well as research topics of interest such as medical, travel or local issues," explained Guerrero.

In June 2005, Guerrero introduced the "Technology Café" to the seniors. Those interested enrolled in a six-week course taught by a computer instructor where they learned basic computer skills, how to use e-mail and conduct research on the Internet. Guerrero also developed a second six-week course where seniors could enhance skills learned in Level One. Both courses also have speakers come to the class who discuss topics related to the computer and the Internet.

Each class has nine students who share the three computers in the lab. The class is taught in



*Mary Guerrero
Inner City Coordinator*

English but the instructor is bilingual so the students are able to ask questions in Spanish if they feel more comfortable. If participants are interested, they also can take a self-paced typing class to learn how to type or sharpen their keyboarding skills as well as access the computers during open lab times.

"I think the classes have been successful because the seniors are able to come to a quiet, familiar environment where they are also comfortable," said Guerrero.

"They're also able to meet other seniors and make new friends with the classes. The seniors have grabbed on to this program and have really soared with it."

Those who've completed the classes have had positive feedback on the program. One senior wrote in an evaluation that he "will use my computer skills to communicate with family members and research important issues for me like travel, volunteering and medical problems." Another senior surprised his son who is in the military overseas by sending him an e-mail. Still another senior told Guerrero that she was able to conduct Internet research before her husband had open-heart surgery so she was able to ask his doctor the right questions.

Guerrero currently is planning classes for 2006. "I'm so proud of the seniors who took the computer class," said Guerrero. "They've had a whole new world opened up to them."

When Guerrero isn't overseeing all aspects of the Inner City program, she enjoys spending time with her husband of 32 years. She is the proud mother of two daughters and the enthusiastic grandmother to her

two-year-old granddaughter. She also is a dedicated Astros fan.

Guerrero truly enjoys her work with the Inner City program and what she is able to do for the seniors she interacts with. "This is an amazingly gratifying job."

Mary Guerrero addresses seniors at the Christmas gathering as Elia Mata (left) looks on.



Things to Know Continued from page 1

A fish dinner will be available for \$7 per plate and delivery is available on orders of 10 or more plates. Pre-ordered take-out fish dinners can be placed by calling 281-452-7598. The event also will feature a plant sale, bake sale and garage sale which begins at 9 a.m.

A Day on the Greens

Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia's "Swing Thing 2006" golf tournament is set for Feb. 27 at the Timber Creek Golf Club. This fun day of golf benefits the East Harris County Senior and Youth Programs of Precinct Two.

Sponsorship opportunities are still available at the gold, silver and bronze levels, as well as individual hole sponsorships which are available for \$250. Golfers also can still register for this event with the tournament fee being \$175. For more information, call 713-240-6118.

Can You Help at the Nursing Home Olympics?

The 2006 Nursing Home Olympics is scheduled for Thursday, March 30, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Clear Lake Park. To ensure all participants have a good, safe time, we need volunteers to help with the event. If you can lend a hand, please call 281-479-4232 to volunteer.



Representing Seniors in East Harris County

In April 1985, Gov. Mark White signed a resolution that created the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature (TSHL). This non-partisan group that operates out of the Texas House of Representatives when the Texas Legislature is not in session is made up of 117 older Texans whose job is to advocate for all older Texans. Members of this group are not lobbyists, do not accept funds from lobbyists, pay all their own expenses and work extremely hard for the older Texans they represent.

Steve Coycault has been serving as the TSHL representative for Harris County Precinct Two for the past two terms. Coycault truly enjoys being involved with this group but does say it is an intensive role as he works on TSHL projects or speaks to seniors on the phone almost every day.

During his time in the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature, Coycault has been involved with several issues including insurance, property taxes, identity theft and nursing home regulations. Though the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature may not be widely known, it provides a valuable service to seniors. "TSHL has accomplished a great deal for seniors and the disabled in Texas over the past 21 years," said Coycault.

Election just around the corner

Serving in the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature is both exciting and challenging. Older Texans (those 60 years of age or older) residing in Harris County Precinct Two can run to be the Precinct's representative or for a Harris County at-large position. Those interested in running for this office must write a letter stating their intent to run and file it by Feb. 28, 2006, with the Area Agency on Aging, 8000 N. Stadium Drive, 3rd Floor, Houston, Texas 77054.

Potential candidates also must pay a \$5 filing fee, complete a candidate information form (form number 103) and have a minimum of 25 registered voters age 60 or older who live in the area the candidate seeks to represent sign a petition (form number 105) by the filing deadline. For copies of the required forms or to ask any questions, contact Eva Williams at the Harris County Area Agency on Aging at 713-794-9006.

