



## Rangers, volunteers finishing off-season work at Belton Lake



Courtesy Photo

A new seating area was built by US Army Corps of Engineers crews and volunteers at Westcliff Park during the off-season. With the weather warming up, local residents are already flocking to local lakes for a little fun in the sun.

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

Spring is almost here, and that means Bell County residents will soon head to the cool waters of area lakes. But during the slow winter season, volunteers and the US Army Corp of Engineers have been busy at Belton Lake working on damaged facilities at its many parks.

"Belton Lake Volunteers have been hard at work this winter season making improvements to many facilities around the lake," said Lead Park Ranger Jewel Hale. "There are still a few projects under way or planned for

summer 2026."

Hale said completed volunteer projects include gate arm repair, camping shelter repairs, dock maintenance, sign installations, picnic table assembly and much more.

One of the largest Belton Lake projects has been improvements to the Westcliff Park campground.

"Since many campsites and facilities at Westcliff were damaged during a flood and severe weather event in 2024, lake staff have worked to complete repairs and renovations through contract task orders, local vendors and US Army Corps of Engineers volunteers."

"Westcliff Park campsites 1 through 19 have been renovated," Hale said. "These renovations include new roofs, construction of concrete approaches and construction of concrete delineation surrounding the impact areas."

Hale said other Westcliff improvements include the replacement of two restroom facilities in the day use area, installation of a new fee-collection machine and installation of new volunteer host sites.

At Temple Lake Park's Sandy Point, picnic facilities damaged by

See **RANGERS**,  
Page A2



Courtesy Photo

Lake Belton High School seniors Dhruv Bhat and Alex Yuen have been named finalists in the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program, one of the nation's most prestigious academic competitions.

## Two Lake Belton High School seniors named National Merit Finalists

Special to the Journal

Lake Belton High School seniors Dhruv Bhat and Alex Yuen have officially advanced to finalist standing in the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program, one of the nation's most prestigious academic competitions.

After earning Semifinalist recognition in the fall, Bhat and Yuen advanced to Finalist standing by meeting the program's rigorous academic, testing and application requirements, a distinction achieved by only about 15,000 students nationwide. Fewer than one percent of U.S. high school seniors earn this distinction.

As finalists, Bhat and Yuen are now eligible to compete for approximately 6,870 National Merit Scholarships that will be awarded later this year.

Dhruv Bhat, the son of Sanjay and Nandita Bhat of Temple, is involved in tennis, UIL Academics, HOSA-Future Health Professionals, Student Council and National Honor Society. He has been accepted to The University of Texas at Austin, where he plans to major in biology with the goal of entering the medical field.

"This shows that when you put in the work, you can reach the top," Bhat said. "But it's just the beginning. As you move into college and beyond, you have to keep pushing yourself."

Bhat credits his older sister as a strong influence in shaping his work ethic and determination.

Alex Yuen, the son of Joyce Zhao and Josh Yuen of Belton, is active in the National Honor Society, HOSA-Future Health Professionals, Student Council and UIL Academics, and previously competed in tennis. He has also been accepted to The University of Texas at Austin, where he plans to pursue a premedical pathway.

"This recognition helps ease the financial burden on my parents and strengthens my college applications," Yuen said. "It gives me an opportunity to stand out and continue working toward medical school."

Lake Belton High School Principal Steele Hantgin praised both students for their perseverance and academic excellence.

"Advancing to National Merit Finalist is an incredible achievement that reflects years of commitment, sacrifice and academic excellence," Hantgin said. "Dhruv and Alex represent the very best of Lake Belton High School, and this is a proud moment for our entire Broncos community. We are thrilled to celebrate this mile-

See **MERIT**,  
Page A3

## Schoepf's named Texas' best barbecue joint

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

Fresh off being tagged as the No. 1 BBQ joint in the Lone Star state by Texas Barbecue Online Magazine, there's more big news smoking on the pit at Schoepf's.

The family-owned spot on Central Avenue — known for its tasty brisket, ribs, TexMex BBQ and a variety of sausages — is opening a second restaurant in Georgetown.

"We're still working on approvals and permits, but we expect to start construction soon," said co-owner Ronnie Schoepf. "We hope to be open by summer."

The new Schoepf's will be located on Georgetown Square next to Wildfire Restaurant & Saloon.

"Our Georgetown menu will essentially be the same as in Belton," he said. "We will cook a lot of the meat in Belton and deliver it to Georgetown. We don't want to smoke up Georgetown Square."

Side dishes and desserts will be made at the new Schoepf's. Staci Schoepf, Ronnie's wife, will serve as pitmaster for both Belton and Georgetown locations.

Ronnie said the new Schoepf's will have at least 10 employees — the Belton store has 30.

Derik Strelsky, owner of Texas Barbecue Online Magazine, announced his Top 50 list of top BBQ spots on

See **SCHOEPF'S**,  
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Courtesy Photo

Ronnie and Staci Schoepf accept a plaque from Texas Barbecue Online Magazine owner Derik Strelsky last week after being named No. 1 BBQ restaurant in Texas. The magazine's Top 50 list also included Cospers Country Meat Market in Killeen (No. 11), Pustka Family BBQ in Temple (No. 29), Rossler's Blue Cord BBQ in Harker Heights (No. 34), Miller's Smokehouse in Belton (No. 36), and Smellin' Smoke BBQ at Fort Hood (honorable mention).

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## Belton FD presents 2025 report

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

The Belton Fire Department's annual report for 2025 was presented to City Council during Tuesday's meeting.

The Belton Fire Department in 2025 "continued to advance its mission of delivering professional, reliable and responsive fire and emergency services to our community."

The fire department responded to 2,439 incidents, and emergency calls ranged from

structure fires and vehicle accidents to medical assists and hazardous materials incidents — showing the broad scope of services provided to Belton residents.

### Among the calls for service were:

- 28 structure fires;
- 25 vehicle fires;
- 61 wildland or outside fires;
- 370 motor vehicle accidents;
- 896 medical assists;
- 190 lift assists;
- 30 hazardous materials incidents.

The department also participated in 114 mutual aid responses, continuing strong regional partnerships with surrounding agencies.

According to Fire Chief Jon Fontenot, community outreach remains one of the department's highest priorities. Firefighters and staff participated in 80 community engagements during 2025, reaching 2,566 Belton ISD students and 1,057 adults during

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# City adds two large vehicles to fleet



Courtesy Photos

The City of Belton recently purchased two vehicles that are and will be used by the Fire Department as well as transporting staff and officials.

## Special to the Journal

The City of Belton has two additional vehicles in its fleet, a passenger bus and a specialized blocker truck.

The bus expands the City's ability to train personnel and orient volunteers. The blocker truck will be used by first responders at emergency scenes.

The vehicles debuted on Tuesday, Feb. 24, prior to a City Council meeting. Three days later the Belton FD used the City's blocker truck for the first time at the scene of an accident on I-14.

The HOP donated the 2018 Ford E-450 passen-

ger bus following changes to its service model. The bus seats 12 passengers and has 143,465 miles. The City invested \$11,352 in repainting and routine maintenance to prepare the vehicle for municipal use.

The bus will support a variety of functions, including tours for members of boards and commissions, orientation sessions for new employees, and site visits to municipal facilities and infrastructure projects.

The blocker truck is a 2004 International 7400 4x4 equipped with a 3,000-gallon water tank.

City Council approved the purchase in September 2025, and the vehicle was acquired the following month from Williamson County Emergency Services

District No. 5.

The truck has 58,800 miles and was purchased for \$99,500. The City invested an additional \$24,195 for lighting, graphics, radio equipment, and other upfitting, bringing the total cost to \$123,695.

Blocker trucks are positioned behind emergency scenes to shield firefighters, police officers, and motorists from oncoming traffic.

By absorbing potential impacts, these vehicles protect frontline fire engines and critical equipment, helping preserve the City's primary emergency response capabilities.

# Belton ISD awarded grant from Meta



**Dominique Frazier**



**Yvonne Malmstrom**



**Camille Hicks**

## Special to the Journal

Belton Independent School District has been awarded a Meta Data Center Community Action Grant totaling \$44,050.97 to launch the "K-5 Code, Collaborate, Create" initiative, bringing advanced STEM makerspaces to Charter Oak, Lakewood and Leon Heights Elementary.

With the addition of these three campuses, every elementary school in Belton ISD will now have access to a makerspace, expanding hands-on STEM learning opportunities for students across the district.

The grant was developed by Belton ISD educators Camille Hicks, Yvonne Malmstrom and Dee Frazier, whose collaborative vision focuses on helping students move from passive technology

use to active creation and innovation.

Through the initiative, the campuses will establish Future Builders Makerspaces, dynamic learning environments where students can explore coding, robotics, engineering and design through hands-on experiences.

STEAM learning, which integrates science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, encourages students to think creatively while solving real-world problems.

For Camille Hicks, innovation specialist at Leon Heights Elementary, the inspiration behind pursuing the grant came from the curiosity she sees in students every day.

"The level of student curiosity, engagement and wonder I experience while facilitating STEAM lessons is incredibly inspiring," Hicks said. "I pur-

sued this grant because I am committed to ensuring our students have every possible opportunity to experience this type of learning."

The makerspaces will introduce students to AI literacy and emerging technologies using age-appropriate tools designed to help them solve real-world coding and design challenges.

Funding from the grant will provide access to Sphero robotics kits, 3D printers, Makey Makey invention tools and virtual reality exploration technology, allowing students to design, prototype and test their ideas.

Hicks said providing these tools to elementary students helps build more than technical skills.

"I believe every student deserves the opportunity to learn, innovate and create in a hands-on environment," she said. "By providing these resources, we are doing more than buying supplies. We are building a culture of creativity, collaboration and critical thinking."

For Yvonne Malmstrom, innovation specialist at Charter Oak Elementary, the opportunity to bring these experiences to students was equally exciting.

"As soon as we learned about this opportunity, my heart skipped a beat," Malmstrom said. "I've always believed kids need as many opportunities as possible to fuel their curiosity through STEAM. This grant gives us the chance to ignite that passion through hands-on experiences."

Malmstrom said the makerspaces will allow students to explore, collaborate and learn through trial and discovery.

"Kids are naturally curious, and sometimes the structure of school can unintentionally limit that," she said.

"STEAM gives students the chance to explore, fail, try again, and succeed through engaging activities. They learn to collaborate and rely on one another to reach their goals."

For Dee Frazier, a third-grade teacher at Charter Oak Elementary, the makerspaces will provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn through hands-on discovery.

"I was inspired to pursue this grant because through experience I know how many students learn best through hands-on experiences," Frazier said. "These tools will allow them to build, test ideas and problem-solve, helping them deepen their learning in meaningful ways."

Frazier said the tools will also help students turn their ideas into real solutions.

"What excites me most is that these tools will help students bring their ideas to life and open their minds to new possibilities," she said. "I believe this will help build the confidence to make decisions, create and experiment in ways they may not have before."

A key component of the program is the Junior Tech Ambassador program, where fourth- and fifth-grade students will mentor younger learners by demonstrating equipment, assisting with projects and helping troubleshoot technology.

The program is expected to serve approximately 1,600 students in kindergarten through fifth grade across the three campuses during its first year.

District leaders say expanding makerspaces to every elementary campus supports Belton ISD's ongoing effort to connect STEM learning from elemen-

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## Rangers - From Page A1

flooding and a big storm in 2024 have been replaced during the park's off-season. Hale said volunteers improved the amenities at Temple Lake Park Pavilion by weeding and re-surfacing the washer pits, horseshoe pits and volleyball court.

"Some of the camping shelters at Cedar Ridge Park have been renovated or repaired," Ranger Hale said. "Onsite volunteers worked to replace damaged wooden supports to some of the campsites in a section of the park

that's closed during winter months. A contract task order also provided needed construction or repair to a handful of campsite shelters in both sections of the park."

