

DATELINE

March 5, 2021 | Vol. 66, Iss. 3

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Gators restore beauty, sustainability, student involvement in UHD gardens

By Indira Zaldivar

This spring, green thumbed-Gators are restoring the UHD Sustainability Garden in front of the mailroom in One Main Building along with the seven garden beds along the Sciences and Technology Build-

ing. The team of 10 students are designing the green spaces with sustainability at the heart of each design under faculty mentorship.

CUAS Director Lisa Morano, Ph.D., professor of biology, Vassilios Tzouanas, Ph.D.,

professor of computer science and engineering, and Juan Martinez, coordinator of sustainability, meet with the students virtually every week to offer guidance.

The goals of the garden project are for students to have educational spaces to learn how to optimize garden space and food production. The students will also restore solar power in the UHD Sustainability Garden, so that the automatic irrigation system is back on.

In the STB beds, the students will assemble individual solar-powered timers to irrigate the beds from the STB's water capture system.

The CUAS offers the students a

\$500 stipend upon completion of the project.

The project is currently underway, so don't be surprised if you catch any corn, strawberries or other delicious food growing in any of the garden beds.

The 10 students are the first to plant at the STB, building that has won multiple awards, gold-level Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, to name a few. These 10 students signal the return of student involvement at the UHD Sustainability Garden that was long disrupted by the pandemic.

Thankfully, dedicated mail staffers, Debora Evans, manager of Shipping, Mailing and Receiving, and

Jacqueline Simms have kept the garden growing strong amid the void of the pandemic and have even led other UHD staff to join.

This project will allow UHD staff and students to work together to restore the beloved UHD Sustainability Garden and initiate the legacy of sustainable food production in the STB beds.

Elia Gonzalez, UHD accounting student and nature enthusiast commented.

"This project means revival to me and a compromise with our Mother nature," Gonzalez said. "I expect to leave my ancestor's knowledge in this garden and gain from its process and my peers."



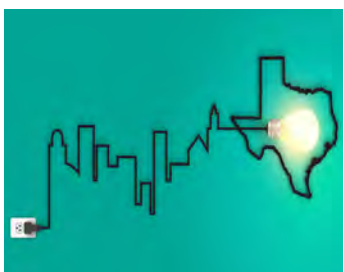
Preservant threatens Fifth Ward children
see News, Page 7



Abbott reverses mask mandate
see News, Page 13



Green New Deal wrongly blamed
see Opinions, Page 20



ERCOT power grid raises suspicions
see Opinions, Page 21



Biology students, Ani Vu (front) and Rene Mays (back) planted a peach tree, rue, bee balm, lavender, corn seeds and sage in two of the seven beds along the Science & Technology Building. Photo credits: Indira Zaldivar





THE DATELINE

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The Dateline is the official student newspaper of the University of Houston-Downtown. Since its first issue in 1982, The Dateline is proud to be "Student Run since Volume One." We strive to meet the needs of a growing university as well as the growing metropolitan city that surrounds us.

Submission Policy

The Dateline staff consists of students from the University of Houston-Downtown who complete all tasks required to produce the newspaper, which serves all UHD campuses. The opinions and commentaries expressed within reflect the views of the contributing writers. No opinions expressed in The Dateline reflect the viewpoints of the University of Houston-Downtown, its administration, or students.

The Dateline reserves the right to edit or modify submissions for the sake of clarity, content, grammar, or space limitations. All submissions become property of The Dateline and may not be returned.

All paid writers must be currently enrolled students at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Press releases, story ideas, news tips and suggestions are always welcomed. We encourage all students to contribute.

Any student interested in joining The Dateline staff may request more detailed information sending an email to the editors at editordatelinedowntown@gmail.com.

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@the_dateline

Grants, scholarships available to Gators

By Bryan Kimbro

Students feeling the squeeze of paying for college can likely benefit from scholarships or federal grant programs by filling out a simple application.

Students have nothing to lose in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. Filling out the FAFSA allows students to access need-based aid,

such as Pell Grants, as well as federal loans.

Grants are similar to scholarships and different than loans in that students never have to pay them back, except on rare occasions. Unlike scholarships, college grants are primarily based on the financial needs of a student. To see if you are eligible for grant money, visit <https://studentaid.gov>.



Gator Support

Scholarships are mostly merit-based, which means they are given out based on some kind of ability, hobby, ethnicity or other characteristic. Below is a non-exhaustive list of scholarships offered to UHD students.

For more information, visit <https://www.uhd.edu/financial/scholarships>.

Dr. Nancy A. & Dr. Jacques P. Leveille Mathematics Education Endowment for MS

This scholarship awards \$500 for students pursuing a B.A. or B.S. in Mathematics with Secondary Teacher Certification, or B.S. in Applied Statistics with Secondary Teacher Certification. Preference is given to scholarship applicants who demonstrate financial need. The application deadline is March 12.

Edwin and Justine Hodges Memorial Scholarship for MS

In order to be considered for this scholarship, applicants must be a declared major in Applied Statistics, Mathematics, or Data Analytics (B.A., B.S., or M.S.) among other qualifications. Award is \$750 for the Fall and renewable for the Spring semester. The deadline is March 12.

Marilyn Davies College of Business Scholarships

Scholarships are awarded on the basis of a variety of factors, such as financial need, academic merit, and area of study. Scholarships do not have to be repaid.

They are designed to reward, encourage and assist you in pursuing academic excellence and leadership roles. The Scholarship application is open until June 4.

June P. Wood Memorial Scholarship for MS Award

This scholarship awards \$750 for declared majors in Applied Mathematics that meet certain criteria. It is awarded in the Fall and renewable for the Spring semester. Deadline is March 12.

UHD Textbook Assistance Application

Program provides assistance with purchasing required textbook(s) for current degree-seeking students who are experiencing a financial hardship. Assistance provided from this program does not have to be repaid. Applications must be fully completed and contain supporting documentation. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. Applications will be kept confidential and for committee use only.

Veterans' Emergency Fund

Student veterans are eligible for a maximum benefit of a one-time payout of \$500. Awards are based on availability of grant from Hamill Foundation. These amounts are subject to change and are not guaranteed. Must be enrolled at UHD in at least 9 hours during the current semester and have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0.

Teresa Tapp Scholarship

Must be registered for a minimum of six credit hours per semester with a cumulative GPA of 2.5. Must be nominated by a UHD club coach, personal trainer or fitness instructor. Must submit a typed essay on how you have personally benefitted from your involvement in a UHD Sports & Fitness program. Award is \$500 per academic year/\$250 per semester.

Good Neighbor Scholarship Program 2021-2022

One year of tuition is awarded to nonresident students from an eligible country in the Western Hemisphere. Deadline for application is March 10.

UHD detectives warn Gators of scams, solicitations

By Indira Zaldivar

In response to scammers using UHD emails to solicit Gators, UHD Detectives Raymond Jenkins and Deionne Jackson on Jan. 27, warned of red flags to identify scams.

The Federal Trade Commission in 2019 issued consumer alerts regarding the car wrap and secret shopper scams targeted at college students nationwide. However, Gators fell for these scams even late in 2020, and new students have reported this year receiving scam letters in their mails without explanation.

“Anytime anybody offers you money to put in a bank, it’s a red flag,” Jenkins said.

For the car wrap scam, Gators received emails coming from UHD email addresses with subject lines such as “GET PAID TO DRIVE.” Scammers offered \$250 to \$350 per week if students drove around with their vehicles wrapped with advertisement of a well-known product or event. Then the students were told a check would arrive in the mail, and to use some of that scammer’s check money to pay the car wrap “specialist.” However, since the check turned out to be fake, students ended up wiring their own money to pay the “specialist” in advance, but the visit never materialized.

The secret shopper scam used

subject lines such as “job placement for University of Houston-Downtown” and “job approval” promising Gators would earn \$250-\$350 per task at a retailer store. Scammers instructed students to deposit the check that would arrive shortly. The “first task” varied.

some of the deposited money. The other asked the students to buy iTunes cards or reloadable gift cards with the deposited money and then send the scammers pictures of the cards or card numbers.

By the time, the banks caught the scammers’ checks

responds to it, and it’s just a scam,” Jenkins said. “They send them like a \$2500 check, the students go cash it, put it in their bank, and they never hear from these people again.”

While some banks did not hold the students liable for the checks which round up to \$2500 each, most students were held responsible for depositing and cashing the scammers’ checks. The UHD Police Department has reported the scams and monetary damage to local law enforcement but chances of authorities tracking them down are “slim to none.”

“The only way we are going to be able to combat this, is to put out the information to not even respond to these emails,” Jenkins said. “That’s the only way right now that we are going to be able to stop this.”

Although UHD policy PSOB124 prohibits any job offers via emails or any form of soliciting, Jenkins said scammers targeted college students who more than likely are just trying to make ends meet and “not really looking into it.” One student told Jenkins that she believed the scam because the scammer used the same Gator mail address from a UHD classmate to target her.

The memo available on the UHD website, states that all student assistant positions must be post-

ed by Employment Services and Operations on the UHD Careers Site “prior to the distribution of any public notices, placed advertisements, or screening of applicants.”

Any official opportunities for student employments, Jackson reiterated that “you have to go yourself to see what jobs are available.”

Jackson urges students to activate the flag feature in the designated Gatormail app, Outlook. Subject lines worded as “job soliciting,” “job approval,” “job placement” and “employment opportunity” should be immediately discarded and marked to flag as it is against UHD policy to offer jobs via email. Jackson wants to remind Gators that UHD’s Career Services or ESO “wouldn’t email you, they check out these jobs’.”

As for tips to identify if any job offer is legitimate or a scam, free and easy resources lay at the student’s fingertips.

Firstly, Jackson said to look out for any company logos and contact information in the job offers and to Google them.

“If you can get a contact number for that company, then try to call and confirm that they sent you this information to do this job.” Jackson said. “If you don’t get a number that way, then go to the Better Business Bureau website. A

lot of times, a lot of people report scams to them, so you’ll get complaints where individuals reported this happened to me, and they’ll drop a story... they’ll even inform you of the details that they were asked to do as far of a scam.”

Another scammer tactic is communicating via text only. Jackson said scammers often use text apps to create any number.

“Try calling the number they’re texting you from. If it’s busy or if it’s a disconnect sound, then you know again.”

As scams persist, the detectives and UHD Police Department hope that students will remain alert and stay well-informed so that when real job opportunities come their way, they take advantage of them while identifying and reporting any scams that may leech along.

“When you are trying your hardest to go to school to pay for books and tuition, you think that you have a legitimate opportunity for a job, and it’s nothing but a scam.” Jenkins said. “We’re just trying to do our best to get this put out.”

To sign up to receive the Federal Trade Commission’s consumer alerts, visit the FTC’s website at consumer.ftc.gov.

Gators Don't Get Scammed: Tips & Red Flags

Red flags your job application is a scam!

- The solicitor follows up through text message or email only and the phone number is non-existent
- The company name, logo, and contact information is not consistent
- The company is not available on the Better Business Bureau search engine
- The job is officially reported as a scam on the Better Business Bureau website

Tips to keep Gators safe from future scams:

- Find employment opportunities from Career Services and posted by ESO on UHD Careers Site
- Sign up to the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Alert
- Flag subject lines labeled as employment opportunity in your Outlook inbox
- Discard any employment offers sent to your Gatormail and report them to the UHD Police Department

Resources Mentioned

- www.uhd.edu/administration/employment-services/
- www.consumer.ftc.gov/
- Non-Emergency UHD police number: 713-221-9055
- <https://www.bbb.org/>

Karina Rodarte Alvarez

One assigned students to “test” the in-store money transfer service, like Western Union or Money-

Gram, by sending were fake, the scammers were long gone and the gift card money too.

“They send an email, the student



Wheels in Motion: Differently-Abled Spotlight

By Michael Kowis

I have spent all last year documenting the plight of the disabled community in our continued struggle against the pandemic. I started writing this year talking about testing technology. This time, I would like to spotlight a particular student amongst the differently abled

community who has achieved great things while studying here.

Tawana Pinkney

Pinkney is a senior here studying for her social work degree. She has a fractured spine as a result of a horrific car accident, yet that has not kept her from doing big things here. She currently maintains a 3.8 GPA and is a part of the National

Society for Leadership and Success. She has made the dean's list every year for the entirety of her academic career here. She graduates in May with plans to continue her master's degree.

It was such an honor to meet a student who is achieving greatness here. Even though, in general, this community gets pushed aside in favor of more "qualified" individuals. Further,

I am very happy to see that she is a part of the NSLS. Taken from their website, this is what they do. "We help students identify career goals, hone their leadership skills, and turn ambitions into action. Our program provides a life-changing experience giving you access to essential tools to excel in your future and make a change in the world." With an academic attitude

demonstrated here, I believe Tawana is an excellent model for what every student, differently abled or not, can and should accomplish. Best of luck in your future endeavors, Tawana.

In conclusion, I believe everyone, differently abled or not, can accomplish what Tawana has. Grit and determination may be the attitude hallmarks that make a great student

but knowing how and when to work at one's best are the foundations that, in my opinion, lead to high levels of success.

If you are a student with disabilities who has made accomplishments like this story, please speak to the ODS and contact me at kowism1@gator.uhd.edu

UHS fails to turn passion into payment for The Dateline staff

By Sheryl Sellers

Publishing The Dateline relies on a vast array of organization, talent, skill and enthusiasm. It depends on the time and dedication of the editor, section editors, social media manager, writers, graphic designers, photographers, cartoonists, and a business manager. It is a lively, energetic, dedicated and engaging team of students who not only enjoy their work but who are so passionate about it.

One reward for their dedication is recognition and seeing one's handiwork in a printed publication.

However, Dateliners are missing another important, much relied upon reward for their talented and accomplished work – prompt payments.

Not prompt as in immediate, but

certainly within a few weeks after publication and invoicing.

At least, as with any job, that is the expectation. But for The Dateline staff, receiving payment for their efforts all too often falls short of that expectation.

The Dateline contributors are not employees of the university. They are contractors/vendors. They apply to The Dateline and trade their knowledge, research, writing, editing and artistic skills for, dare I say, cash. Working for The Dateline is as much an academic, personal achievement as it is a financial transaction.

Student Affairs has drilled into Dateline staff, ad nauseam, that it takes time to gurgle through the payment process. I get that. But just how much time does this process have to take?

The onboarding and payment processes proctored by UHS and effectuated by UHD Student Affairs is antiquated and inefficient. And the process has changed twice since spring 2020 when I took on the role of business manager for The Dateline.

The Dateline is not always instructed on these changing processes, the new protocol or its requirements. Oh, we may receive an email from Student Affairs indicating a change has occurred. But that announcement is a far cry from an explanation or instruction. But maybe that step is "someone else's job."

When questions were raised to Student Affairs about the change in protocol, the response was a receipt contact information for the new payment provider. The Dateline

email requesting help and support in understanding the new payment processes that are proctored by our university was answered simply: Don't ask us, ask somebody else.