Getting Out and About Via Precinct Two Transportation Department

In the mid-1970s, a vision was developed in Precinct Two to provide transportation services at no cost to seniors with a goal of helping them become more active in the community. Thirty years later, the Harris County Precinct Two Transportation Department has a fleet of 30 buses with 15 full-time drivers that brings seniors to activities seven days a week. In 2005, 280 groups went on outings via this bus program.

"The Precinct Two program has served as a model for other precincts in Harris County as we were the first to develop a bus program," explained Royce Stanley, transportation coordinator for the Precinct. "We bring our senior groups on many different trips such as fishing trips, Astros' games, holiday parties, fund raisers and even overnight trips, and we do all of this at no cost to them."

Stanley became involved with the Precinct Two transportation department four years ago and he said the program's fleet has been revamped during this time. "Commissioner Fonteno was the innovator of this program and when Commissioner Garcia came in, she brought a fresh set of eyes to the program," said Stanley. "She really believes in the program and gave us the green light to go into replacement mode and buy better equipment and more comfortable buses with added features."

One of the new additions to six of the buses in 2005 was DVD players. Another seven buses will be outfitted with DVD players in 2006. Groups using the buses can bring their own DVDs to view on outings and the Precinct also will be utilizing them to update the seniors on important information.

Stanley and his team also are researching the possibility of using buses that run on non-polluting alternative fuels as well as adding pollution control devices to the existing fleet. "Commissioner Garcia really believes in trying to clean up the air in Precinct Two," said Stanley.

Making your reservations

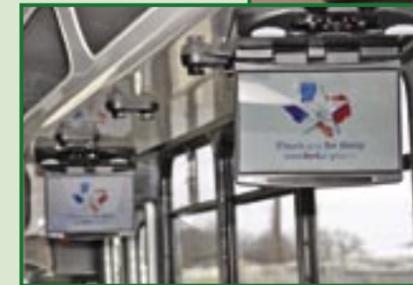
Buses are booked twice a year via a lottery system. If a group wants to take part in the lottery, a group leader is selected and she/he is given a handbook

that goes over details how to request a reservation. The leader then submits the group's reservation request to the lottery. Bus reservations lotteries will take place in March and September of 2006.

If a group forms after the lottery has taken place, don't be discouraged from trying to reserve a bus. "We often have cancellations after the lottery takes



This is just one of the buses serving seniors in Harris County Precinct Two (above). DVDs provide a source for entertainment and information (left).



place," said Stanley. "We immediately go to our short-notice waiting list and usually are able to find a group to take the newly opened time. On average, we can book a trip in about two weeks."

Senior groups within Precinct Two have access to four different types of buses: 16-passenger style, 28-passenger style, 38-passenger style and handicap accessible buses.

Currently, 28 people work in the Precinct Two transportation department and everyone truly enjoys working with the seniors. "Everyone working together is what has made our program a success," explained Stanley. "Almost every week, I get letters from seniors groups thanking the bus drivers, the people on my staff and Commissioner Garcia for this program. So many seniors have told me that without our buses, they wouldn't be able to go on these fun trips."

To learn more about this program, speak to the senior coordinator for your area or call the transportation department at 281-452-6071.



EHCS
5002 NASA Road One
Seabrook, TX 77586

Non-Profit
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Permit No. 182

The East Harris County Senior Citizens welcomes all new participants!

EHCS 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.

Mark Your Calendar

The following are some major events that will take place in February and March 2006 for East Harris County Senior Citizens:

Feb. 9: Sweetheart Ball – Grayson Community Center

Feb. 10: Tabletop Travel Show – East Harris County Activity Center

Feb. 14: Inner City Program Valentine's Day Party – East Harris County Activity Center
Valentine's Day Parties – Barrett, San Jacinto and Walker Community Centers

Feb. 16: Black History Program – Barrett Community Center

Feb. 24: Hometown Opry – East Harris County Activity Center

Feb. 24: Mardi Gras Ball Social – Walker Community Center

Feb. 25: Houston Rodeo Parade in downtown Houston

Feb. 27: Swing Thing 2006 – Timber Creek Golf Club

March 2: Gospel Night – Flukinger & Ramsey Community Center

March 7: North Channel Rodeo Party – Baytown Community Center

March 8: South Channel White Elephant Bingo – East Harris County Activity Center

March 17: St. Patrick's Day Sock Hop – North East Community Center

March 21-23: Inner City Program Senior Olympics

March 23: Seniors' Spring Fashion Show – Barrett Station Community Center

March 24: Hometown Opry – East Harris County Activity Center

March 30: Nursing Home Senior Olympics – Landolt Pavilion

March 31: North Channel Fish Fry – Flukinger & Ramsey 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 dancing)

Third Thursday: East Harris County Activity Center (country-and-western dancing)

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

This list is as of Jan. 27, 2006.