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# WESTWARD expansion

## LITTLE LAND LEFT

Experts estimate 13% of Cy-Fair's developable land remains undeveloped. Residential growth is accelerating south of Hwy. 290 and east of the Grand Parkway.

13%

Undeveloped land

SOURCE: POPULATION AND SURVEY ANALYSTS/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



DANICA LLOYD/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## Home construction picks up in last open land tracts

BY DANICA LLOYD

Since the local portion of the Grand Parkway was completed about five years ago and improvements along Hwy. 290 wrapped up last year, developers have accelerated construction of master-planned communities in the western portion of Cy-Fair ISD.

"We actually have residents that reside within Bridgeland where one of the family members might work in the Energy Corridor [and] the other one works up in The Woodlands or in Springwoods Village with Exxon," said Heath Melton, executive vice president of master-planned communities,

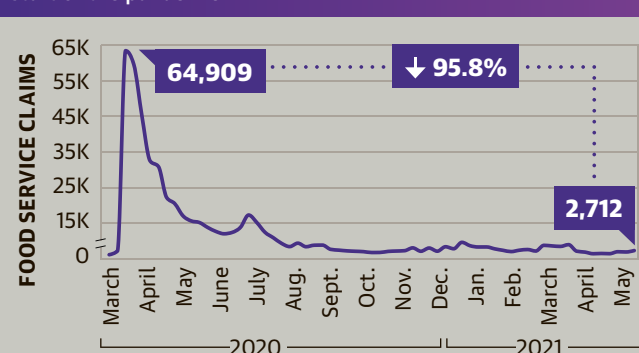
residential, for Bridgeland developer Howard Hughes Corp. "That's all key to our selection [of] a location."

Another 18,637 single-family homes are expected to be built within CFISD over the next decade, according to a report released in March from

CONTINUED ON 28

## UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMS

Thousands of Texans working in the accommodation and food services industry have claimed unemployment benefits since the start of the pandemic.



SOURCES: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## Cy-Fair restaurant owners struggle to fill job openings

BY EMILY JAROSZEWSKI & ANNA LOTZ

"Now hiring" signs are posted outside restaurants across Cy-Fair, from locally owned eateries to fast food chains. Employers are incentivizing applicants actively searching for jobs.

Local restaurant owners said they are shocked people are not taking advantage of the surplus of job openings, some requiring no experience, as they recover from a global pandemic.

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board, the public workforce

CONTINUED ON 32

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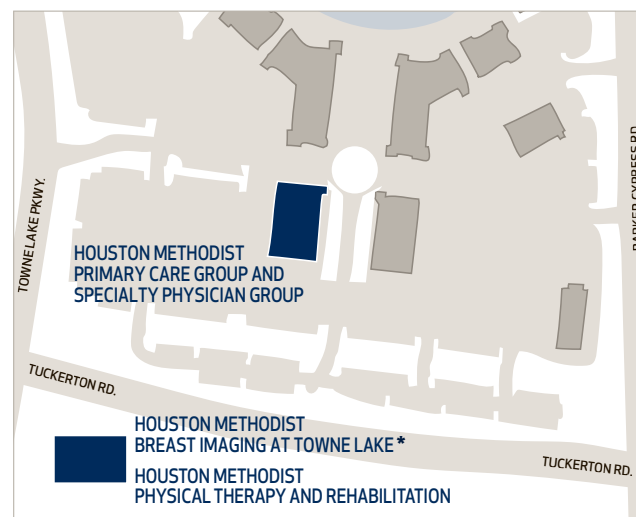


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Owners John and Jennifer Garrett launched the first edition of *Community Impact Newspaper* in 2005 with three full-time employees covering Round Rock and Pflugerville, Texas. We have expanded our operations to include hundreds of employees, our own printing operation and over 30 hyperlocal editions across three states. Our circulation is over 2 million residential mailboxes, and it grows each month with new residents and developments.

*Community Impact Newspaper* teams include general managers, editors, reporters, graphic designers, sales account executives and sales support, all immersed and invested in the communities they serve.

Our **mission** is to build communities of informed citizens and thriving businesses through the collaboration of a passionate team.

Our **core values** are Faith, Passion, Quality, Innovation and Integrity.

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## THIS ISSUE

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS MONTH



**FROM EMILY:** Experts predict in the next 10 years our community will gain at least 37,000 new housing units. In this issue we take a close look at where this development is taking place and what local residents can expect. Our real estate coverage begins inside (see Page 18) with current market data and a deep dive into the latest trends.

Emily Heineman, **GENERAL MANAGER**

**FROM DANICA:** Many local businesses are struggling to fill open positions as the economy continues to reopen. This trend is hitting the food service industry especially hard as many workers have made more from unemployment benefits than they would working minimum-wage jobs. Read what some Cy-Fair business owners and policy experts had to say about this dilemma inside (see Page 32).

Danica Lloyd, **EDITOR**



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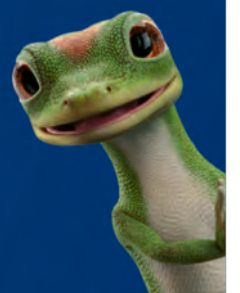


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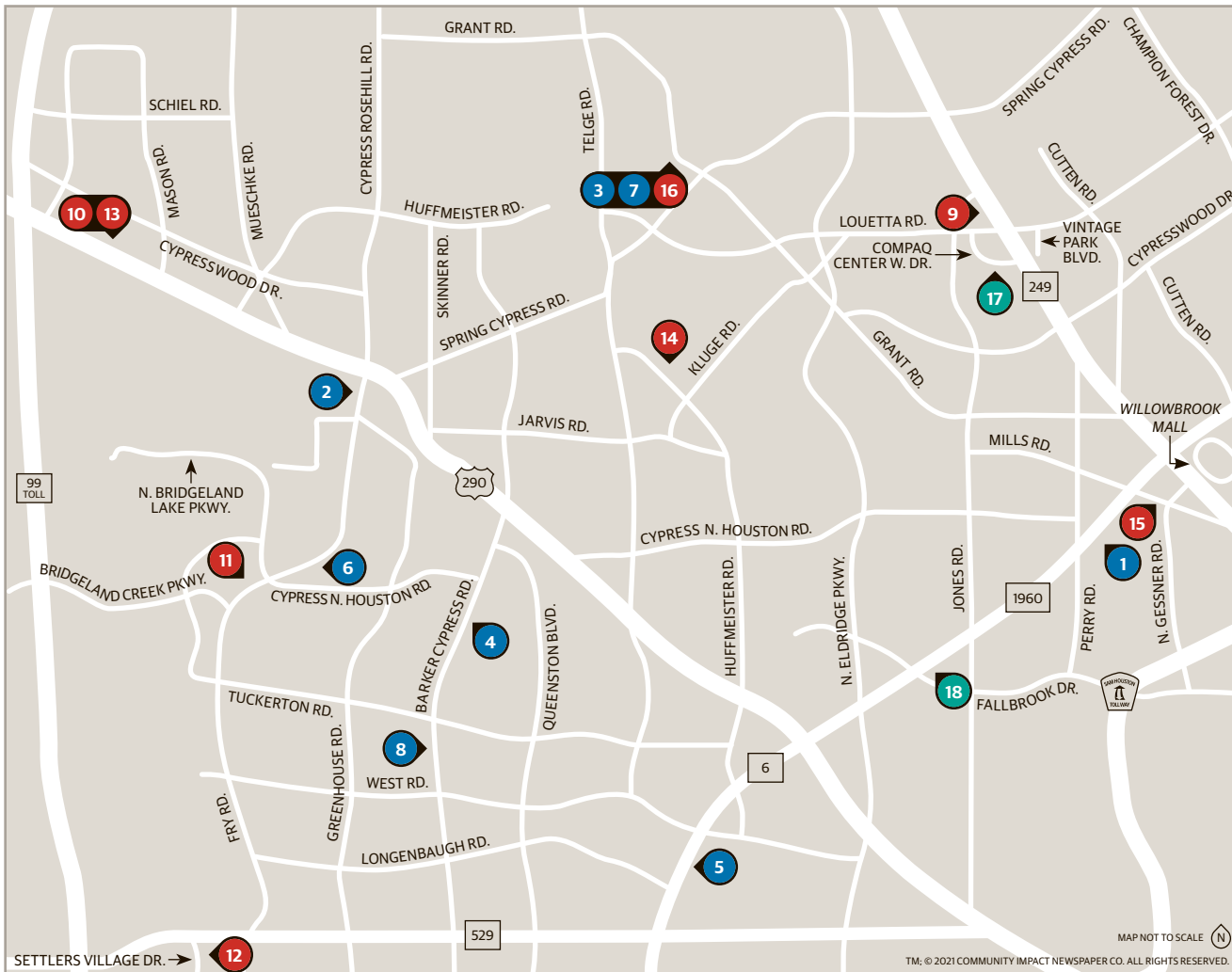


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## NOW OPEN

**1 Masterpiece Desserts** launched a soft opening June 26 at 9111 FM 1960, Ste. A, Houston. It will continue every weekend until the grand opening July 31, which will have a ribbon cutting, music and entertainment. Owner Kenneth Brooks said he and his wife started with a food truck, and this is the first brick-and-mortar location for the business, which specializes in miniature cheesecakes. Flavors range from sweet potato to strawberry, cookies and cream, red velvet, and caramel crunch. Vegan options are also on the menu. 281-965-1535. [www.masterpiicedesserts.com](http://www.masterpiicedesserts.com)

**2 Fajita Pete's** celebrated its grand opening June 6 at 13201 Fry Road, Ste. 120, Cypress, according to a news release. The Houston-based eatery is known for its fajitas, which include chicken, beef, shrimp, veggie and mixed options. All fajitas are grilled to order and served with a side of rice and beans. The franchise has 14 additional locations across the Houston area. 281-304-2395. [www.fajitapetes.com](http://www.fajitapetes.com)

**3 Domino's** opened another location at 14119 Grant Road, Ste. 180, Cypress, on June 3. Domino's offers a variety of pizza, wings and pasta for delivery or carry out. 832-220-9302. [www.dominos.com](http://www.dominos.com)

**4** Local nurse practitioner Elaina Johnson opened a cash-only clinic in June at 10750 Barker Cypress Road, Ste. 103, Cypress. **Walk-In Wellness Family Clinic** does not accept insurance, but families can receive medical services they need at prices that are often less than out-of-pocket insurance deductibles, according to the clinic's website. Johnson said services and treatments include pediatric care, allergy and immunology services, preventative screenings, physical exams, diagnostic testing, dental services, gynecology and skin disorder treatment, among others. 832-509-1842. [www.walkinwellnessclinic.com](http://www.walkinwellnessclinic.com)



Fajita Pete's

COURTESY FAJITA PETE'S

**5 Clean and Clear Pool Supplies** opened in June at 8494 Hwy. 6 N., Houston. The pool company specializes in maintenance, repairs, DIY supplies and automation. The family-owned and operated company has had over 15 years of experience in the business and provides services for the Greater Houston area. 713-466-1607. [www.cleanandclearpoolstx.com](http://www.cleanandclearpoolstx.com)

**6 Sandstone Chiropractic** opened another location at 10920 Fry Road, Ste. 800, Cypress, on June 21. First-time patients can expect a consultation, examination and X-rays if needed. Treatment begins on the first appointment if necessary. 281-203-0070. [www.sandstonehealth.com](http://www.sandstonehealth.com)

**7 Rock Creek Oral Surgery Specialists** opened June 10 at 14119 Grant Road, Ste. 140, Cypress. The clinic specializes in wisdom teeth removal, cosmetic procedures and other various oral surgeries. Appointments and consultations can be scheduled online or over the phone. 832-930-7801. [www.rockcreekoralsurgery.com](http://www.rockcreekoralsurgery.com)

**8** Holly Smith, a dental hygienist of 17 years and a Cypress resident, opened **Glo Parlor** on May 25 at 9945 Barker Cypress Road, Ste. 200, Room 19, Cypress, inside the Reserve Salon & Spa at the Boardwalk at Towne Lake. Glo Parlor offers all-natural teeth-whitening services and products. 281-386-6959. [www.gloparlor.com](http://www.gloparlor.com)

## COMING SOON

**9** Houston-area eatery **BB's Tex-Orleans** will open a new location this fall at 21441 Hwy. 249, Tomball, according to

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BB's Tex-Orleans

COURTESY BB'S TEX-ORLEANS

Maricela Bassler, chief brand officer for BB's Tex-Orleans. The eatery will feature a Cajun-inspired menu, such as boiled crawfish, po'boys and homemade gumbo as well as a full-service bar. The eatery is one of three locations opening this year, with the other two being in Kingwood and San Antonio. There are 10 other BB's Tex-Orleans locations in the Houston area. [www.bbstexorleans.com](http://www.bbstexorleans.com)

**10 Aloha Poke Co.** is expected to open mid-September at Fairfield Town Center, 29040 Hwy. 290, Ste. A05, Cypress. The company's goal is to create more fast-casual and healthy eating options, something Aloha Poke Cypress Franchisee Amanda Tabb said Cypress is lacking. Aloha Poke caters to all dietary restrictions and offers seafood, chicken and tofu to accommodate vegan, keto or gluten-free customers. [www.alohapokeco.com](http://www.alohapokeco.com)

**11** Officials announced June 16 that **Russo's New York Pizzeria & Italian Kitchen** is set to open in October at Lakeland Village Center, 10615 Fry Road, Ste. B1-600, Cypress. The eatery specializes in New York-style pizza, but calzones, pasta, deli sandwiches, salads and soups are also on the menu. [www.nypizzeria.com](http://www.nypizzeria.com)

