## **CY-FAIR EDITION**



# **Cy-Fair's uninsured rate** expected to increase

Texas has the nation's highest percent of residents without health insurance, and because of an unemployment uptick in the wake of the coronavirus, local health care experts said providers are struggling to meet needs and communities can anticipate even higher rates.



## "I DON'T SEE THIS **CONFLICT GOING** AWAY REGARDLESS **OF WHATEVER IS RESOLVED** FOR JULY."

RENEE CROSS, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF THE HOBBY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

## **Debates ensue over voting in Harris County during coronavirus pandemic**

## BY SHAWN ARRAJJ

Efforts to expand access to mail ballots in Texas during the coronavirus have been blocked in several recent court rulings, including a May 27 ruling by the Texas Supreme Court.

However, in that same ruling, Supreme Court justices upheld a piece of voting law that essentially allows voters to decide for themselves

whether they qualify for a mail ballot and said election officials are not obligated to verify those qualifications.

In the May 27 ruling, the Supreme Court agreed with state officials, who argued that a lack of immunity to COVID-19-the disease caused by the coronavirus-did not qualify as a "disability" in and of itself under state law,

**HEALTH CARE SNAPSHOT** 

358.093 

> and therefore was not enough to make a voter eligible for a mail ballot.

> "We agree, of course, that a voter can take into consideration aspects of his health history that are physical conditions in deciding whether, under the circumstances, to apply to vote by mail because of disability," the court wrote. "We disagree that lack of immunity, by itself, is one of them."

> Meanwhile, a separate but similar lawsuit is making its way through federal court, where an appeals court also ruled against expanding mail ballot CONTINUED ON 32

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VOLUME 11, ISSUE 10 | JUNE 16-JULY 20, 2020

| A CLOSER LOOK          | Harris County in 2018.<br>TO |         | nwest<br>TION |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---------|---------------|
|                        | 8%                           | 240,204 |               |
| Younger than 19        | <b>16.8%</b>                 | 481,656 |               |
| 19-64                  |                              | 76,876  |               |
| 65+ 🔷                  |                              | 10,070  |               |
| UNINSURED POPULATION E | BY RACE                      |         |               |
|                        | 12.2%                        | 521,237 |               |
| White                  | 22.6%                        | 216,557 |               |
| Hispanic               | 12.3%                        | 140,075 |               |
| Black                  | 14.2%                        | 137,424 |               |
| Other                  |                              |         |               |
| UNINSURED POPULATION   | BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS         |         |               |
| Employed               | 14.7%                        | 365,154 |               |
| Unemployed             | 35.3%                        | 19,484  |               |
| Not in labor force     | 20.8%                        | 97,018  |               |
| Not in tabol force     |                              |         |               |
| UNINSURED POPULATION E | BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME          |         |               |
| Less than \$25,000     | 22.6%                        | 68,486  |               |
| \$25,000-\$49,999      | 24%                          | 124,906 |               |
|                        | 17.3%                        | 128,199 |               |
| \$50,0000-\$74,999     | 11.2%                        | 118,699 |               |
| \$75,000-\$99,999      | 7%                           | 358 093 |               |

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## WHO WE ARE

John and Jennifer Garrett began Community Impact Newspaper in 2005 in Pflugerville, TX. The company's mission is to build informed citizens and thriving businesses through the collaboration of a passionate team. Today we operate across six metropolitan areas, providing hyperlocal, nonpartisan news produced by our full-time journalists in each community we serve.

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**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS MONTH** 

**THIS ISSUE** 

**FROM KIM:** Since the beginning of 2017, I have been a part of Community Impact Newspaper and am excited to join our Cy-Fair edition as general manager. I am proud to have called Cy-Fair home since 2005. In addition to our mission of letting residents know what is going on in their backyards and helping local businesses grow, our family-owned company's purpose is to be a light for our readers, customers, partners and each other. Be the light for someone today, and as always, thank you for being a valued reader.

Kim Giannetti, GENERAL MANAGER

FROM DANICA: We hope you enjoy this year's Health Care Edition, which takes an in-depth look at the region's uninsured population (see Page 28) and continues to explore how COVID-19 is affecting our neighbors. Despite ongoing challenges from the virus, you will also find announcements of new businesses opening and updates on local projects moving forward.

Danica Lloyd, EDITOR

## THIS ISSUE BY THE NUMBERS









CI

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All content in this print publication, both editorial and advertisements, was up to date as of the press deadline. Due to the fast-changing nature of this event, editorial and advertising information may have changed. Please visit communityimpact.com and advertiser websites for more information.





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NEWS IMPACT



## **NOW OPEN**

**1 The Toasted Yolk** celebrated its grand opening June 15 at 27008 Hwy. 290, Ste. 100, Cypress. The eatery is open from 7 a.m.-3 p.m. daily and serves breakfast, brunch and lunch. Menu items include omelets, pancakes, salads, sandwiches and soups. www.thetoastedyolk.com

2 A new sweets shop opened May 22 at Fairfield Town Center, 28610 Hwy. 290, Cypress. **Sleek Creperie & Cafe** serves savory and sweet crepes with waffles, coffee and gourmet chocolates. 281-213-2108. www.facebook.com/sleekfairfield **3 Which Wich** sandwich shop opened June 1 at Fairfield Town Center, 28902 Hwy. 290, Ste. J-03, Cypress. The eatery serves customizable sandwiches, wraps, salads, fries, cakes and shakes, among other menu items. Catering and delivery services are also available. 832-653-6381. www.whichwich.com

4 Local entrepreneur Jose Morillo opened **Camp Bow Wow** on June 12 at 16641 Telge Road, Cypress. The 8,700-square-foot site features 75 cabins for dogs, eight teacup suites, and five indoor and outdoor play spaces. Services include overnight stays, day camps and a 24-hour monitoring system. Morillo owns TM; © 2020 COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER CO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

two other Camp Bow Wow locations in the Houston area. 281-826-9881. www.campbowwow.com/cypress

**5** The Olive Tree Counseling opened May 1 at 12262 Queenston Blvd., Ste. E, Cypress. The business, run by Kristin Carpenter, offers a full range of mental health services both in office and by teletherapy. The office serves clients age 10 and older and specializes in young adults; caregivers; people with disabilities; and people experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma or grief. Self-pay and insurance are both accepted at the new practice. 281-743-3468. www.theolivetreecounseling.com



COURTESY THE TOASTED YOLK

**6 Pollo Bravo Express** opened June 10 at 6871 N. Fry Road, Katy, at the southwest corner of FM 529. The Peruvian-Mexican restaurant, which has five locations across Houston, specializes in Peruvian-style rotisserie chicken, which is marinated in a mixture of 25 different ingredients. Other menu items include Peruvian-style spaghetti, ceviche and taquitos. www.pollobravoexpress.com

**Mexpozole Restaurant**, an Aztec-inspired Mexican restaurant, opened May 27 at 6871 Fry Road, Ste. 112, Katy, near the FM 529 intersection. The eatery– which is open for dining in, takeout and delivery through Uber Eats–features a range of traditional Mexican dishes and specializes in pozole, a traditional Mexican soup made with hominy and chile peppers. 832-835-7584. www.mexpozolerestaurant.com

8 A new location of the financial services company **Edward Jones** opened May 21 at 17302 House & Hahl Road, Ste. 205, Cypress. The office is run by Eric Reed, who has been with Edward Jones since 2000. Services include wealth management; advice on retirement and college savings; advice on stocks, bonds and mutual funds; and advice for business owners. Edward Jones is also a licensed insurance provider. 281-855-1581. www.edwardjones.com

9 Dr. Urmeel Patel began seeing patients earlier this year at **Millennium Physicians**' new oncology office, located at 27700 Hwy. 290, Ste. 330, Cypress, in the Memorial Hermann Cypress building. Patel is board certified in medical oncology and hematology. 281-440-5006. www.millenniumphysicians.com



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## **COMING SOON**

**10** Construction on a new location of **In-N-Out Burger** is underway at 7611 FM 1960, Houston. Carl Arena, vice president of real estate and development for the company, said in an email that while the store was in "the later stages of construction," officials are not yet announcing an opening date. The California-based burger joint has dozens of locations in Texas and ventured into the Houston area late last year with locations in Katy and Stafford. Along with burgers, fries and shakes are also on the menu. 800-786-1000. www.in-n-out.com

(1) Cypress residents Leanna and David Barton are opening **Play Street Museum** in mid-June at 25712 Hwy. 290, Ste. E, Cypress. The small-format children's museum is designed to encourage young children's imagination and creativity. The farm-themed children's venue features interactive educational exhibits and offers private parties. 281-717-2239. www.playstreetmuseum.com

