



# ONE TO ONE

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*A Report to the Residents of Harris County Precinct One ... from Commissioner El Franco Lee*

## Precinct One and Hester House team up to provide services



**The 24,535-square-foot Wellness Center enables the Hester House to deliver more recreational and social services in the Fifth Ward area.**

The recently constructed Wellness Center at the Julia C. Hester House, a 71-year-old nonprofit community center, now offers recreational activities to improve the quality of life in the Fifth Ward community.

The 24,535-square-foot Wellness Center – which includes a gym, a weight room and an enclosed, five-lane, 25-meter pool – was constructed with a Texas Health and Human Services Commission \$4 million grant secured by Texas State Rep. Harold Dutton, who is a product of the Hester House. Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee, who also participated in Hes-

ter House programs during his youth, assisted in contributing funds for the Wellness Center construction.

At an Oct. 24 grand-opening ceremony, Dutton said people in Houston asked how the \$4 million will be spent after he obtained the grant.

“And I said, ‘We are going to build a community with this money,’ ” Dutton said. “We are going to start with the Hester House. But what we are building is not a building. What we are building is not an enclosed swimming pool. We are not building a health and fitness center. What we are building is community because I

believe Hester House is the start of a rebuild of this community.”

The gymnasium at the Wellness Center at 2020 Solo St. was named the Harold V. Dutton Jr. Recreation Center. Also, the pool was named the Robert Tapscott Aquatic Center in honor of the former Hester House athletic director.

In addition to the Wellness Center and the existing Hester House community center, the campus also includes the 9-acre Boyce-Dorian Park that Precinct One now maintains.

Through a partnership with Hester

*(See Wellness Center on page 2)*



## Precinct One

# Commissioner El Franco Lee

### Comments on current and future activities

#### Happy New Year

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year. As usual, the Precinct's staff this year will work diligently to deliver top-notch services in the areas of road and bridge construction and maintenance; parks' upkeep and development; flood control; and seniors and youth programs.

#### Flood Control Projects

The Harris County Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have signed agreements on major flood damage reduction projects in the White Oak and Hunting bayous' watersheds.

The agreements allow the Flood Control District to qualify for federal reimbursements for eligible work to reduce flooding risks and damages along White Oak and Hunting bayous, and to apply for

reimbursements for future eligible design and construction work after the projects are completed.

#### White Oak Bayou

The White Oak Bayou project includes 15.4 miles of earthen, grass-lined channel modifications from Cole Creek upstream to F.M. 1960, four stormwater detention basins providing approximately 2,940 acre-feet of storage, and recreation features along the channel and within the detention basins. The estimated cost of the project – many elements of which have been constructed – is about \$124 million, of which approximately \$70 million would be eligible for federal reimbursement.

The number of homes and businesses subject to the 100-year flooding event would drop from 6,100 to 4,600. All of the

homes and businesses will benefit from reduced frequency and depth of flooding.

#### Hunting Bayou

The Hunting Bayou project includes 3.8 miles of earthen, grass-lined channel modifications from downstream of the Englewood Railroad yard to U.S. 59, a 75-acre stormwater detention basin providing about 1,000 acre-feet of storage, and replacement or modification of 17 bridges. The estimated cost of the project is approximately \$165 million, of which about \$70 million would be eligible for federal reimbursement.

The number of homes and businesses subject to the 100-year flooding event would drop from 5,100 to 650 and all homes and businesses will benefit from reduced frequency and depth of flooding.

## Precinct One programs are in progress at Hester House

*(Wellness Center from page 1)*

House, Lee's Precinct One will incorporate some of its youth and seniors' programs at the community center. Senior citizens enjoy exercise classes, weight training, water aerobics and Learn to Swim sessions. Youth participate in basketball, Learn to Swim, music and literacy programs.

"As kids, with our membership card in hand, we fully enjoyed the lifestyle at Hester House with the aid of strong and caring mentors," Lee said. "Hester House taught us youngsters skills in the pool, on the field, on the court, in the classroom, as well as social skills for both mind and body.

"Hester House will again serve as a beacon of opportunity to teach, train and expose our kids to a quality environment that will help prepare them for quality adult lifestyles," he said.

