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DEFEATS CINCO  
RANCH IN  
DISTRICT PLAY  
SPORTS | PG 7

# KatyTimes

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VOLUME 113, ISSUE 3

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025

## Council approves steps for new ‘Katy Exchange’ city-run market event

Petition to leave Katy’s ETJ also presented by landowner

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO  
PUBLISHER

At the January 13 meeting of Katy’s city council, council members approved a number of

steps toward implementation of the new city-run “Katy Exchange” market event. Dates for the five market events have been set as the third Saturday in March, April, May, August, and November. The events will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., except for the inaugural event on March 15, which will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Following a closed executive session near the end of the meeting, council members also gave a

5-0 vote of approval for the mayor to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce for the Katy Exchange. The purpose of the MOU was not disclosed. Additionally, dates have been set for other city-sponsored events in the historic town square at Avenue C and Second Street: • March 8, 5 to 8 p.m.: Great 80s! celebrating the 80th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of

Katy • April 5, 4 to 7 p.m.: Taylor Swift ERAS Night • May 10, 7 to 10 p.m.: Beatz the Heat Beach Bash on the Square • June 13, 7 to 10 p.m.: The Greatest Showman • August 9, 8 to 11 a.m.: Classic Cars and Coffee • September 13, 4 to 7 p.m.: Blues and Brews • October 4: Katy Rice Harvest Festival Parade, 8 to 11 a.m.

Street closures were approved for all events. In an unusual request, landowner Katy Trees, LLC, petitioned to exit the city’s extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ). The 81-acre property in Harris and Waller Counties, located west of Eula Morgan Road and south of Clay Road, is planned for residential development, Mayor Dusty Thiele

See **MARKET**, page 3

## Next year’s budget will be a challenge, Smith tells KISD board

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO  
PUBLISHER

At Monday’s meeting of the Katy ISD board of trustees, Chief Financial Officer Chris Smith provided an update to the district’s 2025-2026 budget. The first official update to the coming year’s budget, the presentation focused on five objectives for 2025-2026: • A balanced budget: Smith said this would be nearly impossible without “draconian measures” and help from the state. • Competitive compensation: Without a change in the legislative landscape in Austin, the district will

See **KISD**, page 3



Katy ISD CFO Chris Smith provides the first overview of the district’s 2025-2026 budget to the district’s board of trustees at the January 13 meeting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATY ISD

More than 230 participants, including Katy ISD police officers, crisis management teams, and representatives from local and county emergency response agencies, including city and county law enforcement and hospitals, attended a critical incident review of the mass shooting at Uvalde, hosted by the Department of Justice (DOJ) on January 6 at the Merrell Center, 6301 S. Stadium Lane in Katy.

## Katy ISD hosts area districts, agencies for Uvalde shooting review

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Reflecting Katy ISD’s commitment to safety for students, staff, and visitors, on January 6 the district hosted the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for a comprehensive, critical incident review of the tragic May 2022 mass shooting at

Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. More than 230 participants, including Katy ISD police officers, crisis management teams, and representatives from local and county emergency response agencies, including city

See **REVIEW**, page 3

## Fort Bend County secures \$58.6 million in H-GAC funding for SH 99 frontage road projects

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Fort Bend County Precinct 1 Commissioner Vincent Morales announced January 13 that the county has secured \$58.6 million in funding from the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) to advance critical mobility projects along the Grand Parkway (SH 99) in the Cinco Ranch area. These investments will enhance mobility, alleviate congestion, and accelerate the construction of voter-approved frontage roads in one of Fort Bend County’s fastest-growing regions, according to the press

release from the commissioner’s office. “First, I wish to thank the leadership of the Houston-Galveston Area Council for their partnership - this funding marks a significant step forward for our community,” said Morales. “When I took the lead on these projects in 2022, my focus was clear: expedite timelines, engage residents on sound wall designs, and position these projects for funding opportunities like this H-GAC allocation. These projects have been championed and helped to this point

See **PROJECTS**, page 3



PHOTO CREDIT: © MICHAEL MORTON PHOTOGRAPHY.

Sunrise on the 419-acre land addition to the Katy Prairie Preserve, a conservation success that protects critical habitat for wildlife and helps safeguard communities from flooding.

## A landmark day for conservation

Coastal Prairie Conservancy permanently preserves 1,329 acres

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

The Coastal Prairie Conservancy (CPC) announced on January 6 the conservation of 1,329 acres in a single day, including a 910-acre property in Waller County and 419 additional acres also in Waller County that expand the Katy Prairie Preserve. These additions bring CPC’s total preserved lands to 33,607 acres. The 910-acre property located on the Brazos River features coastal prairie grasslands, hardwood forests, and an oxbow lake. The land, which remains a working cattle ranch, is undergoing habitat restoration to support grasslands and natural areas along the Brazos River. The tract serves as a key stopover for migratory birds along the North American Central Flyway. The Katy Prairie Preserve was expanded by 419 acres, increasing its preserved area to over 19,300 acres. CPC’s efforts safeguard tallgrass prairies, natural depressional wetlands, and numerous streams and tributaries. Cypress Creek runs through much of the preserve. These landscapes provide essential habitats for species such as Northern bobwhite quail, Swainson’s hawk, bobcat, and

See **CONSERVATION**, page 3

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January 16, 2025  
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## Harris County District and County Courts celebrate adoption of expanded language access plan