**12 SilverCrest Assisted Living & Memory Care** is slated to open this fall at 7002 Settlers Village Drive, Katy, near the Fry Road and FM 529 intersection. SilverCrest was co-founded by a woman with more than 15 years of senior living nursing experience. The staff also includes a nurse practitioner with 15 years of experience. 281-305-8878. [www.silvercrestseniorliving.com](http://www.silvercrestseniorliving.com)



Russo's New York Pizzeria & Italian Kitchen

COURTESY RUSSO'S NEW YORK PIZZERIA & ITALIAN KITCHEN

**13 Spavia Day Spa** is slated to open July 2 at Fairfield Town Center, 29040 Hwy. 290, Ste. A11, Cypress. The business offers massages, facials, body scrubs, spray tanning, waxing and other treatments for men and women. Owner Kim Gillihan said the day spa experience includes amenities such as robes, sandals, warm neck wraps, wellness teas, a retreat area and changing rooms with lockers and showers. 832-769-0077. [www.spaviafairfield.com](http://www.spaviafairfield.com)

**14 Office Evolution**, the nation's largest network of locally owned and operated coworking spaces, is expanding to 14150 Huffmeister Road, Cypress, in late 2021. The company offers private offices, coworking, virtual offices and meeting rooms. Owners Putul and Samir Banerjee decided to become Office Evolution franchisees and incorporate flexible workspace solutions into their existing property. [www.officeevolution.com](http://www.officeevolution.com)

**15 Quick Quack Car Wash** will open Aug. 30 at 8631 Mills Road, Houston. The car wash offers a quick three-minute wash, and an unlimited membership that allows for unlimited car washes. 888-772-2792. [www.dontdrivedirty.com](http://www.dontdrivedirty.com)

**16 Wink Family Eyecare** is planning to open in early August at 14119 Grant Road, Ste. 200, Cypress. Wink Family Eyecare performs eye exams, assists with the treatment of dry eyes and helps set up patients with glasses or contacts.

## RELOCATIONS

**17 Mexcor International**, a spirits importer and distributor, announced May 24 the relocation of its corporate headquarters from 8950 Railwood Drive,



The school's second local campus is opening this fall. (Courtesy Acton Academy Cy-Fair)

## FEATURED IMPACT

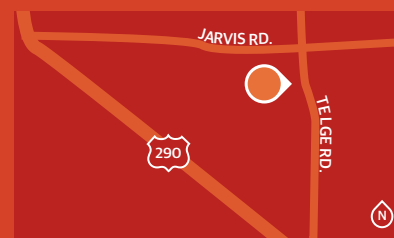
### COMING SOON

**Acton Academy**, a nontraditional private school that emphasizes hands-on, project-based learning, will open Sept. 7 on local nonprofit Cy-Hope's campus at 12715 Telge Road, Cypress. Founder and Head of School Kristah Slate said she started Acton Academy Cy-Fair in 2019 at the Foundry Church, 8350 Jones Road, Houston. She anticipates an enrollment of 100 students at that campus in the 2021-22 school year with another 25 at the new Cypress campus in its first year.

Slate said students are typically self-motivated, and they are given freedom to explore their passions. The 21st-century learning center is designed for students as young as 5 years old through high school.

"We focus on nontraditional, learner-driven and project-based learning, so we're focusing on developing skills in the area of academics, but also social and emotional—really giving kids the opportunity to have joy and rigor in their education," Slate said.

The new Acton Academy campus will host open house events July 13 and 27. 713-882-7699. [www.actoncyfair.com](http://www.actoncyfair.com)



Houston, to a 28-acre facility located at 11177 Compaq Center W. Drive, Houston. The new 250,000-square-foot facility contains a warehouse for the company's direct imported products as well as a temperature-controlled warehouse for its liquor, wine and beer inventory. 713-979-0066. [www.mexcor.com](http://www.mexcor.com)

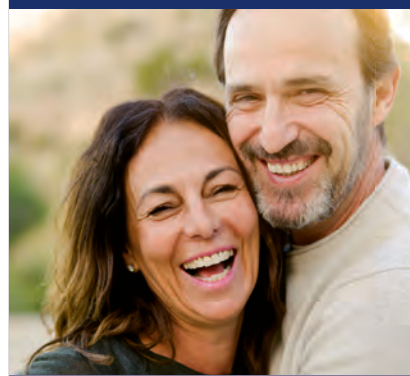
**18 Med Shop Plus's** owners, Charles Johnson and Tolu Opeloye, hosted a ribbon cutting for the grand re-opening of their business on June 18 at 11585 FM 1960 W., Houston. The store, formerly located at 11037 FM 1960 W., Houston, is the only African American licensed medical supplies operator in northwest Houston. The business offers medical supplies,

scrubs and professional medical attire. 281-469-4032. [www.medshopplus.com](http://www.medshopplus.com)

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Club Z Tutoring** celebrated five years in business June 10. The company offers online and in-person tutoring at clients' homes. Tutoring is offered for children as young as preschool-age, and can be used by adults not enrolled in an education program. Club Z services ZIP codes 77433, 77429, 77065 and 77070. Additional tutoring services can be found online. 832-529-2092. [www.clubztutoring.com/cypress](http://www.clubztutoring.com/cypress)

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## JULY

## 02 TEST YOUR TRIVIA KNOWLEDGE

Brew:30 Taphouse hosts a trivia night featuring '80s music from DJ Scott and prizes. 6:30-9 p.m. Free. Brew:30 Taphouse, 15914 Telge Road, Cypress. 281-516-9315. [www.brew30taphouse.com](http://www.brew30taphouse.com)

## 04 CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY

The Boardwalk at Towne Lake will hold a celebration for Independence Day. The event is open to the public and will feature live music; however, fireworks will not be a part of this year's event. Noon-3 p.m. Free (admission). The Boardwalk at Towne Lake, 9945 Barker Cypress Road, Cypress. 713-690-0000. [www.boardwalktl.com](http://www.boardwalktl.com)

## 05 THROUGH 30 CREATE EXPERIMENTS AT LITTLE BEAKERS

Little Beakers will be holding five-day science lab camps throughout July. Attendees will have the opportunity to create their own boat and see real jellyfish, octopi, sharks and more. 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. or 1:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. \$185 (per five-day session). Little Beakers, 13040 Louetta Road, Ste. 226, Cypress. 833-543-7522. <http://cypress.littlebeakers.com/camps>

## 06 THROUGH AUG. 20 REGISTER FOR YMCA CAMPS

Local YMCA sites host four- and five-day camp sessions for children ages 5-15. Activities include games, sports, swimming, arts and crafts and educational activities. 7 a.m.-6 p.m. (Hwy. 249 location) 6:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. (Longenbaugh location). \$35 (registration fee), \$155-\$215 (camp costs). Langham Creek Family YMCA, 16725 Longenbaugh Drive, Houston. D. Bradley McWilliams YMCA at Cypress Creek, 19915 Hwy. 249, Houston. [www.ymcahouston.org](http://www.ymcahouston.org)

## 08 KICKSTART IMMUNE SYSTEMS

The Cy-Fair Women's Club hosts a wellness speaker at its monthly membership meeting. Dr. Amber



**JULY 06** **DJ SNOOPADELIC LIVE**  
THE BARN AT FRIO

Rap and hip-hop artist Snoop Dogg will perform a post-Independence Day DJ set as DJ Snoopadelic for adults age 21 and older only. Food and drinks will be available for purchase. 6 p.m. \$90 (pre-sale), \$100 (at the door). The Barn at Frio, 16416 Mueschke Road, Cypress, 281-256-3746. [www.barnrx.com](http://www.barnrx.com) (Courtesy Atticus Lite)

Horsely will lead the discussion, which will be available in person and via Zoom. 6:30 p.m. Free. Berry Center, 8877 Barker Cypress Road, Cypress. [www.cyfairwomensclub.org/events](http://www.cyfairwomensclub.org/events)

## 12 THROUGH 16, 26-30 EXPLORE NATURE

Summer day camps will be held for two weeks in July. Children ages 7-9 can participate in the junior rangers camp July 12-16, where campers will learn what a park ranger needs to know. The nature exploration camp from July 26-30 is for ages 10-12, and campers will learn about the local flora and fauna. Parents can register their children online. 9 a.m.-noon. Free. Kickerillo-Mischer Preserve, 20215 Chasewood Park Drive, Houston. 713-274-4299. [www.hcp4.net/parks/kmp](http://www.hcp4.net/parks/kmp)

## 16 THROUGH 17, 23-24, 30-31, AUG. 1 SEE A LIVE MUSICAL

Playhouse 1960 performs "9 to 5: The Musical," a play based on the 1980 movie featuring Dolly Parton. Fully vaccinated attendees are not required to wear masks. 8 p.m. (July 16-31), 3 p.m. (Aug. 1). \$18-\$21. Playhouse 1960, 6814 Gant Road, Houston. 281-587-8243. [www.playhouse1960.com](http://www.playhouse1960.com)

## 16 THROUGH AUG. 1 ENJOY A PLAY

"Handbagged," a play by Moira Buffini

that imagines what happened in the private meetings between Margaret Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth II, will be performed live over three weekends. Parental guidance is recommended for age 10 and under. 7:30 p.m. (Fri.-Sat.), 3 p.m. (Sun.). \$22-\$35. Stageworks Theatre, 10760 Grant Road, Houston. 281-587-6100. [www.stageworkshouston.org](http://www.stageworkshouston.org)

## 17 CELEBRATE A GRAND OPENING

IDEA Lab Kids celebrates its one-year anniversary with a free community event featuring games, snow cones, a face painter and prizes. Due to COVID-19, the business was unable to hold a grand opening celebration last year. Registration is available online. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. IDEA Lab Kids, 11808 Barker Cypress Road, Cypress. 281-746-2008. [www.idealabkids.com/location/cypress](http://www.idealabkids.com/location/cypress)

## 19 THROUGH 23 SEND THE KIDS TO ART CAMP

Painting with a Twist hosts a five-day children's art camp available for age 7 and older. Parents are asked to send snacks, drinks and lunches with their children. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. \$175. Painting with a Twist, 12344 Barker Cypress Road, Ste. 200, Cypress. 281-256-8383. [www.paintingwithatwist.com/studio/cypress](http://www.paintingwithatwist.com/studio/cypress)



Comedian Zane Lamprey stops in Houston on his Laughs & Drafts tour. (Courtesy Zane Lamprey)

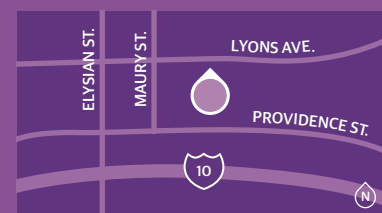
## WORTH THE TRIP

## Saint Arnold Brewing Company

## July 22

Saint Arnold Brewing Co. will host special guest Zane Lamprey, an award-winning comedian and travel show host. The event is strictly for age 21 and older. 6-9 p.m. \$25 (general admission).

2000 Lyons Ave., Houston  
713-686-9494  
[www.saintarnold.com](http://www.saintarnold.com)



Find more or submit Cy-Fair area events at [communityimpact.com/event-calendar](http://communityimpact.com/event-calendar). Event organizers can submit local events online to be considered for the print edition. Submitting details for consideration does not guarantee publication.



Adam Lampe, CEO & Co-Founder

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A portrait of Dr. Lavinia Middleton, a woman with long brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a pearl earring.

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# Texas Central signs \$16B construction contract for high-speed rail project

BY DANICA LLOYD

Texas Central, the developers behind the proposed high-speed rail project between Dallas and Houston, could be one step closer to groundbreaking. Officials announced June 15 they have signed a \$16 billion contract with Webuild, a global engineering and construction company, to lead the civil construction team that will build the train.

According to a news release, Webuild, formerly Salini Impregilo, has constructed 8,500 miles of railway and metro infrastructure in Australia, Europe, Asia and the Americas. The company has operated in the U.S. market since the 1980s and expanded its presence in 2016 through a merger with The Lane Construction Corp.

“Our goal is to put together a team of the best players in the world from each industry needed to bring this project to life. The addition of Webuild helps us accomplish that goal,” Texas Central CEO Carlos Aguilar said in a statement.

Webuild will execute the heavy



Construction on the project could start as early as this year, officials said. (Rendering courtesy Texas Central)

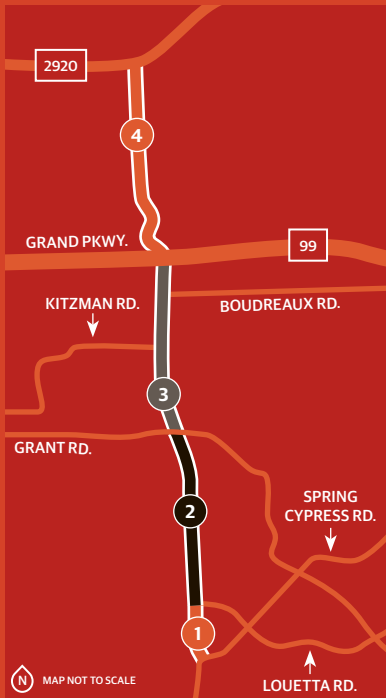
construction for the project, including the design and build of all 236 miles of the alignment, about half of which will be on a viaduct.

Officials said much of the alignment is elevated to reduce the effects on landowners and residents living along the route as much as possible.

Texas Central signed a design-build agreement with Salini Impregilo and Lane Construction in September 2019—when the project was estimated to cost \$14 billion.

