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WHAT'S INSIDE

PROGRESS

Progress is an annual publication of KDH Media Group that focuses on the developments of the past year in the Central Texas communities the Killeen Daily Herald serves. The section also takes an in-depth look at the changes in store in the year ahead.

This year's 68-page edition includes news, information, photographs and advertisements that highlight the positive developments in Killeen and its neighboring communities of Harker Heights, Fort Hood, Copperas Cove, Belton, Nolanville, Florence, Salado, Gatesville and Lampasas.

In addition to chronicling developments in the business sector, Progress also features news and analysis from the areas of education, military, real estate, recreation and the medical community.

The content for the 2021 Progress edition was created by staff of the Killeen Daily Herald's editorial and advertising departments, as well as several news correspondents and public information officials.

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KILLEEN BUSINESS

Economy shows resilience amid pandemic

BY ERIN ESKEW
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

The Killeen economy proved to be even more resilient than anticipated over the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to John Crutchfield, president of the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce.

“Sales tax performance is a good indicator,” Crutchfield said.

Sales tax revenue is published on a quarterly basis on the comptroller’s website: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/transparency/local/allocations/sales-tax/>

The city of Killeen shows a more than 17% increase in sales tax revenue than the previous year, according to the website.

The lowest month of revenue was in March, with just over \$1.8 million in revenue, compared to the most lucrative months of September and November, which each saw more than \$2.6 million in revenue, the website said.

Another indicator of the economic health of the community is the issuance of building permits — which remained strong throughout the year, Crutchfield said.

“Not only is it an indicator of investment activities, but it does provide an indication of how many businesses opened,” Crutchfield said.

Permits issued are disclosed on the City of Killeen’s website.

Over the last year, there were 695 permits for single-family homes, 99 for duplexes and 13 for multifamily apartments, according to the website. Additionally, the website states 19 commercial permits were issued.

“As expected, the pandemic affected the employment rate,” Crutchfield said. “The pandemic also impacted enplanements at the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport.”

According to data from the Texas Labor Market, the December 2020 report registered 52,730 employed residents in the city of Killeen, down from 54,913 in January of the same year.

Overall, Crutchfield said the Killeen community is more resilient than most.

“This is due to our military background, experience with multiple deployments, and the trauma and loss that accompany those deployments. The various criminal incidents that have occurred on Fort Hood and extreme growth,” Crutchfield said. “These challenges have helped strengthen the community — enabled it to adapt to challenges in a proactive manner.”

Looking ahead, Crutchfield anticipates an expanded and



New building permits remained strong throughout Central Texas in 2020.

better coordinated public health effort as well as continued growth to the education system and increased internet bandwidth.

“These things are critical to ensuring that the community has the tools necessary to treat and educate our residents,” he said. “The pandemic demonstrated that, in a knowledge-based economy, growth is achieved through innovation and technology.”

Local organizations were forced to embrace teleworking and remote learning, with Zoom, GoToMeeting and other platforms increasingly becoming a part of every organization’s daily routines, he added.

Looking over the past year, Crutchfield said he was inspired to see the willingness of both individuals and organizations to participate in the sharing of information.

The Killeen Chamber can be reached at killeenchamber.com or by phone at: 254-526-9551.

Continued on page 8



Customers wait in long lines to get into H-E-B in March as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions limited capacity inside. The community has shown resilience in deadline with the challenges of 2020, local officials said. They expect the area's economy to continue improving in 2021.

From page 7

ADAPTING TO MEET NEEDS

Gina Pence, president of the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce, noted industries changing and adapting business models to meet the demands of COVID-19.

"There is a much higher demand now for smaller footprints in commercial real estate," Pence said. "This is good news for micro- and small-business startups and expansions."

Developers have shifted their focus to cater to small businesses, while bringing new life to older areas of the community, Pence said.

This past year has had its share of social economics, Pence said, which has highlighted the need for precise communication and transparency to bring the people together.

"Team Harker Heights has done a great job the years to maintain positive community relations," Pence said. "As a leader in the community, I was most proud to watch our community come together in a time of need and support each other."

Pence said she and other local officials continue to find ways to improve programs to benefit the community as a whole.

"Safety and communication will always remain top priority," Pence said. "It is extremely important that we maintain and build relationships, adapt to newer technology, and reinvest in our local community."

Pence said these factors are key to the foundation to be prepared for future challenges.

"The year of 2020 was an experience like no other," Pence said. "During the shutdown we were all forced to slow down

and reconnect in a different way with co-workers and family members."

For many, it was an opportunity to get back to the basics and enjoy nature, Pence said.

"Harker Heights has some of the best parks in Central Texas and it has been wonderful seeing families in the community enjoy the outdoors during these times," Pence said. "We had businesses that experienced recording breaking sales figures and others were challenged to keep their doors open. This biggest factor was everyone supporting each other and coming together as a community."

Harker Heights saw an 18.76% increase in sales tax revenue over the previous year, according to the comptroller's website.

"We are now in the post-pandemic economy and we must maintain caution and hope for the rest of 2021," Pence said. "The Central Texas economy has stayed healthy compared to other regions during the pandemic."

Along with national trends, Harker Heights is dealing with shortages in products, increases in the cost of goods and services, unemployment, Pence said.

Employment for Harker Heights was at 12,015 residents in December of 2020, compared to 12,512 in January of the same year, according to Texas Labor Market data.

"We need to prepare for federal and state policy changes that will impact our local businesses," Pence said. "Economists are forecasting the U.S. economy will start 2021 slowly and accelerate in the second half."

The Harker Heights Chamber continues to support local businesses and offer resources to help with growth. For more information visit www.hhchamber.com or call 254-699-4999.

COVID, other tragedies marred 2020 for Killeen

BY STEVE WILSON
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Like the rest of the country, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the lives of Killeen residents in 2020. Yet it was not the only factor.

January was the first full month of City Manager Kent Cagle's term in office, having started officially in early December. In addition to a balanced city budget, Cagle cited addressing the issues of homelessness and city growth as his two main priorities.

On March 23, Bell County Judge David Blackburn issued the first shelter at home order due to the pandemic. It was the first of its kind in the Central Texas area. At the time, there were at least 10 confirmed cases of the virus in Bell County.

By Feb. 8 of this year, a total of 19,496 of COVID-19 cases had been reported in the county, with 265 deaths, including longtime Killeen City Councilman James Kilpatrick.

Area retailers such as H-E-B, Walmart and Sam's Club began imposing purchasing restrictions in an effort to keep shelves stocked longer, everyday items such as toilet paper, paper towels and cleaning products becoming harder to find.

Area residents also found it harder to eat at local restaurants. A Killeen family of eight was denied a table at a Harker Heights restaurant in May, because their family size exceeded the recommended number for restaurant seating.

In April, after a some debate, the Killeen City Council approved entering a tax abatement agreement with First National Bank for a new five-story banking headquarters to be built on Trimmier Road and Central Texas Expressway.

The agreement exempts part of the taxes owed in return for improvements to the property. The 10-year, \$858,715.27 deal was approved at the council with a 6-1 vote.

The following month, city elections were delayed to November, due to COVID-19. When the election finally took place Nov. 3, Mellisa Brown, Ken Wilkerson and Rick Williams were elected to the Killeen City Council.

The city was placed in the spotlight earlier in the year in connection with the disappearance and death of Army Pfc. Vanessa Guillen.

Guillen's remains were discovered on June 30, by contractors working along the Leon River near Belton.

She had been reported missing on April 23, having last been seen on Fort Hood.

In August, in large part in response, an Independent Review Committee arrived at Fort Hood to "examine the command climate and culture at Fort Hood and the surrounding military community to determine whether they reflect the Army's commitment to safety, respect, inclusiveness, diversity, and freedom from sexual harassment."

That same month, the body Sgt. Elder Fernandes, also stationed at Fort Hood was discovered Aug. 25 hanging from a tree near the railroad tracks by Sammons Golf Course in Temple. An autopsy report ruled his death as suicide by hanging. Both Guillen and Fernandes had reported being sexually harassed on Fort Hood. Both have been



This mural honors Spc. Vanessa Guillen, a Fort Hood soldier who was found dead in June after being reported missing in April.

represented by attorney Natalie Khawam, a supporter of the #IamVanessaGuillen bill, which Khawam said would "allow for members of the military who have been sexually abused or harassed to report such claims outside of their immediate chain of command."

Also in August the Boys & Girls Club of Central Texas dedicated the McLaurin-Boyd Family Clubhouse in downtown Killeen.

On Oct. 15, Garrett Galloway, brother of Marvin Guy hosted his family's first press conference since his brother's 2014 arrest.

Guy remains in the Bell County Detention Center, on bonds totaling \$4 million, charged in connection with the murder of Killeen Police Department Det. Charles "Chuck" Dinwiddie. The case has helped raise awareness, both locally and nationally, on the wisdom of "no-knock" raids by police, especially for narcotics-related search warrants.

With 10 years still left on its existing comprehensive plan, the Killeen City Council in November approved a new plan, at a cost of \$349,140. Dallas based firm Verdunity was contracted for the project.

Also in November, the council began to discuss the development of a public facility corporation, the purpose of which is the development of \$51 million housing development, at W.S. Young and Business 190, to be built by Ohio-based NRP.

Both the corporation and the NRP project were later approved, following considerable debate and public input.

Despite being the holiday season, December saw perhaps Killeen's most tragic point of the year, setting a new homicide record at 31. This surpassed the record of 30 set in the 1991, the year of the Luby's Cafeteria massacre.

With new plan in the works, slower growth set for Killeen

BY STEVE WILSON
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

As was the case last year, Killeen's population is growing and is expected to continue to do so, but for the foreseeable future at a slower rate than during the last decade.

According to data provided by the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce, via the Killeen Economic Development Corporation, the population estimate for 2021 is 153,370.

"Our Growth Study, completed two years ago, only has population projections for the city for 2022 and that is 156,817," said Chamber Director of Research Jennifer Hetzel by email.

The data showed, between 2010 to 2021, a population increase of 20.91%. However, for 2021 to 2026, that percentage is expected to slow to an increase of 7.57%.

In early 2020 Tony McIlwain, now Killeen's director of planning and development services, estimated the city's population at 149,998 — 10,000 more than five years ago.

"Killeen is a growing community," McIlwain said at the time. "Fundamentally, growth signals that our city is an attractive place to call home. Population can be a key driver in economic development opportunities for companies that seek high growth areas or higher population markers. Killeen's primary and secondary housing markets remain robust and affordable."

The Killeen Planning and Development Services Department predicted then that the population could reach 179,079 by 2029, citing the "numbers are updated annually and are expected to change."

In late 2020, the Killeen City Council approved a new comprehensive plan, to be conducted by Dallas-based Verdunity, Inc., at a cost of \$349,140. According to a city report,



City Manager Kent Cagle addresses a Killeen City Council meeting.



A recent TransMap survey of Killeen's streets estimated the total maintenance needs at \$41.7 million and reconstruction needs at \$120 million.

the purpose of this plan is to be "a long-range planning document that establishes guidelines for the future growth of a community, while allowing a city to anticipate and manage growth in a way that improves the quality of life of its residents."

Killeen Mayor Jose Segarra supported the plan, although he did not take part in the 6-1 vote to approve it.

"I think the council took the right steps in moving this issue forward," Segarra said by email. "When completed, this will give the council and the staff clear direction as to how the citizens want our city to grow and in what direction while utilizing our current resources. The return on an investment for our city and to our citizens will easily exceed the initial cost of this plan."

Annexations, several of which took place in April and June of 2020, continue to factor into city growth.

"Voluntary annexation (someone wishing to bring their property into the city limits) is considered on a case by case basis by city council," City Spokesperson Hilary Shine said by email on Feb. 11. "We anticipate there could be requests as growth continues south, but there are no requests at this time."

"We expect Killeen to continue to grow in population, so managing demands for service will impact policy decisions. Completion of a comprehensive plan will be a priority in the coming year."

In October the council heard a presentation on a recent study from TransMap, an Ohio based firm which the city contracted to determine a "Street Conditions Assessment" for Killeen. This study estimated the total maintenance needs in this area \$41.7 million, and the estimated reconstruction needs are \$120 million.

Maintenance study, streetlights top Killeen infrastructure issues

BY STEVE WILSON
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

In October, the Killeen City Council heard a presentation from Public Works Director Danielle Singh about a recent study by Transmap, an Ohio-based firm that assigned a Pavement Condition Index for every street within the city.

“There were no changes suggested, it was a new evaluation and grading of each street,” City Spokeswoman Hilary Shine said by email. “The Street Maintenance Fee (paid monthly on utility bills) brings in about \$1.6 million per year, and that entire amount is placed in the Street Maintenance Fund and committed to street maintenance.”

The fee was adopted by the council in December 2018 and placed on bills as of August 2019.

“Street maintenance fee revenue is specifically used for surface treatments that extend the life of the roadway,” Shine said in April. “The general fund provides approximately \$5 million for other types of street maintenance (striping, signage, sidewalks, etc.) as well as personnel and equipment.”

Within the overall PCI range are seven subgroups, or work types. These include good, with a PCI of 85 to 100, requiring little or no maintenance; satisfactory, 71-85, requiring routine maintenance; fair, 56-70, requiring non-structural overlay; poor, 41-55, and very poor, 26-40, requiring structural overlay; serious, 11-25; and failed, 0-10.

To look up the PCI for your street, go to <https://gisweb-18.ci.killeen.tx.us/gis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d6b6120b4bc745bbbcc36aba1b932839>. Once on the site, use the “hamburger” menu on the top right and turn on the KilleenPCI_2019 layer. Then click on a street or locate a specific address through the upper left search box.

STREET LIGHTS

With public safety a key concern, the Killeen City Council voted on Jan. 26 to enter into a professional agreement with Tanko Streetlighting Inc. The agreement, supported by the city managers office, had already been approved in the city’s budget for the current fiscal year, and will not exceed \$196,300.

“The company provides a turn-key solution for municipalities with professional services ranging from auditing streetlights to energy efficiency conversion projects,” according to a city staff report.

Approximately 4,440 streetlights throughout the city are owned by Oncor. The city pays a monthly tariff per streetlight that amounts to nearly \$697,085 annually. Mayor Jose Segarra touched on the potential costs saved by the new agreement.

“I think a well-lit neighborhood can be a deterrent for crimes, there is evidence that show that to be true,” Segarra said. “If we are able to save money by owning our own street lights, then that saving can also go a long way to adding more smart lights throughout our city.”




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Local officials and project members pick up dirt in their shovels to signify the groundbreaking of the new hangar at the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport in December.

Killeen airport adding a new hangar

BY HUNTER KING
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

A new hangar is being built at the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport that will allow for air travel of patients from small clinics and hospitals to major medical facilities in Dallas, Houston and Austin.

The project is going to cost just over \$5 million and the expected completion date is December 2021. The hangar will have 16,000 square feet of space and will be a centralized maintenance facility and air ambulance base, according to CSI Aviation.

Hilary Shine, the spokeswoman for the city of Killeen, said the money for the project came from two separate Military Airport Program grants.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in December.

The hangar will be leased to CSI Aviation, a nationwide company that flies medical patients to the proper hospital for their care.

William “Rock” Collins, the president and chief operating officer of CSI Aviation, spoke on the project and why

Killeen was the site chosen.

“It all had to do with market research in terms of being able to provide the medical flights primarily in addition ... to providing to the military sector,” Collins said. “Killeen was a logical place for us to be located with the kind of people we serve.”

Collins added how the new hangar will allow CSI Aviation to support the population.

“It’s not just simply the local hospitals that these airplanes will support; it’ll support all these major hospitals in Houston and Dallas and Austin and so forth, anything that’s along the I-35 corridor or over on the coast,” Collins said.

Congressman Roger Williams, who attended the groundbreaking in December, said the project will be good for Killeen.

“It’s gonna help the community because it’s gonna bring jobs. We already know I think 20 jobs in the beginning and 42 as we go down the road, good-paying jobs, I mean that’s a big deal, that’s what we’re about, that’s economic growth,” Williams said.

The HOP hangs on during tough times with grants

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

The HOP Hill Country Transit District continues to provide a much-needed service to the Central Texas community despite years of funding woes.

Recent funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act provided more than \$10 million in grant awards to the HOP, which relies on funding from customers' fares, as well as income at the federal, state and municipal levels.

"We know many of our nation's public transportation systems are facing extraordinary challenges and these funds will go a long way to assisting our transit industry partners in battling COVID-19," FTA Acting Administrator K. Jane Williams said in a news release about the coronavirus aid. "These federal funds will support operating assistance to transit agencies of all sizes, providing essential travel and supporting transit workers across the country who are unable to work because of the public health emergency."

The HOP did not have to request funding from the cities of Killeen or Temple because of the grants, according to city spokeswomen.

"The City of Temple did not budget funding to The HOP in fiscal year 2021," said Emily Parks. "On April 30, 2020, we received a letter from The HOP indicating that they would not be asking for funding for the remainder of FY 2020, as well as FY 2021 due to the funding they would receive related to the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act."

The HOP serves Temple, Belton, Killeen and nearby rural areas.

The transit service provided more than 448,000 passenger trips in 2018 on its fixed routes. Its ridership was expected to be down for 2019, because services were cut in Killeen and Copperas Cove, and Saturday hours were cut systemwide, said Darrell Burtner, director of urban operations for the transit district, in an FME News Service story.

The HOP did not provide more recent ridership numbers.



Grants have helped the HOP continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PAST FUNDING TROUBLES

The HOP receives funding from the Texas Department of Transportation Public Transportation Fund, the Federal Transit Administration, and municipal sources.

But in recent years, funding shortfalls have required that the communities served by the HOP make up the difference.

For the past several years, the HOP received 38 percent of its funding from the Federal Transit Administration, 19 percent from the state, 4 percent from local entities, 33 percent from the Hill Country Transit District; and 6 percent from local fares.

In 2019, the HOP had to change some of its routes because of increased costs and decreased revenues.

"We have to match service levels to the funding we have," Burtner told FME News Service.

Temple ridership was predicted to be 19.7 percent lower in 2019, compared to 2018. Killeen ridership was expected to decrease by 31.6 percent after routes were cut in 2019, according to the FME News Service.

Burtner said that the HOP meets or exceeds every performance measure. The system has a goal to serve 10 passengers per hour on its fixed routes and in 2018 the average was 13.9 passengers per service hour.

THE HOP MEETS A NEED

"We know there is a strong demand for transit in this region," Burtner told FME News Service.

The HOP began in the 1960s as a volunteer transit service. It now serves a nine-county area covering 9,000 square miles.

"In the last decade, the system has experienced significant growth and consists of three divisions: the nine-county Rural Division, the Killeen Urban Division consisting of Copperas Cove, Harker Heights, and Killeen; and the Temple Urban Division consisting of Belton and Temple," according to the Hill Country Transit District.

In addition to its urban routes, the HOP's rural service covers Milam, Bell, Coryell, Hamilton, Mills, Lampasas, San Saba, Llano and Mason counties.

The HOP operates nine fixed routes that serve primarily as a connector route between major cities in the service area. Bus routes are indicated by numbered signs along area streets, and each bus stop has map and schedule.

Urban services operate from 5:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. weekdays. No weekend service is offered.

The base bus fare for one-way travel on a fixed route is \$1. A reduced fare of 50 cents is available for seniors 60 years or older; children 12 or younger; Medicare recipients, students and those with disabilities provided they have a discount card issued by the HOP.

Monthly passes with unlimited rides are \$25. Rural fares may vary, and rural passengers should call The HOP for specific information.

