

Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

NEWSLETTER



May 2022

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Issue 5

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The Message



Droughts, Floods and Flow

Global warming is converting Texas from being a harsh environment – periods of constant drought, punctuated with flooding – to one that’s attractive to increasingly disruptive weather events. The National Weather Service is calling for 21 hurricanes this season (which starts June 1) – destructive and expensive for Texas and Texans. The proposed names are:

ATLANTIC STORM NAMES		
2022		
ALEX	IAN	RICHARD
BONNIE	JULIA	SHARY
COLIN	KARL	TOBIAS
DANIELLE	LISA	VIRGINIE
EARL	MARTIN	WALTER
FIONA	NICOLE	
GASTON	OWEN	
HERMINE	PAULA	

We happen to live in “flash flood alley” – that Balcones Escarpment tends to cause high moisture storms to stall out and dump their loads. We have a higher potential for flooding than anywhere else in the nation, certainly a distinction we could do without here in Central Texas. The rain not only rolls down our rocky, clay-rich soils and steep terrains, but overwhelms our drainage systems in our metropolitan areas with lots of hard, paved surfaces.

We have just exited May under abnormally dry to severe drought conditions. The drought line has been

crossing Texas and is now right through us heading east. The area of the state impacted by exceptional drought climbed to 25 percent, its largest value in 8 years. By end of June, all of Texas is expected to be under drought conditions. Rainfall is down in all reservoir regions – we rely on water flowing from those in the Highland Lakes area, yet their inflows have been decreasing since the 1940’s. Any major rainfalls have been east of them, so Lake Travis just keeps dropping in level.

Federal and state funding have been released to help regions be good stewards with water, wastewater, and water basin flood-planning. We, in fact, voted in 2019 to amend our constitution to provide for the creation of a Flood Infrastructure Fund, FIF, which cannot be raided by the legislature for any other purpose. This fund is administered by the Texas Water Development Board and the county is using grant money from FIF to cover our Atlas 14 Water fall maps for the Salado, San Gabriel, and Brushy Creek Basins – a multi-year endeavor to map and gather the data and update the anticipated rainfall data across our county.

Speaking of the Brushy Creek Basin, as you’ve probably seen in the news, the cities of Leander, Cedar Park, Austin and Round Rock are struggling mightily to manage an unusually high wastewater input to their shared water treatment plant just west of Red Bud and south of SH79. Output into Brushy Creek has resembled chocolate milk with dark foam. Sludge coats the bottom of the stream, and it’s flow is greatly reduced by the drought.

Measurements of E Coli have been elevated, and the aroma, if I may be able to refer to it as such, is distasteful. The plant is undergoing configuration changes to allow it to process more than the current 21.5M gallons of wastewater daily but is not there yet. More wastewater is coming into the plant than anticipated (source not understood), so it is flowing thru all treatments too rapidly to adequately be treated. Outside consultants have identified a number cracks in the wastewater pipes feeding into the treatment plant and many have been corrected. We’re a month away from being able to adequately treat more wastewater – meanwhile the showers are still occurring and toilets being flushed – no way to stop that. There are great minds and numerous skilled individuals working to solve the problems and to expand capacity – for now, we wait.



Home New

Lower Brushy Creek Water Control & Improvement District's Anniversary



May heralded LBCWCID's 20th anniversary. A celebration and swearing in ceremony for new board members was held in Taylor on May 19. This organization has weathered many years of no funding to finally having the public vote to support maintenance of these 23 earthen dams built between 1957 and 1976 at a rate of \$.02/\$100 evaluation values. They are facing a daunting level of work as growth comes to the southeastern side of the county. As homes are built in or near spillways and downstream from dams, the hazardous level of the dams moves from (rural) low to high hazard designations meaning loss of life and structures is probable if breach occurs. That results in required work on each affected dam, perhaps higher dam, broader spillway, deeper reservoir, etc. Mucho buckos needed and the LBCWCID has no

say on where development goes. The county also can't establish "no development zones" but is watching for impacts and sending out warnings. How many of you know where the closest dam upstream from your house is located, its condition and hazard designation? All these dams along the Brushy Creek Basin were established to protect against soil erosion. This picture was taken at LBCWCID's Dam 13 on Christmas evening 2020. Waterfront property...