Due to the several emails with the new payment provider, I am beginning to build a relationship with the staff, which is a skill Student Affairs might attempt and benefit from. But I do share all the information I receive so that Student Affairs can understand the process they use for payments. I thought that some understanding of the system might be helpful them.

If UHS has the required student information, and if Student Affairs has each staff member's current semester schedule, payments can resume. But we

can never be sure if Student Affairs receives the information... there is rarely, if ever, any acknowledgement confirming that the onboarding information was received.

Now, as for payments, or lack thereof, the paper trail (if it can be defined as a trail, rather than a sloth-like paper passing) following publication of an issue of The Dateline invoices are prepared. These are sent with the reference from the publication to The Dateline's Faculty Advisor. He affixes his signature and returns the invoices to the business manager who then scans the invoices and sends them out again - this time to Student Affairs. There they are digitally recorded into the UHD payroll system.

They are then on their merry way through the bureaucratic black hole of reviews.

First stop is the Office of the Pro-

ost, then to Employment Services and Operations Office for validation and accuracy check (again).

Next stop, UHD Accounts Payable where they process payments every two weeks along with other payroll and billing.

But that's not the end. Once processed they are sent to UH Main Campus for disbursement through direct deposit to the student's designated bank account.

Any hold-up enroute can add weeks to the process, as the invoices must be sent all the way back down the bureaucratic ladder, back to The Dateline staff to correct missing or mismatched information or to rescan a blurry PDF. Then the process begins again, traveling all the way back up the bureaucracy, sitting in any one inbox for indeterminate amounts of time.

Continued on page 6

National Eating Disorder Awareness Week By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

The National Eating Disorder Association dedicated the week of Feb. 22 through Feb. 28 to raise awareness on eating disorders. During the pandemic, eating disorders have become more dangerous than ever. Three most common types of disorders affect people of all ages and sizes.

Eating dis-

gain and weight loss, or in some cases overeating and overexercising combined, can lead to a stressful “medium” weight.

Binge eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the U.S. and characterized by eating quickly to the point of fullness and discomfort. Signs include eating an entire meal even though

with over exercising or food restriction.

Anorexia nervosa is the most fatal eating disorder, and is characterized by extreme calorie restriction, intense fear of weight gain, and body dysmorphia. Other signs of anorexia include constant diets, lethargy, thinning hair, absent menstruation, and ritualistic

as self-induced vomiting or purging, heavy laxative use, fasting, and excessive exercise. Some signs include eating in secret, using the bathroom immediately after eating, and teeth or gum damage from self-induced vomiting.

These are only a few of the many eating disorders out there. If you or someone you know show any signs of an eating disorder, we encourage you to start a polite, respectful conversation. Please do not diagnose yourself or others and see a health professional if you believe you may have an eating disorder.

It is also very important to dismantle the stereotypes of what an eating disorder looks like. Not everyone suffering from an eating disorder is young, thin and gaunt nor are they necessarily female. Matter of fact, a third of people suffering from eating disorders are male.

Family and friends are much less likely to notice their loved one suffering from an eating disorder because they do not fit the Hollywood ideal of what a person suffering from an eating disorder looks like. Individuals who believe that they are too large or

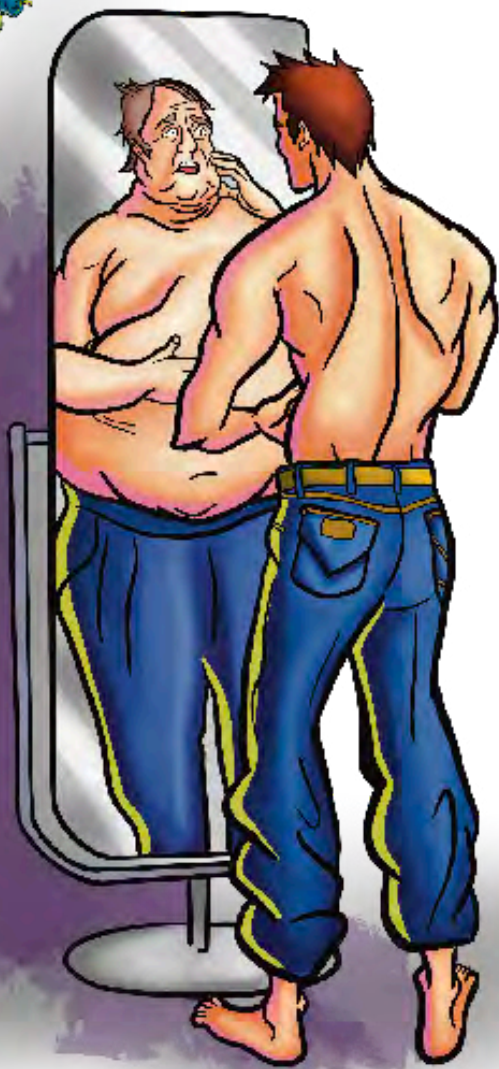
big-framed believe that they will not be taken seriously if they do reach out for help.

The lack of awareness of eating disorders leads to assumptions that could be fatal for some. Having an eating disorder

with no support system can be very isolating, confusing, and lonely.

No one suffering from an eating disorder deserves to suffer alone. The NEDA has virtual resources

on their website such as live seminars, virtual support groups, and online forums. We encourage all UHD Gators to reach out to NEDA’s helpline at 800.931.2237 or text NEDA at 741741.



Gean Garcia

orders are serious mental illnesses, characterized by an unhealthy obsession in body weight or shape and constant thoughts of eating and exercise. It is also important to note that eating disorders can lead to extreme weight

you’re not hungry and feeling too embarrassed to eat in front of strangers because of the amount you’re eating. People with the condition may feel ashamed or depressed after a “binge”. Binge eating disorder is not associated

eating patterns. In some cases, thin peach fuzz will appear all over the body including face and hands.

Bulimia nervosa could also be seriously fatal. It is characterized by engaging in unhealthy behaviors after a binge such

GATOR LIFE EXCLUSIVE

NATIONAL EATING DISORDER AWARENESS WEEK

No one deserves to suffer alone. Below are the three most common eating disorders to give awareness for you and others.



BINGE EATING DISORDER

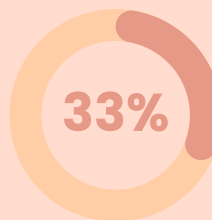
Most common eating disorder in the U.S. is characterized by eating quickly to the point of fullness and discomfort. It is also eating an entire meal even though you’re not hungry, and feeling too embarrassed to eat in front of strangers because of the amount you’re eating.

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

The most fatal eating disorder, and is characterized by extreme calorie restriction, intense fear of weight gain, and body dysmorphia. May suffer from thinning hair, absent menstruation, and ritualistic eating patterns

BULIMIA NERVOSA

Characterized by engaging in unhealthy behaviors after a binge such as self-induced vomiting, laxative use, fasting, and excessive exercise. Some signs include eating in secret, using the bathroom immediately after eating, and teeth or gum damage from self-induced vomiting.



A THIRD OF PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM EATING DISORDERS ARE MEN



THE NEDA WEBSITE HAS LIVE SEMINARS, VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS, AND ONLINE FORUMS. YOU CAN REACH THE NATIONAL EATING DISORDER ASSOCIATION (NEDA) HELPLINE AT 800.931.2237 OR TEXT NEDA AT 741741.

Karina Rodarte Alvarez

UHS fails to turn passion into payment (continued)

And there can be any number of delays along the way. Furthermore no one can determine where the invoices are once they leave Student Affairs. And, surprisingly, some invoices depart ways with their group of invoices. Think of socks in your dryer, and you will get the gist.

Why do we

bring this up? There are students who have waited eight months, I repeat, eight months to be paid.

Last year a student was almost evicted from their apartment, unable to pay rent while waiting to receive past-due payments.

This past fall semester, another student was waiting

for payment on over \$5,000 for work invoiced dating back to the spring semester 2020. The student was thrown into financial delinquency and was barred from enrolling in Spring 2021 classes. Several inquiries were made, but the full amount was not paid out until January 2020, after a full year of not

receiving payments owed.

Why does The Dateline staff have to wait so long for payments? Show me where the buck stops, so a bridge can be built to ease the transmission.

And here's a not so novel idea: How about a tracking system, either online or via outdated yet helpful paper? An envelope perhaps with date, time and place? These routing envelopes worked well in the "old days." I

created a tracker on an Excel spreadsheet for a former employer. Easy peasy. And it would keep students informed and updated about the status of their payments.

Students who give their time, energy and skills to interview, research, write, publish and facilitate the university's media should not have to wonder if and when they will be paid for their contributions.

We are asking for change. These payment delays

jeopardized (and continue to jeopardize) students' living arrangements, enrollment and education, graduation dates, and overall mental and physical well-being. How many individuals reading this would wait patiently - two weeks, four weeks, eight months, a whole year - to be paid for their work? Not many. The Dateline staff is tired of waiting patiently.



Sarah Ramirez

By Sara Garcia

Isa Loshaj, owner of Good Times Cafe, located at 2100 Travis St. in midtown, opened his restaurant in 2018, to bring visitors and residents a taste of native coun-

try, Kosovo. The cafe delights visitors with a "mix between Italian, French and some Balkan food" inspired by his culture's European cuisine with a twist of American influence.

Loshaj, 35, grew up in Peja, Kosovo, small city with a 100k population before moving to New York in 2011.

For nearly 10 years, he has followed the footsteps of his

father and grandfather who used to own restaurants in Kosovo. After he and his family settled in Houston, he opened his business in 2018.

Loshaj said Houston offered him

and his family "the city life as well as the family comfortability."

"It fit the criteria of diverse city in all aspects," Loshaj said. "I thought midtown Houston was a

very vibrant area with an extensive restaurant scene."

Freshly-roasted coffee, authentic cuisine made from scratch, and craft cocktails are why Loshaj says you should visit Good Times Cafe next time you are in midtown. He added that Good Times Cafe serves unique options like handmade beef pepperoni flatbread, goulash, and polenta and "some of the most delicious cocktails including Good Old Fashion martini."

Good Times is the place to have a "big enjoy." The food and the atmosphere always match the mood. And on the second visit, Good Times Cafe will discount 15% off any purchase.



Good Times Cafe in midtown Houston serves a "mix between Italian, French and some Balkan food" with a twist of American influence inspired by owner, Isa Loshaj's native European cuisine. Photo credits: Sara Garcia

Cancer-causing preservative contaminates groundwater, threatens Fifth Ward children

By Sheryl Sellers

Five times the baseline rate of lymphoblastic leukemia has been identified in children living in the Fifth Ward/Kashmere Gardens area in northeast Houston.

The probable culprit, creosote which was used until the late 1980s to preserve wood on railroad ties. A former industrial site where railroad ties were treated with the substance sits in the Kashmere Gardens area. A creosote "plume," (creosote absorbed into the ground forming a plume) has moved beneath approximately 100 homes and was discovered in the groundwater and soil in the area.

Multiple agencies recognize creosote as a possible carcinogen, however, Texas state investigators state that they do not have enough data to confirm the cause of the high cancer rates.

Owner of the railyard, Union Pacific Railroad, UPR,

is sympathetic but is unconvinced that they are responsible. "We sympathize with families who have loved ones undergoing medical treatment. Union Pacific continues to follow the science as we evaluate the updated assessments," UPR wrote in a statement.

UPR has admitted that creosote may contaminate ground water up to 66 stories below the soil, but they further state that years of testing does not indicate a path from the site to the residents.

An initial cancer cluster was identified in the area triggered by high rates of adult cancers of the lung, esophagus, and larynx in 2019. This second cancer cluster of leukemia affecting children was identified in Aug. 2020, however, the results of the study were not communicated to the community until that December.

Residents in the affected area are requesting that UPR

relocate them and pay for their medical expenses and further appeal that the area be deemed a Superfund site by state and federal authorities. (Superfund sites are highly contaminated areas listed in the National Priorities List that require cleanup of hazardous contaminations that pose a significant risk to people and to the environment).

A 65-year-old resident of Kashmere Gardens, Dianna Jackson, wants the area cleaned up. "If (the contamination) were anywhere else – River Oaks, The Heights, Meyerland – this would have already been taken care of years ago."

When Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner was apprised of a troubling report by the Texas Department of State Health Services dated Jan. 4, he issued a statement supporting the resident's appeals to UPR. "I am requesting that Union Pacific help to relocate

affected residents and create a buffer between contaminated areas and homes in the neighborhood."

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and environmental activist, Erin Brockovich, attended community meetings to lend support on the issue as well.

Kashmere Gardens and the Fifth Ward are predominantly Black neigh-

borhoods. The fact that dump sites and land use and industrial areas are located near these neighborhoods is not lost on residents and others.

Dr. Robert Bullard is an urban planning and environmental policy professor at Texas Southern University.

"This is the textbook case of environmental racism that we have been fighting

since 1979." Long-time resident and lung cancer survivor, Barbara Beal, is just one of the many who are angered, even more so now that it is "involving the babies."

"Move us out, buy us out. Just do what's right." Beal is grateful that the city is calling for action. "I do feel hopefully that something's going to happen positive."

Superfund sites endanger Houstonians

By Sheila Delgado Rayo

Superfund sites are contaminated with hazardous waste. There are 55 of these sites in Texas, and they are threatening the lives of Houstonians. Neighborhoods, Fifth Ward and Kashmere Gardens are currently fighting two cancer clusters supposedly linked to hazardous waste and project materials according to Texas Department of State Health. Houston

Mayor Sylvester Turner called to designate Harris County's 22nd Superfund site.

The Superfund program was founded in 1980 to force those who were polluting the sites to pay for the cleanup, but funding expired only 15 years later. Since then, taxpayers have been forced to pay for the cleanup of those sites. However, with less money available,

less sites have been cleaned.

Millions of Americans are constantly in danger because of these toxic sites and Texas is no exception. Currently, the lack of funds has "jeopardized the cleanup of 55 existing Superfund sites." Reinstating the "Polluter Pays Tax" would allow for enough funding to clean them up.



Harris County elections set for May 1

By Sara Garcia

During Harris County's local elections, voters choose who will represent them, how tax money will be spent in their districts and if taxes should be raised in an area or not. This year's local election, also known as uniform election, will be held on Saturday, May 1.

Elections are seasonal, right? Wrong. According to Texas code, elections are held every year. Various candidates will be on the ballot.

Harris County is looking for citizens to work as election clerks. Those interested in volunteering and participating in the democratic pro-

cess can email electionworkers@cco.hctx.net to see if there are election worker needs in your area,

Rachelle Obakoza, 19, Manager of Voting Centers and Recruitment for Harris County said local elections are even more important than general elections.

Obakoza

also recommended that voters take advantage of early voting to avoid long wait times.

Early voting begins Monday, April 19 and runs through Tuesday, April 27.

To verify voter registration status, check voting eligibility and polling boundaries, residents

of Harris County can visit the Harris County Tax Office's website.

Twenty-six entities have asked Harris County to conduct a joint election for them. Voters should check with their city, ISD, MUD or any other political jurisdiction they are in, to see if they are

holding an election. The last day to register for the May 1 elections is April 1. Find a voting center in your area by visiting harrisvotes.com.