Road striping has been completed at multiple parks, including Belton Lakeview, Temple Lake Park, Westcliff, White Flint, Miller Springs and Cedar Ridge. In addition, roadside tree-trimming work has been finished at Live Oak Ridge, Winkler, Rogers and Miller Springs.

"We modified the

hours of operations on March 1 at some of our day-use parks such as Temple Lake Park, Westcliff, Cedar Ridge and White Flint," Hale added. "These parks will have the front-gate entrances open at 5 a.m. and close at 10 p.m. daily. Campers and marina users at the park will be provided with gate codes for after-hours access."

For information on volunteering at Belton Lake, please reach out to the Belton Lake Office at (254) 742-3050.

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# OBITUARIES



## Boales

Lloyd Mervin Boales  
April 1, 1933 – February 24, 2026

Lloyd Mervin Boales, 92, of Killeen, Texas, passed peacefully into the arms of his Savior on February 24, 2026. Lloyd lived a long and full life marked by love, faith and steady devotion to his family and friends.

Born on April 1, 1933 in Florence, Texas to Mervin Samuel and Cloa Ewing Boales, Lloyd was the youngest son of seven children. He grew up in central Texas and learned the value of hard work very early. He began work at The Belton Journal in 1949 where he swept the shop and washed printing presses at night. From that beginning, he worked his way up to Journeyman printer. In 1964, he went to work at the Killeen Daily Herald as a linotype operator, then became Composing Room foreman. When the paper went to offset/cold type, he became the self-taught computer repair person. He retired as Systems Manager from the Herald in 1998.

In August of 1954, Lloyd went on a blind date with Nettie Mae Parker. After that first date, they never dated anyone else. They were married June 10, 1955 and celebrated 70 years together; a testament to their deep love and commitment.

Lloyd was a longtime member of Memorial Baptist Church in Killeen, where he served in several capacities including trustee for many years. He found special joy in serving as a greeter before church services. Lloyd never met a stranger and would talk to a fence post as long as it stood still, so this role was a perfect fit for him.

He was an avid gardener and grew enough onions, tomatoes and okra to fill the freezer and feed all his family and friends. In his younger years, he loved to go fishing on the river with his brothers and reminisced about those times frequently. He loved any activity that took him outside whether it was checking cows or feeding goats.

Lloyd leaves behind his wife, Nettie; his sister Carolyn Lankford; three daughters: Paula Boales Pabis and husband Frank; Lisa Nigro and husband Mike; Julie Savage and husband Frank. Three granddaughters: Shay Mueller and husband William, Haylee Hobby, Baylie Savage and one great-grand-

daughter, Adelyn Kate Mueller. Lloyd loved “his girls” fiercely and was a constant presence in their lives. In addition, there are many nieces, nephews and cousins who will miss him.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his brothers Clyde, Elwyn, Jack, and B.I. Boales; as well as his sister Pauline Moore.

Visitation and funeral services were held at Memorial Baptist Church in Killeen, Texas, on Saturday, February 28, 2026.

In Lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Memorial Baptist Church in Killeen.

4001 Trimmier Rd, Killeen, Texas 76542.

Crawford Bowers Funeral Home in Killeen was in charge of arrangements.

## Wilganowski

Miken Klaeson Wilganowski  
January 10, 2026 – January 10, 2026

Miken Klaeson Wilganowski, a beloved son, brother, and grandchild, was born on January 10, 2026, in Temple, Texas. His journey, although brief, was filled with light and so much love, his presence touched the hearts of many.

A funeral mass was held at Christ the King Catholic Church on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 2 p.m. Burial followed directly after at North Belton Cemetery. Dossman Funeral Home is helping with arrangements.

From the moment he entered this world, Miken brought immediate joy and happiness to his family. He was deeply cherished by his parents, Kyle Wilganowski and Josephine Vasquez, who embraced every moment with him.

He was loved by his older siblings Alan Trueblood, Mia Trueblood, Rawlings Wilganowski, and Addison Wilganowski. Miken’s grandparents, Fransico and Marinella Vasquez, alongside Kathleen Wilganowski, held a special place in his life, showering him with affection and love. His uncles, Michael Paul Vasquez and Fransico Vasquez III, hold a special place in their heart for Miken. He is deeply loved by his cousins and many others.

Though his time with us was all too brief, every moment with Miken will be cherished and never forgotten.

Miken will be deeply missed by his family. In the hearts of his loved ones, his memory will forever be missed. Their loss is profound, but they find solace in knowing that Miken will always be a part of their life as a precious blessing and now their little angel.

As they navigate life without him, the family holds tight to the beautiful legacy that Miken leaves behind—a tiny footprint left in their hearts forever. “Loved beyond words, missed beyond measure.”

## Thacker

Robert Duane Thacker  
May 8, 1956 — January 29, 2026

Robert Duane Thacker, affectionately known as Bob, left this world on January 29, 2026, in Temple, Texas, at the age of 69. Born on May 8, 1956, in Dumas, Texas, Bob’s life journey was marked by a blend of steadfast dedication, warmth, and a heart full of love for his family and faith.

A proud construction worker by trade, Bob took great pride in the fruits of his labor, building not just structures but a legacy of hard work and resilience. He possessed a spirit that reached far beyond the physical—his role as a host for Alcohol Anonymous meetings highlighted his deep compassion and commitment to helping others find their way. With an unwavering faith in God, Bob was an active member of his church, where he found community and extended his kindness to those around him.

Bob’s love for his family was boundless. He was a devoted family man, never missing a school function and always standing as the biggest cheerleader for his children. His greatest joy was sharing meals and creating cherished moments with his loved ones. He is survived by his former wife, Rita Thacker, and his devoted life partner of 20 years, Deborah Bush. His legacy continues through his children: son Jordan Thacker and daughter Cheryl George, who carry forward the values and love he instilled in them. The joy in his life flourished through his four grandchildren—Isaiah, Josiah, Ashinee’, and Eden J. Thacker—and his two great-grandchildren, Jordyn and Jayceon Watchman-George, who brought light to his days.

Bob also shared a tight-knit bond with his brother Larry Thacker and wife Glenda, and his sister-in-law Kanda Thacker, whose presence enriched his life and for whom he held deep affection. He is preceded in death by his older brother, David Thacker, whose memory will remain in the hearts of those who loved him.

Beyond his work and devotion to family, Bob savored life’s simple pleasures, relishing camping trips under a starlit sky, the thrill of fishing adventures, and the comfort of cooking and gardening. His zest for life was seasoned with memorable evenings spent watching WWE wrestling matches on television, where the roar of the crowd mirrored the enthusiasm in his heart.

As we remember Robert Duane Thacker, we celebrate a life well-lived—a life of faith, family, and unwavering spirit. He touched many lives and leaves behind a tapestry of love, laughter, and cherished memories that will continue to inspire those who knew him. While he has departed from our sight, his legacy of love and kindness will forever ring in the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to cross his path.

Arrangements are under the direction of Sabrina Young at Young’s Daughters Funeral Home and Bereavement Center in Temple, Texas.

# Morgan’s Point Resort City Hall storm repairs nearly complete

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

Morgan’s Point Resort is close to finishing repairs to City Hall and other city-owned buildings that suffered significant damage during the May 22, 2024, storm, according to Shahdiah Valentin, MPR’s director of administrative services.

The storm damage in the Morgan’s Point Resort and Temple areas was caused by two separate tornadoes that struck miles apart, according to the National Weather Service in Fort Worth.

“The first tornado started at 6:21 p.m. about 2 miles

south-southeast of Morgan’s Point Resort,” said David Bonnette, a meteorologist with the NWS. “It traveled 2.78 miles on the ground and was rated as an EF2. Top speeds were 120 mph, and the storm ended in west-northwest Temple.”

According to Bonnette, 30 injuries and no deaths were reported, but extensive damage was reported in Morgan’s Point and west Temple.

“The tornado formed near Texas 317 between FM 2483 and West Adams Avenue where at least a dozen power poles were significantly damaged,” he said. “The

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tary school through high school career and technical education programs.

By introducing engineering, coding and design at an early age, students can begin developing the skills and curiosity that will prepare them for future CTE pathways and high-demand careers in technology and engineering.

“Our students are innovators today and the future of tomorrow,” Hicks said.

The initiative

launched in January 2026 and will culminate with a community Innovation Expo, where families and community members will have the opportunity to see students showcase their creations and technical projects.

Frazier said the grant represents an investment in students and their future.

“Thank you for investing in our students and their potential to become future innovators,” she said.

## Merit - From Page A1

stone and all the hard work that made it possible.”

Belton ISD Superintendent Dr. Malinda Golden said the recognition is a significant accomplishment for both students and the district.

“Being named a National Merit Finalist places Dhruv and Alex among the most accomplished students in the country. That is

extraordinary,” Golden said. “This honor reflects their discipline, drive and unwavering commitment to excellence. Achievements like this do not happen by accident. They happen when students embrace challenge, teachers pour into them and a community believes in their potential.”

National Merit Scholarship winners will be announced later this spring and summer

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A4  
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# LIFESTYLES

THE BELTON JOURNAL

## Local gators in Central Texas likely have been here for decades

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

A small but healthy population of American alligators living on the Lampasas River just above Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir have kept to themselves in recent years.

"We might hear the odd rumor every now and then, but we have not personally seen or had any physical evidence reported to us in the lake or along the stretch of river managed by us," said Alex Klepac, a natural resource specialist with the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Texas alligator experts say a small but healthy group lives on the Lampasas, and they've likely lived there for decades if not centuries.

"I'm not sure how many alligators live in the Lampasas, but there are a few," said Jonathan Warner, alligator program leader for Texas Parks & Wildlife.

"Gators living in the Texas Hill Country are rare, but they do exist. This is the extreme western fringe of their range," he said. "Down in southwest Texas along the Rio

Grande, you have a few, but the Lampasas alligators are about as far west as this species goes."

Warner said the gators likely have been here all along but now humans and wildlife are crossing paths at an unprecedented rate.

"It's not a case of alligators moving into our habitat, it's the other way around," he said. "More and more people are moving to Central Texas, and as a result, humans are expanding into their world. There will be more encounters in the future. Their numbers are not rapidly expanding, we're just bumping into them more frequently."

"Alligators are native to the Lampasas River watershed," he said. "They must have a den somewhere to survive cold weather."

Warner said both Stillhouse Hollow and Belton Lake have habitats that are perfect for alligators to call home, but he said all reported encounters have been on the Lampasas River.

Bob Maindelle, an avid fisherman and owner of Holding the Line Fishing Guide Service, said he has personally seen gators on the Lampasas.

"I've seen them — they are there," Maindelle



Courtesy Photo/Texas Parks & Wildlife

American alligator stands in shallow water alongside a bank in the Lampasas River upstream from Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir. Experts say a small number of gators live in the Lampasas and likely have for a long time.

said during a recent interview. "I saw one just upriver from Stillhouse, but I've never seen or heard of alligators in Belton Lake."

TP&W Game Warden Chris Sanchez, who is based in Temple, said there have been two incidents of alligators being illegally killed in Bell County since 2016.

"There were two taken illegally — a big one in 2016 and a six-to-eight-foot gator in 2021," Sanchez

said. "We've gotten a few calls, but we have frequent conversations about the Lampasas River alligators. This is a known area for the native species, but they are seldom seen. We know they live in the Lampasas River corridor."

In 2016, two fishermen were charged in the killing of an 11-foot gator in the Lampasas, just west of Stillhouse. The men were fishing for catfish when the alligator hung

itself on a hook. The men said they euthanized the animal before calling a TP&W hotline.

Bell County is a non-core alligator hunting county, meaning only one alligator can be harvested per person during a season that runs from April 1 to June 30. Hunters must have a permit and can only harvest gators on private property.