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

The Harris County District Courts and County Courts at Law have adopted an updated Language Access Plan that aims to help community members who aren’t fluent in English better navigate the justice system, according to a December 18 press release. Under the plan, access to language assistance services, such as courtroom interpreters and translators, will be expanded for individuals with limited English proficiency. The expanded access includes an increase in the availability of interpretation and translation services in court proceedings — for plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, victims, parents or guardians of minors, and others participating in proceedings or programs operated by the courts. The new services are subject to funding from the Harris County Commissioners Court. “We believe all who interact with the justice system should be able to understand what is happening — not just the proceedings, but all the forms, processes, and resources associated with them,” said Judge Toria Finch, Harris County Local Administrative Judge for the 20 County Courts at Law and presiding judge of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 9. “The Courts

are committed to prioritizing this issue and expanding services, and we hope to get the funding to be able to do it.” Because personal liberty is at stake, the criminal and juvenile district courts and county criminal courts already provide interpreters for all who come before the court and can’t speak English fluently. Spanish interpreters are available daily and some court forms are available in both English and Spanish. However, court proceedings are often delayed when someone needs interpretation or translation services in a language other than Spanish. In the civil and family district courts and county civil courts, interpreters are provided upon request for individuals who can’t speak English fluently and have been found to be indigent. But not everyone who comes before the civil courts knows they can request language access services. The new plan allows for expanded access to court interpreters as well as the translation of existing court forms into more languages. It also calls on the courts to increase public awareness about the resources so community members will know how and when to request them. “Our judiciary has come together as a

See **LANGUAGE**, page 3



# Fort Bend County Clerk celebrates 10 lucky couples with free wedding event on Valentine’s Day

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

On February 14, 2025, Fort Bend County Clerk, Laura Richard, alongside Judge J. Christian Becerra, will host a special, free marriage ceremony event at the Travis Building, 301 Jackson Street in Richmond, giving couples the opportunity to celebrate their devotion in a unique and meaningful way this Valentine's Day. The announcement was made in a January 6 press release.

The event, which will bring together ten couples, is part of the County Clerk's efforts to support and celebrate love, commitment, and the diverse families of Fort Bend County during one of the busiest marriage license seasons all year, the release said.

The ceremony will take place at the Travis Building in Richmond at 3:30 p.m. and will be officiated by the Honorable Judge Christian J. Becerra who has generously agreed to do the services for free. The Fort Bend County Clerk's office will also be on hand to assist with marriage licenses, ensuring the smooth completion of all necessary filing steps after the ceremony.

Clerk Richard said, "Valentine's Day is the perfect occasion to celebrate love in all its forms. I'm excited to witness this joyous occasion and to be part of a tradition that recognizes and supports the bonds that hold our community together."

The event is open to all eligible couples who have purchased their marriage license 72 hours in advance from the Fort Bend County Clerk's office. Interested couples should register with the County Clerk's Office through email at [ccclerkrecords@fbctx.gov](mailto:ccclerkrecords@fbctx.gov) or by visiting the County Clerk's website at [www.fbctx.gov/county-clerk](http://www.fbctx.gov/county-clerk) for more details on how to participate.

Couples interested in participating are encouraged to apply early, as space is limited.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

Paranormal Cirque returns to Katy January 17 – 27

Immerse yourself in a world of thrills, chills and suspense, as you experience a Paranormal journey like no other. Under this Clown Castle, the black and red big top tent, Acrobats of the Air, Illusionists, freaks, mysterious creatures and all the elements that make one think of a "normal" Circus but that of normal has very little. A new show with breathtaking implications always poised between fun and the most uninhibited fear that will transport you to a dark world inhabited by creatures with incredible circus art abilities. A crazy yet fun fusion between Circus, theatre, and cabaret in perfect harmony with the evolution of a show that brings you back to when we dream ... and when we had nightmares and fantasies. Scare, encompass, amuse and surprise are the ingredients for a mixture of emotions impossible to forget. This is truly a Paranormal experience like no other, held at Katy Mills Mall, 5000 Katy Mills Circle in Katy. Go to [black.cirqueitalia.com/events/1219\\_Paranormal-Cirque-Katy-TX](http://black.cirqueitalia.com/events/1219_Paranormal-Cirque-Katy-TX) for performance dates and times and ticket information.

Celebrate the ‘Big Day’ at Parkway Fellowship’s main campus on January 26

Help celebrate the 22nd birthday of the Parkway Fellowship, 27043 FM 1093 in Richmond on Sunday, January 26. The event will feature kids’ games and prizes, bounce houses and student games and giveaways. There will be services at 9 a.m., 10:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., with new worship music, God stories, a worship night, small group sign-ups and membership classes, in addition to a brand-new message series called “State of Mind.” For more information, go to [parkwayfellowship.com/bigday](http://parkwayfellowship.com/bigday).

Connect with other Katy area businesses each Wednesday morning with the Katy Business Connection



Kick-off 2025 with a strong start and develop an effective business network! Join this free networking group every Wednesday and strengthen your business connections. Meetings take place at the Monty Ballard YMCA at Cinco Ranch, 22807 Westheimer Parkway in Katy, from 8 to 9 a.m.

More networking – Tuesdays with B. C. E. Networking Katy on first and third Tuesdays

The Best Client Experience Networking group of Katy (B. C. E. Networking), organized by local real estate broker associate Des Aina, meets on the first and third Tuesdays each month at Buzz & Bites, 23445 Kingsland in Katy. Meetings focus on the best service for clients and take place from 9 to 10:30 a.m. RSVP on EventBrite at <https://bit.ly/BCEnetworkingKaty2025>.



PHOTO BY JHOAN F., COURTESY OF CIRQUE ITALIA

Cirque Italia's Paranormal Cirque returns to Katy Mills Mall with performances from January 17-27.

Help make a difference at the gala for Katy Angels on February 1

Join Katy Angels in making a difference in the community. Local nonprofit Katy Angels will hold its gala from 6 to 10 p.m. on February 1 at the Palacio Maria Banquet Hall, 21728 Highland Knolls in Katy. The nonprofit's mission is to demonstrate God's love by providing groceries and essentials to those in need in Katy, and the group believes that by working together, we can make a difference and spread hope. For more information, go to [facebook.com/katytangels/](https://facebook.com/katytangels/).



Fulshear Regional Chamber FOR Commerce to hold quarterly luncheon on February 5

Gather with the Fulshear Regional Chamber FOR Commerce at Gauchos do Sul, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on February 5 for the chamber's quarterly networking luncheon. The address is 910 W. Grand Parkway S. in Katy. RSVP required – please contact Rachel Durham at the chamber at [rachel@fulshearregional.com](mailto:rachel@fulshearregional.com).