Find a voting center in your area by visiting www.harrisvotes.com.

Tell a friend, and please go vote.

I-45 project impacts disenfranchised communities

By Bryan Kimbro

The Texas Department of Transportation, TxDOT, approved dramatic plans for Houston on Feb. 4, which included moving Interstate 45 from the west side of Downtown Houston to the east side, according to a record of decision, (ROD,) issued Feb. 4.

The \$7 billion plan, known as the North Houston Highway Improvement Project NHHIP, will also nearly double the width of the Gulf Freeway from downtown to Greenspoint, according to an executive summary issued with the ROD. The project, as currently designed, will disproportionately affect the

homeless and those in low-income and minority neighborhoods bordering downtown's southeastern to northeastern sides while inexplicably benefiting the highly gentrified areas immediately west and south of downtown.

The project will further displace households along I-45 from I-10 to Greenspoint. "While the ROD marks the end of the [National Environmental Policy Act] process, TxDOT is committed to continuing to meet with stakeholders and accepting public input as it proceeds through future project development phases," TxDOT Houston District Engineer Eliza Paul said.

"TxDOT will continue to do all we can to help make the NHHIP a success as the project continues to be developed."

The NHHIP is estimated to displace at least 160 single-family homes, 433 multifamily residential units, 486 public and low-income housing units, 344 businesses, five places of worship and two schools.

Despite years of public discussions and community input, which favored the option to not build the proposed project TxDOT began purchasing low-income apartment complexes as early as Aug. 2019 when it bought Clayton Homes Apartment Complex on the

forgotten outskirts of northeast downtown.

"TxDOT and the Houston Housing Authority, (HHA,) have agreed that the 296-unit Clayton Homes Apartment complex would be purchased earlier-than-needed so that HHA is provided time to search for and develop a new property," said Carlos Swonke, director of environmental affairs for TxDOT.

"HHA's goal is to have replacement units available for the residents so that each resident will only have to relocate once. TxDOT committed in the agreement to compensate for relocating all 296 units."

Others tar-

geted by TxDOT in advance include the 270-unit Kelly Village Apartment complex, an 81-year-old facility owned and operated by HHA; Temenos Place Apartments II, which offers affordable housing for low-income individuals, homeless individuals and persons with disabilities, the Greater Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Independence Heights; the Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church in Fifth Ward, Loaves and Fishes Magnificat House Ministries, Fatima House, which provides social and religious ministry services and SEARCH Homeless Services.

"Regarding homeless camps and

homeless individuals in the right-of-way TxDOT will coordinate with the City of Houston and homeless services providers to develop a plan to assist in the relocation of the homeless prior to construction," said Swonke.

In addition to relocation compensation TxDOT is committing \$27 million toward affordable housing initiatives in Independence Heights, Near Northside, Greater Fifth Ward and the Greater Third Ward.

For more information on the project, visit www.ih45northandmore.com.

Mattress Mack comes to Houston's rescue

By Sheryl Sellers

On Feb. 24 viewers of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" were introduced to Houston Hero, Jim McIngvale otherwise known as Mattress Mack. Those who have been in the Houston area for any length of time are familiar with his store, Gallery Furniture, the initial store famously located at 6006 I-45 N. between Parker and Tidwell.

Mack opened the doors to this location on Feb. 17 to accommodate people who needed a place to eat, sleep or just warm up from the freezing cold Houston area temperatures. "He is the definition of an American hero," said Ellen as she introduced Mack.

When people lost power, heat and water, Mack opened his store for them to rest and get warm. Thousands of people went to Gallery Furniture for that reason, and several hundred spent the night. Over the course of three days, over 3,000 meals were served and over 500 people were given a warm place to sleep.

Mack wanted to open the doors on Monday, however, the slick streets precluded that idea. Instead, he invited anyone who needed assistance to come to Gallery Furniture on Tuesday. As he told Ellen and her viewers, the "crisis is far from over." Mattress Mack started a GoFundMe

account and instituted a food drive. Over \$18,000 of the designated \$50,000 has been donated through GoFundMe.

This is not the first time that Mack has come to the aid of Houstonians in need. In 2017 during the flood created by Hurricane Harvey, he opened the doors to his store for first responders and

others who fled rising floodwaters. The store is equipped with a restaurant, showers, and a restroom. Over 400 people found safe haven in Mack's buildings

during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

"We've always had a saying here at Gallery Furniture that we have a responsibility for the well-being of the community, so if something bad happens, we want to be one of the first businesses to act because it's our job to help the community, not just take money out of the

community. We don't want to necessarily make a lot of profit; we want to make a big difference in the community and make the community a better place, when people are hurting, whether they're going to drown during Hurricane Harvey or they're going to freeze to death during this winter storm, it's our responsibility to

step up and take a leading position."

Mack told the audience, "My parents taught me when I was a little child that the essence of living is giving." At the end of the interview, Ellen presented Mack with a check in the amount of \$20,000 from Shutterfly to Mattress Mack's Winter Community Outreach.



Photo courtesy of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show"

LINK Houston calls for public transit improvements

By Indira Zaldivar

A report by public-transit advocacy organization, LINK Houston, released on Dec. 3, recommended four areas of improvement for Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County moving forward amidst the pandemic. It also highlighted the demand for METRO even during months most strained by the pandemic as ridership on local bus and light rail “never dipped below 43%.”

Over 4.5 million reside in the “backbone of the region’s deeply affordable transportation network.” 2020’s Transportation Equity Demand Index identified that people in the eastern southeastern, and southwest areas of Houston and

Greater Greenspoint, have the highest need for more affordable transportation options based on the 15 socio-economic-environment factors identified in the report.

Almost 867,000 people live in the high TEDI areas, including 304,000 households having one or more persons with a disability; 91,000 households that own no vehicles; 59,000 people commuting primarily by transit; and 430,000 jobs paying less than \$15,000 annually.

The area that needs the most improvement labeled “change route” like in 2018, is span of service. Specifically, the report called to extend service hours for 12 local bus routes that connect with

Transportation Equity Demand Index’s high-demand communities.

Riders in TEDI high-demand areas are usually essential workers or work at centers with extended hours such as airports, convention centers, Galleria-Uptown, higher education institutions, and the Texas Medical Center. Most fixed routes offer services all day, but frequency decreases past 6:00 p.m.

Anthony Herrera, started riding METRO from the Spring Park & Ride station to his job in the Medical Center because of the pandemic.

“The pandemic made me start riding,” Herrera said. Before the

pandemic, he used to carpool with his mom because their workplaces were only five minutes apart. Due to COVID-19 precautions in the workplace, Herrera’s mom started working from home, and he no longer had a ride to work.

For Herrera, the bus schedules have been “kind of unreliable” and the bus schedules are “always changing.”

Since the pandemic the bus schedule for his route 209 has reduced frequency from every 15 minutes to every hour. Span of service ends at 7 p.m., when buses ran until 10 p.m. before the pandemic, and the bus schedule now has a longer six-hour break midday.

Social dis-

tancing measures on all METRO rides, restrict the number of people who get on. In result, riders are forced to wait for the next bus, but after service hours, bus conductors must call in a back-up bus for the stranded bus riders. Twice, Herrera and other bus riders had to wait until 8 p.m., past bus route service hours, for an unscheduled back-up bus to arrive.

“Now that we’ve adjusted for the pandemic, the buses haven’t adjusted again to get more buses back.”

Herrera agrees with LINK Houston’s recommendation and suggests that METRO should increase span of service and frequency as more people adjust to the pandemic and ridership normalizes.

The second-to-most area needing attention, labeled “could be better,” is reliability. The report called to make 95% the new goal of local bus punctuality. Compared to the current on-time performance goal at a low 75%, real on-time performance in November 2018 was 74.6% of bus trips and 78.3% in February 2020, last data due to COVID-19 disruption.

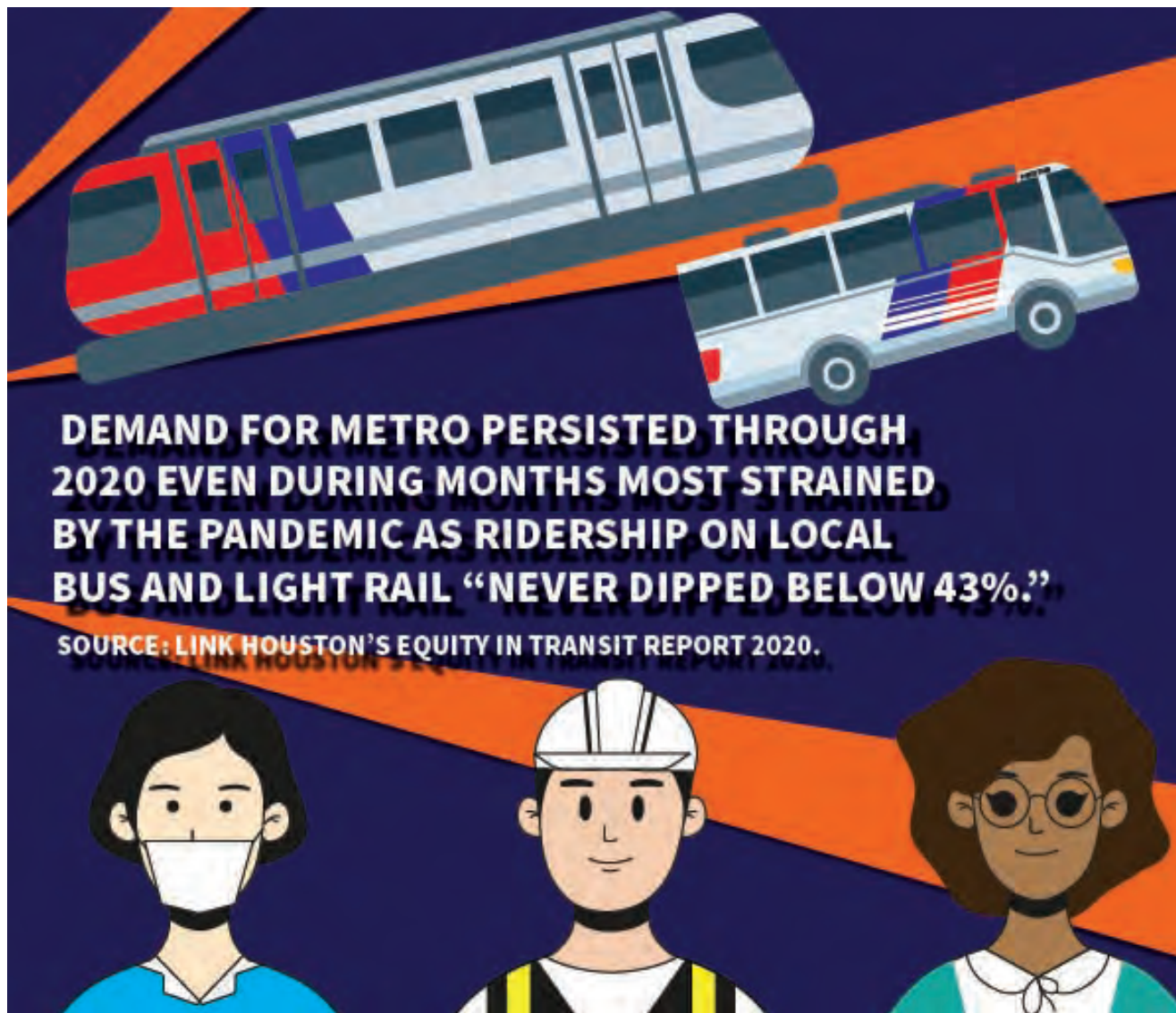
LINK Houston rated METRO’s accessibility and frequency as “on route” for

implementing on-the-ground accessibility upgrades in more than 312 transit stops in 2020 and increasing frequency on some routes to “above pre-COVID-19 levels.”

Examples include increasing frequency on the Route 3-Langley, making “several hundred transit stops on local bus routes” accessible, and opening METRO Rapid Silverline, the region’s first bus rapid transit line which serves riders in Uptown since August 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for METRO: less revenue, more expenses, staff safety, uncertain fiscal future, and “varying, continued demand for services.” METRO’s 2021 budget includes funds for some local bus-related projects, which “may improve reliability when in operation.”

Despite the pandemic’s strains on METRO, LINK Houston has applauded METRO’s upgrades and continued efforts to improve equity in transportation for Houstonians throughout the years. Houstonians can use LINK Houston as a resource to stay up to date with transportation projects in a city where equitable transportation still offers room for improvement.



Whitney Barrett

HISD waives STAAR, TELPAS still required

By Ann Margaret Lummus

Parents with children learning remotely grades K-4 can waive STAAR without consequence to their child's education plan. Grades 5-8 may take STAAR, however the outcome will not affect their grade progression. According to the Texas State Teachers Association's website, the TEA announced a formal opt-out option for the test is available even while a pandemic or natural

disaster is not happening.

Unlike K-8 students, high school students are still required to take STAAR in order to fulfill curriculum requirements for graduation. Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath said, "It's logistically impossible to allow children to take the exams remotely."

High school students learning remotely must attend

class on campus for STAAR testing May 4-7.

This rhetoric does not apply to students K-12 taking the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System, TELPAS, which is an essential precedent to the STAAR exam for non-native English speakers.

"TEA designed the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TEL-

PAS) and TELPAS Alternate to assess the progress that limited English proficient (LEP) students."

In Houston Independent School District, HISD, 16% of students are taking the TELPAS exam. The administration window for TELPAS is opened Feb. 22 to Apr. 2.

Clay Robison, spokesperson for the Texas State Teachers Association, which represents

about 68,000 state teachers said that the group believes standardized testing and testing-based accountability should end. Robison said the test discriminates against students of color, low-income students and students whose first language isn't English"

Unlike the STAAR test, the TELPAS test cannot be waived even for online remote students. HISD justifies

this, stating, "The score must be manually entered for each of the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing domains," meaning taking the test online appears defective due to a computer program. As a result, compared to the waived STAAR exam TELPAS will not be an exception for HISD students.

Utah charter school recants Black History opt-outs

By Amber Williams

On Feb. 5, a Utah Charter School, allowed parents to choose to remove students from the Black History Month curriculum after multiple parents made a request to do so. On Feb. 6, the decision was recanted a statement was released by Maria Montessori Academy. MMA Director, Micah Hirokawa, posted this statement in the "Utah Montessorians" Facebook group.

"Celebrating Black History is part of our tradition," Hirokawa stated.

"We regret that after receiving requests, an opt-out form was sent out concerning activities planned during this month of celebration... at this time no families are opting out of our planned activities and we have removed this option. In the future, we will handle all parental concerns on an individual basis. We are excited to celebrate the rich content of Black History Month at our school."

MMA is approximately 94% Caucasian per Census data. The Utah State

Board of Education data shows only 3 of MMA's 322 students are African American. However, with the director's statement, the school is still receiving backlash from its past choice. The Utah Jazz Organization, NBA basketball group that focuses on social and racial injustice through scholarships, as well as two of the organization's stars, Donovan Mitchell and Rudy Gobert, have made statements about MMA's decision.