Hester House – named after the late Julia C. Hester, a teacher who opened her home to neighborhood youth – opened in 1943 on Lyons Avenue and about six years later moved to 2020 Solo.

Its mission is to enhance the quality of life in Houston's Fifth Ward and surrounding communities through programs and services that promote self-empowerment. It also provides family and social services.



Seniors participate in a strengthening class in Wellness Center gym.



Children Learn-to-Swim classes are held in the enclosed pool.



## Fish Fest lures 200 youth to marine habitat lessons

Amanda Varrera, 12, flanked by Dajanay Williams and Trenton Brinson, split her undivided attention between the pair while assisting them during Kids Fish Fest – despite Amanda being only a few years older.

“Let me untangle your line,” Amanda asked Trenton, 7, on the banks of the lake at Challenger Seven Memorial Park.

“Do you need more bait,” she queried Dajanay, 10.

This was just one of many examples of teamwork at the Harris County Precinct One event that’s designed to let youth ages 5-13 experience fishing with the assistance of older volunteers.

“It’s a little hard because I have to watch over two of them,” conceded Amanda, a



**Amanda Varrera, 12, right, a volunteer, baits a hook for Trenton Brinson, 7, at the annual Kids Fish Fest at Challenger Seven Memorial Park's lake.**

student at Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan. “But at the same time it’s a fun experience.”

Fish Fest organizers took great pride in making the event educational and fun. The lake

was stocked with 1,000 pounds of catfish and 100 pounds of largemouth bass.

“Less than 10 percent of the children have ever experienced fishing a day in their lives,” David Matthews, Precinct

One’s Environmental Education Program director, told volunteers. “So what we are making here today is a life experience.”

With help from volunteers from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and students from the Environmental Education Programs’ service learning schools, the youth first were informed about fish species and their habitats. Then they were instructed on casting.

Each volunteer assisted two fishers.

D’Arius Smith, who was assisted by Dobie High School senior Jesse Chavira, caught a large catfish. “I was surprised because I didn’t think I was going to catch anything,” D’Arius said.

## Texans sponsor early Christmas for YET children

With Donny Hathaway’s “This Christmas” song blaring, Texans cheerleader Liz, 12-year-old John Burnley and 10-year-old Jayden Leonard – smiles plastered on their faces – swayed to the beat in their seats.

This festive scene, which took place at the Texans’ annual Boys & Girls Club Holiday Party for 100 youth who participate in the NFL Youth Education Town at Finnigan Park, was one of many in the gym that was decked in holiday colors with two Christmas trees surrounded by wrapped gifts.

“It felt good having fun with the cheerleader,” John said.

“It was funny, too,” chimed in Jayden.

Liz (Texan cheerleaders only provide their first names), fellow cheerleader Delaney and Texans defensive back Jumal Rolle were the stars of the party – each visiting tables to interact with the children. Also, there was an appearance by “Santa” TORO, the Texans mascot.

“It’s pretty amazing,” Liz said. “And this is why we do what we do just to see the smiles on the kids’ faces, especially this time of the year.”



**John Burnley, 12, left, and Jayden Leonard, 10, rock to the beat of “This Christmas” along with Houston Texans cheerleader Liz at a Christmas party the football team sponsored for about 100 youth.**

Added Rolle: “Giving back is the ultimate goal of what I

ever wanted to do when I made it to the NFL.”

## About 4,000 dance and dine at annual Seniors Holiday Celebration

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Seniors Holiday Celebration brought together about 4,000 Precinct One residents for three hours of dancing and dining on a turkey meal with all the trimmings.

The event, held Nov. 20 at NRG Center, kicked off the holiday season for the senior citizens. Throughout the Celebration, more than 100 people at a time were line dancing on the red carpet.

"We thank you all for coming out – all nearly 4,000 of you," said Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee, who hosted the event. "We were ready for you this time. We rolled out the red carpet."

Upon entering NRG Center, many seniors dropped off non-perishable food, which later

was donated to The BEACON, a nonprofit organization that provides social and health services to poor and homeless men, women and children; and the Bread of Life, a ministry of St. John's Church.