Katy Christian Chamber to meet on February 5

Join members of the Katy Christian Chamber of Commerce on the first Wednesday of every month for their chamber networking luncheon. Open to both members and non-members. All are welcome at the next meeting, scheduled for February 5 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Midway BBQ, 6191 Highway Blvd.. in Katy. A great place to network with like-minded leaders, business owners, and professionals in the greater Katy area. Luncheon format includes table networking and room-wide attendee introductions. Bring a give-away and receive an extra shout out to bring attention to your product or service. For more information or to secure a luncheon ticket, contact [info@katychristianchamber.com](mailto:info@katychristianchamber.com)

Katy Area Chamber of Commerce hosts ‘Chamber Connections’ on February 6

Looking for a chance to network with other business professionals? Sign up for the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce's Chamber Connections to connect with other businesses through a casual, lightly structured networking meeting. This is a lightly structured networking meeting where each attendee will give a 30-second infomercial about their business and what they do. The Chamber brings in additional business resources to educate our members on different ways they can support their businesses. The next meeting is on February 6 from 8 to 9:30 a.m. at a location TBD. For more information, please contact Stacy Jacobs at 832-437-8465.

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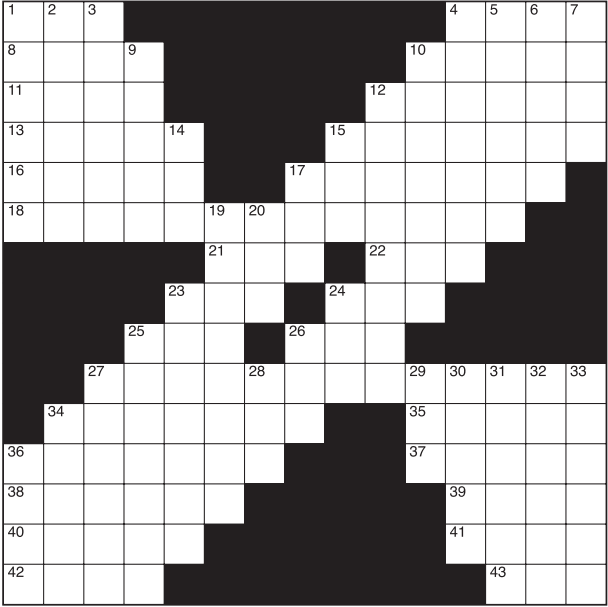
## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

CLUES ACROSS

- You fry food in it
- Pesky insect
- Gets older
- \_\_\_ Dern, actress
- Uncouth man
- One who sulks
- Napoleon's king of Naples
- One who swims underwater
- Make amends
- Expressions
- Document format
- What a beaver makes
- Limb
- Photograph
- Golf score
- Moroccan mountain range
- Wrinkled dog breed: Shar \_\_\_
- 20th century sex symbol
- Remedy for all diseases
- Bluish greens
- Moved swiftly
- Type of units
- Madames
- Indian religious god

CLUES DOWN

- Town in central Brazil
- Large burrowing rodent
- Nerve cell
- Estimating
- Bakers use it
- Regions
- Small lake
- Environmentalist nun
- More kookie
- Announce officially
- Israeli city \_\_\_ Aviv
- Title given to friar
- Inches per minute (abbr.)
- Buildings
- Pouch
- They steal on the high seas
- It's mightier than the sword



- Going off on a tangent
- Monetary unit
- Young woman
- Type of bulb
- Type of drug (abbr.)
- City opposite Dusseldorf
- Animal disease
- Martini necessities
- Elude
- La \_\_\_: Buenos Aires capital
- An oft-enduring symbol

Answers will be provided in next week's edition.

## SUDOKU

		8		2	9			4
	1		4	8				
	6			7		5		
2			1			8		
5				4				7
	5					3	8	
7				6				
	9	1			2			

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Answers will be provided in next week's edition.



## PROJECTS

from page 1

with the collaboration of many stakeholders, but chief among those are State Representative Jacey Jetton and State Senator Joan Huffman. Because of their commitment and support, we are delivering on our promise to provide relief to commuters and taxpayers who rely on this vital corridor for their daily needs.”

The \$58.6 million in funding will support three key road segments, previously approved for design through voter-backed Fort Bend County mobility bond referendums:

- \$23.2 million for construction of the SH 99 southbound frontage road from Bay Hill to Cinco Ranch.
- \$17.8 million for construction of the SH

99 northbound frontage road from South Fry Road to Westheimer Parkway.

- \$17.6 million for construction of the SH 99 southbound frontage road from Westheimer Parkway to South Fry Road.

State Representative Jacey Jetton emphasized the importance of these improvements, saying, “Fort Bend County attracts thousands of new residents each year, drawn by its safety, excellent schools, and affordability. With growth comes increased congestion, especially on SH 99 through Cinco Ranch. Partnering with Commissioner Morales, we prioritized expanding this critical roadway. I’m proud of the progress we’ve achieved together with county and state leaders, in-

cluding Senator Huffman.”

County Engineer Stacy Slawinski highlighted the strategic role of H-GAC’s Carryover Spend Down Policy: “These funds stem from H-GAC’s policy to utilize leftover transportation dollars efficiently. Since December 2023, the Transportation Policy Council has allocated nearly \$1 billion for carryover projects, including \$335 million programmed in October 2024 under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program for initiatives ready by August 2026. This policy allows Fort Bend County to leverage external resources for the SH 99 frontage road projects while reallocating nearly \$80 million of county funds to other critical mobility initiatives.”

Construction on the first segment is set to begin in March 2026, with completion anticipated within 18 months. Construction of subsequent projects will start in late 2026 and conclude by the end of 2028. In total, these initiatives will add nearly 10 lane miles of new frontage roads along SH 99, improving traffic flow and safety for residents in Katy and Richmond.

As part of its commitment to regional mobility, Fort Bend County continues to prioritize SH 99 improvements in coordination with TxDOT, according to the press release. Recent enhancements to mobility include additional lanes and direct connectors at the Westpark Tollway.

