



# Precinct 4 Update

R. Jack Cagle, Harris County Commissioner

Winter 2011

## A Message from Commissioner R. Jack Cagle



It is with Precinct 4 pride that this article for the *Update* newsletter comes to you from your new Commissioner. Since taking office in the first week of October, I have been pleased to meet many of you.

Many of you I've known for years and I have had the great joy of making many more new friends.

I am here as your steward of our tax dollars, and here to speak on your behalf on Commissioners Court as we move forward in these challenging times.

It's no secret that Harris County government has been cutting back in recent years. This challenge includes taking what Precinct 4 does well and seeing how we can do those things even better.

More than anything else, during these tough economic times we must live within our means. I look forward to working with my colleagues on Commissioners Court to set realistic budgets that all departments can live within.

If that means we have to change the way we approach some things, it is a challenge we must meet. A focus on solid management principles will allow Harris County to provide the services you expect without increasing your tax burden.

Here are some things you might want to know:

Growing up in Houston, my mother was a teacher and my father worked for NASA on the Apollo manned space program. College included Rice University and Baylor Law School.

I have represented Precinct 4 and all of Harris County as Judge of the Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 1 since 2000.

Prior to that, I managed my own law office, representing many businesses and individuals in and around Precinct 4.

The Cagle family includes my wife, Janet, who attended nursing school in The Medical Center, and three children: Richard, Victoria, and Elizabeth.

**"I am here as your steward of our tax dollars, and here to speak on your behalf on Commissioners Court as we move forward in these challenging times."**

Please know that what you have to say is important. Precinct 4 has an email address where you can send me a message at any time: [commissionercagle@hcp4.net](mailto:commissionercagle@hcp4.net).

As always, should you need help with county-related business, please contact Precinct 4's Community Assistance Department at [cadir@hcp4.net](mailto:cadir@hcp4.net) or by phone at (281) 353-8424.

What you have to say—your needs and your vision for our neighborhoods and our workplaces—will always be heard. Together, we will continue to make Precinct 4 the great place that we all know it is to live, work, and play.

### Focusing on the Issues

Jesse Jones Park & Nature Center Celebrates 25 Years

Surviving the Drought

Commissioners Court, Holiday Schedules

Project Linus at Community Centers

Spring Creek Greenway Update

Citizen's Police Academy

# Jesse Jones Park Celebrates 25 Years

## Volunteers Make the Difference

Pioneer Days celebrated 25 years of history, education, and fun Saturday, November 12 at Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center. Commissioner R. Jack Cagle (seen in the picture to the right) saw firsthand how hundreds of dedicated volunteers join precinct staff in presenting life at a circa 1820 homestead.

Blue skies and mild weather greeted more than 2,100 visitors to this year's event that recreates life at the Redbud Hill Homestead and Akokisa Indian Village.

A highlight of the day for visitors came when Commissioner Cagle, Precinct 4 Parks Administrator Dennis Johnston, and former parks staffer and Pioneer Days veteran Carmine Stahl spoke about the history of the area and of the event.

According to Commissioner Cagle, Pioneer Days—particularly 2011's anniversary edition—offers a perfect setting to remember where we've been and speculate on where we will be 25 years from now.

"The hard work of our forefathers, the settlers, and the Native Americans set the stage for the quality of life we enjoy today," Cagle said. "As we work together to build our own futures here in Harris County, we can take pride in our heritage and the work of those who have gone before us."

Visitors were able to participate in and learn about crafts including shingle-making and frontier foods preparation, including smoking beef jerky, hand churning butter, and baking bread in a wood fire oven.

Interaction with re-enactors representing both the Mexican army and Texian settlers was also a highlight. They shared the craft involved in keeping and maintaining their authentic field dress and weaponry. A highlight of the day for many was their mock skirmish, which was a real part of life for many settlers in the years leading up to Texas Independence from Mexico in 1836.



From left, Darlene Hostetler, Commissioner R. Jack Cagle, Carmine Stahl, and Dennis Johnston get in the Pioneer Day spirit.

Below, the day featured demonstrations of spinning and weaving. Photos by Lori Bear

The re-enactors also participated in a 21-gun salute staged to recognize not only Redbud Hill's occupants of the 1830s, but also all of the volunteers and staff who have made Pioneer Days a signature event for the park, the community, and the region.

Part of what makes Pioneer Days such a special event to the community is that it has become a true labor of love for those who spend countless hours preparing and ensuring that they achieve historic authenticity, according to Darlene Hostetler, director of Jones Park.