## RELOCATIONS

12 Dr. Steve Stanton, owner of Houston Podiatry, relocated his business in May from 7905 Hwy. 6 N., Houston, to 9740 Barker Cypress Road, Ste. 108B, Cypress. The office provides services related to sports medicine, pediatric care, geriatric care and wound care, among other areas of podiatry. Officials said the move was needed because the business outgrew its old space, where it had operated for the past 15 years. 281-550-3338. www.houstonpodiatry.com



## **EXPANSIONS**

**13** Master-planned community **Amira** is adding 113 acres of property to its development at 20508 Mueschke Road, Tomball. The added land will equate to an additional 400 new homes in the community, according to a May 18 news release. Johnson Development opened Amira last fall and has thus far sold 175 homes, officials said. Prices start at \$220,000 for floor plans by developer Beazer Homes and at \$240,000 for floor plans by developer Perry Homes. www.amiratexas.com

Cypress residents Stanley and Ashley Anemelu recently added new features to their mobile application **LocalServes**, which offers pictorial menus for restaurants throughout the Cy-Fair area and beyond. During the coronavirus pandemic they added the ability for restaurants to indicate their ordering and delivery options. The app also offers an alternative to physical menus in restaurants, officials said. www.localserves.com

## **IN THE NEWS**

14 Howard Hughes Corp. announced May 21 that Cy-Fair ISD officials finalized the purchase of a 16.7-acre plot of land in the master-planned community for **Elementary School No. 57**, which is slated to open in time for the 2022-23 academic year. Construction of the 120,000-square-foot, two-story campus is included in the \$1.2 billion bond passed in 2014. The school will be located off Tuckerton Road near Fry Road in the Parkland Village neighborhood. Officials said the new campus will hold 1,092 stu-



## **FEATURED IMPACT**

## **COMING SOON**

Jersey Village Mayor Andrew Mitcham said he plans to open **Senate Avenue Brewing Co.** in late June or early July at 16000 Dillard Drive, Ste. F, Jersey Village. The 4,800-square-foot facility will have 12 craft beers on tap; patio games; a large green space for children; and a full kitchen serving pizza, burgers and seafood, among other items.

Mitcham said the business will be open for lunch and dinner daily as well as brunch on the weekends.

The Jersey Village native said he is excited to bring a unique business to the city that can cater both to its retired population and young families moving to the area.

"I've been involved in the local

dents, and attendance boundaries will be determined in late 2021 or early 2022.

## CLOSINGS

**15** Acute Workshop announced on Facebook on May 10 that the DIY studio will close its 20510 West Road, Ste. 100, Cypress, location permanently. Acute Workshop opened in July 2018 and offered classes for adults and children to decorate signs, centerpiece boxes, serving trays, canvas pillows and other community since I was a kid, and just over the years that I've been involved, there has always been a lack of quality restaurants and community gathering spaces," he said. "The byproduct is people have conversations and they learn about each other, and it makes for a better community. That's a direct reflection of what craft beer can do for a community."

www.facebook.com/senateave



projects. 281-386-0396. www.acuteworkshop.com

**(16) Crystal Bay Designs** closed in mid-March due to the coronavirus outbreak, and owners Kevin and Erica Ryan said in an April 20 Facebook post they will not reopen its doors at 11438 Cypress North Houston Road, Cypress. However, the business will continue operating online, according to the post. The website offers iron-on transfers, glitters and rhinestones, among other design elements. www.crystalbaydesigns.com







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Damion Smith | Cancer Survivor

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## **TRANSPORTATION UPDATES**

## Texas Central wins court case over eminent domain

## BY SHAWN ARRAJJ

A key decision in a lawsuit affecting plans for a high-speed rail line connecting Houston to Dallas was handed down May 7 when the Texas 13th Court of Appeals determined Texas Central, the company planning the rail line, to be legally recognized as a railroad company in Texas.

Plaintiffs in the case–James Miles v. Texas Central–said they plan to appeal it to the Texas Supreme Court.

The decision, provided it is not reversed by the Supreme Court, allows Texas Central to use eminent domain to obtain land where the line will run. Some landowners along the proposed route—including plaintiff James Miles, who lives in Leon County—have refused to sell their land to Texas Central, making the future of the rail uncertain.

Eminent domain involves the taking of private property for public use, even against the will of the owner. Only particular entities are allowed to use it under state law, including railroad companies. Officials with Texas Central have previously said they only intend to use eminent domain as "a last resort" and would compensate landowners fairly.

Miles, who won his case at trial court in 2019, argued Texas Central is not operating a railroad because it does not own any trains and has not constructed any tracks, among other issues. In her ruling, appeals court Judge Nora Longoria reversed the trial court decision.



Longoria wrote that her decision was based on the language of the Texas Transportation Code and the intention of the state lawmakers who wrote it.

"Miles's interpretation would have this court ignore the Legislature's instruction ... by limiting the word 'operating' to solely the present tense. We decline to do so," Longoria wrote.

Texas Central CEO Carlos Aguilar lauded the decision.

"This decision is rooted in state law that allows survey access and use of eminent domain by railroads, pipelines, electrical lines and other industries that provide for the public good and a strong economy," he said in a statement. "This decision confirms our status as an operating railroad and allows us to continue moving forward with our permitting process and all of our other design, engineering and land acquisition efforts."

In a statement, Miles' attorney Blake Beckham said the ruling creates a "wild, wild west" of eminent domain authority in Texas.

"This court of appeals ruling has only strengthened our resolve to keep fighting to protect not only our property but the private property rights of all Texans," Miles and Beckham said in a statement.

Initial hopes among Texas Central leadership were to break ground in 2020 and be operational in five to six years. The company laid off 28 employees during the coronavirus pandemic, but officials said they are still working through the approval process with the Federal Railroad Administration.

In the wake of the outbreak, some state and federal lawmakers have lobbied federal transportation officials to suspend the review process for the project. Texas Central officials estimate the project will cost \$20 billion, money they said will be raised through private investment. Opponents said that funding is not likely to be raised while the pandemic is ongoing.



**PROJECT UPDATES** 

## Hwy. 6 bridge construction

The Texas Department of Transportation is building a four-lane flyover bridge that will connect Hwy. 6 and FM 1960 over Hwy. 290 from North Eldridge Parkway to Copper Grove Boulevard.

The project is on track to be done by late 2020 with most related lane closures running through November.

Timeline: September 2019-late 2020

Cost: \$41.4 million

Funding source: TxDOT

## METRO REOPENS PARK & RIDE FACILITIES ON LIMITED BASIS



The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County reopened park and ride facilities May 18 along all major freeway corridors to downtown Houston. Services operate from 5-9 a.m. for inbound trips and from 3 -7 p.m. for outbound trips. Buses are scheduled to pick up passengers approximately every 15 minutes. Park and ride routes serving the Texas Medical Center will continue operating on a regular weekday schedule.

ALL INFORMATION ON THIS PAGE WAS UPDATED AS OF MAY 27. NEWS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE OR OTHER LOCAL TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS? EMAIL US AT CYFNEWS@COMMUNITYIMPACT.COM.

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## **EDUCATION**



# Preliminary CFISD budget includes \$1 billion in expenses

## BY DANICA LLOYD

Cy-Fair ISD could see up to a \$44.9 million shortfall in fiscal year 2020-21 with teacher salary raises and additional funding for coronavirus response efforts, Chief Financial Officer Karen Smith said May 11.

"The deficit assumes all positions will be filled, all budgeted funds will be spent, tax collections will slightly decrease [and] average daily attendance will be less and includes additional one-time funding for COVID-19 of \$10 million," she said.

Board members adopted a \$992.3 million budget for FY 2019-20 with a \$27.5 million deficit. However, Smith said she anticipates a balanced budget by the end of FY 2019-20.

## **Budget considerations**

Smith said she anticipates about \$995.8 million in revenue next year. The budget includes \$1.02 billion in expenses and a \$24.5 million shortfall before pay increases, for which the board will choose between two options.

The first option is implementing a one-time payment of \$500 or \$1,000 into the base salary for all employees for \$12.3 million. The second option involves these one-time payments and increasing salaries by 1% for an additional \$8.1 million.

"Although this would increase the estimated budget deficit to \$44.9 million, the district has a healthy fund balance and has not realized prior budget deficits," Smith said.

CFISD has a current fund balance of \$518.7 million, or about 6 1/2 months in expenses, she said.

Additionally, hiring teachers and paraprofessionals to accommodate enrollment growth will cost CFISD about \$11.6 million.

One of the biggest changes the school district will face in the upcoming academic year is adapting services as needed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The preliminary budget was built understanding that there will be additional cost to keep our employees and students safe, provide our students the resources for various learning options and to provide remediation due to lost instruction," Smith said.