## CONSERVATION

from page 1

white-tailed deer.

“The preservation of these additional lands marks a significant milestone for the conservation of land in an area under intense development pressure,” said Mary Anne Piacentini, President and CEO of the Coastal Prairie Conservancy. “By safeguarding an additional 1,329 acres, we are not only advancing our mission to

protect the natural heritage of our area but also ensuring long-lasting benefits for both people and wildlife. These natural spaces will serve as vital resources for generations to come.”

Landowners interested in exploring conservation options are encouraged to contact [info@coastalprairie-conservancy.org](mailto:info@coastalprairie-conservancy.org).

## LANGUAGE

from page 1

united front to ensure that language — the very thing that connects us — does not impede access to justice in the courts,” said Judge Latosha Lewis Payne, Harris County Local Administrative Judge for the 67 District Courts and presiding judge of the 55th District Court. “I want to personally thank the tireless effort and collaboration put forth by all stakeholders involved in this process: the Department of Justice, Harris County Commissioners, our colleagues at the Harris County Courts of Law, and our Harris County District Courts Ad Hoc Language Access Committee, which includes Judge Nata Cornelio, Judge Gloria Lopez, Judge Ana Martinez,

and Judge Christine Weems. It is my sincere wish that the new plan better serves and reflects Harris County’s growing diverse community.”

The Language Access Plan was developed by the Harris County District and County Courts at Law in coordination with the Administrative Office of the District Courts, Office of Court Management, and U.S. Department of Justice. It was approved by the Harris County Courts at Law in September and the Harris County District Courts in October.

It replaces the Harris County Limited English Proficiency Plan for Court Proceedings, which was adopted in 2012.

## MARKET

from page 1

said. City Administrator Byron Hebert said that the request to leave the city’s ETJ was the first such request to exit Katy’s ETJ that he could remember since coming to work for the city. The city and the landowner were not able to come to agreement on issues of residential lot sizes and detention measures, Hebert said. The landowner sought to build 45-foot lots, which is a smaller footprint than permitted by the City of Katy. Hebert said that the landowner also wanted to work through the detention issues with a MUD located closer to their property, and that the landowner would have to work with the Brookshire-Katy Drainage District and the Harris County Flood Control District on drainage issues. Emergency services to the area will be provided through ESD #200, Hebert said. Although council members voted against granting the request to exit the ETJ, city staff said that the request would become effective in 45 days from the date of the request, under existing law.

In other action, council:

- Approved 5-0 the appointments of Jaime Corona to a seat on the Katy Management District No. 1, and of Durran Dowdle to fill a seat on the Village of Katy Development District. Corona, a local realtor and past

president of the Rotary Club of Katy, previously held the seat on the Katy Management District No. 1 which will now be filled by Dowdle, former city council member and mayor pro tem for the City of Katy. Corona is filling the seat on the Katy Management District No. 1 which was vacated by Bob Hargarther.

- On a 4-1 vote, approved the purchase of property at 903 D in Katy. Councilmember Dan Smith dissented, stating that the property was not part of the city’s long-term strategic plan and that property should not be purchased “on a whim” without a distinct purpose in mind. Mayor Pro Tem Chris Harris said that the property would add green space to Thomas Park and would provide facilities and storage for Keep Katy Beautiful.

Mayor Dusty Thiele also welcomed new city staff members Anthony Bond, who is the city’s new IT director and Katie Lowen, who takes over as Animal Control Supervisor, following the retirement of David Brown.

Thiele also announced that city offices would be closed on January 20 in observance of Martin Luther King Day.

The next meeting of Katy’s city council will be January 27 at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, 901 Avenue C in Katy.

## KISD

from page 1

not be able to afford a salary increase, according to Smith. “It’s a function of state funding,” he said.

- Competitive health plan, which will also require help from state funding.
- Safety for students and staff, which will remain a high priority.
- Opening of two new campuses, which are expected to open full; new staff will need to be hired for these schools, which will be more of a challenge with this budget.

Smith said that the budget assumptions for the coming year included average growth in taxable values, slowing enrollment, the need for campus staffing, changes in compensation and benefits and changes in tax rates. He said that enrollment is slowing all over the state and that Katy ISD is currently under its enrollment projection by about 400 students and is forecasting growth of only 500 students in the next budget cycle. Smith said that about 89% of the district’s budget is payroll, with the next largest category being utilities, at 4.8% of the budget.

The district is in a good position to “go through these unknowns,” Smith said. Average daily attendance (ADA), upon which state funding is calculated, is up due to the district’s current incentive programs.

The district will also get a better rate on its property insurance, saving close to \$1 million.

Among the “bad” listed by Smith: sluggish enrollment growth; allotment caps which can cause special allotments, such as the “fast growth district” allotment received by KISD to be prorated rather than being fully funded by the state; and changes to SHARS/Comp ed, which saw another \$5 million hit to KISD just before Christmas, Smith said. And “the ugly” described by Smith included the current state legislative sessions and stagnant revenues for the district.

Actions the district will take in planning will include close monitoring of all expenditures; staffing up for growth as the two new schools open; and taking economic uncertainties such as state funding, inflation and the state economy into account. The KISD financial services department will present an update on long-term debt plan/projections at a February board meeting.

The board also heard a presentation on the district’s Chromebook program survey, which was administered to parents, students and teachers in the fall of 2024. The “Class 1:1” Chromebook program, which emerged out of the 2023 bond and which provides a computer

to every student in grades three through twelve, is four months old, said Chief Communications Officer Andrea Grooms, and the purpose of the survey was to “identify what is working and how we can improve.” The survey covered topics such as the effect of the devices on learning, the ease of use both at home and at school, the need for printing at home, difficulties in transporting the devices and the type and frequency of problems encountered with the devices. Grooms said that the district has a “Class 1:1” group which meets weekly to address these and other issues.

