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Volume 8, Issue 50 • 8 pages Wednesday, December 26, 2012 • 50 cents

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- Local dog walker shares furry friends
- Big Frog biz brief

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Source: LCRA Updated: Dec. 1, 2012

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Happy New Year!

LISD Board approves new plan to assess district safety

Concerns arose over \$1.5M unused for elementary security

By LESLEE BASSMAN
Four Points News

Leander ISD board members approved a multi-faceted plan to deter security threats and enhance current safety procedures following the Dec. 14 massacre at Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary School.

At the Dec. 20 meeting, the LISD Board of Trustees agreed to evaluate unused bond money for enhanced entrance security in the elementary schools, coordinate with individual school principals to respond to specific safety shortcomings in each building, seek an independent audit of the district's safety procedures, and decide how law enforcement and mental health personnel will provide for campus safety.

This was part of an amended meeting agenda that included a "Student Safety Discussion."

Board faces questioning over funds, renovations for elementary school security

By her own admission, Julie Reinhardt had never been to a LISD Board of Trustees meeting prior to this one. Following the recent tragedy in Newtown, Mason Creek's Reinhardt was joined by other Whitestone Elementary School parents seeking answers as to why their school did not receive security enhancements authorized in a 2007 LISD bond package.

"We were informed that bond money was sitting there to go for a more secure school entry," said Jennifer Haynes whose two children are at Whitestone Elementary School. On the day before the Newtown shooting, Haynes asked the school's principal about the new entryway she assumed would be built following the 2007 bond election.

On the LISD website, the third entry under "Construction and Capital Improvement" enumerates the current status of the 2007 bond projects. "Enhanced



Leslee Bassman

Cedar Park father Mike Voith questions LISD Board members about a \$1.5 million construction project to enhance security at the entrance to the district's elementary schools. A number of area parents turned out at last week's meeting to hear the trustees' plans to address safety at LISD schools.

Entrance Security at Elementary Campuses" is the tenth entry, listing a bond budget of \$1.5 million and a status of "Planning" with its scheduled construction completion posted as "undetermined."

Haynes had heard that Whitestone was named as one of the campuses set to receive the renovation as the newer elementary schools had already been

designed with security upgrades in mind.

Mike Voith, another Whitestone Elementary School parent, questioned the board during the citizen comments segment as to why other projects were completed before the security updates to the elementary schools, especially in light of the relatively small cost to the program -

Fire likely started by fireworks device

Drought conditions aided the wildfire

By LYNETTE HAALAND
Four Points News

A fire near Low Water Crossing Rd. last week was most likely started by an aerial fireworks device, but the official cause is undetermined, officials say.

On Dec. 19 there was a fire in an area of dense woodlands, involving mostly heavy grass and light brush, burning on an extreme slope that overlooks the Low Water Crossing Rd., just below the homes on Cloudy Ridge Rd.

"Some residents on Cloudy Ridge Rd. reported a 'popping' sound, then a 'loud boom' and 'the sky turning red' just prior to

FIREWORKS, 5

SAFETY, 3

Local robotics teams advance to invitationals

Senior Solutions was their theme

By LYNETTE HAALAND
Four Points News

Nine local robotics teams were award-winners in the Central Texas FIRST® LEGO® League Qualifying Tournament and six advance to the Invitational Tournament in

February.

The Engineering Eagles, Falcon Lego Legends, Spectrum, Falcon Builders, Brick Birds, Olivav's Antecedents, Checkmate!, Senior Savers and Pie Eating Tigers were a few of the more than 125 teams from the Austin area competed during the qualifier rounds. Six of these local teams were awarded



ROBOTICS, 3

Canyon Ridge Middle School 6th grade students Hunter Lee and Rohit Nama watch their robot in action. The Engineering Eagles at CRMS earned a Teamwork Award. Four Points Middle School's robotics team RoboFrogs was one of more than 125 teams at the FIRST® LEGO® League Qualifying Tournament.



Four Points steps up for Steiner family

Andrade fundraiser collects \$30k

By LESLEE BASSMAN
Four Points News

The Four Points community rallied to support one of its own recently, mom and nurse Beth Andrade

who is battling Stage 3 Multiple Myeloma cancer. The Dec. 6 live and silent auctions held at the West Austin home of Angela Rivera tallied over \$30,000 to help the Steiner Ranch family cope with the high cost of Andrade's life saving proce-

ANDRADE, 5



Cliff Stokes

Dan Andrade, Beth Andrade, Carolyn Andrade, and Angela Rivera enjoy the recent fundraiser to benefit "Miracle for Beth".

Young Men's Service League serves community

By LYNETTE HAALAND
Four Points News

In the spirit of the season, members of the Austin Vipers Chapter of the Young Men's Service League joined the Travis County Sheriff's Office to help prepare for the holiday season.

Boys and moms met on several evenings to wrap gifts for the Brown Santa program. This year, Brown Santa anticipates bringing Christmas morning special for about 2,000 families in Travis County. Every child receives a stuffed animal, a



At the Down Home Ranch in Elgin - 2012 Texas Chainsaw Manicure, Viper YMSL volunteers helped create a "defensible space" around the residential areas of the Ranch. Working with the Texas Forest Service volunteers, they cut down trees and removed and burned brush.

SERVICE, 8

Flying fireworks banned in Travis County

Ruling cites fire danger

By RICH KEITH
Four Points News

Four Points residents will have to celebrate the new year without fireworks having wings, fins or sticks, according to the Travis County Commissioner's office. In a special voting session on Dec. 14, the County banned "sky-rockets with sticks and missiles with fins" due to severe drought conditions in Travis County including the Four Points area. However, all other fireworks will legally be sold in Travis County from Dec. 20 through Jan. 1.

