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# FOUR POINTS NEWS

Volume 7, Issue 43 • 10 pages

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## Water Treatment Plant 4 construction moves offshore into Lake Travis

*Four Points News views site by boat*

By LESLEE BASSMAN  
[LBassman@austin.rr.com](mailto:LBassman@austin.rr.com)

Offshore construction work of Water Treatment Plant 4 started a few days ago in Lake Travis and is visible from Ranch Road 620.

Austin Water Utility gave a media tour by boat on Thursday showing the raw water intake site of the City's new water supply system.

The water intake construction site includes a floating 80-foot by 160-foot barge which is used to support a 250-ton crane. Once the temporary platforms are constructed, contractors will begin to drill a vertical shaft 85 feet deep which will meet the first transport tunnel.

Although the intake segment of the project will eventually be located underwater, marina contractor Manson Construction

SEE WTP, 2



A welder works to construct one of three temporary platforms at the site of WTP4's raw water intake system on Lake Travis.

## Steiner starts Firewise program to help prevent fires

By LYNETTE HAALAND  
[Lynette.FourPoints@gmail.com](mailto:Lynette.FourPoints@gmail.com)

Steiner Ranch is creating a Firewise program to help protect the community from fires.

Firewise is a nationally recognized program that brings together all the appropriate agencies to come up with a plan to mitigate the risks from wildfire along the Wildland/Urban Interface.

"Essentially, it empowers communities to bring all the stakeholders in their area to the table to establish and implement prevention strategies that could save their homes and possibly lives," said Nathasha Collmann, Steiner resident and Firewise organizer.

The Steiner Firewise group is already working with the HOA, Tra-

SEE FIREWISE, 2

## Environmental variance approved for new development in Steiner

By LYNETTE HAALAND  
[Lynette.FourPoints@gmail.com](mailto:Lynette.FourPoints@gmail.com)

The Austin City Zoning and Planning Commission approved the environmental variance across the Critical Water Quality Zone on the commercially designated tracts in the front of Steiner Ranch.

The Oct. 18 meeting, had a strong showing of Steiner residents who are against the proposed development. About 10 spoke at the meeting who opposed the variance, sources say.

The variance passing is the first step in a series of approvals needed to pave the way for two new projects: 26 apartment buildings with 298 units and a 100,000-square-foot storage facility.

Sarah Crocker, of Crocker Consultants and the authorized agent working for both developers on the two different projects, is trying to coordinate a community meeting for Steiner residents and neighbors to be able to ask questions to the developers.

"We are trying to work with the community," Crocker said.

The Steiner Ranch Apartment project hopes to break ground in early 2012 pending approvals. Greystone Steiner Associates plans to develop on a portion of the 52 acres at 4800 Steiner Ranch Blvd.

In a separate project, a contract is pending for a new storage unit to be built on a lot across from Quinlan Crossing. Taylor Woodrow Communities/Steiner Ranch LLC is seeking to subdivide 4807 N. Quinlan Park Rd. They want to subdivide the 81 acre tract into four lots.

Last week the Austin City Zoning and Planning Commission took notice of all the forms submitted by those of who opposed the variance, sources say.

## They did the mash...



Monster Mash at River Place Elementary on Friday night featured a costume contest, dinner, games and loads of fun. See more photos on pages 8 and 10.

## RM 2222 traffic issues continue, possible solutions discussed

### TxDOT traffic study to start

By LESLEE BASSMAN  
[LBassman@austin.rr.com](mailto:LBassman@austin.rr.com)

Ambulances and police vehicles have become an all too common sight during popular drive times in Four Points, especially along RM 2222 approaching the Four Points Middle School and Vandegrift High School complex.

Last week alone, the vicinity noted three accidents on the short stretch of roadway between River Place Boulevard and McNeil Drive. Ironically, two of the morning collisions occurred on Oct. 18 only hours before the

previously scheduled traffic update meeting was held at VHS.

Texas Department of Transportation is initiating a traffic study soon but some think it is not soon enough.