The board of trustees is expected to adopt the FY 2020-21 budget at the June 15 board meeting.

## **NEWS BRIEFS**

# Group gives update on creek quality

## BY SHAWN ARRAJJ

A group working to improve water quality along Cypress Creek revealed some preliminary solutions at a May 29 virtual meeting, including reducing pet waste along the creek and improving area sewer systems.

The group, Cypress Creek Watershed Partnership, has been working to identify pollution sources—namely fecal matter—along the creek since last July. If unaddressed, water quality is likely to continue to deteriorate as the area becomes more developed, which would have negative effects on health, the environment and the economy, said Justin Bower, a senior planner with the Houston-Galveston Area Council who is overseeing the partnership's work.

The partnership is aiming to reduce pollution levels by varying degrees spanning 64%-74% at different segments along the creek. On May 29, officials revealed the vast majority of pollution—about 75%—can be attributed to pet waste. "Overall what we're trying to do is change the behaviors of pet owners," Bower said. "A big part of what we need to do is make people more aware of the negative impacts of pet waste and the role they have in that."

Possible solutions include more pet waste stations, increasing the number of dog parks and existing capacity, and looking to homeowners associations and apartment complexes to help with enforcement, Bower said. Solutions would be targeted at the more developed parts of Cypress Creek, largely focusing on downstream areas but also including master-planned communities upstream.

Although sewer systems only account for about 4% of creek pollution, Bower said they are still of concern because human waste has more severe health consequences, especially in instances where a system overflows into a neighborhood.

## TxDOT reversing Hwy. 249 ramps

BY HANNAH ZEDAKER

The Texas Department of Transportation began a three-month project April 20 to reverse the Hwy. 249 northbound entrance and exit ramps between Jones and Spring Cypress roads.

According to TxDOT Public Information Officer Danny Perez, the \$2.6 million project will reverse the existing entrance/exit ramp configuration to an exit/entrance configuration by shifting the new exit ramp south of the current entrance ramp. Perez said the project aims to ease traffic congestion the interchange's current design facilitates.

Perez said the project is expected to eliminate the queue back onto the main lanes for drivers exiting to Spring Cypress Road. The project also includes restriping the Hwy. 249 northbound frontage road approach to Chasewood Park Drive.

## **HWY.249 RAMP REVERSAL**

The project will reverse the existing entrance/exit ramp configuration to an exit/entrance configuration.



**Funding source:** Texas Department of Transportation

SOURCE: TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION/ COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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# John Ogletree: George Floyd's death a 'watershed moment'

## BY DANICA LLOYD

Between graduation ceremonies for Cy-Fair ISD's class of 2020, school board member and First Metropolitan Church's senior pastor John Ogletree attended a June 2 march in downtown Houston honoring George Floyd, the black man who was killed in the custody of the Minneapolis Police Department on May 25.

"I felt the need to be present in the protest in Houston because I believe the murder of George Floyd is a watershed moment in our country on the issue of injustice and police brutality," he said. "I went there to let it be known that I'm a part of what I would call righteous indignation over what happened to George Floyd."

Alongside tens of thousands, Ogletree said he marched for justice and in hopes that those in positions of authority would recognize the rights endowed to all Americans in the Declaration of Independence—the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He said his fellow protestors included individuals of all races and religious backgrounds unified in the same purpose.

"[Floyd's] cry of 'I can't breathe' is really a metaphor for every black, brown, Asian, Jew, every immigrant, every person in poverty ... basically everybody's saying 'I want to breathe," Ogletree said. "I want to be able to get a job and not be looked at for the color of my skin. If I've been speeding or you suspect me of a crime, treat me like you would treat a white gentleman from River Oaks." Ogletree said his experience



John Ogletree is a member of the Cy-Fair ISD board of trustees and the senior pastor of First Metropolitan Church in Cy-Fair. (Courtesy Cy-Fair ISD)

protesting for justice dates back to his time as a student at the University of Texas at Arlington. The school's mascot from 1951-1971 was the rebels, and at every football game the mascot would ride out on a horse waving a Confederate flag when the team scored a touchdown.

Ogletree said black Americans still deal with discrimination from their white neighbors who largely do not understand what African-Americans have experienced in the past as well as the present.

# Cy-Fair ISD to continue serving curbside meals through August

## BY DANICA LLOYD

Cy-Fair ISD will continue serving meals curbside to children 18 years and younger throughout the summer until school returns in August, officials said.

Since the program began March 16, the school district has served more than 800,000 meals at no cost to local families.

Students can access meals from any campus listed regardless of

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where they are enrolled. Nineteen campuses are offering breakfast and lunch from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. during the summer, according to district information.

Parents can bring their children to the pickup sites or bring their children's student ID to receive one breakfast and one lunch for each child through a contactless pickup process. For more information, visit www.cfisd.net.

| CURBSIDE CAN  |   | g 19 campuses are offering<br>o children 18 and younger<br>:he summer.  |
|---|---|---|
| Elementary schools  | Middle schools  | High schools  |
| <ul> <li>Bane</li> <li>Danish</li> <li>Francone</li> <li>Frazier</li> <li>Holbrook</li> <li>Kirk</li> <li>Matzke</li> <li>Walker</li> </ul> | <ul> <li>Anthony</li> <li>Arnold</li> <li>Goodson</li> <li>Kahla</li> <li>Thornton</li> <li>Truitt</li> </ul> | <ul> <li>Cypress Creek</li> <li>Cypress Lakes</li> <li>Cypress Ridge</li> <li>Cypress Springs</li> <li>Langham Creek</li> </ul> |

SOURCE: CY-FAIR ISD/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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## **CITY & COUNTY**

# **COVID-19 testing center opens in Cy-Fair, offers free testing**

## BY DANICA LLOYD

**HARRIS COUNTY** COVID-19 testing centers that previously operated in Baytown and Katy moved to new sites in Pasadena and Cy-Fair on June 1, according to a press release.

May 30 was the last day of operations for the Goose Creek CISD Stallworth Stadium and Katy ISD Legacy Stadium locations. Services began June 1 at San Jacinto College Central, 8060 Spencer Hwy., Pasadena, and Pridgeon Stadium, 11355 Falcon Road, Houston.

These two new sites have the capacity to test up to 750 individuals daily—up from 500 at the previous locations. Appointments are required. The county continues to operate a total of six testing locations, where up to 1,700 residents can access testing each day.



## **PRIDGEON STADIUM**

11355 Falcon Road, Houston

Learn more and sign up for free testing at www.covcheck.hctx.net. Residents who believe they have COVID-19 can take a self-assessment online or call 832-927-7575.

## HIGHLIGHTS

JERSEY VILLAGE The city pool reopened May 30 after temporarily closing in late March.

HARRIS COUNTY Applications for the county's \$30 million COVID-19 relief fund opened June 11 to underserved residents.

## **MEETINGS WE COVER** Livestreams can be accessed via websites.

Jersey Village City Council will meet at 7 p.m. on July 20. 713-466-2100. www.jerseyvillage.info

Harris County Commissioners Court will meet at 10 a.m. on June 30. 713-698-1102. www.harriscountytx.gov

## As hurricane season nears, Harris County reworks 2018 flood bond plans

## BY SHAWN ARRAJJ

HARRIS COUNTY In addition to merging several projects and reworking cost estimates, Harris County Flood Control District officials announced May 20 four new projects, including the creation of watershed-spanning implementation plans in Cedar and Halls bayous.

"Our intent in updating the bond project list is to be transparent about our work and include more detailed information as it is available. We intend to build every project originally included on the bond project list," HCFCD Executive Director Russ Poppe said in a statement. "Going forward, we will update this list semiannually."

Plans for Halls Bayou, which runs through the northeastern part of the county, were added as a locally funded project after another project on the district's original list did not get approved for funding from the Army Corps of Engineers, according to the May 20 release. The project will be managed by a "bond implementation manager," who will use the local share of funding set aside for the original project, about \$48 million, for efforts to acquire right of way and carry out design and construction efforts.

The efforts are intended to remove as many as 2,800 homes from a portion of the 100-year flood plain in Halls Bayou, according to the release.

In Cedar Bayou, located in the east central part of Harris County, the implementation plan will include efforts to coordinate multiple different flood projects, including stormwater conveyance along Adlong Ditch, the construction of a stormwater detention basin near the Coastal Water Authority canals and I-10, and wetland restoration. A total of \$9.2 million has been set aside for the effort, redirected from other projects in the watershed where costs were reduced.

The district also opted to merge some projects. Twenty watershed storm repair projects were merged into one project, as were 17 projects to buy and clear flood-prone properties and 16 projects involving subdivision drainage to make managing the project more efficient, according to the release.