Earlier in the month, local fireworks vendors

voluntarily removed flying fireworks from their shelves. American Fireworks is one of the vendors who agreed to the self-imposed ban.

"Why should we risk those things — even though they are about 20 percent of our sales — when you can shoot all the other many items that we have without incident," said Chester Davis, owner of Bastrop-based American Fireworks, which has stores in Austin stands throughout Travis County.

"It's not worth the risk in dry conditions," he said.

Davis should know. He serves as president of the Texas Pyrotechnic Association. "I've been in the fireworks business 40

FIRE DANGER, 5

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KELLER WILLIAMS

C2 Club promotes culture of caring

By LYNETTE HAALAND
Four Points News

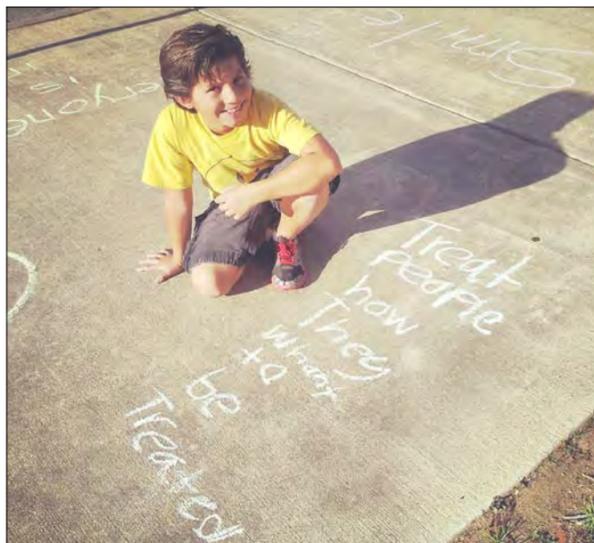
The C-Squared Club idea started in Leander ISD in 2010 at Leander High School and now has spread to include clubs at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Steiner Ranch Elementary started its new C2 Club with the mission to promote a culture of caring and bring awareness to the issue of bullying.

Recently SRE held the first annual Kindness Week where members created themed days to spread kindness including: Red Carpet Welcome, Mustache You a Question, Shine Bright with Kindness, Mix It Up lunch, and Chalk It Up, where C2 students wrote kind messages on the sidewalks and playground.

"During the Red Carpet Welcome, students had bull horns to welcome students into the school and we clapped and cheered for them as they walked by," said Rebecca Rainey, Assistant Principal SRE.

Each themed day during Dec. 3 through 7 was built to promote individual differences, self-confidence, getting to know new friends, and overall caring for one another.



On Chalk It Up Day, C2 Club members wrote messages like: Treat people how they want to be treated. The optimistic group of 4th and 5th graders greeted students coming into school with claps and cheers during the Red Carpet Welcome.



Scouts build Grandview Hills a car

Car to be used in math program

By STEVE ALVAREZ

Webelos Scouts from Cub Scout Pack 1776 presented Grandview Hills Elementary School Assistant Principal Tol Wilhite with a project car Dec. 5. The group of fourth and fifth grade boys who attend Grandview Hills, River Ridge and Steiner Ranch elementary schools built a car that will be used by the school in their Driver's License mathematics program.

The Driver's License program at Grandview Hills Elementary encourages mastery of mathematics and students can earn a different driver's license for every level they master. The scouts spent six weeks building the car at their den meetings.

"This project gave the kids a chance to give back to the community in a tangible way," Webelos Assistant Den Leader Brian Miller said. "They will be able to see this project as it is used in school presentations and it will serve as a reminder that boys from the community contributed to the school

and that their hard work is appreciated."

Grandview Hills Elementary regularly has recognition ceremonies called "Fly High Friday" for kids who earn their drivers' licenses and Wilhite and scout leaders from Pack 1776 agreed that a car would be a great prop to incorporate into the program to make it more fun for the kids.

In addition to helping the school, the scouts learned about woodworking, tool operation, workshop safety, delayed gratification and selfless service.

"I think community service is becoming less common these days," Miller said. "Serving gives these kids a sense of purpose and an awareness of a world outside of video games, school and sports. It gives them the opportunity to think about something other than themselves. I've no doubt that kids who choose to take time to give back to their community will grow up with a better sense of what is truly important in our society."

Pack 1776 adopted GHE earlier this year through the Boy Scouts of America Adopt-a-School program. As part of the program, the pack is required to perform service projects for the school. Since the start of the 2012-13 school year Pack 1776 has contributed more than 50 hours of community service to the school alone.

The Webelos who built the car are Dylan Frazzell, Ben Jones, Duncan Alvarez and Jacob Miller from Pack 1776. Sam Webb, the We-



Webelos Jacob Miller cuts wood in the shape of a car.



After six weeks of work, Webelos Scouts from Pack 1776 present Tol Wilhite with a wooden car they built for the school's driver's license program. Pictured L to R are Dylan Frazzell, Jacob Miller, Duncan Alvarez and Assistant Principal Tol Wilhite.

belos den chief and a Boy Scout from Troop 441, also contributed to the project. The boys also fulfilled requirements to earn their craftsman activity badges while working on the project.

"I love it," Wilhite said when he received it from the scouts. "It is especially great that they did the over-

whelming amount of the work themselves."