Broadband Service Across Texas

The Texas Broadband Office under the leadership of Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar first held a series of 12 "listening" meetings on a tour for broadband issues from economic regions across Texas – ours was in Waco in April. Indeed, Glenn and Greg Conte, the Director of the Broadband Development Office really did listen and take notes at those. The Texas Rural Funders (of course the least served areas for broadband (89% of rural households and businesses lack broadband) held a state summit on broadband on May 18 in Bryan. The majority of us with access to the Internet are actually not using "broadband" which is currently defined as 100 Megabits/second download and 10 Megabits upload, but struggle to stream with 25/3 speeds, sigh. 25% of all Texans lack access to the Internet.

This broadband summit brought together persons of all types to discuss issues, challenges and funding to extend the utility which is broadband from the cherry-picked delivery services we have today to extending affordable service to everyone. One librarian in the little town of Pottsboro discussed providing broadband and even has a telemedicine room in the library working with a hospital system in the Dallas area and holds sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays with the hospital managing appointments. Deep East Texas COG has 7 of their 12 counties working together on a broadband implementation plan. Lonnie Hunt, the Exec Dir DETCOG and former County Judge of Houston County said they didn't even have good cell phone services over their territory with no large cities. Never saw him being in the broadband business, but good things are happening in their plan to bring it to every household/business.

P.S average household has 11 internet devices connected to the internet. *Slow? Disconnect that toaster and washing machine from the network!*

The Texas Broadband Office hopes to have their data released in June, with the Broadband office's report out in early October – get your plan in place. Expect Texas to be the largest awardee of federal funds when info is finally released.



**Get Connected Y'all:
A Guide for Texas
Communities on
Securing Broadband**

May 2022



Where is Commissioner Cook?



Nursing Studies Abundant in Wilco

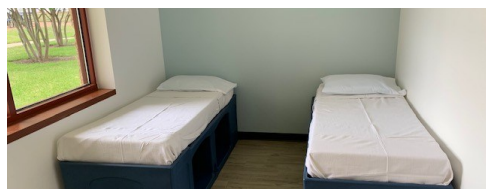
Two celebrations highlighting nursing studies were held in our county in May. First was the annual Nursing Day Celebration at St. David's School of Nursing at Texas State University in Round Rock. This program highlights the study projects of nursing seniors within Williamson County. I took pictures of some of the

project displays and sent them to our Texas Representatives to potentially pursue funding or change with bills. Some pointed out unnecessary restrictions in our laws, many pointed out medical needs within communities of low income – but no, Thrall will never be able to afford their own EMS ambulances.

Then, a second celebration occurred at the St. David's Surgical Center on Louis Henna Blvd in Round Rock. Galen College of Nursing, a private company, has partnered with St. David's to have their school of nursing housed on the 4th floor of the surgical center. Their open house showcased state of the art training facilities, and the programs are based on a quarter system allowing new students to enter programs more frequently than the semester-based systems of most colleges. They offer a 3-year BSN degree, a 15-18 month Associate Degree in Nursing which bridges licensed practical /vocational nurses for the role of a Registered Nurse upon passing NCLEX-RN, and a 12-month program for Vocational Nursing, a diploma program.



Bluebonnet Trails Community Services Open House



With financial assistance from Williamson County, using \$8.1M from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Bluebonnet Trails is starting a brand new youth therapeutic respite program that will serve children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 17. This 16-bed, 24-hour program serves youths for as short as a few hours or as long as 30 days.

Participants receive wraparound care, including innovative therapies, care coordination, family partner services, case management, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and more.

The facility opens on June 1, 2022.





Texas State Technical College Graduation



Texas State Technical College held their Spring 2022 graduation at Kalahari on May 3. The evening began with a reception to honor the students graduating with honors and special recognitions: Phi Theta Kappa members, the international honor society of 2-year colleges, honor graduates who maintained GPA of 3.5 or higher, Board of Regents Honor Roll Members having GPA of 4.0, SkillsUSA Medal winners (from competitions), Military Veterans and the winner of the Provost Outstanding Achievement Award, the selected student by faculty and staff. Food was probably chosen and prepared by alum of the TSTC Culinary Arts program as Kalahari is a major employer of them.

Certificates and degrees were awarded in the fields of Culinary Arts, Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning, Industrial Systems Mechanical Specialization, Precision Machining Technology, Machining Technology, Machining, Welding Technology, Structural & Pipe Welding, Structural Welding & Cyber Security. Sing along with Willie & me - "Mommias, do let your babies grow up to be tradesmen....."