In other actions, the board heard a report on the district’s fine arts and theatre program. Executive Director Damon Archer and Assistant Director of Fine Arts Susan Chiborski presented: “Fine Arts Theatre: Producing High Quality Productions that Captivate and Transport the Audience.” Students from the Katy High School theatre group performed a scene from their upcoming musical, “Little Women,” which will be performed at the school January 23-25.

The next meetings of the school board are:

- Regular board meeting: January 21
- Work study meeting: February 17

## REVIEW

from page 1

and county law enforcement and hospitals, convened at the district’s Merrell Center at 6301 S. Stadium Drive in Katy to gain insights from the DOJ’s report, “Lessons Learned from the Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter Robb Elementary.” The intensive examination was initiated following the events of the devastating mass school shooting.

Katy ISD’s Superintendent Ken Gregorski thanked attendees for their dedication to school safety and expressed support for collaborating around best practices aimed at keeping students, staff, and schools safe.

“The tragedy at Robb Elementary serves as a solemn reminder of the immense responsibility we share to protect our schools and communities,” Gregorski said. “Your presence and commitment to safeguarding schools and communities is deeply appreciated.”

The review was led by Nazmia Comrie, a senior pro-

gram specialist with the DOJ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and James Golden, a policing consultant with more than 40 years of service in law enforcement. It included a timeline of the incident, observations, and recommendations for those working in tactical command, school safety, emergency management, and public communication.

On May 24, 2022, an active shooter took the lives of 19 children and two school staff, injuring 17 others at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. At the request of Uvalde’s city leadership, the U.S. DOJ established the Critical Incident Review to conduct an independent after-action review of the mass casualty event and provide recommendations. More information about the Department of Justice’s Uvalde findings can be found on the DOJ’s COPs website at [cops.doj.gov/uvalde](https://cops.doj.gov/uvalde).

As part of Katy ISD’s con-

tinuous improvement protocols for school safety, district police and crisis management teams collaborate with external law enforcement partners to routinely train and prepare for known and unknown scenarios and threats, the district said in a January 6 press release.

“The district prides itself on these ongoing partnerships and its community’s unwavering support of school safety,” the release said. “Currently exceeding state-mandated standards, every Katy ISD campus is staffed with armed police officers and/or security guards, equipped with integrated alert systems, 24/7 surveillance, and regularly conduct safety drills.” Designated staff at each school train extensively on the latest mental health supports and crisis mitigation. To further enhance security, Katy ISD police work alongside contracted K9 police units trained in narcotics and weapons detection to conduct random inspections at secondary campuses.



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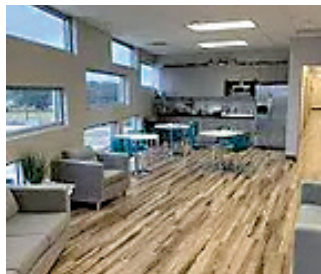
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# ‘Pups N Popcorn’ provide stress relief at Seven Lakes



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHANNON PETERSEN, SEVEN LAKES HIGH SCHOOL

Sofia Mateen, club president for Motivating Minds at Seven Lakes High School in Katy, snuggles with one of the eight puppies brought to campus by local shelter Special Pals for a “pups N Popcorn” event in December.

BY SUSAN ROVEGNO  
PUBLISHER

Yes, it’s true – another Katy ISD high school has gone to the dogs.  
This time, it’s Seven Lakes High School at 9251 S. Fry in Katy, where students in the mental health alliance (Motivating Minds Club) helped launch an event before winter break, called “Pups N Popcorn.”  
On Wednesday, December 18, students who signed up were invited to participate in a final exam stress relief activity featuring dogs and puppies from local animal shelter Special Pals Rescue. All eight of the dogs in the program were up for adoption.  
Motivating Minds student president Sofia Mateen and club officer Nate Mitchell (who also runs a club called “Pause for Paws”), along with other club members, helped organize and run the event. The students were assisted with the

project by the school social worker and school counseling team including school counselor Shannon Petersen.  
About 100 students participated in “Pups N Popcorn,” organizers said. The students spent their 30-minute lunch in the library and rotated through interactions with the eight puppies and dogs visiting the campus. In general, students got to spend about ten minutes petting and playing with a puppy.  
“Final exams can be extremely stressful for students—this event is meant to bring a bit of happiness and stress relief for our students,” said Petersen. “This is our third event since last school year, and we have a great turnout every time.”  
“We made a deliberate effort to host this event during final’s week, which is typically when students are stressed about their midterms, said Mateen in an email to the Katy Times. “The idea was that we could provide them with some comfort and the chance to play with some adorable

fluffballs amidst the stress that is high school and final exams. Every student that came in could not stop smiling throughout the entire experience.”  
But it wasn’t just the students who benefitted from time with man’s best friends. The school’s principal, assistant principals, several teachers, and support staff – a total of about 40 staff members altogether – stopped by the event and joined in the fun too.  
“I had some of my teachers from previous years finding time in their day just to come to the library and play with the puppies,” Mateen said. “The experience was nothing short of euphoric and heartwarming. The puppies created such a positive and exciting ambience at our school which would not have been possible without the help of Special Pals! Our goal of providing a safe space for students and their mental health was ultimately achieved, and we could not be happier with how the event turned out.”

## SEAT delivers bill of rights to state legislators

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT), a student-led movement demonstrating youth visibility in educational policymaking, delivered a “Student Bill of Rights” to more than 1,200 Texas policymakers one week prior to Opening Day of the Texas Legislature. The organization was founded by Katy ISD graduate Cameron Samuels.  
The declaration was crafted with the participation of more than 100 Texas students from various grade levels, backgrounds, lived experiences, identities, and political perspectives, according to the January 7 press release.  
“This Bill of Rights was crafted by the SEAT Roundtable Collective in Aug. 2024 - Jan. 2025 as a declaration for students, by students,” says the preamble to the document. “We deserve a seat at the table.”  
SEAT’s Bill of Rights declares that students deserve:  
• Agency to make decisions in education  
• High quality public education for all  
• Safe and welcoming school environments conducive to growth  
• Freedom of expression in a pluralistic, multicultural democracy  
• Holistic student care to support health, well-being  
• Truthful, critical, and substantive curriculum  
• To be leaders of today, not only of tomorrow  
• Streamlined and personalized pathways for lifelong learning  
The document may be viewed in its entirety at docs.google.com/document/d/1rKG5jaTossrgm6Utl42c-7NuhjXF8WYthVX7Om1AJyAM/edit?tab=t.0.  
“The Student Bill of Rights represents a moment where we, as students, are asserting our fundamental right to have a seat at the table,” said Grace Ding (she/her), SEAT Research Director and Katy ISD student. “Student voices have been silenced far too long in decisions affecting our educational realities. Our declaration is the product of diverse student perspectives across Texas coming together to envision a future that serves all of us.”