The boys also made Wilhite, a former scout, an honorary member of their den by having Wilhite do their greeting ritual which consists of primal body movements and repetition of the phrase "Choomba walka, choomba walka."

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[a transmission from the year 2052]

Dear Great, Great Grandpa,
You haven't met me, but if you're reading this in 2012 via time travel, your granddaughter is now six years old. She will grow up happy and healthy and have a son - That's me. I'm 18, and I bear a striking resemblance to you, from the pictures I have seen.

Anyway, just wanted to say thanks for hookin' me up with that sweet college fund. That was cool of you!

With love,
Your great, great grandson, Joseph

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Updating parents on 15 percent rule



BRET CHAMPION
Leander ISD Superintendent

On Nov. 30, Texas Education Commissioner Michael Williams signed a waiver to defer the "15 percent rule," the requirement that a State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course exam is to count as 15 percent of a student's final course grade, until the 2013-2014 school year. This waiver means that end-of-course exams will not impact Leander ISD students' final course grades for this year; however, standard scores on these tests remain

a requirement for graduation for current sophomore students and below.

As it was originally written, the 15 percent rule puts students in a sort of double jeopardy - students would have to meet state requirements to graduate AND these scores could be the deciding factor in whether a student passed or failed a course. Because this rule puts so much at stake for students, educators and parents have been fired up across the state about the 15 percent rule for months. As an added challenge for districts, lawmakers were rolling out their vision for the STAAR, including the end-of-course exams and 15 percent rule, while school districts were making very difficult financial decisions to reduce budgets, such as increasing class sizes, eliminating staff and cutting re-

sources.

Let me be clear: LISD does not shrink from increased standards. Rather, we welcome our responsibility to prepare students for rigorous state assessments and believe that public schools should be accountable for their progress. Our district is committed to student learning and believes in increasing achievement. LISD has its own processes and metrics in place to ensure that every student graduates with every option open, poised to lead Texas forward into the 21st century. I believe no one wants an accountability system that results in students falling further and further behind, as the current assessment system potentially could, putting barriers up that could derail our students from their educational paths.

I have no doubt that credit for the waiver is due in part to grassroots efforts from teacher and parent organizations who were galvanized by the potential negative consequences this rule could have had on student learning, graduation rates and college admissions. I would like to thank Governor Perry, Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst and Senator Patrick for supporting the deferment of the 15 percent rule another year, and Commissioner Williams for signing the waiver. These gestures are a clear demonstration that they are listening to the concerns of those whom they represent - parents, community members and educators. This waiver is a huge relief for Texas students.

But, parents, educators and community members,

please take note: this waiver only applies to this current school year, so unless action is taken during the 83rd Legislative Session to permanently remove the 15 percent rule from the state accountability system, or yet another waiver is signed in future years (you may remember that a similar waiver was issued last school year, the first year STAAR end-of-course exams were administered), the 15 percent rule will eventually come into effect. We must all continue to be vocal in our concerns until the 15 percent rule is read-dressed in an appropriate manner.

Also of note, on Dec. 13, Representative Diane Patrick sent a letter to Commissioner Michael Williams urging him to continue the suspension of the assignment of accredi-

tation statuses and performance ratings through the 2012-2013 school year, stating that unintended consequences have surfaced as a result of HB 3 and that suspending accountability ratings this year will give the Legislature an opportunity to address these issues in the coming legislative issue.

In the next few weeks and months, stay tuned to the LISD Legislative and Finance webpage for more information about the issues that public schools face this session. I challenge you to stay informed of the issues, get engaged in the process and support the students of LISD. Just like the example we have here in the waiver of the 15 percent rule, know that grassroots efforts can have a powerful effect on laws that impact your children. Your voice matters. Have a great week!

ROBOTICS FROM 1

golden ticket to advance to the Invitational Tournament on Feb. 2, 2013.

The qualifying rounds took place on the first two Saturdays in December. Robotics teams rotated between three judging stations and three opportunities to demonstrate their robot performance on the game table.

This year's theme, *Senior Solutions*, set the stage for all components of the competition. Students explored the topic of aging and how it may affect a person's ability to maintain his or her lifestyle, such as solving issues like getting around, keeping in touch or staying fit.

"Senior Solutions gave teams a better understand-

ing of the kinds of challenges people 65 and older face, while combining real-world science and technology," said Becky Carter, long-time coach and Hill Country Education Foundation Robotics Society chair.

"These students are discovering exciting career possibilities, learning that friendly competition and mutual gain are not separate goals and that helping each other is really the foundation of teamwork," Carter said.

For the competition project, teams first identified a senior mentor at least 65 years or older. Students identified and learned about problems facing seniors, researched obstacles and then

suggested ways to improve the quality of life for the seniors affected. Teams also had to share their problem and solution with others.

Each team member contributes to all areas of the challenge. On the game table, students designed, built, tested and programmed an autonomous robot using LEGO® Mindstorms to solve a set of missions on an obstacle course and score the most points possible. Robots could fix a chair, use a ball to knock down bowling pins, lift a weight as high as possible, select the correct medicine, turn stove burners off or make use of video call screens.

