

# HILL COUNTRY NEWS

VOLUME 27, ISSUE 51

SERVING CEDAR PARK, LEANDER AND NORTHWEST AUSTIN SINCE 1968 ■ hillcountrynews.com

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025

## County officials urge preparedness this winter

### STAFF REPORTS

Williamson County officials say winter weather can arrive with little warning—even in seasons with mild forecasts—and preparation remains key to community safety.

“We work year-round to make sure Williamson County is ready for severe weather,” County Judge Steve Snell said during a recent press conference. “When we plan, prepare and communicate, our community is safer and stronger during difficult conditions.”

Leaders from emergency services, road operations, emergency medical services and fire safety joined Snell in outlining how county departments prepare for winter and what steps residents should take now to reduce risks.

Senior Director of Emergency Services Bill Zito noted that while the county maintains robust response plans, residents must also be personally prepared. “The county focuses on unincorporated areas, and our cities have resources to support their own residents,” he said. “Being ready at home helps all of us get through winter weather more safely.”

Williamson County Road and Bridge Division Director Matt Williamson said crews are equipped with 400 tons of sand and four sand trucks, ready to treat roads when temperatures drop. Crews monitor pavement temperatures and can pre-treat roads with chemical de-icers if ice is expected. The county’s 1,600 miles of roadways are prioritized to maintain emergency access. “We ask our residents to remain off the roadways if they can and wait for temperatures to rise above freezing before traveling on neighborhood roads,” Williamson said.

Emergency Management Director Bruce Clements said even minor cold snaps can cause hazards. He recommended residents protect people, pets, pipes and plants and maintain at least 72 hours of essential supplies. “Even with a milder outlook this year, winter weather in Texas can shift quickly,” Clements said. Residents can sign up for alerts at WarnCentralTexas.org to stay informed.

See WINTER, page A5



COURTESY WILLIAMSON COUNTY

County winter weather equipment includes emergency response vehicles and sand trucks used to treat roads during icy conditions. The county maintains 400 tons of sand and four sand spreaders for use on its 1,600 miles of roadways.

Deputy Superintendent Chris Clark was appointed acting superintendent at last Thursday’s board meeting.

COURTESY LEANDER ISD



## Clark named acting superintendent following Gearing's retirement

### STAFF REPORTS

LEANDER, Texas — Leander ISD has appointed Deputy Superintendent Chris Clark as acting superintendent following the retirement of Bruce Gearing, who led the district for six years.

In a 6-1 vote during a Dec. 11 board meeting, trustees accepted Gearing’s voluntary retirement and named Clark to lead the district during the transition period. Trustee Paul Gauthier cast the lone dissenting vote.

Clark will serve in the acting role while the board conducts a search for a permanent superintendent, expected to begin in early 2026. As part of the transition plan, Gearing will remain with LISD through

the end of the school year in a non-administrative, advisory role as “superintendent emeritus.”

Clark, who joined LISD in June 2023 as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, was promoted in December 2024 to deputy superintendent of learning and innovation. His appointment as acting superintendent is contingent upon his agreement not to apply for the permanent role — a condition trustees say is meant to preserve fairness in the hiring process.

“It was really important for the board



CHRIS CLARK

to try to maintain consistency and also stability in our district because we have a lot of heavy stuff going on right now,” Board President Anna Smith said. “We wanted someone who understands the layout of teaching and learning as we go through these budget conversations.”

Clark brings more than 30 years of education experience, including nearly two decades in leadership roles in Frisco ISD, McKinney ISD, and Tulsa Public Schools. His LISD tenure has included overseeing instructional initiatives, expanding Pre-K programs, and aligning strategic goals.

“I’m grateful for the trust placed in me during this time,” Clark said. “Transitions can be challenging, but they’re also

See CLARK, page A5

## Williamson County to launch LOSS, a suicide survivor outreach program

### STAFF REPORTS

Williamson County is finalizing plans to implement a Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (L.O.S.S.) program that will deliver immediate, on-site support to those grieving a recent suicide.

The L.O.S.S. model sends two trained volunteers—often including at least one suicide loss survivor—to the scene of a suicide to offer emotional and practical support. The goal is to connect families with resources and help shorten the often lengthy delay between a loss and

the pursuit of mental health services.

Dr. Frank Campbell developed the model in 1998 at the Baton Rouge Crisis and Trauma Center. His research found that suicide loss survivors typically wait more than four years before seeking professional help. The L.O.S.S. approach aims to intervene sooner, offering a bridge to care and a sense of hope during a vulnerable time.

“Supporting families in the immediate aftermath of a suicide is one of the most com-



See LOSS, page A4

## Southwest Airlines will bring 2,000 new jobs to Austin as city works to expand crowded airport

Austin and the state offered the Dallas-based airline a package of economic incentives totaling \$19.5 million to locate a new crew base at Austin’s airport.

BY PAUL COBLER  
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Southwest Airlines is building a new crew base for pilots and flight attendants that will bring 2,000 new jobs to Austin as part of an economic development agreement struck between the company, the city and the state,

the company announced at a Friday news conference alongside Gov. Greg Abbott.

The new base, located at Austin Bergstrom International Airport, will open in March and initially hold roughly 1,000 employees, according to a news release by Southwest, one

See SOUTHWEST, page A5



MANOO SIRIVELLU/THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Gov. Greg Abbott, Austin Mayor Kirk Watson, Southwest Airlines CEO Bob Jordan, Austin City Manager T.C. Broadnax and Austin-Bergstrom International Airport CEO Ghizlane Badawi announce the airline’s Austin expansion, expected to create 2,000 new jobs, on Dec. 12, 2025.

HAVE A NEWS TIP?  
news@hillcountrynews.com

GET THE PAPER DELIVERED  
hillcountrynews.com/delivery



December 18, 2025  
6 pages in one section

\$1.50

**NOW HIRING!**  
Please apply at researchpest.com

**RESEARCH PEST CONTROL**

Locally Owned & Family Operated

512-258-5228  
www.ResearchPest.com  
Residential • Commercial

**Call today for a bug-free Christmas!**

Bugs • Rodents • Termites

Serving Cedar Park & surrounding communities for over 40 yrs

**Probate? Voted Best Lawyer by Hill Country News Readers**

**Divorce?**

**Wills?**

1st Place  
30000+ Readers

Call for an appointment  
512-918-3958  
www.terrydavis.com

**Terry Davis & Associates**  
ATTORNEY AT LAW

Stay Current And Informed...  
**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**

**HILL COUNTRY NEWS**  
Subscribe • Support • Advertise | In Print & Online  
512-259-4449 | www.hillcountrynews.com

# Reunion stations help reunite owners, lost pets in Round Rock

**STAFF REPORTS**

The Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter has begun rolling out "Reunion Stations" across Round Rock in an effort to reunite lost pets with their owners without requiring shelter intake or police involvement.