"You're asking us to wait," stated Four Points' resident Nancy Kotlarz who was one of the first parents to reach the distraught teens involved in the Tuesday morning collisions. "I sat there with six hysterical children this morning and you're asking us to wait."

Last week's meeting drew parents, interested neighbors and Leander ISD officials. LISD Board of Trustees Vice-President Pam Waggoner outlined proposed solutions to the problem which has grown as more VHS students have turned driving age and more commuters have been added to the roads.

"We need more roads to get out if an emergency happens," said Waggoner of the limited access paths to and from the area.

The problem focuses on the issue of the preserve nature of the property surrounding VHS.

Waggoner stated that the City of Austin controls the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) land which is protected by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW), making the notion of opening up a road crossing the area much more complicated. Possibilities to overcoming this hurdle may include lobbying the USFW for access, using utility land for a roadway and trading acreage for a route of egress.

Additionally, Waggoner stated that neighboring 3M Corporation has denied the school district direct access to its roadways, which could have possibly dissipated the congestion in the area.

Currently, LISD is working with TxDOT to study the traffic patterns around the neighborhood with an eye towards adjusting the local traffic flow through signal



River Place resident Todd Feinstein attended last week's traffic update meeting to learn more about a move towards decreasing the speed limit on RM 2222. Feinstein believes the change will worsen traffic problems in the area.

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**FIREWISE, FROM 1**

Travis County, Lake Travis Fire Rescue, and has the support of Sarah Eckhardt, Travis County Precinct 2 Commissioner. The group hopes to have a representative from Texas Forest Service on the team soon.

"We have all agreed to have Savannah Point serve as the pilot program for Firewise in Steiner Ranch - which will then be rolled out to the rest of Steiner Ranch," Collmann said.

The HOA is facilitating Firewise meetings and will be the owner of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The CWPP document will be the community's guide for fire prevention.

Travis County Natural Resources representatives who manage the Balcones Canyon-

lands Preserve are assessing the status of the interface zone along the perimeter of Savannah Point. They are working on establishing a prescription for the treatment of the Savannah Point zone and for any/all neighborhoods on the Wildland/Urban Interface.

Because the Balcones Preserve is a federally protected endangered species habitat, they are working to get permission to establish a shaded fuel break along the interface zone. They have applied for grants to help cover the costs of this endeavor, Collmann said.

They are other initiatives in the works to help prevent fires.

"In the meantime, we are planning a neighborhood workday on Nov. 12, under the su-

pervision of Travis County, to remove all limbs and other flammable debris that is already on the ground in this zone," Collmann said.

LTRF is providing Steiner Firewise with valuable knowledge about fire safety and will be performing individual home assessments so that homeowners can take specific action to protect their homes. LTRF is also working on scheduling training for the Steiner Firewise committee to become certified to help perform Home Ignition Zone assessments.



The Four Points Chamber of Commerce 2nd annual Expo featured keynote speaker Drew Sanders, Head Football Coach/Athletic Coordinator at Vandegrift High School, Ray Freer, Chairman of the Chamber, and Marie McGrath, Expo Master of Ceremonies, gave Sanders an award. Sanders gave a four pronged speech on how to make the most of each day 1) count your blessings and enjoy today 2) celebrate victories 3) plan your work and work your plan and 4) keep perspective. The Oct. 20 Expo and Networking Reception raised money through a silent auction for Vandegrift's PTSA.

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**WTP, FROM 1**

Company is assembling the temporary platforms. They will be used to construct three stainless steel mesh screens responsible for filtering the raw lake water. Tunnels will carry the water to the Bullick Hollow station and then to WTP4 currently under construction. A final tunnel will transport the water seven miles to the Jollyville Station. The process will filter 50 million gallons of water per day.

Last Thursday's lake elevation at 628 feet revealed the temporary platforms which extend 690 feet, around 60 feet above current water levels. However, officials anticipate lake levels improving to 680 feet this winter which would submerge all but ten feet of the system. After construction of the intake phase is finished, the platforms will be removed and regulatory buoys placed around the area to warn

boaters and swimmers of the structure beneath.

