



WESTCHASE TODAY

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District Positions for Mid-Century Success

Extending service plan through 2045, Board ensures continuation of managed prosperity



Extending the Horizon: Having petitioned to extend the Westchase District's service plan through 2045, property owners are thinking about their long-term futures. (Photo courtesy of David Reynolds, Digital Knight Productions)

When Westchase District was formed by the Texas Legislature in 1995, people developed film, rented videocassettes and used public pay phones. Today, those technologies are largely obsolete, and we can't imagine living without our smartphones, social media channels and streaming services. While we can't predict for certain what life will be like 25 years from now, one thing is for sure: Westchase District will still be around.

Last fall, more than 50 Westchase District property owners signed petitions requesting the District's Board of Directors, in accordance with state law, extend the life of the District, which previously was set to expire in 2023. In December, the Board voted unanimously to extend the District's service plan through 2045.

Forward thinking

The service plan maintains the current assessment rate of nine cents for every \$100 worth of property value that has been in place since 1995. "I'm glad the District's that much of a responsible fiduciary steward to do that," said Jeannie Bollinger, president of the Houston West Chamber of Commerce. "I think this shows that Westchase District is extremely forward-thinking about the future of its community."

"This extension ensures that Westchase District will be around to continue its core services of public safety, mobility and beautification into the middle of the 21st century," said Philip Schneidau, Board chair. "It positions us to maintain the infrastructure of streets and street-

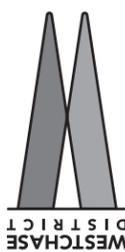
scapes, as well as the amenities – like parks and trails – that we're building through our 380 Program. Securing our operations for the future also allows us to seek an extension of the 380 Program and compete for additional grants."

The certainty and continuity of the District's services is critical when it comes to taking on large-scale, multimillion-dollar projects. "Some projects would consume our entire budget for one year, but since we're guaranteed to be around, we can phase some of those projects over multiple years," said Irma Sanchez, Westchase District's vice president of projects. "Extending our service plan allows us to scale our ability to improve the area for our stakeholders."

(Continued on Page 8)



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WESTCHASE TODAY is published quarterly by Westchase District, a municipal management district funded by local property owners in a 4.2 square-mile area centered on the Sam Houston Tollway between I-10 and US-59 on the west side of Houston, Texas. We promote economic growth by enhancing mobility, beautification, public safety, planning and development of the District.



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Building Blocks

Once upon a time it was Lincoln Logs, then Tinker Toys and still later it was LEGOS: toys with lots of little pieces that can be shaped into just about anything imaginable. If your parents (or maybe grandparents) were indulgent enough, you could also purchase motors, landscaping and animals to create entire communities – much like we are doing today in Westchase District. Okay, the parallel is not exact. We’re not going to take the entire District apart and put it away tonight, but various parts may well be re-purposed over time. Additionally, our building blocks are different. This edition of *Westchase Today* points out a few of them we are using to build the community we envision.

However, the goal we have in using these blocks is more significant than the blocks themselves. One of the late author Stephen Covey’s most often quoted mantras is, “Begin With the End in Mind.” While this is sound advice, and indeed pithy, it is not entirely original. In the Bible, we can find similar guidance in Luke 14:28, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?”

We have taken this advice – both old and new versions – to heart. Our overarching goal has long been to create a district that is mobile, safe and attractive. These attributes benefit each of our stakeholder groups and continue to be our central objective. However, the context in which we conduct our projects and programs changes over time due to market trends, demographics and competitive pressures, to name a few factors. Even as our approach has evolved since 1995, our focus has not shifted.

This focus was a key factor in the area owners’ recent approval of extending the Westchase District Service Plan (see page 1). We greatly appreciate their support and take this responsibility seriously. Being assured of many more years ahead, we can take on larger projects that are phased over years. It’s also a big plus for our owners and tenants with long-term perspectives.

Twenty-three years ago, public art was not part of our program of work. But as we have become a more urban area, we are seeking to improve our



Westchase District Board Chair Philip Schneidau

marketing edge in attracting millennials. We have discovered the value of enhancing the visual appeal of our public infrastructure, and we’re adding to it throughout our area in a variety of applications. Making our community both more attractive and memorable is a win-win. You can read more about this work on page 4.