Riders must have the correct fare because drivers cannot make change. Multiride tickets and monthly passes can be purchased at the Killeen City Library at 205 E. Church Ave., or they may be purchased in person or by mail through the Belton office. Bus passes also can be purchased at Copperas Cove Library, at Harker Heights City Hall, at Temple City Hall, at the Temple Visitor's Center, and at Belton City Hall.

Route and schedule information is available at www.takethehop.com. For more information, call 254-933-3700, and select option 3 for customer service.



Intake pipes move down the cliff toward Stillhouse Hollow Lake and will be lowered to pull water from the lake at the new water treatment plant.

Water treatment plant nears completion on Stillhouse Hollow

BY HUNTER KING
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

A new water treatment plant on Stillhouse Hollow Lake is on the verge of completion after most of the project was completed in 2020.

The Water Control and Improvement District No. 1 has been in the process of building the water plant since 2018.

Ricky Garrett, the general manager of the water district, spoke on what was accomplished on the plant in 2020.

“Over the last 12 months, what was a site littered with structures of concrete and steel and pipe morphed into a functioning water treatment plant. Much like a new house being built, the outside of a water plant appears complete and ready long before it’s actually ready.

“There are literally miles of control and electrical wiring to be installed and each one to be tested,” Garrett said. “Over the past year all the final floor and wall coverings were placed in the Operations Building and the Maintenance Building.

“The laboratory was completed along with water sample station in the Operations Building along with final plumbing and electrical. Piping work was completed on the bulk chemical storage tanks and pumps as well as the chlorine feed building. The high service (finished water) flow meter and vault was installed along with various other vaults to accommodate sample pumps and stations,” Garrett said.

“The largest items completed over the past year were setting

and testing the raw water pumps, setting and testing the high service pumps and setting and testing all the electrical supporting the plant.”

Garrett has also spoken on the final hurdle of getting the plant online in early 2021.

“The last hurdle to be cleared before the plant can provide treated water to the public is approval from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Our engineer (recently wrapped) up a comprehensive report to be submitted to TCEQ. The report includes information about the stability of the water, a metric that assures the water is non-corrosive,” he said.

The \$60 million water plant will serve south Killeen, Harker Heights, Copperas Cove and Nolanville.

The bulk of the project is being paid for with \$54 million of bond funds coming from Killeen and other cities, and the extra \$6 million will come out of the district’s reserve fund.

The city of Killeen is receiving the most additional water at a maximum of 10 million gallons per day and is responsible for just over 51.6% of the debt service.

According to figures from December 2019, Killeen uses less than half of its annual allocation of 5 billion gallons from the Belton Lake treatment plant.

With the addition of the Stillhouse plant, the district will be providing a maximum of 91 million gallons per day of treated water. Currently, the district is treating a maximum of 74 million gallons per day at its water plant on Belton Lake.

Bell County's population growth leads to bigger 2021 budget

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Bell County commissioners passed a budget for fiscal year 2021 that was higher than the previous year.

In August last year, the Bell County Commissioners Court unanimously adopted the county's \$109.2 million budget and set a tax rate of 42.53 cents per \$100 valuation for fiscal year 2021.

Revenues and expenditures in Bell County's 2021 budget are about \$2 million higher when compared to fiscal year 2020's budget of \$107 million.

Fiscal year 2021 went into effect on Oct. 1, 2020, and ends on Sept. 30, 2021. The projected fund balance for 2021 is more than \$44.2 million.

The tax rate for the 2021 budget is 42.53 cents — a 2.47-cent decrease from the current rate of 45 cents.

"You have to go back more than a decade to find a lower combined tax rate than what we're proposing here," Bell County Judge David Blackburn said in August after the court passed the budget and tax rate.

Although the rate is lower, some taxpayers will likely see a higher tax bill. Property appraisals are fueling those increases. Bell County's certified value increased 12.34% to nearly \$22.4 billion, according to the Tax Appraisal District of Bell County.

More than 67% of the county's income, or around \$90 million, comes from property taxes. Sales taxes account for more than 16% of income, or around \$22 million.

On the expenditure side of the coin, public safety, including jail and juvenile detention, accounts for more than 36% of the county's operating expenses.

Behind all of the dollars and cents is an increase in the county's population, which leads to a budget on the rise. Twenty years ago, more than 237,000 people called Bell County home. The population in 2020 is more than 395,000, according to the county.

For example, the costs of personnel



Bell County Judge David Blackburn, top, presides over a meeting at the Bell County Courthouse in downtown Belton.

have risen every year since at least 2017, when more than \$56 million was budgeted. In fiscal year 2021, the costs are budgeted to be \$66.6 million. Operating costs have risen, also, from \$34.1 million in 2017 to \$42.5 million in 2021.

There are some aspects of the budget that are out of the control of county officials.

Blackburn pointed out 9.77 cents of the county tax rate can be attributed to unfunded mandates — laws approved but not funded by the Texas Legislature. Those unfunded mandates — which include indigent health and defense and property tax exemptions — cost about \$15.8 million, according to the county.

"That number continues to grow both in terms of real dollar amount and as a percentage," the county judge said. "It's certainly going to be a challenge for us each and every year going forward as it has been in past years."

Blackburn said that the county's economy continues to thrive, with an AA+ rating from Standard & Poor's and a low ad valorem tax rate when compared to the region and state, according to Bell County's budget presentation.

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DIGITAL AGENCY

Local organizations get out the vote, inform voters in 2020

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

For three local organizations that support Black and Latin-American communities, 2020 was all about getting out the vote for the election that year.

Bell County had more than 186,200 registered voters in 2018, according to the Texas Secretary of State.

NAACP KILLEEN BRANCH #6189

Last year, the NAACP hosted numerous voter registration events, often in coordination with other local organizations.

“The goal is to ensure that your vote matters,” said Killeen NAACP President TaNeika Driver-Moultrie in August, at one of their voter registration drives. “We want people to participate in rallies and marches and protests, but also to show up at the polls.”

Driver-Moultrie said that the events are not to encourage people to vote a certain way, as the NAACP is nonpartisan.

The NAACP celebrated its 50th anniversary last year.

Other outreach efforts focus on education, economic development, the Census 2020 and combating health disparities in Black and brown communities.

LULAC HERENCIA COUNCIL 4297

Also on a mission to make sure voters were informed were members of the LULAC Herencia Council 4297, which has a long history of emphasizing educational attainment and leadership of Latinos in the community.

The organization teamed up with the Stars and Stripes Exchange Club to host a forum in February. People in attendance had a chance to ask questions of candidates for the Texas House of Representatives, Bell County Precinct 4 Constable, Bell County Justice of the Peace Precinct 4, Place 1 and other contested races ahead of the primary election.

The council hosted other political forums for regional and



Volunteers with the Killeen Branch of the NAACP help out with the organization's Get Out the Vote campaign in October.



LULAC helped organize protests near Fort Hood to demand justice for Spc. Vanessa Guillen, who was slain by a fellow soldier.

local candidates, to include Killeen ISD school board and Killeen City Council.

The Herencia Council also hosted an event to support the family of murdered soldier Vanessa Guillen. Tons of folks showed up to the event, where for \$10 they enjoyed plates featuring brisket, chicken or sausage with rice, beans, bread and jalapenos.

Every March, the organization hosts the “My Heritage, My Legacy Gala.”

Monthly meetings are held at the Harker Heights Recreation Center on the second Monday of the month, from 6 to 8 p.m. The organization posts regularly on its Facebook page: facebook.com/LULACHerenciaCouncil4297.

KILLEEN-FORT HOOD LULAC COUNCIL 4535

Now in its 28th year, Council 4535 is the oldest LULAC council in Bell County.

Both LULAC 4535 and the Herencia Council kept voters informed through numerous postings on social media.

Council 4535 also kept its traditional focus on education and preparing future leaders in the Latino community, awarding tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships.

The focus on education can be seen through its citizenship training classes and scholarships to graduating seniors from Killeen and Copperas Cove school districts, as well as for current students at Central Texas College and Texas A&M University-Central Texas. Hundreds of people have taken the courses since 2014.

Anyone is welcome to join the council.

The Firefighter and Police Officer of the Year are announced at the organization's annual banquet.

The LULAC Council 4535 Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and all donations are tax deductible. For more information on scholarships, banquets, tickets or membership, call 1-800-KILLEEN or visit www.killeenlulac4535.com.

KDH Media Group a trusted source of information

For more than 130 years, the Killeen Daily Herald has continued to look for new ways to provide readers with the most up-to-date and pertinent news and information.

Seldom has this commitment been more important than during the current coronavirus pandemic.

Beginning in March, when the virus first invaded Bell County, the Herald provided its readers and online viewers with crucial information such as how to recognize the virus' symptoms, how to protect yourself from the virus, availability of COVID-19 testing in the area and where to obtain masks, as well as timely updates on government mandates regarding business restrictions and school closings.

The Herald also offered daily articles on developments related to the pandemic as well as graphics to update the community on the virus's spread in the region — a box showing cases per 1,000 residents for area cities and counties, and a daily map providing the daily cumulative total of cases per county in an eight-county area.

As the virus continues to impact our area, the Herald has become a vital and trusted source of information regarding COVID-19 testing availability, vaccination signups and county public health advisories, as well as updates on the virus's impact on local school districts and the area's economy.

Of course, public health coverage is just one aspect of news coverage for the Herald, an award-winning newspaper that has established itself as one of the oldest businesses in the Greater Killeen-Fort Hood area.

First published as a small weekly publication in 1890, the newspaper has evolved into a thriving, multimedia company that is recognized as an important source of news and information to readers and online viewers alike.

As part of the multifaceted KDH Media Group, the Herald continues to serve the fast-growing Central Texas community with an award-winning daily publication and several weekly publications, as well as online at kdhnews.com and on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

In addition, FME News Service — a joint collaboration of the Herald and its sister paper, the Temple Daily Telegram — brings readers a broader spectrum of news, sports and information spanning the coverage areas of both publications.

The Herald continually looks for ways to expand reader engagement, offering a weekly online opinion poll, occasional Facebook polls, and live-streaming of selected events via Facebook Live and Twitter.

The Herald's convenient news app gives users instant access to its online offerings via their phone, tablet or other mobile device. The app can be downloaded for free at the Apple App Store or Google Play.

The Herald also offers a free text alert system, providing readers with the latest breaking news via text message to their mobile device.

In addition to its in-depth reporting in the areas of municipal and county government, public education and military developments, the Herald continues to provide dynamic coverage of local, county and state elections.

The Herald also offers candidate bios, video interviews



and issue-oriented Q&As and updated information on all local races of interest at its politics site, kdhnews.com/centerforpolitics.

The Herald's commitment to timely, thorough and accurate reporting of local, regional and state news has earned the newspaper an array of prestigious journalism awards in recent years.

The Herald has been recognized as Newspaper of the Year for its circulation category three times since 2011. The honor is given by the Texas Associated Press Managing Editors at the group's annual conference.

Last summer, the Herald was recognized with 12 Texas APME awards, including third-place honors for both Newspaper of the Year and Newsroom of the Year.

Last year's Texas APME honors give the paper more than 80 awards from the organization since 2015.

In addition to an award-winning daily newspaper, the Herald continues to produce three weekly publications — the Fort Hood Herald, the Copperas Cove Herald and the Harker Heights Herald — to better serve specific audiences within the Central Texas community.

In conjunction with the Temple Daily Telegram, the Herald also publishes a regional magazine called *Tex Appeal*. Now entering its 10th year of publication, the high-gloss publication features profiles of individuals, groups and businesses that make an impact in their communities.

The Herald has evolved far beyond its roots as a weekly newspaper serving a small cotton-farming town prior to the arrival of Camp Hood in 1942. In the nearly eight decades since then, the community has changed dramatically, and the Herald has grown and changed along with it, keeping pace with the needs of the growing region.

"It is exciting to be a part of the growth and development of our area," said Sue Mayborn, the Herald's editor and publisher. "We take very seriously our role and responsibility of being a credible news source. Through our in-depth news coverage and our strong emphasis on local news, we continue to strive to give our readers the information they need to make informative decisions on matters affecting their lives."

Killeen Chamber pivots to meet needs during pandemic

BY JENNIFER HETZEL
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

2020 was a year of change and adaptation for the local community, and the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce was no exception.

The coronavirus pandemic required the chamber to pivot their programs to meet these new challenges and continue to serve the business community.

A database was created on KilleenChamber.com compiling documents businesses might need to receive aid and find programs to help their business stay open.

A digital Restaurant Guide was created that listed all known restaurants in Killeen and Harker Heights detailing whether businesses were still open, how to place an order and how they were serving and/or delivering food.

The chamber also began offering webinars featuring local experts and businesses. Some were targeted to businesses, with topics such as new ideas for reaching customers and how the PPP loan works.

Webinars for the general public were also offered, featuring experts discussing information such as proper mask usage and staying active at home.

Another project to result from the 2020 pandemic was the Serving Our Heroes program.

Through various sponsors, the GKCC purchased \$15 gift cards from member restaurants, caterers and bakeries. They were distributed to local front-line workers at AdventHealth Central Texas, Seton Medical Center, the Killeen Police Department and the Killeen Fire Department.

The program offered great exposure and a much needed cash infusion for local businesses. In total, nearly 900 gift cards were purchased and distributed. Most in-person events were restructured and moved online.

Leadercast, an annual leadership conference broadcasted to approved sites across the nation, was postponed and offered as a hybrid event in September 2020.

The 2021 event is currently planned for May 5, though the delivery format has yet to be decided.

The chamber also held its 86th Annual Membership Banquet in September.

The following award winners were recognized:

- Roy J. Smith Award: Scott Cosper
- Large Business of the Year: Centex Technologies
- Small Business of the Year: Beronio Wealth Planning Solutions

- Nonprofit of the Year: Texas Charity Bingo

The 2021 Annual Membership Banquet is currently scheduled for Sept. 16.

In 2020, the Public Policy Council held luncheons with Comptroller Glenn Hegar, Commissioner of Higher Education Harrison Keller, and a State of the City & County.

The Military Relations Council held luncheons with Major General Jeff Broadwater and Command Sergeant Major Hendrex.

The Leadership Killeen program graduated 19 students in

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about or join the chamber, call 254-526-9551, visit killeenchamber.com or email nichole@killeenchamber.com.

To learn about the chamber's economic development work or data about the Killeen area, visit killeenedc.com or email phyllis@killeenchamber.com.

To learn about the 14 Forward campaign, visit killeenchamber.com/forward or email jennifer@killeenchamber.com.

2020 and a new class of 14 students began in September.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Major employers continue to increase jobs, while new businesses add to the growing pool of jobs.

The Killeen Economic Development Corporation funded renovation upgrades to the new Boys & Girls Club Central Texas facility in downtown Killeen.

The new facility will serve 30-150 youth per day and fills a previously vacant building in the downtown district.

CSI Aviation, a company recruited by KEDC in 2017 to locate at the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport, expanded its operations this year. CSI Aviation provides medical flight and air ambulance services and will provide maintenance services to commercial airlines in Killeen.

The company projects to add 40 new jobs within six years.

First National Bank Texas announced the construction of a new corporate headquarters building in Killeen on Trimmier Road, and Interstate 14. The facility will replace a branch located on the same site.

Additionally, KEDC helped recruit the following businesses to the community in 2020: Raising Canes, Firestone, Ollie's, Dunkin Donuts and Church's Chicken.

14 Forward, a privately funded arm of the chamber that focuses on economic development, released several research papers this year.

- "An Innovation District in Killeen" explains what an innovation district is and how and why the chamber is working to create one in Killeen.

- "Redeveloping Downtown Killeen" explains the importance of downtown to the community's development and offers suggestions for how redevelopment can be achieved.

- "5G Technology" explains how 5G works and why it is an asset.

These papers can be viewed at killeenchamber.com/research_publications.

14 Forward staff continues to work with the Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition and Youth Infrastructure Coalition to ensure the continued expansion of Interstate 14 from Fort Bliss, Texas to Fort Stewart, Georgia.

This designation will have enduring economic impact on Killeen and other cities along the route.



Representatives of Texas Charity Bingo receive the Nonprofit of the Year Award from Meredith Viguers, right, at the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce's annual awards banquet. From left are Patrick Green, assistant manager of operations; Scot McFall, general manager of operations; Kathi Barksdale and Lori Knapp, accountant.

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Progress continues on the new Killeen corporate headquarters for First National Bank Texas.

New First National Bank Texas facility on schedule

BY STEVE WILSON
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Progress is being made on a new five-story banking facility in Killeen, set for an opening late this year.

Jessica Pelache, director of customer experience for First National Bank Texas, said construction progress for the new corporate headquarters building, located at Interstate 14 and Trimmier Road is proceeding as planned. The bank has an existing branch there, and has owned that land since owned since the 1980s, she added.

“We are excited about our continued growth and the growth of Killeen,” Pelache said.

Pelache said the 47,000-square foot facility will house a state-of-the-art full-service bank branch replacing the current Trimmier Banking Center as well as professional and support offices.

The full-service bank will be located on the first floor of the building. The other four floors will house various executive level and professional support departments. Employees from both the downtown Gray Street headquarters and the Trimmier Road branch would consolidate within the new facility.

“While we are also currently exploring the possibility of an additional expansion opportunity in Killeen, we are unable to comment further on that project at this time,” she added.

Pelache said that the bank has invested over \$14 million into the new building. First National has 338 branches in four states and over \$3 billion in assets. As a result, the company said it has outgrown its current facility in downtown that was

built in 1960 when the bank had only \$100 million in assets and only one branch.

The bank held a virtual groundbreaking ceremony for the new facility in October.

“As a result of the pandemic, we have opted for a virtual event for this groundbreaking as an abundance of health precaution,” Bobby Hoxworth, president and CEO of First National Bank Texas said at the time in a news release. “We look to the future with great anticipation as we continue to serve our communities one customer at a time, providing outstanding financial products and services wrapped in a strong commitment to a convenient community bank experience.”

According to Hoxworth, the new building will house a total of 130 full-time jobs with the average annual salary of \$66,983.

First National Bank Texas was founded in Killeen in 1901 and has provided financial services to the community for over 119 years. The new corporate headquarters is set to open in late 2021, however, the company has not given a specific date.

Last April, the Killeen City Council approved entering a tax abatement agreement with First National Bank on the property.

The 10-year, \$858,715.27 deal was approved with a 6-1 vote, with then-Councilman Gregory Johnson in opposition. Johnson said he felt “uncomfortable” with the current state of local small businesses due to COVID-19 and the council voting on “something like this at this time.”

A tax abatement is an agreement between a local government and a property owner to exempt part of the taxes owed in return for improvements to the property.

Unemployment spikes during 2020

HERALD STAFF REPORT

It is nearly impossible to discuss 2020 without bringing up the deadly pandemic that hit the United States in January. After reaching the country's shores, COVID-19 spread quickly, upending nearly every expectation people had for the year.

One of the hardest-hit areas was the job sector, with millions of people losing their jobs or receiving a cut in hours as thousands of businesses closed or cut staff due to coronavirus restrictions.

Unemployment numbers for the state of Texas — and for the Killeen/Temple Metropolitan area — show just how badly the local area was effected by the pandemic.

In January and February 2020, the unemployment rate for the Killeen/Temple Metropolitan area was 3.8% and 3.7%, respectively. Compared to 2019's 4.5% and 4.1% unemployment rate for the same two months, the year off to a good start. But when COVID-19 reached the area in March and city and county officials decided to impose restrictions and social distancing measures in order to limit the spread of the virus, the unemployment numbers began to rise.

In March, unemployment reached 5.3%, and after a full month of shutdowns and restrictions the number skyrocketed to 11.2% in April.

