

Leader seeks submissions

The *Leader* encourages local schools, groups and individuals to continue sending story ideas and photos they'd like to see included in the newspaper. Submissions have declined following the death of *Leader* publisher Marie Flickinger in November. Contributions may be submitted to mynews@southbeltleader.com.

Kirkwood to meet Jan. 27

The Kirkwood Civic Club's monthly meeting will take place 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 27, at the Sagemont Community Center, 11507 Hughes Road near Beltway 8. Meetings are typically held the last Monday of the month. For additional information, call Kirkwood Civic Club President Ericka McCrutchon at 281-989-9990.

Knights hold barbecue sale

Knights of Columbus Council 9201 will host a barbecue fundraiser at St. Luke the Evangelist, located at 11011 Hall Road, Saturday, Feb. 1, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday, Feb. 2, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cost will be \$12 for a pulled-pork sandwich, cole slaw, chips and soft drink; and \$6 for sausage-on-a-stick. Proceeds will benefit the church's capital campaign.

Sagemont to meet Feb. 4

The Sagemont Civic Club will hold a meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 4, at The Gardens, 12001 Beamer at Hughes. All Sagemont residents/homeowners are invited to attend. The meetings typically take place the first Tuesday of each month. For more information, call Kay Barbour at 713-419-3545.

Freeway Manor to meet

Freeway Manor Civic Club will hold its first meeting of the year at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23, at Bible Way Church, 10120 Hartsook. Residents of Freeway Manor, Sun Valley and Gulfway Terrace are encouraged to attend.

New Covenant feeds needy

Each month, New Covenant Christian Church, 10603 Blackhawk at Kirkfair, will have food distribution events the first and third Wednesday from 1 to 2 p.m. and the second and fourth Saturday of the month from noon to 1 p.m. or until supplies last. The purpose of the events is to provide food to people in need. For additional information, contact the church at 281-484-4230.

Coffee with the Constable

Harris County Precinct 2 Constable Jerry Garcia will be at Donut Haven, 10802 Hughes, from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. each Thursday as part of the weekly Coffee with the Constable series. The next event will be Thursday, Jan. 23, with another event happening the following Thursday, Jan. 30. For more information, call Sagemont Civic Club President Kay Barbour at 713-419-3545.

Gulf Freeway closures set

At least one northbound and one southbound main lane and frontage road lane on the Gulf Freeway will be closed from SH 96/Calder/Brittany Bay in League City to FM 519/Main Street in La Marque daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and from 8:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. until further notice.

At least one northbound and one southbound frontage road lane on the Gulf Freeway will be closed from Deats Road in Dickinson to FM 2004/Camp Wallace Access in Texas City from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. until further notice.

At least one northbound and one southbound main lane and frontage road lane on the Gulf Freeway will be closed from FM 519/Main Street in La Marque to Tiki Drive in Galveston daily from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and nightly from 8:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. until further notice.

The closures are associated with an ongoing construction project to widen the freeway from three to five lanes in each direction and the frontage roads from two to three lanes in each direction.

Beltway closures planned

Two northbound and two southbound Beltway 8 frontage road lanes will be closed at Fairmont Parkway daily from 4 a.m. to 4 p.m. until further notice. Significant delays are expected.

The closures are associated with the ongoing project to widen Beltway 8 from two to four lanes in each direction.

Telephone closure planned

At least one northbound and one southbound lane on SH 35/Telephone Road will be closed from Airport Boulevard to Bellfort Avenue daily from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (excluding Sundays) until further notice.

Ellington holds eRecycling

The City of Houston Solid Waste Management Department's monthly electronic recycling event will take place Saturday, Feb. 8, at the Neighborhood Recycling Center at Ellington Airport from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

The collection events take place the second Saturday of each month. For additional information, visit www.houstonsolidwaste.org or call 311.

Dobie names 2025 Hall of Honor inductees

Jan. 31 ceremony to recognize 3 alumni, 2 faculty, 1 volunteer

Dobie High School recently announced its 2025 Class of Hall of Honor inductees, recognizing three alumni, two faculty members (a married couple) and one volunteer (also an alumni and faculty member).

This year's group of inductees will officially be sworn in at an induction ceremony set to take place at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, in the area school's auditorium.

Now in its 13th year, the Hall of Honor recognizes graduates who have made significant contributions to the community and serve as role models for current and future students.

Alumni members to be inducted into the Hall of Honor this year include Ahmed Badr, Jean Liew and Audrey Castoreno Atkinson.

Faculty members being inducted include the science-teaching duo of longtime husband-wife team of Jeanne and Louis Parlangei.

While he is also an alumni and former faculty member, Jim Sawyer will be inducted into the Hall of Honor this year for his volunteer work in the community.

Ahmed Badr, alumni

Ahmed Badr is an Iraqi-American author,

poet and social entrepreneur working at the intersection of creativity, displacement and youth empowerment.

Badr's work seeks to combine poetry, archival collections, and multimedia to explore the complexities of migration, identity and self-expression, with a focus on reframing and reclaiming the power of tragedy. Badr is the director of the Patricelli Center for Social Entrepreneurship and assistant professor of the Practice in Public Policy at Wesleyan University.

At 26, he is one of the youngest senior university faculty and staff members in the world. He is author of *While the Earth Sleeps We Travel: Stories, Poetry, and Art from Young Refugees Around the World* (Andrews McMeel), featuring a foreword by actor and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Ben Stiller. WTESWT has been se-



Ahmed Badr

lected as the First-Year Common Read for the University of Delaware, Albertus Magnus College and CUNY's Queensborough Community College.

On July 25, 2006, Badr's home in Baghdad was bombed by militia troops. He and his family relocated to Syria, where they lived as refugees for more than two years before receiving approval to move to the United States. As a teen (and Dobie Junior), Badr founded Narratio, an organization and online platform that activates, supports, and highlights the creative expression of displaced young people through fellowships, workshops, publishing and partnerships. In summer 2019, Narratio launched an annual storytelling and leadership Fellowship for resettled refugee youth in partnership with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Over the past six years, work by 80 Narratio Fellows has reached 2.5 million individuals worldwide.

In 2020, Badr began a storytelling and strategy consultancy with the World Bank's Connect4Climate initiative. For this role, Badr co-hosted #Youth4Climate Live, a nine-episode series highlighting youth climate leaders in conversation with government ministers, institutional executives, and civil society. The series and the #Youth4Climate campaign reached more than a billion people across 130 countries. Badr's work has been exhibited at Juilliard, Harvard Divinity School, Yale Law School, UNICEF House, Christie's, World Bank Headquarters and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others. In February 2020, Badr debuted four visual works at Educate, an exhibit featuring global emerging artists at Christie's New York. In 2023, Badr delivered a keynote speech at the Nobel Prize Teacher's Summit. Badr has addressed the United Nations on more than ten occasions, and his work has been recognized by National Public Radio, Instagram, Buzzfeed, and Global Citizen, among others. Badr received a Bachelor of Art in anthropology from Wesleyan University and a master's degree in education from Harvard University. He is the recipient of the Adrian Cheng Fellowship from Harvard Kennedy School, and the Social Innovation Fellowship Fund award from Harvard Business School. He is a National Geographic Young Explorer, and serves as one of 17 UN Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals in the Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth.

Jean Liew, alumni

As a self-proclaimed introvert and lover of narrative descriptions of illness, Dr. Jean Liew was always drawn to medicine. Her early interest was fuelled by reading books about illness, such as those by Oliver Sacks, eventually leading to a thesis on illness narratives in Charlotte Brontë's

work at the University of Texas (Austin), where she received honors degrees in both English and biology.

Liew is now assistant professor of medicine at Boston University Medical School, where she has worked for the past two years doing clinical epidemiology research to identify novel risk factors for osteoarthritis and their potential mechanisms. She has also been instrumental in the implementation of the COVID-19 Global Rheumatology Alliance Registry, as the administrative lead of its steering committee since March 2020 – work that has laid the foundation for understanding risk factors for severe COVID-19 among people with rheumatological diseases.

After completing her medical degree at the University of Texas, Liew went on to an internal medicine residency programme at Oregon Health and Science University (Portland), where she led a small research project that inspired her to seek further training in epidemiology. Along with a 3-year rheumatology fellowship at the University of Washington (Seattle, WA, USA), she completed a masters' degree in epidemiology, during which she worked with Susan Heckbert at the Cardiovascular Health Research Unit and remotely with Lianne Gensler at the University of California-San Francisco to investigate the association between pharmacological therapies and cardiovascular risk factors in patients with ankylosing spondylitis.

Outside of work, Liew describes herself as a keen but infrequent baker, favoring simple bakes that bring happiness to herself and others. She has two cats (Socs and Sam) and loves to spend time outside and visiting museums – her current favorite being the art museum at Yale University.

Liew is also active on social media, providing a running commentary of conference presentations that many of her colleagues find invaluable. She has grown her Twitter followers from around 50 when she first began tweeting about the American College of Rheumatology conference in 2018 to almost 6,000 in 2022, and she is often found among the top ten influencers at international rheumatology conferences.

Liew uses social media to keep on top of the literature and has begun collaborations with people she had never met before, some even evolving into close friendships. She points out that the COVID-19 Global Rheumatology Alliance came

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New Beltway 8 Shell opens



After months of construction, the new Shell service station located on Beltway 8 at Hughes Road/Sabo opened to the public. This marks the third gas station to be located at the area intersection, with signage for a possible nearby fourth station to be located on Hughes Road at Sageglen where the Church's Chicken was once located (see inset photo). Photos by James Bolen

Leader continues its 2024 Year in Review

The *Leader* continues its look back on 2024 with a list of some of the significant stories of the year. For highlights up to March 7, see the Jan. 16 edition of the *Leader*.

March 7

Two local principals were recognized by Pasadena ISD, as Morris Middle School Principal Allison Lewallen was named the school dis-

trict's Elementary Principal of the Year, and Dobie High School Principal Dr. Jorly Thomas was named the school district's Secondary Principal of the Year. This honor reflects the impact these two leaders have made on their students, staff and community. Their dedication and commitment to maintaining high standards of education has led to strong ratings, state recognition and positive learning outcomes.

Winter storm strikes South Belt area

The South Belt community was expected to experience a hard freeze at press time, with temperatures expected to drop into the lower 20s Tuesday, Jan. 21. The winter storm was also expected to bring between 3 and 5 inches of snowfall to the Houston area.

Dubbed Winter Storm Enzo by meteorologists, the storm was predicted to be one of the iciest in the state's history.

Both Pasadena ISD and Clear Creek ISD were closed Tuesday due to the icy conditions. (Monday was a school holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.)

Both Hobby and Bush Intercontinental airports were closed Tuesday due to the frigid conditions.

Houston and Harris County opened dozens of

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Filing begins in local school elections

PISD, CCISD, SJC to each hold May 3 board elections

Candidate filing for a place on the ballot in the upcoming area May 3 school board elections began Jan. 15 and will continue through Feb. 15.

Pasadena ISD, Clear Creek ISD and San Jacinto College will hold elections.

Pasadena ISD

To be decided in Pasadena ISD are the Position 1 seat currently held by Paola Gonzalez, the Position 2 seat currently held by Crystal Davila, the Position 3 seat currently held by Nelda Sullivan and the Position 4 seat currently held by Casey Phelan.

All incumbents are expected to file for re-election.

All positions are at large. Terms are four years each.

At press time, it was unclear what was being done to fill the Position 7 seat recently vacated by the death of longtime board member Vickie Morgan late last year. Pasadena ISD officials said they were in discussions with the district's legal team and hoped to come to a resolution at the board's next meeting.

For additional information on Pasadena ISD's 2025 election, visit pasadenaisd.org/trusteeselection25.

Clear Creek ISD

Voters in Clear Creek ISD will decide who will fill the District 1 position currently held by

Jessica Cejka and the At Large Position B seat currently held by Scott Bowen.

Both incumbents are expected to seek re-election.

Terms are three years each.

To apply for a position on the ballot, interested individuals may download the Candidate Application and Information Packet at ccisd.net/elections; pick up a packet in person at the Clear Creek ISD Education Support Center at 2425 E. Main St. in League City; or request a packet by email to elections@ccisd.net.

For additional information on Clear Creek ISD's 2025 election, visit ccisd.net/elections.

San Jacinto College

In the San Jacinto College District, voters will select who will fill the Position 3 seat vacated by *Leader* founder and longtime board member Marie Flickinger late last year shortly before her death.