Improving public safety is key to our mission and this spring we’re seeing advancement in the form of emergency call boxes that we have added along our trails and will be included in our parks that are in the planning stages. The units’ unique base design allows us to easily move and relocate them if necessary, as if we were popping LEGO pieces on and off a baseplate. Not only were these high-tech devices not part of our original plans, neither were the trails that they help protect and enhance. This is adaptation on top of adaptation.

These projects and more help answer the question we continue to ask, “How can we help our owners today?” We might be playing with the pieces as we build a better future for the District, but we’re not just playing around.

Overseeing a Rich Field of Opportunity

Real estate pro Pamela Culver joins Board of Directors

Pamela Culver is among the lucky few who land their dream job straight out of college. With both a bachelor’s degree in environmental design and a master’s degree in land development from Texas A&M University, she was recruited by Richfield Real Estate Corporation to acquire and manage real estate in Texas and Arizona, including property in Westchase District. With 20 years’ experience in the area, Culver was an ideal addition last summer to the District’s Board of Directors.

Waiting on a vision

As senior real estate manager with Richfield, Culver oversees a land portfolio of more than 20 properties in Texas, California, Utah and Wyoming. “I discovered in college that I really like the finance side of the real estate development business,” she said. “It’s the variety among our properties that keeps me engaged and interested.”

Richfield burst onto the West Houston real estate scene when it acquired and

repositioned the Carillon Shopping center in 1995. Diversifying into offices with West8 Tower and Meadowglen Building, and into multifamily with the Portico at West 8 apartments, Richfield holds a 100 acre-parcel of undeveloped land at the southeast corner of Westheimer and Beltway 8 – one of the hottest properties in Houston.

Culver said while Richfield’s leadership eventually wants to develop the land to include residential, retail and entertainment options, market turns over the years have kept the company in a holding pattern. “The owner sees the value in long-term holds and she’s been patiently waiting for nearly 20 years for just the right market conditions to move forward,” she said.

“Our vision for the land is that it becomes the bullseye of Westchase District,” she added. “We’ve discussed with the District having a signature park and festival area that would draw visitors from around the region. Every time we

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Meat Some New Faces in Farming

Three protein vendors represent changes in ranching business

In 2014, *Rangelands* magazine published a report evaluating 90 years of census data and predicting that the average age of American ranchers will be 60 years old by 2050. However, when you visit the Westchase District Farmers Market to buy meat, don't expect to encounter any grizzled, Stetson-wearing cowboys with spurs and bandanas. The three protein vendors at the market represent a new breed of ranchers who burst preconceived notions of typical farmers.



Buy Some Bison: *Katerra Exotics* owner Patrick Bierschwale is always a good sport, cheerfully posing for an advertising photo for the farmers market.

Katerra Exotics

Patrick Bierschwale was a professional mixed martial arts fighter coaching Brazilian jiu jitsu and kickboxing when he decided to become a rancher. "I was eating a lot of bison and people were always asking me where they could get some, so I decided to start selling it," he said. Today, Bierschwale owns Katerra Exotics (katerraexotics.com), specializing in pasture-raised bison and other grass-fed meats.

Operating from a base of about 100 acres in Katy, Texas, Bierschwale also works with ranches in Bryan, Chappell Hill and Waller. "We raise bison, cows, goats, lamb and wild boar as well as chickens and turkeys," he said. "We process about two bison a month, one cow, one goat, one sheep and five to ten hogs, which adds up to several thousand

pounds of meat. My biggest problem is not having enough animals to meet my customer demand."

Bierschwale said that while he enjoys meeting customers at the farmers market, his favorite part of his business is working with the animals themselves. "I have five kids, including a two-year-old climbing up on me all the time, so time spent feeding and hauling the animals feels like a relaxing lifestyle," he said, laughing.

Hibiscus Hill Farm & Ranch

As an immigration attorney, Ellie Trinh spent a lot of time on the road and was frequently away from her two young children.