Staging for the Lake Travis intake system, located just below Oasis Bluff Drive, is being conducted at the Keller Marina. According to Manson Construction Project Manager Terry Hammerwold, the raw water intake system build out will be complete in March, at which time Obayashi Corporation will take over the tunnel construction aspect of the project.

Austin Water Utility spokesperson Jason Hill stated that the agency has been in contact with residents in the project's neighborhood, informing them of "what they'll hear and for how long". Additionally, contractors have accommodated their schedule to fit important events, such as weddings, occurring at the restaurants above the work site.

"We are on budget and on target for 2014," said Hill of the system's opening date.



Four Points News staffer joined local media last week for a close-up view of the water intake phase of the City's new Water Treatment Plant #4. The structure is being built about three miles offshore from the system's staging site at Keller Marina.

**Lake Travis United Methodist Church**

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8:30 am  
Traditional  
Worship  
Holy Communion  
{Sanctuary}

**"The Vine"**  
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Traditional  
Worship  
{Sanctuary}

**"The Way"**  
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Worship  
{Ministry Activities  
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(Blue Ray DVD Player)



**Grace Borer**  
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**Corey Fain**  
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**Grace Erdman**  
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The Hill Country Education Foundation enhances the educational experience of students living in the Four Points community of Austin, Texas.

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## Vandegrift High School prepares first senior class

This fall, Leander ISD's Rouse and Vandegrift high schools welcomed the classes of 2012 back into their halls as the schools' first seniors. This is a very exciting time for both of these young high schools. As you might expect, with an inaugural senior class comes a heightened sense of student-driven leadership, school pride and general excitement that can be readily felt. Over the next two weeks, I am going to focus on some of the ways RHS and VHS are celebrating seniors, while simultaneously getting them ready for opportunities after high school.

This week, I am going to focus on Vandegrift High School because their homecoming is Friday, October 28. Establishing traditions, especially those that focus around homecoming, is a unique part of being that first senior class as seniors are setting a precedent for the rest of the underclassmen.

This last week at VHS has been one filled with pep rallies, spirit days and parades. While homecoming festivities are standard at all LISD high schools, since the school opened in 2009, the entire VHS community has done a fantastic job of rallying together to support students and spreading school pride. The culture of the school is ripe with a tradition of honor and excellence.

It is this infectious atmosphere of enthusiasm, lead in large part by the senior class, that continues to be a driving force for student success at VHS. For example, using the new Naviance program — a comprehensive web portal available at every LISD high school that assists students in evaluating college and career options — some students at VHS have already completed the college application process and received letters of acceptance. Hanging proudly

in the hallways are banners that proclaim the names of VHS students and the colleges they have been accepted to. These banners not only allow the school to celebrate those seniors and their accomplishments, but they also motivate other seniors to complete their applications and inspire the underclassmen to stay on a path of college-readiness.

Like all LISD high schools, VHS and RHS are centered around a college-going culture. Staff are readily available to help students prepare resumes, write essays and research financial aid. In the case of VHS, the school leadership has worked hard to create a unique learning environment called PIT.

Since the school opened its doors two years ago, Principal Charlie Little saw PIT as a great way to promote college- and career-readiness opportunities. The VHS PIT bell schedule carves out 40 minutes on Tuesdays each week. Tuesday PIT time generally has an academic focus, encouraging students to engage in tutorials with peers or teachers, while Friday PIT is set aside for clubs.

While some students participate in extracurricular activities or class-based programs, the leadership at VHS believe that it is important to provide an opportunity during the regular school day for all students to participate in some sort of orga-

nized activity. So, on an almost weekly basis, all VHS students have time to participate in clubs during Friday PIT.