Candidate Salvador Serrano Jr. has filed to assume the Position 3 seat.

Also to be decided is who will serve in San Jac's Position 4 seat currently held Larry Wilson, who has filed to maintain his position.

Terms are six years each.

For additional information on San Jacinto College 2025 election, visit www.sanjac.edu/about/board-trustees/board-election.

Dobie DECA dominates district



Dobie DECA students excelled at the district competition held Thursday, Jan. 16, at the Epicenter in Rosenberg. Alissa Nguyen (left) and Kaitlyn Resendez will each be advancing to state competition in business finance, hospitality/tourism, respectively. Dobie DECA students are under sponsors Amber Allan and Stacy Thomas.

Dobie High School to recognize 2025 Hall of Honor inductees

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about through discussions on social media.

"You don't have to sit in the same room and have a meeting with people," Liew said. "You don't have to be in their research group or at their institution. It just shows that you can do a lot of things that have a real impact on people's lives, completely online."

Audrey Castoreno, alumni

Audrey Castoreno Atkinson is an accomplished Emmy and AP award-winning anchor at KENS 5 in San Antonio, where she currently serves as the morning anchor. With over a decade of experience in broadcast journalism, she has built a career marked by dedication, excellence and a passion for storytelling.

Castoreno demonstrated a strong academic focus and leadership potential from an early age. A distinguished honors student, she excelled in both her studies and extracurricular activities at Dobie High School. As a cheerleader, she learned the value

of teamwork, discipline and perseverance – qualities that would later become foundational to her career. Her involvement in Dobie News, where she held the role of news director during her senior year, sparked her early passion for journalism and broadcasting. The program allowed her to refine her leadership skills while also developing a deep understanding of the media landscape.

In addition to her academic and extracurricular accomplishments, Castoreno was recognized for her commitment to giving back to her community. She volunteered with Best Buddies, helping foster relationships for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and was honored as a Trailblazer in her senior year – a recognition of her outstanding leadership and service.

Following high school, Castoreno attended Sam Houston State University, where she pursued a degree in Broadcast Journalism. At Sam Houston, she continued

to hone her skills as a storyteller, working at the university's TV station, SHSU Channel 7 and interning at Fox 26 in Houston. During her time there, she gained invaluable experience in front of and behind the camera, which laid the foundation for her future career in broadcast journalism.

Her first professional experience came at KAVU-TV in Victoria, where she worked as a reporter and fill-in anchor. The small market experience proved to be a crucial stepping stone, shaping her



Audrey Castoreno

Understanding of the craft and deepening her passion for broadcast news.

Castoreno's career trajectory took her to Midland-Odessa, where she spent four years as the 4 and 5 p.m. anchor at NewsWest 9. This experience provided her with an opportunity to engage with larger audiences.

In 2015, she made the move to San Antonio, where she joined KENS 5 as a reporter and producer. Over the years, Audrey quickly rose through the ranks, ultimately being promoted to anchor. Today, as an anchor for the morning show, she has become a trusted face for the San Antonio community. Her work has earned numerous accolades, including Emmy and Associated Press awards, a testament to her unwavering commitment to delivering impactful and informative news to her audience.

Beyond her professional success, Castoreno finds balance and joy in her personal life with her husband, Brian, to whom she has been married to for ten years. Together, they are raising two young daughters: Aurora, who is 4 years old, and Cora, who is 1 year old. Family is at the heart of everything she does, and her role as a wife and mother is one of her greatest sources of pride. She strives to be a positive role model for her daughters, showing them the importance of hard work, kindness, and giving back to the community.

Outside of her professional achievements, Castoreno has remained deeply committed to community service and volunteerism. She has been an active member of the Junior League of San Antonio (JLSA) for the past nine years and currently serves on the board of directors as the vice president of Community. Her leadership within the

organization is a reflection of her dedication to improving the lives of others. In 2019, she was honored as the JLSA Volunteer of the Year for her outstanding contributions to the League's mission.

In addition, Castoreno has volunteered with Communities in Schools, an organization focused on helping at-risk students stay in school and achieve in life. Her work with these organizations highlights her passion for making a positive impact, not only through her profession but also by giving back to the community that has supported her throughout her career.

Castoreno's career is marked by a continuous drive for excellence, both on and off the screen. Her accomplishments in journalism – alongside her dedication to volunteering and leadership – serve as an inspiration to aspiring journalists and community leaders alike. As she continues her work at KENS 5, Castoreno remains focused on telling stories that matter, while also making a difference in the lives of those

of 76 years of teaching between them, they always had the goal of opening the eyes of their students and being the wind beneath their wings. Jeanne graduated from Southwest Texas University with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and chemistry. She began her teaching career in Dayton ISD teaching life and earth science at Woodrow Wilson Junior High and biology and physics at Dayton High School. She continued teaching at Friendswood High School, where she taught physical science and biology II. Later, Jeanne began her Pasadena ISD teaching career at Beverly Hills Intermediate, where she taught earth and life science. Finally, she found her niche at J. Frank Dobie High School teaching first geology and physics and then pre-AP physics and AP physics.

Louis graduated from St. Francis College in Brooklyn with a Bachelor of Science in chemistry. In addition, he received a Master of Science in physical chemistry at Bowling Green State

School in Brooklyn, where he sponsored students in the New York City Science Fair, where many awards and recognition were obtained.

In 1976, Louis moved to Texas, where he began teaching physical science at Dobie High School. Eventually, he moved to pre-AP and AP chemistry. After Jeanne and Louis met at a National Science Foundation geology event at Texas A&M University, they married and began to encourage each other in their respective fields.

At Dobie, Louis sponsored the JETS Club and Science Olympiad. He also helped judge the Science Olympiad competition. In addition, he sponsored the Science Club, where students participated in Annual Galveston Beach and Galveston Bay clean-ups. Jeanne helped integrate the Physics of Hot Air Balloons, where students flew their own Hot Air Balloons over Dobie High School. Eventually, the Science Club built a model called Energy Town with multiple energy sources. The Paper Recycling Program began in 1995, with Science Club collecting old newspaper from community business, hospital, old ages home, etc. to eventually having recycle bins place outside of Dobie High School, which the district expanded to other Pasadena ISD schools. At Dobie, the money collected was used to find programs for Special Needs Students. Louis was honored by the Houston Galveston Area Council as a certified teacher for water quality of local waterways. Clear Creek, Mary's Creek, Mudd Creek and Turkey Creek. He involved numerous Science Club students to learn how to do water quality testing on Saturday mornings.

Both Jeanne and Louis were Academic Decathlon team tutors in physics and chemistry and student-teacher supervisors for University of Houston. They jointly received a mini-grant by the Houston Business Committee for Fascinating Physics and Chemistry Program. Their students were trained from 1988 to 1998 to do physics and chemistry demonstrations at the local Beverly Hills and Thompson intermediates. The program was expanded to include students from a special topics class, who did the physics and chemistry demonstrations at Moore Elementary.

Both teachers led Dobie's AP testing in physics and chemistry leading the district in students receiving college credit. Many hours were spent tutoring before and after school and during lunch to help students become successful. As lifetime learners, Jeanne and Louis attended CAST conferences as participants and as presenters. They also attended numerous Woodrow Wilson National Foundation Workshops to expand their knowledge. In 2007, Louis and Jeanne became involved with Laying the Foundation, a Dallas-based nonprofit group that promoted quality teacher training. Later they both became trainers and trainer of trainers supporting each other as they traveled all over the United States presenting workshop empowering other teachers to implement the program. Jeanne was awarded the 2012 National Science Teacher of the Year by the Laying the Foundation and was honored by the Pasadena ISD board.

In 2007, Jeanne received the 2007-2008 Toyota Tapestry Grant and in 2011, she was recognized as Teacher of the Year at Dobie. Jeanne was Science Department Chair and inspired her teachers at Dobie to be the best they could be. Louis began the Biodiesel Program at Dobie where used cooking oil was converted into biodiesel fuel. Both Jeanne and Louis were honored numerous times by the top-10 graduates of Dobie as their Shining Star, the teacher who made a difference in their lives. In addition, they both received awards from the National Society of High School Scholars.

Jim Sawyer, volunteer (also alumni and faculty)
While being highlighted for his volunteer work for the high school and surrounding community, Jim Sawyer is the first inductee to qualify for three areas on the Dobie Pride Wall, as alumni, faculty member and community volunteer.

Sawyer said, however, if given his choice, he'd prefer to be inducted along with his classmates in the alumni section. A 1973 Dobie graduate, Sawyer was the captain of the football and baseball teams. Sawyer served as president of the Tri Hi Y club and was

selected as a Rotarian and an Optimist.

Following graduation from high school, Sawyer attended Wharton Junior College on an athletic scholarship. He later received a bachelor's degree from University of Houston and a vocational education degree from Texas A&M.

Sawyer worked as a teacher and coach in Pasadena ISD for 40 years. Sawyer began his teaching career at South Houston High School, where he taught math and science, before switching to teaching career and vocational classes.

Sawyer coached a variety of sports through the years, including football, baseball, both boys' and girls' basketball, golf and tennis. After 25 years at South Houston, Sawyer returned to his alma mater Dobie, where he taught career and vocational classes for 15 years.

Sawyer said he took some of the lessons he learned at Dobie and incorporated into his own teaching.

"The best teacher I had as a student at Dobie was Coach Lloyd," said Sawyer. "He taught us history by telling stories. I loved it and tried to incorporate that style into my own teaching style."

Sawyer was instrumental in building the bonfire each year, collecting pallets from throughout the South Belt area and building the structure for homecoming. Sawyer volunteered his

time and skills to build the wall for the Dobie Pride Wall, and he spent last summer with volunteers adding the new addition to the Hall of Honor. He continues to work with the Seniors Helping Seniors program, spending countless hours organizing time and materials and doing prep work on area houses to



Jim Sawyer

allow senior class members to help in the community. He also drove the bus as a volunteer for numerous campus programs.

The word "no" is not in Sawyer's vocabulary. A highlight remembered by students was going to visit area elementary schools to read and tutor students from feeder campuses.

Sawyer said many of the lessons taught at school carried over into his personal life.

"My goal at Dobie became the same as my goal as a grandfather – to teach my students everything I know."

Elected officials share their words

Commissioner Miller supports Lt. Gov. Patrick's cannabis curtailment effort

Just down the street from the Austin headquarters of the Texas Department of Agriculture is a trailer selling consumable cannabis products; the sole purpose of these products is to inebriate. When did the Texas legislature debate recreational marijuana and ultimately vote to legalize it?

The answer is, they didn't. Thanks to loose legal language and generous interpretations of the law, an unregulated market for recreational marijuana has sprung up across Texas.

Texas has, over the past few years, legalized hemp farming and processing, as well as creating and then expanding a compassionate use program for those who benefit from cannabis as medicine. When passing these laws, legislators sought to define intoxicating marijuana, which remains illegal in most cases. The resulting definition has led to the problems we face today.

The process of testing cannabis for the level of intoxicating THC is costly and complex. Local police must send samples to one of the few labs which does the testing and wait through a long backlog for a result. Unless you are dealing with massive quantities from transnational criminal gangs, it's just not worth the time, hassle, and expense for law enforcement to bust someone smoking a joint in a city park or sneaking a dime bag into a concert. As a result, many local authorities have largely stopped enforcing marijuana possession laws. Either the time and cost of investigating and prosecuting most cases simply isn't worth it on limited police budgets, or they are run by leftists who want to thwart Texas' marijuana laws.

On top of that, the levels of intoxicants permitted by the law are equally difficult to police. This has led to a flood of unregulated "consumer products" such as vape pens, edibles, chocolates, and even raw cannabis "buds" being sold at retail establishments across the state.

What's worse, there are no consumer standards, safety inspections, or chemical analysis of these products to determine their level of intoxicants or even their basic safety.

I strongly support hemp as a commercial product. I strongly support medical marijuana and our state's compassionate use program. In fact, I want to see it expanded to include far more medical conditions than it currently does. Everyone who can benefit from it to help with their legitimate medical condition should have it available to them. I also strongly support robust research into cannabis so we can best use it as medicine and for a myriad of consumer products.