SEAT is gearing up for the Texas Legislature and incoming federal administration. Over two years, the movement has introduced legislation, published editorials, delivered testimony, and filed legal action to advance student rights in Texas. SEAT has supported youth mental health, transgender justice, Ethnic Studies curriculum, and closing Texas’ five remaining youth prisons.  
With what they view as potentially discriminatory policies on the docket, including book bans and mandates for displaying the Ten Commandments in classrooms, SEAT organizers remain committed to elevating student voice in policymaking and dismantling oppressive power structures.  
“Our Student Bill of Rights ensures students are centermost in scholastic decision-making,” said Emeriek Moreno (he/him), SEAT Engagement Director and University of Texas at Austin student. “No matter students’ backgrounds, public education must share knowledge and strength to ensure equity is shared amongst us.”  
“We know firsthand where the faults in our education are because we see them every day. We can envision what an ideal education system can look like,” said Hayden Cohen (they/them), SEAT State Policy Director and university student in Houston. “This legislative session will be an uphill battle for students. We are telling the people who represent us, our legislators, that we’re not staying silent in any fight. We will harness our collective power.”  
For more information on SEAT, visit studentsengaged.org.

## Harris County attorney announces two-week summer legal academy

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Calling all students interested in law!  
Applications are now open for the Harris County Attorney’s Summer Legal Academy, the office of county attorney Christian D. Menefee announced in a January 7 press release.  
The Summer Legal Academy (SLA) is a paid two-week educational readiness program for high school students aspiring to become attorneys. Students will learn the process of applying to law school, what to expect as a law student, the different areas of law, and hear directly from various attorneys. This program will provide students who are interested in a future career in the legal field with pivotal resources and tools for their journey.  
The SLA is open to Harris County students in high school who are entering grades 10 through 12. Priority will be given to first-generation college



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Harris County high school students in grades 10 through 12 who are interested in pursuing a career in law can apply for the county attorney’s summer legal academy now through March 23.

students, students from a low-income background, and/or members of groups underrepresented in the legal profession.  
Students will be expected to submit:  
• A recommendation letter  
• High school transcript- the transcript is used primarily to determine eligibility. There is no minimum GPA requirement.  
• A writing sample,

which may be a class assignment in which a grade of B or better was received  
• A personal statement on their most meaningful achievement and how it relates to future goals  
• A short essay response on one of the following  
(1) What is your favorite Supreme Court case and why  
(2) If the legal field was not an option, what career would you pursue instead  
(3) Which is your favorite

legal/law related show, movie, or podcast and why?  
Apply now at harriscountytexas.jotform.com/242956219472868.  
The priority deadline is March 1 and the deadline to apply is March 23. The Summer Legal Academy runs from July 14 to July 25.  
Hear directly from students in the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiUA44K1Uvk or check out the 2024 SLA photo album at https://www.flickr.com/photos/198699282@N04/albums/72177720318831579/with/53858419272.  
More information and the application to apply for the Summer Legal Academy are available at cao.harriscountytexas.gov/students.  
If you have additional questions about the programs, would like more information, or would like to request that the County Attorney or staff member speak at your school, please email Communications@harriscountytexas.gov.

## 29th Annual Treasures of the Texas Coast Children’s Art Contest underway

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

On January 7, Texas Land Commissioner Dawn Buckingham, M.D., initiated the 29th Annual Treasures of the Texas Coast Children’s Art Contest supported by the Texas General Land Office’s (GLO) Adopt-A-Beach Program. All public, private, and homeschooled Texas kindergarten through sixth-grade students are invited to participate in the contest. Students’ artwork should illustrate why the Texas coast is important or special to each student.  
Ten winners will be chosen in mid-April from the four grade-level categories: K– 2nd, 3rd– 4th, 5th, and 6th. One grand prize winner will be chosen from among the finalists. Winning artwork will appear in a 2026 calendar, which will be distributed throughout the state.  
This year’s grand prize winner will receive

one six- to eight-night Caribbean cruise for two from Royal Caribbean International departing out of Galveston, Miami, Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, Port Canaveral or Puerto Rico, in addition to the prizes listed below for all winners. The grand prize winner’s teacher will also receive one six- to eight-night Caribbean cruise for two courtesy of Royal Caribbean and a prize from Adopt-A-Beach.  
All 40 winners will receive two free day passes to Schlitterbahn in New

Braunfels or Galveston, a gift card to an art supply store, a gift from Texas Adopt-A-Beach, a certificate of recognition from the Texas General Land Office, and copies of the 2026 calendar displaying the winning artwork.  
All submissions must be postmarked by March 5, 2025, and mailed to:  
Texas General Land Office  
Adopt-A-Beach Program: Children’s Art Contest 2025  
P.O. Box 12873  
Austin, Texas 78711-2873

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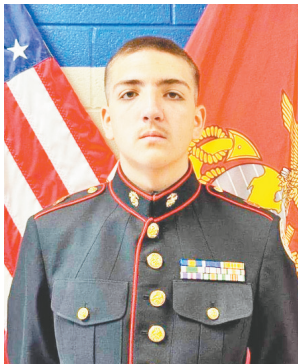


PHOTO COURTESY OF ROYAL ISD

Hard work pays off for Royal High School Falcon MCJROTC Cadet Jacob Carter, who earned the required cut score for a personal invitation to the MCJROTC Marksmanship Championship in Anniston, AL—with all expenses paid, the district announced January 9 on its website.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES:  
The Katy Times (ISSN 067-180) is published on Thursday. Subscriptions are available for \$35 per year in Harris, Waller and Fort Bend counties and \$45 elsewhere. Subscribe at www.katytimes.com or by mailing payment and delivery information to Katy Times, P.O. Box 678, Katy, TX 77492-0678. Periodical-rate postage paid at Katy, Texas 77494.