As such, the number of bond projects fell from 237 to 181, officials said. As of late March, a total of 136 of those projects were active, and eight were completed.

Of the 37 remaining projects, 19 are slated to launch between November 2020 and July 2021, and 18 will be launched between July 2021 and March 2022.

The district has spent about \$257 million while securing about \$678 million in partner funding.



Work targets flood-prone areas. (Shawn Arrajj/Community Impact Newspaper)

## Flood control district BOND PROJECT STATUS

Here is a summary of bond projects as of March 2020:

136 active

8 completed

**19** to start between November 2020-July 2021

**18** to start between July 2021-March 2022

SOURCE: HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## Jersey Meadow experiences busiest month in decades in May

## **BY SHAWN ARRAJJ**

JERSEY VILLAGE Located on Rio Grande Street in the city of Jersey Village, Jersey Meadow Golf Course was completely closed in late March and remained closed for the entire month of April due to the coronavirus pandemic, said Matt Jones, who serves as head golf professional at the course. After reopening May 1, Jones said the course was on par for its best month in May at least since the city assumed ownership in early 2000.

"It hasn't been this busy probably ever," Jones said in a May 26 phone interview. "We're at our maximum. We can't get any busier."

Through May 26, the golf course had brought in about \$184,500 for the month of May, Jones said. By comparison, in May 2019, the golf course raised about \$138,000. In the 2008-09 fiscal year, which Jones said was the best in the course's recorded history, about \$184,000 was raised in May.

The record-setting revenue comes as Jones said they are limiting the number of tee times per hour. People are only allowed to play in groups of four, and instead of having tee times every eight minutes, they have been spread out to every 12 minutes, Jones said.

Additionally, only four people are allowed in the golf pro shop at one

time, and only one rider is allowed per golf cart while golfing, he said. Carts are sanitized and completely washed down in between uses.

The city also approved the purchase of new golf carts earlier in the year, each equipped with a GPS monitoring system and digital scoring, which Jones said removes the need for pencils and score cards. Staff also outfitted each hole with a PVC pipe that keeps golf balls from sinking more than 1 inch into the hole, so golfers are not reaching into the same holes throughout the day, he said. COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER IS PROUD TO SAY THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

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## CY-FAIR

## **HEALTH CARE SNAPSHO**

COMPILED BY SHAWN ARRAJJ & DANICA LLOYD

## **HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR COUNTY?**

These rankings are updated annually but include data from previous years. There are other factors included that are not listed below.

## **HEALTH OUTCOMES INCLUDE:**

## • LENGTH OF LIFE

• QUALITY OF LIFE, such as the number of poor mental and physical health days reported

## **HEALTH FACTORS INCLUDE:**

- HEALTH BEHAVIORS, such as smoking, obesity, physical activity, excessive drinking, alcohol-impaired driving deaths, sexually transmitted infections and teen births
- CLINICAL CARE, including health insurance coverage; number of physicians, dentists and mental health providers; preventable hospital stays; and flu vaccinations
- SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS, such as educational attainment levels, children in poverty, income inequality and violent crimes
- PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT FACTORS, such as air pollution, drinking water violations, housing problems and long commutes



Harris County is among the bottom

factors, which includes poverty and education, and physical environment, which includes air quality and commuting.

quarter of counties for socioeconomic

## Harris County

**2020 STATEWIDE HEALTH CARE RANKINGS** (out of 244 counties)

| HEALTH OUTCOMES  | 32  |
|------------------|-----|
| Length of life   | 23  |
| Quality of life  | 68  |
| HEALTH FACTORS   | 151 |
| Health behaviors | 72  |
| Clinical care    | 64  |
| Socioeconomic    | 190 |
|                  |     |

## HARRIS COUNTY: PHYSICIANS AND NURSES

The county has added over 2,400 nurses and 180 primary care physicians since 2017, but it lags in rankings because of the county's growing population.

| <b>REGISTERED NURSES</b> |
|--------------------------|
| Total registered nurses  |
| 2017 <b>43,487</b>       |
| 2018 44,782              |
| 2019 <b>45,946</b>       |
| Per 100,000<br>residents |
| 2017 <b>938.5</b>        |
| 2018 949.5               |
| 2019 <b>940.1</b>        |
| State rank               |
| 2017 27                  |
| 2018 27                  |
| 2019 30                  |
|                          |



Cases per 100,000 residents







## **CY-FAIR CASES PER ZIP CODE**

Hundreds of cases of the new coronavirus have been identified in local ZIP codes.

**CASES AS OF JUNE 8** CASES KEY: 77040 147 40-79 80-119 77064 161 120-159 77065 72 160+ 77070 125 77095 117 77429 167 77433 177



SOURCES: ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN POPULATION HEALTH INSTITUTE, COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS. ORG. TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES, HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

All coronavirus data is up to date as of press time June 9. For updated coronavirus data and information, go to community impact.com.

March 8-March 14 8

March 15-March 21 43 March 22-March 28 418 March 29-April 4 839

April 5-April 11 2,277

April 12-April 18 1,092

April 26-May 2 1,080

May 3-May 9 1,075

May 31-June 6 2,203

1,323

1,644

1.450

April 19-April 25 975

May 10-May 16

May 17-May 23

May 24-May 30

## HOSPITALS

## Health Care Edition 2020



## Memorial Hermann Cypress Hospital

## COMPILED BY DANICA LLOYD

## 1 CHI St. Luke's Health–The Vintage Hospital

20171 Chasewood Park Drive, Houston 832-534-5000 www.chistlukeshealth.org/ locations/vintage-hospital

- Trauma level: N/A
- NICU level: II
- Total number of employees: 420
- Number of beds: 65
- Number of beds dedicated to coronavirus patients: none
- New programs, expansions: none

## 2 HCA Houston Healthcare North Cypress

21214 Hwy. 290, Cypress 832-912-3500 www.hcahoustonhealthcare.com/ locations/north-cypress

• Trauma level: N/A



- NICU level: N/A
- Total number of employees: 1,400
- Number of beds: 163
- Number of beds dedicated to coronavirus patients: none
- New programs, expansions: adding full-time neurosurgical coverage in September

## **3** Houston Methodist Willowbrook Hospital

18220 Hwy. 249, Houston 281-737-2500 www.houstonmethodist.org/willowbrook

• Trauma level: N/A

- NICU level: III
- Total number of employees: 3,147
- Number of beds: 312
- Number of beds dedicated to coronavirus patients: 94 with 18
- additional beds if needed • New programs, expansions: ongoing expansion of women's services; a medical/surgical unit with 36 additional beds opened in February; new facilities will open in July in the Towne Lake neighborhood in Cypress; a dedicated physical therapy and breast care center in the works for Tuckerton and Towne Lake Parkway

## 4 Memorial Hermann Cypress Hospital

27800 Hwy. 290, Cypress 346-231-4000 www.memorialhermann.org/cypress

- Trauma level: III
- NICU level: ||
- Total number of employees: 583
- Number of beds: 105
- Number of beds dedicated to coronavirus patients: N/A
- New programs, expansions: in pursuit of Bariatric Center of Excellence, Joint Commission Chest Pain Designation and Breast Center of Excellence

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## **CORONAVIRUS**

## Health Care Edition 2020

# Health systems examine plasma transfusion for COVID-19 treatment

BY DANICA LLOYD & BEN THOMPSON

Several Greater Houston-area health systems are investigating whether a decades-old plasma transfusion therapy may be a safe and effective method to treat COVID-19 patients.

The therapy involves the transfer of plasma from donors who have recovered from confirmed infections of COVID-19 to patients currently infected from COVID-19. The experimental treatment is under evaluation as a possible method to enhance immune responses of COVID-19 patients using the antibodies found in the blood of recovered donors, according to researchers at area hospitals.

The therapy was recently applied in a clinical trial of 25 Houston Methodist patients with severe cases of COVID-19. The hospital said the trial was the first in the nation used for COVID-19 patients.

While not yet approved in the U.S. for widespread treatment of COVID-19, the Houston Methodist researchers noted the therapy has been used in past viral outbreaks as far back as the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic and saw recent success in a small sampling of COVID-19 patients in Wuhan, China. Dr. Eric Salazar, an assistant professor of pathology and genomic medicine at the Houston Methodist Research Institute and the principal investigator on the Houston Methodist trial, noted results from a study on a national 5,000-patient trial released May 14 also suggested the treatment is safe.

Houston Methodist's initial trial was aimed at determining the safety of the therapy and ran from March 28-April 14. Each of the 25 participants received a 300 milliliter transfusion of convalescent plasma and were monitored for two weeks.

Researchers found 36% of the trial participants experienced clinical improvements one week after their transfusions and 76% of the participants had improved or were discharged after 14 days.

The treatment alone was not credited for improvements or recoveries.