While I do not support recreational, retail marijuana for all, it's up to the legislature to fix the legislation on the books and, while doing so, have a robust and transparent debate about whether or not to expand its availability. That has not yet happened. I have received a lot of messages asking me to come out against Dan Patrick's efforts to curtail the unregulated and unsafe market that I have described. I will not. That's not how the law works. The Lieutenant Governor is right to go after these unregulated and often illegal businesses.

Even if the legislature voted to legalize recreational marijuana tomorrow, that legislation would create a legal market with rules, guardrails, checks, and balances. These products are potentially dangerous. In many cases, we don't even know who the manufacturers are, where these products are coming from, or what kinds of chemicals and unsafe additives may be part of the production process.

Texas needs clear and understandable laws. Texas Republicans need to be rowing in the same direction in order to achieve this goal. That is why I stand with Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick while expecting the legislature to do its job.

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner An eighth-generation Texas farmer and rancher, Sid Miller is the 12th Commissioner of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). A twenty-six-time world champion rodeo cowboy, he has devoted his life to promoting Texas agriculture, rural communities, and the western heritage of Texas. Commissioner Miller will be available for television, zoom, and phone interviews.

In My Opinion

King: Harris County tax bill sticker shock

As I have previously shared with you, when Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo claimed that the Commissioners' Court was raising property taxes by 8%. Her statement was, to put it nicely, untrue. Tax bills for Harris County began going out shortly after Thanksgiving and many homeowners are seeing jaw-dropping increases. Of course, each homeowner's tax bill is highly dependent on their individual circumstances, but on average, the increase may be the largest ever imposed by a local government in Texas. Here are the numbers.

The Commissioners' Court set the tax rate for four entities: the County, the Hospital District, the Flood Control District, and the Port Authority. Here are the increases in the tax rate for each:

	2023 Tax Rate	2024 Tax Rate	Rate Increase	%Increase in Rate
County	0.35007	0.38529	0.03522	10%
Flood	0.03105	0.04897	0.01792	58%
Port	0.00574	0.00615	0.00041	7%
Hospital	0.14343	0.16348	.02005	14%
Total	0.53029	0.60389	0.0736	14%

This shows that the tax rate for these four entities increased by 14% in just one year. To be fair, voters narrowly approved the Flood Control District's increase, although I wonder if they would have done so, had Hidalgo not lied to them about how much their Harris County taxes were really going up.

But the Flood Control portion of the County's tax bill is a relatively minor portion. Even if we eliminate the Flood Control District's rate increase, the increase in the rate that was imposed by the Commissioners' Court was still over 11%.

So, there was no universe in which the tax increase was only going to be 8%, as Hidalgo promised.

But it gets worse because your actual tax bill is the product of the tax rate and the taxable value of your property. According to the last report from HCAD, the taxable value of the average home in Harris County is up by just over 3% this year. Because of the compounding effect, the average homeowner will see a nearly 15% increase in their actual county tax bill this year.

Commissioners' Court was primarily able to cram down this onerous tax increase by using a loophole that allows local governments to exceed the State imposed limits in the case of the declaration of an emergency (Derecho and Hurricane Beryl). The Court also used several other exceptions to the State limit available to it in previous years but was blocked by the two Republican commissioners boycotting the meeting called to set the tax rate.

Harris County was not the only jurisdiction that jumped on the tax-raising bandwagon. Almost 100 other taxing entities in Harris County raised their tax rates. However, several large jurisdictions held their tax rate even with the City of Houston and Houston ISD being the most notable.

Some homeowners will see truly eye-popping increases, especially if they live in a jurisdiction that raised taxes like Harris County and had a large valuation increase. HCAD raised the value of the home of a friend of mine by 10% this year. He lives in the Houston Community College District, which raised its tax rate by 4.3%. His total tax bill was nearly 18% higher than last year. This is the five-year history of his tax bill from the Tax Assessor-Collector.

You will notice that his tax bill declined in the previous two years, due to the property tax relief passed by the Texas Legislature. However, in his case, local governmental entities have clawed back about half of that relief.

By the way, the five-year history for your home is included on the back of your tax bill or you can access it on the County Tax-Assessor's website by looking up your property and then clicking the blue button in the left-hand margin titled "5 Year Account History."

This year's tax increases came on top of an average increase of over 10% last year because even though a taxing entity did not raise its tax rate, HCAD increased the average home value by that amount. As I noted in my earlier post on this topic, wages in the Houston region have been rising for the last five years at a 3.9% annual rate. So, Harris County's taxes over the last two years have risen roughly four times higher than wages.

Recent polls have shown the growing frustration of young people, in particular, at the unaffordability of owning a home. The combination of a storage of single-family homes, high interest rates, and spiraling insurance costs and taxes has simply made it impossible for many young people to purchase a home.

Many attribute this frustration to the trend of many younger Americans abandoning the Democratic Party in favor of more populist candidates. However, many of our local officials, and especially some on Harris County Commissioners' Court, do not seem to recognize that they are contributing to this home affordability crisis with their obsession with ever-larger budgets fueled by ever-higher property taxes. Perhaps Harris County voters will help them make that connection in the next election.

Bill King

Ballroom dancers host Valentine's Day dance

A Valentine's Day dance sponsored by ballroom dancers of League City, Bill and Neva Schroder, will take place at Hometown Heroes Park, 1001 East League City Parkway, League City Saturday, Feb. 1, from 7 to 9:45 p.m. Everyone, with or without a partner, is invited. The facility maintains a floating hardwood floor.

The attire is "Dress as You Like," casual to after-5. Door fee is \$10. Neva will DJ. This smoke-free and alcohol-free event. Questions may be directed to Neva@LetsDanceBallroom.org.

Local library events set

In case of storms or adverse weather, refer to library website for details.

Bracewell Branch Library

Bracewell Library is at 9002 Kingspoint. Customers are encouraged to visit the building to browse, check out and return materials, use the computers and Wi-Fi, and check out holds. For information, visit <https://houstonlibrary.org/>. For online learning, visit <https://houstonlibrary.org/online-learning-7556> or call 832-393-2580. Hours are Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Wednesdays, noon – 8 p.m.; Fridays, 1 – 5 p.m.; and Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Bracewell is closed Sundays.

Book drop

The book drop is open. Library materials can be returned. The library continues to provide online resources to enjoy the library virtually. Large items such as FLIP kits or laptops should not be placed in the book drop, but taken inside.

Parker Williams Library

Parker Williams Library is open. Visit <https://www.hcpl.net/reopening> for reopening information or the main website at <https://www.hcpl.net/branch/parker-williams-branch-library>. The library will follow state and county guidelines for mask and social distancing.

The book drop is open. Social media links are Facebook.com/ParkerWilliamsLibrary and Instagram.com/ParkerWilliamsLibrary.

The following events are scheduled for Parker Williams Library, 10851 Scarsdale Blvd.:

- Thursday, Jan. 23, 10:15 – 10:45 a.m. Toddler time.
- Saturday, Jan. 25, 11 a.m. – noon Community craft, lunar new year.
- Monday, Jan. 27, 1 – 2:30 p.m. ESL conversation club.
- Monday, Jan. 27, 6 – 7:30 p.m. Citizenship classes.
- Tuesday, Jan. 28, 10:15 – 10:45 a.m. Babies 'n' books.
- Tuesday, Jan. 28, 1 – 2 p.m. Citizenship classes.
- Wednesday, Jan. 29, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Lunar new year 2025, year of the snake.

Parker Williams "No-Contact Curbside Holds Pick-Up"

- After receiving notification that holds are ready for pickup, call 832-927-7870.
- Have a library card number and PIN handy.
- A pickup time and instructions will be given.
- Upon arriving, park in one of the two parking spots reserved for curbside holds.
- Be prepared to show a library card or other form of ID for verification.

Hours are Monday, 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Wednesday, 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Friday, 1 – 6 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Visit <https://www.hcpl.net/branch/parker-williams-branch-library> for details.

Online services

- Use HCPL Wi-Fi service with HCPL's drive-up Wi-Fi.
 - Download e-books and audiobooks, stream movies, research and learn at www.hcpl.net.
 - Attend an HCPL program or story time online through Facebook or YouTube.
 - Check an account to renew loans or request books, e-books, comics or graphic novels.
 - Stream classic films, indie cinema and award-winning documentaries on Kanopy.
 - Listen to audiobooks through RBDigital or OverDrive.
 - Read along and play with picture books on TumbleBooks.
- Don't have an HCPL library card? Instant access can be obtained to all HCPL's digital materials and research tools with an iKnow Digital Access Card. Apply at <https://www.hcpl.net/services/iknow-card> for a HCPL card. For details, visit <https://www.hcpl.net>.

South Belt-Ellington Leader

The Voice of Community-Minded People

11555 Beamer 281-481-5656

E-mail: mynews@southbeltleader.com

David Flickinger, owner

Death

Stephen (Steve) Brisbay



Stephen (Steve) Brisbay, loving husband, son and father, passed away on Jan. 10, 2025, at the age of 64.

Steve was born on Oct. 31, 1960, in Houston. He lived most of his younger years in the Aldine area, graduating from Aldine High School in 1979. He loved horses, dogs and fishing. As a boy he wanted to be a cowboy. Steve grew up active in many

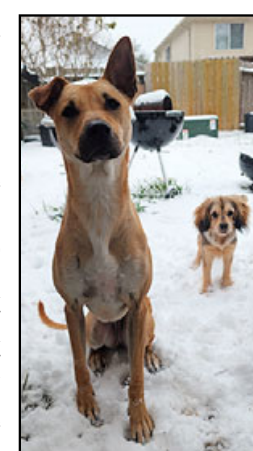
sports. He rode in the Harris County Junior Mounted Posee delivering the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo invitation to the mayor of Brenham. While attending Texas A&M, he was on the water skiing team. Steve loved saltwater fishing and spent many weekends fishing at the Laguna Madre in Port Isabel. He spent most of his professional career working in oil and gas at Texaco and Marathon Oil Company.

Steve is survived by his wife, Linda Brisbay; daughter Ally Brisbay; mother Carol Rose; stepfather Don Rose; father Ronald Brisbay; stepmother Nicole Tupper and husband Josh; stepbrother Ryan Verducci and wife Jessica; and numerous nieces and nephews.

He is preceded in death by his grandparents Catherine and Claude Brisbay, Helen Zweigel and Abe Sigerman, and stepmother Linda S. Brisbay.

He will be missed immensely by family and friends but his memory lives on in their hearts forever.

Locals enjoy snow day



South Belters Luna (left) and Sol enjoyed snow for the first time. On Tuesday, Jan. 21, many Houstonians received their first-ever snow fall. Locals played in snow and a few even built snowmen. Below are snowmen built by Kelvin Lopez (CTHS tenth-grader) and his dad, Jose Abarca.



New Covenant Christian Church Day Care Christian Based Child Care



New Covenant Christian Church provides Christian based child care for the local community. Director Nedra Jackson and her staff are here to take perfect care of your children while you work.

281.481.2003
www.newcovenantchristianchurchhouston.com
10603 Blackhawk Blvd. Houston, TX 77089
Blackhawk@Kirkfair

ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST
Catholic Church
Rev. Douglas J. Guthrie, Pastor
Rev. Antonio Cisneros, Parochial Vicar
11011 Hall Rd.
(between Beamer & Blackhawk)
www.stlukesatholic.com

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday Vigil	5:30 p.m.
Sunday	8 a.m. and 10 a.m.*
Sunday	1 p.m. Misa en Español*
Monday, Wednesday & Friday	9 a.m.
Tuesday & Thursday	7 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confessions)
Thursday 7:45 to 8:30 p.m. Saturday 4 to 5 p.m.

Parish Office: 281-481-6816
Children's Faith Formation: 281-481-4251
Adult Faith Formation: 713-538-2862
All are welcome to come to worship and serve the Lord in a spirit of love, sharing, and hope.

Leader remembers 2024 highlights

Continued from Page 1
emphasizes every student's holistic development and every staff member's unique value. Under her leadership Morris Middle School has been recognized as a Model Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work Campus through innovative scheduling, a focus on professional development and the establishment of a cohesive staff.