"I don't know where to start,"

Mitchell stated on his Twitter. "Racism is taught... And the fact that kids are being told by their own parents to not learn about black history and black excellence is sickening and sad!! And this is just part of the problem."

Similarly, Gobert wrote on his Twitter Page. "Meanwhile, kids can't be opted out of the many lies that are being 'taught' the rest of the year!"

With MMA's decision and withdrawal of Black History opt-outs, the issue gained the

attention of Congressman Blake Moore, who has also made a statement on Feb. 7.

"I share the disappointment and sadness at the news that some in the Ogden area community sought to opt-out of Black History Month lessons and events," Moore wrote on his website. "I am heartened that our local school reversed its decision under the guidance of strong leadership. While I have not reviewed the curriculum myself, I strongly believe we cannot learn American history without

learning Black history," he said.

The MMA's decision also gained the Ogden NAACP branch's attention. Posted by education reporter for the Standard Examiner, Emily Anderson, NAACP's statement read, "While this decision was recently reversed, we find its very consideration troubling," the Twitter statement began. "We welcome the MMA to engage in dialogue with the Ogden NAACP and revisit its commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion."

AI enters legal system

By Shirley Bright

Artificial Intelligence is almost a normal part of our lives. AI has names like Alexa, Siri or "Hey Google." We use Alexa and Siri to set timer, create and send text messages, or find new recipes. AI may or may not be totally normal, but now AI is ready to enter

the legal system with the name of Claudius.

Claudius is the creation of Joseph J. Avery, JD, president and CEO Of Claudius Legal Intelligence, Inc. and Ph.D. student at Princeton University. Avery formerly practiced civil law in Virginia but now is studying biases in

criminal law. Joseph and his team gathered tons of data for the criminal law and built an AI for predicting law cases outcomes. This led to parallel question of what types of bias - and how much - were civil law cases.

The challenge of building an AI

for civil law is having access to information from cases.

"Many times civil cases are settled out of court and are subject to non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements," he said.

Other times, the cases are settled in court, but the results are not published or stored in a manner amenable to review.

"This presents a challenge for the lawyers' access to data," Avery said.

Many civil case lawyers only have access to the files which they have settled and are left to fend for themselves against large insurance companies. Claudius levels the playing field for attorneys and as Avery emphasizes, allows

access to the justice system for everyone, by the application of a federated learning technique. This allows Claudius's algorithm to be trained across multiple decentralized databases. This is done without exchanging data samples and keeps the information private and confidential.

Continued on page 12

Six dead in Dallas-Fort Worth crash due to icy roads

By Shaheryar Khan

Six people lost their lives because of the 133-vehicle accident on Feb. 11 on Interstate 35W near Fort Worth due to freezing weather conditions. First responders took at least 60 people to

local hospitals due to the historic winter storm that dropped freezing rain, sleet, and snow across the state of Texas.

Officials said the crash spanned a half-mile between

Northeast 28th Street and Northside Drive. Over several hours, there were 26 fire department vehicles, 80 police cars, and 13 ambulances on the scene. As first responders arrived, the

accident continued to expand.

The treacherous roads caused cars to slip and slide on the road colliding with one another.

The most major blow to the accidents was

when more than a dozen semi-trucks periodically lost control and rammed into the cars that remained stationary due to the initial crash.

A representative from MedStar,

one of the ambulance providers, said that many of the people involved in the wreck were health care workers.

Continued on page 12

Cruz faces backlash for vacationing amidst disaster

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

On Feb. 17, Texas Senator Ted Cruz headed to a resort in Cancún, Mexico amidst Storm Uri that left millions without power. After photos leaked on Twitter and other social media platforms, Cruz returned the following afternoon, stating that his family also lost heat and electricity, and that he merely accompanied his family.

Prior to returning to Texas, Cruz stated, "With school cancelled for the week, our girls asked to take a trip with friends. Wanting to be a good dad, I flew

down with them last night and am flying back this afternoon."

However, many critics noted that the large suitcase Cruz had returning seemed much too large for an overnight trip. Afterwards, an anonymous source exposed that Cruz was initially booked to return home on Saturday. The return ticket was not booked until Thursday morning, the same day he returned.

Cruz acknowledged his initial plans, claiming that he would have worked remotely and engaged via Zoom,

but "I needed to be here [in Texas], and that's why I came back."

Later, text message screenshots revealed that Senator Cruz' wife, Heidi Cruz hastily planned a vacation to the Ritz-Carlton in Cancún which costs \$309 a night. Notably, no one in the group chat responded to her invitation. The texts were leaked by an anonymous source who is suspected to be one of the neighbors included in the group chat. More photos were leaked, showing the family's poodle, Snowflake, the who

was left home alone.

Cruz acknowledged the social media backlash trending on Twitter and viral on every social media platform.

"As it became a bigger and bigger firestorm, it became all the more compelling that I come back." Cruz also said that he didn't want criticism about this trip to distract from the real issues Texas was facing.

Cruz's vacation left dozens of Republican and Democratic politicians in utter shock, including Galveston Mayor Craig Brown who

said, "If he was in the midst of this and he was experiencing this, I think there would be a different attitude."

Robert Mann, former Louisiana communications director during Hurricane Katrina, said "It defied all common and political sense to leave the state for anywhere at a time like this, much less take a vacation to a toasty, warm spot like Cancun. It's among the dumbest, most callous things I've ever seen a politician do."

Even Ray Sullivan, an Austin Republican who was

chief of staff to former Gov. Rick Perry said, "People expect their elected officials to be fully engaged during a crisis."

The winter freeze left at least 30 Americans dead, and left many Houstonians without water or electricity for over a week. Upon his return home, protestors were waiting, chanting "Resign! Resign!"

After seeing the outrage in Texas, Cruz said, "In hindsight, if I understood how it would be perceived, the reaction people would have, obviously I wouldn't have done it."

AOC, Beto aid Texans in need

By Aansa Usmani

On Feb. 15 - 19, Texas experienced a historic snowstorm, leaving many without power, water, or heat. Amid the freezing temperatures, Senator Ted Cruz chose to "cruz off" to Cancún rather than assisting vulnerable individuals or contacting constituents.

Despite returning a day later, claiming he only "wanted to be a good dad," Cruz' remarks were overshadowed by the actions of his former Democratic rival, Beto O'Rourke,

and Congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14). The two Democratic individuals raised a combined total of \$5 million for struggling Texans in separate ActBlue fundraisers.

On Feb. 20, Ocasio-Cortez—alongside her Democratic colleagues, Representatives Sylvia Garcia and Al Green—arrived to aid vulnerable Texans. According to CNN, Ocasio-Cortez, Green, and Garcia "visited food distribution centers, water delivery

sites and toured the damage left behind from an unprecedented storm."

Known for their progressive stances in Congressional legislation, the three lawmakers emphasized the importance of unity and charity towards those severely impacted by the historic freezes.

"It's one thing to read about what's going on, but it's another thing... to see the damage for ourselves... Let's try to get this assistance out the door [and help] as

much as people need and as quickly as we can."

Across the Lone Star State, O'Rourke's Powered People, a nonprofit political action committee, ran a volunteer-based phone bank, contacting senior citizens in need of essential supplies. By Feb. 18, O'Rourke's organization connected almost 800,000 individuals.

He tweeted, "BIG THANKS to the volunteers who made over 784,000 phone calls to senior citizens

in Texas today. You helped to connect them with water, food, transportation, and shelter. And you made sure that they knew we were thinking about them and that they matter to us."

O'Rourke's successful efforts prompted speculation of a potential governorship run in 2022.

As of now, O'Rourke stands by his previous statement, "Whether or not I run, I will do everything in my power to elect a Governor who looks out for everyone, keeps Texans safe, answers to the

people instead of the special interests & guarantees that we all have equal opportunity to achieve our best in life."

Ocasio-Cortez's and O'Rourke's efforts prove that southern hospitality and sympathy transcends states and party lines. Climate disasters call for unity, not escape from responsibility—these are all lessons Cruz must learn if Texas were to suffer from additional natural disasters within his tenure.

Dallas-Fort Worth crash (continued)

Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office released the identities of the six people who died from the crash.

Those six include: Tiffany Louann Gerred (34), Tarrant county clerk; Aaron Luke Watson (45) managing partner at Jason's Deli; Ray Vardy (49), First United Methodist Church leader; Ta-

mara Fatima Mendoza Querales (46), Venezuelan staffing agent; William Darrel Williams (54) of Pahoa Hawaii and Michael Henry Wells (47) of Justin, Texas.

Like many immigrants, Tamara Fatima Mendoza Querales was a single mother who brought her daughter and mother to the United States, to live a better

life. Her daughter, Pamela Ly Anglero, started a GoFundMe writing about her late mother.

"She was amazing and noble to everyone. Even if people were bad to her, she would always treat them the same; transmitting good vibes, positivity and her beautiful smile would light up everything," said Anglero.

Fort Worth Police Chief Neil Noakes issued a statement, "The scene we saw today is, probably, unlike anything any of us have seen, and we pray to God, we never see it again. Our hearts, our thoughts, our prayers go out to everyone negatively affected by this tragic incident,"

As the first responders took the

injured people to the hospitals, buses came to transport people who did not need medical attention immediately. The weather was under 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

Texas is notorious for its hot weather is always prepared for the harsh heated conditions they are faced with every year. However, unlike their northern

neighbors, Texans are not prepared for arctic-level temperatures. Texans have not experienced weather conditions like this for over 40 years. The Texas Department of Transportation issued a list of driving percussions amid the winter storm.

For more information, visit <https://www.txdot.gov/>

AI enters legal system (continued)

Claudius was created to be a "co-counsel" for personal injury law firms. As a former practicing attorney, Avery issues the disclaimer, "Claudius is not licensed to practice law, and it does not practice law or provide legal advice."

Claudius is designed to assist firms in the painstaking efforts of predicting case value to inform decision-making or the probable outcome of a case. Avery explains, Claudius's algorithm is designed for fairness, trustworthiness,

and it incorporates a number of techniques, including predictive modeling and natural language processing. This AI helps firms optimize their intake and settlement decisions. The amount of data available, the elimination of research time and greater settlement for the firms ultimately leads to greater settlement for the clients.

Avery and his team launched this innovative technological tool in the summer of 2020. As Joseph carefully reiterated, access to justice and finding the biases in

the system was the purpose of his team's initial research.

Avery said, "They want to make a difference."

Texas has a large volume of active small claims. But Texas, like many states, is working hard to address access to justice issues.

But as Avery re-emphasizes, "Not everyone who needs legal help or even quasi-legal guidance gets it."

There were no direct indicators of why there were significant number of cases in Texas.

Speculation could be factors of culture, economic or the political climate of the state.

To address the issue, Avery and his team are putting Claudius to work for all Texans. If someone is pursuing a small claim and have decided to do so without an attorney, Claudius is here to help. Available through GetPaidNow and powered by Claudius, the access to justice tool is completely free. Through the simple and intuitive self-service portal, Claudius will learn all

about your injury and the facts surrounding your case. It will rely upon past cases, academic research, and its proprietary computational AI process to estimate what your case is worth. And it then will guide you through its document generator to resolve your claim or, if you decide you need legal help, connect you with the perfect attorney. In short, Claudius will get you where you want to be—and for free.

Claudius' namesake was inspired by the Roman Emperor Claudius. He was the first emperor who allow

claimants or defendants to hire a skilled orator to speak for them. Claudius and its applications are the beginning of the possibilities for AI in the legal system. Avery and his team of students from Princeton, UPenn, Rutgers, Michigan and Berkeley, are looking to expand. Students interested in computer science, business, marketing or the legal system are encouraged to contact Avery for more information.

Interested students can contact Avery and his team at: hello@claudius.ai.

Rush Limbaugh leaves complicated legacy By Salvador Hernandez

On Feb. 17, Rush Limbaugh died of lung cancer after a year-long fight. Throughout his career, many came to despise Limbaugh for his views on politics which were often interpreted as hateful and bigoted. There are also those who admired the man's bombastic persona and pioneer spirit. Regardless of the hatred

and admiration that Limbaugh received throughout his career, his impact remained constant in the areas of alternative media and the political landscape.

On Aug. 1, 1988, Limbaugh's talk radio show launched its national syndication to millions of listeners in the United States. Limbaugh's meteoric rise is often

cited as the spark which brought new life into AM radio, once thought to be a dying form of media. Limbaugh's ultimate contribution to radio was solidified with his induction into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1993.

Limbaugh's political views were often controversial including his support of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and

his disagreement with LGBTQ+ marriage rights. Limbaugh even gave rise to the "birther movement" which spread the false allegation that former President Barack Obama was not born on United States soil.

Limbaugh's impact in politics was felt heavily in the GOP. Noteworthy, the GOP made Limbaugh an honorary member of Congress

after the 1994 Mid-term Election, ending decades of Democrat-led chambers in both the House and the Senate. Limbaugh gave many individuals their start in politics and radio from the likes of Mark Levin, Erick Erickson and Sean Hannity.

A number of individuals chimed in on his passing with remarks ranging from hatred to praise.

Many praised his contributions to radio such as financial advisor, Dave Ramsey to political analyst, Ben Shapiro. Others expressed a lack of sympathy for his passing including political analyst, Cenk Uygur, and entertainer, Louis Virtel.

Continued on page 15

Governor Abbott reverses mask mandate, business restrictions, opens Texas 100%

By Indira Zaldivar

Governor Greg Abbot faced strong criticism after issuing an executive order on March 2 that ends the statewide mask mandate and allows businesses to operate at full capacity in the Lone Star State starting March 10. With only less than 7% of the Texan population fully vaccinated, health officials warn Texans to keep wearing masks and social distancing, while disappointed local officials ask the governor to reconsider.

“It is now time to open Texas 100%,”

Abbott said during the press conference in Lubbock, Texas. “All businesses of any type are allowed to open 100%.”

Sporting events, concerts, and other entertainment events typically accounting for large gatherings, can also operate at full capacity, a spokesperson confirmed. For the first time since July 2, Texans will not have to wear masks in public and cannot face penalties anywhere for failing to.

The order gives businesses and individuals full leeway in how to

conduct operations and navigate the pandemic, meaning, businesses can require customers to wear masks and implement additional safety protocols in their establishments or not.

UHD student Jesse Rodriguez, who works in the restaurant industry, praised Abbott’s decision.

“Had the governor waited any longer, I believe Texas’ 43,000 plus eating and drinking places might’ve been in grave danger of closing, if they have not already.”

County judges may re-

quire COVID-19 mitigations only if COVID-19 hospitalizations in any of Texas’ 22 hospital regions rise above 15% of the capacity in that region for seven consecutive days. Even when local restrictions trigger, businesses must be allowed to operate at a minimum 50% capacity.

While the state was averaging 227 COVID-19 deaths per day the week of the executive order, Abbott said that state mandates are “no longer needed.”

The state is far from herd immunity, which health experts

have said requires from 75% to 90% of the population to be immune. However, only 6.8% of the Texan population is fully vaccinated.