What's interesting about the clubs, since they are founded and organized by students, is the variety of them. There's a club for fantasy football, drama, music, Quidditch, mobile application development and even language creation. All clubs go through a vetting process and must have a clear and relevant focus. To create a club, students have to complete an application, submit a list of initial members, establish meeting dates, identify a faculty sponsor and write organizational bylaws. As you might imagine, club participation gives VHS students invaluable experience in teamwork, leadership and organization. Some clubs also get involved in community service projects. Ultimately, clubs allow students to break down social barriers

and come together with other students who share common interests. Students enjoy PIT time tremendously and are gaining valuable real-world experience while having fun. All of these skills will assist students later in life — whether it be at college or in the work force.

These processes are merely scratching the surface of the college- and career-readiness initiatives at VHS. I hope it's given you a taste for how creative LISD schools can be in preparing students for post-secondary opportunities. I look forward to sharing with you next week how Rouse High School is preparing its first senior class for life after graduation.

For more information about Vandegrift High School or Leander ISD, visit [www.leanderisd.org](http://www.leanderisd.org).

Have a great week!



BRET CHAMPION

### Legislative changes in education affect class sizes, purchasing

By LESLEE BASSMAN  
LBassman@austin.rr.com

Last week's meeting at Vandegrift High School provided Texas Tribune Reporter Morgan Smith a forum within which to update Four Points residents about legislative changes affecting education in the state.

According to Smith, public education funding was cut by \$4 billion for the coming two years as the Legislature convenes biannually. Senate Bill 8 granted the Texas Education Agency broader authority to provide larger class sizes. Senate Bill 6 provided individual school districts the flexibility to shop outside of the state Board of Education's approved vendor list for the purchase of electronic materials and textbooks.

Finally, school districts throughout the state have joined in a series of lawsuits based on Texas' inability to adequately and equitably fund its schools, Smith said.

To date, LISD has not joined any of these legal actions.

### TRAFFIC, FROM 1

nal reprogramming. The study, which is expected to start this week or possibly next month, would not provide an immediate answer since results may take up to two or three months.

According to LISD Executive Director for Capital Improvements Jimmy Disler, a \$400,000 dual right turn lane off McNeil Drive onto RM 2222 has been approved and will be constructed next year. Also, a traffic engineering study has resulted in a recommendation to lower speeds, from 60 m.p.h. to 55 m.p.h., along the roadway between RR 620 and Loop 360.


Recent improvements to the area's roadways included restriping the circular intersections in front of the middle school into a single lane roundabout. However, projects involving utility movement will not be considered this year.

"One thing at a time is getting done and that's more than in July," Waggoner said.


Adding to the logistical and financial problem of making the area's traffic pathways safer is a possible redistricting change.

Waggoner urged Four Points residents to "meet the commissioners and get to know the candidates" as representatives who will take part in future local roadway decisions.

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## Just a thought

### Four Points needs more official updates in emergencies

Remember the Steiner fires when everyone was clamouring for official word on how bad things were and when we could go back into the community.



LYNETTE HAALAND

In those first hours, Steiner families were searching for any credible news source that could tell them anything new.

I too, as a reporter, was desperate to hear the latest information to post on our Four Points News Facebook page. But one of my main sources, Lake Travis Fire Rescue Chief Jim Linardos, was coordinating firefighting efforts, and my other main source Travis County Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer Roger Wade did not have the answers early on about what the public wanted to know.

"We screwed up in that," said Sarah Eckhardt, Precinct 2 Travis County Commissioner. She told this to community members at her October Coffee Jolt community meeting at Cups & Cones in Steiner Ranch last Wed.

"We must do a better job. We need to develop a brand of credibility and a reliable information source 24/7," Eckhardt said.

The Travis County's Emergency Services Department is requesting authorization to hire a Public Information Officer at the Commissioners Court on Tues. Nov. 1. (See Eckhardt's column below. She is our Four Points Commissioner.)

I agree it is time for more official communications from authorities. It seemed the TV news and radio updates had very little to tell us. There were rumors and hearsay floating around on social media sites too.

As it ended up, our best source of first-hand information came from Andy and Paul. On Labor Day, Andy Jones and Paul Boomgaart kept families informed on the Steiner Ranch Social Committee Facebook page. Jones rode his bike and called neighbor Boomgaart

with the information on which sections were officially burned. Jones called Boomgaart that morning and said: "I'll be the eyes if you'll be the keyboard."