In his short time as Dobie High School principal, Thomas has displayed the characteristics of a strong leader by offering support for all of those around him through the capacity of coaching, mentoring and opportunities for faculty and students. He is known to take extra time to meet with his staff individually to hear their concerns and gives feedback on growth. Thomas has upheld Dobie's culture of excellence and most recently received the Texas CREST Award for their outstanding counseling program. Additionally, Thomas completed his doctorate in education in 2023. Drawing on 25 years of education expertise, Thomas challenges the notion that talent is fixed. Instead, he emphasizes deliberate practice, feedback, and continuous learning to unlock one's full potential. By nurturing curiosity and character skills, he positively impacts students' lives. Thomas's educational journey began as a history teacher at North Shore High School in 1998. He later transitioned to a counselor at Spring ISD, where he worked with teenage fathers. His career progressed to Lake Olympia Middle School in Fort Bend ISD, fol-

lowed by roles as assistant principal at Beverly Hills Intermediate and J. Frank Dobie High School before assuming the principalship of Fred Roberts Middle School. Gifted the opportunity to build the school from the ground up, he established a foundation of trust, courage, and empathy, shaping the school's culture and staff recruitment. Guided by Thomas, Roberts Middle School earned recognition as a 2020 Texas Schools to Watch Campus for its academic achievements and improvement efforts. Roberts Middle School has earned several academic distinctions in student progress and growth under his guidance. His mentorship has propelled six of his admin team members into principal and district leadership positions within Pasadena ISD. Returning to Dobie High School as principal, Thomas continues championing excellence in Pasadena ISD. In addition to his educational leadership, he completed his Doctor of Education in 2023. As a staunch advocate for public education, he participated in the Raise Your Hand Principals Advocacy Fellowship to advocate for Texas public schools. Thomas is committed to fostering a compassionate and nurturing environment in every school setting.

Nominations for the annual recognition are submitted every January from principals, district levels, executive directors, directors, specialists, managers, coordinators and the superintendent's cabinet members. Later, a committee of principals who were previous honorees

meet to make a final selection for the elementary and secondary principals of the year. Levallen and Thomas went on to represent Pasadena ISD in the Region 4 Principal of the Year competition by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals.

The results from the March 5 primary elections have been tabulated, with few surprises. While many of the primary races were predictably won by the incumbents, one notable exception was the contest for the position of Harris County district attorney, in which two-term Democratic incumbent Kim Ogg was trounced by challenger Sean Teare for her party's nomination. A one-time employee of Ogg's in the DA's office, Teare received 75 percent of the vote to his former boss's 25 percent. In November's general election, Teare went on to defeat Republican opponent Dan Simons, who ran unopposed in his party's primary. The DA race was hotly contested this year after Ogg ruffled many feathers in her own party last year when she criminally charged three of County Judge Lina Hidalgo's staffers for their alleged involvement in a bribery scheme, prompting Teare's well-funded campaign as a challenger.

In the race for Harris County Precinct 2 constable, Democratic incumbent Jerry Garcia maintained his position, easily defeating party challenger David Garza. Garcia received 76 percent of the vote to Garza's 24 percent. No Republicans filed to enter the race. In the contest for Harris County Precinct 2, Place 1 justice

of the peace, Democratic incumbent Jo Ann Delgado also kept her position after capably defeating her Democratic opponent Oscar Salazar Jr. Delgado received 71 percent of the vote to Salazar's 29 percent. No Republicans filed to run for the position.

U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D), state Rep. Dennis Paul (R) and state Rep. Mary Ann Perez (D) all ran unopposed for their party's nomination.

The historic lunar mission associated with local company Intuitive Machines – the first of its kind in 50+ years – had to be cut short due to problems associated with the spacecraft's sideways landing, officials with the company and NASA announced at a press conference. According to officials, the lander, named Odysseus, came in too fast for its landing, causing one of its six legs to catch the surface, causing it to tumble over. The spill caused the craft to land on its side, rather than upright as intended. Further, the awkward landing prevented the craft's antennas from facing the Earth and left the lander's solar panels closer to the surface than intended hampering communications. Officials continued to collect data until the lander's power depleted Tuesday, about two-three days sooner than planned.

Despite the mission's technical difficulties, Intuitive Machines continued to release stunning photos of the mission, many reminiscent of the lunar landings of the 1960s.

The *Leader* will continue its 2024 Year in Review in next week's edition.

Dobie FFA participates in Pasadena Livestock Show and Rodeo

Dobie FFA students participated in the Pasadena Livestock Show and Rodeo Winter Prospect show. The cattle, swine and goat teams came away with multiple placings including a Grand Champion Jr. Goat Showman.



Dobie FFA participants, from left, Vianka Alanis, Sadie Jones and Jenna Molina display their show goats during the Pasadena Livestock Show and Rodeo.



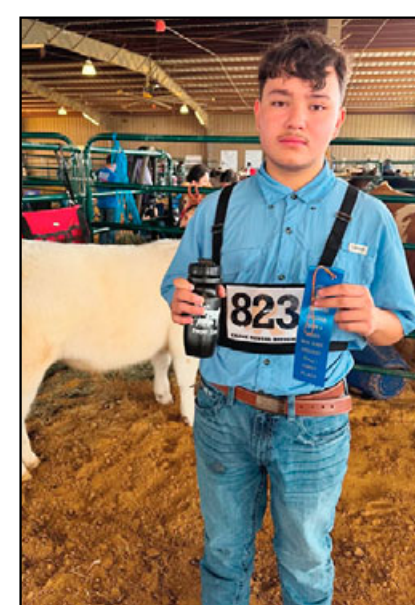
The Dobie swine team came home with first- through third-place ribbons. The Pasadena show awardees included, from left, Kevin Rubio, Kiara Torres, Thalia Oddo (Ag adviser) Annabelle Sallee, Cierra Hall and Marissa Martinez.



Melanie Avalos placed third in goat rings A and B.



Luke Stacey won fourth place in goat rings A and B and Grand Champion Jr. Showman.



Pablo Ruiz's steer placed first in rings A and B.



Hunter Stacey won third place in rings A and B in the Pasadena steer competition.



Abrianna Carbajal (left) won girls' fourth-place scramble heifer while Julien Cano won boys' fourth place scramble heifer.



Hunter Stacey (left) and his brother, Luke Stacey, are shown with their show goat from the Pasadena LS&R event.



The cattle team placed first through fourth. Melanie Sanchez placed first and second place in both rings.

South Belt struck by winter storm

Continued from Page 1
warming centers up to the public

City and county courthouses were also closed due to the weather and all non-essential employees were told by officials to stay home.

Residents were urged to stay off streets unless it was an emergency and to practice safe heating practices.

City of Houston trash pickup was expected to be delayed by two days, Solid Waste officials announced Monday, Jan. 20. Local MUD collections were also delayed.

At press time, power loss was a major concern among officials. According to CenterPoint representatives, approximately 1,200 support crew were on standby in case of power restoration emergency.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire and public safety officials held a press conference Monday afternoon, warning of the storm's conditions and urging residents to be prepared and cautious.

City of Houston officials offered the following tips to help residents stay safe in times of low temperatures:

The four Ps
During periods of extreme cold and/or winter weather, remember to protect the four Ps: People, Pets, Pipes and Plants:

- People should dress warmly and in layers. Check on family, friends, and neighbors who may be susceptible to this week's cold

weather and/or not have access to housing and heating, including the elderly and those with special needs. The Coalition for the Homeless coordinates information for partner agencies and the general public and maintains an updated list of those resources for individuals who may be experiencing homelessness: <http://bit.ly/2TX-Saan>.

- Pets should be brought indoors or provided with a warm place to sleep.
- Pipes that run outside or under a house should be wrapped in pipe insulation to avoid cracks due to water freezing in them. Open kitchen and bathroom cabinets under your sinks to allow heat to enter them.
- Plants may need to be covered or brought inside to avoid frost damage.

Driving conditions
As with any type of precipitation, such as rain, sleet or snow, residents who are driving vehicles should take steps to protect themselves, including the following:

- Give themselves extra stopping distance. Wet conditions mean it takes longer for vehicles to come to a complete stop.
- Ensure windshield wipers are in good working condition before heading out on the road. When conditions are wet or dark, be sure to use headlights.
- Never use high beams in urban areas. Highway overpasses and bridges pose the highest risk of icing. Take extra precautions when

driving over them.

- Slow down. Rain, sleet, and snow can limit visibility, giving drivers less time to recognize danger.
- Slowing down gives provides extra time to adjust to changing conditions.

Space heaters
Heating devices cause more than 100 fires in the City of Houston each year, resulting in numerous injuries and possible death. Citizens should always keep in mind that: Space Heaters Need Space.

The Houston Fire Department recommends the following safety tips when using supplemental heating sources:

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm.
- Never leave children unattended in a room with a space heater – Children knock over space heaters, especially if they are placed on top of wobbly tables or stools and near where the children play. Children may also stick paper or toys in the grates of the space heaters especially gas space heaters. The city had two reported fires in 2004 caused by children playing with space heaters.
- Keep all combustible materials, including yourself, at least three feet from the heater.
- Open face heaters should have a screen.
- Provide ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

Electric heater tips
– Never overload outlets

or breakers.

- Don't use extension cords for the heater. If the cord is hot to the touch, turn off the heater and unplug it.
- Electric heaters permanently installed in the wall or ceiling should have lint and dust removed regularly. Lint and dust will burn.
- For additional information on safely using space heaters, visit houstonfire.org.

Rental property tips
Landlords are obligated to maintain their rental properties to the minimum standards set by the Houston Housing Code of Ordinances (Sec. 10-363).

Heating equipment must be able to maintain a minimum inside temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit (measured three feet above the floor) when it is 20 degrees Fahrenheit outside. To report suspected violations, call 311.

Stay updated
For the latest forecast from the National Weather Service, visit weather.gov/houston.

Sign up for emergency notifications via AlertHouston: bit.ly/2z1PeNn.

Download a Disaster Preparedness Guide and make a plan at bit.ly/2NmO8IZ. For information on roadway conditions, visit houstontranstar.org or follow the Texas Department of Transportation on Twitter @Tx DOTHouston.

San Jac receives workforce grant

San Jacinto College has been awarded a \$109,020 Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grant from the Texas Workforce Commission to train 20 students in the high-demand field of radiologic technology. These funds will equip students with the skills necessary to pursue careers as radiologic technologists and technicians.

"As the demand for skilled professionals in health care continues to grow, this grant ensures San Jacinto College can provide cutting-edge training that directly meets the needs of our region's workforce," said Dr. Brenda Hellyer, chancellor of San Jacinto College. "By investing in our students and their future careers, we are not only empowering them but also strengthening the economic vitality of our region."

The JET grant is part of a broader initiative announced by Gov. Greg Abbott, who awarded more than \$15 mil-

lion in career training grants to 60 Texas higher education institutions and independent school districts. These funds will provide students with access to state-of-the-art equipment and resources for career and technical education programs, helping them transition into high-demand, good-paying jobs after graduation.

Abbott highlighted the importance of initiatives like the JET program in sustaining Texas' economic growth. "As Texas' economy continues to grow, it is critical that we invest in our future workforce," said Abbott. "This \$15 million in career training grants will support career and technical training programs for thousands of Texas students across our great state. I thank the Texas Workforce Commission for their continued partnership with Texas' high schools, colleges, and universities to help students achieve high-demand, good-paying jobs after graduation."

San Jacinto College's radiography/medical imaging program launched a new Associate of Applied Science degree in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) fall 2024 to address the healthcare workforce needs of the Gulf Coast region. This direct-entry pathway allows students to achieve certification more quickly, enabling them to enter the workforce sooner.

"The JET grant will provide San Jacinto College with state-of-the-art equipment to train our students," said Dr. Rhonda Bell, dean of health and natural sciences. "This ensures our graduates are well-prepared to excel in the fast-paced, high-demand field of medical imaging, meeting the critical needs of our region and beyond."

Through the strategic use of JET grants, TWC continues to invest in programs that open doors for Texans to secure rewarding careers while meeting the workforce needs of local communities.

Ellis praises Commissioners Court's \$1M grant award

Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis recently supported Commissioners Court's approval to give a \$1 million grant to the African American Male Wellness Agency, a nonprofit that will provide opioid prevention services and education to black men.

The grant comes from the Overdose Data to Action (OD2A), a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program that focuses on the drug overdose crisis. The grant program is administered by Harris County Public Health (HCPH).

"The overdose epidemic is a public health emergency that's hitting Harris County hard, especially in our most vulnerable neighborhoods," Ellis said. "I support the Overdose Data to Action program's partnership with the African American Male Wellness Agency that takes a grassroots, community-based approach to address this issue in Harris County. Working together, we can reverse this trend and save lives."