There are always a lot of celebrities in the crowd, including Houston City Councilman Michael Kubosh and Texas State Reps. Sylvester Turner and Harold Dutton. Very few knew that Don Gillis, one of the oldest living professional football players, was one of the guests.

"I think it's a good deal," said Gillis, who played center and linebacker for the St. Louis Cardinals. "(I enjoyed it) very much so."

Gillis and his wife, Joan, were seated at a table with 11



**VIEW FROM ABOVE:** Dining and dancing on the red carpet were two highlights of the annual Seniors Holiday Celebration on Nov. 20 at NRG Center.

others from the Colonial Oaks Assisted Living and Memory Care.

"I think it's wonderful," Ms. Gillis said. "We don't have many dancers in our group, but we love the music."

Carolyn McCray, a line-

dance instructor at the Wendel D. Ley YMCA, and about a dozen of her students definitely enjoyed the dancing.

"This is my first time coming to the event and it won't be the last," said Arlene Thomas. "I enjoyed everything."

## Seniors Fall Fest provides fishing at lake and fun under pavilion



**Versie Jordan, with help from her husband, Paul, shows a catfish she caught Oct. 20 at the Seniors Fall Fest, which included a fishing trip at the Challenger Seven Memorial Park lake.**

Paul and Versie Jordan didn't bring the kitchen sink to help them catch fish at the Precinct One annual seniors' fishing trip. They certainly could have filled up their sink with the mess of fish they caught Oct. 20 at Challenger Seven Memorial Park.

"I'm going to have the right stuff – a little of all kinds of bait. All kinds of shrimp, liver, chicken liver, salt-water cut bait and shrimp," Paul Jordan said of his preparation for the trip.

"And hotdogs," his wife added.

"We are throwing everything at them but the kitchen sink," the husband added.

It was that kind of outing around the lake at Challenger Seven Memorial Park, where Precinct One seniors gathered for the Seniors Fall Fest. Underneath a nearby pavilion, other seniors danced and played games.

To commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness Month, some breast

-cancer survivors gave personal testimonials and released pink balloons.

A fried-fish dinner, cooked fresh at the park, was served to seniors at the pavilion and around the lake.

For the fishers, however, their mission was to catch their own meals for a few days to come.

"I always come out here with Tom Bass Park (seniors)," Leon Booker said. "I do a lot of salt water fishing, too."



## Registration ongoing for Precinct One's LEE Program internships



Craig Veazie, foreground, a LEE Program intern last summer, looks on as engineer Mark D. Gribble goes over a road drawing at Aguirre & Fields Engineers and Planners.



ternships at Harris County departments and private companies.

This summer, more students will participate in the LEE Program. Applications are now being accepted through April from students ages 17-23.

In Veazie's case, he worked at Aguirre & Fields Engineers and Planners in Sugar Land.

"He brings a youthful energy and freshness," said Mark D. Gribble, an engineer with the firm. "It's given us a chance to give some of our 8- to 10-year engineers a chance to manage (Veazie)."

Other interns also received on-the-job training.

Kristyn Veecher, 19, who is studying journalism at Hampton University, said working at the NFL Youth Education Town at Finnigan Park was good training because her minor is sociology.

"It was a really good experience to see how the youth organization works," she said. "It felt so good to see all the kids come every day even though they didn't have to because they really enjoyed themselves."

### How to apply for internships

**WHAT:** LEE Program Internships

**WHO:** Students ages 17-23

**CONTACT:** Robyn Codner

**PHONE:** 713-991-6881

**WEB:** [hcp1.net/Programs/LEEPProgram](http://hcp1.net/Programs/LEEPProgram)

**DEADLINE:** April 30

Seeing an actual road project on the drawing board was an excellent educational opportunity for Craig Veazie, a Prairie View A&M University engineering student. A greater learning experience was watching a project evolve from the drafting table to an actual road.

"One of the things that I enjoyed was going out in the field and seeing how the projects were actually constructed

and designed," said Veazie, a junior majoring in civil and environmental engineering. "For me, seeing something go up is pretty extraordinary."

Last summer, that experience was made possible by Precinct One's Leadership Experience and Employment Program (LEE Program), which placed Veazie and about 100 high school graduates and college students in 10-week in-

## Training sessions available to appoint citizens as volunteer deputy registrars

The Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector's Office is providing training to designate eligible Harris County residents who want to be volunteer deputy registrars, which allows them to register qualified people to vote.