Farming Family: Grant Wilson (far left) and Ellie Trinh, (far right) became farmers after seeking to improve their children's health.

Concerned about their eczema and milk allergies, she started buying them goat milk, later purchasing raw milk at local farms. "We tasted milk at about every dairy farm within a two-hour radius of Houston, trying to find the best," she said. That search led Trinh and her husband, Grant Wilson, to purchase a 14-acre farm in Tomball

and become dairy farmers overnight. "We moved from a high-rise to a trailer next to the milking barn," she added.

Milking goats and Jersey cows, Trinh and her family eventually sold their farm to merge with the 160-acre Hibiscus Hill Farm & Ranch in Waller, Texas (hibiscushillfarm.com). "They had been processing our meat for years, and we felt the owners' values matched our own," Trinh said. Hibiscus Hill sells 100 percent pasture-raised, grass-fed beef, lamb, pork, chicken, bison and goats. A trained scientist, Trinh also developed a line of live probiotic skin care products for eczema, acne and dermatitis, offered at the farmers market and online at skinprobiotics.net.

"I try to educate my customers because I believe trust is built when they become more knowledgeable," she said. "I love what I do now and best of all, I get to be with my kids more now. And, because we've cleaned up our diet, we don't get sick."

Frydek Heritage Farm

Three years ago, Chris Lowe was working as a construction administrator for an architectural firm in Austin when he and Julie, his wife, decided to purchase her grandparents' 23-acre farm in Sealy, Texas. "Several years ago, we both read *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and started buying all our produce and meat from local farms," Chris said. "We'd always talked about having land and while we started out as homesteaders, we decided to do something with the farm."

Having no prior farming experience, the Lowes attended county-sponsored seminars, took classes through Texas A&M, became involved with the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and toured other farms to learn best practices. Now they own and operate Frydek Heritage Farm (frydekheritagefarm.com), raising Gulf Coast native lamb, heritage breed hogs and about 150 chickens. "We sell shoulder roasts, sausage, pork chops, and bacon, as well as both free-range chicken and duck eggs," Chris said.

Using rotational grazing techniques, the Lowes strive to keep their pastures healthy. "We like to think we produce healthy, wholesome food that's raised with a conscience," Julie said. "We're looking forward to bringing more products to the market, so if you live or work in the area, come see us on Thursdays. Whether you're on a Keto, Whole30, no sugar or Paleo diet, we have you covered."



Hi, Lowe! Chris Lowe with Frydek Heritage Farm offers smoked pork sausage and free-range eggs every week at the Westchase District Farmers Market.

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conduct a feasibility study, the costs go up, along with the population density needed to make this project a hit. It all really needs to be built in one shot versus piecemeal construction, so for now we're waiting for things to align in multiple industries."

Because of Richfield's vast holdings in the District, Culver has a long history interacting with District staff. "They've always kept me well-informed about transportation, beautification and planning projects," she said. "Now as a Board member, I'm looking forward to diving into the nitty gritty of it all. I feel like I'm surrounded by some great brains and I'm honored to be a part of it."

Family and fandom

Once a resident of West Houston, Culver now lives in Sugar Land with George, her husband, who also works in Westchase District as GIS director for LJA Engineering and Surveying. "People often comment on how they think he looks like actors Jason Bateman or Tim Williams, a.k.a. the Trivago Guy," she said, laughing. "But we were high school sweethearts in San Antonio, so I knew him before those guys became famous."

When not shooing away mistaken autograph seekers, the Culvers spend most of their free time transporting their two teenage children to baseball tournaments, photography classes or weightlifting competitions. "We are definitely their chauffeurs, cheerleaders and number one fans," she said.



A P.C. Addition to the Board: As senior manager of real estate with Richfield, Pamela Culver oversees properties in Texas, California, Utah and Wyoming.

Vote for the “Best of Westchase”

You get to choose the Chosen Ones in online contest

Outta the way, Oscars! Git gone, Grammys! Ease on down the road, Emmys! After an extended absence, the only awards that really matter have returned: Best of Westchase. Whether you live in Westchase District or merely “reside” here during workday hours, you probably have your favorite places to eat, shop and maybe even hide from your boss. We celebrated and honored your local favorites in 2005 and 2010, and we decided it’s time to rekindle the love affair with all things Westchase. We want to hear from you, so let ‘er rip!