In Harris County between 2018 and 2022, black, non-Hispanic and white, non-Hispanic adults had the highest rates of substance-involved health care facility visits, with a 375 percent and a 342.7 percent increase over the five years, respectively, according to HCPH.

In substance-involved deaths during that same period, all racial and ethnic groups experienced an increase with black non-Hispanic adults experiencing the largest increase of 79.3 percent. The nonprofit African American Male Wellness Agency was selected to address the significant increase in opioid-related deaths among African American men.

With a strong community presence and a history of collaboration with OD2A, African American Male Wellness Agency will implement a grassroots approach that targets high-risk areas through direct support services, including recovery coaching and the distribution of naloxone, a medicine that rapidly

reverses an opioid overdose. HCPH will provide data support, tracking, and technical assistance to ensure effective, targeted interventions.

Also, the health department will award three other

partnerships that reflect various demographic groups and ensure strategies that recruit and reach diverse participants from different sectors, particularly those disproportionately impacted by overdose.

FORMS > Affidavits > Form 33.06 > Tax Deferral Affidavit for Over-65 or Disabled Homeowner.

Exemption applications can be found on the appraisal district's website, www.head.org, under the Forms tab on the top tool bar.

For further details about property tax deferral, contact the Harris Central Appraisal District's information center at 713-957-7800 or submit the webform at www.head.org > ABOUT > CONTACT US > Account Questions. Information can be found online at www.head.org by keying in "tax deferrals" in the Search Bar at the top right of the screen. Information also is available on the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division's website at www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/

HCAD offers deferred property tax payments

Texans who are age 65 or older or who are disabled as defined by law may postpone paying current and delinquent property taxes on their homes by signing a tax deferral affidavit at the Harris Central Appraisal District office.

Once the affidavit is on file, taxes are deferred – but not cancelled – as long as the owner continues to qualify for the exemption. Taxes accumulate with 5 percent interest per year. The law extends the tax deferral to the surviving spouse of the person who deferred taxes on the homestead if the surviving spouse was at least 55 years old when the deceased spouse died.

"Homeowners who are 65 or older or disabled also should be sure they have applied for and received the appropriate homestead exemptions. These exemptions will reduce future

SJC Central Children's Center earns NAEYC re-accreditation

The San Jacinto College Central Campus Children's Center has earned re-accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, achieving an exceptional 91.96 percent pass rate. The accreditation is valid through February 2030. The center is one of only

four NAEYC-accredited facilities in the Deer Park, La Porte and Pasadena area. With more than 30 years of experience, NAEYC is the nation's leading organization in early childhood education accreditation, setting comprehensive standards for program quality, professional practices, and operational excellence. NAEYC accreditation is widely recognized as the gold standard for early childhood education programs, representing a commitment to operational excellence and high-quality care.

"NAEYC accreditation helps ensure we continue providing high quality care and education," said Abigail Ramirez, Children's Center director. "As early childhood educators, we believe the journey of student success begins in the early years. Through NAEYC's standards, we're intentionally focused on building future generations - including both the children in our care and San Jacinto College students."

The center, which has served the community for more than 20 years, underwent a comprehensive evaluation process including classroom observations and portfolio reviews. The re-accreditation process began immediately following their previous accreditation in September 2019.

San Jacinto College Surrounded by monuments of history, evolving industries, maritime enterprises of today, and the space age of tomorrow, San Jacinto College has served the people of east Harris County, since 1961. The college is one of the top 10 community colleges in the nation as designated by the Aspen Institute and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction in 2020. The college is a Hispanic-serving institution that spans five campuses, serving approximately 45,000 credit and noncredit students annually. It offers more than 200 degrees and certificates across eight major areas of study that put students on a path to transfer to four-year institutions or enter the workforce. The college is fiscally sound, holding bond ratings of AA+ by Standard & Poor's, and Aa2 by Moody's.

Meador Teacher of the Month



Meador Elementary School announced Cecilia Stewart as their December Teacher of the Month because of dedication to staff and students for the last 35 years. Left to right, are principal Jennifer Chavez and Stewart.

Dobie football team spreads Christmas joy



Under the guidance of Dobie's coach Cohen Landry, coach Caitlin Morrison and varsity head football coach Daniel Fitzmorris, shown, left to right, Dobie football players Lorenzo Aguirre, Thomas Canil, Isaac Zamora and Jeremy Valencia dropped off Christmas gifts to students at Frazier Elementary. This is the second year that the Dobie football team and the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America chapter collected toys for the goal of spreading joy and love to the community.

Frazier announces mathematicians of the month

Frazier Elementary School has recognized students from each grade as Mathematician of the Month. Shown at right, left to right, are pre-k students Hope Solano, Aidan Jackson and Gianna Cuadros.



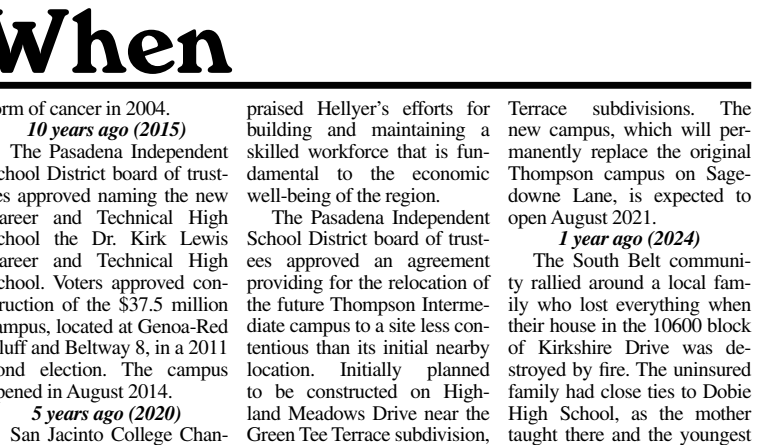
Shown, left to right, are kindergarteners (front row) Yuli Perez, Zoe Garcia, (back row) Jada Arizaga and Harrison Cowart.



Left to right, are first-graders (front row) Camila Saldivar, Vincent Estrada, (back row) Luka Chavez and Leilani Torres.



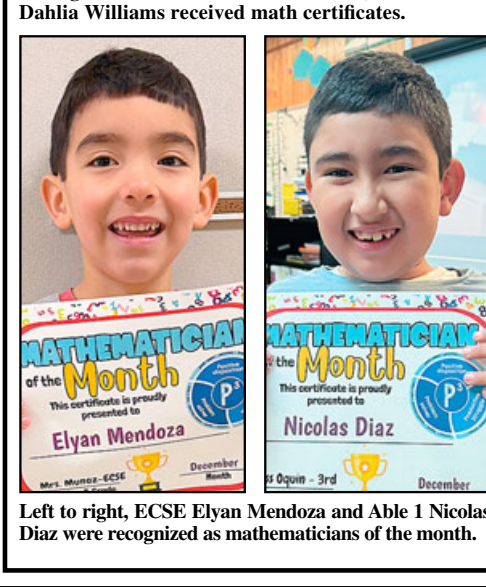
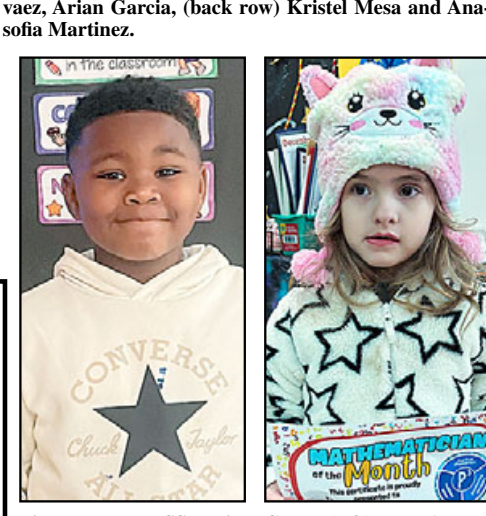
Shown, left to right, are second-graders (front row) Aria Salas, Ezekiel Lopez, Athan Garcia, (back row) Sophia Covarrubia and Antonella Bautista.



Left to right, are third-graders (front row) Nathan Navaez, Arian Garcia, (back row) Kristel Mesa and Anasofia Martinez.



Left to right, are fourth-graders (front row) Orzorah Herrera, Zendaya Serrano, (back row) Jeremiah Meda and Giovani Garcia.



First-graders BSS Julian Greer (left) and Able 1 Dahlia Williams received math certificates.



Left to right, ECSE Elyan Mendoza and Able 1 Nicolas Diaz were recognized as mathematicians of the month.

Remember When

45 years ago (1980) Several flood control experts addressed residents at the first meeting of the Regional Citizens Task Force. The task force was designed to be the basis of a five-county flood control authority.

35 years ago (1990) Justice of the Peace Howard Wayland was making plans to move into new offices at the courthouse annex opening on Beamer at Scarsdale.

30 years ago (1995) South Belt business owners along with the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce met with the city of Houston deputy director of public works to protest the proposed installation of a 36-inch waterline down Scarsdale Boulevard.

25 years ago (2000) South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce incoming president Johnny Carmona received the traditional gavel from Terry Felton at a banquet held at The Gardens.

20 years ago (2005) Four South Belt residents were honored at the 21st annual South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce banquet: Joe Craddock, Gilbert Aguilar, Jannis Lowery and the Rev. Gordon Berg. The four were recognized as ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

15 years ago (2010) In a surprising move, newly named Dobie head football coach Derek Fitzhenry resigned from his post before even starting the position. According to Fitzhenry, his family wanted to remain in Giddings, where he planned to continue to coach.

10 years ago (2015) The Pasadena Independent School District board of trustees approved naming the new Career and Technical High School the Dr. Kirk Lewis Career and Technical High School. Voters approved construction of the \$37.5 million campus, located at Genoa-Red Bluff and Beltway 8, in a 2011 bond election. The campus opened in August 2014.

5 years ago (2020) San Jacinto College Chancellor Dr. Brenda Hellyer was presented the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership's prestigious Quasar Award at the group's annual Quasar Award banquet Jan. 24. B.A.H.E.P. President Bob Mitchell

praised Hellyer's efforts for building and maintaining a skilled workforce that is fundamental to the economic well-being of the region.

The Pasadena Independent School District board of trustees approved an agreement providing for the relocation of the future Thompson Intermediate campus to a site less contentious than its initial nearby location. Initially planned to be constructed on Highland Meadows Drive near the Green Tee Terrace subdivision, the new campus was scheduled to be built on Riverstone Falls Drive near Hughes Road. The original site had been met with opposition from residents of both the Riverstone Ranch at Clear Creek and Green Tee Terrace subdivisions.

The new campus, which will permanently replace the original Thompson campus on Sage-downe Lane, is expected to open August 2021.

1 year ago (2024) The South Belt community rallied around a local family who lost everything when their house in the 10600 block of Kirkshire Drive was destroyed by fire. The uninsured family had close ties to Dobie High School, as the mother taught there and the youngest son was a senior at the area school. Pasadena ISD also assisted in the family's recovery. Two Houston firefighters suffered minor injuries when the home's ceiling collapsed on them while battling the blaze. Houston Fire Department officials estimated property damage at \$275,000. The fire reportedly started in the fireplace and spread quickly from there. In all, 33 personnel responded to this incident, including firefighters from stations 23, 70, 71, 52, 61, 93 and 24.

Over The Back Fence by Nicole

MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY FALL AWARDS DEGREES Congratulations are in order for South Belt student Jeannie Yen Nguyen who earned a Bachelor of Science degree in radiologic sciences from Midwestern State University at the end of the fall 2024 semester.

BIRTHDAY WISHES FOR REBECCA Dobie grad Rebecca (Heath) Irvine enjoys a birthday Jan. 23. Best wishes are sent from her husband Steve and her father Richard Heath of Kirkwood.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO THE WIESSSES Special wishes to Jacquelyn and Louie Wiess who will be celebrating 66 years of marriage Jan. 23. Much love and wishes for many more wonderful years to share together. Hugs and kisses from their children Heidi, Louie, Kara, spouses and grandchildren, Cody, Louie, Arianna, Ameilia and Jence.

CLAUDIA MARKS A BIRTHDAY Birthday wishes are sent to former Leader staff member Claudia Cubos who marks a birthday Jan. 23 from her family, friends and staff at the Leader.