College ain't easy to pay for; real jobs hard to find for those in liberal arts just to feed their mind. Deep college debt with minimum wage just block them from finding their way. Life with three roommates, credit card debt, ramen soup, working that long endless day.

Momma's don't let your babies grow up without options. Don't let 'em ignore those industrial fits, technical careers with good benefits.

Mommias don't let your babies grow up without futures. 'Cause they'll never return to live at your home, but come 'cause you're someone they love. Workforce trade jobs open futures anywhere in the world. So many careers for workers with futures in sight. Employers now compete for them and those with offers ponder which are best for 'em. They ain't wrong deciding that trade jobs are best fit, dilemma is which for them is right.

Mommias don't let your babies grow up to be aimless. Trade industries are crying for help right now. Are paying and training with fulltime jobs - wow!

Momma's don't let your babies grow up to be skill-less. 'Cause skilled tradesmen always in demand, even in good times and bad.

Mommias do let your babies grow up to be tradesmen. These skills come sometimes with benefits for you. Let them be plumbers, A/C techs are great too.

Mommias let your babies thrive, grow & love what they do. "Cause in your old age they'll still have a job, still be working and able to take care of you.



IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

Williamson County Commissioners Court proclaimed May 15-21, 2022 as Emergency Medical Services Week.

I hope you never need EMS, but know that here in Williamson County, our EMS system is 2nd to none. They are ready to provide lifesaving care to those in need 24/7 and emergency care for sudden illness or injury.

On the far right is a picture of Mike Knipstein, our EMS Director, and the other picture is of the leadership of our EMS service with Commissioners Court Members.

Thank you Williamson County EMS for taking care of our people!



On May 24, 2022, Commissioners Court held an historic vote.

Bob Daigh, our Senior Director of Infrastructure, was tasked with formulating a plan to help with water infrastructure in our communities across the county, using funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).



He came back with that plan, which Commissioners voted unanimously to fund at \$72.5M. It helps virtually all areas of Williamson County with water infrastructure (not water resources) such as replacing pipes and in-take machinery.

This is the first time the county has taken action on such an issue, and we don't think many other counties across the nation, much less the state, has done more on this issue.

One of the caveats with ARPA funds is that these projects must be completed by the end of 2026. So, be on the look out soon for a water infrastructure project near you!

In the picture to the left are city and water management professionals who have a stake in managing our water.

4th Annual Allies of Hope Award Gala

Celebrating Law Enforcement officers, Prosecutors and Victim Services Individuals Making Major Contributions for Justice for Victims of Violence

Saturday night, May 28, at Kalahari, Hope Alliance celebrated those persons in Williamson County that drive justice in family violence and sexual assaults. An attentive audience filled one of the ballrooms at Kalahari where those special stories were shared concerning each of the 10 individuals heralded for their efforts; we all know there's a team assisting them but clearly each when beyond the norm in their investigation to yield sufficient evidence to put the offenders in prison, gave support to victims to encourage them to be formidable witnesses in trial, and lead in prosecution to make sure Williamson County is effectively tough on domestic violence.

AWARDEES



CEDAR PARK PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

SVU DETECTIVE RYAN ZANDER

Corporal Ryan Zander began his law enforcement career in 2013 with the Williamson County Sheriff's Office and served in the corrections bureau as a field training officer.

In 2016 he joined the Cedar Park Police Department as a Police Cadet. He attended the CAPCOG (Capital Area Council of Government) Regional Police Academy, Class 80 and graduated Valedictorian and received the Chief's excellence award.

Detective Zander served on night shift patrol and quickly identified a passion for investigations and joined the Criminal Investigations Division. While in CID he investigated multiple complex felony property crimes, recovered stolen property and obtained criminal charges to hold the offenders accountable. After a short period, he was selected to join the Special Victim's Unit and conducted numerous complex investigations, such as homicides, felony assaults and multiple investigations for crimes against children. Detective Zander maintains the highest confession rate within the division due to his ability to relate, exhibit empathy and understanding with anyone he comes in contact with.