At the competition, along with the game table scor-

Team Name	School	Awards
The Engineering Eagles	CRMS	Teamwork Award
Falcon Lego Legends	FPMS	Received Programming Award for best use of sensors and Golden Tickets to compete in Invitational
Spectrum	FPMS	Received Gracious Professionalism Award and Golden Ticket to compete in Invitational
Falcon Builders	FPMS	Received Presentation Award and Golden Ticket to compete in Invitational
Brick Birds	GVHE	Received Robot Performance Award
Olivaw's Antecedents	LWBE	Received Golden Tickets to compete in Invitational
Checkmate!	Paragon	Received Mechanical Design Award and Golden Ticket to compete in Invitational
Senior Savers	RPE	Received Innovative Award and Golden Ticket to compete in Invitational
Pie Eating Tigers	RRE	Received Mechanical Award

ing, judges assess the teams' work in three areas: Robot Design, Project and Core Values. Teams can receive awards from such categories as mechanical design and robot performance, to innovative solution and teamwork.

"FLL judges determine teams that are well rounded and show excellence in all areas of competition. They are the ones who receive a golden ticket and move on," said Laura Root with the HCEF Robotics Society.

Other teams that com-

peted include: Grandview Hill's 4 Ever Rock'n Bots, River Ridge's SSF and Flying Purple People Eaters, River Place's Team Titanium, Brickers and InflatAnators, Canyon Ridge's iRobots, and Four Points' RoboFrogs.

SAFETY, FROM 1

roughly .0025 of the bond's \$559 million budget.

It's a \$559 million bond package and we're talking about \$1.5 million for elementary school security, said Voith who described this children's school as having a wide, open entrance. "Security is on our minds."

Michael Prechel of Cedar Park is the parent of two children in LISD schools, including Naumann Elementary.

"Our schools are just too accessible," said Prechel. "There's not enough security during the day."

Prechel asked board members "to look at what's out there" in terms of heightened security for the neighborhood schools.

"I think everyone had their eyes opened (recently)," Prechel said. "I want to encourage the board to pursue ways to deny easy access to the schools and delay people who want to do bad things from getting into the schools."

Cedar Park's Frank Weger concurred, citing the need to "take our elementary schools off the soft target list" and give police "extra seconds" to get to the scene.

Where's the money now?

LISD Board Superintendent Bret Champion stated that the \$1.5 million bond item was to be spent on only the redesign and architecture plans of the entryways

in the district's elementary school campuses. The amount allotted was not enough to cover the actual costs to build any new plans.

The bonds were authorized for the elementary school entrance enhancements in 2007 but, due to the economic downturn, were never sold. They were scheduled to be sold in the 2011 bond sale; however, the district has not sold any bonds in either 2011 or 2012. Champion is hoping to sell the bonds in 2013.

In order to have the money to add the new security entrances at the elementary school campuses, the district would have to either use funds already earmarked for building a new elementary school or to hold a bond election to generate additional revenue, said School Board President Pamela Waggoner.

Safety at elementary school entrances is a concern for old and new campuses

To date, 15 out of LISD's 23 elementary schools utilize three different building layouts or footprints in an older design concept. The Board and the district will be reviewing the designs at all of their schools for safety concerns, old and new - not just the elementary schools.

LISD is currently constructing Elementary School #24, Leonard Reed

Elementary, in the Red Oak subdivision. The district's eighth middle school, Florence Stiles Middle School on CR 179, opened this year. Construction money for both schools was approved by LISD voters in the 2007 bond package.

Campus security shortfalls under the microscope

Following the Newtown tragedy, Champion met with the Central Texas School Safety Consortium to begin reviewing the district's safety plans. On the Monday following the shooting, he spoke with all LISD school principals and asked them to review the safety plan with their staff. Darla Humes, LISD Safety and Risk Management Director, is currently working with Champion to examine each campus' safety efforts.

"We live now in a new world and we need new security standards," Champion said.

Board members are in agreement that, for obvious security reasons, much of the district's campus safety redesign won't be made public. During Thursday's meeting, Champion requested that communications from the public regarding safety shortcomings in specific schools be addressed in a discreet manner.

Vice President Russell Bundy advocated taking a more proactive stance by

strengthening parent volunteer programs, such as Watchdogs, in the schools.

"The best way we can make our kids feel safe is to be there," said Bundy.

District-wide safety auditors to weigh in

The trustees intend to consult with an audit panel to fully review the district's safety plan. The review is mandated by law and was last conducted in LISD during the summer of 2011. The audit system would act as another proactive measure to lessen the chance for a security emergency in the district.

Law enforcement presence and mental health experts in district

Faced with a tight budget, board members discussed the idea of LISD aligning with other school districts who have their own police force. For instance, nearby Pflugerville ISD boasts a district law enforcement staff, Pflugerville ISD Police Department, a not-so-difficult choice for a school system which is wholly contained within the city's borders. Not so is the case for LISD, a district which spans across various city and county jurisdictions including Leander and Cedar Park Police Departments, Travis County Sheriffs Office and Travis County Constables Office.

Since the program began with a grant in the early 2000's, LISD's Family Services Team continues to employ only four social workers despite the district's population growing by over 9,000 students during the past ten years. At last week's meeting, Place 4 Grace Barber-Jordan stated that Texas is last in the country in terms of mental health spending for the general population.

According to Champion, the district's trained and licensed social workers often refer students and families to other local and state resources, including non-

profits, to provide aid. The staffers work to connect the children, teens and parents with the appropriate organization or agency in the community for further help. Licensed school psychologists and counselors try to fill in the gaps as well, but a shrinking budget remains at the heart of the problem.

Champion stated that he anticipates having the short-term "improvements rolled out to the Board by this spring." When updated national security standards are released, LISD will review the safety protocol requirements for compliance.

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PUBLISHER'S POINT OF VIEW

In 2013, I resolve to...



LYNETTE HAALAND

It is New Year's Resolution time again when many of us vow to ourselves to improve - break bad habits, be kinder to others, lose weight, eat healthier, get organized, etc.