If a person encounters an alligator, Warner said

the best plan of action is to leave it alone and move out of the area.

"Don't feed it," he said. "If it's fed, it's dead."

Alligators that are fed by humans begin to associate food with people, which could lead to an ugly outcome. In locations where gators are common and human/alligator interactions occur on a regular basis, a fed alligator will become aggressive and the animal must be destroyed.

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## Free tax preparation available at the Belton Senior Center

By Michele Weisman  
The Belton Journal

Free tax preparation is available on Mondays at the Belton Senior Activity Center through April 13, from noon to 3 p.m.

No appointments or AARP membership is re-

quired.

Those needing tax preparation should bring their Social Security card for everyone on the return, a photo identification, tax records for the filing year such as W-2 forms, and a copy of last year's tax return.

Three volunteers, trained by the IRS, certified, and annually retested are available to help those who stop by.

There is a table outside the quilt room, with a sign-up sheet, informational flyers, and a tax form to fill out. People are called back into the quilt room when volunteers are available.

The process takes, on average, about 30 minutes. A volunteer, using IRS

computers and software, prepares the tax return. A second volunteer then reviews the return.

Due to depreciation, they cannot file for returns with rental property or farms.

Matt Lyons, a 13-year volunteer said, "We have somebody else do a 100% check to make sure it's correct. Then we review it with the client. Once the client's happy with it, we get them to sign it. Then

we will electronically file it with the IRS."

Senior Center Activity Director Judy Owens said, "We're happy to have volunteers who are certified under IRS guidelines."

Tax preparation and filing with the IRS is also provided at Rose Hall by the AARP volunteers in Temple at 107 N. 9th St. on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to noon through April 14.

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BELTON JOURNAL/Michele Weisman

A tax return is being reviewed by AARP IRS trained volunteers Matt Lyons and John Redwine.



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# Clark Associates to head Belton drainage project

By David Stone  
The Belton Journal

The City of Belton will hire Clark Associates Engineers for construction administrative services for the upcoming West Avenue I drainage project.

The decision came during Tuesday's Belton City Council meeting.

According to Scott Hodde, director of public works, West Avenue I has experienced a significant increase in stormwater runoff during the past few years. The bulk of the runoff is from the Interstate 14 corridor.

This runoff flows north through a drainage channel that passes through parkland near the Jaycee Park Baseball Complex, eventually topping the curb and flooding West Avenue I. From there, Hodde said, the water continues down Mitchell Street and is ultimately collected by storm inlets along Mitchell street and circle.

"The runoff creates a river-like flow across West Avenue I, impacting a resident within the Housing Authority Complex along with a few residents just east of the baseball complex," Hodde said in a statement to Council.

"The city's goal is to explore detention options that would reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater in this area," he added. "Depending on the results of the analysis, improvements to drainage culverts and channels may also be necessary."

Clark Associates provided design and bid phases for completing a regional drainage analysis and developing recommendations to address the existing issues which also include construction plans for a regional detention pond and other drainage improvements as necessary.

The project has been awarded for construction to Mills Construction, LLC and Clark Associates has proposed a professional services agreement for construction administration services. Clark Associates will be responsible for many inspections and duties related to the project, including bi-weekly on-site inspections and reports.

The \$38,465 cost of hiring Clark Associates has already been budgeted.

# Report - From Page A1

education events.

Central Fire Station is staffed with one Lieutenant, one Driver/Operator, and three firefighters.

According to Fontenot, this staffing model supports frontline response operations while maintaining depth of personnel for emergency incidents,

training, and community risk reduction activities.

Station 2 is staffed with one Captain, one Driver/Operator, and two firefighters. The Captain serves as the shift commander and is responsible for the overall management, supervision, and operational readiness of the entire shift.

# Schoepf's - From Page A1

March 2, which marks the day Texas won its independence from Mexico.

"It's fitting that on this day we release the 2026 Texas Barbecue Top 50," Strelsky said at the time. "This is Texas Barbecue Independence Day."

"This list represents a new era in Texas barbecue recognition, built on merit, craftsmanship, consistency, and the quality of the cook," Strelsky said. "No outside influence. No agendas. Just fire, smoke, meat, and the men and women who dedicate their lives to mastering it."

"Our commitment is simple. Every pit. Every plate. Everything that leaves that counter is judged on what matters most: the food and the craft behind it. Nothing beyond the quality of the cook enters the equation."

"In the high-stakes world of the Texas barbecue scene, the difference between a 'reliable stop' and the No. 1 crown comes down to an obsession with the craft and a soul-stirring experience."

"For decades, Schoepf's BBQ in Belton was the beloved guardian of old-school tradition, Strelsky added. "But while the rest of the pitmaster world was looking the other way, a quiet revolution took place at 702 E. Central Ave. Today, Schoepf's isn't just a Central Texas staple. It is a power-

house of 'Craft BBQ' innovation that demands the top spot on the leaderboard. We are proud to feature this transformation in the latest edition of the Texas Barbecue Online Magazine."

Ronnie and Staci found out the big news by reading it on the Texas Barbecue website.

"I had no idea there was judging going on," Ronnie said with a grin. "Of course, it was exciting news to be mentioned as the best BBQ place in a state where there's awesome barbecue everywhere."

In addition to great food, Schoepf's is known for hosting concerts in the "back room" and in the massive venue behind the restaurant.

With a menu that features a huge variety of smoked meats and many side dishes, Ronnie said his prime brisket is the rustic restaurant's most popular item.

"We use Creekstone Farms prime brisket — it's a very special product," he said. "It's high-grade grass-fed beef."

Ronnie and his dad started Schoepf's BBQ back in 1993. Ronnie served as manager when it opened, and in 2007 he and Staci took over as owners.

The couple aren't the only family members wearing a Schoepf's apron — their five kids also help out.

# Burn Ban Lifted

Special to the Journal

Bell County Judge David Blackburn has issued an Order Lifting the Burn Ban. This new status takes effect on Wednesday, March 11, at 6:00 a.m.

The decision to lift the Burn Ban was made after the county received beneficial rainfall over the weekend with more in the forecast for this week.

While the Burn Ban is lifted starting Wednesday morning, Bell County residents are required to report burns through the Burn Ban phone line, (254) 933-5555.

This practice not only informs individuals of Texas laws around burning, but it also ensures that area fire department personnel are not mistakenly deployed to extinguish planned burns.

# Morgan's Point - From Page A3

tornado continued to move east/southeast across the Terrace at Lake Pointe subdivision, damaging many homes, especially roofs and windows."

Significant roof and tree damage was found in the neighborhood south of Tarver Elementary School, Bonnette said.

The tornado, according to Bonnette, then crossed Tanglehead Drive and headed toward West Adams, damaging many west Temple businesses, including stand-alone restaurants, shops, banks and strip centers.

"A few of the businesses in the area suffered major roof damage and cars were flipped up and down Adams," Bonnette reported. "Most of the power poles along West Adams were damaged or snapped in half."

"The tornado continued to move southeast, crossing Old Waco Road, damaging other homes and businesses. Additional tree damage was found as the tornado tracked across an

open field south of W. Adams Ave and west of South Kegley Road."

While a National Weather Service survey team found additional damage east of Kegley, debris indicates the circulation lifted around 6:26 p.m., but downdraft winds estimated between 80-90 mph continued throughout the city.

An EF1-rated tornado hit southeast parts of Temple and continued toward Little River Academy.

"That storm hit at 6:33 pm. and moved 2.20 miles before dissipating," Bonnette said. "That tornado packed wind speeds of up to 95 mph."

"The second but brief tornado — it was gone in two minutes — developed in southeast Temple near Bob White Road north of FM 3117. It tracked over mostly open fields, but roof damage was found near the intersection of these roads. It was major damage."

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## Are You a Potato or an Egg?



**John C. Perry**

I heard a most interesting quote the other day: "The same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg."  
It caught my attention, so I did what any curious person does, I looked up the science behind it.  
It turns out the difference lies in their composition. Eggs contain proteins that solidify when exposed to

heat, causing them to harden. Potatoes, on the other hand, are rich in starches that break down when boiled, making them soft.  
Same water.  
Same temperature.  
Same conditions.  
Two completely different outcomes.  
That simple kitchen truth carries a powerful lesson about life. We all face "boiling water" moments, stress, loss, disappointment, uncertainty. Yet people respond in remarkably different ways. Some grow stronger under pressure. Some feel themselves breaking down. Some avoid the heat altogether. Others react with anger or fear.  
So, the question becomes:  
Are we potatoes or eggs? Or maybe, something else entirely?

As a Christian, I've learned that the goal isn't to become harder or softer when life heats up. Hardness can make us brittle. Softness can make us fall apart. Scripture points towards a different response altogether.  
God doesn't ask us to be potatoes or eggs.  
He asks us to be faithful.  
In stressful seasons, the question isn't "How tough am I?" but "Who am I trusting?" Left to ourselves, we might crack or crumble. But with God's help, we can endure the heat without losing who we are.  
Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." That means the boiling water isn't the end of the story. The circumstances don't define us, His presence does.

Some days we feel strong. Other days we feel like we're barely holding together. But God meets us in both places. He shapes us, steadies us, and walks with us through the heat.  
Faith truly can do wonders. Putting your trust in our Lord and Savior can change how you face every challenge. When stress comes, turn it over to God. How? By praying. By seeking His direction. By asking for His strength. And by responding to His will rather than your fear.  
Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

What comforting words.  
And Isaiah 30:21 gives us this promise: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"  
God's guidance is both active and personal.  
So, the next time you find yourself in a stressful situation, turn it over to God. You may be amazed at what happens.  
Maybe the better question isn't whether you're a potato or an egg, but when life starts to boil, who is shaping your response?  
John C. Perry is the Immediate Past Lay Leader with New Life Methodist Church. They meet every Sunday at 9 a.m. (Bible Study) and 10 a.m. (Worship Service) in the Salado Middle School at 1169 Williams Rd.



## Local Activities & Events

### Newcomers Club Activities

#### March

- |                                                  |                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 03/12: Mexican Train Dominoes, Couples Night Out | 03/23: Well Read Women, Monday Canasta |
| 03/13: TGIF Lunch                                | 03/24: Singing Bluebonnets             |
| 03/16: Snack Time Mah Jongg                      | 03/25: Fun Lunch                       |
| 03/17: Bunco                                     | 03/26: Mexican Train Dominoes          |
| 03/19: Nonfiction Book Club, Meet & Greet        | 03/27: Trailblazers Walking Group      |
| 03/21: Exploring Wines                           | 03/28: Jimmy's Egg                     |

**"To join or for more information, please call: Mary Pringle (760)265-5035 or email at: pringlem@msn.com. Visit the website: www.bellcountynewcomers.com."**

#### Blood Drive - March 14

Blood Drive at Belton Masonic Lodge #166 on Saturday, March 14, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Call Tom Cumming at 254-368-1365 to schedule an appoint or for more information.

#### 0.5K Hop, Skip, and Sip - March 14

Get ready to Hop, Skip, and Sip with us at Nolan Creek Brewery's 4th annual (POINT) 0.5k on March 14th, 2026, at 2 PM! Check-in starts at 1 PM at The Gin/Scores complex, 219 S East St, Belton. The "race" begins at 2 pm and is a whopping 3 blocks to Nolan Creek Brewery, 206 N Penelope St, Belton — run, walk, skip, or dance your way to the finish line! Your ticket includes a FREE BEER, T-shirt, souvenir cup, and surprise goodies! Then, celebrate at our big after-party with live music, green beer, and good times at the brewery. Register by March 8th to guarantee your T-shirt size! For anyone who registers on or after March 9th, we'll do our best, but sizes may vary. Thanks for understanding as we gear up for this epic event! Register at facebook.com/nolancreekbrewery or call call 254-613-4190 for more information.