GEORGETOWN PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DETECTIVE BRYAN GEORGE

Georgetown PD's nomination for this year is Detective Bryan George. Here is why:

While Det. George was a patrol officer he received a call where a female stole her boyfriend's handgun and told her boyfriend that she was leaving to go kill her child's father who lives in Georgetown. When she left with his gun, the boyfriend called 911 with her vehicle description and gun description. While responding to her child's father's residence, Det. George found the vehicle parked at Circle K. Officer George contacted her and found the holster in plain view, but she denied having the gun. Officer George thought to look in the trash can and magically the gun was there. It is believed the female suspect threw the gun in the trash when she saw officers driving by. She was ultimately arrested for Terroristic Threat and told officers that she was feeling "homicidal today".



LEANDER PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

MRS. MIRNA JOHNSON, VICTIM SERVICES

Mirna has been working in Victim Services since 2008 as a volunteer in Cedar Park, then in 2011 she became the Coordinator there. She started the program in Leander in 2015 until present time. Mirna has two wonderful sons who are 19 and 21, and has been married since 2015 to her husband Barry. Mirna is very passionate about helping people during their time of need. It can be very scary and hopeless feeling when dealing with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, so it is important to let the victim know that we are there for them and let their voices be heard. Giving the victim an opportunity to know that they are now in control of their lives again makes a huge impact and is so rewarding for herself and her advocates.



LIBERTY HILL PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

OFFICER ESTEBAN GOMEZ-SANCHEZ

Officer Esteban Gomez-Sanchez is a first-generation Mexican American who was born in Los Angeles, California. He is the youngest of three siblings. Shortly after graduating from high school, Officer Gomez enlisted in the United States Army as a Logistic Specialist. He served over seven years in the military and obtained the rank of sergeant. He participated in multiple training exercises throughout the United States and deployed overseas in support of Atlantic Resolve. Officer Gomez met his wife while working at the same unit in Fort Hood, Texas. Together, they have three children.

After leaving the military, Officer Gomez maintained his desire to serve his country and his community. He decided to settle down in Central Texas and become a police officer. He was pleased to accept a position at the Liberty Hill Police Department, where he had the honor to become Liberty Hill's newest K9 officer. Although Officer Gomez and K9 Evo have been together for a short time they created a strong bond that extends beyond their work duties. Officer Gomez likes to enjoy his free time riding motorcycles and traveling with his family.



PFLUGERVILLE PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DETECTIVE BRIAN MILLER

Detective Brian Miller began his career with the Pflugerville Police Department in April 2002. He began serving the community as a patrol officer for ten years, seven of which was dedicated to night shift. He was known for being a well-rounded officer and specialized in DWI enforcement. His expertise in the patrol setting was noted and he was asked to become a Field Training Officer and did so for four years. During his stint on patrol, he became a K-9 officer with his partner Pprog and waged the war on drugs for seven years. This passion for detecting and seizing narcotics became a gateway into the Narcotics Division where he promoted to Corporal. Detective Miller remained a K-9 Officer while in narcotics for an additional four years before passing the role to another officer. In December 2019, Detective Miller was assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division as a Persons Crimes Detective. During the two and a half years in the unit, he has investigated numerous sex crimes against women and children. His investigative skills have been instrumental in numerous admissions of guilt from suspects which have led to arrests and federal indictments. Detective Miller, through his dedication to our profession, continuously achieves expeditious justice and recovery for survivors which deserves to be recognized.



ROUND ROCK PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DETECTIVE RIGO VALLES

Detective Rigo Valles has been with the Round Rock Police Department for 23 years. The last two years he has been assigned to the Domestic Crimes Unit of the Criminal Investigations Division. During 2021, Det. Valles investigated close to 90 criminal cases involving survivors of both family violence and sexual violence. He is the only Spanish-speaking Detective in the Unit and, as a result, he investigates all the cases involving Spanish speakers and routinely assists Detectives in other Units with Spanish-speaking cases. Det. Valles has volunteered to attend outside events put on by our county partners to show support for our community and our survivors. He is devoted to seeking justice for victims in every case he works. His passion and work ethic are evident in his work product. Det. Valles brings great credit to his community, his Department, and the law enforcement profession.