"Regarding this past year's events, it certainly was unprecedented in regards to impact and it was extraordinary since it was not a by-product of the market or the overall economy," said Charley Ayres, director of Industry/Education Partnerships for Workforce Solutions of Central Texas. "In the Killeen/Temple metro area, the average household of four spends \$398 at restaurants, and during the lockdown that spending dropped to \$80 per household.

"In March, consumer spending for the metro area was \$791.33 million but began to climb in July and as of December consumer spending has rebounded to \$1.02 billion, which are pre-COVID numbers. Job growth will follow this trend."

Ayres said Workforce Solutions was able to quickly shift gears at the

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES		
KILLEEN-TEMPLE	2020	2019
JANUARY	3.8	4.6
FEBRUARY	3.7	4.2
MARCH	5.3	3.8
APRIL	11.2	3.2
MAY	10.8	3.1
JUNE	7.7	3.8
JULY	7.2	4.0
AUGUST	6.1	3.8
SEPTEMBER	7.3	3.6
OCTOBER	6.3	3.5
NOVEMBER	7.4	3.5
TEXAS		
JANUARY	3.8	4.2
FEBRUARY	3.6	3.9
MARCH	5.1	3.5
APRIL	13.1	3.0
MAY	12.7	2.9
JUNE	8.7	3.6
JULY	8.3	3.7
AUGUST	7	3.6
SEPTEMBER	8.2	3.3
OCTOBER	6.7	3.3
NOVEMBER	8	3.3

beginning of the pandemic, offering a variety of services including virtual job fairs, career curbside service and even in-person services if necessary.

After the strictest of the restrictions began to ease, unemployment numbers began to fall once more. By November, unemployment had dropped to 7.4%, a significant improvement from April, but still much higher than November 2019, which saw just 3.6% unemployment.

Even though the numbers are currently high, Ayres thinks the overall downward trend will continue as the state continues to reopen.

"The industry sector that was hit the hardest during the pandemic has been food service and accommodations," Ayres said. "This was critical since these industries in our region are among the largest in hiring numbers second only to Government and Healthcare. However, as the State continues to reopen our projections show that unemployment will continue to shrink and be at the level of pre-COVID numbers."

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New businesses open despite coronavirus pandemic

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, which has wreaked havoc on some small businesses in the Central Texas area, John Crutchfield, president of the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce, said the retail market in Killeen continues to grow.

“Many vacant facilities have been backfilled with different retailers, and the community continues to receive inquiries from prospective new businesses,” Crutchfield said.

Why?

“The Greater Fort Hood market does well in sales because soldiers and veterans have a guaranteed steady income. Because of this, retailers understand that the market is more stable than most,” Crutchfield added.

In Killeen, many of the retail deals that were being worked on in 2019 came to fruition in 2020. The coronavirus pandemic caused a delay in some of the deals, but many remained on schedule, Crutchfield explained.

“Most national retailers work on store openings three-years in advance. Killeen remains in the top tertiary markets in Texas,” he said.

An indication of a growing market, the city of Killeen received higher sales tax revenue in 2020 than it did in 2019.

Crutchfield said a contributing factor in this could have been Texas House Bill 1525 that went into effect in October 2019. The new legislation allowed sales tax collection for sales from online marketplace and remote retailers.

“This new revenue stream caused increased sales tax income for many cities, especially when consumers were increasingly shopping online during the pandemic,” Crutchfield said.

He added that the coronavirus stimulus payments could have also been a contributing factor. Area residents began

receiving \$1,200 stimulus payments after President Donald Trump signed the coronavirus relief package earlier in the year.

Looking ahead to 2021, the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce and the Killeen Economic Development Corporation will continue to prioritize getting a grocer on the north side of Killeen.

Killeenites living on the north side lost two grocery giants within a span of around three months in 2019.

First, IGA Foodliner closed on Aug. 28, 2019.

The store’s last owner, John Benson, who had owned the grocery store for over a decade, said there was too much competition with H-E-B and Walmart.

The store itself existed in the city since the mid-1970s. Beginning its life as a Piggly Wiggly grocery store, the location became an IGA in the mid-1980s.

Shortly after the closure of IGA, H-E-B dropped a bombshell of an announcement that the store at 809 N. Gray St. would close on Oct. 20, 2019.

The nearest H-E-B location to the one that closed is at 2511 Trimmier Road, 2.5 miles away, across busy I-14. Another store is at 1101 W. Stan Schlueter Loop, four miles away. H-E-B also operates locations in Harker Heights and Copperas Cove.

“We are also looking at vacant land that could be used for developments to attract new businesses as well as increase the tax base for the City,” Crutchfield said of the other priorities for 2021.

One business that was looking to move to Killeen would have purchased the property that once housed Gander Mountain.

Camping World backed out of its requests to rezone the land after the Killeen City Council shot down the initial proposal with a 4-2 vote on Dec. 8, 2020.

Camping World would have brought about 50 jobs and possibly \$40 million in revenue per year to Killeen.

Crutchfield said that as the economy recovers from the pandemic, he anticipates more businesses will expand and move to Killeen.

“It is unknown how the retail market will pivot as a whole to safeguard against business disruptors,” he said. “KEDC staff is scheduled to attend retail conferences to promote the community and track new national trends.”

KILLEEN OPENINGS

Some new businesses opened or held grand openings in Killeen in the midst of the pandemic.

Pier 7 Juicy Seafood & Bar, a Louisiana Cajun style seafood restaurant officially opened for business on May 17, 2020.

The restaurant, 1501 E. Central Texas Expressway, opened for take-out business before transitioning to in-person dining.

Pier 7 is occupying the building that once was Hooters before it closed in July 2019.

Waldy’s Pizza World & More opened to the public on July 24 at 1510 S. Fort Hood St.

Waldemar “Waldy” Rivera and his father had a life-long



Brick & Forge Taproom opened in August. It’s located at 2901 E. Central Texas Expressway, Killeen.



People wait in line outside Ollie's Bargain Outlet in Killeen on its opening day in October. The store in the Cielo Vista shopping center.

dream of opening a pizza place with a unique spin and opened a place in Puerto Rico where he is from.

Tex-Rican Ranch Restaurant, located at 3281 Chaparral Road in Killeen opened Oct. 25, 2020.

It is a Chinchorro-style Puerto Rican restaurant.

Owner Edwin Camuy said his first business started in 2010 in Harker Heights, and he also owns Tex-Rican Restaurant in the 440 Plaza on South Fort Hood Street.

HARKER HEIGHTS RETAIL MARKET

Gina Pence, president and CEO of the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce, described the retail market in 2020 as a "roller coaster ride."

"The highs included strong spending on personal self-care, home projects and outdoor activities," Pence said. "The lows included closures, business mergers and bankruptcy filings."

During the challenging times, Pence said the community saw new business growth and record-setting profits.

"In 2020 Harker Heights had 1,133 total business establishments giving us an increase over the prior year with 1,082," Pence said.

Pence shared similar sentiments as Crutchfield when discussing the health of the retail market in 2021.

"The retail industry can include grocery, drug, department, and convenient stores," she said. "Service-related businesses such as beauty salons and rental places are also considered retail business. Investors and retailers are continuing to

choose Harker Heights in 2021 to develop and open new business.

"Closures and limited occupancy have created a social crisis for many which led to an increase in online shopping and virtual experiences."

As businesses began opening up under Gov. Greg Abbott's phased reopening plan, the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce started a campaign to assist small businesses.

The campaign, called #TogetherWeAreStronger, to encourage residents to support local businesses.

To take part of the campaign, local business owners requested a window decal free of charge to display in their business.

While business owners could show their customers the decal in their windows, residents could support stores and their community by shopping local.

Businesses such as Southern Grace Salon & Boutique took part in the campaign by requesting a decal.

Looking ahead to 2021, Pence said the Heights Chamber will continue to work with its local businesses.

It is extremely important that we work closely with our local businesses on their needs and provide educating opportunities to help grow their business," Pence said. "Our local businesses must incorporate online shopping, user friendly web tools and offer social experiences to help maximize sales."

Continued on page 24

From page 23

BUSINESSES JOINING THE KILLEEN CHAMBER IN 2020

(As provided by the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce)

- AEON Nail Spa, 4001 E. Stan Schlueter Loop #204, Killeen
- Aligned Mortgage, 3800 Trimmier Road, Suite A, Killeen
- Asésu's Fine Dining & Catering, 224 E. Ave. D, Killeen
- Autism Behavior Support, 4003 W. Stan Schlueter Loop, Suite 3, Killeen
- Bell County MotoWorks, 3925 S. General Bruce Drive, Temple
- Brick & Forge Taproom, 2901 E. Central Texas Expressway, Killeen
- Burger King, 1029 S. Fort Hood St., Killeen
- Cakelandia CTX, 701 W. Elms Road, Suite 350, Killeen
- Cicis, 832 S. Fort Hood St., Killeen
- DIMAT Enterprises
- E-Smart Security
- First Choice Automotive Repair, 900 Leifester Circle, Killeen
- Fish Window Cleaning, 5904 E. Veterans Memorial Blvd., Suite B100, Killeen
- Fort Hood Spouses' Club,
- Fresh 'N' Pure Alkaline Water, 2809 W. Stan Schlueter Loop, #103, Killeen
- HA Homes, 2700 S. Fort Hood St., Suite F, Killeen
- His Anointed Hands Catering
- ImPossible Paradigm Shifters Youth Program, 405 S. Second St., Killeen
- Integrity Urgent Care, 2520 Trimmier Road, Suite 100, Killeen
- Jo Agency, Inc.
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- Killeen Memorial Park Funeral Home and Cemetery, 3516 Lake Road, Killeen
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- Little Jamaica Restaurant & Lounge, 1200B Willow Springs Road, Killeen
- Live and Let Liv Yoga, 2304 W. Stan Schlueter Loop, Killeen
- Lockridge Priest, Inc.
- Luxé Salon and Spa Suites
- Mansions 54, 5401 N. Mays St., Georgetown
- Marvel's Florist, 720 N. 10th St., Killeen
- Memory Lane Photos, LLC, 6702 Creek Land Road, Killeen
- My Little Storie
- Network Systems Integrators
- New Horizon Music Studio, 1205 E. Central Texas Expressway, Killeen
- No Limit Custom Prints, 1314 Georgetown Road, Copperas Cove
- Nutree Bookkeeping
- Quality Quilts by Laura, 3006 Oakwood Drive, Harker Heights
- SFRB Productions, LLC, 2611 Boyd Ave., Killeen
- She Jay's Hair Collections
- SHE WILL Foundation, 402 N. Eighth St., Killeen

Jack Sparrow welcomes patrons to Pier 7 in Killeen. The seafood restaurant opened in May.



- Spectrum REACH
- Supreme Hair & Beauty Killeen, 3301 E. Rancier Ave. #101B, Killeen
- Top Koat Nail Studio
- Top Mini Storage, 1101 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Killeen
- Traffic Kings, LLC
- Vista College, 1001 S. Fort Hood St., Killeen
- We Clean It Custodial Services
- We Play Drop Zone
- Wilmar Financial

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(As provided by the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce)

- Tandem Virtual Assistant-Fred Harris
- Farmers Bridges Insurance Agency, 3045 Stillhouse Lake Road, Suite 111, Harker Heights
- GameDay Sports Bar and Grill, 302 W. Veterans Memorial Blvd., Harker Heights
- Orangetheory Fitness, 3045 Stillhouse Lake Road, Harker Heights
- Visiting Angels, 2213 Birdcreek Terrace, Temple
- TexThreads, 100 E. FM 2410, Harker Heights
- Fort Hood Spouses Club
- 3D Volume Lash & Brow Studio, 813 S. Amy Lane, Suite 104, Harker Heights
- SHE Will Foundation, 402 N. Eighth St., Killeen
- Social Coffee Bar, 3300 S. Fort Hood St., Suite A, Killeen
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- Boozy Beans Coffery, 2408 Clear Creek Road, Killeen
- You First Health and Wellness



- T & N Construction and Cleaning Service LLC
- Life Moves Yoga, 3045 Stillhouse Lake Road, Suite 110, Harker Heights
- Divine Touch Massage Therapy and Skin Care, 4008 E. Stan Schlueter Loop, Suite 108-109, Killeen
- Katura Cleaning Services, 1819 S. Bend Road, Salado
- Cen Tex RV and Boat Storage
- Blackacre Title Company, 100 W. Central Texas Expressway, #104, Harker Heights
- Training for Warriors, 905 Mountain Lion Circle, #900, Harker Heights
- Gold Financial Services, 100 W. Central Texas Expressway, #200B, Harker Heights
- Texas Tykes Daycare, 546 E. FM 2410, Suite D, Harker Heights
- Avery Flooring, 2803 E. Veterans Memorial Blvd., Suite A, Killeen
- Brick & Forge Taproom, 2901 E. Central Texas Expressway, Killeen
- Scuba Divers Paradise, 4600 Simmons Road, Belton
- OnSite! Mobile Cook & Sip
- The Field House Gym, 704 Edwards Drive, Harker Heights
- Renee Trusky All City Real Estate
- Freedom + Storage, LLC
- Always Here Properties, LLC, 400 E. Central Texas Expressway, Suite B, Harker Heights
- CSV LLC
- Lakeside Ice
- Hubbert Roofing, 11221 Highview Drive, Belton
- Kachemak Bay Flying Service, 7720c Airport Road, Temple
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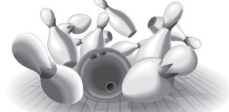
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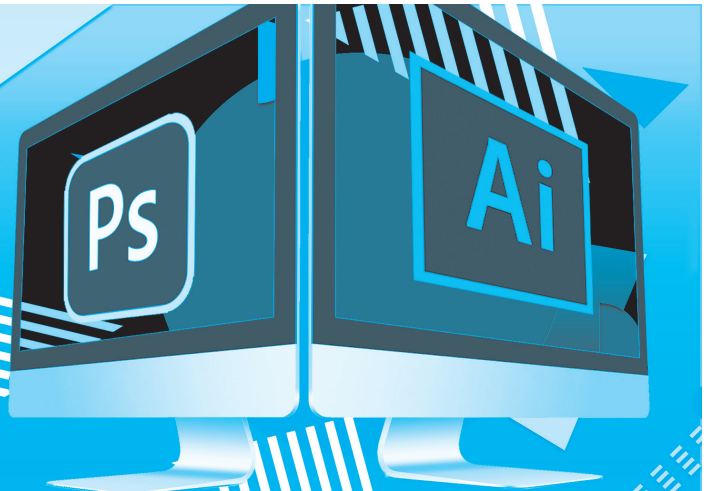
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BY ARTIE PHILLIPS
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Home values in the Killeen area saw a 17.7% year-over-year increase at the end of 2020, according to data from the Fort Hood Area Association of Realtors. "Texaswide, the median price of homes is up 12% over the last year," Michael DeHart said. "Trends show that the Bell County area is more stable than the average across the nation." The market doesn't sway up as radically or bottom out like

the national housing market, he said.

In contrast with the way COVID-19 has affected other areas of the economy, the real estate market has remained very steady, DeHart said.

Although homes are put on and taken off the market for a variety of reasons, DeHart said tracking the number of closings from year to year can give an accurate picture of how the housing market is doing.

The average home price in the Killeen area was \$169,250 in December 2020, the most recent month for which data is

Continued on page 32

Median Price
\$200,000
▲ 16.5% YoY

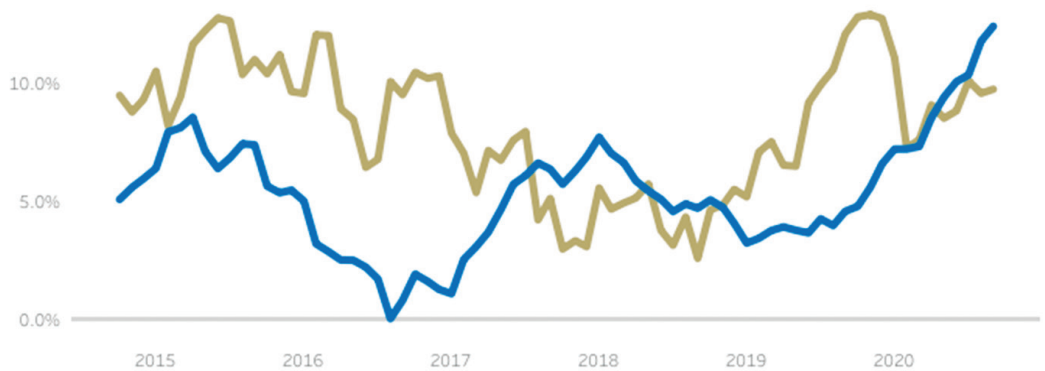
Closed Sales
529
▲ 15.8% YoY

Active Listings
332
▼ -65.8% YoY

Months Inventory
0.6
▼ -1.3 YoY



GROWTH TREND FOR CLOSED SALES AND MEDIAN PRICE



TRANSACTION TIME STATS

Days on Market
37

21 days less than December 2019

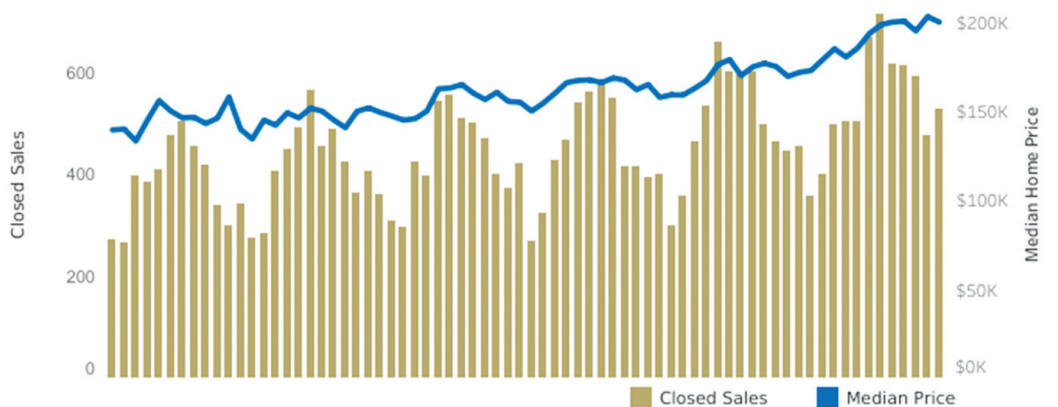
Days to Close
36

3 days more than December 2019

Total Days
73

18 days less than December 2019

CLOSED AND MEDIAN PRICE HISTORY



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Home values in the Killeen area rose 17.7% in December and home sales rose 8.4% over 2019.

From page 31

available. This is an increase of \$24,250 from \$145,000 in December 2019.

There were 219 sale closings in the area in December 2020, an increase of 8.4% from 200 closings in December 2019.

The total months of housing inventory in December 2020 was just 0.5, down from 1.5 the previous year.

The average home spent 31 days on the market, 15 fewer days than in December 2019.

Traditionally, area home values since 2000 have been mostly flat as they just keep pace with inflation. There is plenty of new construction, which generates an ample supply of inventory to keep up with the housing demand.

Killeen survived the 2008 housing crash relatively unscathed because home values had not climbed anywhere nearly as dramatically as they had in places like Florida, California and Nevada. Foreclosures are still prevalent in the area but dropping.

The average home price across all of Texas was \$270,000 in December, an increase of 8.9% over \$248,360 in December 2019.

On average, homes across Texas spent

47 days on the market, 18 days less than they spent on the market in December 2019.