The stations — bright yellow boxes placed at local businesses — contain microchip scanners and instructions for locating pet owners. Shelter officials say the goal is to install at least one station in every ZIP code in the City of Round Rock before expanding to nearby communities.

"We're proud to host the WCRAS chip scanner in front of our studio to help reunite lost pets with their owners," said Zelinda, owner of Round Rock Yoga and a longtime supporter of the shelter.

The process is designed to be simple. A person who finds a lost animal can go to any Reunion Station, scan the pet's microchip, and use a QR code to access instructions for contacting the owner or a support team.

The first Reunion Stations have been installed at:

- Round Rock Yoga, 106 S. Mays St., Suite 200
- Pet Suites, 15940 Great Oaks Dr.
- Anchor Bar, 2702 Parker Dr.

More locations will be added in the coming weeks, according to the shelter.

The initiative is part of WCRAS's broader effort to involve the public in returning pets home quickly, reducing the burden on the shelter and easing stress for animals and their families. It also provides an alternative to calling animal control or visiting the shelter directly.

Local businesses interested in participating can contact Leonard Delgado, community engagement coordinator, at Leonard.Delgado@wilcotx.gov.

WCRAS serves the City of Round Rock, the City of Leander, Cedar Park, Hutto, Georgetown, and unincorporated areas of Williamson County. Its mission is to ensure safe placement of all healthy and behaviorally sound animals in the region.



WCRAS team members stand beside a newly installed Reunion Station outside the Anchor Bar in Round Rock on Dec. 11, 2025. The bright yellow stations help community members scan lost pets for microchips and contact owners directly.



A Reunion Station stands outside Pet Suites in Round Rock on Dec. 11, 2025. The station allows community members to scan lost pets for microchips and access owner contact information.

## Quick Facts: Reunion Stations

- **WHAT:** Yellow boxes with microchip scanners for lost pets
- **WHERE:** Installed at businesses across Round Rock
- **WHY:** To return lost pets home without police or shelter involvement

### HOW IT WORKS

1. Scan pet's microchip at a station
2. Use QR code for owner info

### INITIAL LOCATIONS

- Round Rock Yoga
- Pet Suites
- Anchor Bar

# LISD board meetings to relocate in 2026

**STAFF REPORTS**

Leander ISD will shift the location of its Board of Trustees meetings to the Lippe Instructional Materials Center beginning in January 2026. The new meeting site is located at 1775 W. New Hope Dr., Building B, in Cedar Park — west of Lakeline Boulevard — and offers a more central location within the nearly 200-square-mile district.

District officials said the move will minimize disruptions to daily operations at Cedar Park Middle School, which hosted meetings over the past year, and spotlight one of LISD's newest facilities funded by the 2023 bond measure.

"Our community spans a large geographic area, and it's important that Board meetings remain convenient and accessible," Board President Anna Smith said. "The Lippe Instructional Materials Center's central location allows more families to engage in the work of the district while giving us the chance to welcome the community into this new district space."

To handle high-attendance meetings, the adjacent commons area inside the Geiger Compass Center will serve as an overflow space with livestream access. The district confirmed that all meetings will continue to be streamed online in full.

LISD's clear bag policy will remain in effect. Signups for citizen comments will still be available from noon the day before the meeting until noon the day of. Parking for attendees will be available in the front lot, with signs directing them to the meeting room.

Questions can be directed to the district through its Let's Talk platform.

# Revolutionary War exhibit set for Williamson County locations

**STAFF REPORTS**

A traveling exhibit exploring the American Revolution will make a stop in Williamson County this December as the nation approaches its 250th anniversary.

The American Revolution Experience Traveling Exhibit will be on display Dec. 10–20 at the Williamson Museum, 716 S. Austin Ave., Georgetown. The museum is open noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

From Dec. 21 to Jan. 2, the exhibit will be split between the Georgetown Public Library, 402 W. 8th St., and the Round Rock Public Library, 200 E. Liberty Ave.

The exhibit, designed to illustrate diverse perspectives during the Revolutionary

War era, features touchscreen kiosks, personal stories, period illustrations and artifacts. It was created through a partnership between the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Battlefield Trust.

The Texas Society Daughters of the American Revolution purchased the exhibit and added panels highlighting Texas' historical connections to the war. Williamson County also contributed panels focused on the contributions of early settlers' forebears.

The exhibit's arrival coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Daniel Coleman Chapter of the Texas DAR, the county's oldest chapter and the event's sponsor.

The traveling display will tour Texas as part of the nationwide commemoration of America's founding in 1776.



A visitor explores personal stories from the Revolutionary War using an interactive touch-screen kiosk at the American Revolution Experience Traveling Exhibit.

## IF YOU GO

**EVENT:** American Revolution Experience Traveling Exhibit

### DATES:

- Through Dec 20: Williamson Museum, Georgetown
- Dec. 21–Jan. 2: Georgetown and Round Rock public libraries

**HOST:** Williamson Museum

**CONTENT:** Interactive kiosks, historical narratives, artifacts

**ADMISSION:** Free

**MUSEUM HOURS:**

- Wed–Fri: Noon–5 p.m.
- Sat: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

## MG FLOORS

WOOD TILE CARPET

*Your friendly hometown floor store!*

- Over 50 years of combined experience
- Professional Installation
- Visit our showroom & browse our samples
- Call or email today for a free estimate

*Flooring for every need!*

8863 Anderson Mill Road, #102 | Austin, TX 78729  
512-238-6190  
MGFloors@yahoo.com | www.mgfloors.com

## SUDOKU

Call today and receive a **FREE SHOWER PACKAGE PLUS \$1600 OFF**

**SAFE STEP WALK-IN TUB** 1-855-576-5653

With purchase of a new Safe Step Walk-in Tub. Not applicable with any previous walk-in tub purchase. Offer available while supplies last. No cash value. Must present offer at time of purchase. CSLB 1002165 NSCB 002399 002445

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

© StatePoint Media

### Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test.

### Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

**Answers found in next week's classified section.**

## HILL COUNTRY NEWS™

**SCOTT COLEMAN, PUBLISHER**  
publisher@hillcountrynews.com

**GINNY BROCK, OFFICE MANAGER**  
Bookkeeping/Ad Sales/Circulation/Obituaries  
bookkeeper@hillcountrynews.com

**MARISSA FERREIRA, PAGE DESIGNER**

**OFFICE HOURS:**  
9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday - Friday, Call for Appointment  
910 Quest Pkwy, Suite 4, Cedar Park, TX 78613  
(512) 259-4449

**TO REPORT NEWS:**  
Call (512) 259-4449 or email: news@hillcountrynews.com

**CORRECTIONS:**  
We strive for accuracy and transparency in our reporting. If you believe that we have made a factual error in reporting, please call (512) 259-4449 or email editor@hillcountrynews.com with a link

to the story in question, along with information on what you believe is factually incorrect in the reporting. Individual columns in the Hill Country News do not necessarily reflect the newspaper's editorial opinion.