"I am so proud of the work that all our volunteers, staff, and presenters put into make this event come together," Hostetler says. "From period costumes to authentic tools and weaponry and ensuring that our homestead and Indian Village are accurate to the time period, everyone involved puts their best 'Pioneer Spirit' on display."

Hundreds of staff and volunteers wear period costumes authentic to every detail (costumes are sewn without modern conveniences like zippers!). All of the gear and campground materials were true to the pioneer days of the 1800s.

Special attention was paid to ensuring that kids of all ages had a good time even when it came to getting



around. Hayrides were available to and from the homestead and village for those who did not want to walk the trail.

Live music with period instruments was provided on two different stages—one at the homestead site and another near the park's main entrance.

Commissioner Cagle took special note of the unique and special contributions of the Jesse Jones Park Volunteers (JJPV), who contribute to every aspect of the event's success including making sure that everyone was happy by offering food and drink for sale.

"I am inspired by the commitment and generosity of these volunteers. Precinct 4 clearly has an asset unique to our park system in all of the volunteers who do so much here at Jones Park and all of our parks," Cagle said.

The 25<sup>th</sup> annual Pioneer Day left everyone looking forward to the 26<sup>th</sup> edition in 2012.

# Surviving the Drought

## Replanting our Urban Forest

**F**rom high winds to heavy rainstorms to periods of drought, the weather in Texas is never boring. This year's summer brought record-high temperatures and a drought that has killed millions of trees throughout Houston. "Trees store energy reserves which they can draw on in times of stress, including drought, but if they're not able to replenish those reserves, they can go into a downward spiral," says Michael Merritt, bayou region urban forestry coordinator for the Texas Forest Service.

### Commissioners Court: In Session!

Want to learn more about how Harris County is run? Make plans to attend Commissioners Court on one of the following Tuesdays in 2012:

Jan. 10 and 24  
Feb. 14 and 28  
March 13 and 27  
April 10 and 24  
May 8 and 22  
June 12 and 26  
July 10 and 24  
Aug. 7 and 21  
Sept. 11 and 25  
Oct. 9 and 23  
Nov. 6 and 20  
Dec. 4 and 18

### Harris County 2012 Holidays

New Year's Day	Mon., Jan. 2
MLK Day:	Mon., Jan. 16
Good Friday:	Fri., April 6
Memorial Day:	Mon., May 28
Independence Day:	Wed., July 4
Labor Day:	Mon., Sept. 3
Thanksgiving:	Thur. and Fri., Nov. 22 and 23
Christmas:	Mon. and Tue., Dec. 24 and 25

Dennis Johnston, Precinct 4 parks administrator, estimates that an average of 15 percent of the trees in Precinct 4's parks system have died. "Older trees like those in Spring Creek Park or areas which have 100 years or more of natural mulch on top of the root system are faring better than others. Newer parks like Matzke and Pundt Park, where the soil has been recently disturbed, or Meyer and Collins, where the natural soils underneath have been altered or compacted, have suffered exceptional losses—up to 40 percent of the canopy." He explains that newly planted trees (one to five years in the ground) are most at risk, especially those without an irrigation system, where losses are in the 80 to 90 percent range.

Though funds are limited, Precinct 4 is working to remove trees located near trail systems and populated areas. "When conifers like pine trees go brown, we have to remove them. Hardwood trees, like sweet gum, elm, and oak, may not be dead, but may have entered an early winter dormant state. With these, we're waiting until the spring to see if they produce leaves again," Johnston says. He explains that the effects of this year's drought will linger for another five years especially in hardwood trees. "Stressed trees are at risk for pathogens and pests. Most recently, park personnel have noticed severe outbreaks of pine bark beetles wiping out entire stands of mature pine trees." To encourage residents to plant trees, Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center is giving away tree saplings at its Arbor Day Celebration, **Saturday and Sunday, January 21 and 22 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.** Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens will provide tough, drought-tolerant plants and trees at this year's March Mart



While conifers like pine trees must be removed when they go brown, Precinct 4 is waiting until spring to see if hardwood trees produce leaves again.

Photo by Lori Bear

sale, **Friday, March 23 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, March 24 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Merritt says that although native trees can usually withstand the wide fluctuations in weather typical to the area, any tree will suffer under times of extreme drought. "Make sure to select a tree that works with the type of soil you have in your area. Also, since it takes a tree two to three years to become established, owners should have a plan for tree maintenance which includes appropriate watering. Newly planted trees need about five gallons of water per inch of diameter up to twice a week, though less in the winter when the tree is dormant." He encourages residents to visit the Texas Forest Service at [www.tfs.tamu.edu](http://www.tfs.tamu.edu) for tips on tree selection, planting, and maintenance and notes that the ideal planting season is from late October until early March.