There were 36,493 closed home sales across Texas in December, up 22% from December 2019. Statewide, the total months of housing inventory was 1.7, down just 1.3 months from the same time last year.

The average price of a home in Bell County was \$200,000 in December, which was up 16.5% from \$171,375 in December 2019.

The Harker Heights average property value in December 2020 was \$245,000, a 15.2% increase from December 2019.

The average home in Copperas Cove is valued at \$175,000, a drastic increase of 39.4% from the same time the previous year.

The average property value for a home in Nolanville was \$286,000 in December, a drastic increase of 24.4% from \$127,812 the year before.

The average property value in Gatesville was \$116,500 in December, a 22.3% decrease from the previous year. This is currently the lowest property value in the area.

The average property value in Lampasas was \$170,000 in December, a 13.3% increase from December 2019.

Permits issued for residential and commercial properties

BY ARTIE PHILLIPS
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Several new businesses and other properties are making their way to Killeen in the near future, with a variety of business permits being issued in 2020.

Many of the new commercial construction permits issued last year were for the construction of new restaurants, with one of the first commercial permits of the year being issued for a new restaurant.

Bubba's 33, a restaurant selling burgers, pizza, wings and more will be moving into Killeen. The restaurant will be at 3701 E. Central Texas Expressway, at the location of the old Killeen Power Sports, which sold motorcycles and ATVs. The new business is valued at \$800,000.

Dunkin' Donuts also began work on a new location in Killeen in May 2020. The second Dunkin' location in Killeen, the new business is located at 1516 S. Fort Hood St. The new business is valued at \$965,000, and opened late last year.

In July 2020, both Burger King and Church's Chicken announced plans to open new locations in Killeen, with both companies planning to open the restaurants right next door to each other. Burger King, valued at \$775,000, will be built at 1029 S. Fort Hood St. Church's Chicken, valued at \$575,000, will be located at 1025 S. Fort Hood St.

A coffee shop announced plans to come to the Killeen area in November 2020. Dutch Brothers Coffee is a mostly drive-thru shop that serves coffee, smoothies, freezes, teas an energy drink and nitrogen-infused cold brew coffee. The business will open its second Texas location at 1109 W. Stan Schlueter Loop. The new business is valued at \$525,000.

Other businesses are making their ways to the area, as well. A new smoke shop, The Chill Zone, will also be opening up in the city soon. Chill Zone will be at 1603 Florence Road and is valued at \$47,000.

In addition to new businesses being permitted in 2020, multiple ongoing construction projects continued throughout the year.

The Killeen Independent School



Killeen issued a variety of commercial and residential building permits in 2020 as the area grows.

District broke ground on High School No. 6 — now named Chaparral High School — in October 2019, and construction has continued at a steady pace. Currently on track to open to students in 2022, the new school is budgeted at \$147 million.

Construction is also nearing completion for a new elementary school in Killeen, Pat Carney Elementary School. The school is valued at \$16.72 million, and construction began in May 2020. The building is expected to open to students in August for the 2021-2022 school year.

For a complete list of permits issued in 2020, check out the city of Killeen's monthly permit reports at <https://www.killeentexas.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=38>.

HARKER HEIGHTS

Perhaps the biggest commercial construction project to be permitted in 2020 was when the City Council approved a zoning change that cleared the way for a new Hampton Inn off Knights Way near Carl Levin Park. While the zoning request was approved, construction has yet to begin on the new 88-unit hotel, which will located near 335 E. Knights Way, to the south of the private drive between Popeye's and Whataburger.

In addition to commercial projects in the city, there was also a school construction project finished by KISD. The new Nolan Middle School on Warriors Path in Harker Heights was

complete in 2020, and opened to its first class of students in the 2020-21 school year. The school replaced the former Nolan Middle School at Jasper and Florence roads, and cost \$54 million.

For a complete list of permits issued in 2020 go to www.mygovernmentonline.org/ and look up Harker Heights' permit reports.

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Thousands of homes planned on Belton's south side

BY JACOB SANCHEZ
FME NEWS SERVICE

BELTON — South Loop 121 is becoming a hotbed for housing developments. Bulldozers and backhoes motor on land to prepare it so hundreds of homes can be built.

Freshly poured black asphalt roads break the monotonous brown dirt. In the future West Canyon Trails subdivision off of West Avenue O, an office and a lone model home are the only structures built.

This area — and really the greater South Belton sector — is increasingly becoming the future of the county seat. City of Belton data shows that, so far, 1,565 homes have been platted in the area between Loop 121 and Interstates 14 and 35. And that's just the beginning of this southern development boom.

The Belton Independent School District owns a 109-acre site that may hold a future campus — or two. BISSD and city leaders are in early talks about building up area infrastructure — including water, sewer and roads — so the land can be ready for whatever the district decides to build there — and for whatever else may spur off of it.

Mayor Wayne Carpenter boiled down that expected explosion of new home construction to a single word.

“It’s really the old adage of location, location, location. It’s close to town. It’s got easy access to I-14 and I-35,” Carpenter said. “I just think that whole area of the city — the west and



The future West Canyon Trails subdivision off of West Avenue O in Belton will eventually have 170 homes. It is one of more than a dozen subdivisions with 1,565 lots platted that are expected to be constructed in the area between Loop 121 and Interstates 14 and 35.

southwest — is just prime for future growth.”

Belton has an estimated 22,883 residents, according to a new population figure the City Council recently approved. That is a 25.6% increase since the 2010 Census.

With this influx of new homes, the city’s population is all but certain to grow in the coming years.

City Manager Sam Listi said it makes sense that the South Loop 121 area would see a bevy of housing construction.

“Development cannot occur without appropriate infrastructure to support it,” Listi said. “Water and sewer lines are in place within the Loop 121 corridor. Add to that the proposed widening of the loop and the 109-acre Belton ISD tract at Loop 121 and Shanklin Road, and you can see why the area, with its quick access to I-35 and I-14, is so appealing.”

SPURRING RETAIL GROWTH

Developing South Belton — the city’s main growth corridor — has long been a goal of local officials. Belton is betting that Three Creeks — a sprawling subdivision that is expected to have 1,500 homes just south of city limits off of Stillhouse Hollow Dam Road — will help spur retail development.

Another proposed neighborhood, River Farm, may push the need for more stores in South Belton even further. River Farm, located east of I-35 and along the Lampasas River, is anticipated to have as many as 1,775 homes.

Much of Belton’s growth in the past decade has been in its northern areas between Sparta Road and Lake Road. That has been changing. In the past five years, more than 700 homes have been built in Three Creeks, Listi said.

Mayor Pro Tem Dan Kirkley pointed out Bell County is not the only area seeing a boom — in fact, it’s just at the precipice of one. He said residents don’t have to look far to see what is coming. “We’ve watched Interstate 35 grow. Georgetown used to be isolated. Round Rock used to be isolated. Well, we’re not isolated anymore.”

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New Life Apostolic Church opened its doors at 4712 E. Rancier Ave. at the end of March.

Churches build new facilities to serve congregations

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

In the past year, several Killeen-area churches embarked on construction projects to enlarge their existing structures or to build new ones for their congregations. Here's a look at some of the projects undertaken in 2020.

NEW LIFE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

A church that has served downtown Killeen for 20 years moved into a brand new facility in 2020.

Pastor Tony White said the church opened its doors at its new location, 4712 E. Rancier Ave., at the end of March 2020.

Originally in a hallway between two buildings on North Gray Street, the church was most recently at 702 N. Eighth Street in downtown Killeen. White said the church occupied that location for about 17 years. Four years ago, the church began the process of purchasing new land and developing the plans for the new building.

"We were growing, naturally — thank God," White said. "And we also wanted a location to possibly be a little bit more accessible and visible, so that we could help more people."

When the coronavirus pandemic began, the church purchased air purification systems for the new building, and it has been able to operate out of the it for much of the pandemic. White said the church began to implement a signup sheet for those wishing to attend service in-person. It also began to implement live streamed services on YouTube.

The current membership is about 145 people, White said.

FAITH POINT CHURCH

During its 53rd year of service, Faith Point Church moved into its new facility at 1826 Stagecoach Road in Killeen.

The 15,600-square-foot building opened on Sept. 13, and it is the first of several buildings planned for the property.

Previously located at 3504 E. Central Texas Expressway, the church sold its 15-acre property along Interstate 14 to Car Max in 2017 and purchased the 17-acre property on Stagecoach Road that November.

Construction crews began work on the property in June 2019 and poured the foundation for the main building in

October 2019. Work continues on the site. Phase 1 includes the building of a multi-use facility/cafe called Heis Coffee that Pastor Scott Hoxworth referred to as somewhat of a modern-day "fellowship hall." Heis Coffee will also temporarily house the church offices when it is complete.

Hoxworth said he hopes construction will begin within the next couple of months, and once in progress, construction of that building should take around six months.

Next will be its children's ministry building, followed by its youth ministry building, projects that Hoxworth anticipates will be complete in a few years.

CADENCE CHURCH

Within 15 months of officially opening, Cadence Church was able to move into its facility, Pastor Joe Bernier said.

When it opened in 2018, Cadence Church rented the gym of the Armed Services YMCA in Copperas Cove and operated in a "mobile" setting.

In November 2019, the church began leasing the space that once housed GymKix in Copperas Cove. With church members working hard to construct the walls of the sanctuary, or what Bernier calls the "Main Room," and the nursery area, Cadence held a soft opening on Jan. 3, 2020.

On Feb. 23, 2020, the church, at 815 E. Highway 190, Suite B, Copperas Cove, held its grand opening.

Bernier said 189 people attended the grand opening, which represented an increase in attendance by around 50% from when it first opened.

During the pandemic, Bernier said attendance has averaged around 85 to 90 people. Without coronavirus restrictions, the "Main Room" can comfortably hold about 160 people.

Renovations continue to be made inside the more than 12,000-square-foot facility.

Bernier said the church has hired contractors to do minor improvements, such as texturing the walls, but the bulk of the work has been done by church members.

Current renovations include expanding the nursery into two larger rooms, renovating the office space and creating a large, multi-purpose room for various church and community activities. Bernier said he hopes the renovations will be complete before Easter, April 4.

HARKER HEIGHTS

Widening project continues along Interstate 14

BY STEVE WILSON
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Work that began two years ago continues on the Interstate 14 widening project through Bell County. On Oct. 14, the Texas Department of Transportation began the third and final phase of the I-14 expansion project, stretching from Harker Heights to Belton. Specifically, this phase spans from FM 2410 in west Belton to I-35.

TxDOT Spokesman Jake Smith said the contractor, James Construction, has been working on the following aspects of the project:

- Widening of mainline bridges over Nolan Creek East and West, and over cross streets.
- Construction of lowered sections of main line subgrade, base and paving under cross streets.
- Construction of subgrade, base and paving for widened

sections throughout the project limits.

- Construction of permanent concrete barrier rail.

“All of these items are still in progress but significant amounts of each have been completed,” Smith said.

Smith added that the following tasks also remain in phase 2, which spans from Indian Trail in Harker Heights to FM 2410 in Belton: Final paving, striping of the final driving surface, the widening and intersection improvements at the interchanges, and on and off ramp improvements, primarily consisting of construction of new ramps.

“Based on the most recent schedule, phase 2 is projected to be completed in late 2021, weather permitting,” Smith said. “The entire project itself is still on schedule to complete in 2023, weather permitting.”

Phase 1 of the project began in April 2018 and was completed in the spring 2019, with Big Creek Construction, Ltd., of Hewitt, as the contractor. Austin-based JD Abrams is the contractor for phase 2, which began September 2019.



Lane widening projects continue between Harker Heights and Belton on Interstate 14. Phase 2 should wrap up later this year, weather permitting.



Crews prepare heavy equipment in May to work on a repaving project on Farm-to-Market Road 3481 in Harker Heights near Chaparral Road.

Heights adjusts services amid pandemic; more projects ahead

BY JERRY BARK
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Harker Heights has made great progress during the past year. We have continued to thrive and prosper, even in the face of the pandemic.

There is no doubt that the past year brought unprecedented challenges and uncertainties. As our city's vision statement says, the staff will continue to adapt and provide quality services that the residents expect.

We know the importance of the programs the city offers and look forward to returning to normal operations as soon as possible.

Until large gatherings are safe, the public is able to participate remotely in City Council meetings and workshops.

While COVID-19 may have slowed our lives, the city continued to move on. For instance, the city had several long-term employees retire, and it's always difficult to replace that type of expertise and knowledge.

This time saw my promotion from public relations director to assistant city manager; Ayesha Lealiiee was promoted to finance director; Kristina Ramirez was promoted to planning director; and Julie Helsham was promoted to city secretary.

There were other improvements that occurred in 2020.

The Parks and Recreation Open Space Master Plan was completed to provide a sense of direction for recreation, parks, and open space guidance.

An additional bathroom facility was added to Carl Levin City Park, near the playground area.

A parking ordinance that will affect residential parking on grass and heavy vehicle parking within residential neighborhoods will be enforced beginning Oct. 1, 2021.

A Mobile Food Vendor ordinance was also approved in 2020, setting regulations for operations in Harker Heights.

Road projects around the city continued as well.

FM 3481 was widened over a good portion of its length to include a center turn lane. A traffic signal was also added at Vineyard Trail and Cedar Knob Road.

The city, Killeen Independent School District and city of Nolanville, through a joint agreement, began improving a segment of Warriors Path in front of the new Nolan Middle School. It provides a center turn lane and an 8-foot sidewalk along with numerous drainage improvements. This project will greatly improve mobility in and around the school.

Interstate 14 widening continues through Harker Heights.

Fire Station #2 renovations were completed, adding 2,200 square feet of space for new living quarters, a kitchen, TV room, computer work area and offices. The existing portion of the facility was renovated to become the weight room, storage, tool room, and laundry area. The renovation also included a new exterior to the front of the building, new bay doors, new generator, upgrade propane capacity, and new furnishings.

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED IN 2021?

The city has begun to reincorporate the youth and adult sports programming. Safety precautions will continue to be at the forefront of those decisions when determining how those leagues will proceed.

The Parks and Library departments are always bringing forward new and exciting programs to engage all interests. Online classes and programming will continue to be offered by the city's Recreation and Library services.

The city and Waste Management have agreed to a new trash service that will begin March 1. Each utility resident will receive a 96-gallon trash cart. Service routes and the trash collection will continue on the current schedule.

Look for construction to begin soon on a west-to-east turnaround bridge on the east side of FM 2410.

A major sidewalk project providing connectivity from Prospector to Vineyard Trail on FM 3481 is under engineering and should begin construction in 2021. A number of drainage projects are planned in the north area of the city in 2021.

The city is always seeking ways to provide an even greater level of service for residents, businesses and visitors.

JERRY BARK is assistant city manager for the city of Harker Heights.

Heights chamber advocates for small businesses

BY GINA PENCE
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

The Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center maintains support for more than 800 members and the community.

The chamber was excited to see an increase in programs, visitors, sales tax, and new businesses in the first two months of 2020. All economic indicators were showing a promising forecast for the year. Then, COVID-19 hit and the chamber quickly had to begin shifting our business model to maintain being a strong support system for the community.

With a cross-section of local partners, we supported efforts to understand the impact of COVID-19 closures and respond quickly with programs, resources, and policy shifts. The length of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the severity of the decline remains unknown.

Since March, we at the chamber have worked tirelessly to support our members and the community. We shifted our resources to connect with you individually, to understand how you were impacted, and what you needed to get through.

Based on what we heard from you, the chamber took on new and significant issues. Early on, we convened other chambers of commerce in the region to propose a set of recommendations for local governments to support small business and the community.

We helped small-business owners with resources and tools to help stimulate the economy during the reopening stages.

We helped initiate a regional business group with an economic recovery plan.

The chamber has also ramped up its advocacy efforts, pressing the needs of small businesses and the economy with elected officials in our cities, county and state.

We heard that too many of our members were in limbo early on in the pandemic, waiting for the implementation of federal relief. Then, the Bell County Commissioners Court approved \$800,000 in COVID-19 grants to support local businesses. We were able to not only advocate for the financial support, but were able to help distribute over \$120,000 in emergency relief grants to small business throughout the Harker Heights area.

Later, the city approved \$339,468.50 of Coronavirus Relief Fund Small Business Grant program supporting Harker Heights businesses in two phases. The chamber, the city and regional partners have worked tremendously hard to support local businesses during these challenging times.

Like many of your businesses, our organization has had to adapt too. We have said goodbye to cherished volunteers and co-workers, figured out virtual work environments, and adjusted our programming to be relevant during the pandemic.

Through partnerships, we have had the opportunity to innovate and stay relevant. One thing that was highlighted time and again this past year is that none of our work is done alone. Our programs can only function with hundreds of chamber volunteers and engaged members.

Please know that our partners are the key to success and the chamber itself can't exist without your continued support and



Gina Pence, left, president of the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce, presents Alicia Searcy with a #TogetherWeAreStronger sticker. Searcy owns the Southern Grace Salon & Boutique in Harker Heights.

membership. Thank you for all of the trust and commitment this partnership represents, we are eternally grateful to you.

HOW WE HELP

Here's a recap of resources and tools the chamber continues to provide helping our local businesses thrive:

- Expanding our shop local program with a recovering our community together campaign – Together We Are Stronger
 - Curation of local, state and federal resources and information
 - Responsive programming that maintains economic vitality
 - Provided communication platforms to connect and inform businesses
 - Opportunities for the community to come together in person and virtually
 - Free online egift card program to local businesses. Sign up now <https://www.giftfly.com/signup/QHKE-X7HW-U5Y5>
 - National marketing partnership with Support Local USA Today. Supporting local chamber members that offer egift cards. View city of Harker Heights listings <https://supportlocal.usatoday.com/city/harker-heights-tx/>
 - Partnership with city of Nolanville supporting local businesses and the economic development committee
 - Welcome bags for newcomers and visitors into the area
- Please visit www.hhchamber for community events, business resources and city updates. Stay social with the chamber on FB, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube for new exciting programs coming soon.

GINA PENCE is president and CEO of the Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center.

Nolanville plans for improvements, growth in 2021

BY KARA ESCAJEDA
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

2020 definitely threw some curve balls, but it also provided the City of Nolanville with the ability to plan 2021 as a year of action.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite disruption from quarantine, infrastructure improvements remained on schedule. Work focused on engineering of Avenue H for bike lanes and sidewalks that lead to Monarch Park. About \$1.2 million in funding was awarded through a livability from the Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Texas Department of Transportation. More information about the project can be found at: https://www.nolanvilletx.gov/page/Stay_Current

Construction is anticipated to begin in February 2021 and will take approximately six months. Additionally, Old Nolanville Road Bridge is scheduled for much-needed repairs.

Monarch Park recently added fitness equipment stations around the track as well as solar lighting with sensors.

The third Texas Parks and Wildlife Grant will begin in October 2021 and includes public restrooms and a pavilion.

Construction continues on Interstate 14 through Nolanville. The project will make I-14 three lanes in both directions through the city. It is scheduled for completion this summer.

The city's comprehensive plan update task force meeting fortunately concluded prior to the shutdown. The remainder of the year was used to fine tune the document for approval to put it into action in 2021.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This past year has been a very exciting one for the Nolanville Economic Development Corporation. Despite the pandemic, business has been booming. Kerry Phillip has recently come on board as the new EDC coordinator.

Grizzly's Hidden Falls Nursery is a recent addition in Nolanville and they have embraced the city motto



COVID-19 testing is offered on Wednesdays at Central Bell County Fire & Rescue in Nolanville.

of "A Community that Cares" and become woven into the very fabric of community life.