"We knew Houston Methodist had the ability to implement a convalescent plasma donor program, and



Houston Methodist researchers conducted a 25-patient trial in March and April to examine the safety of convalescent plasma transfusions as a possible treatment for COVID-19. (Courtesy Houston Methodist)

given the lack of targeted treatment options, we felt it was our responsibility to pursue this as rapidly as possible," Salazar said.

Including the clinical trial, Salazar said nearly 100 Houston Methodist patients received a convalescent plasma transfusion and nearly 70 were discharged from the hospital as of May 21.

## **Regional efforts**

Similar work is also underway at other hospitals in the region. Thirteen hospitals within HCA Healthcare's Gulf Coast Division are participating in a national study to determine if plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients could benefit those currently hospitalized due to the virus.

Those who tested positive for the coronavirus and have since tested negative can donate plasma through the American Red Cross and other donation centers. Officials have encouraged eligible volunteers to donate plasma since early May as part of the study being led by the Mayo Clinic and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"We are proud to take part in this important study," Chief Medical Officer Mujtaba Ali-Khan said in a statement. "We are asking for the help of our community to spread awareness about plasma donation for patients facing COVID-19 not only in Houston, South Texas and Corpus Christi, but also around the world."

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and Memorial Hermann also announced their physicians were investigating the experimental treatment in April. In a statement, the organizations requested plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients and said the donation process for those who qualify is similar to a standard blood donation.

"This is one way for the community to work together to combat COVID-19," said Dr. Henry Wang, a professor and executive vice chair of research in the Department of Emergency Medicine with McGovern Medical School at UTHealth, in the statement.



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## **CORONAVIRUS**

# **Cy-Fair health care workers adapt** to changes from COVID-19

## **BY SHAWN ARRAJJ**

Dr. Anastasia Gentles said she has worked diligently at her Cypress-area pediatric urgent care clinic over the past few months to adapt to shifting needs caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Gentles, who runs Night Light Pediatric Urgent Care on Hwy. 290 in Cypress, said all of the changes have been part of an effort to ensure the safety of her patients. Changes have included using a lot more personal protective equipment, enforcing a stricter sanitation regimen, requiring patients to wait in their cars and rethinking how and when to conduct appointments by telemedicine.

"The biggest change is we see a lot more patients online using telemedicine," Gentles said. "We've been doing telemedicine for a year, but we've been a little more lax on what we treat with it."

However, Gentles said telemedicine cannot be used in every situation, and each patient she sees involves weighing the risk of that child coming into her office against the benefits of being able to see them in person. Ear infections, for example, can be difficult to treat virtually. It is especially important for babies, in particular to be looked at in-person, she said.

"Now the risk is less when they come in because of all the PPE and measures we've put into place," Gentles said. "[Telemedicine] was very underutilized before the pandemic, and it's probably over utilized now, so we have to come to a happy medium."

Dr. Urmeel Patel, a medical oncologist and hematologist who works out of two Millennium Physicians offices in the Cy-Fair area, said his practice has also been using telemedicine more. Patel, like Gentles, said telemedicine has both advantages and limitations.

In oncology, telemedicine can be used for patients who can be monitored safely, but any delay in screenings or biopsies can have serious consequences, Patel said.

"A delay in diagnosis could potentially result in seeing an uptick in regards to the number of later stage diseases," he said. "That is a concern I have as an oncologist."

## **Financial concerns**

Another side effect of the pandemic, Gentles said, is that she is worried about the long-term financial consequences on her practice.

In an online survey of 1,548 Texas physicians conducted by the Texas Medical Association between May 4-11, 26% said their practice's revenue has decreased by 76%-100%, while 32% said their revenue decreased by 51%-75%. A total of 68% of respondents said their work hours were reduced, while 62% said their salaries were reduced.

Dr. Chris Blume, a dentist who owns four locations of Active Life Dentistry in Cy-Fair, said the long-term financial health of his business is a concern. For roughly two months, he said

# **Local reactions**

Health care workers and business owners in the Cy-Fair area have had to adjust their practices during the coronavirus pandemic.

[TELEMEDICINE] WAS VERY UNDERUTILIZED BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, AND IT'S PROBABLY OVER UTILIZED NOW, SO WE HAVE TO COME TO A HAPPY MEDIUM."

DR. ANASTASIA GENTLES, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER WITH NIGHT LIGHT PEDIATRIC URGENT CARE





WE'RE BACK UP TO AROUND 75% [REVENUE] NOW, BUT IF THERE'S ANOTHER SURGE IN THE FALL, THAT COULD BE DEVASTATING FOR US AND A LOT OF OTHER SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS."

> DR. CHRIS BLUME, DENTAL PRACTITIONER AND **OWNER OF ACTIVE LIFE DENTISTRY**

A DELAY IN DIAGNOSIS COULD POTENTIALLY RESULT IN SEEING AN UPTICK IN REGARDS TO THE NUMBER OF LATER-STAGE DISEASES. THAT IS A CONCERN I HAVE AS AN ONCOLOGIST."



DR. URMEEL PATEL, MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST AND HEMATOLOGIST WITH MILLENNIUM PHYSICIANS

state law required him to focus solely on emergency procedures, which reduced revenue to 25%.

"We're back up to around 75% now, but if there's another surge in the fall, that could be devastating for us and a lot of other small business owners," Blume said.

Blume said he is following guidelines issued by the Texas State Dental Board, but he said many of the precautions other businesses have had to put in place-such as wearing masks and enhanced cleaning-were things dentists were already doing. Blume said he wants people to know they can feel comfortable coming in for appointments.

"People need dental care," he said. "That's why we're on every corner."



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## COMPILED BY BEN THOMPSON

Decuised Jen

AMBULANCE

# AMBULANCE AWARENESS

Navigating ambulance services for the first time in the heat of an emergency can be a stressful experience. While no two people or medical situations are the same, there are several general guidelines Texans can follow to prepare themselves for an unexpected medical emergency.

## **HAVE AN EMERGENCY?**

## Follow these steps



If someone experiences something that requires immediate medical attention, call 911.



Answer the dispatcher's questions, and follow his or her instructions.

Do not hang up until they do.

## If possible, prepare the home for medical workers.

- Move furniture and pets away from access points.
- Turn on outside lights, and make sure the home address is visible.

Open the front door, and have someone ready to meet emergency responders.

Administer treatment such as CPR until FMS arrives.

## In the ambulance







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## **HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?**

Ambulance rides can range from \$200-\$300 to thousands of dollars depending on the services performed and distance traveled.

## Confirm costs

- Many ambulance riders' trips are covered by their insurance. Check insurance policies or call insurance companies to confirm coverage.
- Call the local ambulance service or hospital district to confirm their costs, and start a personal relationship with the organization.
- If the bill is unaffordable, contact the ambulance service and work out a payment plan.

## WHEN WILL THEY ARRIVE?

Ambulance crews are expected to respond to calls within certain time frames based on the severity of an incident and its location. EMS teams must follow time guidance at least 90% of the time.

## **RESPONSE TIMES IN MINUTES**

|          | <b>Priority 1</b><br>most<br>severe | <b>Priority 2</b><br>moderately<br>severe | Priority 3<br>least<br>severe |
|----------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| URBAN    | 9:59                                | 11:59                                     | 15:59                         |
| SUBURBAN | 11:59                               | 13:59                                     | 17:59                         |
| RURAL    | 14:59                               | 15:59                                     | 19:59                         |
| FRONTIER | 16:59                               | 18:59                                     | 22:59                         |

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Ambulances are called once every 7 seconds on average in Texas.

## STATEWIDE STAFF

Texas employs thousands of emergency medical services workers.

EMS providers 748

First responder organizations **(**):

## **67.904** EMS personnel in the state

**Emergency medical technicians** 34.664

**EMT-paramedics** 19.876

Licensed paramedics 7,725

Advanced EMTs 3.406

**Emergency care attendants** 

2,233

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Ambulances may not display lights and sirens when responding to calls. It does not mean the call is any more or less important.

SOURCES: JOSEPH W. SCHMIDER, DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES STATE EMS DIRECTOR; JAMES CAMPBELL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT CHIEF OF EMS/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEW





## **HOW IT WORKS**

Contact tracing is a disease control method that involves identifying, testing and isolating those who are sick.



After a person gets infected with the coronavirus, the number of new people who catch the disease from that person varies based on how many people they came into contact with while infected.



A contact tracer will reach out to a person once the positive test result is confirmed to verify who they came into contact with leading up to the infection.



31

The sick individual must remain isolated for 14 days to prevent further spread of the disease. In the meantime, the contact tracer reaches out to each person the original sick person came into contact with.