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**  
Digital Subscription (eEdition): \$38 annually  
Print & Digital (USPS mail delivery): \$58 annually in Texas, \$80 outside Texas  
\*Mail subscriptions not available outside the US

All subscriptions must be prepaid. Delivery inside Cedar Park and Leander may be made by carrier or mail. Full access subscriptions include access to hillcountrynews.com as well as full digital replica (e-edition) which may include updated content and advertising.

**POSTMASTER:**  
Periodicals postage paid at: Cedar Park, TX (USPS 019423)  
Send address changes to: P.O. Box 1777, Cedar Park, TX 78630

**PUBLISHED BY:**  
Katy Newsmedia LLC  
P.O. Box 1777  
Cedar Park, TX 78630-1777  
© 2025 Hill Country News™. All rights reserved.

## Gov. Greg Abbott wants a tighter lid on home values. Tax policy experts warn that's a bad idea.

Conservative and liberal tax policy experts said Abbott's proposal would lead to higher housing costs and tax benefits flowing disproportionately to wealthy homeowners.

BY JOSHUA FECHTER  
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Gov. Greg Abbott announced his reelection campaign in November, promising to lower property taxes. His plan covers three areas which The Texas Tribune is breaking down over a series of articles. This is Part Three.

FORT WORTH — Gov. Greg Abbott wants to put a tighter lid on how fast property values can rise in a bid to deliver property tax relief to homeowners and businesses — but tax policy experts across the political spectrum warn the proposal wouldn't address the root causes of higher tax bills and would backfire with severe consequences.

A property's value is a key part of the equation that forms a property owner's tax bill. That bill is determined by multiplying the property value by the tax rate set by school districts, cities, counties and other taxing jurisdictions.

Texas property owners have seen steep jumps in their appraisals since the start of the decade as the state's economy boomed, and have complained that those higher property values are driving their tax bills. Homeowners saw persistent jumps in their home values as fierce competition for homes put pressure on Texas' limited housing stock and drove up prices. Those increases have since cooled, but remain a source of angst for property owners.

Right now, the state limits how much a homeowner's primary residence's taxable value can rise each year to 10%. The state enacted that limit in the 1990s to help prevent homeowners in hot housing markets from seeing huge shocks on their tax bill.

Abbott wants to lower that to 3% and extend that cap to owners of all kinds of properties like grocery stores, restaurants and apartment buildings, with the aim of giving property owners more predictability when it comes to their tax bills.

"I know so many people that when they get their appraisal, their hand is quivering with that envelope in their hand because they're afraid to see how much their property taxes are going up," Abbott said at an event last week in Fort Worth, where he championed his proposals.

Abbott's appraisal proposal is a key



Gov. Greg Abbott delivers a plan for homeowners property tax relief during a Texas Taxpayer Empowerment Event on Dec. 4, at Rex's Bar and Grill in Fort Worth.

part of the governor's property tax-cut platform that's front and center in his 2026 reelection bid, which includes provisions to end school property taxes for homeowners and make it harder for local governments to raise property taxes.

Tax experts of all political perspectives interviewed by The Texas Tribune were most skeptical of this portion of the plan. The Abbott campaign did not directly respond to concerns cited by those experts about the proposal. In a statement, Abbott's press secretary Eduardo Leal reassured the entire package would save taxpayers.

"Only in Austin would special interests claim the answer to rising property taxes is... more taxes," Leal said. "Texas just invested \$51 billion in local property tax cuts — without raising taxes or cutting essential services. This is a simple choice: stand with taxpayers or stand in the way. Governor Abbott believes that giving voters more control of their property taxes is essential to making Texas more affordable. He will take his plan to voters to secure a mandate for reining in local spending, overhauling the broken appraisal system, and finally giving Texans control over their property taxes."

Have a question about property taxes? Have your property taxes grown or shrunk in recent years? Are you having trouble affording your property taxes? Email Joshua at [joshua.fechter@texastribune.org](mailto:joshua.fechter@texastribune.org).

### GOOD POLITICS, BAD POLICY

Tax policy experts on the right and left have long maintained that tight appraisal caps, though they may be good politics, don't work and have terrible consequences.

Higher property values don't necessarily mean higher tax bills, tax experts and property appraisers have

said, and local taxing entities carry the responsibility of setting tax rates so that tax bills don't rise exorbitantly even if a property's value does. In Texas, tax-cut proponents have instead pressed lawmakers to focus on efforts to drive down tax rates and revenue, seen as more surefire ways to slow tax bills.

Abbott's idea, tax policy experts said, strongly resembles California's Proposition 13, a 1970s ballot initiative that aimed to reduce homeowners' taxes after several years of rapidly rising home values by putting tight limits on property value growth and tax rates.

What followed: vast inequities between taxpayers, higher housing costs and tax benefits flowing disproportionately to wealthy homeowners — results that have played out in other places like New York City that have also enacted stricter caps.

"Bringing California-style property tax reform to Texas is just not sound policy," said Manish Bhatt, a senior tax policy analyst at the conservative Tax Foundation.

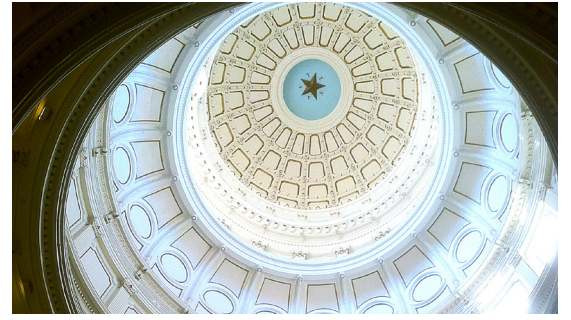
The appraisal cap creates a "lock-in" effect in which long-time homeowners who might've sold their homes won't because they'll lose the tax benefit. That means fewer homes on the market and higher home prices as a result of that scarcity.

"Homeowners are less likely to trade up to a bigger home when they're purchasing power or family size increases," Bhatt said. "That means that there's less supply for newer homeowners and younger families."

That sentiment is shared on the other side of the political spectrum.

"For a state like Texas that loves to pitch itself as being pro-family and good for families, this is a pretty anti-family policy," said Neva Butkus,

See **ABBOTT**, page **A4**



### CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

#### Crockett, Talarico to face off in Dem primary

U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett, D-Dallas, entered the U.S. Senate race on the final day to file, pitting her against state Rep. James Talarico, D-Round Rock. The Austin American-Statesman reported the difference between the two is more of style than substance, with both raising the issues of income inequality, rising prices, corruption and polarization.