Officials said in an email to *Community Impact Newspaper* they are progressing toward construction daily, and they anticipate construction will start in late 2021 or early 2022.

## UPCOMING PROJECT



### Telge Road widening

Harris County Precinct 4 plans to continue widening Telge Road over the next several years. Construction will take place in four segments; the first was from Spring Cypress Road to Louetta Road and finished in 2019.

Segment 2 stretches from north of Louetta to Grant Road; Segment 3 continues from north of Grant to the Grand Parkway; and finally, Segment 4 widens Telge Road from north of the Grand Parkway to FM 2920.

Planned improvements along the corridor include widening Telge to a four-lane concrete boulevard section; improved drainage accommodations; and the installation of traffic signal systems on Telge at Grant, Boudreaux and Kitzman roads.

**Timeline:** request authorization to bid third quarter of 2021 (Segment 2), third quarter of 2023 (Segment 3), first quarter of 2025 (Segment 4)

**Cost:** TBD

**Funding source:** Harris County Precinct 4

ALL INFORMATION ON THIS PAGE WAS UPDATED AS OF JUNE 17. NEWS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE OR OTHER LOCAL TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS? EMAIL US AT [CYFNEWS@COMMUNITYIMPACT.COM](mailto:CYFNEWS@COMMUNITYIMPACT.COM).



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10760 Grant Road, Houston  
281-587-6100  
www.stageworks-houston.org



"Mama's Boy" was presented to a socially-distanced audience this spring. (Courtesy Stageworks Theatre)



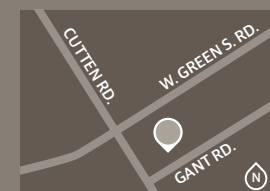
The "Moon Over Buffalo" cast wore masks during April performances. (Courtesy Playhouse 1960)

## PLAYHOUSE 1960

FOUNDED IN: 1973

UPCOMING MAIN STAGE PRODUCTION: "9 to 5: The Musical"

6814 Gant Road, Houston  
281-587-8243  
www.playhouse-1960.com



# Community theater groups bounce back from COVID-19 restrictions

BY DANICA LLOYD

Playhouse 1960 bustled with dozens of children enjoying mask-optional camps this June—a much different site compared to last year's summer camps, which followed strict safety guidelines, said Sammy Green, president of the theater's board of directors.

"It's just good to have life here again," she said.

The profits from 2020 summer camps were just enough to get by while shows were put on hold, Green said. Playhouse 1960 is run completely by volunteers and typically puts on nine main stage shows and four youth performances each season.

But when COVID-19 arrived in Harris County, the remaining shows that season were canceled or postponed. A showing of "The Sound of Music" in December could only accommodate about 50 audience members in a

theater of 159 seats. Those audience members were required to wear masks along with the actors, Green said.

As restrictions across the state were gradually loosened, Playhouse 1960 followed suit while prioritizing the comfort of their cast members.

Now that the COVID-19 vaccine has been accessible for a few months, the theater no longer requires masks. Green said she feels people are ready to return to the theater—to laugh, cry and empathize with characters who may be different than them.

While she likes to include one or two thought-provoking shows that challenge audiences each season, Green said she has several "feel-good" shows planned for the coming season to get people excited about theater again.

"I just want people to come back to the arts, whatever it is—dance and music, museums and galleries—where

people can just experience art because things have been too ugly for too long," she said. "I think the arts is always that area the brings people together in a positive light."

Stageworks Theatre also closed its curtains for about six months during the pandemic. Artistic Director Michael Montgomery said the theater typically hosts 12,000-15,000 audience members annually.

The theater went from selling out shows to seeing revenue streams dry up instantly, but rent payments, utility bills, insurance costs and other operational expenses did not go away.

Montgomery said board members, corporate sponsors, virtual fundraising and a monthly patron program covered some expenses, but Stageworks also took out a federal loan and reduced its rented space by 45%.

"What the pandemic showed us

was ... we rely on people attending our shows and buying tickets so much that we have no room for error," he said.

The board consulted with medical and legal advisers to create safety guidelines and reopened in late 2020 with 25% capacity, temperature checks, social distancing and masks.

He also said he believes the theater will eventually expand again—whether it stays at the current Grant Road site or officials build their own space.

While restrictions have loosened, Montgomery estimates it will be another six to 12 months before community theaters see prepandemic levels of attendance again.

"Demand's picked back up, but ... I think there's people who subconsciously just have changed their habits," he said. "They don't think, 'Oh, let's go to a play on a Friday night.' They stay home and watch movies."




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## EDUCATION

### Cy-Fair ISD board approves 5% employee raises, 2021-22 budget

BY EMILY JAROSZEWSKI & DANICA LLOYD

Employees of Cy-Fair ISD will see a 5% salary increase in the 2021-22 fiscal year. Additionally, hourly employees can expect a \$500 stipend at the end of each semester next year.

CFISD board members unanimously approved these measures as part of the district's \$1.09 billion budget at the June 24 meeting. Additionally, trustees approved raising the starting teacher salary to \$58,500—up from \$56,000 in 2021-22.

Trustees initially considered 3% raises for employees at a June 21 meeting but voted in favor of 5% based on feedback from teachers who said the rate of inflation and health insurance premiums are increasing more than their salaries.

Donna Lord, president of the Cy-Fair Texas State Teachers Association, said the 2020-21 salary is not enough considering the work put in during the pandemic. She said CFISD extended work days by 15 minutes last school year—equating to 47 hours—with no additional compensation.

"You are exploiting your teaching staff," she said at the June 21 meeting. "It's time to step up and show us the respect we deserve."

Chief Financial Officer Karen Smith said about 6,200 district employees, including paraprofessionals and other hourly workers, would be eligible

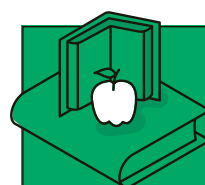
for the two \$500 stipends, so this addition would cost the district about \$6.2 million. She said she believes this ultimately will have minimal effects on the budget and projects the district will maintain a four-month fund balance in the "worst-case scenario."

Payroll costs ultimately amount to about 90% of the budget, which includes a \$88.5 million shortfall. Superintendent Mark Henry said the district is expecting to receive federal stimulus funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund that could help offset the projected deficit.

Smith said the district is eligible to receive as much as \$189.2 million from the third round of ESSER funding, and another \$84.3 million from the ESSER II grant.

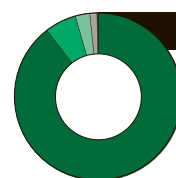
"I'm going to be the optimist and say that when it's all said and done, our fund balance is going to be just fine," Henry said June 24.

District officials expect to receive \$997.8 million in revenue in the upcoming fiscal year, about 56.5% of which would come from local property taxes and 41.5% would come from the state. About 2% is expected to come from federal sources. Smith said she expects the property tax rate will decrease from \$1.3555 to \$1.3356 per \$100 valuation. The final tax rate is set to be adopted in September.



#### CY-FAIR ISD BUDGET

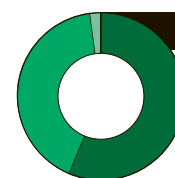
The district is bracing for an \$88.5 million deficit in 2021-22 and will provide a 5% salary raise for employees districtwide.



EXPENDITURES

**\$1.09B  
TOTAL**

- Payroll costs: \$972.83M
- Contracted services: \$65.4M
- Supplies and materials: \$30.95M
- Other operating costs: \$16.15M
- Capital outlay: \$0.95M



REVENUE

**\$997.8M  
TOTAL**

- Local (property taxes): \$563.25M
- State: \$414.38M
- Federal: \$20M
- Other sources: \$0.2M

SOURCE: CY-FAIR ISD/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER • COMMUNITYIMPACT.COM



## Small business center to dissolve

BY EMILY JAROSZEWSKI

The Lone Star College Small Business Development Center will be dissolved July 31, but the SBDC will continue to provide its services to businesses in the North Houston area, according to Steve Lawrence, executive director for the Texas Gulf Coast Network.

"Despite the fact that we're going to kind of go our separate paths, the SBDC services are all available and fully available to the small businesses, and they'll continue to be so," Lawrence said.

The SBDC helped business owners adapt to new online business models amid the COVID-19 pandemic and provided additional marketing services, said Kyle Scott, LSC vice chancellor of strategic priorities.

Lone Star College SBDC serves 800-1,000 clients annually, Lawrence said.

### AIDING BUSINESSES

Although the Lone Star College Small Business Development Center will dissolve this summer, businesses can still receive services via nearby partners, such as the University of Houston and Sam Houston State University.



The Lone Star College SBDC will dissolve **JULY 31.**



LSC has partnered with the SBDC for more than **35 YEARS.**



The center has served **800-1,000 CLIENTS** annually in the North Houston area.

SOURCES: LONE STAR COLLEGE SYSTEM, TEXAS GULF COAST NETWORK/ COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

SBDC programs in Texas are funded by state and federal dollars.

The University of Houston, Sam Houston State University and other nearby partners will split the Lone Star College SBDC services.

## Lone Star College System to pursue additional bachelor's degree programs

BY ANDREW CHRISTMAN

Lone Star College System can expand its bachelor's degree program offerings now that House Bill 3348 was signed into law June 16.

According to a news release, the bill allows community colleges to offer up to five bachelor's degrees at any time. LSCS plans to submit a proposal to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that would allow it to offer a fourth bachelor's degree, a Bachelor of Science in emergency management. Plans for the fifth program have not been announced as of press time.

Emergency management directors prepare plans and procedures for responding to natural disasters or other emergencies, and help lead the

response during and after emergencies, officials said.

"Building on the success of our three current bachelor's degree

programs, Lone Star College is ready to provide even more bachelor's degrees for high-demand careers," LSCS Chancellor Stephen Head said. "This is a wonderful opportunity for Lone Star College students who want to

continue their education close to home at an affordable tuition."

LSCS offers three bachelor's degree programs with a Bachelor of Science in nursing, Bachelor of Applied Technology in cybersecurity and Bachelor of Applied Science in energy, manufacturing and trades management, which began in 2019.

**"THIS IS A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY FOR LONE STAR COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO WANT TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION CLOSE TO HOME AT AN AFFORDABLE TUITION."**

STEPHEN HEAD, LSC CHANCELLOR

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# Harris County identifies racial disparities in traffic stop data

**HARRIS COUNTY** The Harris County Justice Administration Department presented a report to Commissioners Court on June 8 following a unanimously approved motion for the department to “analyze existing racial profiling data produced by law enforcement” one year earlier.

“It’s not about trying to catch anybody or have any gotchas, but obviously, we should know if there is a challenge, and if there is, we ought to work to take steps to correct it,” Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian

Garcia said.

The analysis in the report included racial demographics in instances of consent search, contraband discovery, traffic stops that led to arrests, types of citations or warnings, and the use of force. According to the report, the department analyzed data from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.

Hispanic drivers overall were most likely to receive citations, and Black drivers were most likely to experience bodily injury as a result of a use of force. Black and Hispanic drivers

were also more likely to be arrested in a traffic stop.

However, JAD Research Policy Analyst Matthew Sweeney said there were limitations in the data. Law enforcement agencies did not always report incidents by racial demographics, and population demographics cannot be used as a comparison because constable precincts are not within measurable areas.

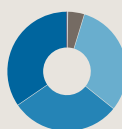
Recommendations from the department included updating the county’s data-collection process to include more mandatory fields.



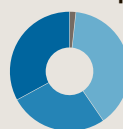
## Traffic stop snapshot

This data shows racial disparities identified in traffic stops by Harris County law enforcement agencies.

### Traffic stops



### Arrests made in traffic stops\*



\*RACIAL DEMOGRAPHIC DATA IS MISSING FROM ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF TOTAL ARREST REPORTS.

SOURCES: HARRIS COUNTY JUSTICE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT, TEXAS COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## County commissioners consider hiring outside firm to raise COVID-19 vaccination rates

**HARRIS COUNTY** At the first in-person Harris County Commissioners Court meeting since the start of the pandemic, commissioners discussed ways to get more county residents vaccinated against COVID-19. About 45% of Harris County residents age 12 and older were fully vaccinated as of the June 8 meeting, and 56% were partially vaccinated, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

In addition to launching a scholarship raffle to encourage children ages 12-17 to get vaccinated, another major attempt to increase those numbers comes in the form of a potential contract with a firm called Elevate Strategies for a full year of targeted community vaccine outreach with three one-year renewal options. Commissioners agreed in a 4-1 vote to have county officials finalize the contract that would be up for approval at a future meeting.

Hidalgo said if that contract is ultimately approved, this firm would engage county residents via calls, texts, social media, face-to-face canvassing and direct mail, focusing

on the neighborhoods hit hardest by COVID-19. The county has previously partnered with Elevate Strategies to help raise awareness about the 2020 census, she said.

Both Precinct 4 Commissioner Jack Cagle, who voted against the plan, and Precinct 3 Commissioner Tom Ramsey expressed concerns about the estimated cost of the project, which was not publicly disclosed during the meeting.

“I don’t want us to just be spending money to be spending money. It should be done with a clear understanding of what we’re going to get for it,” Ramsey said.

### Progress toward vaccination

Nearly half of the eligible Harris County residents—those age 12 and older—were fully vaccinated as of June 22.

### Vaccinated Harris County residents



SOURCE: TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## State to subaward county \$750M

**HARRIS COUNTY** Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush announced June 17 plans to award Harris County \$750 million in flood mitigation funding following the denial by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to a news release.