Additionally, Precinct 4 welcomes groups interested in replanting trees within the parks system to contact Precinct 4 at (281) 353-8100. "Trees provide shade and shelter for wildlife, keep our air conditioning costs down and improve our air quality. The summer drought was bad, and we lost a lot of our canopy. But I think we can survive this, and if we all pitch in, we can come out of this with an even better urban forest," Merritt concludes.

# Providing Comfort to Children in Need

## Community Centers Participate in Project Linus

**M**yrna Pool believes that every child needs a blanket to cuddle. So when she heard that May Community Center needed volunteers to quilt, crochet, or sew baby blankets for children in need, the veteran quilter immediately signed on.

*“Whatever the need, our volunteers have very giving hearts, especially when it comes to helping children.”*

“Kids need comfort...especially these kids,” she says. The baby blankets are created as part of Project Linus, a national nonprofit organization which seeks to provide love, a sense of security, and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need. New handmade blankets, created by thousands of “blanketeers,” are provided to children in hospitals, shelters, and other nonprofit organizations that provide services to children.

### Quilting with Friends

Pool heard about Project Linus through May Community Center’s Friendship Quilters, a weekly class for quilters of all experience levels. The volunteer has been attending the class for three years now, traveling approximately 20 miles each way from her home in Aldine. “I saw the class advertised in the newspaper. It’s a good group of people. I’ve been quilting all my life, and I’m still learning after all these years.”

Pool began quilting when she was just 10 years old. “I tried crochet and embroidery, but my projects would come out upside down and backwards. My grandma taught me to quilt and my first project was a blanket for my baby brother.”

According to Anne Sparkman, who leads Friendship Quilters at May Community Center, of the 75 quilts previously donated to the Houston chapter of Project Linus, Pool has likely done about 20. “I had some quilts I made at home over the last few years. Like many quilters, I stay busy so I always have lots of quilts,” says Pool, who also creates quilts for veterans.

Crosby Community Center also got in on the act, and volunteer Jeannie Ressler was happy to join the group of blanketeers. “I’ve been using fabric squares to create custom-made photo albums for years. When I heard that Crosby Community Center was participating in Project Linus this summer, I went home, searched through all my stores of fabric and started cutting fabric squares for quilts. I enjoy seeing the finished blankets since they are pieces of my life,” she says. While Churches United in Caring donated yarn, blanketeers at the Community Center purchased and donated surplus fabric and materials.

According to Thresa Hester, a Crosby Community Center staff member, the project is a fun and rewarding service opportunity with a variety of ways to help. “We have volunteers like Jeannie, who cut fabric squares, others who sew or iron, and some who crochet or knit,” she says. “Some bring their projects with them when they are volunteering at the Center answering the phones, while others work on their blankets in a sewing or quilting class or at home.”

While Crosby Community Center’s goal was to have more than three blankets for donation, the Center currently has 27 crocheted blankets, 13 quilts, and more on the way. This fall, the group donated the blankets to the Montgomery County chapter of Project Linus, since this area had the biggest need. The chapter serves Casa, Children’s Safe Harbor, Family Promise, Interfaith, Memorial Hermann Hospital, St. Luke’s Hospital, and Sunshine Kids.



Top, Myrna Pool and other volunteers at May Community Center quilted 75 baby blankets for Project Linus.

From left, Thresa Hester, Crosby Community Center staff member, Jeannie Ressler, and Michelle Thompson, director of Crosby Community Center, show some of the work done by volunteers at Crosby Community Center.

May Community Center’s Friendship Quilters are now working on quilts for those affected by the Texas wildfires. “Our volunteers are loving, supportive, and incredibly generous. This is a great group,” Sparkman says.

Hester agrees. “This is a very tight community. Whatever the need, our volunteers have very giving hearts, especially when it comes to helping children.”

Photos by Lori Bear

# Spring Creek Greenway Project Continues

**T**ake a walk, paddle a canoe, or ride a bike. Harris County Precinct 4's contribution to the Spring Creek Greenway now features 7.5 contiguous miles of pristine trail and 2,000 acres of parkland available for all kinds of recreational activities. The linear park now stretches from Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center in Humble to Pundt Park in Spring.