Crockett, in her second House term, has made a name by attacking both President Donald Trump and other GOP opponents, such as U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. In her announcement on Dec. 8, she warned Trump, "I'm coming for you."

Talarico has also gained a large social media audience with a message far less confrontational in nature. He is a Presbyterian seminary student whose Christian faith is a running theme.

"I am called to love all of my neighbors like I love myself, because despite our differences, we all want the same things: a safe neighborhood, a good job, a quality, well-funded public school, and the ability to see a doctor when you need one," he said at his announcement.

The Republican primary also promises to be a spirited race, with incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn facing two challengers: Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt, R-Houston.

#### Tax cuts major part of Abbott's campaign

Gov. Greg Abbott is seeking an unprecedented fourth term and is making property tax cuts the centerpiece of his campaign. He faces 10 largely unknown candidates in the GOP primary and is widely expected to win the nomination.

Abbott wants to make it harder for Texas cities and counties to raise property taxes and has also called for the elimination of school property taxes for homeowners and a slowdown in the rise of property values, according to The Texas Tribune.

Both cities and counties rely heavily on property taxes to pay for services such as public safety, parks, libraries, and road maintenance. Lawmakers in 2019 passed tighter limits on how much they can increase property taxes without voter approval.

"Local property taxes are the foundation of essential community services — they keep police and firefighters on duty, streets maintained, and trash collected," said Monty Wynn, who heads the Texas Municipal League.

In recent years, the Legislature has cut school property taxes by billions of dollars, primarily by raising the homestead exemption. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has proposed increasing that exemption by another \$40,000 and allowing homeowners at age 55 to take an additional \$60,000 off their home's taxable value. That benefit is now limited to those 65 and older.

#### Texas leads nation in 12-month job gains

The state's job market continues to outpace the rest of the nation, according to labor market data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Texas Workforce Commission. The state now has the largest labor force in its history at 15.879 million, gaining 168,000 jobs from September 2024 to September 2025.

"Texas' job market and labor force continue to grow because we have a dynamic workforce system that fosters opportunity for businesses and workers alike," said TWC Chairman Joe Esparza. "TWC will continue to provide the resources and support needed to keep this momentum and ensure that Texas remains a national leader in economic opportunity."

The state's unemployment rate stood at 4.4% in September, nearly identical to the national rate.

#### Plan to battle screwworms faces pushback

As the New World Screwworm makes its way to the Texas-Mexico border, potentially endangering livestock and wildlife, the Texas Animal Health Commission's proposed plan to combat it is facing pushback from agriculture groups, The Tribune reported.

A panel of lawmakers heard from state and federal officials as well as industry groups last week.

"The plan needs significant revision," said Tim Niedecken, executive director of the Livestock Marketing Association of Texas. He said the draft plan would require animals being moved out of an infested zone to have an ear tag, a vet inspection and receive treatment. That does not "meet the realities of this industry today," he told lawmakers.

Dr. Lewis "Bud" Dinges, Texas Animal Health Commission's executive director, said it will likely publish its response plan in about two months. He said the goal is to align with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ensure their actions do not harm trade.

The USDA is building a sterile fly production facility at Moore Air Base in South Texas and is also assisting with similar efforts in Panama. The screwworm was detected about 70 miles from the Texas border in September. It infests cattle by laying eggs in open wounds and can be fatal if untreated.

#### November was warmer and drier than normal

A trend that began in August continued through November, with warmer and drier weather throughout much of the state, according to Dr. Mark Wentzel, a hydrologist with the Texas Water Development Board. By the end of November, 54% of the state was in drought — up 20 percentage points in about a month.

Wentzel said by the end of next February, drought conditions are expected to improve in the eastern half of the state but get worse in the western half.

South Texas and the Big Bend region of West Texas are experiencing the most severe levels of drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

#### More than 4 million real Christmas trees sold in Texas annually

Real Christmas trees are an important contributor to the Texas economy, according to Texas A&M Forest Service, with more than 4 million sold each year. That generated a total economic contribution of \$812.7 million and produced more than 6,000 jobs last year. Tree production acreage has increased from 945 acres in 2017 to 3,565 acres in 2022.

**Gary Borders, a veteran award-winning Texas journalist, compiled this report. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches and, once upon a time, the Hill Country News in Cedar Park. Email: [gborders@texaspress.com](mailto:gborders@texaspress.com).**

## Texas touts job growth despite modest September gains

### STAFF REPORTS

AUSTIN — Texas leaders highlighted continued job and labor force growth in its September report, released this week, but the state's monthly gain of 4,600 nonfarm positions — in a state of nearly 30 million residents — offers a more tempered picture than the public report suggests.

The Texas Workforce Commission last Friday announced that the state's civilian labor force reached a record 15.88 million after growing by 21,700 people in September. The unemployment rate held steady at 4.1%.

See **JOBS**, page **A4**

### State Job Gains in Context

- Total Texas population: ~30 million
- Jobs added in September: 4,600 (0.03% of total jobs)
- Labor force increase: 21,700 people
- State unemployment rate: 4.1%
- Austin metro unemployment: 3.6%
- Top job-gaining industry: Construction (+4,300)
- Fastest growing industry (YoY): Leisure & Hospitality (+2.2%)
- Lowest MSA unemployment: Amarillo, Midland (3.3%)



#### • WILLIAMSON COUNTY — WILCOX.GOV

The Williamson County Commissioners Court is the county's governing body. Commissioners meet beginning at 9:30 each Tuesday morning at the Williamson County Courthouse in downtown Georgetown. Agendas and packets are available, and the meetings are streamed live, on the county's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

#### • LEANDER INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT — LEANDERISD.ORG

Leander ISD Board of Trustees meet the second and fourth Thursday each month at Cedar Park Middle School library located at 2100 Sun Chase

Boulevard at 6:15 p.m. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register. Agendas, board meeting packets and a live stream are on the district's website.

#### • LAGO VISTA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT — LAGOVISTAISD.NET

Lago Vista ISD Board of Trustees meet at 6:15 p.m. on the second Monday of the month at 8039 Bar-K Ranch Road in Lago Vista. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register. You can find agendas and board meeting packets on the district's website.

#### • CITY OF CEDAR PARK — CEDARPARKTEXAS.GOV

Agendas and commissions are available, and many meetings

are streamed live, on the city's website.