“I feel that it is irresponsible for a governor to permit returning to normalcy, when herd immunity isn’t achieved,” UHD student Aansa Usmani said.

Abbott’s decision also defies recommendations by local authorities. A joint letter by Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, sent to Abbott before his announce-

ment, asked Abbott to keep the mask mandate.

Turner and Hidalgo highlighted the greater need to preserve safety measures as a study shows Houston is the first city in the U.S. to record positive cases of all identified variants of the novel coronavirus. The new variants associate a potential for a future spike in cases.

Dr. David Lakey, vice chancellor for health affairs and chief medical officer at the University of Texas System and a member of the Texas Medical Association’s COVID-19 task force said the variants “do seem to be more transmissible.”

Continued on page 14

Capitol officer receives Congressional Gold Medal

By Emily Zaldivar

On Feb. 12, a Congressional Gold Medal was approved by legislation to be awarded to officer Eugene Goodman for the heroism he displayed during the siege of the Capitol on Jan. 6.

Officer Goodman went viral due to footage taken by Washington Post’s Igor Bobic, that showed Goodman holding off a mob of insurrectionists by himself. The video shows Goodman climbing a flight of stairs with the mob right behind him as he stops on the landing and glances to his left into a hall that leads to the Senate chambers—where the door was still unlocked and unguarded.

Goodman

used his radio to tell other officers, “Second floor, second floor,” as he starts backing up into the hall on his right and climbing up the stairs, still with the crowd at his heels. Due to his quick thinking, he led the mob right into the waiting backup officers and away from members of Congress.

Additional footage was later found from Capitol surveillance that showed Officer Goodman running past Senator Mitt Romney while telling him, “It’s not safe here. Go back in. You’ll be safer in the chamber.” The Senator later expressed his gratitude towards the officer.

“I expressed my appreciation to him for coming to my

aid and getting me back into the path of safety.”

Senator Romney is known for being unpopular amongst Trump supporters and was said to be a possible target during the siege.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer introduced legislation to award Officer Goodman with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor, on Friday evening at the end of the day’s impeachment hearing.

“I think we can all agree that Eugene Goodman deserves the highest honor Congress can bestow,” said Schumer.

Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell, agreed stating he

was “pleased to join the Majority Leader’s request.”

The Senate passed it by unanimous consent as well as gave the officer a standing ovation.

Other senators also expressed their gratitude for Goodman’s heroism. Maryland Senator

Chris Von Hollen stated, “Officer Goodman defended our democracy and saved lives of senators and staff.” He continued, “I’m glad the Senate acted quickly on our legislation to recognize the quick thinking and bravery of this great Marylander with a Congressional Gold

Medal. I urge my colleagues in the House to quickly follow suit.”

Officer Goodman has since been promoted to acting deputy House sergeant-at-arms and was later seen at the inauguration escorting Vice President Kamala Harris.



Officer Eugene Goodman charges forward, as he leads he insurrectioners away from Senate Chambers and toward awaiting security reinforcements. Photo courtesy of Yahoo News.

Glacier breaks in Himalayas, 165 missing, 31 dead

By Shaheryar Khan

On Feb. 7 in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, part of a glacier of the Himalayas broke off, causing an avalanche and massive flooding, killing at least 31 people and leaving more than 165 missing.

The incident occurred when the Himalayan glacier of the Nanda Devi mountain broke off and descended towards the Dhauliganga river. Floods followed and destroyed the Rishiganga Dam, causing further damage to the area. Many

plant workers were trapped while villagers around the area evacuated.

The deadly incident seemed unprecedented, but the local villagers predicted something like this was bound to happen. Kundan Singh Rana, a local farmer, spoke with Agence France-Press (AFP) on his thoughts.

“The rivers, mountains and trees are like our gods and any sacrilege will have consequences,” Rana said, referring to the power plants and

the numerous other projects in the area. Although climate change is the leading cause of the glacier breaking off in the Himalayas, construction projects are also to blame.

The construction of hydroelectric plants and a highway spanning almost 500 miles has put the lives of the local villagers at risk. More than 75 small and large power projects are operational in Uttarakhand.

The AAAS predicted that flash floods are more likely to occur. Still, the

construction projects continue to go forth. In 2013, 6,000 people lost their lives in Uttarakhand due to flash floods.

The Scientific Committee in India urged the construction of hydro plants to stop. Still, the government continues to ignore their advice.

Ranjan Panda, a volunteer for the Combat Climate Change Network, spoke with Reuters about the Indian government’s negligence.

“The government should no longer ignore warnings

from experts and stop building hydropower projects and extensive highway networks in this fragile ecosystem,” said Panda.

It is factually proven that climate change exists. Global temperatures have reached record highs and lows over the past century due to human consumption of fossil fuels. Satellite images gathered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) predicted the Himalayan glaciers to melt at an alarming rate. AAAS said that the

glaciers are melting twice as fast as they were in 2000 because of global warming.

It is essential to realize that excessive building is detrimental to the ecosystem and those who have lived there for generations. The villagers commented on AFP, telling them that they do not benefit anything from the infrastructure. Climate change continues to occur at an alarming rate, directly affecting the ones most vulnerable.

Governor Abbott reverses mask mandate (continued)

“That is a message for us to take on that personal responsibility and wear the mask and prevent the spread of those variants, and we do need to monitor that,” Lakey said. “If those numbers do go up, and they result in additional Texans being hospitalized, the state will need to rethink its overall strategy.”

While Abbott asked Texans to not abandon their personal responsibility, and act with vigilance, many people have voiced concerns that the reversal will put them in more danger as people will not be penalized for not wearing masks.

UHD student, Shaheryar Khan said Abbott’s decision feels like a “slap on the face.”

“It makes it seem that the people who practiced social distancing, wore face

masks, limited social gatherings etc. are wronged,” Khan said. “It shows that being ignorant is being rewarded.”

For Varah Thornton, UHD student, lifting the mask mandate “liberates those who do not take this pandemic seriously” and “endangers” the lives of people in her immediate family who belong to the high-risk category.

“It’s a really dangerous decision that removes protections from the most vulnerable,” Thornton said. “It endangers lives like my family’s who’d all love to receive the vaccine but cannot.”

One family member cannot receive the vaccine due to restrictions set by the family member’s medication. Another family member, Thornton’s dad, is

currently hospitalized, and she worries that the hospital personnel who has been “very good about precautions” are put at a higher risk with the recent decision.

“Patients in critical condition like him are put at risk when those working to protect him have to operate in an outside world full of chaos, hoping that they don’t unknowingly bring the virus to the very people they’re caring for,” Thornton said.

For people in the health and science community, the governor’s decision seems illogical and a step back in the battle against COVID-19. That is why some believe Abbott’s intentions are political. According to local officials, this is Abbott’s indignant attempt to take attention away from the power outage crisis in

Texas that left at least 25 people dead in Harris County alone, and nearly 4.5 million customers in Texas without electricity during the week of Valentine’s Day.

“At best, today’s decision is wishful thinking,” Hidalgo said. “At worst,

it is a cynical attempt to distract Texans from the failures of state oversight of our power grid.”

“The governor is wrong to roll back the statewide mask order which is not supported by the medical professionals, science or data,”

Turner said. “Is the governor’s statement today an attempt to deflect from the winter storm system-wide state leadership failure? Yes.”

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To submit pieces or for inquiries about joining The Dateline, email the editor, Jaida Doll: dollj1@gator.uhd.edu

Earthquakes strike Australia, Japan By Riyasa Shrestha

A 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck in the South Pacific on Feb. 11, generating a small tsunami that caused no damage to other regional island nations. Two days later, Feb. 13, a powerful earthquake hit Japan with its epicenter off the coast of Fukushima.

Locals in the Vanuatu capital Port Villa, Australia said they felt the quake but there was no damage from either the shake or subsequent waves. The Australian

Bureau of Meteorology confirmed the brewing tsunami in a tweet. They warned of a threat to Lord Howe Island, which is about 340 miles east of Australia's mainland, but there was no need for evacuations. New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency urged residents to avoid the beaches, rivers and estuaries from Ahipara to Bay of Islands, Great Barrier Island and from Matata to Tolaga Bay.

The tsunami threat passed for New

Zealand after 7 A.M. on Thursday after modelling showed decreased tsunami amplitudes at North Cape, Great Barrier Island and the East Cape. The US Tsunami Warning System issued a tsunami watch for American Samoa and there were potential tsunamis in other regions including Vanuatu, Fiji and New Zealand.

In contrast, the strong Japan earthquake left nearly a million households without power across the Fukushima region

and forced road closures and train service suspensions. The quake triggered landslides and uprooted sections of a major expressway. There were no reports of irregularities at nuclear plants.

Japan's meteorological agency (JMA) said the earthquake was believed to be an aftershock of the massive 2011 9.0 magnitude quake, that caused the country's

worst nuclear disaster on record. As a result of the quake, three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant melted down, releasing radioactive materials into the air. More than 20,000 people died or went missing in the 2011 quake and tsunami, while hundreds of thousands more lost their homes. Aftershocks of a large earthquake can continue over a

period of many years.

The residents on the coast evacuated their homes and headed for higher ground, despite reassurances from officials.

"Even if people say we don't need to worry about a tsunami, I won't buy it. I learned from my bitter experience 10 years ago, and that's why I evacuated," a resident told Japanese news agency, Kyodo.

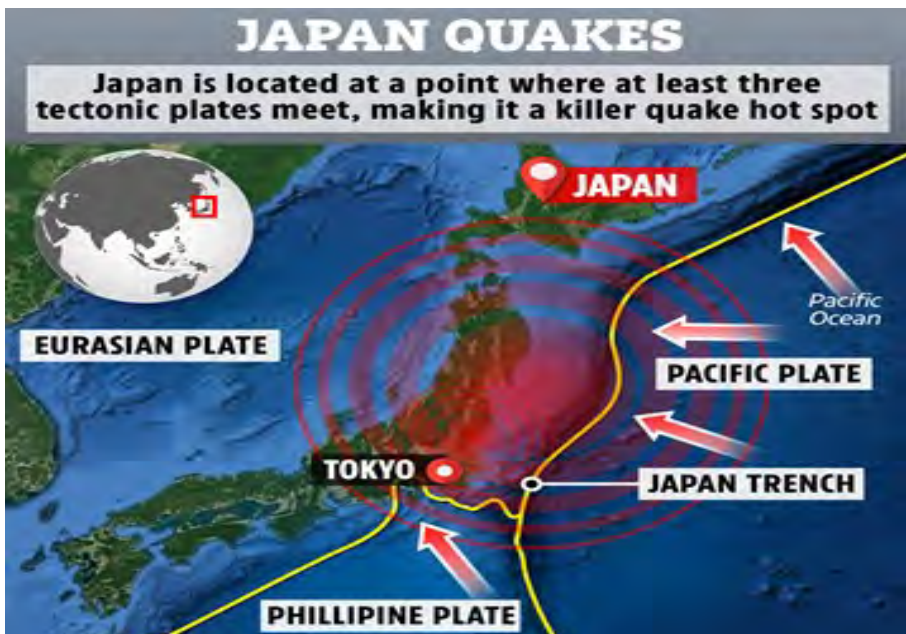


Photo courtesy of The Sun

Limbaugh (continued)

In a tweet, author and columnist to The Guardian, Jessica Valenti, commented on Limbaugh's controversial segments and his death.

"Rush Limbaugh had a segment called 'AIDS Update' set to music where he mocked dying gay people, so I don't really want [to] hear about 'speaking ill of the dead' today," said Valenti.

In another

tweet, standup comedian and talk show host of "The Tim Dillon Show," Tim Dillon commented on the legacy that Limbaugh left in the entertainment industry.

"Rush was one of the greatest talk radio voices in history. Many hated him and will rejoice in his death (should be allowed and sort of the point of being controversial), but his

ability to do what he did revolutionized the medium. RIP," said Dillon.

Limbaugh was an avid philanthropist giving generously to charities. In 2007, he gave \$4.2 million to the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation. The charity aids the children of Marines and police officers who were killed in the line of duty.

Meghan Markle wins lawsuit against UK tabloid By Emily Saldivar

Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex reigned victorious after a long legal battle with the U.K. publishers, Associated Newspapers, Ltd. Markle initially sued for invasion of privacy and copyright infringement after the outlets published parts of a private letter sent from the Duchess to her father, Thomas Markle in August 2018.

Markle's legal team applied for a

summary judgment after citing that the Associated Newspapers had "no real prospect" of winning such a case, according to documents seen by the Hollywood Reporter. On Feb. 11, Justice Warby issued his ruling in favor of Markle and agreed to her statement, stating that the publication of her Markle's private letter was "a plain and serious breach of her rights of privacy."

The judge's

ruling dismissed Associated Newspapers' defense and effectively stopped the case from going to trial. The legal team for the publication claimed unfairness as Markle had consulted with Kensington Palace staff when drafting the letter, hinting at Markle's intentions of publishing the letter in the future.

Associated Newspapers commented, "No truly private letter from

a daughter to father would require any input from the Kensington Palace communications team."

The Duchess of Sussex released her own statement to ET Canada that read, "After two long years of pursuing litigation, I am grateful to the courts for holding Associated Newspapers and the Mail On Sunday to account for their illegal and dehumanizing practices."

Markle also

described the content of the publication as being the "opposite" of the "reliable, fast-checked, high-quality news," the world needs right now.

Markle ended her statement in high spirits saying, "I share this victory with each of you—because we all deserve justice and truth, and we all deserve better."

Markle also thanked her mom, the legal team, and "especially Jenny Afia

for her unrelenting support throughout this process."

Her husband, the Duke of Sussex also had his own legal battle in which he was similarly victorious, though he received a public apology and a settlement for "damages" which he donated to the Invictus Game Foundation.

Welcoming the Year of the Ox

By Argenis Nino

Celebrated by more than 20% of the human population, the Lunar New Year is one of the most recognizable global festivities. It is also known as Chinese New Year in China because it is based on the ancient Chinese lunar calendar.

Although it may sound complex to people who are not familiar with it, essentially the lunar calendar counts all occurring moon cycles from one spring to the next. Astronomical records that have been found with Chinese oracles' bones suggest that the calendar has existed since the 14th century.

Animals were

thought to be introduced through the Silk Road. However, another story that has garnered more attention is the banquet of the twelve zodiac animals. It focuses on the legend of the Jade Emperor and his invitation of all the animals to enjoy a feast with him. The 12 that showed up were the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. This is the order they arrived at the banquet.

In honor of these animals, the Jade Emperor gifted each of them a year to be celebrated and recognized by the people. Another origin story is that of Buddha

himself setting up a race of animals to see who would be most worthy. The zodiac recognized today consisted of the twelve finishing up the race and earning a place by Buddha. Those who follow the Chinese zodiac tend to be influenced heavily that personality and being is connected to their year.

The year 2021 is dedicated to the Ox. The Ox was supposed to be the first animal in the zodiac so it would have been celebrated in 2020. However, the origin says that the Rat had tricked the Ox by piggybacking on it and jumped to be first at the Jade Emperor's banquet.