Instead of directly allocating the \$1 billion in Hurricane Harvey relief funding to Harris County, HUD decided last January to send the money to the Texas GLO to be made available in the form of competitive grants. In May, the Texas General Land Office informed Harris County and city of Houston leaders neither entity had been awarded any Hurricane Harvey flood mitigation funds.

Following requests from these leaders to reconsider, Bush requested a direct allocation to Harris County for flood mitigation efforts from HUD May 26. HUD denied that request in a June 14 letter.

“Money from the federal government is, as always, tied up with endless mounds of red tape and bureaucracy,” Bush said.

## QUOTE OF NOTE

**“THIS [PROPERTY TAX] SYSTEM IS INHERENTLY FLAWED. ... IT MAKES THINGS VERY DIFFICULT TO BE ABLE TO BALANCE THE NEEDS OF THE CITY ALONG WITH THE NEEDS OF TAXPAYERS.”**

BOBBY WARREN, JERSEY VILLAGE MAYOR

## AREA HIGHLIGHTS

**HARRIS COUNTY** After nearly 15 years of service as the executive director of the Harris County Flood Control District, Russ Poppe announced his resignation June 11 amid an ongoing push to secure \$750 million in flood control aid as Texas gears up for another hurricane season. He said the expectations associated with those efforts have had an adverse effect on his quality of life. Poppe said he will continue working with the Budget Management Office and the HCFCDD to finalize recommendations to address bond program funding at the June 29 Commissioners Court meeting.

**JERSEY VILLAGE** Two years after raising homestead exemptions for homeowners, Jersey Village City Council approved another increase for disabled homeowners and those age 65 and older at the June 21 meeting. The homestead exemption, which was raised from 8% in 2019, will remain at 14% of a home’s appraised value. The exemptions for disabled and over-65 homeowners were both raised from \$75,000 to \$200,000 and \$100,000, respectively. The increase will cost the city about \$28,900 in lost revenue, but the 32 homeowners who qualify for this exemption will save an average of \$904. Additionally, the over-65 population exemption increase will cost the city about \$155,500 in lost revenue, but the 788 residents who qualify will save an average of \$181, according to city documents.

## MEETINGS WE COVER

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July 19 at Jersey Village City Hall,  
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[www.jerseyvillagetx.com](http://www.jerseyvillagetx.com)

**Harris County Commissioners Court**  
Will meet at 10 a.m. July 20 at  
1001 Preston St., Ste. 934, Houston  
713-698-1102  
[www.harriscountytexas.gov](http://www.harriscountytexas.gov)



# Bills passed aim to tackle criminal justice reform

BY WESLEY GARDNER

Lawmakers in Texas rounded out the 2021 legislative session in late May, passing several bills aimed at addressing police conduct.

Criminal justice reform was a prominent issue this session after Houston native George Floyd died last year, although numerous bills failed to gain approval in both the House and Senate.

Floyd died last May after former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for nine minutes, sparking protests and demonstrations nationwide calling for reform. Chauvin was convicted in April of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter, according to verdicts issued at the Fourth Judicial District Court of Minnesota.

State Sen. Joan Huffman, R-Houston, who served as chair of the Senate Committee on Jurisprudence, said the Senate worked with law enforcement and community groups to develop and pass key reform bills.

"The Senate has worked diligently on criminal justice reforms designed to instill public confidence in the justice system, ensure accountability and preserve public safety," she said.

However, state Rep. Senfronia Thompson, D-Houston, who authored several bills pertaining to criminal justice reform that did not pass, said there was still more work to be done.

"It was not a good session for criminal justice," Senfronia Thompson said. "I think there was some change that we can build upon in the future."

## A closer look

Among the bills that passed are a ban on certain police chokeholds and neck restraints and a requirement for officers to intervene when they witness their colleagues using excessive force.

Additionally, Huffman lauded the passage of House Bill 929, which requires police officers to activate body cameras during investigations.

"[While] there were other bills that did not have the votes to pass, I am hopeful that [HB 929] will continue to strengthen the crucial relationship between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve," she said.

Meanwhile, HBs 829 and 88 authored by Senfronia Thompson that failed to pass would have required law enforcement agencies to adopt a set schedule of disciplinary actions for officers and eliminated qualified immunity for officers being sued over issues including the use of force.

## LEGISLATIVE RUNDOWN

A number of bills aimed at reforming Texas' criminal justice system were penned during the 2021 legislative session. Here is a look at how they fared.



**Stalled in House committee**



**Stalled in Senate committee**



**Signed into law**



**House Bill 88** would have eliminated qualified immunity for officers being sued over issues including the use of force.



**HB 829** would have required law enforcement agencies to adopt a set schedule of disciplinary actions to impose on officers based on the current wrongdoing and the officers' prior record.



**HB 830** would have limited officers' ability to arrest individuals for traffic offenses that would have at most resulted in a fine.



**HB 929** would require police officers to activate body cameras during investigations.



**HB 3712** would prohibit chokeholds unless an officer believes the restraint will prevent serious bodily injury or death.

SOURCE: TEXAS LEGISLATURE ONLINE/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



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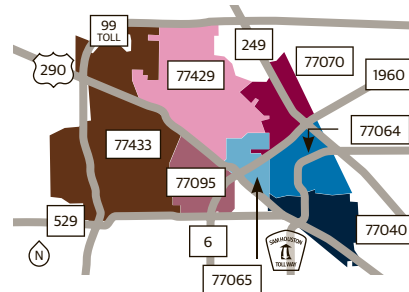
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## MARKET AT A GLANCE

COMPILED BY DANICA LLOYD

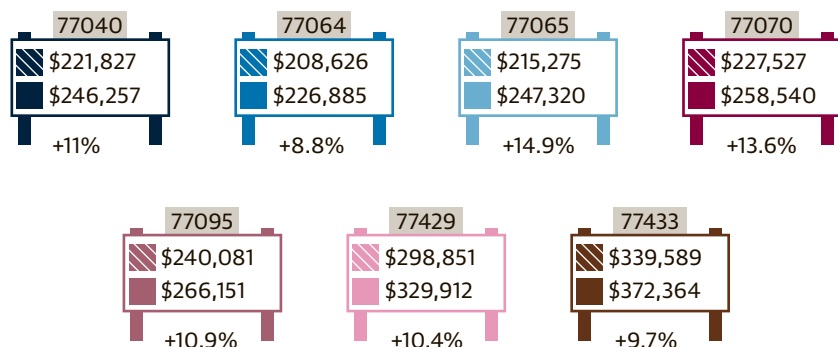
Cy-Fair's real estate market has been active this past year with 682 more homes sold from June 2020-May 2021 than from June 2019-May 2020. Due to low inventory during the COVID-19 pandemic, homebuyers faced competition. Home prices rose by about 11% year over year, and the average number of days on the market dropped from 55 to 33 in that time.

SOURCE: DEBBIE MARSHALL, ROSS & MARSHALL REAL ESTATE/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



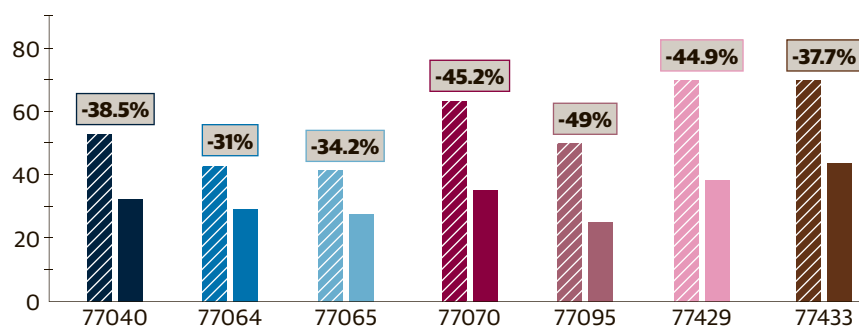
### AVERAGE HOME SALES PRICE

June 2019-May 2020 June 2020-May 2021



### AVERAGE DAYS ON THE MARKET

June 2019-May 2020 June 2020-May 2021





# Demand for building materials delays construction

BY DANICA LLOYD

Due to a rise in demand for construction materials, 71% of contractors said they faced a shortage of supplies needed to complete projects, and 82% said cost fluctuations have affected their business, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Commercial Construction Index report released March 18.

Rising costs and a short supply of lumber, steel, copper, paint, plastics, sheet metal, windows, home appliances and other products have caused construction delays locally and beyond, said Mike Dishberger, CEO of Houston-based Sandcastle Homes and a former Greater Houston Builders Association president.

"A lot of companies thought last year when COVID[-19] hit in the spring that business would drop in homebuilding," he said. "Instead, the opposite happened. People had nothing better to do, I think, than stay at home and decide they want to buy a new house or remodel. So, demand has exceeded supply, and when that happens, prices rise."

For example, Dishberger said plywood cost \$7 per sheet in April 2020 and was up to \$50 per sheet this June. A recent copper shortage increased the price of his electrical materials by 25%, he said.

Dishberger said he has seen costs go up in the past but never quite to this extent.

An uptick in lumber prices began last summer, but other products started to be in short supply in late 2020, and the trend continued into the new year as supply channels could not keep up with demand.

## Homebuyers affected

In addition to delaying the construction process, Dishberger said some homebuilders included escalation clauses in their contracts, giving them the flexibility to bump costs up as materials become more expensive. However, builders do not want to raise their costs to the point where consumers can no longer afford their products.

"Builders normally work on a margin like a lot of businesses, so you would think they're making a lot more money this year," he said. "Well, they probably aren't because the costs are rising faster than they can raise prices. The buying public is not going to

accept a 25% increase in the cost of homes."

Kadie Sellers lives in a Willowbrook-area apartment with her husband of nearly two years and said they pursued buying their first home early this year as she was wrapping up graduate school.

The young couple had reserved a lot and chosen a floor plan by February with plans to build a home near Hwy. 290 and the Grand Parkway later this year. Sellers said the cost of the home had escalated by \$60,000 due to a shortage of building materials by May, when they ultimately agreed this was not the right time to build.

"I don't want to lose equity in a home," she said. "We wanted to invest in something that will grow, and since we're seeing this spike we don't want it to all of a sudden drop again. Then you paid all this money for a house that's not worth what you paid."

Builders told the couple that materials from lumber to shingles, joists and appliances were all backordered. They looked at other less expensive homes but decided they did not want to settle when making such a significant purchase, she said.

## Future outlook

The demand is also exceeding the supply in the market of existing homes. Sellers said many homes are selling as soon as they are listed.

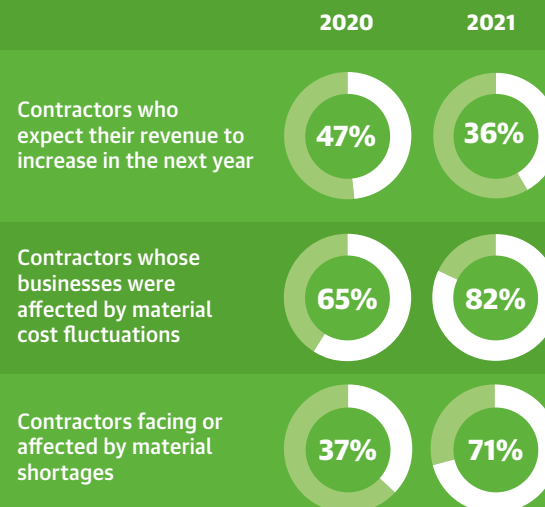
"I'm hoping that we'll see a change because it's becoming kind of unattainable for a lot of people to buy a home right now—especially people who are my age who are looking into buying their first home," Sellers said.

Dishberger said he expects to see elevated costs for several more months, and he does not anticipate costs ever declining to prepandemic levels.

"Until they get supply channels worked out where they have materials going across the country in rail, trucks, ship—however they get here—and get employees to work to do that, the issues are going to continue," he said. "If the price gets too high, some [builders] are going to say, 'I'm not going to start any more houses [because] I can't make the money I need to make.'"

## IN SHORT SUPPLY

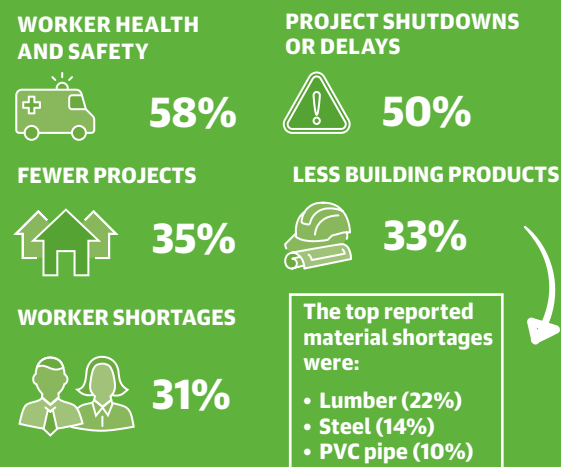
Contractors across the U.S. are facing material shortages in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce survey.



## THE COST OF COVID-19

Survey responses for the first quarter of the year revealed 80% of contractors were experiencing project delays due to COVID-19.

Their top concerns at the time were:



SOURCE: U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION INDEX Q1 2021/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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# Flooded homes at high risk for mold

BY EMILY JAROSZEWSKI & JAKE MAGEE

Residents who have experienced broken pipes or high floodwaters in their homes run the risk of mold growth, which can cause damage to their homes and their health, said Robert Rodriguez, operations manager for All Dry USA, a Houston-based business that offers mold removal, water damage restoration and other home services.