CIRCULATION:  
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POSTMASTER:  
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## Katy Times

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CAP receives donation of new signage

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Citizens for Animal Protection has unveiled a striking new sign outside the animal shelter's location at 17555 Katy Freeway near Barker Cypress in Houston. Visible from I-10 West near Katy, the new sign stands fifteen feet taller than its predecessor, catching the eyes of motorists traveling east and westbound on the freeway.

"[The sign] will inspire countless future pet parents to adopt and give animals a second chance at life," said a spokesperson for CAP.

One Houston couple's generous donation will provide future pet parents with a "sign to adopt" from Citizens for Animal Protection. The big, red, blue and black sign depicting CAP's round logo was donated by the Schwartz family, in memory of their precious cats, Sassy and Punkin.

But this isn't a one-off donation.

The Schwartzes' ties to CAP run deep. They're part of the CAP Codicil Club, whose members have committed to a legacy donation to CAP, and they were honored in November as recipients of the Melcher Humanitarian award at the shelter's annual Celebrity Paws Gala. They have also enhanced the CAP Cornelius Clinic's ability to provide vital care that may be needed by donating radiograph and ultrasound equipment.



PHOTO BY SUSAN ROVEGNO

Thanks to a generous donation from the Schwartz family, the Citizens for Animal Protection animal shelter at 17555 Katy Freeway in Houston hopes to be more visible and to encourage more pet adoptions.

tarian of the Year award at the shelter's annual Celebrity Paws Gala. They have also enhanced the CAP Cornelius Clinic's ability to provide vital care that may be needed by donating radiograph and ultrasound equipment.

"We're thrilled to unveil our new sign, which is not just taller

and more colorful – it's a symbol of our growing impact in the community," said Executive Director Sandi Mercado in a statement. "It is more than just an upgrade – it will be a lifeline for the animals in our care."

The sign's increased visibility means more potential adoptions, volunteers, fosters and supporters for the nonprofit animal shelter. Its LED screen allows the shelter to spotlight hours of operation, adoption events, and monthly specials at the CAP Cornelius Clinic, and highlight animals who are looking for their forever family.

About Citizens for Animal Protection

Founded in 1972, CAP shelters, rescues, and places homeless animals for adoption with loving families. Located at 17555 Katy Freeway, Houston, CAP advocates for animal welfare through various programs including pet adoption, spaying and neutering, humane education, and a pet supply shop. CAP speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves, working tirelessly to prevent animal cruelty and to find forever homes for pets in need.

Katy Responds welcomes newest board member

CONTRIBUTED REPORT

Katy Responds announced on January 9 that Mark Carroll has joined the nonprofit's board of directors.

Carroll did not grow up in the Katy/Houston area but is a fifth-generation Texan from South Texas. He and his wife, Kristi, moved to Houston more than twenty-five years ago to pursue opportunities at the encouragement of his college fraternity brothers.

Upon arriving in Houston, Carroll has been blessed with a successful career in finance, construction and commercial real estate development with projects in Houston and South Texas, primarily for retail development. He and Kristi moved to Katy with the news of the impending birth of their first child and only daughter, Kayla, who recently graduated from Texas A&M. Three years later came the blessing of their second child and only son, Reid, who is a

sophomore at Texas State University.

Carroll's wife, Kristi, is very involved in Young Men's Service League (YMSL) and it was through her involvement with YMSL that he was introduced to Katy Responds and their ministry.



MARK CARROLL

"We look forward to Mark serving on the Board of Directors and know that with his leadership and desire to serve others, Katy Responds will be able to better serve our community," said a spokesperson for the organization in the January 9 press release.

Katy Responds began operations in 2018 and the mission is to be the hands and feet of Christ by partnering with volunteers and stewarding resources to create a safe and secure home for vulnerable seniors and low-income families.

For more information about Katy Responds, visit [www.katyresponds.org](http://www.katyresponds.org) or contact [info@katyresponds.org](mailto:info@katyresponds.org).

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HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL



Dean Spencer shoots a layup during a game between Jordan and Seven lakes at the Jordan gym.

# Seven Lakes outlasts Cinco Ranch for crucial district win

BY TYLER TYRE  
SPORTS EDITOR

Seven Lakes has learned to play under pressure. The Spartans have become a tested squad throughout the year, facing tough games throughout the season in non-district and throughout the first half of district play. Seven Lakes has been steadily growing and getting better, but one thing they had lacked in district play was a win in a game where they were tested all the way to the wire. The Spartans found a way to earn a signature win on Wednesday, overcoming one of the strongest teams in the district in Cinco Ranch, beating the Cougars 68-66 on a last-second shot and moving into second place in the district standings in the process. “That’s why we gave these young guys as many tests as we could early in the season is for moments like this,” said Seven Lakes head coach Shannon Heston. “You have to be battle-tested. There were times early in the season that they weren’t ready for these moments, but because they went through that, they were ready in January, and that’s when these things matter. They have grown and gone through things, which prepared them to come through in these situations.” Sean Mwesigwa ended up being the difference maker in the game, coming up with the deciding