In China, the Ox is valued highly for its history in farming and agriculture. There are mainly positives for those born in the year of the Ox as they are recognized as being hardworking and honest. Humility is also a notable trait as they rely on their work to speak for itself rather than boast. They carry themselves through logic and make great leaders.

The new year preparations for the Ox began in the Little Year, a preparation from Feb. 4 to 11. Normally around this time homes are tidied up to send away negative energy and spirits. Prayers are also an important aspect of this preparation

phase. On Feb. 12, the Spring Festival takes place and is the central boom of the entire fest. Provinces across China are filled with red, a lucky color, fireworks, and grand banquets and parades.

Like holidays in the United States, the Lunar New Year is expected to be a time of reunion for families. The name Spring Festival is because it is recognized as the beginning of spring. There is also blessing from one neighbor to another and an overall positive atmosphere where bad fortune is not thought of.

Feb. 26 is the day of the Lantern Festival. Crafting lanterns to be sent away with hopes and prayers for the year is

the biggest event of the day. Along with setting the lights free, the full moon adds a sense of completion to the cycle to begin again. An interesting superstition is that the word "lanterns" (天灯 / tiān dēng) is similar in sound to "add children" (添丁 / tiān dīng) in Mandarin. Because of this, some couples and families light lanterns with this aspiration.

A person can look up their zodiac sign which is filled with information for relationships, career, fortune, what foods to eat, numbers you should seek, and finer details. As always, 新年快乐 or Happy New Year!

Super Bowl super surge never happened

By Natalie Beauchemin

When it was announced Super Bowl LV was not canceled but opting to take safety precautions, many were skeptical. News sources such as Fox, CNBC, New York Times, US News, and many others published articles about the coming

COVID-19 surge the Super Bowl would cause. Hospitals in Tampa prepared for the Super Bowl super surge. It has been over two weeks since the big game. Where is the COVID-19 surge? Well, it did not happen. With health professionals warning of Super Bowl parties

and the game itself, the COVID-19 cases that followed were underwhelming. So why was there no surge?

For those physically at the game, many precautions were put in place. Super Bowl LV had the lowest attendance in Super

Bowl history, not due to lack of interest but because of social distancing. The NFL limited attendance in the 65,000 seat Raymond James Stadium to a mere 25,000, including 7,500 vaccinated health workers. The NFL customized entry points, making them larger for fans

attending and distributed kits including hand sanitizers and KN95 masks. There were extensive health screenings for staff to limit the spread of the virus.

"Luckily for us the Super Bowl took place when the pandemic was actually shrinking — when

the transmission rate in the community in the Tampa community was pretty low," said Dr. Edwin Michael, an epidemiologist and professor at the USF College of Public Health. "We are saying that the Super Bowl impact will be like 200... cases."

'The Mandalorian' star fired for controversial tweet

By Rachel Ann Preston

Gina Carano was removed from Lucasfilm's hit show "The Mandalorian" following a series of tweets that inspired the trending #FireGinaCarano hashtag on Twitter in early February.

Carano's tweets received backlash from "The Man-

dalian" fans when she shared a post comparing America's divided political belief to Nazi Germany. This comparison was the final straw for Lucasfilm in their choice to remove her from the franchise. The 'Nazi Germany' tweet followed other controversial social media choices she

made such as opting to put the words "boop/bob/beep" in her Twitter biography in place of her preferred pronouns. The bio was seen as Carano ridiculing trans people and she removed it soon after.

Carano has since spoken about the tweet, defending her opinion in

an interview with The Daily Wire. In the interview, she expressed that she only wanted to bring people together with the tweet, noting that she also loves the "spirit of the Jewish people." Carano also stated that the blip in her bio was not a stab at the trans community but a statement

against "cancel culture."

Carano hopes to use her newfound spotlight in the media to further speak out on "cancel culture," an interesting plot twist to the controversy around her own "cancellation," as she was fired from her role in "The Mandalorian."

Carano teamed up with The Daily Wire to produce and develop her own film, calling the film a "dream come true" in her interview. Although many may disagree with her new opportunities, she is looking forward to the future in a positive light.

The life and death of Johnny Pacheco By Salvador Hernandez

On Feb. 15, the world lost a talented musician, Johnny Pacheco, at the age of 85. He will be forever known as the man that revolutionized Latin American music. Pacheco, co-founder of Fania Records, brought the sounds and melodies of Salsa to New York and the masses.

In 1960, Pacheco released his first record, "Pacheco y su Charanga" an album that brought elements of his native

Dominican sound of Merengue infused with the music of Cuba. The resulting product was something new, something unmistakably Latino. In 1964, he would be one of the first recording artist to be signed to Fania Records.

Pacheco was known as a great musician, band leader, producer and businessman, yet most of his label mates regarded him as a friend and a mentor.

In a documentary on Pacheco's life

entitled "Yo Soy La Salsa" Rubén Blades commented on his impact in formalizing the genre and his importance to salsa prominence today.

"His ability as a producer, in order to help create what was out of the question the core of all that has to do with Salsa, in the history of salsa music, which was Fania Records in New York." Blades further went on to state "Without Johnny Pacheco we

would have to consider what may have happened [to salsa]."

The music was a product of the culture in New York sprung up by the injustices that Latinos faced at the time and a longing for their homelands.

In the 1960s, Pacheco amassed a massive amount of talent having the likes of Héctor Lavoe, Willie Colón, and Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez on Fania Records. The "Motown

of Salsa" was spectacular. Even Celia Cruz made an album under the record label called "Celia and Johnny" which gave Cruz a much wider audience appeal in the United States than in her native Cuba.

In an interview with Univision's "Gordo y la Flaca", Pacheco's wife commented on the words he wanted on his gravestone: "Here lies Johnny Pacheco against his will."

Johnny was a

man that brought his own unique brand of humor which he expressed through interviews and his music. His music serves as an inspiration to all Latinos around the world.

The documentary about his life "Yo Soy la Salsa" is a good entry to the genre and the various acts that gave salsa that unique touch of sentimentality and pride deep in the Latino movement of the 1960s.

Kiyme divorces By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

Kanye West and Kim Kardashian filed for divorce on Feb. 22. The marriage lasted just short of seven years. They began dating in 2012, became engaged in October of 2013 and married in May of 2014. Kim cited the reason for their divorce as "irreconcilable differences and the date of separation is to be determined.

This is Kardashian's third mar-

riage and West's first marriage. There were many rumors and guesses as to how the combined estate and finances of the star couple would be split. However, there is a prenuptial contract that allows both parties to keep their separate assets. Kardashian is reported to have asked the court to terminate the ability to award spousal support to either individual.

The divorcees are seeking joint legal custody of their four children North (7), Saint (5), Chicago (3), and Psalm (1). The split allegedly began in January, but Kardashian had not filed for divorce yet because she wanted to make sure she was "making the right decision for the kids." West is reported to be fine with joint custody and both are committed to co-par-

enting.

Kardashian also detailed how West began slowly crossing boundaries towards the end of their relationship on "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" where West opposed her 2019 Met Gala dress for being "too sexy," and throwing away some of her clothes, shoes, and sending her an email about the appropriate size of sunglasses. While this seemed overbearing, they still seemed to

function as a happy couple. Their relationship only started to deteriorate in the second half of 2020.

While the split is supposedly amicable, many sources claim that the divorce was imminent, and their romantic relationship was over for a while. A paparazzi photo captured the two last summer arguing in the car with Kardashian screaming and sobbing.

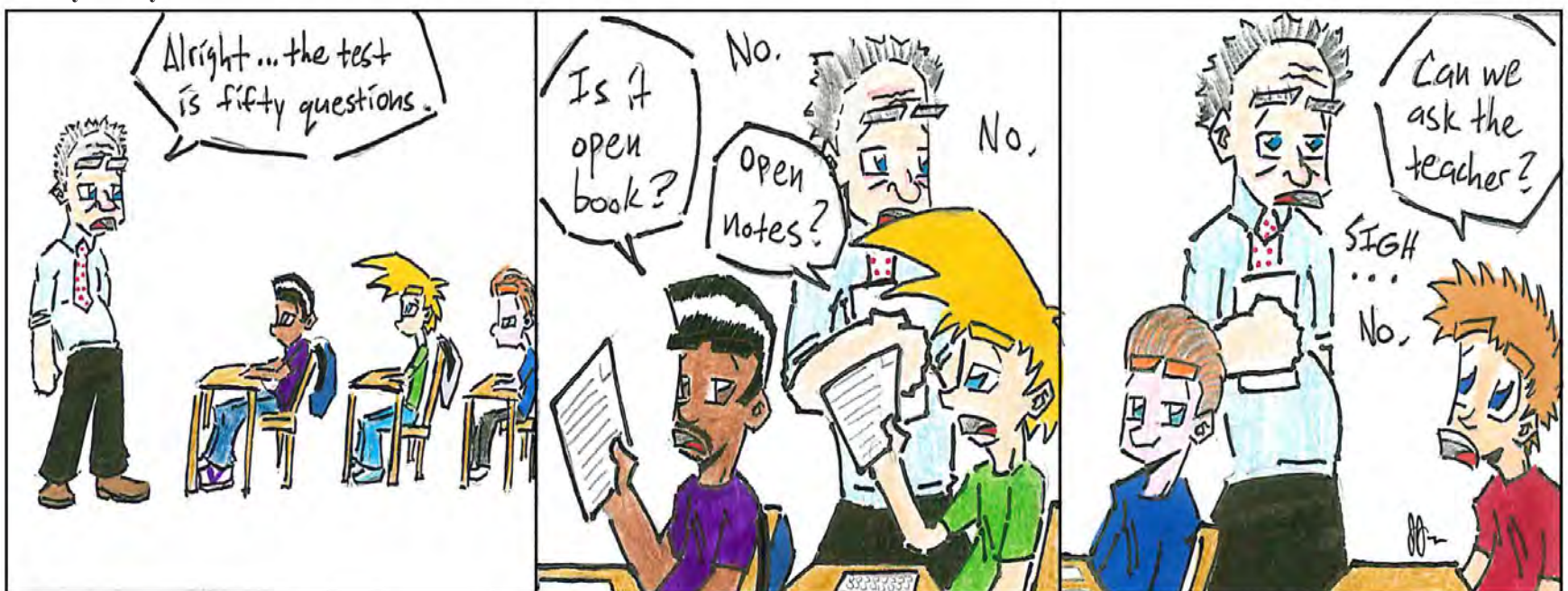
Back in 2018, Kanye West faced

extreme backlash for supporting Donald Trump and later claiming that slavery "was a choice." He released a song called "Wouldn't Leave" detailing Kim's response to the scandal. West's lyric said, "My wife callin', scream-in', say 'We bout to lose it all!'"

Both parties have yet to release public statements. They seem to be focusing on themselves.

A BOWLFUL OF COLLEGE

By Jeremy Jones



Reviews

Studio Ghibli's 'Earwig and the Witch' By Safa Abdallah

"Earwig and the Witch" is Studio Ghibli's first experimental 3D computer-generated film which was originally made for Japanese television. It was directed by Hayao Miyazaki's son, Goro Miyazaki. Released Feb. 3, in the US and Dec. 30, 2020 in Japan, "Earwig" is an adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones' British children's book. She was also the inspiration behind "Howl's Moving Castle."

Studio Ghibli is known worldwide for its beautiful animation and storytelling. Studio Ghibli films often leave its audience with inner peace and wanting more. "Earwig and the Witch" is no exception. A strong-

willed orphan, Earwig a.k.a. Ericka, gets adopted by two magical beings and finds herself immersed in a world full of magic.

The film opens to a red-haired witch (Kacey Musgraves/Sherina Munaf) being chased by someone hiding in a car. As the red-haired witch tries to lose her pursuers, the audience notices that she is carrying a baby. She drops the baby at an orphanage, then the film fast-forwards to a grown Ericka (Taylor Paige Henderson/Kokoro Hirasawa). Although she tries her best not to get adopted, as soon as the strange couple Bella Yaga (Vanessa Marshall/Shinobu Terajima) and the Mandrake (Richard

E. Grant/Etsuchi Toyokawa) saw her, they knew she would be perfect. Although Ericka finds herself in an unfamiliar home filled with magic and a black talking cat (Dan Stevens/Gaku Hamada) to keep her company, she continues on unafraid of the obstacles in front of her or the obstacles that might occur; she is always confident and knows what she wants.

In many Studio Ghibli films, the protagonists are marked in a way to show that they are indeed the protagonist. Like in another Studio Ghibli film, "Princess Mononoke," our protagonist is a female with red marks on her face wearing a necklace

and earrings that are probably made of bones and a fur shawl. In "Earwig", our protagonist is known right away from her two pony-tails that seem to stick up. It makes it seem as though she has antlers or even better, devils' horns.

There have been many negative reviews of this film because many believe it lacks the Studio Ghibli aesthetic. However, "Earwig" keeps the traditional Studio Ghibli characterization. Most, if not all of Studio Ghibli's films include a female protagonist that is strong-willed, a critical thinker, and is one who will take charge of her own destiny, according to Mary Rahjes, Aes-

thetics of Design student at the University of Colorado Boulder. In that case, "Earwig" checks all the above.

Earwig is a smart girl who is not afraid of all the change happening around her and instead is focused on making the best of her situation and getting what she wants.

A Studio Ghibli film would not be one without its beautiful scenery. The audience is met with dark vivid colors of red, beautiful magic greenery, and a quaint

little house full of magic. The best part about the food is that little demon bats can procure, from thin air, whatever dish they are asked to bring. And of course, they always look delicious.

The creators of "Earwig" did not want to stray too much from the book. Although the ending leaves us with many unanswered questions, the audience leaves knowing that everything will be alright and that is a staple for a Studio Ghibli film.



Photo courtesy of GKIDS Films via Youtube

Marvel Studios' 'WandaVision' By Emily Saldivar

Marvel Studios released a new series on Disney+ and it is a breath of fresh air from the usual fast paced action movies produced by the Disney owned studio.

"WandaVision" takes place after the events of "Avengers: Endgame" and follows Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) and the android Vision (Paul Bettany) in their new seemingly domestic life together in Westview, New Jersey,

despite Vision's death in the previous film. While most fans were drawing blanks due to the vague promotion that gave away very little of the show's plot, it is evident now that grief is a central theme brewing under the silly shenanigans and audience laugh track.

Considering that viewers saw Vision's death in "Avengers: Endgame"—not once but twice!—the series' lighthearted

and romantic disposition is a bit of a head-scratcher.

As executive producer Kevin Feige told Emmy, "Elizabeth and Paul were amazing actors... but never had a chance to dominate the narrative." This new stage makes way for the character development necessary for Wanda Maximoff, who has not yet been given her Scarlet Witch alias, and Vision, who has yet to be put to rest in

the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

While it is obvious that a sitcom is not the usual content pushed by Marvel, the studio put much preparation into producing a true-to-era show. Director and Executive Producer Matt Shakman told LRM Online how they "studied tone and style from era to era" to make sure each episode was accurate to the sitcom it emulated. The actors were not spared

either as they "had a sitcom bootcamp with the cast before we began," Shakman explained. "WandaVision" star, Elizabeth Olsen, described it as a "sitcom crash course," where they studied mannerisms and line delivery to give a realistic performance.