A recently completed 5.5-mile hard surface trail and 10-foot-wide, 365-foot-long bridge stretching over Cypress Creek complete the connection between the two parks. The concrete bridge is capable of handling heavy equipment or vehicles needed for maintenance and emergency access, but is not open to motorized vehicles.

The connective trail and bridge are part of Phase 2 of the Spring Creek Greenway project, which will connect and protect up to 12,000 acres of forest on both sides of the creek, preserving an ecological gem and creating

a mecca for ecotourism, education, and outdoor recreation just north of Houston.

"The forests along Spring Creek look nearly the same as they looked over 200 years ago when Akokisa Indians roamed the land, hunting and gathering their food as they traveled this gorgeous spring-fed waterway," says Mike Howlett, project manager for the Spring Creek Greenway. Jones Park, one of the anchor parks of the Spring Creek Greenway, is a nature sanctuary for a wide variety of plants, fungi, and wildlife, including Bald Eagles, Osprey, bobcats, coyotes, armadillos, opossums, and deer. "For lovers of wildlife, the Spring Creek Greenway is home to a multitude of plants and animals."

The Spring Creek Greenway offers multiple input and egress points for those with canoes or kayaks. For equestrians, Precinct 4 will be creating a mulch-based trail that runs parallel to the new 5.5-mile hard surface trail in 2012.



Photo provided by Precinct 4's Parks Department

*The trail and bridge are part of Phase 2 of the Spring Creek Greenway project.*

"Spring Creek holds the distinction of being one of only two remaining waterways in Harris County that has not been concreted, channelized, or otherwise modified to handle more water. In its natural state, the creek's secondary banks filter the water that flows to the creek during times of heavy rain, resulting in cleaner water that flows into the San Jacinto River and Lake Houston," Howlett says.

Precinct 4 has partnered with many key players in bringing about the construction of this section of trail (valued at \$1.75 million), including the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Harris County Flood Control District, Texas Department of Transportation, Montgomery County Precinct 3, and many others. Engineering services were provided by LJA Engineering, and Menade Inc. served as general contractor for construction of this section of trail. Precinct 4 has already begun acquiring land for Phase 3 of the project, which will connect Pundt Park to Riley-Fuzzel Road.

"Preserving urban forests improves every aspect of our quality of life. The Spring Creek Greenway not only helps to reduce flooding and improves air quality, but it provides a home for wildlife and an abundance of recreational opportunities for Precinct 4 residents," says Commissioner R. Jack Cagle.

## Upcoming Citizen's Police Academy

A driver is caught speeding and signaled to pull over into a parking lot. The patrol car parks behind the violator, and from out of the car steps a member of the Citizen's Police Academy (CPA). In this simulation of a traffic stop, the Harris County resident questions the driver, just like law enforcement officers do each and every day in Harris County. The real-life scenario is part of CPA, a program designed to give Harris County residents a working knowledge of the Harris County Sheriff's Office, including police procedures and protocol.

"The Citizen's Police Academy helps residents become better informed and opens the lines of communication between the Sheriff's Office and the public," says Sergeant Yvonne Cooper, Crime Prevention/D.A.R.E.

Residents meet once a week for 13 weeks to learn about a wide array of

topics, including the Texas Penal Code, patrol procedures, gang awareness, and terrorism. "Subject-matter experts from divisions like the Bomb Squad, Homicide, and Traffic Enforcement share information about their areas of expertise and the challenges they face each day," Cooper says.

Residents walk through several real-life scenarios, such as a traffic stop, a domestic disturbance, and a robbery. "We ask participants how they would respond in each scenario," she explains.

The next CPA program will be held in January. For more information or to register, call (713) 759-9454. A registration form is also available online at <http://www.hcso.hctx.net/documents/CPA%20Application.pdf>. Each applicant undergoes a thorough background check to screen for previous felony and Class A or B violations.



Harris County Precinct 4  
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Administration Office (713) 755-6444

Community Assistance Dept. (CAD) (281) 353-8424  
Residents east of Lake Houston  
may call toll free: (281) 456-8852

The Precinct 4 Community Assistance Department  
answers questions and takes requests for road and  
bridge maintenance.

Parks Reservations (281) 353-4196

Community Centers  
Precinct 4 community centers offer a variety of programs  
for children, families, and older adults. The centers can  
be reserved by local organizations for meetings.

Crosby Community Center (281) 462-0543

Mangum-Howell Center (281) 591-7830

May Community Center (281) 324-3373

Senior Adult Program (281) 893-3726

Subscriptions

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