LAILA CELEBRATES A BIRTHDAY Best wishes for a happy birthday are sent Jan. 27 to Dr. Laila Hassan from her family, friends, office staff and the Leader staff.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DAVID! Happy birthday greetings are sent to Davy Flickinger, Leader president, on Jan. 27. David is wished a great day by his wife, Ellie; daughter Natalie and husband Jose Abarca; grandchildren Kelvin Lopez, Noah, Eliana and Isabella Delgado; dad David Flickinger; brother Fred and wife Leslie Flickinger; niece

Kimberly and Matt Lipino; niece Courtney Durham and children Abigail, Jackson and Penelope; and the staff at the Leader.

SCHOOL DAZE The following personnel of the Pasadena ISD celebrate birthdays Jan. 23 through Jan. 29.

Atkinson Elementary Sing a happy birthday song to Diana Salazar-Rodriguez Jan. 24.

Burnett Elementary Light the birthday candles on a birthday cake Jan. 23 for Lena Toole. The day for Maria Gloria and Ericka Palacios to celebrate with ice cream and a double-layer birthday cake is Jan. 25. Remember to wish Maggie Courville a happy birthday Jan. 26.

Bush Elementary Maria Garza and Zorymartha Lopez celebrate a birthday Jan. 23.

Frazier Elementary Light the birthday candles Jan. 26 for Ashley Jones.

Hancock Elementary Jan. 26 is the day for a party for Judy Living and Laura Carillo. Send a happy birthday wish Jan. 28 to Elvia Castaneda.

Genoa Elementary Blow out the birthday candles Jan. 23 for Netza Lopez. Remember to wish Mireya Macedo a happy birthday Jan. 26. Best wishes for a special birthday Jan. 29 are sent to Francisca Tarango.

Meador Elementary Remember to wish Rubi Rocha a happy birthday Jan. 24.

South Belt Elementary Give a birthday shoutout Jan. 28 to Sara Cooper.

Melillo Middle School Best wishes for a special birthday Jan. 27 are sent to Kelly Schwenk.

Beverly Hills Intermediate Jacqueline Resendez celebrates a birthday Jan. 26.

Thompson Intermediate Send a birthday greeting Jan. 27 to Lukus McCuiston.

Dobie High On Jan. 24, birthday wishes are sent to Giovanna Suarez-Torres. Remember to wish Brian Hamlin and Xuan Pham a happy birthday Jan. 25.

FRIENDS CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS Thursday, Jan. 23: Becky Forsyth, Audi Resendez, Rodney Thiel, Wendy Gray and Bill A. Stevens; Friday, Jan. 24: Renee Lister and Lee Balinas; Sunday, Jan. 26: Gene Webster and Craig Green; Monday, Jan. 27: Cheryl Arnesen, Nicole Crader, Raquel Jones, Derek Cooley, Donald Gillock Sr. and Solomon Ard; Tuesday, Jan. 28: Daryn Edwards, Toni O'Bryan, Chris Valvaneda, Nealda Whitley, Lewis Cambiaso, Edgar Ramirez and Jennifer Hernandez; and Wednesday, Jan. 29: Stephanie Martinez-Hinton, Yvonne Moffitt, Margarito Rivera, Debra Dorn, Lauretta Massicott and Holly Conrad.

LEADER WANTS YOU IN THE NEWS For announcements, "Friends Celebrate Birthdays" or announcements email to mynews@southbeltleader.com with OTBF in the subject line by Friday noon for the next week's publication.

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SPORTS NEWS & NOTES

JFD track programs will open at Kethans

There is plenty of activity surrounding the quarter-mile oval at the Dobie main campus these days as the Longhorns' track and field programs are preparing for the start of the 2025 season, which will come Feb. 7 in Deer Park at the Jim Kethan Relays and continue Feb. 14 as the five Pasadena ISD high school programs host the Brown Relays at Auxiliary Stadium in Pasadena.

Looking ahead to the start of the 2025 season, the Longhorn girls will be led by senior standout Stacie Harris, who reached the regional level in the long jump in both 2023 and 2024 and was also the 400 champion at the 22-6A championships a season ago.

Senior Lauren Garza is one of the region's top distance runners and is coming off a gold medal win at district in the 3,200 in 2024 and also figures to be a factor at the 800 and 1,600 distances.

Tariq Riley set a new program record in the 400 at 49.68 as a junior and went on to eventually win a gold medal in the event at the district championships as he looks to have another big season in 2025.

The Longhorns also feature a lengthy list of sprinters who should be able to contribute in the three relay events.

Charles Washington returns as head coach of the Dobie girls' program, while Jacob Watson will make his debut as head coach of the Dobie boys' program.



Dobie varsity boys' players Ryan White (11), E.J. Carter (2) and Damon Miles (12) went into action Jan. 22 after press time against Pasadena Memorial

looking to deal the Mavs a loss in league play. Memorial defeated the Longhorns by a 67-58 count in the first round of action. Photo by Donna Alsdorf

Brook basketball programs hold steady; Dobie boys, girls shoot for winning finish

The state's race to the postseason Division I and Division 2 varsity basketball tournaments has hit the stretch run, with both the Clear Brook boys' and girls' teams in solid shape. While the respective varsity boys' and girls' programs are all but out of the race for the playoffs, there is plenty of momentum to play for in the final handful of games.

CB boys slip
Just like that, the Clear Brook varsity boys' basketball team found itself on the outside looking in

after the completion of round one in District 24-6A action following consecutive losses to league leader Clear Springs and Dickinson over the span of four days.

A look at the 24-6A standings showed that Clear Springs took control of the top spot at 7-0 through the first half, with both Clear Falls and Dickinson at 5-2. Clear Lake, at 4-3, found itself in fourth place by virtue of a first-round victory over the Wolverines, who also finished the first half of

League action at 4-3. At this point, there are five teams battling for the four postseason berths as sixth-place Clear Creek won just twice through the opening round.

If the playoffs started now, Dickinson and Clear Springs would advance to the Division 1 playoff bracket, should they advance, with programs such as Clear Falls, Clear Lake and the Wolverines ticketed for Division 2.

It wasn't that long ago that Clear Brook owned 17 overall victories and stood

at 4-1 in 24-6A play, but then came a 50-45 home loss to Clear Springs Jan. 14.

The Chargers trailed Clear Brook by 11 points late in the third quarter but then used a 15-0 run to start the final quarter en route to the five-point win. The Wolverines went nearly seven full minutes in the fourth quarter without a field goal, leading to the eventual loss to the league leaders.

Another low scoring game ensued as the Wolverines... **Continued on Page 6**

JFD softball leans on experience as 2025 season opener is Feb. 10

With at least 10 players who appeared in the team's bidistrict playoff finale against Atascocita last May back on the field and participating in pre-season workouts, the Dobie varsity softball program knows it has plenty of experience to rely on as the 2025 regular season opener Feb. 10 against Clear Brook nears.

Amaya Corona, Vanessa De La Fuente, Persephone Soria, Viviana Fernandez, Natalie De Hoyos, Lili Sepulveda, Chloe Nunez and Jackie Peralta all had at least one at bat in the bidistrict playoff finale against Atascocita last May for Dobie. De La Fuente, Nunez, Eniko Sanchez and Peralta pitched in the game, while Leslie Sarduy started in the infield.

The youth movement within the Longhorns' program actually began prior to the start of last season, yet the team still managed to put together 19 overall victories, including a 10-2 run which was good for second place within District 22-6A. While the locals were swept in the opening round of the postseason against those Atascocita Eagles, it's easy to see why there are, again, high hopes for 2025.

Soria made a big difference during her varsity softball debut, earning the District 22-6A Rookie of the Year nod after hitting .393 with team highs of 33 hits, 30 runs scored, 23 runs batted in and 10 total extra-base hits.

Nunez earned Utility Player of the Year in the 22-6A varsity softball ranks as she scored 17 runs and knocked in nine runs during her sophomore season while playing in 32 total games.

De Hoyos had a memorable sophomore softball

season on her way to first team All-District honors in the 22-6A ranks as she hit .337 with 21 runs scored, 14 runs batted in and five extra-base hits.

Fernandez earned 22-6A All-District first team accolades as her standout softball season included a .320 batting average with 26 runs batted in, 17 runs scored and seven doubles over 33 total games played.

In the circle, De La Fuente earned District 22-6A first team All-District honors as she was 7-6 with three saves and had a 3.37 earned run average over 24 total appearances.

Corona, Peralta and Sarduy were All-District second team honorees, and three other returnees garnered honorable mention status.

There will be talent all over the field as Dobie opens the regular season Feb. 10 at Clear Brook and while the 22-6A alignment figures to be as competitive as ever, the Longhorns are certainly well prepared for the challenge as preseason scrimmages begin.

SBYSC has late registration

The South Belt Youth Soccer Club is holding registration for the spring season with U4 through U20 age divisions available to players at southbeltsoccer.org. Late registration fees currently apply.

Players in the U4 through U8 divisions will pay \$95, while the fee is \$105 for the U9 through U12 divisions. The fee is \$115 for the U13 through U20 divisions. The fee includes a uniform shirt, socks and shorts while families must provide cleats, shin guards and a soccer ball. Visit www.southbeltsoccer.org for additional details. Practices will start in the second half of January. Games for the older age groups will start in late February and in March for the younger age groups. Games will be played through mid-May.

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Leader continues 2024 year in sports review

The *Leader* continues its 2024 year in review with a look back at some of the outstanding achievements for both individual athletes and their teams during both August and September, leading into October.

Aug. 1
Lutheran South Academy varsity volleyball standout Aniston Collins announced that she verbally committed to continue her education and playing career at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. Collins, a junior with the Pioneers, has been a varsity standout for three seasons and has helped LSA to a pair of state tournament appearances. She will begin her senior season in August.

Aug. 15
Josh Kluka once witnessed the success of the Dobie boys' soccer program from afar and last summer accepted the responsibility of leading the Longhorns into a new era as their newly hired varsity head coach. A soccer lifer first as a youth player in Nebraska and now as a Houston area high school coach, Kluka, a 2016 college graduate, was an assistant at Pasadena High School before a three-year head coaching stint at Santa Fe.

He was the varsity boys' head coach at Katy Paetow during the 2023 season, and simply couldn't pass up the opportunity to pursue the Dobie opening. "I think the success shown at Dobie speaks for itself," Kluka said. "I'm excited for this opportunity but also understand the responsibility to the kids and the program as a whole."

Clear Brook's Patty Barnes concluded her Amateur Athletic Union track and field season in Greensboro, N.C., placing eighth nationally in the age 15-16 girls' 800 at 2 minutes, 30.71 seconds.

al for third place during the USA Track and Field National Junior Olympic Championships July 27 in College Station. Shelton reached the Region III Championships in the 400 during his first two seasons with the Wolverines and would begin his junior season in September.

August 15
The Dobie cross-country program opened the 2024 season with an appearance at Dawson High School's Will Simron Alumni Invitational Aug. 9 in Pearland as competitors navigated a 3,200-meter course.

In the varsity girls' division, a time of 11 minutes, 21.10 seconds was the gold-medal time for senior Keara Zver of Conroe Grand Oaks. A time of 12:52.50 landed Dobie senior Lauren Garza 18th overall as the state meet qualifier from 2023 got her final season going. Dobie sophomore Aracely Alvarado had a time of 12:58.20 as the Longhorns' second overall finisher, and Leyla Martinez (14:28.60) and Mariah Medina (15:23.50) also ran for the locals.

A time of 10:00.40 got senior Zachary Madsen of Clear Lake to the finish line first overall in the varsity boys' 3,200-meter race. As for Dobie, freshman Jordan Roman was 17th-best at 10:43.70. Also for the Longhorns, junior Johan Villavicencio, the Longhorns' top returnee from 2023, was in at 11:08.20, with junior Orlando Paz posting a time of 11:34.20. Senior Carlos Salazar crossed the finish line in a time of 11:45.30, and Jorge Jasso finished at 12:43. The junior varsity girls' course measured 3,200-meters as sophomore Christina Rodriguez placed 13th overall in a time of 15:21.70.

Skyler Mendiola, also a sophomore, was in at 15:55, with teammate Joshua Shelton came up with a personal record time of 47.76 seconds in the boys' age 15-16 400 as he earned a bronze med-

al for third place during the USA Track and Field National Junior Olympic Championships July 27 in College Station. Shelton reached the Region III Championships in the 400 during his first two seasons with the Wolverines and would begin his junior season in September.

boys' 3,200-meter event in a time of 13:06.70.