Additionally, CEFCO recently expanded its operations.

Kuality K9's owner Karen Thorn said her business is doing quite well amid the pandemic in that folks are now more cognizant of the value of therapy animals.

King of the Mountain Cyclery is also doing well. It seems that with the pandemic, everyone is trying to find a way to get out of the house and yet stay socially distant. The demand for bikes has become astronomical.

A couple of walking trails are being developed, and plans are in the works for an entire area that will become known as Market Square. It will focus on mixed-use businesses such as cafes, breweries, art studios and gift shops. This will give Nolanville the "old downtown" appearance with walkable streets, string lights, public art and more.

COVID AND CARING

The city's first response to COVID-19 was to educate the city's vulnerable population to modify their routines to prevent the spread amongst them.

An opportunity was identified to assist seniors and small businesses immediately affected by the shutdown. Let Us Do the Cooking was commissioned to provide daily

drive-thru lunches at its facility in Nolanville to seniors for several weeks, encouraging them to eat at home. Hill Country Transit volunteers eventually took over this responsibility and continue to sustain home delivery of meals to seniors with the assistance of First United Methodist Church.

First United Methodist also included mask donations made by Mary Ho and Randy Broussard in the meal delivery

SAFE CHILD CARE

The Boys & Girls Club's Nolanville Unit was approached to provide safe child care for essential workers. The Nolanville EDC quickly developed an application process for businesses to receive grant funding to assist during the shutdown. The city was allocated approximately \$300,000 in COVID Cares funding, which offset the cost of these activities and prevented a reduction in essential services and assisted in changing operational strategies such as modified court procedures, virtual meetings, increased cleaning frequencies and implementation of RU OK program (automated daily check-in by phone for seniors and latch-key kids).

However, the majority was used to improve COVID testing operations at Central Bell County Fire & Rescue on Main Street.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement still occurred in safe bite-size ways. For instance, Keep Nolanville Beautiful hosted a seed stomp in Monarch Park and a tree planting with the 504th Military Intelligence Brigade. Public awareness focused more on education through live streaming and social media. The Holiday Decorating Contest was very popular this year as neighbors worked together to increase cheer.

The Police Department teamed up with Central Bell County Fire & Rescue to deliver toys to those who wrote letters to Santa and placed them in the box at City Hall. The Texas Horse and Mule Club and the Lions Club assisted in the collection of requested toys.

KARA ESCAJEDA is city manager of Nolanville.



Students walk their bicycles to the new Lake Belton High School on the first day of in-person classes in the Belton Independent School District.

Belton upgrades infrastructure, adds school to meet growth

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA

HERALD CORRESPONDENT

The city of Belton has been staying busy with the infrastructure projects needed to support the city's growing population, while its school district has grown so much that a second high school has opened.

Currently the population of the county seat stands at 22,532, according to Paul Romer, the city's public information officer. There are good reasons why the city's population has risen nearly 25 percent since 2010.

"Belton is located between two lakes, has great local restaurants and other businesses and the school district has a great reputation in the region," he said.

The improvement projects that the city is tackling in 2021 are: the widening of Loop 121 from two to four lanes; the South Belton Water Line; and improvements to Heritage Park.

"The Loop 121 widening is a TxDOT project that is necessary to accommodate the increased traffic that comes with population growth," Romer said. "Much of the expansion will include large sidewalks that link to the Nolan Creek Hike & Bike Trail."

Heritage Park long has been a popular spot for Beltonians, and it will be even better after the completion of park improvements such as a new road through the park, additional parking

and restroom facilities, pavilion and a fishing dock. Romer said the design phase is currently underway.

"The awarding of a \$750,000 grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife to develop Heritage Park was definitely a highlight of 2020," Romer said. "The goal with the park is to preserve open space while adding amenities that appeal to a wide variety of people."

BELTON ISD

A vigorous housing market has been one of the forces behind an increase in enrollment for Belton's public schools.

"With more than 12,600 students, BISD's enrollment is up and exceeding projections for the 2020-21 school year," said Karen Rudolph, Belton ISD spokeswoman. "Our demographers attribute this sustained growth to the way the district reopened in the fall after the COVID-19 closure in the spring and the hot local housing market. The district is expected to add more than 2,370 students in the next five years, which is why the district has acquired more than 2,100 lots to build on."

COVID-19 presented its challenges, but 2020 was not without its high points. Dr. Matt Smith was hired in February as the district's superintendent and Lake Belton High School opened in the fall.

"We've been working to build the foundation for a strong campus culture," said Lake Belton High School

Principal Jill Ross. "It's exciting to lay the groundwork for the traditions and values Lake Belton High School students will celebrate for generations to come."

The district's original high school also saw improvements last year.

"We completed renovations at Belton High that included adding a 3,200-square-foot orchestra rehearsal hall, sectional room and three practice rooms along with renovations to the 1,200 square feet of existing band hall, instructor office space and the band music library," Rudolph said.

Belton's young learners weren't left out, as elementary playground improvements included 76 swings, 13 playscapes, 17 shade structures and 33,876 square feet of synthetic fall protection.

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Salado supports small businesses hit by pandemic

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Even with a vibrant community of small businesses, the Village of Salado was not immune to the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy.

The southern Bell County town has around 2,400 residents.

“The Village of Salado launched a multi-faceted support initiative for small businesses in Salado impacted by COVID-19,” according to the village. “The objective of the Salado Small Business Support Initiative is to offer immediate limited financial assistance and business counseling services to affected businesses to aid in maintaining their business and workforce.”

The Small Business Support Initiative included several elements such as a grant program, access to the Salado Small Business Resource Center and a Commercial Building Incentive Program.

It’s not the first time the small town has weathered trying economic times.

Downtown Salado businesses took a hit during years of interstate construction that made for white-knuckle driving through the village. That construction, which widened the

busy I-35 from four to six lanes, ended in Salado in late 2016. Officials previously said 82 of the Salado’s 127 businesses shut down during the four years that it took to improve I-35, according to FME News Service reports.

SALADO ISD

Salado Independent School District campuses have been humming with activity.

“We completed the construction of a new middle school, baseball field, softball field and tennis courts,” said Superintendent Michael Novotny. “We also completed renovations to our elementary school and our stadium for football, soccer and track.”

Novotny said the districtwide enrollment for the 2020-21 school year was 2,129 students.

“This compares to 2,060 students at this time last year and 1,943 students two years ago,” he said. “While our enrollment still increased this year, it did not increase quite as much as the past several years. However, most school districts across the state and nation actually declined in enrollment this year.”

He said that over the past few years Salado ISD has been the fastest-growing school district in terms of enrollment within Education Service Center Region 12.

Florence plans infrastructure upgrades; school sees growth

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

The northwestern Williamson County town of Florence continues a trend toward growth, with at least eight new businesses opening in 2020 and 2021 and negotiations for 250 new homes in the city ongoing with a developer.

“The future looks bright for Florence,” said Mayor Mary Condon, who has been serving since 1995. “I sincerely believe we’ll come out stronger at the end of this COVID-19 crisis.”

Reelected last year, the mayor foresees sustainable growth for the small town of around 1,175 residents.

“We need to secure water availability for the city of Florence so we can continue to grow in a sustainable way,” she said.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The city recently purchased a former Chisholm Trail Water Special Utility District property from the Georgetown, which will allow all of the city’s departments to be housed in one location.

In other infrastructure projects, the pool project was completed although its opening was delayed by COVID-19. Five streets are being paved and more paving projects are planned.

“Recent repairs to our water tower presented the

opportunity to place a new graphic on its exterior,” Condon said. “It now boasts, ‘Florence, Texas, Est. 18,000 B.C.’, an accolade afforded to Florence with the discoveries at the Gault Archaeological Site.”

For more information on local businesses and events in Florence, visit florencechamberofcommerce.org or florencetex.com.

FLORENCE ISD

After voters approved a \$7.5 million bond in 2018, all campuses, and other district facilities, have seen improvements, and more projects are ongoing. Those include renovations to the science lab; roof repair and replacements; HVAC modernization; security upgrades; additional classroom space; and other electrical and technology upgrades, according to FISD.

The district has just over 1,000 students at three campuses.

“We provide high-quality programs that are all gaining positive momentum,” said Superintendent Paul Michalewicz. “Our students are provided a quality education by teachers and staff members who care about and grow the whole child.”

Michalewicz said that the district was selected to the College Board’s Annual Advanced Placement Honor Roll for the second year in a row.

“Florence ISD is one of only 30 Texas school districts to receive this honor,” he said.

COPPERAS COVE

Work begins on Business 190 project in Cove

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

The Business Highway 190 Improvement Project is officially underway in Copperas Cove as road crews have begun tearing up concrete to make way for a sidewalk on the south side of the highway.

TTG Utilities of Gatesville began work on the first phase of the project in mid-January, around six weeks after cones and signs were initially placed.

The project spans Business Highway 190 from Constitution Drive to Avenue D, a distance of a little over a mile.

Motorists have been met with a closed outside lane on the eastbound side of the highway, and all motorists have been met with a speed limit reduction of 5 mph.

On Dec. 1, the Copperas Cove City Council approved a request by the Texas Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph for both directions of travel and for the duration of the project. The council voted 6-1 for the ordinance change without discussion.

Councilman Jay Manning had the sole dissenting vote, stating after the meeting that he felt 40 mph was too low for the business highway to begin with.

The project has been in the works for seven years and was met with much resistance from Copperas Cove business owners and residents during the planning phases.

The project, according to TxDOT, will involve the construction of a raised median, bike lane and sidewalk on the south side of the road.

In order to maintain three travel lanes in each direction, TTG Utilities will convert the north outside lane (for westbound traffic) to a shared vehicle and bicycle lane.

Following work on the sidewalk, that lane will be reopened and the center turn lane and inside lane in both directions will be closed while TTG Utilities constructs the median.

Once the median is complete, those lanes will be reopened and then there will be various lane closures while a new surface is applied to the roadway, TxDOT officials said in a November news release. TxDOT said the project should be complete in the summer of 2022.

OPPOSITION

The Business 190 Improvement Project has been in the works since 2013, when the Business 190 Master Plan was created. During the planning process, TxDOT held multiple public meetings that allowed residents and business members



The speed limit has been lowered to 35 mph along part of Business Highway 190 in Copperas Cove while crews work to add a sidewalk.

to voice their concerns or support for the project.

Some residents, such as Siggie Loe, said during a Feb. 12, 2019, meeting that the median would do nothing to prevent accidents. Loe said that accidents happen, because people don't pay attention when they drive.

TxDOT countered that by citing the safety program of the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway administration that found medians provide an area of refuge for pedestrians and reduce accidents by 15%.

TxDOT said the median will slightly reduce lane width, but the lanes will meet all of TxDOT's design standards.

Other residents, such as James Leight, said the project will force people to make U-turns at multiple locations in both directions. Leight also made a comment about how difficult it may be for trucking companies to make deliveries to businesses along the route.

Early in the Feb. 12, 2019, meeting, TxDOT said adequate U-turn spacing will be available at all crossovers and large trucks may need to find alternate routes to give them a "right in, right out" access to businesses.



New homes are going up across Copperas Cove as the city expects exponential growth in the next five to seven years.

Cove officials expect large growth in short amount of time

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Homebuilding contractors are currently working on five developments in Copperas Cove, and there are three more that are being considered or planned.

On the north side of town, contractors are nearing completion of the Creekside Hills development.

City Manager Ryan Haverlah said on Jan. 6 that development was entering Phase 3 of its design.

“So, they’ve built out Phase 1 — sold every single house — Phase 2 is being built right now. The majority of houses that are going vertical ... most of those houses, before they are being built, are being sold,” Haverlah said.

Haverlah described two developments on the west side of town as “significant,” and he described two developments on the south side of town as “fairly large.”

One on the south side is in the extraterritorial jurisdiction, which means it is technically outside of city limits, but it is within the 2-mile boundary of the city.

All of these developments are indicative of large population growth that is expected in the next five to seven years.

Haverlah, getting the data from Development Services Director, Bobby Lewis, told members of the Morning Exchange Club at Lil’ Tex Restaurant on Jan. 6 that if Lewis’ estimations hold true, by 2028, the population of Copperas Cove would be nearing 50,000.

The potential five- to seven-year growth would represent an increase of 33% over the current population. The Jan. 1 estimate for the city was 36,615, which would represent an increase of 2.33% from 2020’s estimate of 35,781 people.

To obtain the current year’s estimate, the city took last year’s estimate of 35,781 from the Texas Demographic Center, factored in the building permits and applied the U.S. Census Bureau’s household size multiplier of 2.68 persons per household to the new single-family and duplex housing units, Lewis told the council.

“In five to seven years, that’s pretty quick for Copperas Cove,” Haverlah said. “That may not be quick for other areas, but for Copperas Cove, that is very quick, considering that for the last 20 years, we have grown at 1% or just over 1% each year.”

In 2020, there were 247 new single-family and 32 duplex building permits (64 dwelling units) issued, which combined, totals 311 new units, Lewis told the city council on Jan. 19.

Haverlah pointed to a 2019 study the Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce commissioned on demographic trends to indicate where some of the people may be coming from.

The study, which was presented by RKG Associates, Inc. of Alexandria, Virginia, on Dec. 4, 2019, indicated that there is an increase of people moving out of western states, such as California.

Russ Archambault, vice president and principal of RKG Associates, said at the time that 300,000 Californians move to Texas each year.

“Copperas Cove has the prime ability and timing right now to increase our business growth — specifically primary jobs and retail,” Haverlah said. “And I’m going to keep focusing on that no matter who’s coming.”

Haverlah said one of the primary reasons he has heard from those who have moved to the area is that it is cheaper to live than where they came from.

Cove EDC hopes to fill industrial park with primary jobs

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Industrial manufacturers may dot the landscape in The Narrows Business and Industrial Park and along the outskirts of Copperas Cove in the future.

At least that is the hope for Jonas Titas, executive director of the Copperas Cove Economic Development Corporation.

One of the main priorities for Titas and his staff is to bring in primary businesses. He acknowledged that with rapid growth expected in the city, it will naturally bring in more market-driven businesses, such as retail and restaurants, but he is also eyeing primary businesses in which a majority of products or services are sold outside the area, such as manufacturers or call centers.

Though he could not give specifics, Titas said two manufacturing businesses are interested in The Narrows.

“The truck driving school is out there,” Titas said recently. “And we have another couple active prospects.”

Titas said he hopes a land sale will be complete soon for another business in The Narrows, 600 Robert Griffin III Blvd., which opened in 2015.

City Manager Ryan Haverlah expressed confidence in the CCEDC and concurred with its priority to bring primary jobs.

“If we do not start growing from a business perspective — not only retail, but specifically, primary jobs — our community is going to have a hard time continuing providing services,” Haverlah said. “The reason I say that is taxes that come from residential homes do not pay for all of the necessary services, such as public safety, police, fire, parks and recreation, quality of life and then the administration of all those things combined.”

Titas said the CCEDC recently became fully staffed.

“We really put a work program together to be an aggressive economic development organization and city towards job creation,” he said. “... As soon as we kind of got excited about going out and started to (prove) ourselves, the pandemic hit, so it kind of put a pause on some of the things we’re really trying to do.”

Though not in The Narrows, a new business near the industrial park could be a sign of things to come, Titas said.

Southern Hills Chiropractic, 1856 Patriot Circle, opened its doors on Jan. 18.

“This was kind of like our first business that we worked with through the process to ask them ‘What are we doing well?’ ‘How can we better help you?’,” Titas said on Feb. 6.

Titas said he wants it to be as easy for people to start a business in Copperas Cove as it is anywhere else.

“There’s going to be a demand for pent up services,” Titas said. “We’ve also seen with the pandemic, our sales tax numbers have gone up, so it shows how much buying power is in Copperas Cove.”

Titas gave an update on the EDC to the Copperas Cove City Council in a special workshop meeting Jan. 7.

In an effort to attract primary businesses, the city has identified three parcels of land totaling 400 acres on the west



Southern Hills Chiropractic, 1856 Patriot Circle, opened its doors on Jan. 18.

side of State Highway 9 that are currently owned by Fort Hood that it wants to possibly swap with the installation.

Titas told the council that the main holdup with the land swap is that city residents currently live on the parcels of land Fort Hood wants in return. Titas did not specify which parcels of land those were.

Other Capital Improvement Projects the CCEDC is prioritizing are utility burial and improvements along the Business 190 corridor. Titas said burying the utilities would provide a more attractive entrance into Copperas Cove.

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Residential development continues around Lampasas

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Residential development is continuing in Lampasas, indicating growth within the city as well as the county.

The estimated population in Lampasas County for 2021 is 22,016, an increase of 1,154 in the past year, County Judge Randall Hoyer said via email on Feb. 9.

Lampasas City Manager Finley deGraffenried said population estimates for the city have not yet been made available by the state demographer.

DeGraffenried said multiple factors could be contributing to residential growth in the city.

“Staff believes residential development is due, in part, to quality of life, family amenities, the school district and available health care,” he said.

DeGraffenried said he believes there has been an increase in people relocating to Lampasas from places such as Austin, Killeen and Copperas Cove.

Lampasas has continued other development and capital improvement projects. One of the top priorities for the city has been to increase internet capacity, speed, options and service for our residents and businesses.

“Currently the city is working with two ISP’s that are deploying fiber to the home/business for all parts of Lampasas,” deGraffenried said.

Over the past five years, the city has spent \$3 million in road improvements, \$4 million in water and sewer improvements and \$1.25 million in parks and library improvements.

In 2021, the city will continue further development of its



Tri County Toy Run participants arrive at Putters 'N' Gutters in Lampasas.

park system to include an outdoor pavilion and skate park at Campbell Park and hike and bike trails at the 580 Sports Park, deGraffenried said.

At the county level, a new sheriff’s office and jail is set to open in March, Hoyer said.

“The jail has a capacity for 112 beds,” he said. “Our current jail has 28 beds.”

The county commissioners will decide what to do with the old jail building and the land it sits on.

Lampasas County is also revising its Subdivision Rules and Regulations due the significant increase in the number of subdivisions going in, Hoyer explained.

“Our current rules and regulations have not been revised in a number of years and we want to ensure the growth is in the best interest of the county and its residents,” Hoyer said.

Gatesville officials expect sustained growth for next decade

BY CHERI SHEPHERD
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Located just a short drive from Killeen, Temple and Waco, the city of Gatesville — the “Spur Capital of Texas” — offers a small-town feel without scrimping on amenities that enhance the quality of life.

Recent developments demonstrate the community’s commitment to enhanced housing, education and health care services for its residents.

Keeping an eye to the future, the Gatesville City Council adopted the 2020 Comprehensive Plan to guide the city’s growth and development.

With the availability of developable land and a dependable water supply, Gatesville anticipates residential growth over the next decade. Growth is demonstrated by the 109 residential housing and 10 commercial building permits issued in 2020, a 52% increase over 2019.

One of the most notable new construction projects is Gatesville Trails. The age- (55+) and income-restricted

neighborhood will offer 48 one- and two-bedroom units ranging in size from 720 to 1,000 square feet. The project is on schedule for completion mid-summer 2021.

Coryell Health, based in Gatesville, has recently completed a \$44 million construction and renovation project. Patients have access to a wide range of health services including a 25-bed licensed hospital, a Level IV Trauma Center emergency room with primary and specialty care providers, an advanced wound care center, a state-of-the-art outpatient rehabilitation center, a skilled nursing facility with long-term care and inpatient rehabilitation, and assisted and independent living units.

The Gatesville High School campus is undergoing an expansion and update. The project includes a 55,000-square-foot addition with new classrooms, a cafeteria, and a library.