Just one rule

The only requirement for nominating is that all winners must be located within Westchase District boundaries. For a refresher, visit westchasedistrict.com/land-use-map. We’re accepting nominations through Friday, March 29 at westchasedistrict.com/best in the following categories:

Living in Westchase District

- Best Apartment Community
- Best Private School
- Best Place to Take Out-of-Towners

Shopping in Westchase District

- Best Clothing Store
- Best Grocery Store
- Best Non-chain Retail Store

Working in Westchase District

- Best Company to Work for
- Best Charity/Nonprofit
- Best Place to Hide from Your Boss
- Best Office Lunch Catering
- Best Office Lobby Space

Amenities in Westchase District

- Best Bank/Credit Union
- Best Brunch
- Best Farmers Market Vendor
- Best Happy Hour
- Best Higher Education
- Best Hotel Bar
- Best Kid-friendly Dining
- Best Landscaped Area
- Best Nail Salon
- Best Place to Get Fit
- Best Public Art Installation
- Best Romantic Dining
- Reader’s Choice: Best _____

Once nominees are selected, you can cast your votes online from April 8 through April 26. We’ll announce the winners, present them with a commemorative plaque and buy each of them an appetizer at a happy hour event in early May. Details to follow in upcoming issues of *The Wire*. Also, we’ll have a special results section in the Summer 2019 issue of *Westchase Today*. So send in your nominations, vote on your favorites and stay tuned...it’s going to be the best!



Good Art = Good Business

More public art in District makes smart economic sense

Westchase District has enjoyed superior public safety, landscaping and accessibility for decades, but in recent years its public art has helped to distinguish the area as a hub for culture and artistic expression. Since last fall, the District has commissioned a handful of new pieces and still more public art is on the way.

Recent activity

Mural artist Larry Crawford has contributed two new pieces of original art in the District. The first depicts various runners enjoying a jog on a trail. From the smallest in a stroller to the four-legged variety, everyone can enjoy a run or walk along the trail on a beautiful day. The mural is located just north of Meadowglen Lane on the west side of the HCC Campus Trail.

Crawford also painted a thought-provoking mural on the west-facing wall of the Market at Westchase shopping center at Wilcrest and Westheimer (11103 Westheimer). The mural, which is 25 feet tall and 64 feet wide, features characters

ranging from *The Wizard of Oz’s* Dorothy to an astronaut asking, “How can the sky be the limit when there are footprints on the moon?”

Local artist Reginald Adams painted two vibrant murals on both sides of the box culvert where Walnut Bend Lane spans a Harris County flood control channel and the District’s Library Loop Trail. The east side of the culvert features colorful marine life while the west side is decorated with lush plants.

Adams also painted the west side of the box culvert and its surrounding concrete apron at Rogerdale Road, just north of Richmond. A colorful submarine and aquatic scene help punctuate the eastern end of the Library Loop Trail. Finally, Adams painted a colorful lion directly on the sidewalk of Trailside Park. When viewed from certain angles, the lion takes on a three-dimensional effect.

In addition to these installations, Crawford has painted QR codes on two of the District’s largest murals. When scanned with a mobile device, the codes take users to westchasedistrict.com.

More to come

Louis Jullien, Westchase District’s projects director, said several more pieces are budgeted for this year. “We’ll have more playful elements on the sidewalk of Trailside Park as well as a large mural at the park made from a repurposed construction sign,” he said. “Also, we hope to paint some large wings on the side of building just off Richmond Avenue that will make for a really neat place for selfies.”

Jullien said he believes the District’s investments in public art aren’t just for cultural or aesthetic purposes but that they help to foster social interaction that can lead to creating a community. “They’re investments in placemaking that build pride and a sense of belonging in the District,” he said. “Each public art project by itself doesn’t create a great public space, but taken together, their continued visibility, publicity and brand identification help to create an aura about the Westchase District that no developer can purchase at any price.”