TAYLOR PD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DETECTIVE VINCENT CLIFFORD

Detective Vincent Clifford is the Taylor Police Department recipient for the annual Allies of Hope Award. Detective Clifford was instrumental in assisting the victim of a violent kidnapping that occurred in Taylor in 2021. The victim was actually kidnapped twice by being forcefully abducted on two separate occasions in Taylor. With the assistance of the Williamson County Sheriff's Office, the victim was located and brought to the Taylor Police Department. Detective Clifford was able to assist the victim while also putting her at ease. Taylor Detectives obtained probable cause for three arrest warrants, arresting and charging the ex-boyfriend with two counts of Aggravated Kidnapping, a first-degree felony. The brother of the ex-boyfriend was also arrested and charged with Aggravated Kidnapping, a first-degree felony. Detective Clifford's actions provided needed protection and assistance to the victim of these violent crimes, as well as bringing positive recognition to the Taylor Police Department and himself.

For Detective Vincent Clifford, the incomplete sentence should read "The victim was actually kidnapped twice by being forcefully abducted on two separate occasions in Taylor". This is a sanitized description of what happened to the victim.



WILLIAMSON COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICER OF THE YEAR

LAURA GORMAN, CRIMINAL DIVISION CHIEF

Laura got her undergraduate degree in psychology from Southwestern University in Georgetown Texas in 2003. She then traveled to Denver Colorado where she earned her law degree in 2005, and a master's degree in psychology in 2006, from the University of Denver. Laura quickly came back to the central Texas area and began working as a prosecutor for the Travis County Attorney's Office in July of 2007. After approximately 8 years handling all types of misdemeanor cases, Laura moved into the Family Violence specialty division for the Travis County Attorney's Office where she exclusively prosecuted domestic violence charges. Laura had the privilege of being the prosecuting attorney for the Travis County Attorney's Office Domestic Violence High Risk Team, directly handling the prosecution side of all designated high risk misdemeanor charges for approximately 3 years of her career. Laura joined the Williamson County Attorney's Office as the Criminal Division Chief in March of 2020 where one of her main areas of focus is working to improve the prosecution outcomes of domestic violence cases and protections for victims of abuse.



WILLIAMSON COUNTY D.A. OFFICER OF THE YEAR

SARGENT SHERRIE PAPPAS

Sherrie began her career in law enforcement in Arkansas in 1987 and then in Texas in 1990. Before moving to Williamson County, Sherrie spent 26 years as a law enforcement officer in Bowie County, Texas. Sherrie spent her first 16 years at the Bowie County Sheriff's Office, and she spent her last 10 years at the Bowie County District Attorney's Office. While at the Sheriff's Office, Sherrie investigated child abuse, sexual assaults, murders. Sherrie was eventually promoted to Captain over the Criminal Investigation Division. Sherrie left the Sheriff's Office and started as a trial investigator with the Bowie County District Attorney's Office where she was involved in the successful prosecution of numerous cases. Sherrie is currently the Sergeant Investigator for the Special Victims Unit at the Williamson County District Attorney's Office. The Special Victims Unit handles child abuse, sexual abuse, adult sex crimes and family violence cases. Sherrie is a member of the Texas District and County Attorneys Association, the Williamson County Multidisciplinary Team and the Williamson County SART and DART teams.



WILLIAMSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DETECTIVE CHRIS PINA

Detective Chris Pina began his career at the Sheriff's Office in June of 2009 as a Corrections Officer and after only three short years graduated to the rank of Commissioned Corrections Deputy. In October of 2014 Chris transferred to the Law Enforcement Bureau of the Sheriff's Office where he joined the ranks of the Uniformed Patrol Division as a Field Deputy. Chris continued to strive forward eventually becoming a Field Training Deputy charged with training new Deputies assigned to patrol and then in January of 2020 Chris promoted to the rank of Detective in the Criminal Investigation Division. Chris currently is assigned to the Special Victim's Unit and is called upon to investigate cases involving child abuse/neglect, sexual abuse of children, as well as elder abuse.

Allies
OF HOPE 

I want to take this time to encourage you to get in shape and come out for Hope Alliance's 5K run/walk where you will hear from a victim of domestic violence as they tell their story and how their life have been positively affected by Hope Alliance counselors and programs. This race is held in late fall at San Gabriel Park in Georgetown. Watch for its announcement at www.hopealliancetx.org.



PLEASE HELP IF YOU CAN!

The Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter (WCRAS) is experiencing a life-saving crisis in medium-to-large adult dogs and is requesting the assistance of the local community to get through it.

Compared to last year at this time, the WCRAS has taken in 200 more dogs, creating a critical issue as they have run out of space to house medium-to-large adult dogs. With over 170 dogs currently at the shelter, staff is stretched to the limit in their ability to properly care for these dogs. Over the past several weeks, more dogs have come into the shelter than have gone out each day, compounding the issue and creating this life-saving crisis.