Renovations to existing portions of the school include repurposing the existing library into the an administration suite and converting the existing cafeteria into additional classrooms. Construction is expected to be complete for the 2021-22 school year.

FORT HOOD

Construction begins on Mounted Warrior Museum

BY DAVID A. BRYANT
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

The National Mounted Warfare Foundation broke ground in November on Phase I of a new, state-of-the-art museum near Fort Hood's main gate.

"Projected to open in late 2022, Phase I of the Museum will be a 28,700-square-foot structure including 13,000 square feet of interactive and immersive permanent exhibit galleries and over 7,000 square feet of temporary exhibit space," Bob Crouch, vice president of the foundation, said. "Our goal is to fund and construct Phases II through VII sequentially once Phase I is underway."

According to Crouch, Phase II will expand the permanent exhibit gallery space by 11,000 square feet. Phase III will be the construction of two 1,500-square-foot multi-purpose conference/classrooms. Phase IV will add the museum gift shop and foundation staff offices. Phase V will be staff offices for the museum curators, Phase VI will be an upgraded outdoor amphitheater, and Phase VII will be an additional pair of multi-functional conference/classrooms.

"While we have funded Phase I, we still have several phases we need to raise money for, so we would definitely appreciate continued donations," Crouch said.

Although the city of Killeen provided about \$1.3 million to get the foundation underway, most of the funding for the museum was raised from private donations, including a \$5 million donation from an anonymous donor in April 2014.

The Army is allowing the foundation to build the museum building on about 17 acres of land adjacent to the Fort Hood visitors' center and overlooking Interstate 14, outside of Fort Hood's fenced security area. That means visitors will not have to go through a Fort Hood gate to access the museum — a point, officials say, that could lead to greater attendance.

Additionally, the U.S. Army Center of Military History will fund the design, fabrication and installation of the museum's exhibits. Upon completion of Phase I, the Army will assume ownership and management of the museum, while the foundation continues to plan and fundraise for future expansion. Fort Hood's two existing museums — the 1st Cavalry Division Museum and the 3rd Cavalry Regiment Museum — will move into the new building, officials said.

Phase 1 has already been approved by the Secretary of the Army. The foundation will need to request additional approval for each phase as funding goals are reached, Crouch said.

In addition to memorializing the many units and soldiers



Construction is underway on the Mounted Warrior Museum at Fort Hood.

who at one time called Fort Hood home, the museum also will be a go-to destination for visitors and could attract thousands of others annually to the Killeen-Fort Hood area, foundation officials said.

Crouch said attendance is projected to be 265,000 visitors in the first year, including 195,000 visitors from outside the area. The museum expects to add at least \$5 million annually to the local economy, said retired Lt. Gen. Paul Funk, the president and CEO of the National Mounted Warfare Foundation.

According to Crouch, the top expenses in the \$22.3 million capital campaign goal included \$12.3 million for Phase I and \$10 million for the remaining phases. Officials have downsized the museum plan over the years. When it was announced in 2011, the foundation was envisioning a \$130 million military museum between 85,000 and 100,000 square feet.

Crouch said the foundation's annual operating budget is \$307,450. Most of that stems from \$227,200 in the annual salaries of the three full-time foundation employees and three development consultants.

Rent, utilities and other bills make up the remainder of the budget, according to Crouch.

To donate or find out more information about the National Mounted Warrior Museum or to buy a commemorative brick, go to nmwfoundation.org.

The Great Place looks ahead to 2021 after a tumultuous 2020

BY DAVID A. BRYANT
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Calendar year 2020 was a busy one for the troopers of Fort Hood, with deployments, anniversaries, COVID-19 and high-level VIP visits.

It was also a sad year for many, with the death of quite a few soldiers and an in-depth investigation into the post, which led to the suspension or relief from duty of multiple leaders.

At least 29 soldiers from Fort Hood died in 2020: Five were homicides and at least eight were listed as suicides. The rest were listed as accidents, including training and non-military related accidents.

Here are some of the events that impacted “The Great Place” in 2020.

COVID-19

COVID-19 hit the nation in January 2020, and by March, events began to take a downward turn for the troops on Fort Hood.

The virus drastically changed the way soldiers trained and worked, putting some training on hold and even keeping the 1st Armored “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team from going to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, to certify for its upcoming deployment.

By the end of the year, units were mostly back to normal while following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines of hygiene, social distancing and wearing face masks when unable to social distance.

Deploying and redeploying units were quarantined for 14 days upon arrival at either Fort Hood or the location of an overseas deployment.

In December, Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center began receiving and administering the first vaccines for the virus to medical personnel and high-risk beneficiaries. Those included those over 65 and those who have cancer, chronic kidney disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart conditions or other ailments.

SPC. VANESSA GUILLEN

Spc. Vanessa Guillen, 20, a soldier with the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, was found dead in late June in eastern Bell County after she was reported missing from Fort Hood since April 22. A suspect in the case, Fort Hood Spc. Aaron David Robinson, fatally shot himself July 1, police said.

Another suspect, Killeen resident Cecily Aguilar, is in custody facing federal charges. Aguilar told investigators that Robinson on April 22 struck a “female soldier in the head with a hammer multiple times at his arms room, killing her on Fort Hood.”

Prior to her being reported missing, Guillen had told her family she had been sexually harassed by an unnamed soldier at Fort Hood.

VP VISIT

Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy visited Fort Hood

and the surrounding communities Aug. 5 and 6 in the wake of Guillen’s murder.

During his visit, he met with civic and community leaders in Killeen and the surrounding communities, then hosted a news conference where he addressed a number of topics.

Fort Hood has one of the highest rates of murder, sexual assault and harassment in the Army, McCarthy said.

In July, McCarthy ordered an independent review, made up of five civilian experts, to look at the command climate and culture at Fort Hood, which prompted the visit.

In addition to sexual assault and abuse, lack of diversity and suicide are other issues McCarthy said his review is intended to address.

He described Guillen’s death as a “catalyst.”

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

At the end of August, the five civilian members of the committee conducting an independent review of Fort Hood arrived for a fact-finding mission.

The Fort Hood Independent Review Committee examined the command climate and culture at Fort Hood and the surrounding military community to determine whether they reflected the Army’s commitment to safety, respect, inclusiveness, diversity, and freedom from sexual harassment, according to an Army news release.

While at Fort Hood, the committee members met with unit leaders, soldiers, local officials, law enforcement and community groups.

Spending weeks in Killeen and Fort Hood, the committee members interviewed 647 individual soldiers during their investigation, 575 of which were female soldiers. Nearly 2,000 soldiers were interviewed in group sessions, and more than 30,000 soldiers and Army civilians on Fort Hood completed an online survey about the command climate and culture on post.

The committee determined that during the time period covered by the review, the command climate relative to the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program, or SHARP, at Fort Hood was ineffective, to the extent that there was a permissive environment for sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The committee also determined that Fort Hood’s CID detachment had a number of deficiencies, especially in areas such as investigating sexual assault/harassment cases, missing soldiers and soldier deaths — whether the deaths were listed as murder, suicide or accidental.










The report found that Fort Hood’s CID detachment often had less than half the number of agents needed to properly conduct investigations on post and that the majority of available agents had less than a year of experience in the job. The post also did not have the necessary equipment to conduct investigations, such as the ability to gather electronic forensic evidence.

AFTERMATH

In the wake of the Army releasing the findings of the Independent Review Committee at Fort Hood, McCarthy

FORT HOOD TROOPS DEPLOYED AROUND THE WORLD



UNIT	STATIONED	DEPLOYED	UNIT	STATIONED	DEPLOYED
 11th Signal Brigade	Iraq/Kuwait	4	 48th Chemical Brigade	U.S.	82
 1st Medical Brigade	Iraq/Kuwait	170	 89th Military Police Brigade	Texas/Mexico Border	244
 36th Engineer Brigade	Iraq/Kuwait	7	 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team	Poland/Germany	3,270
 III Corps	Iraq/Kuwait	169	 Military Assigned	Fort Hood	37,029
 69th Air Defense Artillery Bde.	Iraq/Kuwait	438			

Including about 4,403 deployed.

Source: Fort Hood Population Card and Fact Sheet

Graphic Reporting: David A. Bryant

directed that Maj. Gen. Scott L. Efflandt, III Corps deputy commanding general for support, and Col. Ralph Overland and Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Knapp, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment commander and command sergeant major, be relieved of their duties. The secretary also directed the suspension of Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Broadwater and Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas C. Kenny, 1st Cavalry Division commander and command sergeant major, pending the outcome of a new Army Regulation 15-6 investigation of 1st Cavalry Division's command climate and Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program.

Shortly after, III Corps and Fort Hood Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur "Cliff" Burgoyne III, the top enlisted soldier at Fort Hood, was suspended pending an investigation into "allegedly using unprofessional language toward subordinates."

Forces Command is conducting the investigation, which is unrelated to other investigations on Fort Hood, officials said.

PEOPLE FIRST

Fort Hood leadership launched its Operation People First campaign on Oct. 19.

"Operation People First" is a campaign that prioritizes a back-to-basics, people-first approach to leadership and focuses on the fundamentals of engaged personal leadership to build trust with soldiers, families, civilians and military communities.

The corps-wide program has three primary tenets: Getting

to know soldiers, leaders taking action to ensure trust and discipline is maintained and leaders holding leaders accountable if standards are not met. It is a year-long campaign designed to produce enduring positive cultural change across the force.

The program had already addressed some of the recommendations from the review committee and is also implementing the additional recommendations.

III Corps will share insights and best practices with the Army's new People First Task Force. The People First Task Force will develop a plan of action to address the report's findings as they reassess current policy and programs for issues such as SHARP, suicide and racism. Recommendations will then be submitted to Army senior leaders for review and implementation as quickly as possible.

DEPLOYMENTS

Roughly 4,700 troops from Fort Hood are deployed around the world. The majority of those deployed are with the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, which has 3,700 troops currently in Europe as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve. The troops are primarily stationed in Poland, Germany, Lithuania and Romania.

Additional troops from other units on Fort Hood are deployed in smaller numbers around the world.

Fort Hood currently has more than 36,600 troops assigned to the post.

Fort Hood units face major changes in 2020

BY DAVID A. BRYANT
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

The III Corps and Fort Hood headquarters, led by Lt. Gen. Robert “Pat” White, returned from a yearlong deployment to Iraq in command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve.

During the headquarters’ deployment, an independent review committee was commissioned by the secretary of the Army to look into the command climate and culture at Fort Hood following the disappearance and murder of Spc. Vanessa Guillen.

When the report was released in early December 2020, the III Corps deputy commander for support, Maj. Gen. Scott Efflandt, was relieved of his duties. Efflandt had been in command of the post during White’s deployment. He was replaced by Maj. Gen. John B. Richardson IV.

Later in December, III Corps and Fort Hood Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur “Cliff” Burgoyne III, the post’s senior enlisted leader, was suspended by White pending an investigation for “allegedly using unprofessional language toward subordinates.”

The largest unit at Fort Hood, the 1st Cavalry Division, also saw some changes due to the independent investigation. Maj. Gen. Jeff Broadwater and Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas C. Kenny, 1st Cavalry Division commander and command sergeant major, were suspended pending the outcome of a new Army Regulation 15-6 investigation of 1st Cavalry Division’s command climate and Sexual Harassment/ Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program. The division is currently under the temporary leadership of Brig. Gen. Brett Sylvia and Command Sgt. Maj. Ryan McLane.

Elements of the division deployed and returned across the globe, with the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team deploying in September for a nine-month rotation to Europe for Operation Atlantic Resolve. The 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team returned from a nine-month rotation to South Korea and, shortly after, received the latest version of the Paladin, a mobile 155 mm artillery system.

The 3rd Cavalry Regiment saw perhaps some of the largest changes during 2020. The “Brave Rifles” were expected to deploy in 2021, with a January 2021 rotation to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, originally scheduled to certify the regiment for deployment.

The murder of Guillen, a soldier with the regiment, and the subsequent investigation changed those plans, however. The regiment’s commander and command sergeant major, Col. Ralph Overland and Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Knapp, were both relieved of their duties following the independent investigation of Fort Hood. They were replaced by Col. Kevin D. Bradley and Command Sgt. Maj. Shade Munday in December. Bradley soon after announced the NTC rotation had been canceled to allow time to build better unit cohesion. A date and location for the regiment’s deployment has not yet been released.



III Corps soldiers returned to Fort Hood in the fall after a year in Iraq.

The U.S. Army Operational Test Command saw new leadership come in as Col. David W. Gardner took command in August.

As the Army’s only independent operational tester, OTC tests Army, joint and multi-service warfighting systems in realistic operational environments, using typical users to provide data on whether the systems are effective, suitable and survivable. One of the major pieces of equipment tested in 2020 was the new RQ-7B Shadow Block III Tactical Unmanned Aerial System.

The Block III Shadow improves upon the Army’s version 2 (V2) systems, with a more capable payload sensor, improved engine, weatherization package and an upgraded avionics package which includes Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Communications and upgraded Levels of Interoperability (LOI) functionality.

First Army Division West welcomed a new commander in December, with Maj. Gen. Richard Johnson taking the reins from Maj. Gen. Frank W. Tate.

Division West conducts training readiness oversight and mobilization of designated active and reserve component forces in the western area of responsibility in order to provide trained and ready forces to regional combatant commanders, according to their official website.

The soldiers of Division West train thousands of reserve and National Guard soldiers annually, certifying them to deploy around the globe.

HEALTH CARE

AdventHealth innovates to meet patient needs

BY ERIN RILEY

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

2020 marked a year of great challenges but also great changes. In January, the nation started hearing reports of a new virus in Wuhan, China. By March, the local community was sheltering in place. At AdventHealth Central Texas, in Killeen, and AdventHealth Rollins Brook, in Lampasas, the year marked innovation in how the hospital used its resources to care for its patients, staff and community.

Like many in our area, both hospitals were locked down during the initial days of the pandemic. Visitation was restricted, surgeries were canceled, and the availability of personal protective equipment was carefully monitored.

While there were a lot of unknowns, AdventHealth, a system of more than 80,000 team members and 50 hospitals across 10 states, immediately made adjustments so that all hospitals within the system, including AdventHealth Central Texas and AdventHealth Rollins Brook, could continue to provide care for the communities that relied on them.

"Thanks to the diligent work and the flexibility shown by our national and local teams, we were able to continue to provide care for our communities," said Kevin Roberts, CEO of

AdventHealth Central Texas and AdventHealth Rollins Brook. "We also received substantial community support through donations of PPE, food for our staff, and drive-in prayer services, and that really helped our staff to keep going."

As the pandemic rolled on and some hospital functions returned to normal, AdventHealth continued to be vigilant in its preparations for the various surges it would experience throughout the year.

"We are fortunate that in Central Texas we have a close-knit group of community leaders who work together to ensure our community members have the resources they need to stay safe and stay healthy," Roberts said. "We continuously work with our fellow Bell County hospitals, the county health district, and our local city and county leaders to make sure we are ready to provide the highest quality of care that our community needs and expects."

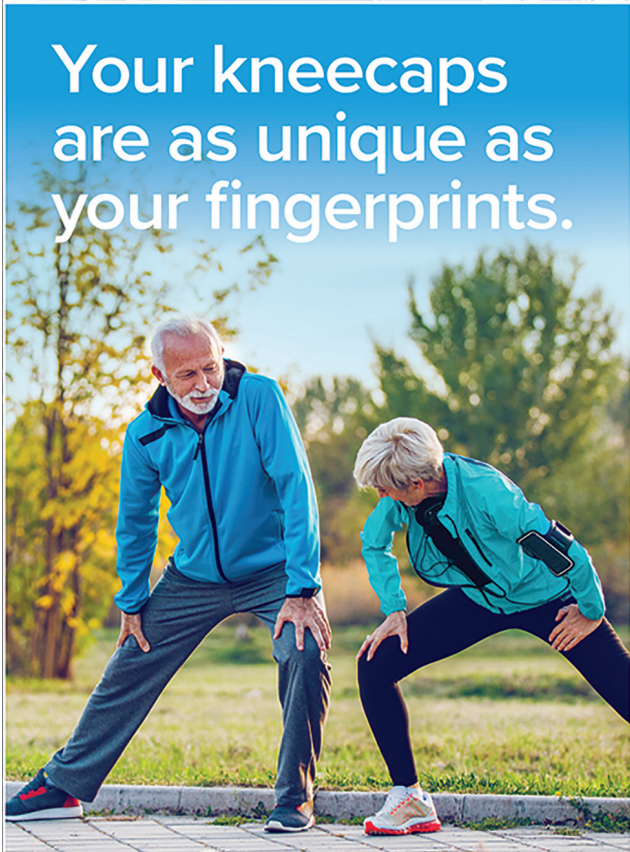
In total, the hospital cared for more than 90,000 patients in 2020 and reinvested more than \$1.5 million in the local community through improved hospital services and community wellness projects.

In 2020, AdventHealth saw changes in two leadership roles

Continued on page 52



Employees gather outside AdventHealth-Central Texas in Killeen with signs as four helicopters fly overhead during a salute to health care workers in May.



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From page 51

within the hospital.

In March, the hospital welcomed Anthony (Tony) Mino as the Director of Development for the AdventHealth Central Texas Foundation. Mino joined AdventHealth after a 35-year career with the ASYMCA.

"I enjoy working in the community, so when I learned about the opportunity with AdventHealth, I decided to look into it," Mino said.

After meeting with the Board of Trustees and the CEO, Mino said he felt he could make a difference at the AdventHealth Central Texas Foundation.

And though 2020 was not your typical fundraising year, there was still plenty for Mino to do despite many events being canceled. In total, 59 businesses supported AdventHealth throughout 2020 by donating PPE and food, all of which were coordinated through the foundation.

"Our team was so appreciative of the overwhelming support we received during these unprecedented times," Mino said. "I'm looking forward to continuing to grow the foundation and supporting the hospital in 2021."

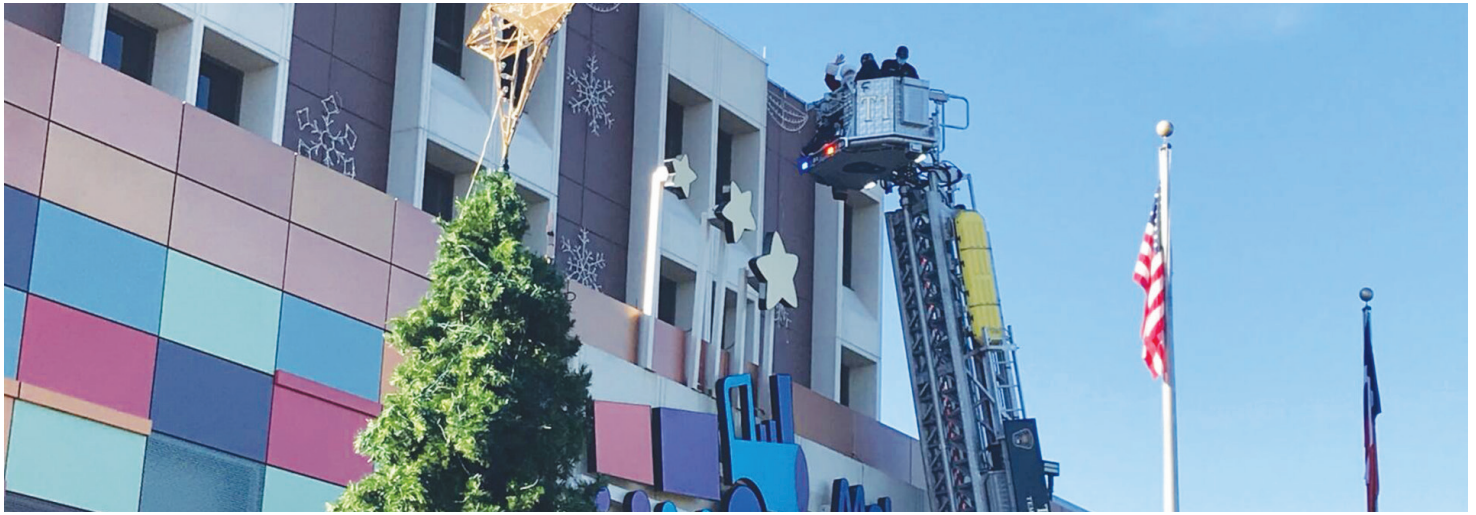
The other addition to the AdventHealth leadership team was Erin Bird, MD, who was named the hospital's chief medical officer in December.