#### MPR Explorers - Mar 26

MPR Explorers invites residents to its monthly gathering featuring a musical performance by the Lake Belton High School Choir Show Ensemble, followed by a meet-and-greet with the Directors of the Friends of the Mary Ruth Briggs Library. The program highlights local talent and strengthens community connections as MPR continues building momentum for events and programs that benefit residents of all ages. Thursday, March 26, social at 10:00 a.m.; program concludes at 11:30 a.m. at Garrett & Mic Hill Event Center, 60 Morgan's Point Blvd.

**NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)** will meet both on TUESDAY, Mar 10 and Mar 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the Temple VA Hospital. Use the entrance on the Valet parking side of the hospital and take the elevator to the 5th floor -Conference Room 5G31. Both care-givers, supporters and those suffering from mental illness are welcome to join us for mutual support and sharing of information. For more information, call 254-771-3638.

**Temple-Belton Ladies Lion Club** Meeting Second and Fourth Monday of every month at 6:30 pm at the Belton V.F.W., 2311 S. Pearl St., Belton.

**Bell Area Parkinson's Support group (BAPS-North)** meets at CTCOG, 2180 N. Main St, Belton on the 2nd and 4th Fridays from 2:30-4:00 PM every month. All are welcome, and there is no membership cost. The Bell Area Parkinson's Support group (BAPS-West) meets at St. Andrews United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 206 W Fowler Ave, Killeen on the 1st and 3rd Fridays from 2:30-4:00 PM every month. For more information contact Gayle Shull at GayleInBelton@gmail.com or (254) 718-4197.

**Marine Corp League** will meet the third Tuesday of each mont at VFW 3859. Dinner is served at 6:30 p.m. and metting will begin at 7:00 p.m. 201 VFW Dr, Harker heights, Tx 76548. Email commandant@mcl1249tx.comfor more inforamtion.

#### Aspen Hospice and Palliative Care Volunteers Needed

Listed here are many ways you can help make a difference for our hospice patients. You can provide companionship, listen to music, read, reminisce, play games, cards, checkers, paint nails, apply makeup, curl hair or take them on walks. Please visit aspenhealthcare.net or call 512-856-5668 for more information.

**Young's Daughters Funeral Home Dementia/Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Group** occurs weekly on Fridays from 6-7 p.m. This group allows your loved ones to join. Loved ones will be doing activities while the group of caregivers are joining together to better understand and learn tips and tricks for daily life. Young's Daughters Funeral and Bereavement Center is located at 4235 East Hwy 190 in Temple.

**Bell County Historical Commission** holds their meetings on the fourth Monday of every month at 6 p.m. in the historical Bell County Court House, 101 E. Central Ave in Belton. Join us in our vision of preserving and promoting Bell County's rich historical heritage for current and future generations. We are dedicated to initiating and conducting programs that preserve and celebrate the county's historic cultural resources in alignment with state laws governing historical preservation in Texas. Our community resources consist of a research room, book repository, cemetery information, historical markers and monument records. Our services include information on historic preservation, educational programming, history community outreach and partnerships. We welcome you to join other history minded folks and get involved by serving on one of our committees that consist of preservation, cemetery, markers and

education. To volunteer or for more information please visit historicalcommission@bellcounty.texas.gov, call 254-933-5917 or visit the office located in the historic Bell County Courthouse, 101 E. Central Ave., RM 117.

**Pistons on the Creek** will meet every third Friday from 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. Come down to Nolan Creek and show off your rides. From classic to modern, muscle, rat rod, exotic, all automotive enthusiasts are welcome. Support our awesome downtown businesses and restaurants surrounded by live music, food, drinks and a great atmosphere.

**Bell Fine Arts Visitors welcome** Wednesday's from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 306 E 5th Ave in Belton. Majong games are available every Monday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Come join the fun and meet new folks. For more information text Jeanne at 409-313-0611.

**Local chapter of the Crochet Guild of America** meets from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Wednesdays at the Lena Armstrong Public Library, 301 E. First St., in Belton. The group is open to anyone interested in crochet. All skill levels are welcome. For information email Betty Reichert at bettyreichert@yahoo.com or Kathy Bement at katshookandneedle@gmail.com. Anyone interested in joining the local chapter of the Crochet Guild of America will also need to join the National Crochet Guild of America. Visit www.crochet.org for details.

**Bell County Texas Democratic Women** holds their monthly meeting on the thrid Saturday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Belton AgriLife Center, 1605 N Main in Belton. Join us to hear from local and state candidates and about important issues and events. This is open to the public.

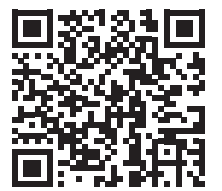
**Leadership Belton** is an excellent source for learning leadership skills. This 10-month program focuses on three key elements: community awareness training, leadership training, and team building. Do you have someone ready to take the next step to become a leader? If so, Leadership Belton is here to make that difference. For more information on how to participate, contact the chamber at 254-939-3551 or e-mail at info@beltonchamber.com.

**Engage & Empower with BISD** Belton ISD believes the learning experiences of our students are enhanced through the engagement of our community. We invite parents and community members to get involved in our schools. Register as a volunteer with our new volunteer and partnership system at the following link: [https://beltonisd.ezcommunicator.net/edu/beltonisd/login\\_form.aspx?app=0](https://beltonisd.ezcommunicator.net/edu/beltonisd/login_form.aspx?app=0).



## Community Information

**TAKE ME HOME PROGRAM** The Belton Police Department is adopting the Take Me Home Program, aimed at helping individuals who need special assistance to return safely home after getting lost. The program is a database with photos and personal information to help police officers find someone who is lost or wandered away from home. Take Me Home is designed for individuals who may need additional aid including those with Dementia, Autism or specific mental health needs. It's free to register someone and the data is kept confidential to first responders. You can sign up a loved one here: [www.beltontexas.gov/take-mehome](http://www.beltontexas.gov/take-mehome). Read more about the program here: [https://www.beltontexas.gov/news\\_detail\\_T11\\_R1166.php](https://www.beltontexas.gov/news_detail_T11_R1166.php).



**Dial 988 for Mental Health Emergencies** To help those contemplating suicide, press option 1 for assistance with military/veteran population.

**Text-to-911** for speech/ hearing impaired, those unable to call or speak due to home invasion, abduction or domestic violence or physically incapable. Providing location, city name and nature of the emergency in the first message is imperative. For further education on this service, don't hesitate to call 254-933-5500.

#### Citizens Helping in Police Service (CHIPS)

are extra eyes and ears while in areas where large groups may gather. Contact the Belton Police Dept. to join.

**Belton Citizens Police Academy** meets Thursday nights to enhance police and community partnerships. Apply online to be a part of this exciting program.

**Slam the Scam** Throughout the year, we give you the tools to recognize scams and stop scammers from stealing your money and personal information. Share the information with your loved ones & Slam the Scam! Visit [ssa.gov/scam](http://ssa.gov/scam) for tips.

**Dementia/Alzheimers Support Group-** Young's Daughters Funeral Home & Bereavement Center, 4235 E. US HWY 190 in Temple. Fridays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Join us for activities while caregivers discuss and help each other during this difficult time. Call Sabrina at 254-401-1302

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Or call (254) 939-5754

## LIVING THE LEGACY

On February 13, Ms. Lawanda Burrell, daughter of the school's namesake, visited James L. Burrell Elementary for a special morning of connection and reflection. Staff members welcomed her with breakfast, shared handmade cards from students and presented a slideshow honoring Mr. Burrell and highlighting the work taking place across campus.

Ms. Burrell expressed her gratitude before visiting each table to personally meet staff members. She later toured the campus with the principal, continuing conversations in classrooms and learning spaces.

The gathering celebrated the lasting impact of a name and legacy that continues to shape the James L. Burrell Elementary community today.



## HEALTHCARE HORIZONS OPENS DOORS FOR STUDENTS

On February 10, 2026, Career and Technical Education students from Belton High School, hosted Healthcare Horizons, an engaging event designed to connect South Belton Middle School students with opportunities in the health science field.

Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) members and alumni participated in the day's activities, with additional insight shared through videos featuring former students. Breakout sessions included keynote speakers and interactive learning experiences such as *Drawn to the Vein*, *Lifeline Lab*, *It's the Little Things*, *Vital Signs* and *Stop the Bleed*. The event concluded with a closing session led by a health science teacher.

Healthcare Horizons provided students with valuable exposure to real-world healthcare careers and hands-on learning experiences.



## PEN PAL PARTY BRINGS LETTERS TO LIFE

On December 9, 2025, Lake Belton High School students met their Charter Oak Elementary pen pals in person for a special Pen Pal Party filled with fun and connection. The collaboration was part of English classes at both campuses, where students built relationships through written correspondence throughout the semester.

During the visit, high school students stepped into mentor roles as they spent time laughing, making ornaments and participating in a friendly snowball fight with their elementary partners. The event brought pen pal relationships to life and created lasting memories for students on both campuses.

Scan here to watch  
Charter Oak x LBHS  
Pen Pals



## Q&A WITH DR. MALINDA GOLDEN



As spring unfolds across Belton ISD, campuses are buzzing with activity, milestones and meaningful moments. Superintendent Dr. Malinda Golden recently reflected on the experiences that have stood out this season, the district's continued focus on family and community partnership, and the intentional work shaping a strong finish to the school.

**Q: Spring is a busy season for schools. What moments on campuses lately have reminded you why this work matters?**

A: The first thing that comes to mind is the research symposium I recently attended at Lake Belton High School, followed by another one for two of our students at Temple College on a Saturday. Watching the culmination of a semester's worth of work was incredible.

These students were deeply thinking about real-world problems in the bioscience field. They developed hypotheses, collaborated with one another, conducted research and persevered through experiments that did not always go as planned. In one case, a parent accidentally threw an experiment away, and the students had to adapt quickly and restart within a tight timeframe. That resilience was powerful to witness.

Beyond the science itself, what stood out most was their critical thinking and communication. To see students synthesize their research, stand confidently in a gym with more than 200 people filtering through and articulate their findings so clearly was a beautiful demonstration of our Journey of a Graduate competencies in action. Moments like that remind me why school matters.



**Q: How is Belton ISD continuing to strengthen connections with families and the community this spring?**

A: We are continuing to strengthen our Parents as Partners work, which focuses on equipping families with learning opportunities and topics that support them as they walk alongside their children through school. Each year, this series grows stronger, and we still have a couple of sessions remaining that I am excited about.

I am also looking forward to engaging our community in strategic planning this spring. As we think about the future of Belton ISD and what the next five years should look like, it is important that we listen to the hopes and dreams our families and community members have for our students. Their voices will help shape how we support those aspirations and continue building toward a strong future for Belton ISD.

**Q: What should families and community members know about the work happening now that will shape the remainder of the school year?**

A: I am incredibly proud of our campus leaders and teachers. Each campus has clearly identified not only its improvement goals but also what it hopes to become for its students and families.

Every campus has developed what I would call a final-quarter playbook. There is a clear focus on finishing the year strong, aligned to our district vision of empowering each and every learner to pursue their dreams and enrich their communities. Our principals can articulate exactly how their work connects to that vision, and our teachers are carrying that focus into their classrooms every day.

There is a strong sense of alignment and purpose across the district right now, and that dedication is what will carry us through a successful end to the school year.



## BELTON ISD'S NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS LEADS THE WAY IN INCLUSION

Belton ISD's Night of Champions continues to grow as a signature event celebrating inclusion through athletics and student leadership, featuring the Belton Champions.

Throughout the school year, coaches and student athletes from Belton High School and Lake Belton High School have led activities in football, cheer, basketball and soccer for students receiving special education services, creating meaningful connections and memorable experiences.