#### • CEDAR PARK CITY COUNCIL

Meets at 6 p.m. the second and fourth Thursday of each month at City Council Chambers, 450 Cypress Creek Road, Building 4. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

#### • CITY OF LEANDER — LEANDERTX.GOV

Agendas and minutes for all boards and commissions are available, and City Council meetings are streamed live, on the city's website.

#### • LEANDER CITY COUNCIL

Meets at 6 p.m. the first and

third Thursday of each month in the City Council Chambers, Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 N. Brushy Street. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

#### • CITY OF LAGO VISTA — LAGOVISTATXAS.ORG

Agendas and minutes for all boards and commissions are available on the city's website.

#### • LAGO VISTA CITY COUNCIL

Meets 6:30 p.m. the first and third Thursday of each month in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 5803 Thunderbird Drive. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

# ABBOTT

from page A3

senior analyst at the left-leaning Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. "That's going to hinder the ability for young families who are getting married and want to buy their first home and enjoy the perks of homeownership and build some equity and raise their kids in a property that they own. The people that are going to stand to benefit the most are older folks who have owned their homes for a long time, who have a lot of wealth already built up."

A tighter cap would also make the tax system more unfair, experts said. Under a tighter cap, longtime property owners wind up paying much less in property taxes than newer ones, putting first-time homebuyers and new business owners at a disadvantage. Such a disparity largely doesn't exist under the state's current tax system, according to an analysis by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

That disparity does exist in California, said Adam Langley, associate director of tax policy at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

"It's very common to see identical, side-by-side homes with one person paying taxes that are more than five times higher than their neighbors," Langley said.

For all of that, local governments may simply set tax rates where they need to in order to collect however much revenue they need to make up for funds lost to the cap. That scenario played out in Cook County, Illinois, where taxpayers eventually wound up paying higher tax bills than they would have without a strict appraisal cap, researchers found.

That dynamic is beginning to play out in Texas. Texas House lawmakers pushed a nearly identical appraisal cap proposal to Abbott's during the 2023 legislative session. That proposal met stiff resistance from Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and tax-cut proponents in the Senate. Patrick reiterated his opposition to a tighter appraisal cap Tuesday when he released his own tax cut proposal. The 2023 legislation also garnered opposition from groups representing businesses the proposal was intended to benefit. The concern was that older businesses would benefit at the expense of younger ones.

Lawmakers eventually settled on a compromise, creating a 20% appraisal cap for business properties worth \$5 million or less.

There are signs that the policy drove up tax rates. A study commissioned by the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association and Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy found that Collin, Harris, Midland, Moore and Smith counties adopted higher tax rates in 2024 than they otherwise might have to make up for value lost to the cap. Taxes on properties that benefit from the cap fell by \$12.8 million while taxes on properties that don't rose by \$14.2 million, those researchers found.

Abbott also wants appraisal districts to appraise properties once every five years rather than every year as they are now. That could lead to homeowners paying taxes on a higher value than

they might have on an annual appraisal cycle.

There are other ways to address worries brought on by rising appraisals that don't carry the same nasty consequences, experts said. Among those suggestions: a "circuit breaker" program that basically caps property tax bills when they exceed a certain percentage of a homeowner's income. About 30 states and the District of Columbia have programs known as "circuit breakers" that give homeowners a credit or rebate when that happens, which particularly helps lower- and moderate-income households.

Texas lawmakers have occasionally floated and abandoned such an idea, noting the projected cost of administering that kind of program. Texas doesn't have an income tax, so it doesn't have a way to verify someone's income. But states without an income tax, like Washington and New Hampshire, have such programs. Standing up a "circuit breaker" would likely cost less than eliminating school property taxes for homeowners, Butkus said.

## Abbott's plans leave out direct relief for people who rent

Absent from Abbott's platform is any direct tax relief for the state's 4.3 million households who rent their homes — in keeping with years of GOP tax-cut policy.

Abbott has said Texas tenants would benefit from his proposed appraisal cap, which would apply to owners of rental properties. Separately, tax-cut proponents have often argued that renters benefit from the billions of dollars the state sends to school districts every year to lower their tax rates.

Other states have programs that provide direct relief to rental households. Renters, too, are eligible for "circuit breaker" programs in the places that have them, Butkus said.

Abbott's platform doesn't tackle other aspects of housing affordability, like the rising cost of homeowners' insurance. What relief homeowners have seen on the property tax side has been eaten up by rising homeowners' insurance costs, among other homeownership expenses, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Lawmakers this year largely sidestepped ideas to tame insurance bills.

The platform also doesn't address how to tame the state's considerable housing shortage, a key driver of the state's higher home prices and rents. Abbott signed new bipartisan laws this year to cut red tape and allow more homes to be built to ease the shortage, laws lauded by housing advocates and Abbott has spotlighted on the campaign trail. But he hasn't said if he thinks state lawmakers need to pursue further changes in the future.

Abbott will need state legislators to sign on to his tax-cut agenda for any of it to become law, and some have already done so. But he'll likely face resistance in enacting some parts of his platform from Patrick, who leads the Texas Senate. Patrick is deeply resistant to key parts of Abbott's agenda, like the stricter appraisal cap proposal.

**"Supporting families in the immediate aftermath of a suicide is one of the most compassionate steps we can take as a community. The L.O.S.S. program will help survivors feel seen and supported from the very beginning."**

RUBEN LEAL, Senior Death Inquest Investigator

## LOSS

from page A1

passionate steps we can take as a community," said Senior Death Inquest Investigator Ruben Leal. "The L.O.S.S. program will help survivors feel seen and supported from the very beginning."

Precinct 2 Executive Assistant Kathy Pierce added during a Dec. 9 Commissioners Court meeting that the help provided through this program is "just invaluable."

County agencies and partner organizations are currently coordinating final logistics, volunteer training standards, and deployment protocols. Once launched, the program will be integrated into the county's emergency response

The National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by calling or texting 988.

system to ensure timely outreach at the scene of a suicide.

The volunteer-based initiative welcomes participation from both suicide loss survivors and community members. Those interested in joining can contact Ruben Leal at [ruben.leal@wilcotx.gov](mailto:ruben.leal@wilcotx.gov). The county encourages compassionate individuals to step forward to assist those facing one of life's most devastating moments.

## JOBS

from page A3

Over the past year, Texas added 168,000 nonfarm jobs — a 1.2% growth rate, narrowly ahead of the national average.

"Texas' job market and labor force continue to grow because we have a dynamic workforce system," said TWC Chairman Joe Esparza.

But the September job gains equate to roughly 0.03% of the state's total employment, a modest increase for a state that includes Houston, San Antonio, Dallas and Austin — four of the 15 largest U.S. cities.

Construction posted the strongest monthly gains, adding 4,300 jobs statewide. Trade, transportation and utilities added 2,000 jobs, while other services added 1,500. Leisure and hospitality led year-over-year industry growth at 2.2%.

Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown added 1,700 jobs over the month, while its unemployment rate ticked up to 3.6%, compared to 3.4% a year earlier, according to the TWC

spreadsheet data.

TWC commissioners pointed to the role of workforce programs in the state's economic performance.

"TWC's investments are key to the success of Texas' resilient workforce," said Commissioner Alberto Treviño III, citing training, apprenticeships and child care as essential to workforce stability.

Despite the upbeat messaging, employment gains remain uneven across regions. Amarillo and Midland recorded the lowest jobless rates at 3.3%. San Angelo followed at 3.4%, while several urban regions, including Austin, saw year-over-year increases in unemployment rates.

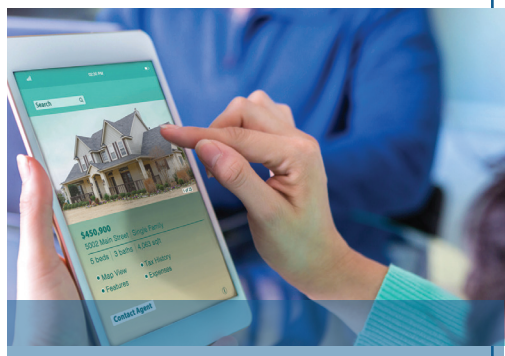
"TWC is upholding Texas' reputation as the best state to live and work," said Commissioner Brent Connert, adding that the agency will continue linking job seekers with employers.

Employment estimates are developed with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# FOLLOW THE NEWS

## EVERY DAY

*Amy Way*



There is no where else to find fast, accurate access to information about Cedar Park, Leander and Northwest Suburban Austin, along with curated news from around the region, state and nation.

**Become a member today and make a difference.**

**Support community journalism here in your community for just \$38\* for the year!**

# HILL COUNTRY NEWS

Subscribe • Support • Advertise | In Print & Online  
**512-259-4449 | [www.hillcountrynews.com](http://www.hillcountrynews.com)**

\* Digital only subscription. Print & Digital (USPS mail delivery): \$58 annually in Texas, \$80 outside Texas

**For Print Home Delivery and Unlimited eEdition Access – and to Support Independent Local News – Subscribe by Phone or Online Today!**

# SOUTHWEST

from page A1

of the state's largest employers. By mid-2027, the base will expand to reach its expected size of 2,000 employees, who will be paid an average salary of \$180,000, according to the news release.

"As we've seen Southwest grow, the Texas economy has grown," Abbott said at the news conference. "Then, when Southwest recently decided they wanted to achieve another expansion that will lead to 2,000 more employees ... we knew that we wanted that project to be located in Texas and

located right here in Austin."

Southwest CEO Bob Jordan credited a package of economic incentives from the state and the city for bringing the expansion to Austin.

The governor's office awarded the company a \$14 million grant from the Texas Enterprise fund, along with a \$375,000 bonus for reserving some of the new jobs for veterans, Abbott said. The enterprise fund is administered through the governor's office and is intended to give "deal closing"

grants to companies that are considering a new project in Texas as well as other states, according to the governor's office.

"The collaboration between the city, the state and Southwest to get to this agreement sends ... an important message about what we can do together to benefit the people of this city and this state," Austin Mayor Kirk Watson said.

The Friday announcement came a day after the Austin City Council unanimously approved an incentive package for South-

west worth up to \$5.5 million over five years. Southwest will receive \$2,750 from the city for every Austin-based hire it makes, as long as the employee lives within city limits, according to city documents.

"This economic partnership made this decision easy," Jordan said.

The crew base's construction comes as Austin works to expand its airport, which has struggled in recent years with crowded terminals and long security lines as the city around it continues to

boom. A new concourse is being constructed and is expected to open by 2030 at the earliest, part of a \$4 billion expansion, according to the city.

The concourse will add as many as 40 new gates to the airport over time, more than doubling its current number of 34.

Southwest currently operates roughly 130 daily departures from the airport, a number that could balloon to "well over" 200 per day once the expansion is completed, Jordan said.

# WINTER

from page A1

Clinical Captain Davis Winget of Williamson County EMS said falls, cold exposure and interruptions in medical care are common winter risks. "Planning ahead for medications, medical devices and mobility needs helps residents stay safe when temperatures drop," he said.

Fire Marshal Mike Lugo added that improper heating practices raise fire and carbon monoxide risks. He advised

keeping flammable materials away from heaters and never using ovens to heat homes. "Simple precautions make a significant difference during cold weather," Lugo said.

Officials emphasized the importance of staying weather-aware, preparing early, and checking in on neighbors. Resources and updates are available at [www.wilcotx.gov](http://www.wilcotx.gov).



## Winter Weather Prep Tips

- Keep 72-hour supply of food, water, medications
- Protect people, pets, pipes, plants
- Stay off roads during icy conditions
- Sign up for alerts: WarnCentralTexas.org
- Use heaters safely; never use ovens for warmth
- Monitor weather from trusted sources
- Prepare mobility or medical equipment in advance

County winter weather equipment includes emergency response vehicles and sand trucks used to treat roads during icy conditions. The county maintains 400 tons of sand and four sand spreaders for use on its 1,600 miles of roadways.

COURTESY WILLIAMSON COUNTY



Former Superintendent Bruce Gearing's voluntary retirement was approved at last week's board meeting.

COURTESY LEANDER ISD

## Leadership Timeline at Leander ISD

- **JUNE 2023:** Chris Clark joins LISD as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.
- **DECEMBER 2024:** Promoted to deputy superintendent of learning and innovation.
- **DECEMBER 5, 2025:** Superintendent Bruce Gearing announces retirement.
- **DECEMBER 11, 2025:** LISD Board accepts Gearing's retirement, names Clark as acting superintendent.
- **EARLY 2026:** Search begins for permanent superintendent.

# CLARK

from page A1

moments to stay grounded in who we are. I'm committed to steady leadership, transparency and supporting the people who show up every day for our students."

Gearing, who announced his intent to retire on Dec. 8, reflected on his time in the district with gratitude. "This district and this community have changed my life," he said in a statement. "It has been an honor to serve Leander ISD."

During his tenure, LISD implemented a five-year strategic plan, expanded teacher collaboration, passed a \$763 million bond, and received national recognition from the College Board as AP Large District of the Year in 2023.

CALL, EMAIL OR VISIT:  
**(512) 259-4449**  
[bookkeeper@HillCountryNews.com](mailto:bookkeeper@HillCountryNews.com)  
[HillCountryNews.com](http://HillCountryNews.com)

# CLASSIFIEDS

PLACE YOUR AD TODAY!

## CLASSIFIED LINE AD RATES

\$14.00 minimum charge for 15 words.  
54¢ each additional word.  
As low as \$8.50 per issue with discounts for consecutive weeks.