A volunteer deputy regis-

trar must be:

- at least 18 years of age
- a United States citizen
- a Texas resident

Other restrictions involving mental incapacitation and criminal background apply.

Volunteer deputy registrar appointments made during

2015-2016 expire at the end of 2016. By law, all volunteer registrar appointments expire on Dec. 31 of even-numbered years.

Training sessions are ongoing. Also, the Tax Assessor-Collector's Office will send a

representative to your location to train a group.

### For More Information

**Visit:** [hctax.net/Voter/Deputy](http://hctax.net/Voter/Deputy)

**Call:** 713-274-8387

## South Belt Stormwater Detention Basin construction kicks off

**E**xcaavation work has started on the first phase of the South Belt Stormwater Detention Basin that will reduce flooding risks and damages in the Clear Creek watershed in Harris and Galveston counties.

The project, which began in September and is scheduled to be completed later this year, is expected to benefit hundreds of homes and businesses in the area, including south Harris County Precinct One.

Last August, Harris County Commissioners Court awarded a \$3.46 million contract to Trans-Global Solutions Inc. for the project's Phase I. Galveston County has pledged \$10 million toward construction cost.



A weir is being built on Mud Gully channel in the South Belt area.

The basin is designed to reduce flooding risks and damages by safely storing excess floodwater during heavy rains and slowly releasing it back to the bayou when the threat of flooding has passed. It will be on a Clear Creek tributary known as Mud Gully channel near Beamer and Dixie Farm roads. The work involves removing about 553,000 cubic yards of soil and constructing a weir and outfall pipe connecting the basin to the channel. When the

first phase is complete, the South Belt basin will hold about 91 million gallons, or 279 acre feet, of excess stormwater.

The second phase is under design. After its completion, the basin will hold more than 407 million gallons, or 1,250 acre feet of stormwater.

Some basin capacity must be available before work can start on the Beamer Ditch channel improvement project, which extends from Sagerock Drive to Astoria Boulevard north of the basin. The South Belt basin and channel projects will remove the 1 percent (100-year) floodplain from 593 Harris County homes and 54 Galveston County homes.

## Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences building construction under way

**C**onstruction is under way in the Texas Medical Center for a 200,000-square-foot, 9-story building that will house the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS).

"Today, we celebrate not just the construction of a building, but the work to be housed here and those dedicated to the role of sound scientific evidence in the pursuit of justice," Dr. Luis A. Sanchez, HCIFS executive director and chief medical examiner, said at a groundbreaking in October. "When complete, the new facility's



An artist rendering shows how the Institute of Forensic Sciences building will look.

open lab design will foster collaboration between both the medical examiner and crime laboratory services." The building, scheduled for completion in early 2017, will include:

- Designed space for forensic expertise in pathology; investigation; anthropology; neuropathology; entomology; emergency management;
- morgue services; histology; toxicology; drug chemistry; trace evidence analysis, including fire debris, gunshot residue and paint analysis; firearms; quali-

ty management; evidence handling; imaging, design and photography; and administrative and operational support services.

- Dedicated consultation rooms throughout the facility for hosting private meetings with families, attorneys and law enforcement personnel.
- Multipurpose training room for hands-on teaching.
- Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant, 200-seat auditorium for academic endeavors.



## Two Biggers' murals in Precinct One parks getting makeovers

A contractor has completed gles.

restoration of the late John T. Biggers' mural in the Tom Bass Regional Park Community Center. EverGreene Architectural Arts now is restoring another Biggers' mural in near-by Christa V. Adair Park.

Biggers, who taught 34 years in the Texas Southern University Art Department, is considered one of the premiere African-American artists.

Restoration of the Tom Bass mural – “Song of the Drinking Gourd” – was completed last year. EverGreene conservators cleaned the mural, consolidated plaster substrate, inpainted areas of loss and applied a layer of isolation varnish to protect the restored artwork that initially was painted in 1987

The mural is approximately 36 feet wide by 24 feet high and is comprised of a concrete grid of rectangles that is 5 feet high and 6 feet across. The top four rows of rectangles are approximately 5 feet high by 6 feet wide. The bottom row is 3 feet high by 6 feet wide rectan-

The mural shows Biggers' use of geometric design with plants and animals on an abstract background or sky. The Gourd is represented by the Big Dipper, which is in reference to the spiritual “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” in which African-Americans would use the constellation to aid them in their escape to freedom.