August 22
The Dobie varsity volleyball team was just two matches into the 2024 regular season, and head coach Dawn Sexton and her staff continued to tinker with the rotation.

The Longhorns opened the season Aug. 13 with a four-set road win at Baytown Sterling. Three days later, Dobie went the distance with Goose Creek Memorial, with the visiting Patriots emerging victorious.

Sexton opened the season with 17 players on the varsity roster. In the early

Dobie netters serve up spring play

While the wintry weather certainly threatened to postpone the start of Dobie's spring tennis season, the Longhorns are nonetheless excited to get started as players will have the opportunity to focus on individual play in boys' and girls' singles, boys' and girls' doubles and mixed doubles as part of a busy four-month run to the 22-6A tournament in late April and perhaps the Region III event in May.

Head coach Manuel Moreno's team was scheduled to get started at the Pearlman Invitational Jan. 23, then play at Houston Memorial Jan. 28.

The Longhorns will have a busy month of February, with the Pasadena ISD Franklin - Kramer Invitational coming February 7-8, followed by the program's annual appearance Feb. 14 at the Lamar University Ron Wesbrooks Invitational in Beaumont.

The Longhorns will also compete at the Corpus Christi ISD Spring Fling Feb. 21-22, then close out the month by

going, she turned to 10 players against the Rangers and 15 against Goose Creek Memorial. The Longhorns were essentially starting fresh after the graduation of 10 seniors a season ago.

Dobie defeated host Baytown Sterling Aug. 13 in four sets, with first-year players making solid contributions in all phases of the game. Senior Juliana Aguirre led the way with 12 kills against Sterling, while junior Jordan Johnson had six kills.

Senior Mia Campos and sophomore Alyssa Goree had five kills each. Goree also had nine service aces.

Terry Brotherton, whose half-century commitment to community service and love for the traditions of his hometown school district helped to enrich all of Pasadena, died Aug. 13. He was 73.

August 29
The Lutheran South Academy varsity volleyball team, coming off a Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools state tournament championship match appearance in 2023, was again off to a hot start to begin the 2024 campaign. Competing in the Mavericks' Volleybash at Pasadena Memorial High School Aug. 15-17, the Pioneers reached the championship match for the second straight season.

Continued on Page 6

With a shock of silver hair and thick Texas drawl as calling cards, Brotherton lent his business skills to a myriad service ventures in the community, including the Pasadena ISD Education Foundation, of which he was a founding member, and the Pasadena ISD Athletics Hall of Fame, which he helped establish in 2012. He served as the first president of the Hall of Fame organizing committee and brought decades of knowledge and personal insight to the Hall of Fame's selection committee.

Following a successful fall team tennis season in which the Longhorns again qualified for the postseason, the spring schedule offers an opportunity for individual players to showcase their talents in either singles or doubles play, and even mixed doubles.

Largely based on their performance during the spring, players will have a chance to qualify for the postseason coming in late April.

assistant coach Kelsey Walters have reloaded the roster and developed a good look during the fall at what the team will look like now in Waco and beyond.

The leader of a two-year college program, Saenz has consistently built rosters season after season while recruiting top talent from the Houston and surrounding areas. As for 2025, it could take some time for the lineup and pitching staff to come together. Still, the expectations will remain the same.

San Jacinto tied for the conference title in 2024 and will settle for nothing less this time around.

Elsewhere, Saenz and

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New school year highlights 2024 year in review segment

Continued from Page 5 ultimately going head-to-head with an undefeated Clements before losing in three sets.

With wins in six of seven overall matches to start the season and with freshman Addison Musgrove very much looking like an instant contributor up front, Lutheran South had to be pleased with its start to the season. Addison Musgrove led the Pioneers through the first week with 45 overall kills, with her sister, senior Kirra Musgrove, delivering 36 more kills. Senior Kenna Sambrano had 30 kills as she got her final season off to a strong start as well. Senior Hailey Pham had 27 kills, with Sutter Addison Collins producing 26 kills of her own.

Collins had 99 assists through the team's first 15 sets, while Kirra Musgrove added 65 assists.

The Dobie varsity boys' cross-country team is feeling good about itself after completing its first 5k event of the season Aug. 23 at the Hometown Heroes meet in League City, hosted by the Clear Creek Wildcats. The Longhorns finished third overall, with Clear Lake winning and Deer Park finishing second by a mere two points over the locals.

Led by several key veterans as well as a couple of terrific newcomers, the Longhorns certainly appeared to have both the talent and the depth to put together a great season. At the Hometown Heroes event, 2023 state qualifier Chris Creedon of Clear Creek was the overall winner at 15 minutes, 25.9 seconds. The Dobie group was led by Chris Lopez, a senior who finished seventh overall at 16:49.1. Freshman Cruz Jasso was 11th overall at 17:00.5. Also for the Longhorns, freshman Jordan Roman took 20th overall in a time of 17:25.4.

Junior Johan Villavicencio was 34th best, as he completed the event at 17:55.3. Dobie's fifth official qualifier was senior Carlos Salazar, who was 58th at 18:35.0. In the varsity girls' division, Dobie senior Lauren Garza, a state qualifier from a season ago, led her team and she was 14th best in a time of 21:08.7.

September 5

Getting a pair of explosive plays for touchdowns barely a half minute into the game, Team 56, otherwise known as the Dobie varsity football squad, went on to defeat the Clear Brook Wolverines 53-28 in the 2024 regular season opener for both programs Aug. 29 at Veterans Stadium in Pasadena.

Dobie junior Marcus Jones returned the opening kickoff 93 yards down the right sideline for a quick 6-0 lead for the Long-



Previously a Pasadena ISD record holder at both the seventh- and eighth-grade levels while at Beverly Hills Intermediate, Dobie freshman Cruz Jasso has already shown that he can compete very well at the varsity level. His second-place finish at the Goehring Invitational Aug. 30 helped lead the Longhorns to the team championship.

horns. Following the ensuing kickoff to the Wolverines, linebacker Michael Williams returned a fumble 15 yards for a touchdown on Clear Brook's first offensive snap of the season for a 12-0 lead just 32 seconds into the game.

It was a memorable start for Danny Fitzmorris in his head coaching debut with Dobie, and also quickly showed just how quickly these Longhorns can change the scoreboard. "There is no doubt that after the first 32 seconds, I thought this stuff (being a head coach) was pretty easy," Fitzmorris joked. "The guys made some big plays early on to get us out of the gate quickly. It's always great to make some big plays early to get some momentum going."

Junior Reid Toner led the way for the Lutheran South Academy varsity boys' cross-country program at the Cooper Drag-on Invitational at Burroughs Park in Tomball, capturing seventh place overall in the Division I Elite two-mile race, posting a time of 9 minutes, 54.68 seconds.

Andrew Wasserman, a junior at St. John's, was the gold medalist at 9:41.25, and several others, including Toner, followed closely. A time of 10:11.69 placed Pioneer sophomore Jeremy Gaitan 12th, and Josh Gaitan was in at 10:24.97 for the 19th-best finish.

Theron Ayala earned a time of 11:19.20 as the sophomore was 37th overall, and a clocking

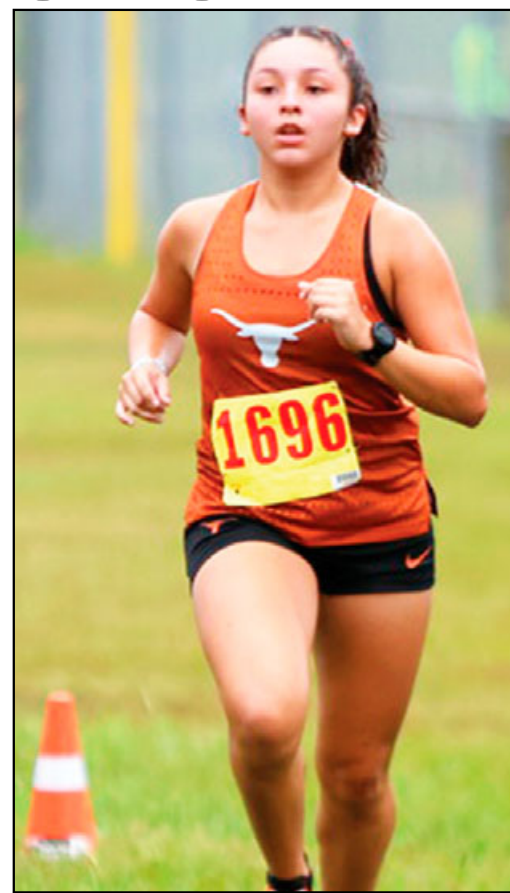
of 11:43.86 placed LSA sophomore Nicholas Pena 47th as the Pioneers were fourth as a team. In the varsity girls' Division II two-miler, the Pioneers' Jayde Barefield paced her team as the freshman was 12th in a time of 13:36.31.

Juniors Carys Rodriguez and Elisabeth Hergenrader were 23rd and 24th, respectively, with Rodriguez in at 14:35.17 and Hergenrader a stride back at 14:35.56.

Dobie freshman Cruz Jasso emphatically announced his arrival on the varsity division cross-country scene Aug. 30, finishing second overall while leading the Longhorns to the team championship at South Houston High School's annual Charlie Goehring Invitational.

Racing at the familiar Crenshaw Park in Pasadena, very often the home of Pasadena ISD intermediate division cross-country races, Jasso completed the Goehring 5,000-meter course at 16 minutes, 25.40 seconds for the individual silver medal. Texas City's Amisadai Yanez was the gold medalist at 16:04.42.

Placing three of its qualifying finishers within the top eight places and the other two in the top 18, Dobie walked away with its first team championship in several years. In the varsity girls' 5,000-meter event, Dobie star Lauren Garza was second overall in a time of 19:26.83 as she paced the Longhorns to a fourth-place team fin-



Lauren Garza collected plenty of medals during a 2023 season in which she became the first Dobie girls' runner in many years to qualify for the state cross-country meet, and she was impressive at the Goehring Invitational Aug. 30, finishing second overall.

ish. Shadow Creek freshman Anisa Mercado was in at 19:18.33 for the individual gold medal.

After his team finished third overall behind a pair of 2023 regional qualifiers the previous week, Dobie boys' head coach Stephen Cross hinted that the Longhorns could very well be in line for a special season. Given Dobie's performance at Crenshaw Park the secret just very well might be out. The team was simply off to an eye-opening start to the 2024 season.

Dobie topped 16 other programs at the Goehring Invitational for the champions' hardware, posting a low of 44 based on the finishes of its top five qualifiers. Goose Creek Memorial's tally of 66 was second-best.

Jasso, who set Pasadena ISD records at both the seventh and eighth grade levels while a student at Beverly Hills Intermediate, has already shown that he has what it takes to do great things at the high school level. Chris Lopez, the veteran of the Dobie crew and a standout in his own right, was seventh overall at 16:49.72. Freshman Jordan Roman was impressive to begin his high school career, placing ninth overall at the Goehring event in a time of 16:58.92. The Longhorns' other qualifiers included junior Johan Villavicencio, 14th at 17:41.07, and senior Carlos Salazar, who was 20th overall at 17:53.65.

September 12

Lutheran South Academy was off to a 2-0 start on the varsity football field following a 41-22 win over Hyde Park. Junior Braeden Robinson had seven grabs for 128 yards and two touchdowns, and also had an interception on defense as the Pioneers picked up the win on the road.

Lutheran South built a big 21-0 lead after one quarter and it extended its edge to 35-7 at halftime in route to the easy victory. Pioneer senior quarterback John LeBlanc was 14 of 20 through the air for 232 yards and four touchdowns. Lutheran South also produced 179 yards on the ground, led by Scott Farine, who had 74 yards on 14 totes. Robinson was the true difference maker through the air with his 128 yards receiving and the two touchdowns.

Senior Chris Lopez guided his team to the finish line at the La Porte Dog Pound Invitational cross-country meet at Northwest Park as the Longhorns continued what had been an outstanding start to the season with a fourth-place finish as a group. Lopez, the Longhorns' top returning performer from a season

ago, was 10th overall at La Porte with a time of 16:26.

Dobie freshman Cruz Jasso came up with a time of 16:39 for 16th place overall in the individual standings. Another standout freshman, Jordan Roman, was 30th overall with his time of 17:09, while junior Johan Villavicencio came up with an early-season personal best of 17:32 for 44th place.