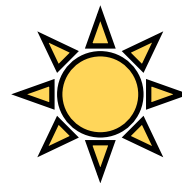
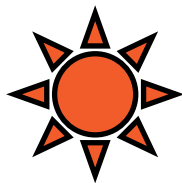
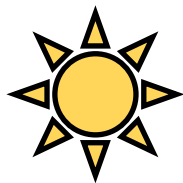
The WCRAS has sent out pleas to the community and other animal welfare organizations requesting assistance with the 170

plus dogs currently on site, but the help they've received has not been enough. For the first time in years, the shelter will be publishing a euthanasia list.

To help make space, the shelter is offering free adoptions for all medium-to-large adult dogs. Appointments are not required but are recommended to reduce wait times. To see all of the adoptable dogs that qualify for this special, go to wilcopets.org. Then send an email to adoption@wilco.org to schedule an appointment for the shortest wait time.

For those not able to adopt at this time, fostering is available. Fostering provides a temporary home to a dog in need, which in turn makes room for another dog in need, creating much needed space to house all of the dogs. The WCRAS can help provide supplies, if necessary, and takes care of any medical needs a dog might experience while in foster care.

CLICK THE LOGO ABOVE TO SEE HOW YOU CAN HELP



For those of you who get your electricity from Austin Energy, they are going to ask for a rise in their base rate to customers.

You can access their Base Rate Filing package [HERE](#).

You can find more information about this proposed base rate increase [HERE](#).

The link to the City Clerk's site to keep up-to-date on filings is [HERE](#).

IN THE NEWS

Williamson Co. Commissioner Cook: Spotlight on transformative justice

[Williamson County Commissioner Cook: Spotlight on transformative justice \(statesman.com\)](https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2020/07/27/williamson-county-commissioner-cook-spotlight-on-transformative-justice/3321117002/)

In 2018, a program began in Williamson County diverting young adults ages 17 to 24 accused of nonviolent felonies, such as drug charges, from the traditional criminal justice system to services that address their development needs and help them make wise decisions to develop a strong foundation for adulthood.

Judge Stacey Mathews of the 277th District Court presides over the Transformative Justice Program, based on the model of stakeholder and community partnerships. The TJ program team includes court staff, prosecutors from the Williamson County's district attorney's office, members of the defense bar and county's Juvenile Services staff. The county aggressively seeks grant-funding for such programs to offset costs and reduce the burden on the taxpayer. The Commissioners Court proudly partners with the Texas Indigent Defense Commission and the Texas Bar Foundation to help us fund this important program.

Does a community-based program led by decision-making teams improve emerging adults' physical and mental health and reduce recidivism compared to the current criminal justice system? I interviewed two alums of this program. I changed their real names to protect their identities.

"Laura" was born into an unstable environment in a Michigan inner-city home. Her father left the family after fathering four children in as many years. Mom, who drank heavily, moved with her three kids to a trailer home in Georgetown, leaving one son behind. When Laura was 9, CPS removed the kids from the home. She, along with the older and younger brother, were placed in a neighborhood home for two weeks and ultimately moved to a group home of strangers. While there, Laura's mom gave up her parental rights. Later, a foster family with big hearts adopted the three children.

Laura thrived in her first two years of high school, joining ROTC, the Color Guard and becoming active in community service. However, her fragile life foundation began crumbling during her junior year, and she lost interest in the programs she had so enjoyed. Lacking friends outside of her prior groups, she drifted. In her words, "everything became meaningless." Then her new parents divorced, and she moved again with her adoptive dad.

She started associating with troubled kids and began making poor decisions. She was arrested in Leander with a bag containing drugs and paraphernalia (the result of a group purchase) on a felony charge to the terror of her younger brother who witnessed her being handcuffed and placed in a police vehicle.

At the jail, J.R. Hancock, a defense attorney for the Transformative Justice Program and whose position is partially funded by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission grant, contacted Laura about the new program. Unbeknownst to her, Hancock was part of Laura's adoption legal team. Recognizing the value of joining this program, Laura agreed to become one of its early clients. The next day Laura walked out of jail to her adoptive dad and her two siblings with a business card for case manager Marc Ruiz, a juvenile probation officer with the TJ program. Although she struggled with trusting people, she called Ruiz, beginning a relationship that would be life-changing.