rebound and score with eight seconds remaining. The Spartans held for a late shot, which went long over the rim. Mwesigwa was there waiting and the junior gathered the rebound, went back up for a putback, and scored before the Spartans defense came up with a final stop to clinch the game. “Our coaches always tell us to get on the high side for rebounds and that’s what I did,” Mwesigwa said. “I knew the ball would come to me if it missed, I got my hands on it and went back up to make a play. I’m just happy I was able to help us get the win.” Cinco Ranch jumped out to the lead and led 22-17 after the first quarter, but Seven Lakes bounced back to take a 35-28 lead at the half. The Cougars responded in the third and went into the final quarter leading 51-49 before Seven Lakes pulled away in the dying moments of the fourth. Mwesigwa’s 13 points and game-winner were a big part of the win and sophomore Dean Spencer also played a huge part, scoring 15 points and coming up with some huge rebounds while also playing strong defense. “I’ve just gotten better at attacking the basket and creating for others,” Spencer said. “That’s my role in the offense and I’ve just gotten more comfortable and better with it as the season has gone along. If it’s there I’ve gotten better about shooting it, if it’s not, I have to find that open man for the three.” The Spartans defense also played

a major role in the win, as the team did enough defensively against the dynamic Jones-Bynum brothers down the stretch to get the win. It’s a challenge that the entire team took on and that paid off with a win in a gutsy effort as Seven Lakes will continue to build off this and onto bigger things. “I’m proud of our guys for how they played down the stretch,” Heston said. “We made the right plays and on defense in the final seconds we made things very hard on them without panicking. The biggest thing you can do is not panic in those situations, but our guys keep their calm in that split-second moment and I’m so proud of all of our guys for that and how they played tonight.”

DISTRICT 19-6A  
**SEVEN LAKES 68, CINCO RANCH 66**

Points: (SL) Dean Spencer 15, Sean Mwesigwa 13, Isaiah Santos 10, AmenEl Tadesse 10, Tillman Jaramillo 9, Jose Martins, 6, Ayden Clarke 5; Dylan Jones-Bynum 26, Prince Jones-Bynum 13, Kellen LeCronier 6, Noah Pearce 5, Isaiah Norman 5, Joseph Kanyinda 3, Brayden Gonzalez 2, Joseph Melijah Battiste 2, Campbell Turner 2;

Halftime: Seven Lakes 35-28; 3-Pointers: (SL) Tadesse 2, Clarke, Mwesigwa, Jaramillo; (CR) Dylan Jones-Bynum 2, Prince Jones-Bynum 2, Pearce, Norman, Kanyinda; Records: Seven Lakes 22-5, 6-2; Cinco Ranch 21-4, 5-2;

# TGCA names 2024 Volleyball Academic All-State Teams

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Athletes from three Katy ISD high schools – Cinco Ranch, Jordan and Taylor -- have been named to the 2024 volleyball academic all-star teams by the Texas Girls Coaches Association, according to a January 9 press release

The Texas Girls Coaches Association selects Academic All-State teams in all conferences in volleyball. Athletes and support staff are nominated by member coaches, must be graduating seniors, and must have a grade point average of 94 or above. The head varsity coach must be a member in good standing of TGCA.

TEXAS GIRLS COACHES ASSOCIATION 2024 Volleyball Academic All-State Teams			
Athlete	High School	Coach	Conf.
Abby Borchardt	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Maggie Finnegan	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Addison Goertz	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Sarah Miller	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Kassie OBrien	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Nicole Teerman	CINCO RANCH	Danielle Wells	6A
Isabella Bingaman	JORDAN	Jennifer Vaden	6A
Arianna Guevara	JORDAN	Jennifer Vaden	6A
Sophia Bissaillon	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Raegan Fleury	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Shelby Landry	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Maria Millan	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Morgan Nordhaus	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Julia Porath	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Ella Randall	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Bailey Silkenson	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A
Talyn Woods	TAYLOR	Brooke Plemons	6A

# Lady Falcons to ‘shine’ for coaches’ association benevolence fund

FROM STAFF REPORTS

It’s Royal High School’s “Day to Shine.” Cheer on the Royal Lady Falcons as they play Alief Hastings on January 25 at 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. at Royal High School. All proceeds from the game will be donated to support the Texas HS Coaches Education Foundation’s Benevolence Fund, which assists both athletes and coaches who are undergoing hardships. Venmo: @THSCAcoaches (Add "Royal Softball" in "What's it for?" field).

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Damien Larson

512-797-9785 damien@bentarrow.net



# Jordan cross country stars honored by TGCA

## FROM STAFF REPORTS

Two athletes from Katy ISD's Jordan High School have been named to the 2024 Fall Sports Academic All-State Team by the Texas Girls Coaches Association.

Athletes must be graduating seniors and have a grade point average of 94 or above to qualify. Athletes are nominated by their member coach, and the head varsity coach of the sport must be a member in good standing of TGCA.

TGCA 2024 FALL SPORTS ALL-STATE TEAM				
CROSS COUNTRY				
Athlete	High School	Coach	Conf.	
Keira Kaunisto	JORDAN	Kymberlee Trnka	6A	
Sofia Mera	JORDAN	Kymberlee Trnka	6A	

# Katy High and Fulshear High athletes named to fall TGCA All-State Teams

The Texas Girls Coaches Association selects All-State teams in cross country and volleyball and honorees were announced in a January 9 press release. Athletes are nominated by member coaches, and the head varsity coach of the sport must be a member in good standing for athletes to be considered for honors. Athletes may be any grade classification, 9-12. Each conference may select up to 50 athletes for honors. Selections are made by the respective sport's All-State Committee, comprised of member coaches selected by their peers for the committee position. There is no limit as to the number of athletes from a school that may be selected.

TGCA 2024 FALL SPORTS ALL-STATE TEAMS				
CROSS COUNTRY				
Athlete	Grade	School	Coach	Conf.
Vienna Fish	Freshman	KATY	Jim Pat Darcey	6A
Victoria Guerrero	Senior	KATY	Jim Pat Darcey	6A
Abby Lester	Freshman	KATY	Jim Pat Darcey	6A
Avery Torrey	Freshman	KATY	Jim Pat Darcey	6A
VOLLEYBALL				
Athlete	Grade	School	Coach	Conf.
Sydney Black	Senior	FULSHEAR	Sydney Zimmerman	6A
Alexys James	Senior	FULSHEAR	Sydney Zimmerman	6A
Bailey Warren	Senior	FULSHEAR	Sydney Zimmerman	6A

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