## DISPLAY AD RATES

Starting at \$16.00 per column inch with discounts for multiple consecutive weeks.

## DEADLINES

Thursday Edition

Display Ads are due Friday by 5 p.m.  
Word Ads are due Monday by Noon

## PAYMENT

Pre-payment required on all line ads.



950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

950 PUBLIC NOTICES

YOUR NEWS.

YOUR WAY.

Find out what all your friends are talking about

HILL COUNTRY NEWS

Follow us on Facebook for easy access to HILL COUNTRY NEWS.

HillCountryNews

Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for a Mixed Beverage Permit by Venelati R2 LLC dba Carmela's Lakeway, to be located at 900 Ranch Road 620 S Unit C108, Lakeway, Travis County, Texas. Officers of said corporation are Andrew Venezia, Manager and Ayla Holdings LLC, Sole Member.

Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for MIXED BEVERAGE PERMIT and MIXED BEVERAGE LATE HOUR PERMIT by LUNA ROOFTOP LLC DBA LUNA ROOFTOP BAR, to be located at 120 W 5TH, UNIT B, AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701. Officer of limited liability company is Rodrigo Jardon Ayala [manager].

## December 11

## Puzzle Answers

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

## Notice Public Hearing

The City of Lago Vista Board of Adjustment Commission will hold a Public Hearing on January 5, 2026 at 6:30 PM in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 5803 Thunderbird, Lago Vista, Texas to receive citizen input in consideration of the following:

**23-2788-SP-E:** Consideration and possible action of a special exception application pursuant to Section 11.60 of Chapter 14 of the City of Lago Vista Code of Ordinances to allow an increase in the maximum height allowed by Table A at 21601 Santa Carlo Avenue, Lot 26153 Highland Lake Estates, Sec. 26 Amended.

All interested persons are invited to attend.

## Notice Public Hearing

The City of Lago Vista Board of Adjustment Commission will hold a Public Hearing on January 5, 2026 at 6:30 PM in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 5803 Thunderbird, Lago Vista, Texas to receive citizen input in consideration of the following:

**25-2904-SP-E:** Consideration and possible action of a special exception application pursuant to Section 11.60 of Chapter 14 of the City of Lago Vista Code of Ordinances to allow an increase in the maximum height allowed by Table A at 8711 Bluff Ridge Trail, Bar K Ranches Plat 12 AMD Lots 12382 & 12383 Blk A Lot 12383A.

All interested persons are invited to attend.

## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The City Council of the City of Leander, Texas will hold a public hearing in the Council Chambers at the Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 North Brushy Street, Leander, Texas, on **January 6, 2026**, at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of receiving public comments on a proposed ordinance granting an extension to the franchise granted to **Al Clawson Disposal, Inc.**, described as "AN ORDINANCE EXTENDING THE TERM OF A FRANCHISE GRANTED TO AL CLAWSON DISPOSAL, INC. TO PROVIDE RECYCLING AND SOLID WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL SERVICES WITHIN THE CITY OF LEANDER; UNDER ORDINANCE NUMBER 20-045-00"

## Notice Public Hearing

The City of Lago Vista Planning and Zoning Commission will hold a Public Hearing on January 8, 2026 at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 5803 Thunderbird, Lago Vista, Texas to receive citizen input in consideration of the following:

**25-2905-PDD-REZ:** Consideration and recommendation on the rezoning of 19708 Boggy Ford Road, ABS 189 SUR 98 CAMPBELL M F ACR 7.055 (AKA LOT 32 RAN CHOL CIELO) from TR-1 to a Planned Development District Rezoning pursuant to Section 10 Chapter 14 of the City of Lago Vista Code of Ordinances. Copies of the proposed Planned Development District are available at city hall for viewing.

All interested persons are invited to attend.

## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The City Council of the City of Leander, Texas will hold a public hearing in the Council Chambers at the Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 North Brushy Street, Leander, Texas, on **January 6, 2026**, at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of receiving public comments on a proposed ordinance granting a franchise to **Google Fiber Texas, LLC**, described as "AN ORDINANCE GRANTING GOOGLE FIBER, TEXAS, LLC, A NON-EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE TO INSTALL, MAINTAIN, OPERATE, AND CONTROL A FIBER OPTIC INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK IN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY OF THE CITY OF LEANDER, TEXAS; PRESCRIBING COMPENSATION FOR THE PRIVILEGE CONFERRED; PRESCRIBING CONDITIONS AND TERMS GOVERNING THE USE OF THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY; PROVIDING FOR NOTICE, DEFAULT AND TERMINATION; PROVIDING PENALTIES; PROVIDING FOR ACCEPTANCE AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND PROVIDING FOR RELATED MATTERS"

**NEED TO PLACE A LEGAL NOTICE?**

Visit [HillCountryNews.com](http://HillCountryNews.com), email [bookkeeper@hillcountrynews.com](mailto:bookkeeper@hillcountrynews.com) or call 512-259-4449.



Texas A&M quarterback Marcel Reed (10) celebrates with teammates after a touchdown during the Aggies' 34-17 win over Florida on October 11.

## Aggies, Hurricanes set for historic CFP clash at Kyle Field

BY BRANDI CHIONSINI

For the first time in program history, Texas A&M will host a College Football Playoff game when the No. 7 Aggies welcome No. 10 Miami to Kyle Field on Saturday.

Both teams enter the 11 a.m. CT kickoff with postseason redemption in mind. The Aggies (11-1) are coming off their only loss of the season, a 27-17 defeat at Texas that cost them a shot at the SEC title. Miami (10-2) closed its season on a four-game win streak, capped by a 38-7 rout of Pittsburgh.

"This is the opportunity you want — to be playing meaningful football in December," A&M head coach Mike Elko said. "We've put ourselves in position to compete for a national championship."

A&M will lean heavily on quarterback Marcel Reed, who has accounted for 3,398 total yards and 31 touchdowns this season. Reed, a finalist for the Manning and Johnny Unitas awards, averages 283.2 yards of total offense per game and leads the SEC in yards per completion (14.0).

Wide receiver KC Concepcion adds explosiveness in all phases. The Paul Hornung Award winner is the only player in FBS this season with a rushing, receiving and punt return touchdown. He's averaged 117.4 all-purpose yards and scored in five of the last six games.