This spring, the district is adding Night of Champions Baseball and Softball. The event will take place Wednesday, April 22 from 6 to 7 p.m. at Lake Belton High School, 9809 FM 2483 in Temple.

As Unified Champion Schools, both high schools also host Partners PE and PreProm. This year also marked the launch of the Unified Robotics team at Lake Belton High School. In its inaugural season, the team, the Circuit Breakers, advanced to the state competition, expanding inclusive opportunities beyond athletics and into STEM.

Through each of these initiatives, Belton ISD continues to create opportunities where each and every student is supported, included and celebrated.



## NEWS AND UPDATES

### BELTON ISD TO CELEBRATE 2026 WALL OF HONOR INDUCTEE

Belton ISD will honor Kegan Sherwood as the 2026 Wall of Honor inductee during the annual Belton High School Wall of Honor Induction Ceremony on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at Belton High School, 600 Lake Road in Belton.

A meet and greet will begin at 9 a.m., followed by the induction ceremony at 10 a.m.

Rooted in a tradition that dates back to 1909, the Wall of Honor celebrates athletes who exemplify dedication, leadership and excellence in competition and now includes a total of 153 inductees. Sherwood earned distinction as a First Team All-State athlete and represents the proud legacy of Belton athletics.

### THE PENGUIN PROJECT PRESENTS MADAGASCAR JR. AT BELTON HIGH SCHOOL

Belton ISD will present its fourth production of The Penguin Project this spring, featuring *Madagascar: A Musical Adventure Jr.* The inclusive theater program pairs students with developmental disabilities and peer mentors, creating a supportive environment where every student has the opportunity to shine. The program reflects the district's commitment to providing exceptional learning experiences for all learners.

Performances will take place at the Belton High School Performing Arts Center, 600 Lake Road in Belton, on Friday, April 24, 2026, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; and Sunday, April 26, 2026, at 7 p.m.

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## Ross named Newcomer of the year for 16-5A

By Clay Whittington  
The Belton Journal

Regardless of the sport, Gavin Ross made an impact.

In the fall, the junior receiver took to the football field and dominated, accounting for 1,218 yards and 11 touchdowns on 84 receptions while helping the Tigers return to the playoffs for a fifth consecutive season.

The performance earned him a spot on the 10-5A, Division II All-District First Team.

Then, the game changed as Ross transitioned to the basketball court, and once again, his presence was felt.

Ross made his debut with the team this season, and he proved to be a welcome addition as he immediately earned a role within the roster, helping Belton secure a share of the league championship.

Like with the football team, individual

honors followed.

Ross was named the 16-5A All-District Newcomer of the Year after averaging 4.9 points, 3.5 rebounds and 3.4 points en route to the Tigers' 29-7, 8-2 record.

It was Belton's fifth consecutive season with at least 27 victories.

Ross had plenty of help, however, as the Tigers delivered another impressive campaign.

Although he was the only Belton player to receive a superlative, two teammates received first-team recognition.

Noah Childers, a senior swingman, and junior forward Ty Johnson occupied spots on the 10-person squad.

A member of the varsity roster since he was a freshman, Childers capped off his career by averaging 11.5 points highlighted by connecting on 38.5 percent of his 3-point attempts. He also had 3.8 rebounds per game.

Johnson was efficient from all over

the floor, making 35.3 percent of his shots from beyond the 3-point arc to average 14.8 points along with grabbing 5.6 rebounds per game.

The Tigers also had four honorable mentions on the list in senior forward Daniel Briscoe, senior guard Jay'dn Loggins, junior shooting guard Abran Knight and junior guard Luke Munden.

Munden averaged 9.1 points, 2.9 assists and 2.3 rebounds, while Knight posted 4.9 points and 2.5 rebounds, and like his first-team teammates, he was a key 3-point shooter, making 30.8 percent of his attempts.

Loggins, who recorded his 1,000th career point this season, averaged 14.3 points to go with 3.4 rebounds, and he made 39.7 percent of his 3-pointers, while Briscoe hit 37.1 percent of his 3-pointers en route to 9.2 points and 6.4 rebounds per game.

Lake Belton was also acknowledged on the list.

Mikey Lockett, a junior guard, was placed on the first team, and teammates Dezmin Ravizee, a senior guard, and senior guard Ameer Williams landed on the second team.

Additionally, junior guard Allen Muchunu, senior forward Christian Onchweri and junior center Jackson Striegler were honorable mentions.

The Broncos finished the season with a 20-14, 1-9 record.

Killeen ISD players received several of the remaining superlatives.

Ellison senior point guard Sean Parks was named most valuable player, and Eagles head coach Alberto Jones Jr. was named coach of the year, while Chaparral junior guard Demoni Mayes and senior forward Carlos Robinson were named offensive player of the year and co-defensive player of the year, respectively.

Robinson shared the award with Waco University senior Justin Neal.

## Tigers soccer finishes district in third place, playoffs bound

By Aries Ramos  
The Belton Journal

The Belton Tigers boys soccer team closed out district play in style last Thursday night, knocking off the Chaparral Bobcats 2-0 at home to secure a third-place finish and a spot in the playoffs.

It was Senior Night for the Tigers, and the underclassmen made sure their older teammates walked off the field with a win to remember. Heading into the match, Chaparral held the top spot in district standings while Belton sat in fourth.

The first half was all chances and no goals. Belton created plenty of opportunities in front of the net but could not get one past the Bobcats goalkeeper. The two sides went into halftime locked at zero.

The second half told a different story. Belton came out focused, and it paid off. Sammy Clark found the back of the net to break the deadlock and give the Tigers the lead. Jorge Hernandez added a second goal shortly after to put the game out of reach. Chaparral never answered,

and Belton walked away with a clean sheet and a big district win.

The victory pushed the Tigers up to third place in district, finishing two points behind first. Belton wrapped up district play with a 5-2-3 record and finished the overall season at 9-5-6, a solid body of work that earned them a playoff spot.

For the seniors, it was the kind of sendoff every player hopes for. Their teammates showed up when it mattered most, and the home crowd got to see a performance worth cheering about on a night dedicated to those who have given so much to the Belton program.

Now the focus shifts to the post-season. The Tigers will open playoff action on March 20th at 6 p.m. against Midlothian Heritage, a team that dominated their district this season. Heritage finished first in their district with a 12-1-1 district record and a 16-2-4 overall mark, making them one of the stronger opponents Belton could draw in the opening round.

## Lady Tigers and Lady Broncos make playoffs with district finishes

By Aries Ramos  
The Belton Journal

It was a big week for girls soccer inside Belton ISD, as both the Lake Belton Lady Broncos and the Belton Lady Tigers wrapped up district play and punched their tickets to the postseason. Both programs finished the district season with impressive records and momentum heading into playoff action.

The Lake Belton Lady Broncos capped off a dominant district run last week, picking up results against both Belton and Waco to close things out in style. The Broncos played to a 1-1 draw with Belton before turning around and shutting out Waco by a score of 6-0.

Against Belton, freshman Ariaiah Vail provided the lone goal for Lake Belton, with senior Clara Hill earning

the assist. It was a sign of what makes this Broncos squad so dangerous contributions coming from all corners of the roster.

The Waco match was a showcase of offensive firepower. Evelyn Bragewitz, Mikaela Ebberts, Teagan Pettijohn, Madison Weber, and Kate Henn all found the scoresheet, with Henn netting a pair of goals on the night. Pettijohn was a force on both ends, contributing three assists to go along with her goal. Ariaiah Vail and Callie Mock each added an assist as well. On the back end, goalkeepers Liz Gudgen and Lilly Glass combined for four saves to preserve the shutout and keep the Waco offense off the board.

Lake Belton finished district play with an 8-0-2 record, going unbeaten through the entire district schedule.

The Broncos finished the overall season at 12-5-2, heading into bi-district playoffs as district champions and one of the more complete teams in the area.

The Belton Lady Tigers also closed out their district schedule on a high note, taking down Chaparral by a score of 4-1 to finish strong. The victory capped a terrific district run for Belton, who matched Lake Belton's district mark with an 8-0-2 record of their own.

The Lady Tigers finished the overall season at 9-5-4, a record that reflects a group that grew and improved as the year went on. Like their counterparts across the district, Belton enters the post-season with confidence and a full head of steam built up over the final stretch of the

See **GIRLS**,  
Page B3

## A memorable walkoff win for the Lady Tigers

By Aries Ramos  
The Belton Journal

If you were looking for a slow Tuesday night at the softball field, you were in the wrong place. The Belton Lady Tigers and the Mc-

Gregor Lady Bulldogs put on one of the most entertaining games of the season so far, trading punches for eight full innings before Belton finally walked it off with an 11-10 victory.

McGregor came out swinging

in the top of the first, putting four runs on the board before Belton even had a chance to respond. The Lady Bulldogs looked sharp early and wasted no time making their presence felt. Heading into the bottom of the first, Belton was already

in a four run hole.

The Lady Tigers answered in the second inning with one of the more impressive offensive displays of the season. The Lady Tigers managed to flip the score quickly and put up 6 runs to jump back out in front.

But McGregor was not going away. The Lady Bulldogs clawed back and took a 7-6 lead heading into the fifth. Belton answered again to go up 8-7.

See **SOFTBALL**,  
Page B3

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# Sports Briefs

By Clay Whittington  
The Belton Journal

Lake Belton has found its new leader. After spending their entire existence under the guidance of Brian Cope, the Broncos were forced to find a new head football coach following his departure for the same position at New Caney West Fork.

Recently, however, a replacement was discovered.

Kirk Rogers was named the program's new head coach after a month-long search, and he brings a wealth of success.

Rogers served as the offensive coordinator at state powerhouse Austin Westlake for the previous 12 seasons, helping guide the Chaparrals to five state championships, where they won three consecutive state titles beginning in 2019.

Prior to Westlake, Rogers was the receivers coach at Southlake Carroll, earning a pair of state championships.

Now, he looks to take the Broncos to similar heights after finishing last season with a 5-6 overall record.

During Cope's tenure, the team was 28-16 with

four playoff appearances.

### POWERLIFTING

A pair of Lady Broncos will compete in next week's state powerlifting meet.

Nani Rubio and freshman Taytum Hobson recently qualified for the event by placing among the top two at the recent regional meet.

The state meet will be held March 19 at Edinburg.

The boys regional meet is being conducted today at Joshua.

### SOFTBALL

The Lady Broncos return to action Friday, hosting Pflugerville Weiss in their non-district finale. First pitch is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Lake Belton enters the contest with a 16-6 overall record after suffering a 3-2 loss to China Spring.

Playing at home, starting pitcher Lilliana Herrera allowed just two hits in 3.1 innings before Natalie Hosch struck out three batters in relief.

Avery Park, Briley Updyke, Bryson Gott and Maliyah Gooden each had a hit for the Lady Broncos, who also recorded five stolen bases.

Lake Belton opens its District 16-5A schedule with a home game against Waco University on Tuesday before playing against visiting Belton on March 20. The games are set to begin at 6:30 p.m. and 1 p.m., respectively.

### BASEBALL

The Broncos and Tigers are closing in on their District 16-5A opening series beginning March 24, but they each have a few games left to prepare.

Lake Belton travels to Austin Westlake on Friday before playing home games against Austin Lake Travis on Monday at 1:30 p.m. and College Station on March 20 at 7 p.m.

Belton plays against visiting Temple on Friday (6:30 p.m.) before closing its non-district schedule by hosting Elgin on Wednesday at noon.

### GOLF

The Lady Broncos placed 11th at the weather-shortened tournament in Waco last week.

Limited to just one round instead of two, Lyliana Gonzalez led the squad with a 99 to place 26th out of a field of 100.

Kaylee Carubelli, a sophomore, complemented the effort with a 107.

