

The Senior CHIT★CHAT

Spring 2009



A Publication for Precinct2gether from Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia

In Harris County, there are approximately 270,000 veterans. For those veterans and their families who live in Precinct Two, there is a committed group of professionals who are available to help navigate the many different aspects of veterans' benefits. This is the team in Veteran Services that is led by Gil Sosa, Precinct Two's service officer. Sosa is a veteran of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne.



VETERANS SERVICES PROVIDES VALUABLE ASSISTANCE

"We really will do anything and everything to help our veterans, their families and claimants," explained Sosa. "We submit claims, complete verification reports, advise on Texas State Veteran Education Benefits and Texas Veterans Land Board home loans, and land tract purchases up for bid by the state on new land properties by Texas Veterans Land Board.

Much of the Veterans Services team's time is spent submitting Veterans Affairs (VA) claims for veterans, dependents and surviving family members in areas including:

- VA benefits compensation claim
 - VA non-service connected pension claim
 - Unreimbursed medical expenses
 - Appeals
 - Assist with filing DD-214
 - Certificates of eligibility
 - Home loan information
 - Education benefits
 - Burial and headstones
- Another important service Precinct Two provides to veterans is transportation to the VA Medical Center in

Houston. "Recently, we were allocated two wheelchair accessible buses which allows us to serve even more veterans," explained Sosa. There are fifteen pick-up/drop-off points in Precinct Two for these buses. Reservations must be made 24 hours in advance and can be done by calling 281-452-6071.

In 2008, Veterans Services worked with more than 10,000 veterans and their family members. Sosa strongly recommends that veterans or their families make an appointment before coming out to the office at the San Jacinto/Highlands

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Things to Know

Are you registered with 2-1-1? Hurricane Ike showed all southeast Texans that hurricanes can develop quickly. Planning for potential evacuation is critical. Make sure you are aware of what evacuation zone you are in and how you will evacuate. If you live in an evacuation zone and know you will not have a way to leave, you need to register with 2-1-1 Texas.

2-1-1 Texas is a free, confidential information and referral program that coordinates evacuation transportation. Phones are answered by certified, multilingual specialists 24 hours a day. Your information only will be shared with your local emergency management office so they can plan for transportation of individuals needing assistance.

If you or someone you know will need help being evacuated, call 2-1-1 today. Remember: you must re-register with 2-1-1 every year. For more information on hurricane preparedness, visit www.hcoem.org.

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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 March, April and May. The name of the community/ activity center that is hosting the event follows the name of each activity:

MARCH

March 2 South Council Meetings, Bay Area and EHCAC

March 2-6 First week of bus booking

March 4 White Elephant Bingo, EHCAC

March 5 Gospel Night, Flukinger

March 5 Rodeo Party, Baytown Community Center

March 6 Lunch & A Movie, Bay Area

March 9-13 Second week of bus booking

March 10 St. Patrick's Day Party, San Jacinto

March 10 Gospel Night, San Jacinto

March 13 Nursing Home Olympics, EHCAC

March 16 Healthy Living Program, North East

March 17 Inner City Olympic Kickoff, North East

March 17 Nursing Home Party and Magic Show, Flukinger

March 17 Gospel Night, Grayson

March 19 Inner City Network Meeting, Martinez Annex

March 20 Lunch & A Movie, EHCAC

March 24-25 Inner City Senior Olympics, North Shore Rotary Pavilion

March 26 Inner City Senior Olympics Closing Ceremony, EHCAC

March 27 Hometown Opry '50s Night, EHCAC

March 31 Cascarones Class, Baldree Building

APRIL

April 1 North Channel Network Meeting, Flukinger

April 2 Gospel Night, Flukinger

April 3 Lunch & A Movie, Bay Area

April 6 South Council Meetings, Bay Area and EHCAC

April 7 Inner City's Easter Party, EHCAC

April 9 North Channel Centers' Easter Party, San Jacinto

April 14 Volunteer Recognition Brunch, North East

April 14 Lunch & A Movie, EHCAC

April 14 Gospel Night, San Jacinto

Monthly Birthday Celebrations

Second Tuesday: San Jacinto, Walker

Third Thursday: Barrett

Last Wednesday: Flukinger, Grayson, North East

April 16 Inner City Network Meeting, Martinez Annex

April 18 Garage Sale Fundraiser, San Jacinto

April 21 Gospel Night, Grayson

April 23 Worden Golf Tournament, River Terrace Golf Course

April 24 Inner City Health Expo, North East

April 24 Nursing Home Party, Walker

April 24 Hometown Opry, EHCAC

April 25 Crawfish Boil & Garage Sale Fundraiser, Walker

MAY

May 1 Inner City Cinco de Mayo Party, Baldree

May 1 North Channel Centers Cinco de Mayo Party, Walker

May 1 Lunch & A Movie, Bay Area

May 4 Council Meetings, Bay Area and EHCAC

May 4-7 North Channel Senior Citizen Olympics, Various Locations

May 8 North Channel Senior Citizen Olympics Awards Ceremony, Baldree

May 8 Mother's Day Style Show & Brunch, North East

May 12 Mother's Day Luncheon, San Jacinto

May 12 Gospel Night, San Jacinto

May 12-14 South Channel Senior Citizen Olympics, EHCAC

May 15 South Channel Senior Citizen Olympics Closing Ceremony, EHCAC

May 19 Nursing Home Party, North East

May 19 Gospel Night, Grayson

May 20 Lunch & A Movie, EHCAC

May 21 Inner City Network Meeting, Martinez Annex

May 22 Mother's Day Tea, Bay Area

May 27 Mother's & Father's Day Party, Flukinger

May 29 Mother's & Father's Day Party, Grayson

May 29 Hometown Opry Gospel Night, EHCAC

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)
April 3 Country & Western Dance, North East	



A Message from Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner

Sylvia R. Garcia



As I write this, I am just leaving St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Houston where a group of our seniors had gathered to board buses for a trip to Austin for Senior Day. This bi-annual event is held in conjunction with the Texas Legislative sessions. I always try to meet with this group to send them on their way as they travel to meet with our legislators.

I cannot tell you how impressed I am each time I meet with this dedicated, active group. They are an extension of every one of the 300 active groups throughout Precinct2gether.

This trip is much more than a simple jaunt to take a picture on the steps of the Texas Capitol. This journey brings a message to our state representatives that the seniors in Precinct Two don't "settle in" as we age – we refuse to settle for anything less than what is coming to us!

I know from speaking with so many of you that this includes not only the concerns you have as retirees but also represents a sense of commitment to our overall community.

Every time you participate in a senior group – whether being active in Precinct2gether or through one of the hundreds of senior-related organizations in our precinct—you are letting our state leaders know of your interests and needs. There are so many areas that affect our senior community that need adequate funding and support, including health care and appropriate oversight of nursing homes.

I pledge to you that I not only am active on Harris County's Commissioners Court but, to the extent that I can be, am in Austin or from my office monitoring legislation that may affect you. I thank you for your continued activity and support as we work together to make Precinct Two the best place it can be for each of our seniors.

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

VETERANS SERVICES PROVIDES VALUABLE ASSISTANCE

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Community Center. "We also visit each of our Precinct Two community centers once a week and/or once a month so veterans and their families may visit with me at a center closer to their home," explained Sosa. "If you do need help in submitting any forms, please plan to see us at least 30 days before the form's due date.

It is imperative that all deadlines be met or eligibility can be lost."

Veterans visiting the San Jacinto/Highlands Community Center also may make an appoint-

ment to see a counselor who comes in once a week for individual and group therapy. "This service is really useful to all veterans but particularly to those who have just returned from active duty," said Sosa.

It's important for veterans and their families to remember that things do change with the VA. "For example, the

VA now has an open-door policy for our vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, especially those with wartime injuries," said Sosa. "These veterans can be treated for 24 months after returning home without any cost or eligibility requirements. This is just one of the new offerings that we are ready to explain to our veterans."

To make an appointment to meet with Veterans Services or to receive a copy of a brochure on benefits and services, call 281-426-2832 or 281-843-2019.





Join in the Fun of Line Dancing

Boot Scootin' Boogie, Macarena, Heel-Toe Polka, Mustang Sally, Cupid Shuffle, Four Corners, Electric Slide and the Cajun Mambo are just a few of the countless line dances that are being enjoyed by people of all ages throughout the world. Not only can line dancing be fun, it's a great way to get some aerobic exercise.

According to a study published by the Mayo Clinic, 30 minutes of dancing can burn between 200 to 400 calories, which is about the same as walking, swimming or riding a bike. Line dancing also can improve posture and balance which may prevent falls.

Other benefits of enrolling in a line-dancing class include:

- Strengthening bones and muscles without hurting joints
- Increasing stamina and flexibility
- Reducing stress and tension
- Building confidence
- Providing a chance to meet new people

Line dancing has been a popular mainstay of several Precinct Two Community Centers. At the Grayson Community Center, intermediate and advanced line-dancing classes are held twice per week. Not only is this a popular class but several of the line dancers frequently entertain at three different nursing homes in the area.