Defensively, the Aggies bring pressure. SEC Defensive Player of the Year Cashius Howell leads a unit ranked second nationally in tackles for loss (8.7 per game) and tied for first in sacks per game (3.4). Howell has 11.5 sacks and six pass



### Aggies vs. Hurricanes

Dec. 20, 2025

#### TEAM RECORDS

Miami (10-2), Texas A&M (11-1)

#### LOCATION

Kyle Field, College Station, Texas

#### KICKOFF

11 a.m. CT, Saturday

#### TV

ABC

Wide receiver KC Concepcion (7) was named the 2025 Paul Hornung Award winner, which honors the most versatile player in major college football. He also received First Team All-SEC honors after leading the Aggies with 57 receptions for 886 yards and an SEC-best nine receiving touchdowns.

SCOTT W. COLEMAN

breakups, the most by any defensive end in the SEC.

Miami, meanwhile, boasts top-10 units on both sides of the ball and is led by quarterback Carson Beck, who is projected to be a first-round NFL Draft pick. Beck has powered an offense averaging 275.8 passing yards per game. On defense, edge rusher Rueben Bain and lineman Akheem Mesidor anchor a front that ranks No. 7 nationally against the run and No. 6 in scoring defense (13.8 points allowed per game).

"We know Miami has NFL players on both lines and at the skill spots," Elko said. "Their quarterback

has seen it all and makes every throw. We'll have to be at our best."

Texas A&M is 7-0 at home this season, setting program records for attendance, including three 100,000-plus crowds for 11 a.m. kickoffs. College GameDay returns to campus for the 12th time, adding national spotlight to a matchup that already features two teams with wins over Notre Dame and high-stakes implications.

For a team trying to become a national power, the moment has arrived.

"We've grown a lot this year," said receiver Mario Craver. "Now we've got to show it on the field."



Far left: Wide receiver Mario Craver (1) reacts after making a 67-yard catch to set up a touchdown on October 11. Left: Texas A&M head coach Mike Elko is leading the Aggies to their first-ever College Football Playoff appearance.

SCOTT W. COLEMAN

### HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

## C.E. King ends Vandegrift's title defense in high-scoring state semifinal

### STAFF REPORTS

WACO, Texas — Vandegrift's bid to repeat as Class 6A Division II state champion came to a close Saturday night as the Vipers fell 58-41 to Houston C.E. King in a semifinal shootout at Baylor's McLane Stadium.

The loss marked the end of an era for a program that has become a fixture in the state's late-December football landscape under longtime head coach Drew Sanders. In its 15th year of existence, Vandegrift (12-3) reached the state semifinals for the fourth time in six seasons and posted a 51-7 record over the past four years, including a 2024 state title.

"They had a few too many bullets for us today," Sanders said after the game.

Vandegrift never led after the second quarter, as C.E. King (13-2) rushed for 467 yards and used five touchdowns from senior quarterback Timothy Potts — four on the ground — to punch its first-ever ticket to the state championship game. King will face DeSoto next Saturday at AT&T Stadium in Arlington.

Potts' 56-yard touchdown run with 1:22 left in the third quarter gave the Panthers a 42-21 lead. Vandegrift responded with a pair of scoring drives capped by touchdowns from senior receiver Brock Chilton to trim the deficit to 42-35 early in the fourth. But King countered with an 80-yard drive and a 20-yard scoring run from Potts to regain control.

Chilton finished with 21 catches for 242 yards and four touchdowns, including scoring receptions of 65, 50, 20 and 2 yards. Quarterback Miles Teodecki threw for 389 yards and six touchdowns in his final game as a Viper, capping a senior season that earned him a scholarship to Kansas State.

Despite giving up 646 total yards, the Vipers remained in contention into the final minutes. King sealed the game with a fourth-down touchdown run by Dionne Sims and an interception by linebacker Damian Broussard.

As the Vipers sang the school song with the cheer squad one final time this season, Sanders and his staff consoled a senior class that helped define a dominant era for Central Texas football.

Among the departing seniors: Teodecki, Chilton, offensive linemen Carter Mannon and Abih Garcia, linebackers James Mulcahy and Luke Davis, and safeties Tobias Gray and Ayden Mitchell.

### Vandegrift vs. C.E. King

Dec. 13, 2025

#### BOX SCORE

C.E. King 7 21 14 16 — 58  
Vandegrift 14 7 0 20 — 41

#### SCORING PLAYS

1Q — VAN: Brock Chilton 65-yd pass from Miles Teodecki (kick good), 10:31  
1Q — CEK: Dionne Sims 3-yd run (kick good), 5:00  
1Q — VAN: Justin Moore TD catch (kick good), 1:46  
2Q — CEK: Dillon Mitchell 61-yd pass from Potts (kick good), 10:50  
2Q — CEK: Royce McIntosh-Houston 35-yd INT return (kick good), 10:23  
2Q — CEK: Potts 8-yd run (kick good), 0:50  
2Q — VAN: Thomas Buechler TD catch (kick good), 0:02  
3Q — CEK: Joshua Hayes 29-yd TD catch (kick good), 9:41  
3Q — CEK: Potts 56-yd run (kick good), 1:22  
4Q — VAN: Chilton 20-yd catch (kick blocked), 10:32  
4Q — VAN: Chilton 50-yd catch (2-pt good), 10:20  
4Q — CEK: Potts 20-yd run (kick good), 5:26  
4Q — CEK: Safety on kickoff recovery, 5:22  
4Q — CEK: Sims 49-yd run (kick good), 1:45  
4Q — VAN: Chilton 2-yd catch (no PAT), 0:00

#### KEY PLAYER STATS

##### Vandegrift

- Miles Teodecki: 35-57, 389 yds, 6 TD, 2 INT
- Brock Chilton: 21 rec, 242 yds, 4 TD
- Thomas Buechler: 4 rec, 34 yds, 1 TD
- Justin Moore: 2 rec, 24 yds, 1 TD

##### C.E. King

- Timothy Potts: 17 rush, 230 yds, 4 TD; 10-14, 179 yds, 2 TD, 1 INT
- Dionne Sims: 27 rush, 214 yds, 2 TD
- Dillon Mitchell: 2 rec, 63 yds, 1 TD
- Joshua Hayes: 1 rec, 29 yds, 1 TD

#### TEAM RECORDS

C.E. King (13-2), Vandegrift (12-3)

#### LOCATION

McLane Stadium, Waco, Texas

**Come See**  
**PAPAW GARNER'S LIGHTS!**  
351 CR 286, Liberty Hill  
**NOW — JANUARY 1ST**  
*Thousands of lights & festive displays for all the family to enjoy free of charge!*  
**Drive by or walk through**

**MERRY**  
*Christmas*  
from the staff of  
**HILL COUNTRY NEWS**  
We will be closed on Wednesday, Dec. 24 and Thursday, Dec. 25 so that our employees may spend time with their families.  
Deadline for Dec. 25 publication is Thursday, Dec. 18, 5 p.m.  
Deadline for Jan. 1 publication is Tuesday, Dec. 23, 5 p.m.