Those contacts will be asked about their symptoms and urged to be tested for the coronavirus.



51

If any contact tests positive, the process is repeated, and a new group of contacts is notified for any new positive results. The process continues, and all newly confirmed positive cases are told to self-isolate.

SOURCES: HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT, U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



# Cy-Fair uninsured rates to grow following layoffs

BY DANICA LLOYD & ANNA LOTZ

Many of the 34,000 Cy-Fair residents who filed for unemployment benefits between mid-March and mid-May this year are joining the community's uninsured population, which included about 51,000 residents in 2018, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Texas has the highest percentage of residents without health insurance in the nation at 17.4%, compared to the U.S. average of 9.4%, according to 2018 census estimates. This amounts to 4.76 million uninsured Texans.

Arts and entertainment, food services, construction and retail are northwest Harris County's employment sectors with the highest rate of uninsured workers, according to the census. Such industries were also hit hardest at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and continue to face layoffs, according to Texas Workforce Commission data.

Economy experts and local community leaders said they anticipate higher uninsured rates to follow the region's spike in unemployment.

"Of the people that are coming for help right now, whatever their situation, there are so many people right now who have never needed assistance before," said Janet Ryan, the director of development for Cypress Assistance Ministries, which supports Cy-Fair's unemployed population, families in financial crisis and other individuals in need.

Health care and policy experts also point to Texas' hesitancy to expand Medicaid eligibility—as outlined by the Affordable Care Act—as a contributor to the state's large uninsured population. According to a report from the independent health care information nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation, 1.5 million currently uninsured nonelderly adults would be covered if the state expanded eligibility.

"If we were to do Medicaid expansion right now, we would not only pick up a million and half of those adults who are already uninsured, but potentially the million or more who may have found

# BARRIERS TO ADEQUATE CARE

Harris County Public Health partner agencies reported in 2019 the top conditions affecting health as well as the challenges to addressing health issues in the county in 2019.



Diabetes and obesity Mental health Cardiovascular health Chronic disease Infectious disease Respiratory disease



Availability Affordability Prevention resources and funding Accessibility Infrastructure of partnerships Political barriers, including to Medicaid expansion

SOURCE: HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH'S HEALTH STUDIES COMMUNITY HEALTH SURVEY/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## CY-FAIR? S EALT Ή $\mathcal{M}$ Despite the rate of uninsured residents in Cy-Fair, the community as a whole is slightly healthier than the average Harris County resident. **6-29%** of Cypress of adults in Cy-Fair of adults in of Cy-Fair ISD is the average life expectancy residents delay have diabetes. Cv-Fair are obese. students are at doctor visits. high risk of obesity. in Cy-Fair.

SOURCES: THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S HEALTH OF HOUSTON SURVEY, TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY, HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH'S HEALTH STUDIES COMMUNITY HEALTH SURVEY/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

themselves on the uninsured rolls in the last month or so would have an option," said Anne Dunkelberg, the associate director of the Austin-based Center for Public Policy Priorities.

## **COVID-19 complications**

Residents without health insurance in Cy-Fair may be eligible for treatment at community-based clinics that charge uninsured individuals on a sliding scale based on their family size and income, such as the Spring Branch Community Health Center's Cy-Fair location on Westgreen Boulevard.

SBCHC CEO Marlen Trujillo said most patients in the network of clinics qualify for federal assistance.

The clinics offer medical, dental and behavioral health services. Case managers also help patients determine if they are eligible for resources such as Medicaid or Medicare.

"A big part of it is not knowing how to navigate our health care system because our health care system is a bit complicated," she said.

The process of walking patients through their options became even more complicated when the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Not only did virtual doctor visits become more prominent, but the assistance qualification work that would typically be done in person moved to phone calls and emails. Trujillo said it was a challenge to do so remotely.

SBCHC offers COVID-19 testing at its Spring Branch clinic, and Trujillo said she is working with city and county officials to expand testing. But even more than a lack of access to testing, a lack of understanding of the virus's severity is hurting low-income



## Health Care Edition 2020



The Kaiser Family Foundation, an independent health care information nonprofit, outlined who would become eligible for health insurance if Texas were to expand Medicaid eligibility.

Expanding Medicaid in Texas would make **1.5 million** uninsured nonelderly adults eligible for coverage.

68% of the expanded population would be childless adults, a group not currently covered. 3 IN 4

would be in a family with at least one worker.

Medicaid in Texas currently may apply to low-income:

parents or caretakers of children

- Image: Pregnant women
- people with disabilities
- **Ø** seniors

SOURCE: KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION/ COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## families, she said.

"One family in particular that I know of went to the flea market over the weekend ... not wearing face coverings and surrounded by many people," she said. "And then the other challenge that we're seeing with our patients that are testing positive is that it's really hard to isolate and self-distance when you have a family of six or eight living in a one-bedroom apartment. "

Trujillo said SBCHC is preparing to add health care providers in the fall to accommodate the demand.

## Long-term effects

CAM is able to support low-income individuals and families with essentials such as food, rent and utilities but cannot help with medical bills. Hospital systems, including Houston Methodist and Memorial Hermann, have set aside funds for uninsured

"THE QUESTION IS, PHILOSOPHICALLY, WHETHER OR NOT IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR THE STATE GOVERNMENT TO BE PROVIDING FREE- OR REDUCED-COST HEALTH INSURANCE FOR ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WHO DON'T CURRENTLY HAVE COVERAGE THROUGH THEIR EMPLOYER."

STATE REP. TOM OLIVERSON, R-CYPRESS

individuals, but Ryan said sometimes these funds go unused simply because people are not aware of the assistance programs.

Because low-income families may struggle to purchase healthy groceries, a poor diet is one of the biggest contributors to poor health, Ryan said. According to county data, about 21%-29% of Cy-Fair residents are obese, and 12%-14% have diabetes.

"[Inexpensive groceries are] typically things like ramen and macaroni and cheese," she said. "If you have \$50 a week to feed your whole family, that really limits what you can buy. You buy what's cheap, and what's cheap is not good for your health."

Additionally, with about 27% of Cypress residents delaying regular doctor visits, according to data from Harris County, uninsured patients especially may have underlying conditions that go undetected.

"When you're sick, as your health is affected by that, you don't have money to go to the doctor, so you procrastinate," Ryan said. "You put it off until it's not a concerning issue [but] a life-threatening situation."

## **Potential policy changes**

An April 27 report from the Kaiser Family Foundation shows 36 states have adopted Medicaid expansion, while the 14 other states including Texas have not opted into Medicaid expansion.

Trujillo said SBCHC would support the expansion of Medicaid to increase access to health care in the communities it serves.

"[Our patients are] a mixture of individuals who don't qualify for Medicaid ... but they don't have health insurance," she said. "They can't afford the employer coverage or their employer doesn't offer insurance benefits, but they still make a little bit too much to qualify for Medicaid."

In Texas, groups that may be covered under Medicaid include low-income individuals who are pregnant, who are a parent or relative caretaker of a child, who have a disability or a disabled family member in their household, or who are age 65 or older, according to Texas Health and Human Services.

"The idea under [the ACA] was you would subsidize coverage in the private market on a sliding scale for this really 'working poor' [group]. ... They're just working folks, probably working two, maybe three jobs and just can't afford health insurance," said John Hawkins, senior vice president for advocacy and public policy with the Texas Hospital Association. "I do think the current situation really changes the playing field [for Medicaid expansion] for a variety of reasons."

Rep. Tom Oliverson, R-Cypress, an anesthesiologist, said while he anticipates Medicaid expansion will be discussed in the upcoming legislative session-slated to resume Jan. 12-he also anticipates redistricting, unemployment and fiscal matters will get more of the focus.

"It's a big-ticket item, and the question is, philosophically, whether or not it's appropriate for the state government to be providing free- or reducedcost health insurance for able-bodied adults who don't currently have coverage through their employer," he said.

Oliverson said his concerns with traditional Medicaid expansion include that few Texas physicians accept Medicaid and that expansion of Medicaid would be costly for the state.

However, Dunkelberg said she believes the ongoing pandemic changes the Medicaid discussion.

"The shape of this disaster may help ... because you have literally millions of Texans who maybe have never been jobless before suddenly overnight being thrown into that situation," she said. "So when millions of Texans suddenly discover that because they have no income, they don't qualify for anything, you may have a change in the political pressure."

Adriana Rezal and Hannah Zedaker contributed to this report.