Line dancing classes began at the Flukinger Center

in 2002 and focus on a variety of dances including country-and-western, pop, rock and Latino. "The line-dance classes are definitely popular because the seniors feel good moving around, working on their memories and they can dance without a partner when they go to parties where there is dancing," explained Toni Drews, Flukinger Center director. "Some of the students in our line-dancing classes have created the 'Flukinger Boot Scooters' and they perform at nursing and assisted living homes within Precinct Two."

Progressive and contemporary defines the tone for line-dancing classes at the North East Community Center where a lot of new music can be heard. North East classes are available for both new dancers and those at the intermediate level. "Our volunteer instructor goes to other community centers in Humble and Huffman to learn new steps and then she comes back and teaches them to her classes," said Lisa May, North East Center director.

Exercise and developing relationships are the benefits seniors at the San Jacinto Community Center receive from line dancing in classes for both the beginning and advanced dancer.

If you're ready to join the fun of line dancing, speak to your community center staff about classes. Keep in mind that some centers include line dancing as part of regular exercise classes.



Things to Know

Community garage sale set for April 18

The San Jacinto Community Center is hosting a community-wide garage sale on Saturday, April 18, from 8 a.m. – 3 p.m. Proceeds from this event ben-

efit Precinct2gether. Garage sale space is available for rent. For more information on the sale or obtaining a rental space, call 281-426-7561.



Spring means it's time for Senior Olympics

Senior Olympics are a tradition each spring in Precinct2gether. The 2009 dates are as follows:

- Nursing Home: March 13 (registration completed).
- Inner City: March 24-26 (registration completed).
- North Channel: May 4-8 with a registration deadline of April 17. Call 281-452-7598 to register.
- South Channel: May 12-14 with a registration deadline of May 1. Call 281-479-4232 to register.



Annual crawfish boil scheduled for April 25

The annual Crawfish Boil, a fund-raising event for Precinct2gether, will be held April 25 from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. at the J.D. Walker Community Center. A plate of delicious crawfish with all the fixings is \$10 per plate. A garage sale starting at 8 a.m. will be held in conjunction with this event with booth rental space available. For more information, call 281-426-3551.



Free UH-Clear Lake classes held at Bay Area Center

The University of Houston-Clear Lake has partnered with the Bay Area Community Center to offer free monthly mini-courses through the University's Clear Lake Association of Senior Program (CLASP). Upcoming classes include:

- March 17: "The Patriot Guard Riders: Their Mission for Our Troops"
- April 21: "Trekking to Mount Everest's Base Camp"
- May 19: "Game Day: Scrabble, Cards and Other Mind Challenges"

Reservations are requested for each mini-course by e-mail at clasp@uhcl.edu or calling 281-283-2019.



Teeing up for seniors

The 12th annual Kim Worden Memorial Golf Tournament is scheduled for April 23 at the River Terrace Golf Course, 16777 Wallisville Rd., Houston, 77049. Open to players ages 50 and up (no professionals), this two-person team scramble will be flighted by team scores at the end of the event.

The \$50 per person entry fee covers green fees, golf cart, range balls, breakfast, sack lunch and door prizes. For more information or to register, call 281-452-7598.



Celebrating Easter with cascarones

Cascarones (confetti eggs) have been a part of celebratory events in Mexico and by many Texas families for years. According to legend, having a cascaron broken over your head brings good luck.

On March 31 from 9:30 a.m. – 11 a.m., Easter cascarones will be made at the Grayson Community Center. For more information, call 713-455-3660.



National Hispanic Council on Aging RECOGNIZES PRECINCT TWO SENIORS

For the past 15 years, the Houston Chapter of the National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCA) has hosted “Bajo El Mismo Techo/Under the Same Roof,” a conference that features educational and informational presentations focusing on issues affecting seniors.

A popular part of Bajo El Mismo Techo is recognizing the King and Queen of the conference. The purpose of selecting a King and Queen is to represent the Houston Chapter of the National Hispanic Council on Aging both during the conference as well as at other local events. The board of directors of Houston’s NHCA selects the honorees based on nomination forms submitted by senior group directors.

For 2008, both the King and Queen are from Precinct Two with Queen Audelia (Lela) Arismendez being from the Inner City and King Jose “Champ” Contreras from the North Channel. “Both seniors have winning personalities and leadership roles within their respective groups,” said Mary Guerrero, Precinct2gether Inner City coordinator.

Arismendez was nominated by Connie Alamia, senior center specialist for the M.D. Anderson Seniors Center. In her nomination form, Alamia said, “I have many wonderful and helpful volunteers in my Center but there is someone who always will go beyond the daily tasks required of an



average volunteer and that is Lela Arismendez. She is the official festivities coordinator for our Center and has been doing an outstanding job.

“Ms. Arismendez’s philosophy of life is, ‘I will do for others who cannot do for themselves and even for the ones that can and won’t,’” continued Alamia.