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**Girls** - From Page B1

regular season.

Both programs now turn their attention to the playoffs, and the outlook for Belton ISD girls soccer is bright on both fronts. Two teams from

the same school district finishing district play unbeaten is no small feat, and it speaks to the level of talent and coaching that both programs have developed.

Playoff soccer is a different animal. Single elimination means there is no margin for error, and both Belton ISD programs know that the work is far from fin-

ished. But if the final weeks of the regular season are any indication, both the Lady Broncos and the Lady Tigers are more than ready for the challenge ahead.

**Softball** - From Page B1

only to see McGregor tie it at eight in the top of the sixth. The back and forth nature of the game had both sidelines and both sets of fans riding an emotional roller coaster with every half inning.

Senior Iris Molina summed up the mindset inside the Belton dugout during those tough moments perfectly.

“Honestly the mentality was that we needed to pick it up, kinda like have each other’s backs,” Molina said. “It was kind of a do or die situation, especially in the seventh. We knew that we could hit off this girl, we just had to prove it.”

And prove it they did. McGregor pushed across two runs in the top of the seventh to take a 10-8 lead with Belton down to their last three outs. Then Tara Stone stepped into the box with one out and sent a two-run home run over the fence to knot the game at ten and send it to extra innings. The place erupted.

In the bottom of the eighth, Anessa Ortiz wasted absolutely no time. On the first pitch she saw, Ortiz ripped a triple and stood on third with nobody out. One batter later, Lauren Vazquez lined a single into the outfield and Ortiz came rac-

ing home to end it.

Belton 11, McGregor 10. Ballgame. The hype on the field matched the hype from the stands according to Molina.

“We were all so hyped, when tara hit that home run all of us got so hyped. Lauren’s walk off was a great hit, she always puts the ball where the infield can’t get to it.”

It was the kind of win that players and fans remember for a long time. Belton showed a ton of fight, refused to fold when things got tough, and found a way to get it done when it mattered most.

**Belton Lake: Stillhouse**

<p><b>FAIR.</b> Water normal stain; 51 degrees; 0.78 feet above pool. The warming trend and solar input on cloudless days has stabilized the water temperature around 50 degrees. This paired with the day length has drawn white bass and shad to the main Leon River and Cowhouse Creek channels. These fish are suspended and are able to be caught via a deadstick tactic with jighead and 3 inch or smaller soft plastic tied to hang horizontally. The use of a thumper will draw fish, and Garmin LiveScope will clearly show both fish and your presentation. When fish move in from the left or right of the screen, adjust your depth to be right in front of them as they pass beneath, then, ever so slowly raise the bait and watch for a follow. Misses are common, but stick with it and you will connect. There are also plenty of bottom-oriented white bass on deep topography. These fish are very responsive to snap-jigging with the white, 5/8 ounce Bladed Hazy Eye Slab with stinger hook. The trick is adding an intentional pause after the jigging stroke, and making sure the jigging stroke ends with the slab about 6 inches off bottom. Numbers of keeper largemouth bass are falling to this deep, snap-jigging approach as well. Report by Bob Mandelle, Holding the Line Guide Service. Catfish are excellent. The steady cold fronts have increased activity for larger trophy sized bluecatfish. Eater size catfish have slowed, but can still be caught using small fresh cut bait. Deep river channels and sand flats have been productive in 35-55 feet of water. Report by Brian Worley, B&amp;S Catfishing.</p>	<p><b>FAIR.</b> Water stained; 54 degrees; 1.61 feet above pool. The warming trend and solar input on cloudless days has stabilized the water temperature around 50 degrees. This paired with the day length has drawn white bass and shad to the Lampasas River channel. These fish are suspended and are able to be caught via a deadstick tactic with jighead and 3 inch or smaller soft plastic tied to hang horizontally. The use of a thumper will draw fish, and Garmin LiveScope will clearly show both fish and your presentation. When fish move in from the left or right of the screen, adjust your depth to be right in front of them as they pass beneath, then, ever so slowly raise the bait and watch for a follow. Misses are common, but stick with it and you will connect. There are also plenty of bottom-oriented white bass on deep topography. These fish are very responsive to snap-jigging with the white, 5/8 ounce Bladed Hazy Eye Slab with stinger hook. The trick is adding an intentional pause after the jigging stroke, and making sure the jigging stroke ends with the slab about 6 inches off bottom. Numbers of keeper largemouth bass are falling to this deep, snap-jigging approach as well. Report by Bob Mandelle, Holding the Line Guide Service.</p>
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**Ask these two questions before buying a home**

**Scot Hrbacek, CFP® Financial Advisor**

If you're looking for a new place to live, you've probably heard the people say buying is better than renting. It sounds simple, but it's not.

The right choice depends on your situation, your budget and how long you plan to stay.

Before scrolling through home listings, think about whether you can afford to buy and whether buying makes sense for you.

A down payment and mortgage are only part of the picture.

*This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.*  
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You'll face closing costs, insurance, taxes, repairs and the ongoing chores that come with owning a place.

Another big factor is time. Buying usually works best when you expect to stay put for at least a few years, because that gives you time to build equity.

On the other hand, renting can offer flexibility and fewer responsibilities.

In the end, the better choice is the one that fits your life and your long term goals.

# CLASSIFIEDS

THE BELTON JOURNAL

## EMPLOYMENT

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0312,19,26 pd

## LEGALS

### THE FOLLOWING VEHICLE IS BEING STORED AT TRIPLE NICKEL TOWING

1988 SUZUKI SAMURAI, VIN:JS4JC51C5J420, NO PLATES  
Vehicle Abandoned at 3700 Bacon Ranch Rd., Unit A, Killeen, TX, 76542  
Vehicle is being stored at 3700 Bacon Ranch Rd., Unit C, Killeen, TX, 76542  
03.12

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters of Administration for the Estate of ROBERT MATTHEW ENO, Deceased, were issued on February 3, 2026, in Cause No. 25CPB00422, pending in the County Court-At-Law: Number one, BELL County, Texas, to: CYNTHIA DIANE ENO. All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law. c/o: JAY R. BEATTY Attorney at Law, 3106 South W.S. Young Drive Building D, Suite 401, KILLEEN, TX 76542  
DATED the 27 day of February, 2026  
JAY R. BEATTY, State Bar No.: 01992450, 3106 South W.S. Young Drive Building D, Suite 401, KILLEEN, TX 76542, Telephone: (254) 526-3024, Facsimile: (254) 526-2545, E-mail: jbeatty@mbaattorneys.com Attorney for Cynthia Diane Eno  
03.12

### THE FOLLOWING VEHICLES ARE BEING STORED AT KILLEEN TOWING & RECOVERY

12197 State Hwy 195 Killeen, TX 76542, 254-526-3856, VSF0651623, <http://www.tdlr.texas.gov>, 1998 Heartland Rig Black charges are \$965.11, 1954 GMC Pickup Blue charges are \$544.62, 2010 Ford Escape Red charges are \$1212.46  
03.12

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters Testamentary for the Estate of LEON RUDOLPH FRASER Deceased, were issued on March 3, 2026, in Cause No.26CPB00093, pending in the County Court at Law, Bell County, Texas, to: CATHLEEN ELAINE ORTON- FRASER. All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.

## LEGALS

ent them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.  
c/o: Mary Wiley Attorney at Law ,100 W. Central Texas Expressway, Suite 306, Harker Heights, Texas 76548  
DATED the 4th day of March, 2026.  
MARY WILEY Attorney for CATHLEEN ELAINE ORTON- FRASER, State Bar No.: 24032669, 100 W. Central Texas Expressway, Suite 306, Harker Heights, Texas 76548, Telephone: (254) 634-6969, Facsimile: (254) 634-6587, E-mail: mary@lindleylawoffices.com  
03.12

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters of Guardianship of DEREK R. RUNNELS, an Incapacitated Person, were issued on February 23, 2026, in Cause No. 25CPB00349, pending in the County Court at Law No. 1 of Bell County, Texas, to: MARCELLA RUNNELS.  
All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law. ESTATE OF DEREK R. RUNNELS, c/o: MARCELLA RUNNELS, GUARDIAN, 11103 Ridgewood Drive, Salado, Texas 76571  
DATED the 4th day of March, 2026.  
J. ERIC STOEBNER, State Bar No.: 24046919, 2106 Bird Creek Drive, Temple, TX 76502, Telephone: (254) 771-1855, Facsimile: (254) 771-2082, E-mail: eric@templelawoffice.com  
03.12

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is given that original Letters Testamentary for the Estate of James Mark Berger were issued on February 19, 2026, in Cause No. 26CPB00053, pending in the County Court at Law Number 1 of Bell County, Texas, to James Louis Coogan Floyd. All persons having claims against the estate, which is presently being administered, are required to submit them, within the time and manner prescribed by law, and before the estate is closed, addressed as follows: c/o James Louis Coogan Floyd, 933 Lemonwood Dr, Harker Heights, Texas 76548  
Dated the 9<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2026  
/s/ Andrew Thompson, Andrew Thompson Attorney for Executor of the Estate of James Mark Berger  
03.12

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that original Letters Testamentary for the Estate of JANICE ANNE TURK, Deceased, were issued on February 25, 2026, in Cause No. 26CPB00078, pending in the County Court at Law No. 1 of Bell County, Texas, to: RICHARD LEONARD TURK. All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them to the undersigned within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.

## LEGALS

ESTATE OF JANICE ANNE TURK , c/o: RICHARD LEONARD TURK, 3103 Matador Dr., Belton, Texas 76513  
DATED March 2, 2026.  
KAREN M. VILLANUEVA, State Bar No.: 24102608, Telephone: (254) 771-1855, Facsimile: (254) 771-2082, E-mail: karen@templelawoffice.com  
03.12

### THE STATE OF TEXAS CITATION BY PUBLICATION CASE NUMBER 25CPB00684

To: UNKNOWN HEIRS  
Nicki Christine Clark, Applicant, on March 02, 2026, filed an First Amended Application for Letters of Independent Administration and to Declare Heirship in a proceeding styled: TIMOTHY WAYNE CLARK, Deceased, and bearing the number 25CPB00684 in the County Court of Bell County, Texas.  
The court will hear the aforesaid Application after the expiration of ten days, exclusive of the day of publication, from the date this citation is published which will be March 12, 2026 in the County Court at Law #1 Courtroom, at the Bell County Justice Complex, 1201 Huey Road, in Belton, Texas. All persons interested in the aforesaid estate are commanded to appear at or before the time set for said hearing by filing a written contest or answer to said application should they desire to oppose or contest it.  
Said written contest or answer shall be filed in the office of Shelley Coston, County Clerk, Bell County, Texas, PO Box 480, Belton, Texas 76513. The name and address of the attorney for applicant is: Paul L. Bailey, 6550 Bank of America Plaza, 901 Main Street, Dallas TX 75202  
The officer serving this Citation shall, in compliance with the Law, serve it by publication once in a newspaper of the general circulation in this, the County in which the decedent last resided as required by Section 202.052 of the Texas Estate Code, for not less than ten days before the return day hereof, exclusive of the day of publication, and the date of publication said newspaper bears shall be the day of publication.  
Issued and given under my hand and seal of said Court at office on March 02, 2026.  
Shelley Coston County Clerk of Bell County, Texas ,PO Box 480 ,1201 Huey Road, Belton, TX 76513  
By: Lillian Phillips Deputy 03.12

### APPLICATION HAS BEEN MADE WITH THE TEXAS ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE COMMISSION FOR A

Wine Only Package Store Permit by Belton Biz LLC DbA NexStar Market to be located at 601 N Main St, Belton, Bell Co., Texas. Managers of said LLC are Joheb Maredia –Manager & Shafik Maknoja –Manager  
03.12,03.19pd