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## **BUSINESS FEATURE**



Amber Hall (left) is the area manager for the Salons at Stone Gate and The Factory Cypress. Her aunt and uncle Stephanie (right) and Gino Hernandez (middle) own both locations. (Photos by Danica Lloyd/Community Impact Newspaper)

# Family salons adapt to coronavirus

Salons at Stone Gate, The Factory Salon reopen with precautions

n a high-contact industry, hair salons are among the many types of businesses learning how to continue offering services while making their customers feel safe as they reopen in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

For the Salons at Stone Gate and The Factory Cypress, owners Gino and Stephanie Hernandez saw 220 clients within the first two days of reopening after closing for several weeks. They were among the first salons in the Cy-Fair area to reopen as soon as Gov. Greg Abbott gave the go ahead May 8 and have implemented several safety measures in addition to what the state has required.

This included removing the furniture and coffee bar from the waiting area and having clients wait in their car before appointments. Additionally, customers answer a series of health questions before entering, and all staff and customers must wear face coverings. The salons have also temporarily halted blow-drying services, are sanitizing each station and tools between guests, and having individuals stay at least 6 feet apart.

"What we're all trying to figure out now is, now that this wave of customers—that pent up demand—what does the new normal look like?" he said. "Because I don't think it goes back to what it normally was. I think there is going to be some slowdown."

Gino and Stephanie opened the Stone Gate location in 2006. With more than a decade of experience working behind the salon chair at the time, Stephanie said she started out on her own with just a receptionist and has since built the business to about 30 stylists between the two locations.

While Stephanie continues to spend time behind the chair to this day, Gino handles the business alongside their niece Amber Hall, who worked her way up from doing laundry part time at the salon to serving as area manager.

Since 2006, the owners have expanded their location and acquired The Factory Salon last year.

Gino said they had been planning to renovate both locations this year and were in contract discussions for a third location in the Fairfield neighborhood, but since the pandemic hit, those plans have been put on hold.

Many stylists in the salons had their busiest week of their careers and even picked up new customers when they reopened, Hall said.

At the salons, new hires go through at least six months of apprenticeship to learn cutting and coloring techniques from Stephanie and the more senior members of the staff.

"How you cut hair, how you greet customers and how you color hair—I think that's also where Stephanie plays a big role," Gino said.

Stylists build close relationships with their customers, and Gino said they have been glad to be back in the salon.

"The other part of being a great [stylist] is being a great counselor," Gino said. "There's definitely a counselor component to this business and making that personal connection and helping your customer get through those hard times."

## **CORONAVIRUS CHANGES**

Both salons have implemented several safety measures since the coronavirus pandemic began.

- Waiting room furniture has been removed.
  Customers wait in the parking lot before their appointments.
- Masks are required for staff and customers at all times.
- Each station and all tools are sanitized between guests.
- Individuals must stay at least 6 feet away from one another.



The Salons at Stone Gate is requiring clients and staff to wear masks when inside.

## **Salons at Stone Gate**

11734 Barker Cypress Road, Cypress 281-256-2204 www.salonsatstonegate.com Hours: Tue.-Thu. 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat. 8 a.m.-5 p.m., closed Sun.-Mon.



## **The Factory Salon**

10920 Fry Road, Cypress 281-256-7747 www.thefactorysalon.net

Hours: Tue.-Thu. 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat. 8 a.m.-4 p.m., closed Sun.-Mon.



## **CONTINUED FROM 1**

## access in early June.

In a May 27 statement, Texas Democratic Party Chair Gilbert Hinojosa condemned the Supreme Court's ruling with regards to lack of immunuty and looked to the federal courts to rectify the issue.

"Now it is up to the federal court to ensure basic constitutional rights still exist in Texas and ensure that Texans have the right to vote safely and not put their health at risk," he said. Those opposed to expanding voting by mail, including Attorney General Ken Paxton, said it is against state law and could lead to voter fraud.

In July, voters in the Republican and Democratic parties will select candidates in primary runoff elections, which determine who will represent each party during the election in November. Ballots in Cy-Fair include races for U.S. Senate and Harris County Precinct 3 for Democrat voters, and Harris County Sheriff for Republican voters.

VOTER MENTALITY

into the July runoff election.

Officials with the Harris County Clerk's Office said they are preparing new protocols for voting in person that try to prevent virus spread. Following the resignation of County Clerk Diane Trautman, who resigned May 31 for health reasons, the county's efforts are being led by interim County Clerk Christopher Hollins.

## An ongoing dispute

The first major court ruling over mail ballots came in April, when state district Judge Tim Sulak ruled any voter who lacks immunity to COVID-19 is eligible to vote by mail. The ruling was quickly appealed by Paxton.

Mail ballots are available to Texas voters for one of four reasons: The voter is age 65 or older, has a disability, is a resident of Harris County but will not be able to vote in the county during the election, or is in jail but

2,385,906

eligible to vote. The debate has centered on whether a lack of immunity to COVID-19 qualifies as a "disability," said Douglas Ray, a special assistant in the Harris County Attorney's Office.

Paxton has warned county election officials that advising a voter to request a mail ballot for an unauthorized reason could come with criminal punishment. However, when voters request mail ballots on their own, the county has no means by which it can vet those requests, Ray said.

"It's unreasonable to demand that we either warn people that they can't do it on this basis or try to require some kind of further proof or do any investigation," he said.

Rosio Torres-Segura, the administrator of communications and voter outreach with the Harris County Clerk's Office, said the office is bound by law to process all requests for mail ballot applications if they are from registered voters and signed.

## **Possible consequences**

As of May 22, the Harris County Clerk's Office had received 77,317 requests for mail ballots from county voters, Torres-Segura said, as compared to roughly 27,552 total mail ballots cast in 2016 primary runoffs.

That number is likely to be much higher for November general elections, which could bring new layers to the courtroom battles, said Renee Cross, senior director of the Hobby School of Public Affairs with the University of Houston.

"I don't see this conflict going away regardless of whatever is resolved for July," she said. "[There] could be a whole new slew of disagreements for the November election."

Michael Moore, who in the Democratic primary for Harris County Precinct 3 commissioner, is a proponent of expanding mail ballots, arguing it would increase voter participation



## **NEW PROCEDURES**

Harris County has **approved up to \$12 million** to implement new procedures for July and November elections to try to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.



Increasing number of early voting locations



Providing virtual training for poll workers

Securing larger voting locations such as gymnasiums in schools to accommodate social distancing



Purchasing additional scanning and sorting equipment for up to 2.4 million mail-in ballots in advance of the November election, one for every

registered voter in the county

SOURCE: HARRIS COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE/ COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



A survey of 1,000 registered voters in Harris County conducted by Rice University

between March 27 and May 4 provides a glimpse of what voters are thinking heading

JULY 2020 RUNOFFS (as of May 22)

 Registered voters
 77,317

 Mail-in ballot requests
 77,317

SOURCES: HARRIS COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE, RICE UNIVERSITY/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



- COMPLIMENTARY BAG AND BOW GIFT WRAP -



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while alleviating some of the health concerns about voting in person posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Moore's opponent in the primary, Diana Martinez Alexander, said she also supports expanding vote by mail, but due to the court rulings, she said she is being careful in how she speaks about voting to constituents.

"I think it places candidates in a very precarious position because we don't want to say anything that's going to cause us any liability," she said. "We do want people to be careful and make good decisions for themselves."

Critics of mail ballot expansion include Wendell Champion, a candidate in the Republican runoff election for Texas Congressional District 18, which covers parts of northwest Houston. He echoed Paxton's concerns about voter fraud.

"In-person ballot voting is the securest way to make sure that the individual's vote is counted and that it is counted at the time it should be counted," he said.

However, in a May 19 ruling that would eventually be overturned, federal district Judge Fred Biery rejected the idea that mail ballots would lead to voter fraud.

"Texas truth is to the contrary,"

Better



SOURCE: TEXAS SECRETARY OF STATE/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

Biery wrote. "Between 2005 to 2018,

there were 73 prosecutions out of mil-

For those pushing for expanded

mail ballot access, the debate centers

on the coronavirus and its potential to

spread at a greater rate if people are

required to show up to polling loca-

In making the case to Sulak in

April, lawyers called on public health

officials to testify, including Cath-

erine Troisi, an infectious disease

lions of votes cast."

tions in person to vote.

**Voter safety** 

Alexander epidemiologist at The University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. Troisi said polls could easily become a hotspot if long lines build up and people do not social distance.

In late April, Harris County approved investing up to \$12 million to fund new safety measures and increase the ability to process mail ballots. Efforts include increasing the number of early voting locations, finding larger locations and sending mail ballots to all individuals over the age of 65. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott also moved the start of the early voting

period from July 6 to June 29.

Cross said if July elections can be tied to new outbreaks of the coronavirus, that will add pressure to resolve the issue before November.

"I think between seeing its successful implementation in other states [and] if the virus continues, those that may oppose mail voting right now will be more open to it by November," Cross said.