"I am extremely excited about the opportunity to serve as the CMO of Advent Health Central Texas," Bird said. "I hope to build on the successes of past CMOs, the executive leadership, nursing and the entire medical staff. Embracing our mission, we will continue and expand the outstanding care we provide to our community. I could not be happier to be a part of the AdventHealth family."

Bird is board-certified in urology and has more than 25 years of medical experience. He has served as the division director of urology and vice-chair for the department of surgery at Baylor Scott and White Medical Center in Temple.

Bird's other leadership roles include membership on the Board of Directors for the Scott & White Clinic and Board of Governors for Baylor Scott & White Health. He replaced Umad Ahmad, MD, MBA, who accepted a CMO position for Baylor Scott & White-Hillcrest in Waco.

ERIN RILEY is public relations and marketing manager for AdventHealth Central Texas.



Santa Claus waved to children from a Temple fire ladder truck on Christmas morning at Baylor Scott & White McLane Children's Medical Center.

Baylor Scott & White cares for patients across Central Texas

BY TIYA SEARCY
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

As the largest not-for-profit health system in Texas, Baylor Scott & White Health provides care to a population larger than the state of Georgia.

Several primary care clinics serve the local community, including Baylor Scott & White Clinic- Killeen, which has served for more than 38 years.

Baylor Scott & White has seen an increase in patients visiting clinics in Killeen, Copperas Cove and Harker Heights. Baylor Scott & White Convenient Care Clinic-Killeen also provides primary and urgent care.

Same-day appointments are available at Baylor Scott & White primary care and specialty care clinics, and patients can schedule virtual health visits via the MyBSWHealth app.

Specialty care services at the Baylor Scott & White Specialty Clinic-Killeen Hemingway include cardiology, obstetrics and gynecology (OB-GYN), orthopedics, general surgery, pulmonary and neurology. The clinic's pain management services include spinal cord stimulation to help manage chronic pain symptoms.

Baylor Scott & White Mental Health Clinic-Harker Heights offers adult mental health services as well as child and adolescent mental health care.

Baylor Scott & White Cancer Center-Killeen on the AdventHealth Central Texas campus has hematology/oncology and radiation oncology services, including an anticoagulation clinic with same-day appointments.

TEMPLE MEDICAL CENTER

Baylor Scott & White Medical Center-Temple has 636 beds and is the only Level I trauma center between Austin and Dallas. It continues to provide personalized, quality care, in addition to supporting medical education and research.

A new two-story 27,000-square-foot facility adjacent to the Vasicek Cancer and Treatment Center will allow patients to receive all cancer treatments in one location. It's scheduled to

open this summer.

In 2020, Baylor Scott & White Medical Center- Temple earned awards for excellence from Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, IBM Watson, Healthgrades, American Heart Association and the Joint Commission, among others.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

Baylor Scott & White McLane Children's Medical Center in Temple is the area's only Level IV pediatric trauma facility and the System's lone Level IV neonatal intensive care unit.

As the only children's medical center between Dallas and Austin, McLane Children's NICU cares for 800-1,000 patients annually. The unit includes on-site pediatric subspecialists and a surgical team for consultation, care and emergency intervention for the most complex and fragile patients. More than 15 departments work together to address babies' complex conditions and ongoing medical needs.

McLane Children's celebrated nine years of service Oct. 4. The facility offers 64 hospital beds and pediatric services, including primary care, at the Baylor Scott & White McLane Children's Clinic- Killeen.

McLane Children's plans to add a second Canine Companions for Independence facility and a virtual school nurse pilot program in collaboration with Salado ISD.

The hospital also hosts a community mobility-accessible musical playground on its grounds. The 9,561-square-foot gated playground offers therapeutic benefits for patients and features that can assist in development and healing.

Central Texas children needing specialized care often rely on the Baylor Scott & White McLane Children's neonatal and pediatric transport team. Since March 2013, the transport team has answered thousands of calls throughout Texas.

In 2020, Baylor Scott & White Medical Center- Temple earned awards for excellence from Cribs for Kids National Safe Sleep Hospital Certification Program and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

TIYA SEARCY is a marketing and communication specialist for Baylor Scott & White Health.



From September to December 2020, the Killeen Community Clinic distributed 605 food boxes to its diabetic patients.

Killeen clinic increases support for diabetic patients

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

One of the more common chronic conditions area residents receive care for from medical professionals at the Greater Killeen Community Clinic is diabetes.

In 2020, partially due to the coronavirus pandemic, the clinic began increasing its support for its diabetic patients, said TaNeika Driver-Moultrie, executive director of the clinic.

“We were seeing that some of our diabetic patients were having a hard time getting a hold of produce — of course to help with their diet,” Driver-Moultrie said. “So we’ve started distributing food boxes every week.”

From September to December 2020, the clinic distributed 605 food boxes to its diabetic patients.

Despite having fewer clinic visits due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Greater Killeen Community Clinic, formerly the Free Clinic, saw an increase in donations for medications and supplies in 2020, Driver-Moultrie said.

In 2020, the clinic received \$3,651,435.87 in medicine and supply donations, compared with \$3,052,260.70 in 2019.

“The great thing is that we have been blessed to be able to provide medications for our patients,” Driver-Moultrie said. “We’ve also been blessed to be able to receive medication from AdventHealth, and so they have been a great, great health partner as well as Seton Medical Center and Baylor Scott & White.”

Driver-Moultrie, who also serves as president of the Killeen Branch NAACP, was hired to the position on June 19, 2020, and her first day on the job was July 7, 2020.

“The clinic is definitely an asset to this community, especially now more than ever as we are in the midst of a pandemic,” Driver-Moultrie said.

Although there were fewer clinic visits in 2020, Driver-

Moultrie said it increased its client base.

“People have lost their jobs, so what does that mean? They’ve lost their health insurance,” Driver-Moultrie said. “So we have been here to fill in the gap for them to still be able to take care of their health care.”

During the pandemic, the clinic changed how patients can be seen. Instead of being seen on a walk-in basis or appointments, patients must now schedule an appointment to be seen.

“That’s the biggest change we’ve had to make,” Driver-Moultrie said.

Changing to appointments only is not the only change the clinic made to reduce the risk of infection with face-to-face visits.

“We also implemented telehealth,” Driver-Moultrie said.

The clinic, which started in November 1994, offers medical services and medication assistance to qualifying residents of Bell, Coryell and Lampasas counties.

To qualify for medical services at the clinic, one must be uninsured and must meet the income threshold of at or below 200% of the poverty level, which is based on family size.

The income is \$24,238 for a family of one, \$32,114 for a family of two and \$37,502 for a family of three, Driver-Moultrie said.

The clinic, 718 N. Second St., Suite A, offers acute care and care for chronic conditions.

Patients are requested to donate \$10 for the care they receive, but the clinic will not turn away any patient if they cannot pay the recommended donation.

The clinic sees acute care patients on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and it sees chronic patients on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday beginning at 9 a.m. with appointment slots continuing until around 4:30 p.m. The clinic is closed on Fridays.

To make an appointment, call 254-618-4211.

Seton maintains high standard of care amid pandemic

BY LUCY TAYLOR
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Seton Medical Center Harker Heights, a partnership between the Seton Healthcare Family in Austin and Ardent Health Services in Nashville, Tennessee, is a Joint Commission-accredited, Catholic hospital proudly serving the Greater Fort Hood area.

The hospital, located at 850 W. Central Texas Expressway, has seen significant growth since its doors opened in 2012 with a staff of 269 employees.

Now, with a staff of approximately 500, Seton continues to provide exceptional quality care to patients.

SMC continues to navigate the largest pandemic of the century. Adequate PPE has enabled hospital staff to maintain a high standard of safe care and infection prevention.

The outpouring of support and donations from our community inspired and motivated front-line staff during the most difficult days in 2020.

Seton continues to provide compassionate and exceptional care for our COVID-19 patients and are vaccinating our staff and other high-risk workers and residents now to help end the pandemic.

The readers of the Killeen Daily Herald named Seton Medical Center the Best Hospital in 2020. Every caregiver at the facility plays an integral role in this award.

Being recognized as the Best Hospital by residents of Central Texas is a tribute to our purpose of caring for our patients and their families in a warm and welcoming environment.

Seton Medical Center is the only hospital in Bell County to be awarded an 'A' for patient safety from the Leapfrog Group's Fall 2020 Hospital Safety Grade.

Leapfrog's hospital safety grades recognize achievements in protecting patients from harm and providing safer healthcare.

"Being recognized as one of the top U.S. hospitals for patient safety directly correlates to our organization's mission of providing quality care in Christian love, service and dignity," said Patrick Swindle, Seton's chief executive officer. "Receiving this prestigious award highlights our team's passion and commitment to achieve excellent results in a safe environment."

Urgent care provides an important access point to healthcare in the community. Seton Medical Center continues its partnership with Freedom Urgent Care.

In addition to urgent primary care, this collaboration also provides access to occupational medicine services for on-the-job injuries, vaccinations, physicals, routine medical testing and OSHA-mandated exams for employees working in an industrial environment. Freedom Urgent Care has two clinics conveniently located in Harker Heights and Killeen.

For more information, visit www.setonharkerheights.net. To find a physician, visit <https://setonharkerheights.net/find-a-physician>.

LUCY TAYLOR is a marketing and communication specialist for Seton Medical Center-Harker Heights.



Tristan Dansby, a registered respiratory therapist at Seton Medical Center in Harker Heights, receives the COVID-19 vaccine from Calee Travis, the chief nursing officer at the hospital in December.



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Virtual care, robotics, patient experience drive Darnall's progress

BY MIKAELA CADE

CARL R. DARNALL ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

During a year of unprecedented change, Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center continued to expand and grow patient services through increased virtual health care, medical innovation and elevating the patient experience.

VIRTUAL HEALTH CARE AND QUIC CLINICS

Darnall expanded virtual care options for all beneficiaries allowing them to get medical care without going to the medical center. Virtual appointments are an integral part of accessing care also led to the expansion of QUiC clinics.

In 2019, Darnall's West Killeen Medical Home was designated as a QUiC clinic. QUiC — Quality, urgent, Internet, and Phone Care clinics. The new QUiC clinic paradigm leverages virtual care, offers same-day and walk-in appointments and allows the team to take a proactive approach in providing preventive health screenings. The success at West Killeen led to all of Darnall's primary care clinics being designated as QUiC clinics in 2020.

"We want to see sick patients when they're sick," Col. Richard Malish, Darnall commander, said. "We don't want them to have to wait a few days to get seen."

Malish said he wants Darnall to be the "go-to" medical center in all Tricare Prime beneficiaries' minds. Whether it is an urgent care need, routine appointment or something that requires inpatient care, Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center is well-positioned to provide the full gamut of health care services for the Fort Hood community.

Darnall also offers four U.S. Army Medical Homes in the community. The two Killeen facilities serve soldiers and their family members in Killeen. The Harker Heights clinic serves those living in Harker Heights, Belton, and Salado, and the Copperas Cove Clinic serves Cove, Kempner and Lampasas.

Each clinic is capable of servicing more than 8,000 patients and offer women's health care, well-baby and child exams, sports physicals and school immunizations, minor surgery, pharmacy and laboratory services.

Darnall is also testing a "virtual ward" system that gives qualifying patients the option to be discharged early to recover at home with the confidence that they are being monitored and supported by their health care team.

"The goal of virtual telemedicine applications like the virtual ward is to allow us to deliver safe, effective healthcare so that patients can manage their medical treatment without them having to physically come to the hospital or clinic," said Lt. Col. Garrett Meyers, chief of the Department of Family and Community Medicine. "The virtual ward ideally could shorten the hospital stay for patients with blood pressure problems, COPD or CHF exacerbations, or other related conditions."

The hospital currently leads all DoD military treatment facilities worldwide in telehealth services utilization, having the highest secure messaging enrollment and providing over 25,000 virtual video visits in previous months.

"Telemedicine trends like secure messaging between doctor and patient via any device from any place, televisions and wearable technology to monitor conditions at home have empowered people to take control of their health care," Meyers said. "It's all about making sure that people are getting the care they need when they need it."

The intensive care unit, emergency department, and pharmacy also increased their use of virtual technology.

HEALTH CARE INNOVATION

Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center, measuring 1.6 million square feet, consists of the main hospital plus three outpatient clinic buildings and is a level III Trauma center. The hospital system serves nearly 100,000 beneficiaries offering primary care and emergency services, and inpatient medical and behavioral health services. Darnall has a 151-bed capacity. On an average day, Darnall sees 3,700 daily visitors, which equates to roughly 1 million encounters per year. Of those visits, about 1.2 million prescriptions keep its 13 pharmacies busy.

Darnall's robotics program continues to grow, adding a MAKO robot to the two Da Vinci robots to facilitate robot-assisted surgeries. Robotic surgery has many benefits, like reducing opioid use, decreased recovery time and minimized convalescence.

To help soldiers dealing with fitness-related injuries, Darnall operates the SPARTA Clinic, which is open during morning physical training. It provides early evaluation and treatment for acute musculoskeletal injuries. The SPARTA clinic helps soldiers recover faster and get back to the mission.

The Fort Hood Intrepid Spirit center provides care for soldiers suffering from traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and other psychological health conditions. The Intrepid Spirit center uses a multidisciplinary approach in treating patients, including art and music therapy.

The \$11 million facility was privately funded through the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. It is the fourth of nine such facilities to open on military bases across the country.

Darnall is also home to a robust medical education program responsible for providing graduate-level education and training in a variety of specialties. This summer, Darnall will host the third annual Joint Emergency Medicine Exercise with Air Force and Navy Medicine residents. The training includes 18 job skills performing 100% of their critical skill tasks lists to prepare residency graduates to serve in operational medical positions.

Darnall also received recognition for demonstrating its commitment to excellence in health care.

In 2020, Darnall was awarded the Practice Greenhealth Environmental Excellence Award, the DHA High-Reliability Organization Award for Patient Engagement and the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program from the American College of Surgeons.

This past year, Darnall launched a new website designed to enhance the patient experience by providing easier navigation and a cleaner look. The team also added a few new patient experience programs to its portfolio.

EDUCATION

Killeen's Chaparral High School to open in 2022

BY HUNTER KING
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Killeen Independent School District's sixth high school, recently named Chaparral High School by the Board of Trustees, is set to open in the fall of 2022.

The new high school is being built in the growing south corridor bordering Killeen and Harker Heights.

As a part of the 2018 bond project, Chaparral High School will be a comprehensive grade 9-12 campus, located on Chaparral Road.

The \$171 million project is currently on schedule and under budget. As of the beginning of 2021, construction is about 50% complete, with the overall design being 100% complete.

On the outside of the building, all exterior walls have been erected. Roofing is over 50% complete, and the exterior glazing

is nearing 40% complete.

In the area of Athletics Sports Facilities, construction continues as exterior walls for concessions buildings for baseball and softball are currently being installed. The batting cages for future softball and baseball teams are under construction, as well.

Interiorly, painting is underway in the classroom wings. Cabinetry is being installed in one classroom wing while sheetrock installation is underway in the administrative suite.

One of the classroom wings is nearing completion of exterior stone and brick installation.

In the coming months, the construction crew will work to complete Exterior Glazing, install science casework, and add framing in the library.

The 447,680-square-foot building will be home to approximately 2,500 students once completed.



Construction of Killeen ISD's Chaparral High School is underway. The district's sixth high school is set to open in the fall of 2022.

Killeen ISD continues quality education, steady growth

BY HUNTER KING
KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Moving into 2021, Killeen ISD continues its mission to provide outstanding education to all students in a safe, nurturing environment while navigating the unprecedented challenges associated with a global virus.

The school district began on schedule in an all-virtual start on Aug. 17, 2020 with 39,459 students logged into virtual platforms.

Two weeks later, the school district began offering traditional face-to-face instruction and 21,700 students returned to the physical classroom. Total enrollment at that time was 44,231.

Killeen ISD continues to offer parents a choice between virtual and in-person learning. Face coverings are required on campus. Signs directing students and staff to socially distance and perimeters around teacher desks are part of the school setting.

A GROWING SCHOOL DISTRICT

Killeen Independent School District, which stretches from Killeen east to Harker Heights and Nolanville and west across Fort Hood, continues to grow.

The community opened the new Nolan Middle School, a 181,753-square-foot building in Harker Heights that includes KISD's second middle school STEM Academy, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

The district also opened a new Pershing Park Elementary School on Central Texas Expressway in Killeen, replacing the 58-year-old campus of the same name adjacent to the new building. That school opened to students with the new semester January 6.

The new Pershing Park is part of the \$426 million bond election voters approved in 2018. Numerous other construction projects are underway.

This fall, KISD will open a new elementary school named for a popular former educator killed in the 1991 Luby's Cafeteria shooting. Pat Carney Elementary School is located on Azura Drive in west Killeen.

The district is planning openings for three new schools consolidating some of KISD's oldest campuses. The new Pershing Park Elementary School will add the current Sugar Loaf Elementary School population.

In addition, the new Clifton Park Elementary School is set to open on Jasper Drive, consolidating Clifton Park and Bellaire elementary schools and Killeen Elementary School on Rancier Avenue will consolidate West Ward and the closed East Ward attendance zones.

In other bond-funded projects, Killeen High School occupied newly constructed administrative space, library, auditorium, choir and art rooms, and special education space. The massive ongoing renovation project is scheduled to continue through 2022.

Construction also continues on the district's sixth high school, which the Board of Trustees named Chaparral High



Prekindergarten teacher Mary Woodlief shows students elements of newly set up learning centers on the first day of a new semester in January, which also was the first day of operation for the new Pershing Park Elementary School in Killeen.

School. It is set to open in 2022 in the growing south corridor bordering Killeen and Harker Heights.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Killeen ISD continues to stay in close contact with the Bell County Health District, the Texas Education Agency and other authorities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

The board of trustees revised the current school calendar, adding seven early dismissal days and seven remote learning days, to provide teachers needed time to plan lessons with the added challenge of virtual instruction.

Through state resources, the school district provides rapid screening for students and staff at the former Nolan Middle School campus on Jasper Drive on school days.

A dashboard on the district website tracks student and staff COVID-19 cases within KISD. Each positive case triggers deep cleaning and communication to the campus population and the health department.

Free breakfast and lunch are available for students through July 2021.



Mae Stevens Early Learning Academy pre-K students eat lunch in their classroom. CCISD extended its free breakfast and lunch through the 2020-21 year.

Cove ISD adds technology, programs to meet student needs

BY WENDY SLEDD
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

CCISD continues to serve students' educational needs in the 2020-21 school year with more than 95% of students returning to the district with safety measures in place during the pandemic.

Approximately 75% of students are learning on campus with the remaining 25% receiving virtual instruction. All students are provided breakfast and lunch at no cost with meals provided on campus and available for curbside pick-up.