Dobie's fifth official qualifier was Carlos Salazar, whose clocking of 17:52 was good for 58th place. Both Diego Paz and Conner Torres have also run well for the Longhorns this season. At La Porte, Paz was in at 18:58 for 85th place, while Torres' time of 19:00 had him 86th overall.

The Sagemont Cowboys celebrated their annual homecoming Sept. 7 at Denny Wranich Sr. Field at El Franco Lee Park against the East End Eagles. The Cowboys' homecoming court included Princess Lexi Tovias, co-Queen Durriyah Hill, King Chance Slaughter, co-Queen Alanah Felton and Prince Erick Montes.

Kailin Newsome led Mississippi State with 59 kills through the team's first four matches on opening weekend of the NCAA women's volleyball season as she got off to a solid start during her graduate senior season with the Bulldogs.

Although Mississippi State dropped three of four matches overall, Newsome recorded double-doubles of kills and digs in each match. Newsome, a Clear Brook High School graduate, Clear Brook's all-time kills leader, previously enjoyed an award-collecting career at Southeastern Louisiana University.

Natalie Onozie, a 2022 Dobie graduate and former District 22-6A Most Valuable Player, was named a Preseason Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference first-team selection ahead of the start of the 2024 women's volleyball season with Albany State University.

Onozie finished her four-year Dobie career with 1,297 assists, 852 digs, 463 kills and nearly 200 service aces in addition to being honored as an All-State Academic Team member. She was a second-team All Conference choice in 2023 with the Golden Rams while registering nearly 300 assists. During opening-weekend action, Onozie had 70 assists and 28 digs over four total matches as Albany State went 2-2.

Wayne Graham, a true legend among all-time great collegiate baseball head coaches who guided the San Jacinto College and Rice University programs to national prominence, died Sept. 4 at the

age of 88.

The headlines about Graham's success with the Owls along with plenty of photos of the legendary coach in a Rice University jersey rightfully poured out when word of his death hit the news feeds. Even the first line of Graham's Wikipedia page states that Wayne Leon Graham was an American head coach of the Rice Owls' baseball program in Houston.

Graham no doubt oversaw a golden era in Rice baseball history, winning a national championship with the Owls in 2003. The Owls also made seven trips to Omaha during Graham's stay as the head coach revitalized the program that had previously experienced just seven winning seasons in 78 years prior to his arrival.

But Graham's history clearly points to the fact that he landed with the Owls prior to the 1992 season based on having built what was then the country's top junior college program at San Jacinto College. It was at San Jacinto College that Graham won five national championships as the head coach, turning the then Gators into the most prominent program in the nation during his stay.

San Jacinto College won national championships within the national Junior College Athletic Association Division I ranks in 1985, 1986, 1987 and twice more in 1989 and 1990.

September 19

Seven turnovers proved to be too much to overcome for Dobie in the District 22-6A varsity football opener against Dawson Sept. 13 at The Nest in Pearland as the Eagles came away with a 51-36 win over the Longhorns.

As it has done for much of the season early on, Dobie's rush offense moved the football with relative ease. Yet the Eagles built a 27-7 lead in the game and seemingly came away with a big turnover when needed to keep the Longhorns at bay. Dobie's Cameron Mathews was again the most explosive performer on the field as he rushed for 243 yards and three touchdowns in the game. But after finding relative success through the air in a Week 2 loss to Klein, Dobie's aerial attack had its issues against the Eagles.

Chris Lopez again led the way for the Dobie varsity boys' cross-country program at the La Porte Bulldogs Invitational Sept. 13 as he finished second overall at the 5,000-meter distance. Lopez, a senior, clocked in at 16 minutes, 28.19 seconds to pace the locals. Teammate Jordan Roman, a freshman, was 12th in a time of 16:58.36. Dobie's Johan Villavicencio was next for the Longhorns as the junior took 16th place with a time of 17:06.03.

Next for the Longhorns was senior Carlos Salazar as his time of 18:17.55 was good for 61st place. Junior Diego Paz was Dobie's fifth qualifying scorer as his time of 18:37.68 placed him 81st. Clear Falls was the team champion at the event, followed by Goose Creek Memorial, Ridge Point, Manvel and then Dobie. In the 5,000-meter varsity girls' race, Dobie senior Lauren Garza was fifth overall in a time of 19:36.49 to lead the way for her team.

Aracely Alvarado, a sophomore, was 26th and she ran a solid time of 21:29.68. Junior Isaura Correa came up with a time of 22:10.11 for 37th place, and Mariah Medina's time of 23:32.32 was 65th best in the event. Senior Layla Martinez was the team's fifth and final official qualifier as she was 77th.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Dobie class of 2024 graduate Lexie Gonzalez (3) was a Day 1 starter as a freshman with the Lamar University women's volleyball program and excelled early on with the Cardinals. Lamar had

won five of nine overall matches through Sept. 16, with Gonzalez delivering a team-high 276 assists in 27 sets played for her team.

Gonzalez was named the Setter of the Year after she helped guide Dobie to a program all-time best 32 wins and a spot in the area Playoff round. A four-year varsity performer at Dobie, Gonzalez had more than 1,600 assists and more than 1,000 digs

and kills as part of a brilliant career with the Longhorns.

Famed former Major League Baseball and San Jacinto College pitcher Roger "Rocket" Clemens joined 11 other standouts who were to be inducted as part of the 2024 class of the College Baseball Hall of Fame as announced by the College Baseball Foundation Sept. 6.

The class of inductees comprised seven players,

three coaches and an umpire who have contributed to college baseball history at the NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA levels. "From MLB All-Stars to College World Series legends, the 2024 College Baseball Hall of Fame class includes some of the most decorated players and coaches in the history of college baseball," said Craig Ramsey, chair of the College Baseball Foundation board of trustees.



Kyle Jurek took charge of the Dobie girls' soccer program after spending the previous two seasons in the same role at Alvin High School. Jurek is Dobie's fourth head coach in as many seasons and said he aims to provide stability for the Longhorns.



Dobie senior Leslie Sarduy led the Longhorns' varsity volleyball team into its home opener Aug. 16 against Goose Creek Memorial at Dobie main. She is set to begin her fourth varsity softball season Feb. 10.

Photo by Gloria Wallace

Basketball programs hold steady

Continued from Page 5 verines played at Dickinson Jan. 17. In that one, the Wolverines were just 16 for 46 from the field in the game, including three of 20 from three-point land.

In the end, the Gators improved to 5-2 in league play with a 42-38 victory. Logan Sariga led the Wolverines with 10 points.

Clear Brook (17-11, 4-3), which opened the second half of 24-6A action Jan. 22 at home against Deer Park, will face Clear Falls Jan. 29 at home and then visit Clear Lake Feb. 1 in a pair of games with huge playoff implications.

Dickinson visited Clear Lake Jan. 22 after press time in another key matchup. The Gators defeated Clear Lake in the first round, 69-63 at home.

Brook girls now third

What was once a three-team race for the top spot in the 22-6A varsity girls' basketball race is now firmly controlled by defending champion Dickinson after the Gators came away with wins over Clear Creek and Clear Brook to move to 8-1 overall with five games to go in the race as of press time Jan. 21.

Dickinson actually lost to the Wolverines early on

in the first half of league play back on Dec. 13 but had reeled off seven consecutive victories as of press time, including a series sweep of Clear Creek.

Courtesy of a first-round win over the Wolverines, Clear Creek, at 7-2 is in second place just ahead of the Wolverines, who are also 7-2.

Each of the aforementioned trio of teams is all but assured of making the postseason, with Clear Brook now needing a win over Clear Creek Jan. 25 to avoid slipping into the Division 2 second seed in the playoff bracket. Deer Park currently is holding off all other challengers for the fourth spot out of 24-6A at 5-4.

Taking on Dickinson at home Jan. 17 with a chance to take over sole possession of the league lead, Clear Brook instead fell 64-61 to the Gators despite 28 points from senior Kamryn McLaurin, including 18 from the standout two-way player in the third quarter. Rezia Castillo had 12 points against Dickinson to go with 11 from Morgan Williams.

With 26 overall victories against just three losses all season, Clear Brook must now focus on

finishing strong down the backstretch and prepare for what it hopes will be a deep postseason run. First comes the Clear Creek rematch.

JFD girls sixth

Following a tough couple of games against first Manvel and then Dawson, the Dobie varsity girls' basketball team was 4-7 within District 22-6A action heading into play against Pasadena Memorial Jan. 22 after press time. Unbeaten Dawson is 11-0 and holds a one-game lead over Pearland, which is second in the league. Manvel is in third place at 9-3, with Shadow Creek fourth at 8-4. South Houston has won five of 11 league games and holds fifth place just ahead of Dobie.

Dobie boys are seventh

Shadow Creek has controlled the action with an impressive 10-0 record to lead the way in the 22-6A varsity boys' division. Pearland is comfortable at 9-1 for second place, while Pasadena Memorial is third with seven wins in 10 overall league games.

South Houston is fourth at 5-5 but is working to hold off both Manvel and Dawson in the fight for what is likely a Division 2 playoff seed. Dobie is seventh at 2-7.



Pamela Crawford, the former longtime varsity girls' basketball head coach at both Clear Brook and Clear Springs high schools, was inducted into the Texas High School Basketball Hall of Fame as part of its Class of 2025.

Photo by Andy Tolbert

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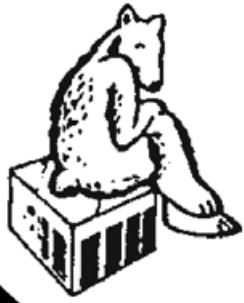
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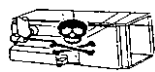
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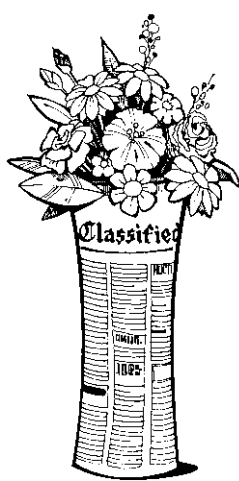
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Dobie football program celebrates successful 2024 season; players awarded



Standout defensive end Aiden Sanchez (center) was recognized as the Longhorns' Defensive Most Valuable Player after registering league highs of 12 quarterback sacks and five forced fumbles in 2024. At left is varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with defensive coordinator Cohen Landry at right.



Nathan Zavala (center) was honored as the Longhorns' Most Improved Defensive Player of the Year for the 2024 season. At left is Dobie varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with assistant coach Jacob Watson at right.



Julian Thomas (center) was the JFD Defensive Hustle Award honoree after his terrific 2024 season. At left is Dobie varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with assistant coach Zacorian Blueford at right.



Cameron Mathews (center), who as a senior became Dobie's all-time leading rusher with more than 5,000 yards for his career, was recognized at the season-ending banquet as the 22-6A two-time Most Valuable Player. With Mathews is varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris (left) and offensive coordinator Charles Washington (right).



Dobie's 2024 Offensive Most Valuable Player award went to senior Bryce Evans (center), who was joined by varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris (left) and offensive coordinator Charles Washington (right).



The 2024 All-Academic award went to Dobie tight end Adam Perez (right), who was joined by Longhorns' assistant coach Will Joiner Jr.



The Dobie varsity football program's co-Offensive Hustle award recipients were James Spivey (second from left) and Tariq Riley (second from right). At left is JFD varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with receivers coach Jermaine Gasaway at right.



Dobie offensive tackle Markel Terry (right) is the two-time winner of the Longhorns' annual Leadership award after earning the honor Jan. 11 at the 2024 season-capping football banquet. At left is Longhorns' varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris.



Dobie junior Marcus Jones (center) was named the Longhorns Special Teams Most Valuable Player for the 2024 season. Jones had seven punt returns for 157 yards and a touchdown to go with 15 kickoff returns for 306 yards and a touchdown. At left is Dobie varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with assistant coach Patrick Nava at right.



Above, senior quarterback Will Joiner III (center) was recognized as the 2024 Most Improved Offensive Player award honoree. At left is Dobie varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris, with team offensive coordinator Charles Washington at right.



Longhorn sophomore defensive lineman Achilles Rostro (center) was honored as the 2024 varsity football Newcomer of the Year, joined by varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris (left) and assistant coach Kameron Eloph (right).



The first-ever Marie Flickinger Community Service award winner was Dobie senior defensive lineman Hunter Stacey (right), who was joined by Longhorns' varsity football head coach Danny Fitzmorris.

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