For a map of all public art in Westchase District, visit westchasedistrict.com/public-art.



Splashes of Color: This aquatic-themed mural can be found on Rogerdale Road, just north of Richmond Avenue.

A Westchase Classic Remains Relevant

Newly-renovated Churrascos Westchase adapts with the times

In November 1995, the owners of Churrascos wanted a more desirable location for the South American restaurant they started in 1988, so they moved to the newly-formed Westchase District staking out (no pun intended) the high-traffic corner of Westheimer and Gessner. In the 24 years since, both Churrascos and the District have grown tremendously and enjoy solid reputations thanks to a willingness to keep current with their respective marketplaces.

Keeping it contemporary

The Churrascos brand has expanded to include six Houston-area locations, as well as an Américas restaurant in River Oaks, the online-only Amazon Grill and Churrascos Catering. Last year, workers completed a renovation of the 10,000-square-foot location at 9705 Westheimer, allowing the facility to better accommodate rehearsal dinners, wedding receptions and corporate events. “After more than 20 years in a 40-plus-year-old building, we wanted to modernize things without losing the warmth of the hacienda touches,” said Fred Espinoza, Churrascos’ chief operating officer. “We took out some walls to create a more open feel near the bar, lightened the colors a bit and remodeled the restrooms. We took a bit of a risk because we didn’t know for sure how guests would react, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive. We’re glad we continued betting on Westchase.”



Be Our Guest: (From left) Manuel Callirgos, general manager; Paula Vargas, banquet and service manager; and Fred Espinoza, chief operating officer, invite you to experience first-class hospitality and delicious South American cuisine at the newly-renovated Churrascos Westchase.

Once the general manager of the Westheimer restaurant, Espinoza has been with the Churrascos Restaurant Group long enough to witness dynamic demographic shifts. “Over time, our clientele has shifted dramatically,” he said. “Fortunately, we’ve been able to adapt quickly. In the past three years alone, our catering business has taken off to where now it accounts for about 20 percent of our overall volume. Also, we’re the preferred caterers for the

Houston Texans. So even on days when our dining area doesn’t look full, the back of the house is still cranking out food.”

He added that Amazon Grill, a virtual restaurant, did more than \$300,000 last year without any real estate footprint. “People still want our food, but nowadays, they want convenience,” he said. “There are now more than 8,000 restaurants in Houston, so we are honored that people still choose us.”



Meating Expectations: Ordering the Churrasco, a signature center cut of certified Angus beef, is never a mis-steak.

Showtime

Espinoza said Churrascos leadership doesn’t view the brand as merely a producer of food. “Rather, we see ourselves as an entertainment company,” he said. “We don’t have customers, we have guests. And, for an hour or so, we want them to be comforted in a stress-free bubble where, through our food, our service and our ambiance, we relax them and provide them with an awesome experience. It’s showtime for us.”

Manuel Callirgos, the restaurant’s general manager said that presenting an excellent experience extends to creating a fun and supportive environment for Churrascos team members as well. “We want them to feel welcome and appreciated and respected. In an industry with high turnover, we pride ourselves on the fact that at this location we have several of the original employees still with us and we have second and even third generations of teammates with us.”

Callirgos, who started as a Churrascos line cook out of culinary school, said he has fond memories of celebrating his ninth birthday in one of the private party rooms he now oversees. “There’s a lot of history here,” he said. “And a lot of plantain chips - we fry more than 500 pounds of plantains every week at this location alone!”

In addition to its famous plantain chips, Churrascos offers regular steak nights (\$15.95 after 4 p.m.), happy hour specials all day every Thursday and a Sunday brunch from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. featuring more than 60 items. “Come by and rediscover us,” Callirgos said. “Or, if you prefer, we’re happy to deliver to you.”

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Technology-assisted Conversations in the Collaboratorium

West Houston Institute offers solution design center for businesses and nonprofits

When the Westchase District's Board of Directors met last fall for their annual retreat, they convened in an innovative 4,000-square-foot solution design center at Houston Community College's West Houston Institute, located at 2811 Hayes Road. The space is called the Collaboratorium and in it trained facilitators conduct workshops using an interactive touchscreen that resembles something from the sci-fi movie *Minority Report*. It's a unique facility that employs the latest technology in the service of inspiring fresh thinking and creative solutions for tackling tough tasks.