“She does for everyone and does not discriminate when it comes to helping.

She always is offering her services without ever having to be asked to help.”

Bea Richardson, assistant coordinator for Precinct2gether in the North Channel area, nominated Contreras to be King of Bajo El Mismo Techo. “Champ is one of the favorite senior leaders, always ready to step up and help or go the extra mile with a big smile, a friendly greeting and a handshake for our seniors, his church family and friends,” said Richardson.

Contreras is the group leader for Our Lady of Guadalupe Church-Baytown, a position he has held for five years. He also has been a part of the Altar Society for 20 years where he plays his trumpet and sings. Contreras’ involvement with music dates back to when he served in the Navy in World War II in the Pacific Special Services and played the trumpet with a band on his aircraft carrier.

Useful Resources on the Web

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

CDC Health Information for Older Adults

<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/info.htm>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have compiled information on senior health including chronic diseases, immunizations for adults and mental health.

Armand Bayou Nature Center

<http://www.abnc.org>

Armand Bayou Nature Center was established with the mission preservation and environmental education.

This Web site focuses on the many activities occurring at the Center.

American Red Cross—Greater Houston

<http://www.houstonredcross.org>

This Web site includes information on classes, health and safety, local events, disaster services and how to get help from the Houston Red Cross.

SCORE—Counselors to America’s Small Business

<http://www.score.org>

SCORE is a non-profit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs nationwide. Many of the volunteers are retired business people who want to give back. If you’d like to share your business expertise with the next generation of small business owners, visit this Web site.

Consumer Action—Federal Citizen Information Center

<http://www.consumeraction.gov>

The Federal Citizen Information Center is a one-stop source for information about consumer problems and government services. FCIC regularly reviews new information from federal agencies and consumer organizations.



Working to Create a Community

The Chit-Chat's featured employee: Lisa May

“Making people feel welcome at our Center is so important to me,” explained Lisa May, director of the North East Community Center. “Everyone needs to be greeted with a smile when they come in, particularly when it’s their first time. When a senior decides to come to our Center, we not only introduce ourselves but also help them meet other seniors so they’ll feel at ease. We want them to be part of our community.”

Creating a true community is a passion for May who has been involved with the North East for the past four years. Prior to joining Precinct Two, May spent 13 years working in Harris County Precinct Four.

As part of her responsibilities, May plans activities for her Center. One of her passions is having both exercise classes and programs to educate seniors about various health-related topics. “We offer our ‘Healthy Living’ program all months except in the summer and in April when we host a health fair,” said May. “My goal is to focus on one specific topic each month. For example, in January we talked about nutrition because most people start the New Year with a resolution to be healthy. Our speaker from the Harris County Hospital District discussed the food pyramid with our seniors and really interacted with them.” Other topics being covered through Healthy Living program in 2009 include stress awareness and renal health, heart health, cancer awareness and recognizing Alzheimer’s disease.

Activities planned for North East seniors include two exercise programs offered three times per week, games, a very popular ceramics class and outings. “Our seniors enjoy shopping trips, going to museums and special events such as looking at Christmas lights or enjoying the spring bluebonnets,” said May.

May is one of the lucky individuals who truly enjoys going to work every day. “Every day really is a new day at our Center,” explained May. “My job gives me the chance to serve so many people and bring our community together.”

When May isn’t at the North East Center, she enjoys reading, gardening, going home to Mexico to see her extended family or spending time with her husband of 43 years, her four children, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



Misunderstandings and assumptions cost consumers thousands of dollars every year. Being a cautious, educated consumer may save you in the long-term. Here are some common myths and the facts from the Better Business Bureau:

MYTH: *You have the right to cancel any purchase within three days.*

FACT: Contrary to popular belief, the three-day “Cooling-off Rule” (right to cancel) applies to only a limited number of cash or credit transactions of \$25 or more. This rule applies to door-to-door sales or places other than at the company’s regular place of business. Car purchases and other vehicles usually are not covered.

MYTH: *Going-out-of-business sales always have bargains.*

FACT: Many of these sales are undertaken by a liquidator who sets the prices with some of the items actually being marked up. Make sure to shop around so that the “big deal” price really is a big deal. For example, ABC News reported that many items sold during the liquidation sale of a national retail outlet were priced up to 14 percent higher than before the sale.

MYTH: *You have the right to a store refund if you request one.*

FACT: Unless the product is defective or was misrepresented, a refund or exchange is a privilege and not a right you can demand. Ask about the merchant’s policy before you purchase the product.



If you have a complaint or question about a local business, call the Greater Houston and South Texas Better Business Bureau at 713-868-9500 or e-mail bbbinfo@bbbhouston.org.



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

Precinct2gether Main Office
 281-862-9531

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 & 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