Spend more time with family is tops on many people's New Year's Resolution list too.

That is the case with Michelle Freeze, Steiner Ranch dentist at Rising Stars Pediatric Dentistry. She and her husband have a senior and a junior at Vandegrift High School. She told me last week at the Four Points Chamber lunch that when your kids start to drive, it takes out one of the opportunities to spend time with them.

Michelle realized several years back that taking family trips was one of the keys to spending quality, family time together. Spending time together at home is good too but there are lots of distractions and "things to get done" around. So one thing they found they all love to do together is ski, and they take ski trips.

Spending more time with family is on my list.

Just the other night I told my daughters to meet me on the couch for snuggle time. My oldest said, "It's only 7 o'clock, what are we going to do?"

We are so programmed to always chip away at our "to do" lists that building in a few minutes of R&R seems odd.

I told my kids, "We are going to do nothing, on purpose!"

We are not alone. Looks like spending time with family tops the About.com Guide's top 10 New Year's Resolutions. Here is the full list:

1. Spend More Time with Family & Friends

Recent polls conducted by General Nutrition Centers, Quicken, and others shows that more than 50% of Americans vow to appreciate loved ones and spend more time with family and friends this year.

2. Fit in Fitness

Exercise keeps you healthy and makes you look and feel better.

3. Tame the Bulge

Over 66 percent of adult Americans

are considered overweight or obese by recent studies, so it is not surprising to find that weight loss is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions. Setting reasonable goals and staying focused are the two most important factors in sticking with a weight loss program.

4. Quit Smoking

On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good. Start enjoying the rest of your smoke-free life!

5. Enjoy Life More

Given the hectic, stressful lifestyles of millions of Americans, it is no wonder that "enjoying life more" has become a popular resolution in recent years.

6. Quit Drinking

Many heavy drinkers fail to quit cold turkey but do much better when they taper gradually, or even learn to moderate their drinking.

7. Get Out of Debt

Join the millions of Americans who have resolved to spend this year getting a handle on their finances. It's a promise that will repay itself many times over in the year ahead.

8. Learn Something New

Perhaps you are considering a career change, want to learn a new language, or just how to fix your computer? Whether you take a course or read a book, you'll find education to be one of the easiest, most motivating New Year's resolutions to keep.

9. Help Others

A popular, non-selfish New Year's resolution, volunteerism can take many forms. Whether you choose to spend time helping out at your local library, mentoring a child, or building a house, there are many nonprofit volunteer organizations that could really use your help.

10. Get Organized

On just about every New Year resolution top ten list, organization can be a very reasonable goal.

Let's get cracking on setting some goals for 2013 and if you tell others or not, that is up to you!

FOUR POINTS OF VIEW

What is your New Year's Resolution?



Kimberly Ruka
Steiner Ranch

To get my family more organized with our six kids, 6 weeks to 12 years. I need to get them trained in more chores and more involved... and get the laundry done.



Kai Lamb
Steiner Ranch

To reach a broader audience and help make Hill Country Education Foundation even more successful than it already is.



Alex Olmos
Downtown Austin

I'm with Regions Bank and I would like to be a better Four Points neighbor to business owners and area members.



Michelle Freeze
Steiner Ranch

To spend time with my family. I have a junior and a senior.

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GARDENING GAB

Gardens tools



MAGGIE TATE
Master Gardner

Just like a successful garden has the right plant in the right place, the right tool for the job makes gardening easier.

There is a multitude of garden tools available and it would be easy to spend a fortune on getting all of them. Each gardener probably has a list of tools most loved and recommended.

I spend a lot of time trimming and weeding so the top tools on my list are pruners, loppers and a unique weeder/cultivator.

My pruner is for small hands. I love it and it fits my grip perfectly. The pruners are put to use on small branches (roses, medium bushes) while the loppers (long handled pruners) are used for large branches (large bushes, trees).

My weeder/cultivator has comfortable grip handle and a single gently curved stainless steel business end with a flattened snakes head shaped tip. It's great for mixing in compost before planting, digging out taproots or

gently nudging out weeds in small places.

When purchasing tools, Travis County Master Gardeners Association recommends buying good quality tools that will last and tools that match your physical size. Stay away from the 'wonder tools' - if its claims sound too good to be true, well, you know.... To keep garden tools in great condition, follow these steps:

- Take a container (an old pot will do, but cover the drain hole) and fill with sand.
- Mix sand with a lubricating oil, like WD-40 or vegetable oil until damp.
- Remove large clumps of dirt from tools with steel wool or other scraper and place the tools into the sand up to the handles.
- At this point, the tools can spend the winter in the sand or can be removed, wiped down with a coarse cloth and put away until Spring. Use the sandy mixture as needed to keep the tools in top shape.

I hope everyone received all the garden presents one could hope for in stockings this Christmas.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year! Maggie Tate is a Master Gardner with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County...For more information on this and other horticulture and gardening topics, please see our website, <http://travis.tx.tamu.edu/>, or contact our gardening hotline at 854-9600.

Five 2013 financial resolutions for the almost-retiree



JOEL KENTY
Financial Advisor

As we say goodbye to 2012 and prepare for the New Year, resolutions come to mind. While everyone can benefit from a year-end financial health check-up, if you're in the final stages of your career, now is a good time to make sure you have your affairs in order. Consider adding these resolutions to your list to help ensure a smooth transition from the workplace to retirement.

Review your monthly expenses and budget.