Ruiz became her rock; always having her back and readily available by phone. She found the TJ team didn't condemn the slips she experienced during her time in the program, but instead sought the root causes and helped her address those. Her weekly team sessions were her favorite times, and while she resisted counseling, she soon realized how important it was to deal appropriately with issues, such as negative self-talk, which limited her potential.

“Laura was able to build a relationship of trust with the TJ Team, which is the foundation of this program,” said Judge Mathews. “I have every confidence that she can take what she has learned and continue to build a successful and productive life. She is a shining example of what being given a supportive second chance can do. Rather than having a felony conviction, Laura is employed and volunteering in her community.”



I met the second participant – "Gabe," a recent graduate of the program, one afternoon. Born in Georgetown, Gabe grew up elsewhere in Williamson County in a large family close to their Baptist Church community. The youngest of five children, he attended church on Sundays and Wednesdays. When he was in middle school, he lost his dad, with whom he was very close, succumbing to an infection following relatively routine heart surgery. The family was financially secure because of their dad's planning; however, Gabe felt his mom was in a grief fog of forgetfulness, odd behavior and not herself. It took one year for doctors to diagnose a brain tumor. While he was still in high school, his mother was treated with chemotherapy to hopefully shrink the tumor causing true brain fog. Gabe quit theatre and sports, but increasingly used marijuana, all while maintaining good grades. He was missing his dad and stressing about his mom.

Two years and two surgeries later, his mom died. Gabe finished his junior year, then passed the GED, and with the experience he gained in his school's culinary program, became employed in the restaurant trade. One day he was stopped for erratic driving while vaping marijuana and was arrested for felony possession and driving under the influence.

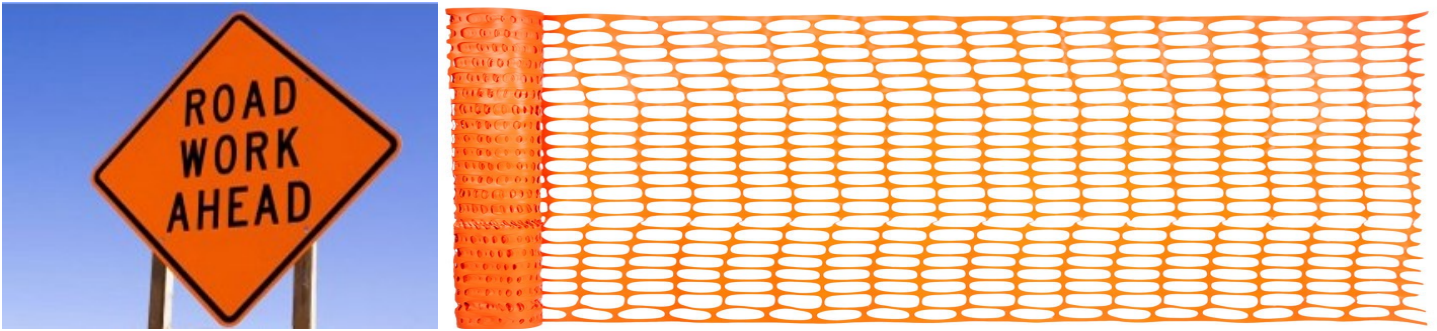
While taking him to jail, the officers mentioned the TJ Program and encouraged him to apply, but he thought it sounded too good to be true. He was booked into the county jail and spent one night. The next morning, he met Terence Davis, director of the program, and Ruiz. They persuaded him, and he agreed to join. Unlike Laura, he had no problem sharing in group therapy or with a counselor. His problem was giving up marijuana, and over the next six months, slipped quite a bit – so much that he was facing placement in a drug treatment center. Fortunately, he realized what it took to make meaningful change and stopped using marijuana. The design of the TJ program allowed Ruiz to increase his time with him and help Gabe develop tactics to recognize his stress points and make appropriate adjustments.

“Gabe is a great example of our commitment in the TJ Program that we won't give up on you,” said Judge Mathews. “You must be willing to put in the work needed to be successful. Now Gabe is going to pay-it-forward and become a mentor with the program.”

Today there are 29 young adults in the program. Since its inception, nine individuals were unsuccessful in completing the program and 17 have graduated.