If that was not enough to anticipate, the additions to the cast certainly are. The return of Agent James "Jimmy" Woo (Randall Park) and Darcy

Lewis (Kat Dennings) brings back the usual snarky banter and witty one-liners that Marvel writing is known for. The appearances of Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris) and the overly friendly yet mysterious neighbor Agnes (Kathryn Hahn) give more fuel to the developing fan theories on just who is behind this alternate reality.

WandaVision streams every Friday on Disney+.

Reviews

The New York Times' 'Framing Britney Spears' By Sheila Delgado Rayo

"The New York Time Presents" is a documentary series that focuses on different topics each episode. The episode titled "Framing Britney Spears" focuses on Spears' evolution from her days before fame to the princess of pop, as she is now known. The docuseries episode focuses on the conservatorship that Britney has been under for the past 12 years and the scrutiny it is now facing.

Raised in Kentwood, Louisiana, Britney was born to a working-class family. They had to pinch before she cast in "The Mickey Mouse Club." Soon after its cancellation, she began singing, and before long, she was performing her first single that has since reached platinum level 14 times. She was simultaneously adored and heavily scrutinized by the public. The criticism only increased when at 21, her break up with Justin Timberlake painted a picture of Spears as a horrible woman.

In mid-2004, after dating for only three months, Britney was engaged and then married, Kevin Federline with whom she had two children. Shortly after giving birth to her second

child, Britney filed for divorce despite the marriage's short lifespan of two years. Federline was given sole custody and Britney got visitation rights.

In 2008 after a visit in January, Britney refused to give the children back to Federline and was consequently taken to a psychiatric hospital where her visitation rights were revoked. This incident caused her to be placed under a conservatorship. It was awarded to her father, Jamie Spears and a lawyer named Andrew Wallet despite the fact that her father had not been a major part of her life before this.

According to the documentary, conservatorship is defined as "a person, official, or institution designated to take over and protect the interests of an incompetent." Though Spears resisted being placed under a conservatorship, her one request was that it be a professional and not her father. Ultimately, this was ignored, and her father was named conservator over her estate and her person, placing her both financially and physically under her father's care.

Though Spears seemed fine with the conservator-

ship, the public got its first glimpse of how she really felt about it in MTV's "Britney: For the Record." Spears stated, "If I wasn't under the restraints that I'm under right now... I'd feel so liberated and feel like myself. When I tell them the way I feel, it's like they hear me, but they're really not listening. They're hearing what they wanna hear... It's like - it's bad. And I'm sad."

Since being placed under conservatorship, Britney's visitation rights have been restored. This was notable since it was her fear of not being able to see her children that is thought to have motivated her to accept the conservatorship.

Jamie Spears eventually was approved to get 1.5% of gross revenue related to performance and merchandise from her Las Vegas residency. Following the announcement of a second Las Vegas residency, Britney cancelled the series

of performances in January of 2019, a move regarded as the beginning of the end of the conservatorship. Shortly after, Andrew Wallet quit after asking for a raise and stating that the conservatorship should be viewed as "a hybrid business model."

After four months of radio silence from Britney, she made a post to her Instagram account claiming to be taking some "me time." But fans noticed that the message did not seem like something that Spears would say. Immediately after, TMZ broke the news that Britney voluntarily checked herself into a psychiatric facility one week prior. An anonymous source tipped off the creators of a Britney Spears-centered podcast, stating that she was in the facility since mid-January and was not there voluntarily. The podcast shared this tip with their followers and created a hashtag titled "FreeBritney."

Groups of fans began protesting to free Britney from the conservatorship she is under, claiming that she does not need it and that Jamie Spears is abusing his power. Despite this, Jamie claims that the #FreeBritney movement is a joke and that he knows what is best for his daughter.

The tabloids report that the relationship between Spears and her father is strained and that she is looking for a way to remove her father from her conservatorship. Soon after, a restraining order was placed on Jamie Spears by Federline. He later stepped down as conservator of Spears' person claiming it was due to health problems, though he continued to be conservator of her estate.

In August 2020 Spears went to court indicating that she would like a bank to become the conservator of her estate instead of her father. While Spears' lawyers cited the

problems that she has with her father, Jamie Spears' lawyers attempted to smooth things over and claim that everything was fine.

In November 2020, the judge decided not to remove Jamie Spears from head of conservator of Spears estate. Instead, the judge added a new co-conservator, Bessemer Trust, a wealth manager chosen by Spears, herself. As the court disputes remain ongoing, no one knows what is going to happen to Britney in the coming years. This documentary offers a peak into the life that she has lived and how she was placed under conservatorship in the first place. However, after 12 years of the conservatorship, Britney is beginning to fight back. Though it is not often that a conservatee is able to successfully rid themselves of a conservatorship, it is not slowing Spears or her fans.

For a deeper look at the #FreeBritney movement that has taken over social media, "Framing Britney Spears" is streaming on Hulu.



Photo courtesy of The Musician Network

ERCOT failed to protect Texans from winter storm, hurt low-income Texans most

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

On Feb. 15, ERCOT declared that it would start rolling blackouts to conserve energy, but for millions of Texans, the blackouts were not rolling. Many, namely those in low-income areas, stayed without power for over 72 hours. The lack of electricity, food, and running water combined with the poorly insulated homes was a recipe for disaster.

A Houston family tried to heat their apartment using a charcoal grill which

resulted in hospitalizations. While others slept in their cars with the engine running to charge their phone and stay warm but ended up inhaling toxic fumes.

Most infuriating of all, downtown cities such as Austin were completely lit up. Dallas citizens were also upset that Highland Park, a well-to-do area in Dallas, had not lost their power only once throughout Storm Uri. Many Houstonians were outraged

that River Oaks and the downtown area still had their power despite the lack of traffic lights that caused dozens of car accidents for those who dared seek shelter or supplies for the storm.

Thousands of Texas families had elderly members and infant children that had to survive in temperatures that dropped in the teens. Most low-income families did not have enough money to buy a generator or purchase

a portable battery. Low-income families are also more likely to live far away from grocery stores and near fast food areas.

With fast-food restaurants forced to close, the trip to a distant grocery store when the roads were covered in ice, and off traffic lights caused panic. Those who became desperate and attempted to take the spoiled food that supermarkets were throwing out were stopped by police or staff.

Many Texans, namely those in older and more affordable homes, had more outdated pipe systems. In many of these homes, pipes burst or froze or just stopped entirely, which led to expensive repairs that these low-income families could not afford, especially during a pandemic.

Thousands of Texans went without water to flush their toilets, wash their dishes in a time where ordering food was impossible, or even

take a shower or wash their hands.

The aftermath of Storm Uri has truly opened the eyes of many Texans to the injustices that plague the low-income communities. We can only hope that the state and city governments will make plans in the future to aid and protect those who need it most.

Green New Deal wrongly blamed for Texas outages

By Emily Saldivar

After winter Storm Uri rocked Texas, many were left Tuesday night without power, and shortly after, running water. In response, government officials were quick to throw the blame on the innovative ideas that combat climate change and utilize practices for a cleaner renewable energy, also known as the Green New Deal, than to show any work towards remedying the actual situation.

In an interview on Feb. 16, Texas Governor Greg Abbott told Sean Hannity, "This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America," despite there being confirmation from experts and officials that most of the energy lost was powered by fossil fu-

els and not by means of wind or solar.

He also went on to say that wind and solar that shut down were "collectively more than 10% of our power grid" and were responsible for the shutting down of the state, which shows that "fossil fuel is necessary." The problem with the Governor's statements is the lack of focus on the actual issue, the Texas power grid's deregulation.

Dan Woodfin, senior director at Electric Reliability Council of Texas, told reporters that frozen wind turbines were not the primary cause of the shut down.

"It appears that a lot of the generation that has gone offline today has been primarily due to issues on the natural

gas system," he said.

Woodfin also said that only about 7% or six gigawatts, was expected to come from various wind sources while about 80%, or 67 gigawatts, is generated by natural gas, coal, or nuclear.

That means the frozen wind turbines played only a small part in the massive blackout. The majority of lost power was from fossil fuels, though both sources were affected by the winter storm. So, what form of energy is winter proof? The answer is neither. At least, in Texas, that is.

Because Texas is in the south, below-freezing temperatures for long periods are not a norm, no matter what time of year it is. However, there are instances, such as the most

recent arctic blast, that leaves no time to winterize the state at a moment's notice.

The solution is to have them prepared before disaster strikes, which is why the Texas Public Utility Commission proposed that energy companies would need to identify and address all potential failure points back in May 2014, according to the Texas Tribune.

Obviously, this did not happen because there was backlash from energy companies. Luminant labeled such changes as "unnecessary" and company representatives claimed that attempting to identify a specific weather limit "would be meaningless." This caused the original proposal to be changed and required only previously known failure

points to be addressed.

As Texans have seen, the effects of such negligence have ranged from dangerous to deadly. While other Texas Republicans, such as Sen. Cruz and Rep. Crenshaw, have made similar statements to Abbott about the Green New Deal, some Democrats have spoken up in response to Abbott's interview.

Democrat O'Rourke tweeted on Tuesday, "Energy experts and State House Dems, among others, were warning of this for years. Abbott chose to ignore the facts, the science and the tough decisions, and now Texans will once again pay the price."

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York also joined in, "I go offline a few

days and return to a GOP Gov blaming policies he hasn't even implemented for his own failures. Gov. Abbott doesn't seem to have a grasp on his state, so here's a reminder: Texas runs 80-90% on fossil fuels." She ended her tweet with, "The real 'deadly deal' is his failed leadership."

The bottom line is, if Texas wants to avoid another disaster like this in the future, all solutions need to be taken into account—no matter what party they come from.

ERCOT's power grid raises suspicion, Texans demand reliable course of action

By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

A deep freeze across the United States handicapped an energy industry in the largest U.S. crude-producing state, Texas, halting oil wells, refineries and truckers, just to name a few.

According to a writer from Reuters, Arpan Varghese, "The freezing temperatures forced industry leaders to announce restrictions on natural gas and crude pipeline operators."

What happens when you seize oil production? Consumer taxation inflation across state lines without notice, no matter the situation, crisis, or war, begins to ripple across the nation like an unstoppable financial pandemic.

Not only did the oil industry suffer but also did Texas's power grid, further weakening an already unstable economy governed by strict rules, regulations, and massive shutdowns.

Unfortunately, the Electric Reliability

Council of Texas and Texas legislators did not anticipate the negative impact of freezing weather on their energy grid, or did they?

Yes! An interim report to the 83rd Texas Legislature House Committee on State Affairs in December 2012, proposed several ideas for ensuring that Texas' supply of energy is sufficient to meet current and future demand. The IR also exposed and examined "weather-related factors affecting resource adequacy." By whom?

On Sept. 22, 2011, Texas House Speaker Joe Straus appointed 13 members. The committee held several public hearings, as well as gathering data from witnesses and experts who testified that the finalized rule regarding Texas's power grid could have devastating consequences on the Texas economy, especially if ERCOT fails to update operations and

infrastructure of the power immediately.

One witness testified the issue of resource adequacy in the Texas electricity market.

"Certain weather-related factors have affected resource adequacy in Texas, by increasing the demand for electricity and potentially hindering generators' ability to produce energy at their full capacity," the witness said. "In 2011, Texas experienced extreme weather patterns that highlighted the importance of having sufficient reserves."

Which begs the question, should ERCOT and Texas legislators be held accountable and finally take massive action?

The interim report analysis in 2011 concluded with a call to review guidelines.

"Utility regulators and [Texas] legislators should take the time necessary to carefully assess market design options before deciding on a

definitive course of action," the report reads.

Ten years later, in February 2021, ERCOT's incompetence, political influence, and failure to change its operations and infrastructure caused massive power outages. According to The Wall Street Journal and power outage watchdogs, more than 3.6 million people went without power in the State of Texas.

Also, Texas refineries shut down, failing to produce roughly 4.6 million barrels of oil per day. Why is this important? Texas is home to some of the nation's top gasoline and diesel-producing refineries.

These are only a portion of Texas refineries that shut down: Motiva Enterprises in Port Arthur, the largest in the United States; Valero Energy Corp and Total SE also halted their Port Arthur operations. Exxon Mobil paused its procedures, Beau-

mont and its Baytown refinery and chemical plant seized operations as well.

These refineries and chemical plants combined, produce over 2 million barrels per day.

If Texas is a human body, then these refineries are the heart that pumps the blood into its vessels (the roads) that lead to every one of its 254 counties (the cells) that keep humans moving, eating, and constantly innovating for the future, for themselves, and the next generation.

As technology and communication advance very quickly, I am left wondering. When will our three branches of government: the judicial, legislative, and the executive branch—take advantage of our public servants and connect them more swiftly by the lifeline that fuels their salaries?

When will political leaders and underwriters write with intention rather

than create tension? When will our legislators pass and execute legislative bills that truly have a positive sequence rather than a negative consequence on the American people?

When will political leaders: Republican and Democrat, unite, discuss, and deliberate matters more readily on a state-by-state basis and relay sensitive information rather than delay important legislation?

Nonetheless, I remain optimistic about the future of this nation because if NASA can send a rocket with a man and woman to the moon beyond the celestial stars, then political leaders can change its operations and infrastructure here on Earth.

If NASA can launch historical outer space missions, I am convinced that ERCOT and Texas legislators can fund a stronger, smarter, and more efficient power grid that will keep Texas lit during the hottest, coldest, and most unstable and unpredictable times.

Is Houston prepared for icy climate?

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

In short, no. Houston is not prepared for icy climate. Even prior to the ERCOT disaster that left over 4 million Texans without electricity, it was apparent that the state was not prepared for freezing temperatures. The ERCOT power grid was not winterized and many homes are not properly insulated. Texas homes and people are

built for the heat, so our lack of insulation and endless collection of summer clothes were useless in Storm Uri.

Highways and sidewalks were not salted by government officials and there were no government-mandated "warming centers" set aside. Additionally, traffic lights are not solar powered, mean-

ing when the power went out, intersection lights went out with it. This led to thousands of car accidents across the state, some of them fatal.

Worst of all, we are used to emergencies such as hurricanes, but a winter storm was extremely unfamiliar to most Texans. Those who were a bit paranoid cleared grocery stores

of bread and milk. Not to mention, some simply did not have that ability because they hadn't been paid yet and simply didn't have the finances, resources, or transportation. Many grocery stores also lost power, spoiling all perishable products. Many grocery stores simply did not consider the storm in their new shipment order or shipments

were unable to arrive at stores and shelves emptied quickly.

Local restaurants and Houston-based celebrities donated supplies directly to the people and politicians, both in state and out of state, were engaged and actively aiding Texans in their time of need. Small businesses gave out free cases of water and ho-

tel and motel owners knocked door to door to offer extra blankets.