Leveling the field

Laura Williamson, Ph.D, is the Collaboratorium's program director. She said the space was intentionally designed to bring people out of their familiar surroundings and facilitate and support creative problem solving. "It's a hub for creative design thinking," she said. "We have a research-based process for helping people work collaboratively to address the wicked challenges they face. We focus on what groups want to accomplish and how we can help them work together to achieve that."

A typical session begins with people mingling informally in an entry foyer before moving to one of two large group spaces, either a roundtable room designed for presentations and discussions or a theater presentation room which houses a futuristic visual collaboration system. Led by a trained facilitator, participants contribute comments via provided tablet computers or through an app on their own smartphones. The comments are projected onto a 21-foot-wide touchscreen where facilitators can manually manipulate and rearrange comments within the digital space.

"Research shows that people often self-censor for fear of voicing unpopular or untested opinions," Williamson said. "One of the key benefits of using this technology is that it's anonymous and everyone has an equal voice. It encourages people to offer thoughts in a group setting and levels the field when it comes to submitting ideas and opinions. It also allows users from remote locations to participate."



High Tech, High Touch: Irma Sanchez, Westchase District's vice president of projects, manipulates comments projected onto an interactive touch-wall hosting a cloud-based visual collaboration system at the Collaboratorium.

For any size

Once participants reach consensus on the big picture, they may adjourn to one of six glass-enclosed conference rooms equipped with flat screen monitors. "These rooms are designed for small group sessions of six to eight participants to further discuss the aspects or details of possible solutions," Williamson said. "That could be for developing a new product line, a new way of serving customers or a new way of working internally or with partners."

Williamson said the process works best with a minimum of six people and, while the Collaboratorium holds a maximum of 36 people, she can easily scale up to accommodate as many as 450 participants using the Institute's adjacent auditorium. "This summer, we're hosting a regional conference in the auditorium, but are bringing the organization's top people into the Collaboratorium for a special session," she said.

Since it opened last year, Williamson has hosted events for professionals in the fields of education, energy and economic development. "We're best suited for entrepreneurs, established businesses, professional organizations, and collaborative groups from different companies," she said. "We've also had outside facilitation consultants use the Collaboratorium for organizational development sessions with their clients."

Rental fees for the Collaboratorium include what Williamson calls "wraparound services" such as pre-meeting consultations, planning agendas and a follow-up meeting presenting content produced during the day. Educational and nonprofit discounts are available. For more information contact Williamson at laura.williamson@hccs.edu.

Collaboratorium Solution Design Center at the West Houston Institute

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Roundtables Discussion: Philip Schneidau (standing, center) addresses the Westchase District Board of Directors at the West Houston Institute's Collaboratorium.

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Applying Compassion to Community Patrols

At a crash scene or in the classroom, Ofc. Angela Hart-Joseph seeks to understand

As a teenager growing up in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Angela Hart-Joseph was fascinated watching the psychological thriller film *The Silence of the Lambs*, featuring Jodie Foster as a young FBI trainee. “I was inspired seeing a strong female who could solve a case and bring killers to justice,” Hart-Joseph said. “That movie definitely pushed me in the direction of a career in law enforcement.” While her career so far hasn’t pitted her skills against any Hannibal Lecter types, Hart-Joseph has made it her life’s work to uncover the truth and make both Houston and Westchase District safer places.



Be Sure to Buckle: As an accident investigator for the Houston Police Department, Officer Angela Hart-Joseph knows all too well how seat belts can save lives.

From hair salons to HPD

After graduating from Vicksburg High School, Hart-Joseph obtained her certification as a hairdresser and worked in various salons as she put herself through college. She moved to Jackson, MS to earn her Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice from Jackson State University, then went through the Jackson Police Academy. While working as a patrol officer for the Jackson Police Department, she earned dual Master’s degrees in Criminology and Sociology. “I’ve always had two to three jobs; it’s just

something that I’m used to,” she said. “Why should I just sit at home when I could be working?”