“It can get hazardous pretty quick,” Rodriguez said.

The mold removal process includes containment, securing the area, initiating air scrubbers to clean the air and getting rid of wet areas that contracted mold. After that, the area has to be tested for signs of mold left through a third-party mitigation system, he said.

After the February winter storm, many homes were affected by mold issues, and homeowners were put on waiting lists to receive services, Rodriguez said. However, the longer the wait, the chances of developing a mold issue increases.

“If your house was affected and nobody got to your house in a month,

well guess what? That water damage conventionally does turn into mold,” he said. “And now you have to do a water job and a mold job.”

A mold job should be treated by professionals, Rodriguez said. He said volunteers and remodeling companies that patch up houses post-flooding do not do the same job as mold removal professionals. Rodriguez said prospective homebuyers should test the home for mold before buying, especially in flood-prone areas.

Bob Phalen, University of Houston-Clear Lake associate professor and chair of its occupational safety and health program, said mold can come with harmful side effects.

“I’ve done assessments where people got pretty sick, but it was mostly nausea, vomiting,” he said.

Mold typically affects respiratory systems, causing coughing or allergic responses. Those who have asthma can see it worsen due to mold, and mold can sometimes even cause infections in people, Phalen said.

## MOLD PRIMER

Mold can be an issue in hot, humid environments, such as the Greater Houston area.

### WHAT IS MOLD?

Fungi commonly found on food or wet materials

### WHERE IS MOLD FOUND?

Indoors, mold is most often associated with damp, musty locations, such as basements and bathrooms.

### WHAT CAUSES MOLD?

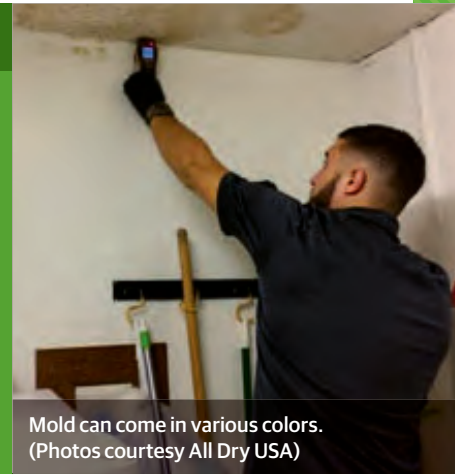
There are five major causes for mold growth: floods, roof and window leaks, condensation, plumbing leaks and damp conditions.

### WHO IS AFFECTED BY MOLD?

Those living with mold can develop respiratory disease, asthma and allergies. Children, the elderly and pregnant women are at higher risk.

### HOW DOES ONE ADDRESS MOLD?

If there is water damage or mold can be seen or smelled, it should be professionally removed before symptoms appear.



Mold can come in various colors. (Photos courtesy All Dry USA)



Treating mold can be hazardous and take days to properly remove.

SOURCE: AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE ASSOCIATION/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



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# HOME IMPROVEMENT

COMPILED BY DANICA LLOYD & MATT STEPHENS



## ASK A HOME ORGANIZER

### THE HOME ORGANIZATION PROCESS CAN BE OVERWHELMING. HOW DO YOU SUGGEST GETTING STARTED?

Start small. Tackling your entire closet or full pantry can feel like digging out of an avalanche, but organizing a pajama drawer or spice rack is more manageable. Small areas take less time, and the instant gratification you get from an organized space may motivate you to keep going.

### WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE KEEP IN MIND DURING THE PROCESS?

Determine why the clutter is accumulating. For example, some of us have trouble visualizing what's behind closed doors. Clear, open storage works best for someone like this. However, if visual clutter distracts you, enclosed organizing systems with labeled bins and neatly sorted drawers are great options.

### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WHEN ORGANIZING, AND HOW CAN THEY BE AVOIDED?

It's tempting to buy a bunch of organizing supplies and shove your stuff in them

without considering the right system for you or your family. I start by talking with clients about how they use their space and determining what works and what doesn't. Then we create a system that flows with the client's lifestyle. That way, any supplies we purchase help maintain their organizing system instead of competing with it.

### ONCE A SPACE IS ORGANIZED, HOW DO YOU RECOMMEND MAINTAINING IT OVER TIME?

If you keep only what you really love, use or need, your space is more likely to stay organized. You'll be tempted to buy less and enjoy what you already have so the clutter is less likely to return.



**Debbie Bush**

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## MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

The National Association of Home Builders offers routine home maintenance tips for homeowners looking to maintain their homes' value and ensure their safety. Find other useful home ownership tips at [www.nahb.org](http://www.nahb.org).



### EXTERIOR

- 1** Roofs should be inspected by a qualified roofer every three years, and skylights should be inspected so leaks do not develop.
- 2** Ensure **downspouts and gutters** do not get clogged with leaves and other debris.
- 3** Inspect **siding** each year to see if it needs repainting, and trim shrubs away so they do not touch the siding.
- 4** Check for split or cracked caulking on **windows and doors** annually, and replace the caulk as necessary.
- 5** Moving parts of **garage doors** need to be oiled once every three months.

### INTERIOR

- 6** **Air filters** require regular replacement, generally once every three months.
- 7** **Safety and security:** Regularly check security alarms and circuit breakers. Check batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors twice a year.
- 8** Clean each **faucet's aerator** every three to four months. Maintain **garbage disposals** by running cold water through them.
- 9** **Masonry walls** can develop a white powder that can be scrubbed off with water and a stiff brush.
- 10** **Hardwood floors** without polyurethane need to be waxed with a liquid or paste "spirit" wax. Use emulsion wax on vinyl.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



## ASK A LANDSCAPING EXPERT

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR HOMEOWNERS TO MAINTAIN THE LANDSCAPING?

You want to keep the integrity of the neighborhood, and if you neglect your landscaping, it's going to make the maintenance a lot harder.

It's very important when [considering] the health of your plants to use adequate soil. You need to bring in the good, high-pH soil that the plants love around here. If you're getting it too much water, sometimes the plant's going to look worse than it is with not enough water.

### WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON ISSUES YOUR CLIENTS HAVE?

Honestly, they don't have a grasp on [regularly] weeding. Having a lot of weeds doesn't look good, but it also suffocates your plants and flowers. It's very important to have somebody cultivate the soil because the longer you go without turning your beds, the more those weeds have time to really make themselves at home.

Customers always ask how they can make their landscaping as low maintenance as possible. Your plant selection is one

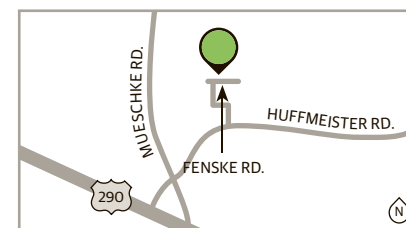
thing. You also have to keep in mind that you have to maintain the beds as well.

### WHAT ARE SOME SIMPLE WAYS HOMEOWNERS CAN SPRUCE UP THEIR YARDS?

Landscaping has a life kind of like us—we only live so long. [For] a lot of landscaping, within a 15-20-year period, it's time to yank them out. An easy way to spruce up your beds would be putting splashes of color. Add some annuals for instant color. Perennials are more like a wave of color throughout the year.

### Robert Gates

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## MAKE A GARDEN

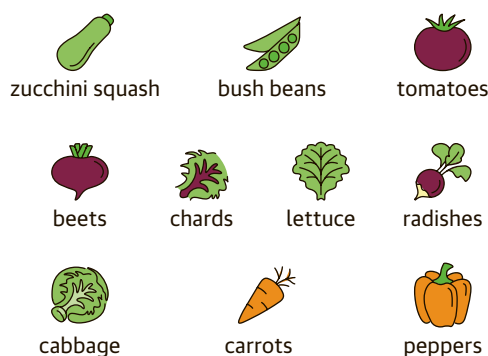
### Tips for choosing a container

The bigger the better—larger containers allow for larger root systems and larger plants as well as holding more water for hot days.






#### Container types can include:

-  • half wooden barrels, buckets or baskets
-  • old bathtubs, galvanized metal tubs, or other tubs or troughs
-  • hanging baskets, which are a good use of extra space and can be used for plants such as herbs or cherry tomatoes

### Popular vegetables to grow:



### Care tips:

-  Watch and treat for insects as needed.
-  Support "climbing" vegetables with cages, twine or a trellis.
-  Liquid fertilizer should be "fed" to plants at least twice per month.
-  Add about an inch of coarse gravel in the bottom of containers to improve drainage.
-  Plants need at least five hours of sunlight per day and may need to be watered once or twice per day.

SOURCE: THE OLD FARMER'S ALMANAC/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



## Morning Star Builders

*Husband-and-wife team create dream homes*

BY EMILY JAROSZEWSKI

**T**ed and Yvonne Cummins, owners of Morning Star Builders in Cy-Fair, have known each other since they were in second grade in rural Kansas, said Yvonne, who also serves as a certified aging-in-place specialist for the business.

In addition to knowing one another for most of their lives, the two have run their local business together for more than 20 years. Yvonne said they each bring their own unique skills and perspectives to the table, which helps balance their personal and professional relationships.

“There are times that he needs my support, and there are times that I need his support,” she said.

Ted specializes in the design and construction aspect behind the business, while Yvonne’s skills are in sales and marketing as well as helping clients choose design

concepts that will accommodate them in their “forever homes.”

“For example, if you love to cook but you already have some knee problems and things, we can even think about what kind of flooring could we put in your kitchen that would make it as comfortable as possible for you to stand long periods of time and still give you a very beautiful aesthetic for that [look],” she said.

Morning Star Builders specializes in

both homebuilding and remodeling. The business began in 2000 and has served communities such as Towne Lake in Cypress, Willow Creek Ranch in Tomball and High Meadow Ranch in Magnolia. The Cummins mostly do business in the northwest Houston area, but they have plans to do construction for clients in Fulshear and Navasota, Yvonne said.

Interior design trends have changed since the pandemic, Yvonne said. Open-concept floor plans have traditionally been requested; however, a few more common requests from clients have included

more rooms with doors for privacy and a double office space so a couple can work comfortably from home, she said.

Morning Star Builders is a partner with Operation Finally Home, a nonprofit organization that provides homes and home modifications to military heroes and widows, and HomeAid

Houston, a charity under the Greater Houston Builders Association that facilitates new construction and remodeling of homeless shelters.

Yvonne said she and her husband strive to meet clients’ needs and adapt to the ever-changing business world with an eye on the future.

“[Morning Star Builders] gives you a more well-rounded experience,” she said. “You get a guy’s perspective, and you get a woman’s perspective.”

**“YOU GET A GUY’S PERSPECTIVE, AND YOU GET A WOMAN’S PERSPECTIVE.”**

**YVONNE CUMMINS, MORNING STAR BUILDERS OWNER**



The business builds and remodels local homes. (Photos courtesy Morning Star Builders)

### EMERGING HOME TRENDS

The Cummins family has seen several waves of home design trends since launching Morning Star Builders. Some current trends include:



Double home office spaces



Rooms with doors for privacy



Ted and Yvonne Cummins have led their business for more than 20 years.

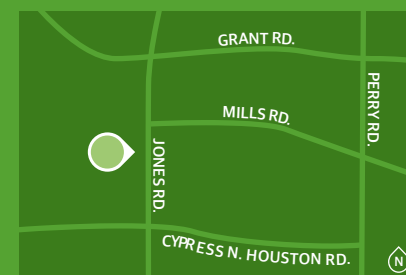
### Morning Star Builders

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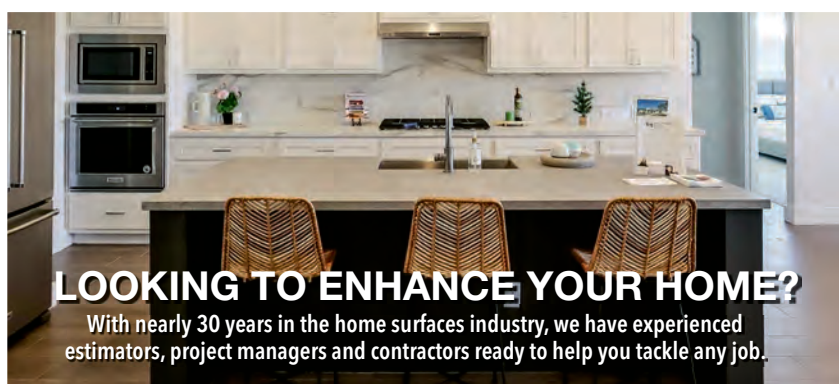
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# Dan and Cindy Boutwell

Longtime Cypress Realtors navigate competitive market

Dan and Cindy Boutwell started their own company, Boutwell Properties, in late 2019 after a nearly 20-year career as licensed Realtors for RE/MAX. The couple said even as the local real estate market became more competitive due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they continued to maintain plenty of listings from past clients and referrals.

The Boutwells work in Longwood, Fairfield, Lakewood Oaks Estates, Rock Creek, Towne Lake and Bridgeland, among other Cypress-area neighborhoods. Cindy said as more communities are developed in Cypress, the market will get busier. Low interest rates, low inventory and increased home prices have defined the local market throughout the pandemic. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Dan and Cindy Boutwell own and operate Boutwell Properties. (Danica Lloyd/Community Impact Newspaper)

## WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LOCAL REAL ESTATE MARKET?

Cindy: I think, right now, the lack of inventory is the biggest thing. When COVID hit, people kind of panicked for just a few days, and then they were like, 'Get me out of the apartment that we're in right now.' Other people thought, 'We need to get a bigger house.' It just went from there and kind of kept on going.