“We know that this program helps young adults,” said Mathews. “I am proud to be able to work with such a great team during the court process to make a difference in the lives of young adults. My hope is that this work can be replicated to provide an option for more young people.”

Researchers at Texas A&M, Harvard and the University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston are gathering data on the program, the individuals in the program and those who chose the traditional jail route and will track them for outcomes up to five years. Now we wait.



620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (TxDOT with primary contractor Bridges and Roads LLC)– They are about to pour the bridge deck over the railroad tracks next week. Not sure if our recent rain will delay that a bit. A detention pond is continuing to be constructed on the west side of Chisholm Trail Rd. under the railroad bridge. Curb and gutter continue to be placed on the eastbound frontage road from Deep Wood to the east. The eastbound frontage road from Lake Creek Dr. to Brentwood St. has been paved. Go [HERE](#) to learn more. This is a \$27.5M TxDOT project. Estimated completion date is summer 2023.

Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– If you remember in last months' newsletter the term PS&E, it stands for Plans, Specs, and Estimates, and there are varying levels of completeness with PS&E. Comments on the 60% PS&E package were submitted this month and environmental due diligence documents have been submitted. The cost of the project was originally supposed to be \$4.17M, but now the estimate is \$3.2M! Construction start is anticipated Spring 2023.

University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to just east of Sunrise Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– *Still a good idea to stay off University if you possibly can!!!* Paving with asphalt has taken place on northbound University Oaks Blvd, south of the University Oaks and University intersection. Pre-work to get ready for the concrete paving on the southeast corner of the Sunrise Rd. intersection is taking place. Concrete paving has taken place in the southwest portion of the University Oaks and University Dr. intersection. Still slated to finish in Spring 2023.

I-35 at US 79- Through Thursday, June 2, 9:00pm—5:00am, northbound and southbound I-35 right lane closed nightly from US 79 to SH 45. Multiple exits and entrance ramps will also be closed. There are weekly updates from TxDOT that you can sign up for [HERE](#).

Because the Great Oaks Bridge project is so important to many of you, we will bring back updates on it, even though it is no longer in Precinct 1— Installation of wall panels and all of what that entails (straps, backfill of dirt, etc.) continues. Bridge beams for phase 2 of the bridge are being set. The foundation for the traffic signal at the Hairy Man abutment has been poured. It's coming along, and construction finish is still anticipated in Spring 2023.

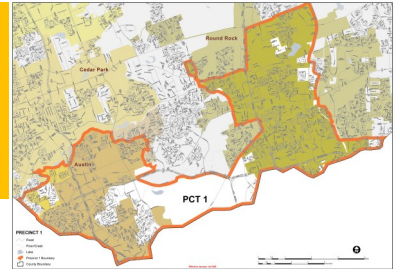
SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER! (CUE ALICE COOPER)

**BE ON THE WATCH OUT FOR CHILDREN
PLAYING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD**

AND

*Congratulations to all
high school and college graduates!*

The Mission, Vision, and Value Statements of the Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 1 Office



MISSION

Providing strong, thoughtful, and collaborative leadership on the Williamson County Commissioners Court through a time of great change and growth in our county

VISION

Upholding a local governmental entity that is centered around best-practices throughout the organization and focused on timely and respectful responses to our citizenry

VALUES

The guiding principles of the Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 1 Office continue to be respect, reliability, and dedication to Precinct 1 constituents, while being open to ideas for positioning Williamson County for the future

CONTACT US!

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SEE US ONLINE!!!

Williamson County's Website! - www.wilco.org

Our office's web site— Terry Cook, Commissioner Pct 1

Non-Emergency Phone Numbers

Austin Fire Department
512-974-0130

County Judge
512-943-1550

Cedar Park Fire Department (ESD 11)
512-401-5220

Jollyville Fire Department (ESD 1)
512-258-1038

Round Rock Fire Department (ESD 9)
512-218-5590

Williamson Central Appraisal District
512-930-3787

Williamson County Landfill
512-759-8881

Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter
512-943-3322

Williamson County Sheriff's Office
512-864-8282

Want to know even more
about what's happening
in Williamson County?

Sign up for the WIL-
CO County Line E-
newsletter! Click [here](#) to
sign up!

Commissioner Cook
keeps meeting with many
MUD Boards and HOAs.
To invite her to your meet-
ing, contact Doris at doris.sanchez@wilco.org or
512-244-8610