The “Christa V. Adair” mural depicts the life of the first executive secretary of the NAACP and Houston civil-rights activist. The mural consists of three sections applied on to a concaved, freestanding wall. It measures 23 feet wide by 6 feet high with two end panels that are 4 feet wide and 6 feet high. The mural is comprised of symbolic iconography that would have been consistent with her life.

The mural was cleaned and tested by EverGreene conservators and is now protected with facing paper. It will be fully restored this year.



Kimiko Hisano, the lead conservator on the murals' restoration, points to a section of the John Biggers' artwork in Tom Bass Park.



Erma Duran, a conservator, cleans the John Biggers' mural in Christa V. Adair Park. EverGreene Architectural Arts is restoring both murals.

## Precinct One Construction Projects

### Tom Bass Regional Park

A contractor for the Harris County Flood Control District will have heavy construction equipment in **Tom Bass Regional Park** to perform maintenance work on a Clear Creek tributary that flows through the park.

The 170-day project involves removing sediment and debris, and repairing erosion

and outfall pipes on a Clear Creek tributary. Repairs will be made along the entire channel, which is between the South Sam Houston Tollway West and Clear Creek.

### Ella Boulevard

Workers have completed a project to expand **Ella Boulevard (Wheatley)** from Little York to West Gulf Bank. The 2

-mile project, of which a 1.96-mile portion is in the City of Houston, involves widening Ella to a four-lane, concrete roadway with storm sewers.

### El Franco Lee Park

Construction is under way for the **El Franco Lee Park** wetland trail and butterfly garden. The new trail sections will tie into the existing trail to

complete a 2-mile loop around the 100-acre wetland, including an elevated boardwalk section within wetland areas. The butterfly garden on the wetland's eastern border will include a covered area with seating. Funding support is provided by a Coastal Impact Assistance Program grant administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department.

## El Franco Lee, Commissioner

Harris County Precinct One  
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### Precinct One Parks' Reservations

All reservations are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Please read the park rules and regulations for reserving pavilions and community buildings prior to making reservations. This information can be found on our website at [hcp1.net/parkreservations](http://hcp1.net/parkreservations).

Refer to the following schedule when making 2015 reservations:

Reservations for the months:	Reservations will be accepted on or after:
April 2015–June 2015	8 a.m. Monday, Jan. 12, 2015
July 2015–Sept. 2015	8 a.m. Monday, March 9, 2015
Oct. 2015–Dec. 2015	8 a.m. Monday, May 11, 2015

For southside reservations, call **713-440-1587**. To reserve Deussen Park and Jordan Community Center, call **281-591-6951**.

### PRECINCT ONE SITES and PHONE NUMBERS

#### REGIONAL OFFICES

El Rio Service Center	713.991.6881
Downtown Office	713.755.6111
El Camino Office Annex	713.741.1096
Kashmere Office "Annex 36"	713.675.0004
Leland Office "Annex 31"	713.697.1104
Neartown Office "Annex 1"	713.755.9300
Hardy Service Center	281.820.5151

#### COMMUNITY CENTERS

Christia Adair Community Center	713.991.6881
Tom Bass Community Center	713-733.3717
Challenger Seven Learning Center	281.332.5157
Deussen Seniors Center	281.454.4108
EFL Community Center	281.464.9708
Finnigan Community Center	713.678.7385
Hardy Seniors Center	281.260.6772
Barbara Jordan Community Center	281.591.6951
Kashmere Office "Annex 36"	713-675.0004
Lincoln Park Community Center	281.445.1617
YET Center @ Finnigan Park	713.676.0519

#### PROGRAM INFORMATION

Aquatics Program	713.748.7333
Discovery Camp Program	281.332.5157
Northeast Adolescent Program	713.673.1655
Seniors Program	713-733.3717
Street Olympics Summer Games	713.741.0851