# HE HAS RISEN

## EASTER PAGE

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**ONCOR ELECTRIC DELIVERY COMPANY LLC PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MEETING  
FOR THE PROPOSED FRYERS CREEK SWITCH – HARTRICK SWITCH – SALADO SWITCH  
138 kV TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT**

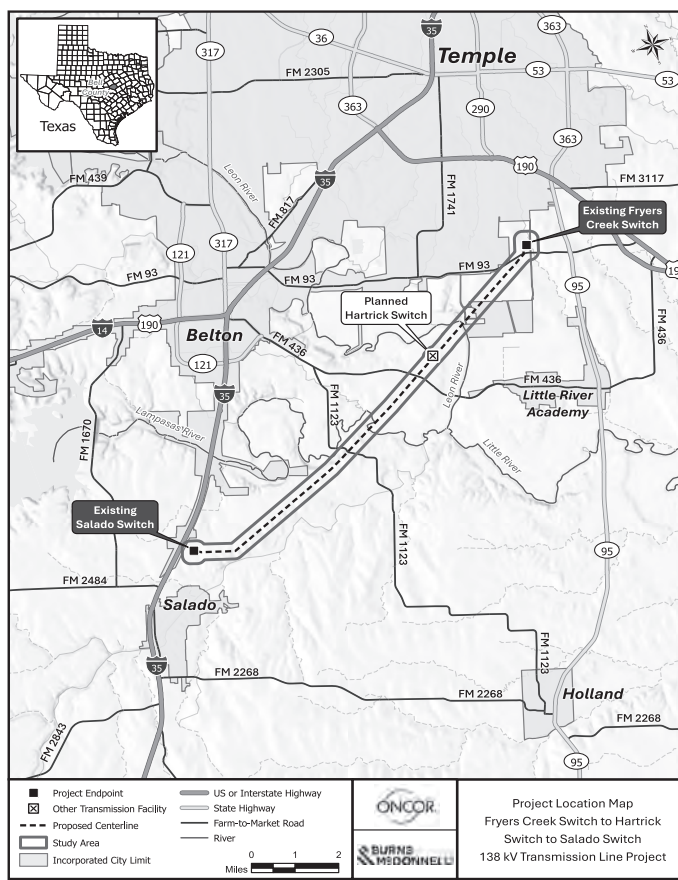
THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026  
5:00 PM – 7:00 PM  
HARRIS COMMUNITY CENTER (EVANS ROOM)  
401 N. Alexander Street, Belton, TX 76513

Oncor Electric Delivery Company LLC (Oncor) proposes to transfer the existing Fryers Creek Switch – Salado Switch 138 kilovolt (kV) circuit in Bell County from the existing lattice tower structures, which it currently shares with Oncor’s Temple Switch – Knob Creek Switch – Salado Switch 345 kV circuit, to new 138 kV monopole structures. The new 138 kV monopole structures will be built adjacent to the existing lattice tower structures within Oncor’s existing right-of-way. The length of the line will be approximately 11 miles.

Oncor’s Fryers Creek Switch is located approximately 1 mile northwest of the intersection of SH 95 and FM 93 in Bell County, while Oncor’s planned Hartrick Switch is located approximately 1.9 miles south of the intersection of FM 1741 and FM 93 in Bell County. Oncor’s Salado Switch is located approximately 1.2 miles northeast of the intersection of Interstate Highway (IH) 35 and FM 2484 in Bell County. Please refer to the attached map for the location of the study area, the project endpoints, and the intermediate switching station.

Oncor is committed to ensuring that the proposed project complies with the requirements of the Texas Utilities Code and the rules of the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT). In support of this process, Oncor is holding a Public Participation Meeting to solicit input regarding the project. Burns & McDonnell Engineering Company, Inc (Burns & McDonnell), a consulting firm retained by Oncor for the project, has identified the preliminary route, which is shown on the map below. The black-dashed line shows the proposed centerline for the project between Fryers Creek Switch and Salado Switch, which will be within Oncor’s existing right-of-way.

Maps with greater detail will be exhibited at the public participation meeting. Individuals attending the open house meeting will have the opportunity to ask questions and provide comments to representatives and technical experts from Oncor and its consultants regarding the proposed project. If you have any questions concerning the proposed transmission line project or the Public Participation Meeting, please contact Kevin Ray of Oncor by phone at (214)486-5835 or by email at [transmissionprojects@oncor.com](mailto:transmissionprojects@oncor.com). For more information, please visit Oncor’s website at [www.oncor.com/transmissionprojects](http://www.oncor.com/transmissionprojects).



Oncor Electric Delivery Company LLC

# Business Showcase

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Scotti’s Italian Ice is a small, veteran-owned family business dedicated to serving refreshing, authentic Italian ice, reminiscent of what owner Ann Scotti enjoyed growing up on the Jersey Shore.

“I’m proud to introduce our East Coast favorite to the Belton community. I’m originally from the Jersey Shore. I grew up in Lighthouse and would visit Ralph’s, saying to myself, ‘I want to do that one day,’” said Ann Scotti. Ann and her daughter Mikayla enjoyed Italian ices during summer trips to New Jersey before moving to Texas after she and her husband served in the Army.

“Italian ice is a gourmet version of shaved ice. It has a soft, smooth texture, created in a special machine,” explained Mikayla. “The business is named after my dad, Dan Scotti, whose go-getter attitude inspired my mom.”

The product is made with all-natural ingredients, and the cookies and cream flavor tastes just like cookies. “I really enjoy seeing the kids’ reactions. They say, ‘It’s good because the flavor is authentic, natural, and delicious,’” said Ann. A three-ounce cup of Italian ice contains only 70 calories, compared to 160 calories in a three-ounce cup of ice cream. The Italian ices are crafted using all-natural ingredients like agave,

real fruit, and cookies. They are kosher-certified and lactose-free.

The Italian ice flavor options include cookie dough, cookies and cream, chocolate fudge, brownie, and cappuccino. They also offer water ice flavors such as USA rainbow (blue raspberry, cherry, and lemon), watermelon, and a sugar-free lemon that tastes just as good.

In addition to Italian ice, they sell cannolis, fresh-squeezed lemonades, and Italian sodas. “We can add flavors like strawberry, blue raspberry, and cherry to the lemonades,” Mikayla noted. The Italian sodas come in sixteen-ounce plastic cups and are available in flavors such as piña colada, mango, and blue Hawaii. They are low-calorie because they are made with club soda and topped with cream and whipped cream.

“A cannoli is a shell made from dough wrapped around a metal rod, filled with ricotta cheese, powdered sugar, chocolate chips, and orange zest,” explained Mikayla. “Dad always took me for cannoli and Italian ice in the summer. It’s very nostalgic to relive those summer memories. They are located at 219 S. East St., behind the Gin, and their hours are Friday and Saturday from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.

**Bell County Museum**  
Spring Break at the Museum

**Tuesday:**  
The Chisholm Trail

**Wednesday:**  
Old Fashioned Toys & Games

**Thursday:**  
Wind Engineering

**Date:** Mar 17 - Mar 19, 2026  
**Time:** 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

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# EDITORIAL

## Plant Probation

My Front Porch • Lynette Sowell

Like a lot of well-intentioned people this time of year, my thoughts turn to gardening. Maybe *this* will be the year I'll actually grow some produce at home.

It's nice to know where your food comes from and know where you can buy it locally.

And in a crisis, such as if grocery store trucks are delayed – it's happened before – there will be a little something to eat.

So with thoughts of summer coming, of ever increasing grocery prices if no delivery crisis, I'm starting to think about planting container gardens. Again.

For several years, I started gardens with the best of intentions. I know how to water. I know how to put plant food on plants. It's not rocket science, like they

say. Yet somehow by May or June, whatever I've planted is dead. I'm lucky to get a solitary tomato. Also, taking care of the cactus and rosebushes in the front yard and they're still alive must count for something.

The shed has stacks of large planters, some empty, some still full of barren soil from a failed attempt at growing. I don't start out with grand aspirations; just tomatoes, squash, peppers, lettuce, and some herbs.

I have a friend who's a champion of green, clean living and promotes local food growers. She also keeps beehives, another thing I'd like to try. I told her I was a flop at gardening.

Of course, she had to ask, bless her heart, what I was doing wrong. "Are you trying to grow something

that's not suitable for your area?"

I explained to her that spring last but a few weeks in Texas, and then the weather goes from warm, to semi-hot, to bake-cookies-in-your-car hot, to wondering-what-outskirts-ring-of-hell-you-accidentally-stepped-into hot (with other inner rings reserved for places closer to the equator).

Last week I stepped into the shed and looked at a few of the pots. Dare I try again? When do you realize a well-intentioned and good activity is a futile effort on your part? I guess I'll have to find out. This year, it'll be plant probation for me. I keep telling myself; I can do this. I can keep plants alive. Then if Doomsday hits, at least I can make a salad. Maybe.

## Luck of the Orange-Ish

Shop the Insanity • Darren Blair

The other day I saw a novelty St. Patrick's Day dish towel set that featured orange cats.

That got me to thinking about a certain orange feline I once had who was, believe it or not, actually born on St. Patrick's Day.

Now, for those of you who have never owned an orange cat, I'll explain. You see, orange cats are balls of pure chaos energy that are only just barely contained by their furry exteriors. Pick something you never thought a cat could do, and an orange cat will either have already done it, be in the process of doing it, or will do it eventually. As part of their pure chaos energy, orange cats can and will run the entire gamut of intelligence, from "their learning curve is flat" to "quite literally smarter than some humans, possibly to the point of even being able to speak a

few actual, literal, human words".

This cat was, shall we say, at the latter end. While he was able to do things very astounding and requiring quite a bit of intelligence, there were days where he could be too clever by half as the saying goes. What do I mean by this?

At one point, we lived in a house with a very large oak tree in the back yard. Mom trusted him enough to let him wander the back yard with supervision, and so once or twice a day he'd walk up to the sliding glass door we had, turn to whoever was nearest, and say "out now", his way of saying he wanted to explore for a while. If nothing else was going on and we saw no sign of other animals, we'd open the door and go join him for a bit of outside time.

Well, somewhere along the way he got out into the back yard on his own.

How? We don't know. Our best guess is that someone didn't secure the sliding glass door and he figured out how to open it the rest of the way from there. Either way, he was out and loose.

...And starting up that oak tree before anyone even knew he was outside, let alone where he was. By the time mom caught up to him, he was already in the lower branches. No, he wasn't feeling like exploring. Rather, as mom soon realized, there were birds in the middle branches and he – mighty hunter that he was – decided they were lunch.

Mom couldn't do much beyond let the sequence of events play out.

Somewhere along the way the birds saw him and flew up to a higher branch. He continued his pursuit. He'd already killed several lizards, and even managed to trap a burglar inside the house.

Birds? He was so confident he could get it done. Thing is, the higher he and the birds went, the thinner the branches became until finally he came to a branch that couldn't hold his weight.

No, according to mom, he did \*not\* land on his feet.

Let's just say that from then on out, he waited to ask permission to go outside, and didn't try to sneak out on his own until after we moved elsewhere.

Folks, sometimes it's so very easy to get fixated on something we become oblivious to what's around us. This can include any potential dangers or problems on the horizon. This is why we all need to periodically step back, look at what's going on, and make decisions from there.

## Can't Let Go

Pleasant Ramblings • Mark Magnan

There are a series of commercials on TV that show people in ridiculous situations and they are holding on to some item from their past. Their "friend" encourages them to let go of the item and then offers to help them sell their keepsake on a phone app. I personally am offended by these TV commercials. They make light of a condition that I am quite familiar with, because I tend to have the same tendencies as the victims in the advertising spot. I have this problem as well, and have never really hidden my affliction. While the poor person in the commercial might seem just over the top on their willingness to hang on to something they are fond of, I can certainly understand.