New construction has been very difficult to deal with. Right now, builders are anti-Realtor because they can sell stuff left and right. What consumers don't understand is you need to get the house inspected because it's been built so fast. New construction is coming up on a downturn because there's not enough people to build houses, and there's not enough materials. So

they're getting ready to not sit pretty, and then they're going to come back and want us to help them.

## WHAT DRAWS PEOPLE TO THE CY-FAIR AREA?

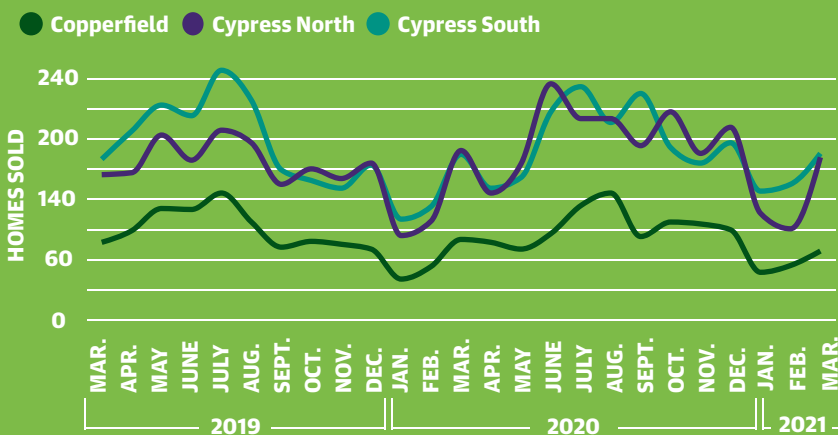
Cindy: There's a couple of things. It's the small businesses that are here. We stayed open, and our small businesses flourished. We have a ton of mom and pop businesses here, and everyone really rallied around them—especially during COVID. Community feel, schools and sports are big. It's a small town without really being a town.

## WHAT CHALLENGES ARE BUYERS AND SELLERS FACING?

Dan: For sellers, they've got to have a place to go. We've run into that where they want to sell, but they have to find something ... because when they do

## CY-FAIR HOME SALES TRENDS

While homebuyers have had limited options when it comes to inventory during the pandemic, home sales have remained steady in Cy-Fair.



SOURCE: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY'S TEXAS REAL ESTATE RESEARCH CENTER/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

find something they know they can sell what they have. Two years ago, everyone was just like, 'I've got to sell this first, and then I'll find something.' Right now, it's kind of flipped a little bit: 'I'll find something, and then I'll sell.'

Cindy: And for the buyers, it's knowing how to write multiple offers. We've got a team that we've trained on how to write an offer to get it accepted without going crazy because you still have to represent the buyer. We got eight offers on one of our listings recently, and there was really only three of them that we would even consider—the offers were poorly written and asking the seller to do all kinds of crazy things.

## WHAT TRENDS ARE YOU SEEING WHEN IT COMES TO WHAT BUYERS ARE LOOKING FOR?

Cindy: They're still wanting it to be clean; they're wanting it to be open concept; and they're wanting space. That's one thing we've noticed, especially ones that have come from

apartments. A lot are still wanting the bedrooms and bathrooms to be updated. But with the shortage right now, people are not as [selective].

## HAVE YOU SEEN DEMOGRAPHICS CHANGE AS HOME PRICES HAVE GONE UP?

Cindy: No, not really. Most of our customers are families, and we've seen some people move from in town. Maybe they're younger, and they want to have kids, and they don't want to be in the Heights or Montrose anymore, so they're coming out here. We've seen some move in from out of state.

Dan: One demographic you don't see is first-time homebuyers. They just can't get anything. A daughter of a past client and her husband, no kids, they want to buy a house with a 5% down payment. They're getting killed. Everyone comes in with 20%-50% cash, and then they'll waive appraisal, and they just can't do it.

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## UNDERSTANDING REVERSE MORTGAGES



With low rates in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, Ray Daniel, reverse mortgage specialist with Fairway Independent Mortgage Corp., said he believes now is an especially good time for senior homeowners to look at reverse mortgage options.

Reverse mortgages allow homeowners to convert part of the equity in their homes into cash without having to sell the house or pay additional monthly bills, according to the Federal Trade Commission website.

With this loan, if the balance is more than the home is worth, heirs do not have to pay the difference. But if heirs sell the home, the lender will take the proceeds from the sale as payment on the loan, and the Federal Housing Administration insurance will cover any remaining loan balance, it said.

Daniel said there are several misconceptions when it comes to reverse mortgages with the biggest being who owns the home. He said even with the mortgage, the senior continues to own the house throughout their lifetime, and it continues to be in their name.

"[Homeowners] can do with it what they want, after they close on the reverse mortgage," Daniel said. "If five years later they decide they need to move and be closer to one of their children or grandchildren, they can sell it."

In addition, qualification requirements include age, credit and income, among others.

However, there are some cons that come with reverse mortgages including added fees for closing costs and the potential for a reduced equity on the home over time, something to consider for those planning to leave the home for their children and grandchildren.

In the case that heirs want to keep the home instead of selling it, the loan must be paid off with another source of funds, but heirs will never have to pay more than the full loan balance or 95% of the home's appraised value, whichever is less, according to the FTC website.

Even so, Daniel said only about 1.5% of adult children inherit a parent's house and move into it.

"If you get a reverse mortgage, that's going to reduce that amount [of equity], but that amount that an owner took out to live their life they didn't have to take it out of their savings account or stocks or bonds or investment account," Daniel said. "So, their investment accounts are larger by the same amount they took cash out of their house."



### WHAT IS A REVERSE MORTGAGE?

Reverse mortgages allow homeowners, who are often near retirement, to convert part of the equity in their homes into cash without having to sell the house or pay additional monthly bills.

Most but not all reverse mortgages are federally insured through the Federal Housing Administration's Home Equity Conversion Mortgage Program.



### PROS AND CONS

Reverse mortgages are not recommended for everyone. Here is a look at some of the pros and cons of this program.

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain ownership of the home</li> <li>✓ More cash on hand to live in retirement</li> <li>✓ No mortgage payment during the life of the loan</li> <li>✓ Neither the homeowner nor the heir are liable for any amount of the mortgage that transcends the value of the home</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ The equity of the home decreases</li> <li>✗ Fees associated with the loan are generally higher than with other financial products; ask lenders about options available</li> <li>✗ Balance of the loan increases over time as does the interest on the loan and the fees associated</li> </ul> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



### WHO QUALIFIES?

Qualifications for borrowers to apply for a reverse mortgage include:

- ➔ Must be age 62 or older. For those in a couple, both must be at least 62 years old;
- ➔ Must live in home as a primary residence for more than 6 months out of the year;
- ➔ Must own the home outright;
- ➔ Must not be a delinquent on any federal debt;
- ➔ Meet basic credit and income qualifications; and
- ➔ Never miss a monthly payment as owners are still responsible for maintenance, taxes and insurance as long as they occupy their home.

### REPAYMENT REQUIREMENTS

Loan repayments will not be required until:

- ➔ Last living borrower dies;
- ➔ Last living borrower no longer lives in the home as their principal residence including moving to a nursing home or assisted-living care facility; or
- ➔ Borrower chooses to sell the property.



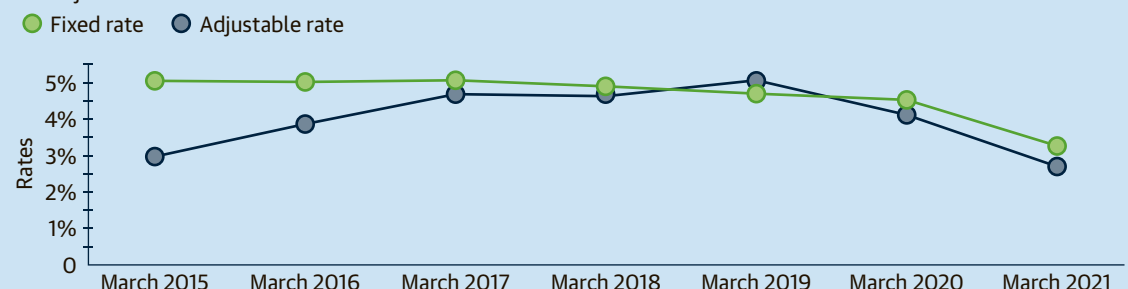
SOURCES: CONSUMER FINANCE PROTECTION BUREAU, WWW.REVERSEMORTGAGEALERT.ORG, FAIRWAY INDEPENDENT MORTGAGE CORP., FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION, U.S DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER



### TRACKING REVERSE MORTGAGE RATES

\*LATEST DATA AVAILABLE AS OF MAY 18

Texas reverse mortgage rates from the HECM program are reported each month. Below is the average rate for fixed and adjustable rate loans over time.\*



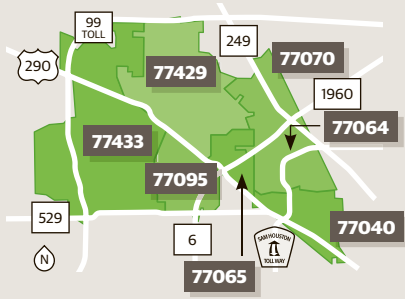
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COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER STAFF

## JUNE 2021 COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE DATA

Occupancy rates in Cy-Fair's commercial real estate spaces have dropped slightly year over year. Office rental rates have fallen by 6% since the first quarter of the year, but both retail and industrial rates have risen slightly. The industrial sector accounts for 74% of the total ongoing commercial real estate construction.

### TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF SPACE

Q2 2020 June 2021

#### OFFICE



#### INDUSTRIAL



#### RETAIL



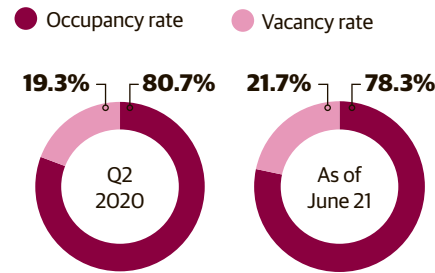
MARKET DATA PROVIDED BY CALDWELL COS.  
7904 N. SAM HOUSTON PARKWAY, FOURTH FLOOR  
HOUSTON, TX 77064  
COLLEGE STATION | HOUSTON | THE WOODLANDS

Although every effort has been made to ensure the timeliness and accuracy of this real estate data, *Community Impact Newspaper* assumes no liability for errors or omissions.

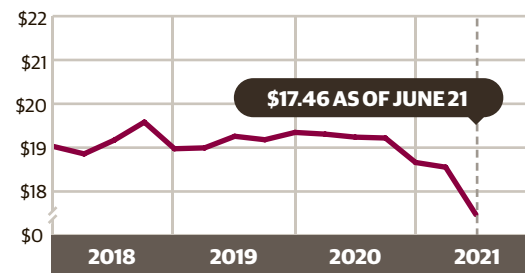


## OFFICE

### OCCUPANCY VS. VACANCY



### RENTAL RATES PER SQUARE FOOT



### UNDER CONSTRUCTION

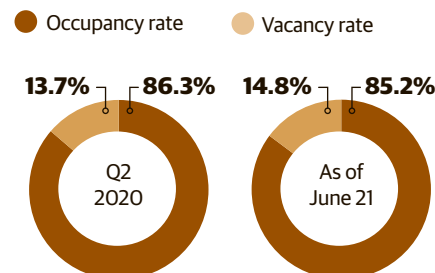
**157,124**  
square feet

**2**  
buildings

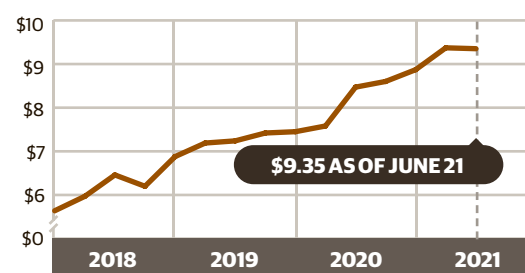


## INDUSTRIAL

### OCCUPANCY VS. VACANCY



### RENTAL RATES PER SQUARE FOOT



### UNDER CONSTRUCTION

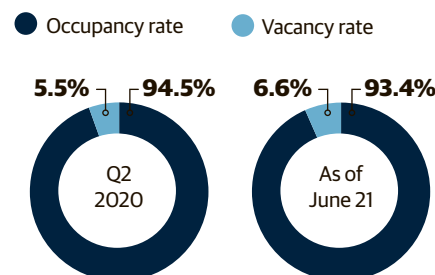
**971,857**  
square feet

**4**  
buildings

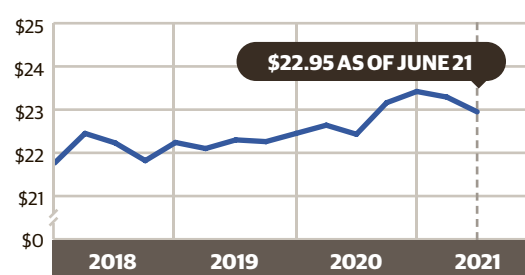


## RETAIL

### OCCUPANCY VS. VACANCY



### RENTAL RATES PER SQUARE FOOT



### UNDER CONSTRUCTION

**178,340**  
square feet

**7**  
buildings

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# THE TOP-GROWING COMMUNITIES in Cy-Fair

Developers including Howard Hughes Corp. and Land Tejas are slated to lead Cy-Fair's growth in the coming years in terms of single-family home construction.