It is useful to know exactly what you spend each month and create a budget that makes sense for

your long-term needs. While employed and earning a salary, it's often easy to make up an overage in spending that happens today the next time you receive a paycheck. You won't have this same luxury once you retire.

Examine what it costs to cover the essentials and determine how much you spend on discretionary items. Look carefully at the expenses that tend to fluctuate each year including entertainment, recreation, travel and healthcare. When it comes to your financial picture, this added knowledge will help you plan accordingly.

Replace your paycheck.

Upon retirement, one of the best moves you can make is to replace the paycheck you used to receive on a regular schedule so you have a predictable amount of income every month. To do so, you will

want to carefully examine your retirement account balances, your lifestyle needs and wants and any additional major financial changes on your horizon (proceeds from the sale of a home, for example).

The process might seem complicated, especially if you want to structure your withdrawals in the most strategic and efficient way. A financial advisor and tax professional are two great resources to turn to for help and advice. With expert input, you can create a plan for your retirement years and rely on this roadmap to help alleviate stress that might come with managing a fixed income.

Review your portfolio.

If you're nervous about your retirement accounts and invested assets, meet with a financial advisor and review your portfolio. Perhaps your investments fluctuated during the recession.

Maybe it's time to re-allocate assets to a stable set of funds that won't waver widely with the market. Either way, knowing exactly where you stand will help you sleep peacefully each night.

A financial advisor can help evaluate how your assets are allocated and make investment suggestions that can help offer a level of growth, income or preservation that's right for you. Taking this balanced approach is vitally important as you enter your retirement years.

Remain calm and rational.

If it's your habit to watch the 24/7 financial news networks, do yourself a favor and find a new hobby as you enter retirement. A steady stream of economic news puts many people on "red alert" status. The constant swings of the market can even cloud good judgment and prompt you to

make sudden changes to your investment strategy. It's just not healthy.

When you retire, try to adopt and maintain a "steady as she goes" philosophy. Making risky investments, buying or selling property or withdrawing all of your money from liquid investments may seem like a good idea today, but might cost you financial security in the long run. Instead, focus on stabilizing your financial situation. Consider developing a retirement network of friends and family members with whom you can talk candidly about financial decisions. This network will help you through anxieties and keep you on solid footing when it comes to financial decision making.

Prepare for the unexpected.

If you don't already have a will, resolve to get one in the New Year. If you have

one in place, make sure it reflects your current wishes and double check your beneficiary designations. Also, set aside time to discuss your plans with your spouse or significant other as well as your children - and tell those closest to you where they can find your important documents. These can be difficult conversations for everyone involved, but they will help reduce the amount of stress you and your family may face in the future.

Developing a good relationship with a financial advisor - and staying in touch with him or her during these crucial years - should also be part of your retirement plan. A financial advisor will not only help you manage a budget for retirement, but will help keep you on the right path to ensure your years of retirement meet your expectations.

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United Heritage gives \$500 toward Project Graduation

United Heritage Credit Union presented the Vandegrift High School Parent-Teacher-Student Association \$500 for their 2013 Project Graduation at the Four Points Chamber of Commerce luncheon on Thursday.

UHCU celebrated its one-year anniversary of its River Place branch with giveaways, treats from local vendors, Plinko, photo opportunities with the University of Texas mascot Bevo, balloon artist, face painters, a bounce house and free \$2 bills for kids, with over 80 children participating.

"We really wanted the event to have a significant local flair and flavor. In the Austin area, gourmet food trucks and Bevo the longhorn are both very popular. We were extremely pleased with the number of people who came with their children and enjoyed the food and fun," said Jenny Laudadio, Director of Marketing for United Heritage.



Jenny Laudadio

At the Four Points Chamber of Commerce luncheon on Thursday, United Heritage Credit Union Branch Manager Trey Bertelson presented representatives of the Vandegrift High School Parent-Teacher-Student Association with a \$500 for their 2013 Project Graduation.

niversary was to see which school collected the most votes in its favor. The school donation contest included River Place Elementary, Four Points Middle School and VHS.

Branch Manager Trey

Bertelson presented Donna O'Brien, Project Grad Chair, and Mary Scherer, VHS PTSA Treasurer, with the \$500 winning check on Dec. 20.

The money will go toward providing graduat-

ing seniors with a fun, safe place to celebrate their last night together as high school students. The program provides a chaperoned all-night, drug, alcohol free celebration for graduating seniors.

FIREWORKS, FROM 1

the fire being discovered. Most likely a large aerial fireworks device," said John Durham, Assistant Fire Chief - Division of Fire Prevention & Community Emergency Preparedness with Lake Travis Fire Rescue Travis County ESD No. 6.

The device Durham is referring to is a mortar or an indirect fire weapon that fires explosive projectiles at low velocities, short ranges, and high-arc ballistic trajectories.

LTFR responded to the blaze with two engines, a quint, one brush truck and one battalion chief. Fire crews advanced those lines down the slope from Cloudy Ridge Rd. as well as applied water from aerial equipment staged above and below the hillside.

Total area the of fire was approximately 100 feet long by 75 feet wide. The fire behavior was "active", but not "extreme". This is typical for a wildland fire on a slope, at night, with low wind and higher relative humidity. The total time on scene was approximately three hours.

Upon investigation of the

area at daylight, a small area of duff or thick, decaying, vegetative matter, covering the ground, was discovered smoldering and burning several inches deep on the hillside just above the main area of fire origin. This was extinguished by investigators.

This particular hillside, with primarily a southeastern exposure, would not normally be subject to extreme fire conditions as would hills with a more southerly, southwest, or western exposure, Durham said.