I wish Four Points News could have been able to give out more information when families needed to hear it most. But it simply was not available to us either.

I literally begged to be a part of the press core that was let into the burn sites on Tuesday morning. The first and only group of four reporters and photographers allowed to capture the destruction a couple of hours before the evacuation was lifted.

I wasn't invited on that tour although I asked to be multiple times. So I waited around after the live press conference with Governor Rick Perry at Steiner Ranch Elementary. Then about an hour later, when the press core members were starting up their cars to go into the neighborhoods, I realized I had one last chance. I looked the Lake Travis Fire Rescue press contact in the eye and said: "We are the community paper and we need to see this more than anybody. These are our homes and our neighbors. I beg you to let me go in."

Persistence and passion paid off and Four Points News could cover the aftermath.

All this to say, I think we do need help in the "official word" department. Travis County does need to develop a single, reliable voice in times of emergency.

I echo the sentiments posted on the Four Points News Facebook page by long time Steiner resident Nathasha Collmann:

"If you were unhappy with the official communications (or lack of) during the Steiner Ranch Fire Evacuation please take a minute to email all 5 of the Travis County Commissioners. Please tell them how important it is to be informed in an emergency and in general."

## FOUR POINTS OF VIEW

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Connor O'Keeffe  
Steiner Ranch

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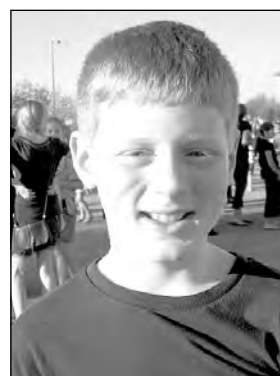
Cal Charla

7 pounds and I usually stay up until midnight doing it.



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Steiner Ranch

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## Community help needed to get full-time Travis Co. Public Information Officer

By SARAH ECKHARDT  
Travis County Commissioner

Travis County is urbanizing to the point where it could use professional full-time help communicating with its large and diverse constituency.

Travis County's Emergency Services Department is currently scheduled to bring an agenda item to the Commissioners Court requesting authorization to hire a Public Information Officer (PIO) on November 1, 2011.

The Emergency Services De-

partment proposes this PIO will work with the PIO in the Sheriff's Department on a daily basis to push information out to the public regarding emergency preparedness and risk minimization, thus developing a single, reliable voice in times of emergency to whom folks can turn regarding threat assessments, evacuation, emergency water, food and shelter and other time-sensitive information.

The PIO will also work with the Travis County Fire Marshal, Medical Examiner, STAR Flight, EMS and Parks.



SARAH ECKHARDT,  
Travis County  
Commissioners  
Court Precinct 2

In the past, the County has pushed information out to the public through various departments based on the nature of the

emergency (flood, fire, drought, evacuees from Hurricanes Katrina and Ike, etc). Departments involved could include Emergency Services, Health and Human Services, and any number of divisions within Transportation and Natural Resources.

Added to this cacophony of informational conduits were the Sheriff's Office, five Constables Offices and 13 separate Emergency Service Districts (none of which are under the supervision of the Commissioners Court).

Our recent experience with the Labor Day Wildfires makes

it abundantly clear that the County and its residents need a unified voice through which the most reliable information can be streamed in the most effective and timely manner (reverse 911, social media and all other tried-and-true methods of communication).

Of course, there is a cost to staffing for these communications. The Emergency Services Department currently has money in their budget to handle this cost. I believe the cost is warranted to increase the bodily

safety and decrease the property loss at risk in emergencies.

If you agree, please email your support to members of the Commissioners Court. Our addresses can be found at www.co.travis.tx.us/commissioners\_court/default.asp.

Sarah Eckhardt is Precinct 2 Travis County Commissioner. She hosted her Oct. Coffee Jolt, round table community meeting, at Cups & Cones last Wed. Prior to being our area commissioner, she spent eight years as an assistant Travis County attorney.

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