## PLANNED NEW SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

NOV. 2020-OCT. 2025    OCT. 2025-OCT. 2030

### 1 DUNHAM POINTE 2,048

598    1,450

### 2 BRIDGELAND 3,600

2,407    1,193

### 3 TOWNE LAKE 866

866    0

### 4 BRIDGE CREEK 1,916

995    921

### 5 LANDMARK INDUSTRIES TRACT\* 1,505

390    1,115

### 6 MARVIDA 2,367

930    1,437

Population and Survey Analysts, demographers who consult with the school district on where potential future school sites will be needed.

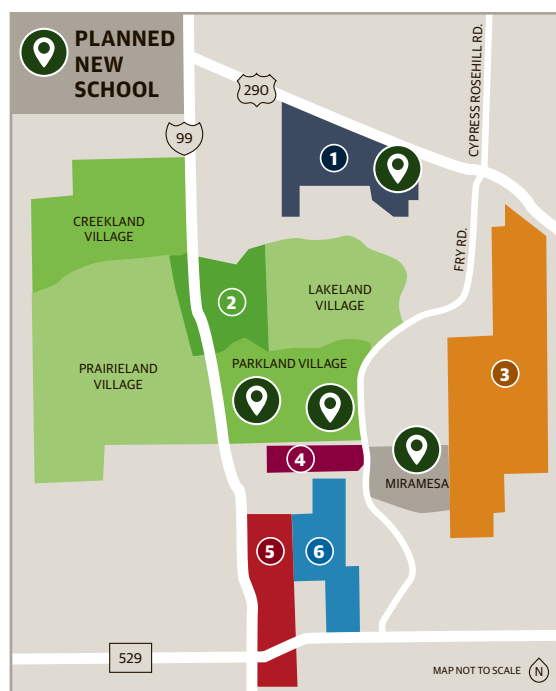
CFISD Chief Operations Officer Roy Sprague said district officials decide when and where to build new campuses based on enrollment projections and insight from local developers.

"With CFISD being more than 80% fully developed within its boundaries, acquiring land will become a significant challenge in the future," he said. "However, the district has already purchased future school and support sites based upon five- to 10-year enrollment projections."

Bridgeland, Marvida, Dunham Pointe, Bridge Creek and Towne Lake are the master-planned communities forecasting the most single-family home development in the coming years.

Archie Dunham, a former energy executive who also developed Stone Creek Ranch in Hockley, purchased 1,327 acres of land south of Hwy. 290 between Mason and Mueschke roads in 2007 as the future site of Dunham Pointe.

In addition to connectivity and its position in what he called one of the top-performing school districts in the Greater Houston region, he said homebuyers



\*WHILE DEVELOPMENT PLANS HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED, PASA ANTICIPATES BOTH MULTIFAMILY AND SINGLE-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT TO BEGIN IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS ALONG THE GRAND PARKWAY SOUTH OF WEST ROAD ON HUNDREDS OF ACRES OF LAND OWNED BY LANDMARK INDUSTRIES.

SOURCE: POPULATION AND SURVEY ANALYSTS/  
COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

are attracted to the range of shopping centers and places of worship in Cypress.

"We really made the decision to buy the land because it was really the last, what I would call, premier residential and commercial site directly on [Hwy.] 290 in the corridor, and so we went after that one because we knew long-term it would be a very, very valuable property," Dunham said.

As Cy-Fair's remaining large tracts of land are built out, PASA projects by 2024, the development of multifamily units will outpace the growth of single-family homes, amounting to about 18,220 new units by 2030.

"That math probably is accurate only in that we're running out of land in Cy-Fair," said Fred Caldwell, president and CEO of Caldwell Companies, which developed Towne Lake and other Cypress neighborhoods. "You end up with smaller tracts that are going to lend themselves toward multifamily."

PASA estimates about 13% of Cy-Fair's developable land is yet to be developed, most of which is east of the Grand Parkway and south of Hwy. 290.

"The unique thing about Cypress is that it seems to always grow and grow ... and when you think that there's [no more] land to be developed, there pops up another master-planned community," said Tim Johnson, director of community sales and marketing for Land Tejas, the company developing several local neighborhoods.

## Bridgeland

Melton said Bridgeland has grown to 16,000 residents since the first of its four villages opened nearly 15 years ago. PASA projects another 3,600 new single-family homes will be built there in the next decade.

While Lakeland Village is effectively built out, development in Parkland Village is expected to continue through 2025, and Prairieland Village is slated for a grand opening next spring with an estimated build-out date of 2035. Melton said the final village, Creekland Village, will start in the next couple of years, and this project in addition to Bridgeland Central, an 800-acre town center, will be ongoing through about 2035 as well.

In the short-term, CFISD plans to open Elementary School No. 57 in 2022 off Tuckerton Road and Middle School No. 20 at the Bridgeland High School site in 2023 to accommodate growth. These projects were included in the 2019 bond program and are estimated to cost \$32.6 million and \$66.9 million, respectively, according to Sprague. As Bridgeland expands, it will grow into Waller and Katy ISDs, Melton said.

The large scale of Bridgeland gave developers flexibility in long-term planning, allowing them to monitor trends and adapt to consumer demands, he said. For instance, creating habitats for native wildlife and dedicating about 3,000 of Bridgeland's 11,400 acres to open space has always been a focus. But Lakeland Village launched the community with manicured landscaping, and Parkland Village followed with more meadowlike vegetation.

Melton said homebuilders have introduced more modern architecture styles, which have resonated with millennials—the top consumer group in Bridgeland last year.

"We like to make sure that we provide home offerings where people can be a first-time buyer, they can go through the different ... phases of life so you can move up and then you can move back down when you become an empty-nester," he said.

## Marvida and Bridge Creek

Land Tejas communities are expected to bring the second- and fourth-most new single-family homes to the market in the next 10 years. Marvida is expected to add 2,367 homes, and Bridge Creek will add another 1,916, according to PASA.

These two new communities are located just west of two other Land Tejas projects—Canyon Lakes West and Miramesa, which is expected to approach build-out next year, according to Johnson.

"The Cypress area and Katy areas are, from a development standpoint, a very easy decision for a developer if you can find land out there to build a development," Johnson said.

Bridge Creek began home sales last year, and Marvida is slated to deliver initial lots to homebuilders this summer. Homes range from \$200,000-\$500,000, which Johnson said meets the budgets for many young families in the market.

Land Tejas requires homebuilders to integrate technology in their homes, such as motion detectors, smart door locks, smart thermostats and USB outlets; and developers plan amenities that appeal to all ages, Johnson said. Marvida's signature amenity will be a lazy river.

Johnson said he believes the master-planned community concept is popular because amenity options



**"THE UNIQUE THING ABOUT CYPRESS IS THAT IT SEEMS TO ALWAYS GROW AND GROW ... AND WHEN YOU THINK THAT THERE'S [NO MORE] LAND TO BE DEVELOPED, THERE POPS UP ANOTHER MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITY."**

TIM JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SALES AND MARKETING FOR LAND TEJAS



like these, schools, retail and other businesses are within close proximity. Additionally, developers typically maintain high standards.

"You have the option to live in an environment where you know what the houses are going to look like because you have deed restrictions and guidelines set forth by the developer," he said. "So, you have peace of mind that the homes down the street from you are going to be very nice and similar to the home you just bought."

### Dunham Pointe

Officials with Dunham Pointe broke ground earlier this year and are in the process of platting the first 995 lots, according to Dunham. PASA projects more than 2,000 new homes in the next 10 years in the community.

Dunham said the first contract signed was a 146-acre deal with CFISD for new elementary, middle and high school campuses in addition to a transportation center and athletic facilities. The elementary campus could open in 2027 or 2028, and the high school could open in 2028 or 2029, according to CFISD officials.

Four homebuilders have committed to the community, and Dunham said he plans to have lots ready for them by late July or early August. Home prices will start around \$350,000-\$400,000 and go up to as much as \$800,000-\$1.2 million, he said.

"I think the demographic will probably not be first[-time] homebuyers, but it would be maybe their upgraded second home just based on that price range," Dunham said.

The community will highlight nature with parks and lakes and ultimately dedicate 300-400 acres for commercial use. Dunham said he has had lots of interest from multifamily developers but wants

to focus on his plan for nearly 1,000 single-family homes over the next few years first.

Dunham claims the location will also be a selling point when it comes to flood control. The community is located just north of Cypress Creek, but contractors have strictly followed the newest 500-year flood plain guidelines and have already constructed about 180 acres of detention, he said.

### Towne Lake

PASA projects another 866 homes will be built over the next five years in Towne Lake.

Caldwell said when he acquired the first 400 acres for Towne Lake in 2005 and a subsequent 2,000 acres the following year, there was little housing activity south of Hwy. 290 despite being in the heart of CFISD. Around the same time, plans for Lone Star College-CyFair and the Berry Center unfolded, and these two institutions along with a 100-acre Harris County Precinct 3 park would make the area a "destination," Caldwell said.

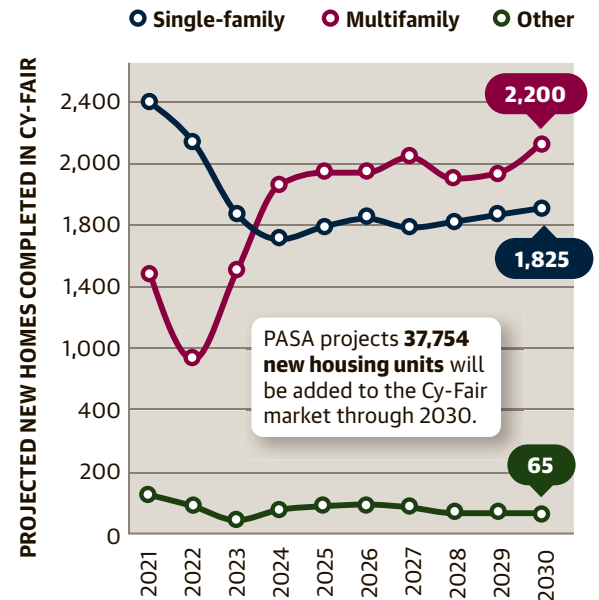
Caldwell Companies has since developed a 320-acre lake and the Boardwalk at Towne Lake, which invites residents to boat to the dining, retail and entertainment center. The lake also contains rainfall to prevent flooding, and its water is used to irrigate common areas, Caldwell said.

"It's the largest earthmoving job probably in the city of Houston. We moved enough earth to fill the Astrodome around 11 times," he said. "Our goal was to have a community connected by water."

Caldwell said commercial development will extend to the front of the community at Hwy. 290 and Skinner Road. Construction will begin by 2024 on a project extending Greenhouse Road to Hwy. 290 and connecting it to Skinner Road, according to officials from Harris County Municipal Utility

# DEVELOPMENT *advances*

Demographers say single-family housing developments will continue to dominate the market's growth for a few more years before multifamily housing fills in the smaller parcels of land that remain in Cy-Fair.



SOURCE: POPULATION AND SURVEY ANALYSTS/  
COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

District No. 500, who anticipate funding to partially be covered by a federal grant.

"When you look at growth patterns in Houston for the last 50 years, they've been north, northwest and west. I think that will continue for the next 50 years, and so certainly the press is going to be into Waller, Willis and far west Katy and Brookshire," Caldwell said. "Those suburban markets are just expanding further and further out, and Cypress has been the example of suburban development done well."



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Joel Cecchetti (center) owns Tex-Mex eatery Tito's Cantina on Hwy. 290. He works alongside manager Michelle Rivera and chef Jorge Nava to create a welcoming atmosphere. (Photos by Emily Jaroszewski/Community Impact Newspaper)

## Tito's Cantina

*Local Tex-Mex eatery prepares to expand with bakery addition*

**W**ith more than 30 years of experience running franchises, Joel Cecchetti, owner of Tito's Cantina in Cypress, is no stranger to the restaurant industry.

He said many assume his wife, who is Cuban, inspired him to pursue the Tex-Mex food industry. But Tito's head chef Jorge Nava, a native of Mexico, created many of the Mexican-inspired dishes diners will find on the menu. Nava said his mother taught him to cook many of the dishes now served at Tito's.

Tito's opened off Hwy. 290 in 2017, serving authentic Mexican dishes and gradually incorporating more Tex-Mex items on its menu. The restaurant is known for its fajitas, Cecchetti said, as well as its many margarita options.

Cecchetti said not only does Tito's serve the Cypress community, but those all over Houston, too.

"We get a lot of people that drive

**"EVERYBODY THAT COMES IN HERE IS A REGULAR. IT'S A NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT."**

JOEL CECCHETTI, OWNER OF TITO'S CANTINA

from inside the Loop that come out here because they like what we have," Cecchetti said.

Now, Cecchetti said he wants to expand the restaurant, which includes adding a panaderia, or bakery. While construction is not yet finished, he said Tito's is selling out of items that customers are able to order in the restaurant. The panaderia is accessible from inside or outside the restaurant and has cakes, conchas and other pan dulce available for purchase.

Additionally, officials said plans

for a new Tito's location will emerge in the near future. Cecchetti said he is looking in the Cypress, Katy and Spring communities for opportunities to expand.

With a number of restaurants struggling to hire staff, Cecchetti said this is not stopping him from opening a new location. He said with COVID-19 unemployment benefits disappearing, he expects to see a number of people ready to return to work.

Every third Thursday of the month, Tito's hosts band Quimbara at 8 p.m. as well as karaoke night every other Thursday. Tuesdays bring a \$1.25 street taco special from 5-8 p.m., and happy hour is weekdays from 3-6 p.m.