Copperas Cove ISD received multiple grants this school year with the goal of every student having a computer device.

The district installed more than a dozen Wi-Fi locations across the city when the pandemic began and continues to invest in technology with the purchase of laptops, iPads, and tablets for both student and staff use.

CCISD introduced two new programs aimed at providing school-based mental health services, said Director of Behavioral Support Services Rhonda Burnell.

"With insurance coverage in Texas reduced for telehealth mental health counseling, the school district now provides services that assess and identify the behavioral health needs of children and adolescents. This program is available districtwide with access for students on all campuses," Burnell said.

CCISD offers numerous certification opportunities to high school students in the health care field, the fastest growing industry for jobs, to include certification as a nursing assistant, medical assistant, emergency care attendant, veterinary assistant, pharmacy technician and others.

CCISD also offers certifications in culinary arts, construction trades, computer information systems, marketing and hospitality, computer graphics, robotics and other programs.

"This year, we have expanded our dual credit, career opportunities and certifications through our partnership with CTC that include advanced auto mechanics, diesel mechanics, welding, pipefitting, carpentry, cyber security and culinary arts," CCHS Associate Principal and CTE Director Kevin Shipley said. "Students in these programs either obtain an industry certification or are on track to complete associates degrees in two semesters following graduation."

CCISD and the University of Texas at Austin formed a partnership to expand access to college level courses through OnRamps, distance education courses offered through dual enrollment at Copperas Cove and Crossroads High Schools.

Crossroads High School more than doubled its student capacity to as many as 300 students. Approximately 5,773 square feet of classroom space expands the former auditorium that served in recent years as the CCISD District Training Facility along with a restroom addition of approximately 700 feet. With the renovations, the bathrooms are now accessible from the interior of the building.

An addition of approximately 1,742 square feet was added to an existing classroom building to make room for more students. Additional restroom renovations of approximately 470 square feet serve the D wing that includes the disciplinary alternative education program.

The CCISD District Training Facility is now the renovated 4,979-square-foot former carpentry shop on the Copperas Cove Junior High Campus. A motorized folding panel partition allows the district to create multiple rooms within the larger facility for training staff and testing and teaching students.

Families moving into Copperas Cove or relocating to a new home in school district boundaries may enter their address on the CCISD website at https://www.ccid.com/273994_3 to determine which school their children will attend.

WENDY SLEDD is director of communications for the Copperas Cove Independent School District.



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CTC a top choice for education

BY BRUCE VASBINDER
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Central Texas College has been providing higher educational opportunities to residents for more than 50 years.

Since opening its doors to more than 2,000 students in 1967, CTC has evolved into a unique institution focusing on affordable, accessible education.

The school's diverse student population includes nearly 6,000 students per semester at its Killeen and Fort Hood campuses, more than 18,000 students at sites across the globe and 10,000 students taking classes online. More than 2,200 students worldwide graduated from CTC in 2020.

CTC is the top college choice for graduating high school seniors in the area as more than 20% come to CTC — the most affordable option in Central Texas. Local students can save nearly \$15,000 in tuition and fees by completing an associate degree with CTC before moving to a four-year university.

With more than 100 associate degrees and certificates of completion available in many diverse fields, CTC prepares students for careers or to transfer to a four-year university. Several new programs were introduced in 2020, including the Fire Service Administration degree program, the Network Cloud Support and Cybersecurity curriculum and a Cyberdefense-Information Assurance program.

CTC also initiated quick career training programs that can help those looking to jump start or change careers. It offers short-term credit certificates of completion and non-credit programs in many areas that can be earned in a year or less.

Distance education offerings continue to expand as CTC now offers more than 400 classes and 60 degree and certificate programs which can be completed entirely online.

CTC continues to foster a strong relationship with Fort Hood. This past year, CTC and Transitions Assistance Support of San Angelo partnered in the Technicians of Tomorrow Career Skills program which leads to career opportunities in the automotive industry at participating Ford dealerships in Texas for transitioning soldiers.

The third CTC-Fort Hood EMT articulation paramedic cohort graduated in April 2020. Another program designed for transitioning active-duty military personnel and veterans is the CTC-Fort Hood Systems, Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP) cohort program.

CTC's Continuing Education program expands each semester with new classes in a variety of areas including business, personal enrichment and career development.

Some of the more recent CTC initiatives include the Eagles' Nest Food Pantry and CTC Live! sessions introduced to engage and support students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moving forward, CTC looks to continue enhancing its alliances with the local school districts and the community through its dual credit programs, the Early College High School, STEM Academy and Early College program.

Explore all the offerings at ctcd.edu.

BRUCE VASBINDER is director of Community Relations for Central Texas College.

A&M-Central Texas adapts to online learning

BY KAREN CLOS

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Texas A&M University-Central Texas is the only public “upper-level” university in Texas. It offers upper-division coursework leading to baccalaureate degrees, and graduate coursework leading to master’s degrees.

It is the only public university in Texas that exclusively recruits and serves transfer students at the baccalaureate level, and it is an exceptional option for community college students, as well as those individuals with some college but no degree.

With the arrival of the coronavirus last spring, the university shifted its focus to largely online learning, and its students and staff quickly adapted.

A&M-Central Texas hosted a modified, on-campus “walk-through” graduation on Dec 12. The event was divided into three separate ceremonies representing the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business Administration, and the College Education and Human Development.

More than 700 graduates from Spring, Summer, and Fall 2020 were invited, and a total of 256 graduates confirmed and participated at the ceremony held in the Bill Yowell Conference Center on campus.

Because of COVID related safety protocols, there was no audience, but guests were allowed to bring five guests, and both guests and graduates remained socially distanced for the ceremony and the “walk-through” receipt of their degrees.

Also last year, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board awarded a Reskilling Grant to a consortium that includes A&M-Central Texas, Central Texas College, and Temple College.

The grant is a total of \$1,024,605 to support adults who want to return to complete or enhance an existing credential. These funds are designed to help pay for tuition and fees for adults who started college, but who have had to stop out before earning a degree or certificate.



Michelle Carroll, and her husband (and employee), John Carroll took part in the university’s walk-through graduation in December.

It is also available to graduates who can benefit from earning additional training (i.e., vocational nurses who would like to earn an associate degree becoming registered nurses.)

Available only for the Spring 2021, Summer 2021, and Fall 2021, these funds will range from \$500 to \$2,500 per semester.

PARTNERSHIP WITH ACC

Most recently, A&M-Central Texas signed an agreement with Austin Community College, expanding their partnership to build a seamless undergraduate and graduate transfer pathway for ACC students seeking advanced degrees in Business Administration and Computer Information Systems at the University. The two institutions held a joint virtual signing on Jan. 11.

A&M-Central Texas continues to offer a wide variety of degree programs for undergraduate students, who may select from 28 baccalaureate and 18 graduate degree programs, several of which have been nationally ranked by

U.S. News & World Report, The Best Schools, College Factual, and Best Colleges.

As one of the most affordable public universities in Texas, it offers its students an innovative array of financial assistance, a 12 SCH maximum for tuition regardless of the number of hours taken, and an option to guarantee that tuition and fees will not change for up to three years.

Programs are designed to provide personalized learning experiences whether delivered on-campus, online, or through innovative hybrid modalities.

With the conclusion of the 2020 fall term, A&M-Central Texas will have produced more than 8,000 graduates prepared to serve the region, the state and the nation as teachers and counselors, businessmen and women, engineers and nurses, pilots and aviation leaders, experts in computer systems and cybersecurity, historians, social workers, and biologists with more to come.

KAREN CLOS is the Chief Communications & Advancement Officer for Texas A&M-Central Texas.

UMHB celebrates momentous milestones in 2020

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Although the year looked a little different, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor celebrated some momentous milestones in 2020, including its 175th anniversary, making it the oldest continuously operating college in the state.

The Baptist Student Ministry also marked 100 years on campus, and Burt Hall celebrated its 100th year as a female residence hall.

In January 2020, the Mayborn College of Health Sciences welcomed its first cohort into the new Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program. The OT program is inside a new 15,000-square-foot expansion at Hardy Hall and features cutting-edge technology, including a virtual anatomy table that offers a 3-D view of a body dissection, a driving simulator, a pediatric therapy lab, and an “activities of daily living” lab, made up of a functioning kitchen, bathroom and laundry room.



UMHB students masked up for graduation.

As part of OT, the Cru Work Skills program also launched last year to serve individuals 18 and older who have intellectual and learning disabilities by helping them gain new work skills that could potentially lead to jobs.

The new Cru Community Clinic also opened this past fall, providing pro bono physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling services to community members in need.

Due to COVID-19, UMHB shifted all classes to online learning in March 2020,

and in the summer launched the new CRUflex modality plan. CRUflex utilizes a hybrid-flexible approach to learning, allowing students to switch between face-to-face, online, and synchronous class sessions.

This spring semester, UMHB is one step closer in its quest to becoming a leader in health sciences with the launch of a Master of Science in Physician Assistant degree—the only PA available between Dallas and San Antonio. Forty students make up the inaugural PA cohort in the 28-month program which focuses on patient education, preventive care, and chronic care management.

Including on-campus and online, enrollment at UMHB is 3,876; 3,379 are undergraduates, 290 are master’s, and 207 are doctoral students.

In UMHB’s spring 2019 class, 412 students were awarded degrees. Of those, 337 earned bachelor’s degrees, 59 received master’s degrees, and 16 earned doctoral degrees.



CAMPUS PROFILE

 UMHB is Ranked in the Top 30 in Best Value Schools by U.S. News and World Report among Regional Universities (West).	 Almost 3,900 students representing 33 U.S. states and 29 foreign countries.
 Over 96% of freshman students receive some form of financial aid.	 We offer over 70 unique academic programs to equip you for whatever course you're charting.
 A 18:1 student-to-faculty ratio means you get real expertise from teachers who know your name.	



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RECREATION

COVID-19 sent shockwaves through prep sports

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Suddenly it was over.

Just days before a boys basketball champion was to be crowned, a relatively unheard of illness descended on the world, and everything stopped, including high school athletics.

Despite the best efforts of all involved, the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated the boys basketball state tournament — a destination Ellison High School fell one victory shy of reaching. The boys and girls soccer seasons suffered the same fate, ending days before the playoffs were set to start.

Additionally, all spring sports were halted.

The baseball, softball, track and field, golf and tennis seasons were each called off midway through, sending shockwaves into all aspects of athletics from recruiting to player safety to offseason workouts.

And, unfortunately, there were significant casualties.

Under first-year head coach Kye Robertson, Harker Heights' softball team appeared poised to reach the playoffs for the first time since 2004 before the stoppage.

Following years of struggling as a program, Shoemaker's baseball team won its first three district games, but the Grey Wolves were not permitted to view their potential.

Additionally, defending state track and field champions Cameron Everts, of Lampasas, and Stacy Brown, of Ellison, lost the opportunity to repeat. The seniors competed in the 300-meter hurdles and long jump, respectively.

Salado's girls soccer team was ranked 15th in Class 4A.

In time, however, coaches, principals and superintendents got a grasp of the coronavirus, controlling the variables enough to allow sports to return in the fall, and area teams thrived on the football field.

With Baylor commit Monaray Baldwin, a receiver, leading the way, Shoemaker finished second in the District 12-6A standings, matching the best finish in school history. Harker Heights joined the Grey Wolves in the playoffs, but each team was eliminated in the first round.

In Class 4A, No. 2 Lampasas' undefeated season came to abrupt end as unranked Corpus Christi Miller upset the Badgers in the second round, while Salado produced the deepest run of any area team, reaching the third round before losing to eventual champion Carthage.

COVID-19's presence was still felt, though, as Gatesville was forced to forfeit its first-round playoff game due to concerns



Shoemaker's De'andre Exford (4) runs a kickoff to mid-field in round one of the playoffs against No. 11 DeSoto at Leo Buckley Stadium in December.

surrounding the coronavirus.

In volleyball, district champion Harker Heights, Ellison and Copperas Cove advanced to the playoffs from District 12-6A, but Salado was the only area team to win a bi-district game.

Salado also had success at the state cross country meet, where Jaci McGregor, who won the 2019 Class 4A state championship, finished 10th overall.



Mary Hardin-Baylor's Alexia Martin (center) shoots over Arlington Baptist's Heaven Muenster (21) during the Lady Crusaders' win in December.

UMHB sports see success despite COVID-19 disruptions

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

It was a year like no other.

Over time, Mary Hardin-Baylor's athletic department has experienced it all. The Crusaders have celebrated a total of 13 American Southwest Conference championships, and they have come up short in seven national title contests.

In the last five years alone, the Crusaders football team has won the NCAA Division III Championship (2016) and seen it stripped it away due to rules violations.

But UMHB never endured a year like 2020.

Everything was proceeding normally until COVID-19 descended across the country in mid-March, putting an end to all remaining spring and winter championship possibilities.

Days before tipoff, both the men's and women's basketball tournaments were called off, and soon after all athletic competitions were canceled through the end of the academic year.

The Crusaders women's basketball team was set to play in a sectional game when the season abruptly ended. They finished the season with a 26-4 record.

The men's and women's tennis and golf seasons, along with the baseball and softball seasons, were each stopped midway through. UMHB's inaugural acrobatics and tumbling season ended after the program collected its first victory.

Despite the circumstances, the Crusaders experienced plenty of success.

The women's basketball team finished ninth and 10th in the final national polls, the softball team ranked 10th to conclude the season, and the athletic department announced women's beach volleyball would be added as a varsity sport in 2022.

Furthermore, UMHB was selected to co-host one NCAA Division III Football Championship (2024 Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl) and one Women's Golf National Championship (2025).

Sports eventually returned in September, but not as usual.

The ASC Council of Presidents announced in late July to delay events for fall sports, including football, cross country, soccer and volleyball, until spring.

The void was filled when sports resumed as the Crusaders men's golf team hosted the Cru One Day Challenge on Sept. 8 in Killeen, splitting matches with Hardin-Simmons and East Texas Baptist.

UMHB women's golf and tennis teams followed suit, and then, the Crusaders basketball teams took the court in late November, giving first-year head coach Clif Carroll his first win with the program.

Carroll is the Crusaders' fourth head coach after replacing Ken DeWeese, who retired after occupying the role since the 1998-99 season. In his 22 seasons, DeWeese led UMHB to the postseason 21 times, reaching the national championship game in 2013.

UMHB also ushered in a new softball coach in 2020 as assistant Melissa Mojica took over following the retirement of Larry Hennig, who produced nine ASC Championship Tournament appearances in his decade with the team.

ASYMCA bounces back after pandemic closure

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

It's no secret that fitness centers statewide took a hit when forced to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Armed Services YMCA in Harker Heights is bouncing back when it comes to its membership and programs since reopening in May.

"We've seen an increase in members as families feel safe to come back," said Amanda Castellanos, ASYMCA marketing coordinator. "We've been able to bring back most of our programs while maintaining social distancing. We missed our members and we're happy to see many of them making their way back."

Castellanos said that staff members do temperature checks at the entrance, masks are required and high-touch surfaces are frequently sanitized.

"We're committed to a clean and healthy environment," she said.

POPULAR PROGRAMS AND NEW IDEAS

The No. 1 program in 2020 was the Children's Waiting Room, which served more than 3,600 children that year. The service provides two hours of free childcare for military parents to attend scheduled medical appointments.

"It never closed during the COVID-19 shutdown, allowing the ASYMCA to continue serving our military families during the pandemic," Castellanos said.

Other youth programs have proven popular, including Chef Class, Creative Canvas, Theatre, Homeschool physical fitness classes, morning Pre-K classes and a range of swimming classes.

"Parents wanted to find something for their children to do after COVID-19 affected our daily lives, and our programs provide a safe and interactive place for children to continue growing even during a pandemic," she said.

Operation Little Learners, a free interactive class for parents and children of active-duty military members, will return for in-person classes later this year. Last year it was offered only as a virtual class.

"It promotes bonding through fun



Janelle Walden, left, and ASYMCA worker Makayla Allen carve a bacon-wrapped Thanksgiving turkey during the little chef class at the Armed Services YMCA in November.

activities," Castellanos said.

Of course, older folks want to have fun, too. For the senior set, the ASYMCA offers Senior Group Fitness, Twinges in the Hinges, and the Silver Sneaker Classic, among other activities and events throughout the year.

"These programs help support our senior community by promoting safe and healthy living," Castellanos said.

The ASYMCA has only grown since opening its doors in 2016. Then, only the fitness floor, swim lessons, and Child Watch were available for members.

"Since 2017, we've implemented more than 70 new programs and classes," she said. "Every quarter we grow in memberships, even after reopening our doors since COVID."

Programs such as Child Watch — before- and after-school childcare programs available at elementary schools in the Killeen, Copperas Cove, Florence, Belton and Lampasas districts — summer camps, holiday camps, and Kid's Night Out, are open to the public.

Call 254-690-9622 for more information or stop by the Harker Heights Wellness Center at 110 Mountain Lion Road.

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Vive Les Arts performers Dorilia Ortega and Marc Grice light up the stage in “Matilda, the Musical.” VLA’s next show is “Moana Jr” on March 5-14.

As Killeen’s only civic theater, VLA remains a fixture

BY EMILY HILLEY-SIERZCHULA

HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Vive Les Arts in Killeen has been a fixture in Central Texas for 45 years, since the theater was founded in 1976.

Since then, it has rolled with the punches — including those thrown by COVID-19. The auditions for “Moana Jr.,” for example, were done both in-person while safely socially distanced, or over video.

“Even with the trials of 2020, we were able to safely navigate a way for our community to come together and celebrate the arts,” according to VLA.

It has a full roster of productions scheduled for this spring. As usual, the fare is varied, from the Children’s Theatre Production of “Moana Jr.,” which has been described as both “thrilling and heartwarming,” to Oscar Wilde’s comedy “The Importance of Being Earnest.” Although it was first published in the 1800s, it remains relevant today.

“We’ve always been committed to producing current works that are in line with what’s just coming off Broadway,” said VLA’s Executive Director Jami Salter.

Salter, who has more than 30 years of experience in theater arts, was hired as the organization’s leader in 2019.

She took over the reins in the midst of upgrades to the house lights, a new sound system and new stage curtains. Also on the agenda is a redesign of the interior of the theatre.

The VLA also meets a need for the arts in Central Texas through educational programs like Musical Theatre 101. MT101 is expanding this year to offering two class sessions. One session will be for students in the first through fifth grades and the other will be for sixth- through 12th-graders.

UPCOMING PRODUCTIONS

- Moana Jr.: March 5-14 (Children’s Theatre Production)
- Once On This Island: April 16-25
- The Importance of Being Earnest: May 14-23
- Something Rotten: July 9-18

For more information, call 254-526-9090 or go to vlakilleen.org. Vive Les Arts, located at 3401 S. W.S. Young Drive, is supported by funds from the City of Killeen and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Individual tickets for the Main Stage are \$20 for adults, \$18 for military members, seniors, students and teachers, and \$15 for children 12 and under. Children’s Theatre tickets are \$14 for adults, \$12 for military members, seniors, students and teachers, and \$10 for children 12 and under.

Season memberships are available for \$90 for individuals and \$85 for military members, seniors, students and teachers.

Ten classes will be held throughout the semester, culminating in a performance showcase in May, according to VLA in January.

Killeen’s only theater is funded by donations and also through grant funds like those that were approved unanimously by the city council in October last year. Eight organizations will receive grants in fiscal year 2021, including \$22,815 for Vive Les Arts Societe and \$14,343, for the Children’s Theatre.



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