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## **REAL ESTATE**

## Featured neighborhood

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Build-out year: 1974 Number of homes in community: 622 Square footage: 1,819-3,645 Home values: \$170,000-\$427,000 Schools: Post Elementary School, Cook Middle School, Jersey Village High School Property taxes (in dollars): City of Jersey Village 0.74 Lone Star College System 0.11 0.01 Harris County Dept. of Education Harris County 0.41 Harris County Flood Control District 0.03 Harris Health System 0.17 Cv-Fair ISD 1.37 Port of Houston Authority 0.01 Total (per \$100 valuation) 2.85

## Recently sold homes in Jersey Village



## 7902 Argentina St.

4 bed/2.5 bath 2,635 sq. ft. Sold for \$250,001-\$285,000 on May 29



**15302 Ashburton Drive** 4 bed/2.5 bath 2,222 sq. ft. Sold for \$285,001-\$325,000 on May 15



**15914 Elwood Drive** 4 bed/2 bath 2.6

4 bed/2 bath 2,640 sq. ft. Sold for \$250,001-\$285,000 on Feb. 3



16002 Juneau Lane

4 bed/2.5 bath 2,106 sq. ft. Sold for \$250,001-\$285,000 on May 27



84

NEIGHBORHOOD DATA PROVIDED BY DEBBIE MARSHALL ROSS & MARSHALL REAL ESTATE, 12623 JONES ROAD, HOUSTON TX 77070 281-469-7677 • YDEBBIE23@GMAIL.COM



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| \$1 million +       | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | 1/110 |
| \$800,000-\$999,999 | -     | -     | -     | 1/40  | -     | 1/261 | -     |
| \$600,000-\$799,999 | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | 1/205 | 11/62 |
| \$500,000-\$599,999 | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | 2/101 | 7/127 |
| \$400,000-\$499,999 | -     | -     | -     | -     | 2/99  | 9/79  | 21/66 |
| \$300,000-\$399,999 | 2/20  | 3/88  | -     | 6/203 | 11/76 | 26/77 | 49/82 |
| \$200,000-\$299,999 | 9/76  | 8/60  | 9/38  | 26/76 | 44/59 | 49/66 | 50/47 |
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## JUNE 2020

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## DINING

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|--|
| Backyard Grill                           |
| Blue Water Seafood41                     |
| Celaya's Mexican<br>Restaurant & Cantina |
| Connie's Frozen Custard                  |
| Corky's Ribs and BBQ40                   |
| Creekwood Grill 45                       |
| Cypress Trail Hideout                    |
| Floyd's Cajun Seafood44                  |
| Freddy's Frozen Custard &                |
| Steakburgers40                           |
| Frio Hill Country Grill 42               |
| Harris County Smokehouse                 |
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|---------------------------|
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| The Kennel Klub           |
|                           |

## RETAIL

| CBD                      | ••• |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Tradition Outdoor Living | ••• |

## TRANSPORTATION

| Reliable Auto Care                  | 2 |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Sterling McCall Collision Center of |   |
| Jersey Village                      | 4 |

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# Houston-area foster care advocates worry of unreported abuse, trauma toll amid COVID-19

## BY ANNA LOTZ

With schools closed for much of the semester and families encouraged to stay home, Houston-area nonprofit leaders worry there will be a spike in reports of abuse as coronavirus measures are lifted, allowing groups to gather again.

Anticipating an uptick, local foster care advocates said they have adapted operations to meet needs amid the pandemic and are preparing for a continued need of foster families.

"Once we start to get out again, people are going to start saying things, and kids will start talking," said Arianne Riebel, director of adoption and foster care services for Arms Wide Adoption Services in Houston, an agency placing children into foster and adoptive homes. "I think that's when the reports are going to start coming in more. That's the major reason why here we can't slow down. They're going to need these homes for these kiddos in the future."

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services data shows schools contributed 15% of abuse and neglect reports throughout the state in fiscal year 2019, second to medical personnel for the source of most reports in the state.

Further, foster care advocates said the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting stay-home orders and upended schedules only exacerbate the trauma children in foster care have experienced.

"The fear and anxiety that we're all feeling now... that's what these foster kids experience every day," said Ann McAlpin, executive director of CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, which recruits court-appointed advocates for children in foster care. "We're concerned that ... all of this uncertainty on top of all of the trauma and uncertainty that they've already experienced is really going to double the trauma."

# END A HAND

Organizations across the Greater Houston area shared ways for the community to get involved in addition to giving financially.

**Arms Wide Adoption Services** www.armswideadoption.org Attend the next virtual information meeting June 17.

SA of Montgomery County www.casaspeaks4kids.com Donate toys or games. Volunteer to be an advocate.

## **Entrusted Houston**

www.entrustedhouston.org Shop from an Amazon wishlist or donate items to Moses Closet Cypress.

## **Love Fosters Hope** www.lovefostershope.org

Donate \$20 to the Finding Hope in 2020 campaign.

## **Anticipating needs**

In DFPS Region 6-which spans 13 counties, including Harris and Montgomery-approximately 2,400 children were in foster care in the month of April, and the region included 2,000 foster homes, Region 6 Media Specialist Tiffani Butler said.

She said as of mid-May the DFPS had not had problems finding placements for children during the pandemic, and the number of children removed from homes was not unlike any other year.

"We're a little bit concerned that we don't have actual eyes on the children because there's a lot that you get from nuance and seeing that you don't get from phone calls," McAlpin said. "We're concerned that abuse that's happening right now might not be being reported. We have not seen a downturn in the numbers, but those go up and down year by year anyway."

McAlpin said advocates are charged with talking to everyone involved in the child's case, including teachers, psychiatrists and medical professionals, as well as building a relationship with the child. Without being able to meet the child in person during the pandemic, advocates have resorted to FaceTime or phone calls.

With teachers reporting a significant amount of the abuse and neglect cases in the state, McAlpin said she believes there will be a need for more foster parents as well as child advocates to counter the spike in reported abuse she anticipates once children are able to see teachers again.

To help meet the anticipated demand for foster families, Riebel said Arms Wide Adoption Serviceswhich serves Region 6-has adjusted its operations to avoid delaying the licensing process for prospective families.

"I feel like more families are reaching out for the licensing process. Honestly, I think it's because they're home more and they have time to stop, do the research, attend the meetings and all of that," she said.

Finger printing and fire inspections have been difficult to complete as social distancing measures have been enacted, Riebel said. However, Riebel said Arms Wide has allowed families to attend training sessions with everything but these few items completed in the licensing process so as not to delay the process further.

Home studies were also paused in April but resumed in May with personal protective equipment and social distancing, she said.

"We haven't allowed this to delay any of our process, because if it does, it will be delayed for the rest of the year," Riebel said.

Training sessions have also moved to live online sessions for all portions but CPR and first aid, which are being held one family at a time in person, she said. The agency's information meetings-usually

# WHO FILES REPORTS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

In Texas, medical personnel and schools contribute more than 33% of reports of abuse and neglect, according to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

|             | al yea<br>ct we | ar 2019, the top 5 reporters of abuse and re:                                 |
|-------------|-----------------|---|
|             | 1               | Medical personnel (18.6%)   |
|             | 2               | School (15.3%)  |
|             | 3               | Law enforcement (12.8%)   |
|             | 4               | Relative (9.1%)   |
|             | 5               | Community agency (7.5%)   |
|             |                 | E: TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE<br>ES/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER |
| W           | TO              | REPORT  |
| and a start |                 | suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation                                      |

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> www.txabusehotline.org (for non-urgent situations)

held in person-have gone virtual as well, she said, and will continue virtually and in person to provide families greater flexibility long term.

## Adapting to COVID-19

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HO

Butler said the DFPS has also moved its visits for families to be virtual when possible. In-person visits are happening only at DFPS offices where 6-foot distancing is in place and spaces are sanitized before and after a family comes in.

To comply with guidelines, Montgomery County-based Love Fosters Hope has moved its overnight camp for children in foster care to an at-home camp, Executive Director Cindy Mericle said.

"Summer camps are a huge part of what we do, and of course that's been very much impacted by the coronavirus," she said.

In place of a June overnight camp, campers will have camp at home, receiving packages, video greetings, materials for a birthday cake, and arts and crafts, Mericle said. Teen camps have been rescheduled with tentative plans for July, pending the availability of rapid COVID-19 testing.

In addition, the organization has kept up its mentorship program remotely, Mericle said, and sent packages to its foster families with gifts for each child and the family to support them during the extended time at home.

"It's been a surprising blessing, even though there's so much bad stuff going on. Love Fosters Hope has been primarily focused on the children and the teenagers as they age out of foster care," Mericle said. "This really opened us up to caring for the whole family, which I'm kind of shocked that we haven't done that before, but we were so busy doing what we were doing."

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