Cecchetti said Tito's is known for having recurring customers that become familiar faces to the staff.

"Everybody that comes in here is a regular," he said. "It's a neighborhood restaurant."

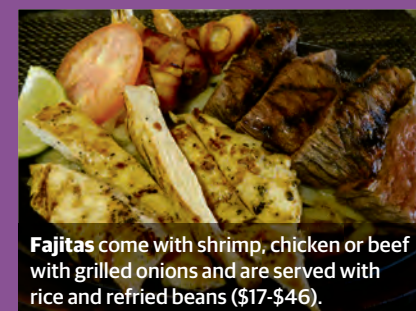
### MENU ITEMS TO TRY



**Margaritas** are served frozen or on the rocks and come in a variety of flavors (\$7-\$10).



**Queso flameado** features melted white cheese with mushrooms, peppers, onions and chorizo (\$9.99).



**Fajitas** come with shrimp, chicken or beef with grilled onions and are served with rice and refried beans (\$17-\$46).

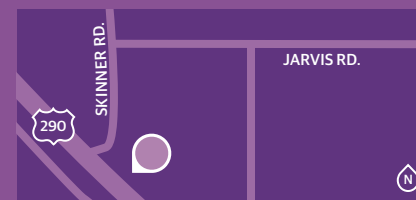
### Tito's Cantina

25250 Hwy. 290, Ste. 190, Cypress

832-653-6777

[www.titoscantina.com](http://www.titoscantina.com)

Hours: Sun. 11:30 a.m.-8 p.m., Mon.-Wed. 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Thu.-Sat. 11 a.m.-10 p.m.



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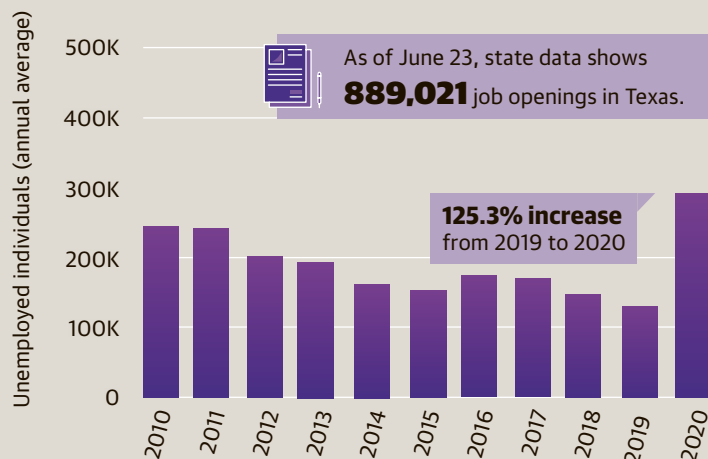


# UNDERSTANDING UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment in the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land area peaked in April 2020 when COVID-19 restrictions began to take effect. Despite restrictions being lifted, unemployment still hovers above 7%.

## UNEMPLOYMENT ACROSS THE DECADE

2020 saw the highest number of unemployed individuals in the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land area in the last decade.



## MINIMUM WAGE OVER TIME

Of the 10 largest states in the U.S., Texas is among the four that has not increased its minimum wage since 2010.

	MINIMUM WAGE		
	2010	CHANGE	2021
CALIFORNIA	\$8	+75%	\$14
FLORIDA	\$7.25	+19%	\$8.65
GEORGIA	\$7.25	-	\$7.25
ILLINOIS	\$8.25	+33.3%	\$11
MICHIGAN	\$7.40	+30.4%	\$9.65
NEW YORK	\$7.25	+72.4%	\$12.50
NORTH CAROLINA	\$7.25	-	\$7.25
OHIO	\$7.30	+20.5%	\$8.80
PENNSYLVANIA	\$7.25	-	\$7.25
TEXAS	\$7.25	-	\$7.25

SOURCES: TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, LABOR LAW CENTER/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

CONTINUED FROM 1

system in the 13-county Houston-Galveston region, found food preparation, operation and servers had the second-highest job demand among all industries in February. About 20,573 food industry jobs in the region, including servers, food preparation workers and various positions in fast food chains, were open at the time.

The restaurant industry is struggling to stay afloat and cater to the high volume of customers coming in as COVID-19 vaccines availability is more widespread, local business owners said.

Even with a \$250 signing bonus incentive for employees that stay longer than 90 days, Mia's Table Manager Alicia Valdivia said she cannot find enough workers to open the new Cypress location on Fry Road. Valdivia said she believes Mia's Table is not drawing in workers because they are unmotivated to return to work, especially if they have been receiving unemployment benefits.

North Houston Association President Marissa Briggs said applicants

will schedule interviews for serving positions but not show up so they can collect unemployment.

"They're having to recruit some of their family in to help whenever they have shortages, and I know that they spend a whole lot of time setting up interviews and planning for teams, and then when the people don't show up for those interviews or don't show up for their first day of work, then they're back to square one," Briggs said. "I can only imagine the frustration that they have."

### Unemployment factors

Gov. Greg Abbott announced to the U.S. Department of Labor on May 17 that Texas would be opting out of federal unemployment compensation related to the COVID-19 pandemic effective June 26, which includes the expiration of a \$300 weekly supplemental benefit. Abbott said in a May 17 news release that Texas is seeing a booming number of job openings.

"According to the Texas Workforce Commission, the number of job openings in Texas is almost identical to the number of Texans who are receiving

unemployment benefits," he said in the release. "That assessment does not include the voluminous jobs that typically are not listed, like construction and restaurant jobs. In fact, there are nearly 60% more jobs open—and listed—in Texas today than there was in February 2020, the month before the pandemic hit Texas."

Additionally, Abbott's decision was also influenced by the fact that, according to the governor's office, about 18% of filed unemployment benefits were found to be fraudulent.

Abbott said as the state reopens to 100% capacity, he believes the focus should be on helping unemployed Texans find employment in one of the state's many job openings. However, Jonathan Lewis, senior policy analyst with Every Texan, said taking away unemployment would only harm those who rely on it. Every Texan specializes in strengthening public policy to give Texans equitable access to health care, education and jobs.

"I think it's kind of a short-sighted strategy to cut off these resources when people have that money coming into their pockets," Lewis said. "They're then able to continue to buy

the goods and services that support businesses, and so you know, it's kind of like shooting yourself in the foot if you're going to cut off these federal benefits while people are still trying to find employment that is suitable for them."

He said populations of Texans who live off these benefits will see the effects more than others. He said workers of color, women with child care issues, veterans and even senior citizens will struggle with less aid.

Another issue facing a return to the workforce for some unemployed workers is salaries not meeting the needs of workers to afford basic things, such as child care or health insurance. In Harris County, the average family of four needs to bring in \$6,084 monthly to afford housing, food, transportation, health care and other necessities, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that considers the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions.

"Wages really benefit society as a whole, so seeing workers be able to kind of negotiate wages up is a really good thing for everybody," Lewis said.

However, the state's minimum wage has remained \$7.25 for more than 10 years, while the national average has increased to \$9.21 since 2010, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"I think it's really important to think about who is being impacted by these cuts, and it's really our most vulnerable Texans," Lewis said.

### Local business reactions

The Union Kitchen is another Cypress restaurant looking to hire employees for every position, General Manager Anthony Messina said.

"Every restaurant is fighting that battle," he said.

The business needs about 70 employees to run effectively, Messina said, but as of June 9, the eatery only had about 53 on staff. He said he has used social media and job websites to promote open positions.

The Union Kitchen has been looking to hire since Abbott opened business capacity statewide to 100% in March. Despite using online sources, the restaurant is struggling to recruit applicants.

"We were completely staffed up for the 50% capacity," Messina said. "And when he [opened up to 100% capacity] and they extended unemployment on top of it, it hurt [us]."

At Mia's Table in Cypress, Valdivia



said she had planned to open by the end of June. However, she said if the eatery cannot meet its goal of hiring at least 30 workers by the estimated opening date, then it will have to push back the opening date again. Mia's Table has not opened as of press time June 24.

To cover more tables with a smaller staff, Marty Wadsworth, vice president of marketing at Willie's Grill and Icehouse, said the restaurant switched over to a digital ordering system combined with servers bringing out food to the tables for faster turnover rates.

"Our team members during the last six months here ... are averaging over \$20 an hour right now simply by picking up more tables," Wadsworth said.

Potential solutions

Melissa Stewart, executive director of the Texas Restaurant Association, said hiring bonuses and referral bonuses are common when trying to recruit more staff members at restaurants.

In the meantime, restaurants have taken many measures to ensure their business stays afloat, including closing for a few extra days or changing their hours of operation.

## UNEMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

To remain eligible for unemployment benefits, claimants must follow certain guidelines. Texas opted out of further federal unemployment payouts beginning June 26.

- ✓ Register on [www.workintexas.com](http://www.workintexas.com).
- 🔍 Complete the minimum number of work search activities each week (three in Harris County).
- 📅 Keep a work search log.
- 📁 Apply for and accept suitable full-time work.

While some are eager to return to the workforce, the challenges of finding good child care for single parents is still weighing on families, Stewart said. Employment may resume at a normal rate when schools and day cares open up in the fall to give those parents a chance to work, she said.

Meanwhile, Janet Ryan, director of development for local nonprofit Cypress Assistance Ministries, said their Operation Jobs program helps

## RETURNING TO WORK

A survey of 506 Americans who became unemployed during the pandemic was conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in late May regarding barriers to re-entering the workforce.

<b>49%</b> of respondents said they are not actively looking for work.	<b>30%</b> of respondents said they do not expect to return to work this year.	<b>13%</b> of respondents said they never plan to return to work.
<b>23%</b> of respondents said they lack the skills or experience necessary for most jobs available.	<b>24%</b> of respondents reported child care and family needs.	<b>26%</b> reported COVID-19 concerns as reasons they are not looking for work.

SOURCES: TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSIONER, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

individuals prepare for interviews, rewrite resumes and refine presentation skills.

The one-on-one program aims to help individuals in job readiness, and most of the jobs in high demand are those that require little to no previous experience or credentials, Ryan said.

In the meantime, Stewart said she encourages restaurateurs to highlight the benefits of working in the industry, such as flexible hours, competitive

pay, a great starting job for high school or college students and a reliable second job when needed.

"We're great for somebody who needs that extra little income," she said.

Hannah Zedaker contributed to this report.



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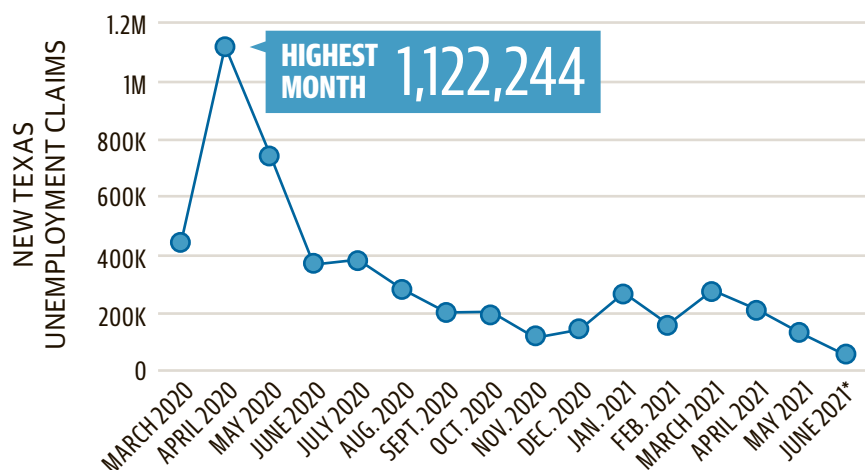
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## THE COVID-19 effect

Initial unemployment claims were the highest in Texas history during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest month came early, with 1.1 million initial claims filed in April 2020.



### Texas TURMOIL

Five weekly peaks of initial unemployment filings from major events that affected Texas since 2000

#### EVENT:

COVID-19: April 4, 2020

Hurricane Harvey: Sept. 2, 2017

Recession: Sept. 27, 2008

Hurricane Rita: Oct. 8, 2005

Post 9/11: Jan. 12, 2002

#### FILINGS:

315,167

63,788

49,398

30,949

26,115

SOURCE: TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

## Where are THE JOBS?



These are the top three job categories in the Houston metro.

### HARRIS COUNTY

- 1 Registered nurses 3,949
- 2 Customer service reps 1,228
- 3 Retail salespersons 1,209

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY

- 1 Registered nurses 386
- 2 Retail salespersons 234
- 3 First-line supervisors of food preparation and serving workers 111

### FORT BEND COUNTY

- 1 Registered nurses 382
- 2 Retail salespersons 193
- 3 Customer service reps 104

### GALVESTON COUNTY

- 1 Registered nurses 256
- 2 Retail salespersons 166
- 3 Customer service reps 68

### BRAZORIA COUNTY

- 1 Registered nurses 154
- 2 Retail salespersons 119
- 3 Customer service reps 69

SOURCE: WWW.WORKINTEXAS.COM/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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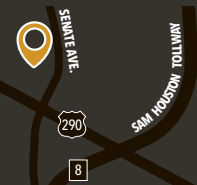
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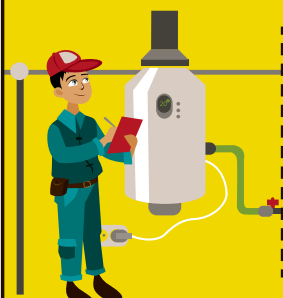


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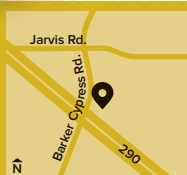
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