"However, the fact that smoldering was found deep in the duff layer on this hillside is a good indicator of the severe effects of drought on the region. Given the extreme slope, dry and tender vegetation, combined with typical afternoon conditions of brisk winds and low relative humidity, had this fire occurred mid-day, the results could have been much different," he said.

"Obviously the precautions regarding the use of fireworks this holiday season can not be overstated," Durham said.

ANDRADE, FROM 1

ture scheduled the end of this month.

As previously reported, Andrade was diagnosed in August with a type of cancer which has attacked her blood marrow and left the mother of three with broken bones and a compromised immune system. In an effort to force the cancer into remission, she will undergo a very expensive stem cell transplant in San Antonio over the holidays. However, long-term care costs for someone with this disease can range as high as \$500,000.

News of Andrade's diagnosis spread throughout the local area and friends and neighbors cooked meals for the family and coordinated fundraisers, including the early December event as well as a jewelry party in November, to defray the costs associated with Beth's treatment.

"When Beth told me about her diagnosis in August, some people would have crawled under a rock and not known what to do," said Gary Hill, a friend of the Andrade family and general coordinator for the local fundraisers. "I said, 'This is going to be expensive and we've got to do something.'"

Besides the successful auction, Hill has planned a golf tournament on MLK Day, Jan. 21, 2013, at Barton Creek Lakeside, Spicewood, to help the family with Beth's continuing treatment.

"It's been an amazing experience," said Hill of the Four Points community's measures to help his friends. "It's renewed my faith in mankind."

To contribute to Miracle for Beth, see "Miracle for Beth Andrade" on Facebook or go to www.fundrazr.com.

FIRE DANGER, FROM 1

40 years, and I know stick rockets and missiles in dry conditions are 99.9 percent of the problems associated with fires," Davis said.

"If you eliminate them, you basically have eliminated 99.9 percent of the opportunity for a fire, because those items travel the farthest distance from the shooter and are the least likely to stay in control," he added.

The products are safe if used correctly, Davis said, but factors such as a shift in wind direction or an uneven launching surface can lead to trouble.

While Travis County saw above average rainfall in the spring and summer of 2012, that has left the area with more flammable brush, made worse by Austin recording no measurable rain since Oct. 26.

"With large amounts of dry vegetation and the low humidity produced by North winds that are common in December, we face an increased fire danger," said Travis County Fire Marshal Hershel Lee. The Fire Marshals' office recommends following these

safety tips:

- Buy from reliable fireworks sellers only and never attempt to make your own fireworks.
- To detonate fireworks, find a flat surface, away from buildings, dry leaves and grass.
- Have water on hand in case of a fire.
- Insist on adult supervision when buying or setting off fireworks.
- Read and follow label directions, warnings and instructions.
- Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks.
- Light only one firework at a time.
- Never try to re-light fireworks that have not fully functioned.
- Never give fireworks to small children; even sparklers can cause serious burns.

The sale and possession of fireworks are prohibited within the city limits of Austin. In addition, fireworks are not allowed in Travis County Parks and parks managed by Travis County.

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BASKETBALL



Nick Fionda - Junior #2 (Post)

Favorite part about being involved in Viper Basketball:
My favorite part about being involved in Viper Basketball is the community within the team.

BASKETBALL



Natasha Desai - Senior #5 (Forward)

Favorite part about being involved in Viper Basketball:
My favorite part about basketball is getting on the court and playing games with my fellow teammates. I've been with these seniors since we were in seventh grade and I am relishing every last moment I get play with them and the rest of the team.

WRESTLING



Keegan Pitts

What do you like about the sport of wrestling? I like wrestling because of the constant challenge that it presents.
What is your goal this year? My personal goal is to be a state placer.
Favorite quote? Gold medals aren't really made of gold. They're made of sweat, determination, and a hard to find alloy called guts!

FCCLA



Maria Taylor - Senior (FCCLA)

Favorite part about being involved in the Viper Family, Career and Community Leaders of America program:
My favorite part is our opportunity to compete.

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VHS hosts Season Tip-Off tourney

The fourth grade 4 Points Basketball Association team won their division in the Second Annual Season Tip-Off tournament, hosted by the Vandegrift High School Boys Basketball Booster Club.

In all there were 32 teams at the tournament from all over central Texas. The 4 Points Basketball organization had eight teams in the tournament. The 4th grade team beat out stiff competition of five other teams to take the championship. More than 1,000 people came through the doors to watch the competitive basketball two-day event.

"Our organization has come a long way in the past three years. We are very proud of our players and professional coaches. They have worked hard," said Peter Fernandes, President of 4 Points Basketball Association.

"The booster club sponsored tournament was a great success and we hope to include more teams at the next tournament in the spring. We are glad that the money raised goes to help support the Vandegrift Boys Basketball program," said Andy Giles, VHS Boys Basketball Booster Club President.

"I was so impressed with the ball handling skills and court sense these kids have at this age," Giles said. "They are going to help make our VHS basketball program a success when they get into high school."



The 4th grade Vipers from left to right, back row, Andy Giles, President of VHS Basketball Booster club, VHS Basketball Coach Je'ron Curtis, Four Points Basketball Association Coach Donald McBride, middle row, James Mooney, Ben Scott, Luke Draeken, Dominic Chmura, Ty Jordan, Holten Garrison, front row, Ryan Back and Christian Cole.

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VHS Soccer hosted self-defense seminar

The Vandegrift High School Girls Soccer team hosted a self-defense seminar recently where 95 participants learned practical defenses against rape and parking lot attacks.