I too am a pack rat. I have had this for a long time, and probably come by it naturally. One of the close relatives that was a

major influence in my early life was a pack rat as well, of course now the term is "hoarder". I think that she was just keeping things in case there was a use for that item later, and she was an expert at getting more than one use out of an item, regardless of what it was.

For me, I find things that speak to me for some reason. That is the reason I could never own a used car lot, I would inevitably find a steady stream of interesting autos that I would just have to hold onto. I would start my own collection, which is fine if I wasn't trying to make a living selling the same type of vehicles.

When I was a child I had my favorite toys, and didn't like other kids playing with them because they did not take care of them like I did. Of course all of those items are gone. Now I see some of the same things for sale

in various places and I realize that I had a small fortune in some of the things that I held dear as a child. A couple of toys were quite rare and ones in very good condition, which mine were, are worth a lot of money these days. Apparently I knew something in those days that others did not.

As I get older, I find it easier to get rid of some things. I have watched TV episodes of people moving into a tiny house, and I wonder if I could pare down my absolutely necessary keepsakes to something that would fit into a living space about the size of the bed of my pickup truck. I just don't think I could do that, especially given the critical storage areas of those tiny houses.

First off, my kitchen requirements might preclude me from making that move. I like my cooking gadgets, and use most of them. I don't think I have

anything that is not needed, so my ideal kitchen would probably be bigger than the entirety of the tiny house itself. Now, does that mean I specialize in huge gourmet meals? Well no, but I am handy in the kitchen and honestly enjoy it.

Next would be some of the items from my past that I just feel like I would need to hang on to. And yes I would be one of those people in a precarious situation holding onto something, seemingly ignorant to the consequences I am setting up for myself.

One of these days something is going to really cut loose in my mind and I will have a garage sale that is filled with many of the things that I have been holding on to. That will be a real boon for someone that stumbles onto that sale. I figure I need to move some things out of my life and let them get back out into the world

for others to enjoy. Besides, one day there will be total strangers combing through my stuff and wondering what kind of person would keep this or that, and then toss most of it into the trash. We all have things that are just meaningful to us, maybe it is just something that holds no intrinsic value other than memories. Perhaps, like me, we feel the need to hold onto that item so that we don't lose the memory attached to it. Or maybe it was a gift and we just can't rid ourselves of the item itself without some guilty feelings.

Thankfully, my mind is changing and I am doing much better these days. I will still have that amazing garage sale one day and sell off those items, perhaps someone else will find them just as interesting as I did and take them into their life.

## Just a Gigolo?

Coffee Talk • Renae Brumbaugh Green

When I was a small, impressionable child, back when I looked up to my older brother like he was the hero of the world, he loved to mess with me. One day, I was in the passenger's seat of the green Camaro he worked two jobs to pay for, and he was driving. I have no idea where we were going... but I do remember the song that played on the radio. As we waited at a red light, my brother got a serious look on his face.

"This is such a sad song," he said.

I scrunched my forehead. It didn't seem like a sad song.

"This poor guy singing... he was in a really bad accident. He lost his legs, his arms, everything from the neck down. All that's left is a talking head."

I may have been young, but I wasn't stupid. "What do you mean?"

"Listen. He says it right there in the song: I ain't got no body!" The words of "Just a Gigolo" burst into the chorus at that moment, and my brother burst into laughter at his own joke.

I rolled my eyes. I was in 6th grade, and it's an unwritten law of 6th grade that you can't laugh at your siblings' jokes, even if they are a little bit funny.

Our heads are important... but even a 12-year-old knows a head needs a body to function. The head is the control center, but with nothing to control, what's the point? It's my body's job to do what my head tells it to do. If it doesn't, there's a problem. If my head says to walk and my

feet don't listen, I'm crippled. If my head tells my hands to write and they don't cooperate, I'm handicapped. I can only function at my best if my body does what my head commands.

My spirit is no different. Paul tells us in God's Word that Christ is the head, and every believer makes up the body. Christ is our supervisor, our boss, our commander-in-chief. But sometimes, we don't obey Him. When that happens, we handicap ourselves. The church--His hands and feet here on earth--is crippled because we don't listen to our head.

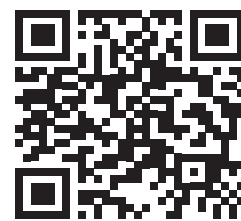
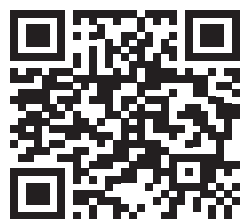
It's crazy that we rebel against Him... after all, He loves us more than we can imagine. He never asks us to do anything that's not motivated by His kindness and

care. He sees the big picture, while we only see what's in front of us. He only wants the best for us. We simply need to trust that He knows better than we do what that is.

I'm glad I'm not like that poor gigolo from the song. (Eye roll here.) Spiritually, I have a fully operating head and body. Any disconnect is on my end, not on Christ's. It's my job to trust Him, follow Him, and obey His orders. When I do, I know I'll always function at my best, making this difficult world a place filled with more light, more kindness, and more love.

*"And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to head over everything for the church, which is His body." Ephesians 1:22-23*

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## Investing in Our Own: Why Supporting Local Businesses Matters

Every dollar we spend is a vote for the kind of community we want to live in. When we choose to support local businesses, we're doing far more than making a simple purchase — we're strengthening the very foundation of our hometown.

In communities like Belton, locally owned businesses are more than storefronts and service providers. They are neighbors, Little League sponsors, church members, volunteers, and familiar faces at community events. The people behind the counter are often the same people sitting beside us at football games and school programs. Supporting them means supporting families who live, work, and invest right here at home.

Local businesses play a vital role in keeping our economy strong. Studies consistently show that money spent locally stays local longer. Instead of profits leaving town through distant corporate

headquarters, those dollars circulate through payrolls, local suppliers, property taxes, and charitable giving. That circulation helps fund better services, stronger schools, and improved infrastructure.

There's also something special about the character local businesses bring to a town. Unique shops, family-run restaurants, and hometown service providers give a community its personality. They create places where relationships are built, stories are shared, and customers are treated like friends rather than transactions. That personal touch is something no national chain can truly replicate.

Local business owners also tend to give back generously. They sponsor youth sports teams, support fundraisers, donate to nonprofits, and step up when the community faces challenges. Their success often fuels the very programs and events that bring a town together.

### So how can we make a difference?

Start by shopping local first. Before clicking "buy now" online or driving to a big-box retailer, check to see if a local business offers what you need. Spread the word by recommending your favorite places to friends and leaving positive online reviews. Engage with local businesses on social media — a simple share or comment can help them reach new customers. Show up for community events where local vendors participate. Most importantly, be loyal. Consistent support helps businesses weather slow seasons and economic uncertainty.

When local businesses thrive, the entire community benefits. Jobs grow. Opportunities expand. Town pride deepens.

Supporting local isn't just commerce — it's commitment. It's choosing to invest in neighbors, strengthen community roots, and shape a future we can all be proud of.

Community matters. Local matters. And where we spend matters most.



# JOURNEY OF A GRADUATE: SPOTLIGHTING MIDDLE SCHOOL MILESTONES

This school year, Belton ISD launched the Journey of a Graduate Milestones Award to recognize middle school students who bring our core competencies to life each day. Across four Board of Trustees meetings, one student from each campus was honored for exemplifying critical thinking, collaboration, communication, perseverance, empathy and adaptability in meaningful and measurable ways.

Here are their stories.

## JOHN HODGES

John Hodges, an eighth grader at Lake Belton Middle School, was recognized in October 2025 for exemplifying communication through service and leadership. He was nominated by Sydney McAfee, sixth-grade English language arts teacher and National Junior Honor Society sponsor, who highlighted the steady presence John brings to his campus community.

Since seventh grade, John has volunteered at nearly every home volleyball and basketball game, working in the concession stand. On busy game nights, he communicates clearly with customers and teammates, helping everything run smoothly even when lines are long and the atmosphere gets hectic. McAfee noted that John has a calming presence during high-pressure moments and consistently steps in wherever help is needed.

That includes the less glamorous responsibilities.

Whether sweeping floors, cleaning spills, or handling behind-the-scenes tasks, John takes on every duty with a smile and without complaint. His steady demeanor and positive attitude help create a welcoming environment for both peers and the community.

Through these experiences, John says he has learned organization, servant leadership and real-world communication skills.

“I feel like throughout this entire journey I have learned essential skills, and it will help a lot in my future,” he shared. “I get to go home knowing that I actually did something today. It’s simple, but beautiful.”

John’s growth reflects the power of communication not just in words, but in action.



## ABIGAIL MATTSON

Abigail Mattson, an eighth grader at Belton Middle School, was recognized in December 2025 for exemplifying perseverance. She was nominated by her tennis coach, Corinna Capraun, who describes Abigail as a student who moves confidently between academics, athletics and the arts.

Coach Capraun shared that Abigail “crosses over all of the categories that students sort themselves into,” making her someone who can connect with and speak to a wide range of peers. Whether in the classroom, on the court, or in the orchestra, Abigail commits fully to the work in front of her.

Her perseverance shows up in both performance and character. Whether mastering a challenging music piece, pushing through a demanding tennis practice, or completing an academic project, she sees things through.

This year, when Coach Capraun set a personal goal to walk two miles each morning before practice, Abigail noticed. Without being asked, she arranged to be dropped off early so she could walk alongside her coach so she would not have to walk alone.

For Abigail, perseverance is personal.

“To have perseverance is to see it through and not half-step it,” she shared. “If you are going to start something, at least have the guts to finish it.”

Her actions reflect exactly that mindset, steady, disciplined and rooted in commitment.



## DYLAN BOURLAND

Dylan Bourland, an eighth grader at South Belton Middle School was recognized in February 2026 for exemplifying communication and collaboration. Nominated by school counselor Christine Wolff, Dylan is known for stepping in without hesitation whenever help is needed and working seamlessly with both staff and peers.

Whether assisting teachers, gathering materials, or supporting classmates, Dylan communicates clearly and responds in a moment’s notice. Wolff shared that “Dylan helps everyone with anything they need on a moment’s notice, so it helps to know that we have someone we can rely on.” She also noted his integrity and the way he consistently chooses to do the right thing. “I hope Dylan knows that we do see him and that his hard work does not go unnoticed.”

For Dylan, collaboration begins with a willingness to serve.

“It feels good to be a helper for other people and to do things that they don’t necessarily want to do,” he shared. “I like being helpful. I can’t not be helpful most times.”

Through steady communication, teamwork and a natural instinct to support others, Dylan strengthens his campus community every day. His actions show that meaningful collaboration starts with simply choosing to help.



## THOMAS “TJ” DAVIS, JR.

Thomas “TJ” Davis, Jr., an eighth grader at North Belton Middle School, was recognized in February 2026 for exemplifying perseverance. Nominated by his teacher, Seth Edwards, TJ is described as a student who defines the grit and determination Belton ISD hopes to cultivate in every learner.

When TJ makes a mistake, he does not stay there. Edwards shared that while TJ may initially see mistakes as failure, he quickly reframes them as part of the learning process, asking himself how he can work through the challenge. Over time, TJ has grown in his determination to fully understand what he is learning and think critically about how to apply it beyond the classroom.

For TJ, perseverance begins with mindset.

“I have been changing mentally, and I see my mistakes as room to grow,” he shared. “I’ve learned that it is hard to get new things and learn new things if you have a bad mindset. If you are not willing to fail and grow, then it will be harder on you in the long run.”

His willingness to embrace growth, reflect and push forward demonstrates that perseverance is not about perfection. It is about progress.



## JOURNEY OF A GRADUATE MILESTONES AWARDS VIDEO SERIES

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