It is sufficient to say that there is hope for Texas that our first responders, government officials, and front-line workers will be given the adequate supplies needed to ensure that Texas stays running the next time disaster strikes.

FEMA runs the show at NRG

By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

Between Kirby St. and Fannin St., hundreds of people in their vehicles line up bumper-to-bumper alongside the NRG Park on March 3.

Why? Hundreds, if not, thousands of registered Texans await a vaccine to combat the novel virus that lingers like a bad habit.

President Joe Biden said on March 1 in an appearance on CNBC, “We are now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May.”

One day later, tensions grow as Governor of Texas Greg Abbott signed an executive order to lift the mask mandate and reopen all businesses to 100 percent by March 11. Are

local leaders upset? Amongst them, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, Houston Mayor, Sylvester Turner, and of course, President Biden, did not hesitate to pound Governor Abbott on his leadership.

Regardless, Texans pack NRG Park waiting to get their vaccine administered to protect them as the Junior Livestock and Horse Show competitions simultaneously happen no more than half a mile away at the NRG Stadium. What does this mean?

Texan’s passion for livestock and horses is far too great to cancel and comply with mandates completely in a time when actions over-

power stagnation and segregation. It has been said, “A body in motion remains in motion, but a body at rest remains just that.”

The human spirit is far too great to slow Texans down. No virus can hinder the citizens from the fourth largest state in America. Furthermore, Texas and the human spirit will not let up nor let federal and political bullying segregate the state of Texas as its people and businesses collapse economically, physically, and mentally.

That is why the Federal Emergency Management Agency, better known as FEMA, created a “super site” at NRG Park, the largest in

Texas, according to a FEMA spokeswoman.

FEMA spokeswoman Carmen Castro also added in an interview by a reporter at KPRC Channel 2, “The plan is to have everyone in and out in 45 minutes.” From what I witnessed, FEMA’s operations are highly and keenly controlled.

Also, Castro mentioned in an interview at KPRC Channel 2, “The vaccination site here at NRG Park is the largest operation we are running in Texas.”

This is why I believe FEMA’s procedures at NRG Park are positive, massive, effective, and vital to strengthen Texans’ confidence and boost Texas’s economy at this moment in time.

As the sun shined where once thousands of round-roving Rodeo fans and Texans drank, barbecued, yelled, roared, tailgated, and flooded the streets and parking lots along Kirby and Fannin St., now FEMA runs the show. For how long, who knows?

However, on the other side of the spectrum of NRG Park, the Junior Livestock and Horse Show competitions continue, and for good reason: to keep the Texas economy going, to keep Texans moving, and to keep some form of movement, culture, stability, and tradition going.

To end on a positive note: For those who have motivated junior siblings who want to cowboy

or cowgirl up and who are interested in making anywhere from \$5,000 (novice non-pro) to \$50,000 (limit amateur), the Horse Show at NRG Stadium from Feb. 25 – March 17 is where it is at! If not this year, there is always enough time to practice for 2022.

I remain optimistic during these troubling, historical, and mysterious times. While Governor Abbott’s executive order lifts mask mandates, it also empowers businesses to reopen at 100%. While risky, the executive order will shift the statistics and the numbers and help Texans get back to work, and fuel 254 suffering counties on the verge of economic failure.

Beware of International Well Building Institute scam

By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

How are restaurants, hotels, vacation resorts, or any other destinations that Americans plan on visiting adapting to this pandemic?

Since February 2021, the International Well Building Institute has gained popularity in the way people interact within their communities and inside its businesses. That said, the IWBI acknowledged that over 8,500 facilities across America have enrolled in the Well-Health Safety Rating and documented in the public eye.

What is the World Health Safety Rating? The WHSR launched back in June 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, exclu-

sively to stamp a specific seal of approval on complying establishments. The stamp of approval shows that a business owner follows strict protocols to ensure the well-being of everyone who enters their business.

The pandemic drives organizations to enroll in the WHSR, according to founder of IWBI and CEO of parent company, Delos, Paul Scialla.

“The pandemic quickly shifted the conversation on health, and IWBI’s role in helping mitigate the impact of the virus,” Scialla said in an interview on Feb. 1. “Supporting people’s safety and

well-being is now more clear than ever.”

While this is true, IWBI intends to profit from this crisis by using celebrities like Jennifer Lopez, Robert De Niro, and Serena Williams, to name a few, to endorse the IWBI seal of approval that Americans will soon see on buildings whose owners enroll in the WHSR.

Undoubtedly, the world’s health industry changes by the day, businesses and their procedures shift by the hour. In the third quarter of 2020, U.S. retail e-commerce sales amounted to over \$209.5 billion because of this pandemic, according to

Statista.

People are scared, so shopping online is a no-brainer. So, who and what businesses prepared for such a high demand of online shoppers? It seems transnational companies and prominent corporate leaders had an inside advantage all along.

For example, in a 2007 Reuters arti-

cle, Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst from The NPD Group, predicted and stated, “We’re going to continue to see the internet become the vehicle for the brick-and-mortar stores to promote big values.”

Now, 14 years later, brick-and-mortar retailers adapt to new protocols including safety measures that are strict and

sometimes harsh, this is where IWBI comes into the picture. However, as mentioned above, during celebrity endorsements, it reads in fine print, “The Health Safety Ratings does not guarantee that a space is safe or free of pathogens.” What is safe?

Continued on page 23



Well Health-Safety Rating seal displayed on a building in Chicago. Photo courtesy of Chicago Suntime.

Supreme Court refuses to clarify election law By Bryan Kimbro

The Supreme Court of the United States ignored a petition by the Republican Party of Pennsylvania to review alleged election-rigging by Democrats in the Keystone State during the 2020 election season.

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, for a good reason, issued a sour 11-page dissent regarding the court's split decision not to hear the petition. Which includes many election controversies over the rights of non-legislative officials to ignore, effectuate, and misconstrue laws at the last minute before an election and after.

Thomas was not the only judge to dissent, but he usually gets the most backlash on social media and news outlets because he is a non-liberal Black man. Thomas, who happens to be the longest-sitting judge of the court, is not a conservative, although he is often criticized his independent views.

Also dissenting were Justice Samuel Alito Jr. and Justice Neil Gorsuch.

The thing about the whole Pennsylvania debacle that has probably been heard from the progressive-to-soft-liberal media is the following storyline. The Supreme Court acknowledged that the number of late mail-in ballots in dispute was too small to change the outcome of the presidential election. Therefore, the argument is moot.

That storyline is what is known as (among other things) a red herring, a logical fallacy meant to distract people from the relevant issue.

What wasn't heard was the unscrupulous legal cherry-picking and unconstitutional (both state and federal) rulemaking effectuated by Pennsylvania Democrats through its own Supreme Court (see *Pennsylvania Democratic Party v. Boockvar*).

Non-legislative officials were able to successfully petition the Pennsylvania Supreme Court while lacking the authority to allow some shady election laws that contradict the state's constitution.

In this case, the relevant issue was no longer concerned with the outcome of the presidential election. Rather, the legal question the case presented — about the power of state courts to revise election laws — was, the dissenters say, a significant one that should be resolved without the pressure of an impending election.

For Thomas, the implications of the court's inaction could be detrimental to democracy.

"Changing the rules in the middle of the game is bad enough. Such rule changes by officials who may lack authority to do so is even worse," Thomas wrote in his dissent.

"When those changes alter election results, they can severely damage the electoral system."

The two cases, *Republican Party of Pennsylvania v. Degraffenreid* and *Corman v. Pennsylvania Democratic Party*, arose from a challenge by the Pennsylvania Democratic Party to the state's system for absentee ballots in light of the

pandemic. Relying on a provision in the state's constitution, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court extended the deadline for absentee ballots until Nov. 6, three days after Election Day.

Any ballots that were clearly postmarked after Election Day would not be counted, the state court ruled, while ballots that were postmarked by Election Day would be counted as long as they were received by Nov. 6.

"Like most states, Pennsylvania has a long history of limiting the use of mail-in ballots due to its propensity for fraud," Thomas wrote. "But in October 2019, the Pennsylvania Legislature voted to reform its election laws through Act 77, which once ratified, would give all voters the option of voting by mail."

Unlike most states, though, Pennsylvania's Constitution conveniently provides a concise list of who may be considered an "absentee" voter. To circumvent the state's constitution and skip the long

amendment process, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf signed a voter reform titled Act 77 into law in October 2019, which ignored the state constitution's section regarding absentee voting and created the "no-excuse" mail-in ballot system.

Republican legislators and the Pennsylvania Republican Party went to the Supreme Court in late September, asking the justices to put the state court's ruling on hold. They contended that the part of the ruling allowing ballots to be counted when the postmarks were not clear would lead to the counting of ballots sent after Election Day, in violation of federal election law and the U.S. Constitution. However, the Supreme Court was split on their decision.

The Pennsylvania Republicans returned to the Supreme Court a few days later, urging the justices to take up the case and rule on the merits of the dispute before Election Day. The court turned down the plea to fast-track the petition for review,

leaving the extended deadline in place for Election Day 2020.

The best way to conduct absentee voting with minimized voter fraud would be online. Just about every licensure test is now available online, including, for example, the highly regulated mortgage loan originator exam. If those tests can be proctored securely, why can't votes be cast online securely as well?

In an age where the federal government can effectively coordinate with its citizens via the internet and securely send stimulus checks to millions of Americans' bank accounts without a hitch, I find it hard to believe that Democrats truly think mail-in ballots are the best way to increase voter turnout while limiting voter fraud.

Dissents and the petitions to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court can be viewed at www.scotusblog.com.

Beware of scam (continued)

Nonetheless, past research shows that big businesses and CEOs like Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, anticipated an unprecedented online presence long ago.

It is true. The pandemic caused a shift in consumer shopping, and big companies did not go

bankrupt. Many big companies did not have to close their doors. Significant corporations did not suffer, rather they gained at the zenith of a crisis. They survived for one reason and one reason only — because they knew long ago that online shopping and 24-hour

services were the future of consumer shopping, spending and entertainment.

Nevertheless, important questions arose. How much power is too much power? Should one individual leader or politician of any state control its people in such a manner? Does

the first amendment still exist, or has it been placed on hold until the pandemic magically disappears?

Furthermore, Janine Perrett, journalist, commented on the unequal profits driven by the pandemic in her opinion article.

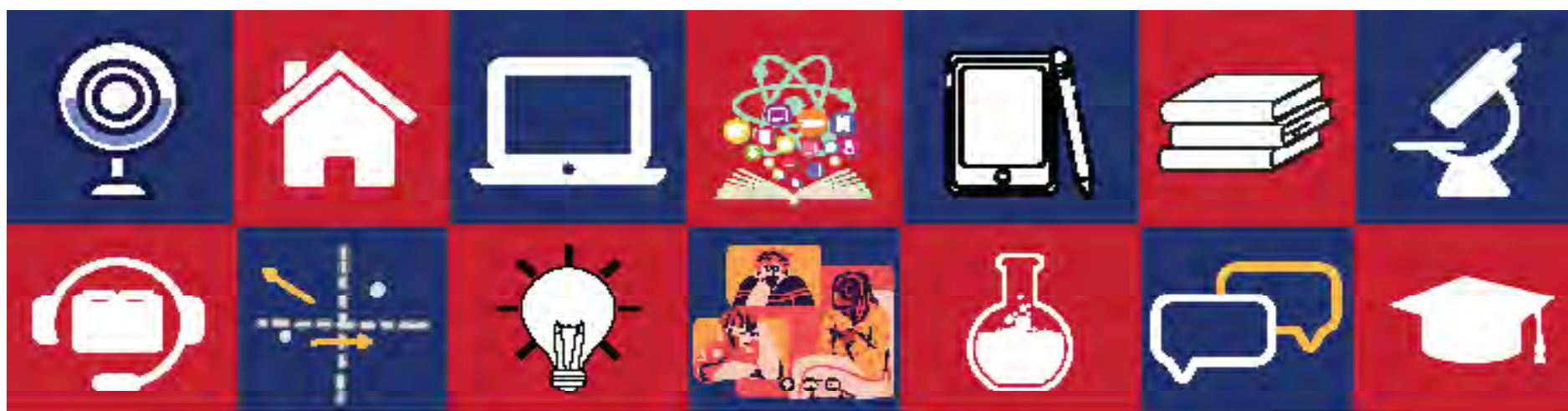
"The rich got richer this year which begs the question,

how did the world's billionaires increase their wealth by 25 percent in a year, when everyone else went backwards?"

Meanwhile, 90% of the U.S. remains dependent on government assistance and welfare, living off pension, baby boomers retire broke. Others become homeless, businesses permanently close,

and simultaneously, Americans wait with despair and desperation for its public servants to lead, govern, and eradicate an invisible virus.

"Just one last question we are all secretly asking ourselves," Perrett wrote. "Could 2021 possibly be any worse than 2020?"



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Student Run Since Volume One

The University of Houston-Downtown is seeking applicants for the positions of Editor and Business Manager for The Dateline, the student-run, bi-weekly newspaper.

Editor Position

This paid position begins summer 2021 (\$425/issue; start date flexible), and the applicants must commit to fill the position for the entire 2021-22 academic year. Duties include responsibility for the overall operation of the paper. Editors assemble and manage a team of student writers and sub-editors and assign them to cover news and events. Position requires some familiarity with the use of Adobe InDesign page-making software.

The paper runs stories anticipat-

ing campus events as well as reviewing them, including student activities and organizations, academics, athletics and lifestyle, university administration, and student government; also cultural coverage of activities in the theatre, film, music, sports and arts communities, particularly as they are of interest to UHD students.

Qualifications include at least sophomore standing, at least one semester in residence at UHD, successful completion of basic writing and communications courses, and a current

3.0 cumulative GPA (3.5 preferred). Applications accepted until position is filled.

To apply, please send a letter of application indicating your reasons and qualifications for applying for the position. Include as well your resume as well as an unofficial copy of your UHD transcript. Send these documents to The Dateline faculty advisor, Joe Sample, Associate Professor, at samplej@uhd.edu. Applications are sought immediately and will be accepted until position is filled.

Business Manager Position

This paid position begins fall 2021 (start date flexible), and applicants must commit to the position for the full 2021-22 academic year. The job involves both advertising sales and managing the business and financial operations of the newspaper.

The successful candidate will have a strong orientation toward personal selling and developing advertising revenue as well as effective budgeting and management skills. Duties include managing business and financial mat-

ters for the paper, in cooperation with the student editor and faculty adviser, and expanding the sales of advertising space in the paper, including to businesses in the campus neighborhoods of NoDo and Washington St. Typical commitment is 20 hours per week; salary is \$800 per month, plus 15% commission on ad sales.

Minimum qualifications include at least sophomore standing or higher, the completion of at least one semester at UHD, successful completion of basic

business courses, and a 2.5 GPA.

To apply, please send a letter of application indicating your reasons and qualifications for applying for the position. Include as well your resume as well as an unofficial copy of your UHD transcript. Send these documents to The Dateline faculty advisor, Joe Sample, Associate Professor, at samplej@uhd.edu. Applications are sought immediately and will be accepted until position is filled.