The head instructor of the seminar on Dec. 1 was Pete Hardy, owner of STW911 in San Antonio and dad of Head Soccer Coach Jennifer Hardy.

He addressed the topic of school shootings specifically during his remarks. His point: teachers and administrators who are equipped to fight back can protect their students better than simply sending them to hide under desks. He said that he had sent a letter to 600-plus school districts offering to train staff in basic takedown and self-defense techniques, and received one response.

The soccer team raised about \$3,000 and donated half of that to Austin SafePlace.

Coach Hardy holds a 2nd degree black belt and was awarded the 2011 National Jefferson Award for Public Service.



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2012 Vandegrift Girls Basketball Roster

#	Jr.	Name	Height	Position
#1	Jr.	Wendy Wan	5'6"	Guard
#3	Sr.	Sophia Duffield	5'5"	Guard
#5	Sr.	Natasha Desai	6'0"	Post
#21	Sr.	Megha Pandya	5'8"	Guard
#23	Sr.	Kelsee Pitman	5'8"	Guard
#45	Sr.	Allie Galloway	5'9"	Post
#31	So.	Aspen Andrew	5'10"	Post
#22	Jr.	Chloe Chappelle	5'6"	Guard
#32	Jr.	Sam Gonzales	5'9"	Guard
#44	Jr.	Annie Brigham	5'7"	Post

2012 Vandegrift Varsity Girls Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	PLACE	V
Dec.28-29	Bastrop Varsity Tourney	Bastrop	TBA
Jan.2-Wed	Dripping Springs	Home	7:00
Jan.5-Sat	Leander	Leander	3:00
Jan.8-Tues	Marble Falls	Home	7:00
Jan.11-Fri	Cedar Park	Cedar Park	7:00
Jan.15-Tues	Rouse*	Home	7:00
Jan. 18-Fri	OPEN		
Jan.22-Tues	Vista Ridge	Home	7:00
Jan.25-Fri	Dripping Springs	Dripping Springs	7:00
Jan.29-Tues	Leander**	Home	7:00
Feb.1-Fri	Marble Falls	Marble Falls	7:00
Feb.5-Tues	Cedar Park	Home	7:00

Italics denoted District Games
** Parent's Night
*Middle School Night
^Senior Night

PLAY-OFFS	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
FEB 11-12		Bi-District Playoff	
FEB 14-16		Area Playoffs	
FEB 18-19		Quarterfinals	
FEB 22-23		Regional Tournament	
FEB 28-MAR 2		STATE TOURNAMENT	Austin

on the court.

3. Who is Vandegrift's biggest rival?

As a new school entering our third year of 4A competition we are still establishing rivalries with our opponents. Currently our main rivals are district foes Cedar Park and Rouse.

4. What has surprised you most so far in this season?

I was pleasantly surprised by the effort displayed in a tournament win over Copperas Cove, a quality team that our players have historically struggled against. Games like that have shown me that we have the ability to compete at a high level.

5. Do you have an interesting story to share about the team that most would not know about?

Earlier in the season we had the opportunity to visit the Texas State Aquarium while at a tournament in Corpus Christi. It was a great bond-

ing experience for the team and a great opportunity for me to get to know the players off the court. We have a wonderful group of young women on this team that will do many great things in high school and beyond.

6. What motivates you as a coach?

There is no experience like being part of an athletic team! I am consistently motivated by the opportunity to have a positive impact on those I coach. It has been a pleasure working with the girls here at Vandegrift HS and I really look forward to what lies ahead.

Record last season: 23-15 (6-6 District) - Regional Quarterfinalists

Returning Leaders: Natasha Desai (Sr.) and Sophia Duffield (Sr.)

Top Newcomers: Aspen Andrew (So.)

Q & A
Head Girls Basketball Coach Julie Wilke

1. What has to happen for the Viper Basketball to be successful this season?

We have a strong, experienced senior class that will need to lead by example in order for us to be successful this season. We also have a competitive group of underclassmen that are hungry to do what it takes to help us achieve our team and program goals.

2. What is your biggest challenge this season?

Our biggest challenge this season is to consistently play to the best of our abilities each and every time we step

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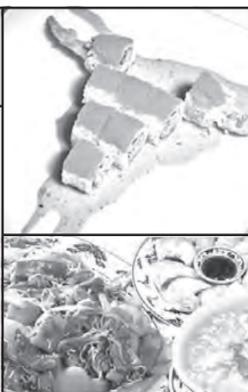
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book and wrapped gifts. "This was a wonderful way to start the Christmas holidays. Over the years we have donated gifts but working as one of the volunteers behind the scenes

made it more meaningful," said Elaine Sproull, who volunteered with her son Jordan. "It was fun to know that you'll make someone's Christmas morning," said

Jordan. At the start of the holiday season, YMSL members handed out race packets for the annual Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot run, benefiting Caritas of Austin.

YMSL is a non-profit organization that initiates and encourages young men and their mothers to pursue philanthropic involvement in their community and provides an opportunity to enhance mother/son relationships. Locally the YMSL Vipers have served over 1,600 service hours since the chapter was formed in June. YMSL is a four-year commitment that begins when boys enter 9th grade and teaches leadership. It's an opportunity where boys become men. Nationally, YMSL serves more than 300 philanthropies. There are 32 chapters in five states with expansion plans in progress. To learn more about The Ultimate Gift and YMSL, visit ymsl-national.org or call 1-866-602-YMSL.

Wishing You a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year!



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