Looking to advance her career, Hart-Joseph transferred to the Houston Police Department in 2006, initially patrolling the Westside, Clear Lake and Midwest divisions, before finding her niche for the past decade in Accident Investigations. “I travel all over Harris County following up on a lot of motor vehicle fatalities as well as any collisions involving police officers and government employees,” she said. “My work is about reconstructing the scene to arrive at the truth of what happened. For me, the most difficult cases are those involving children, but at the same time they’re the most rewarding ones to solve.”

Hart-Joseph joined the Westchase District Patrol last summer, working two shifts per week. “I was already familiar with the area, so when Lieutenant Paul George, my shift commander, told me about an opening, it seemed like a good fit,” she said. “I enjoy interacting with the business owners and I think they appreciate our presence and our visibility in the District.”

Lessons taught and learned

An adjunct professor with Houston Community College since 2007, this semester Hart-Joseph has increased her visibility in Westchase District by teaching Introduction to Sociology classes at HCC’s Westchase District campus located at 2811 Hayes Road. “Sociology and criminology both look at the factors that motivate people to act the ways they do,” she said. “As both a police officer and a teacher, I’m always mindful when I arrive at a scene of the possible biases and experiences that people may have about law enforcement.”

Hart-Joseph added that whether it’s a victim or a suspect, her experience has taught her that everyone wants to be heard. “I try to be compassionate about where people are coming from and remain open to understanding all perspectives,” she said. “As a police officer, I’ve learned it’s all about how I present myself, how I speak to someone and remembering that listening is everything.”

When not working or teaching, Hart-Joseph said she enjoys family vacations with her teenage daughter to island locations: “Anything dealing with blue water and sand – I’m there!”

Attention Trail Users: We Now Have Blue Light Specials

District installs emergency call boxes along trail system

In today’s world of constant connectivity, it seems everyone is tethered to electronic devices 24/7. But Don McKinney, Westchase District’s vice president of Public Safety, said it’s not uncommon for people exercising to be without their cell phones. That prevents them from being able to quickly alert authorities in the event of an emergency. As an added amenity, Westchase District recently installed eight emergency call boxes at various locations along the District’s trail system. The 10-foot, solar-powered towers are equipped with video cameras and allow trail users to call the District’s dispatch service, which can send officers to each station.

A level of confidence

“The call boxes provide trail users with a level of confidence as well as a form of communication during many scenarios that may arise,” McKinney said. “That could be anything from reporting suspicious activity to requesting assistance with urgent health issues.”

When not in use, the call boxes emit a constant yet calming blue light. When activated, the solid light begins blinking to alert responders to the general location of the incident. When the call button is pressed on the illuminated front panel, callers are greeted by an answering service that can both communicate with the caller as well as transfer them to an appropriate first responder.

Flexible advantage

Designed to operate in harsh weather conditions and be tamper-resistant, the American-made call boxes use wireless technology and feature a unique support platform to provide the District maximum flexibility

in determining the towers’ locations. “The towers are attached to an auger-based foundation that we simply screw into the ground, so there’s no digging or use of rebar and concrete to disrupt the surroundings,” said Duane Rumski, national sales director for Case Emergency Systems. “If the District decides to relocate a tower, we just pop off the tower, unscrew the foundation from the ground and move it to a new spot.”

Rumski said each tower checks in daily with a centralized computer that ensures each unit is working properly. “Our system is extremely flexible, reliable and cost effective,” he said. “School districts in Cy-Fair, Fort Bend, Katy and Conroe use our towers. We even use satellite phone technology for towers on Indian reservations in Colorado and along the Texas-Mexico border for the Department of Homeland Security.”

Great value

McKinney said that both the initial investment in solar panels was less than that of traditional electrical connections and the panels are not dependent on a main energy grid and therefore will be less impactful on the District’s electricity bill long-term. “We simply avoid a lot of the headaches and pitfalls associated with hardwired systems,” he said.

McKinney said that an additional four units are budgeted to be installed next year. “Based on the data we collect this year, we’ll have a pretty clear picture on where the ideal locations will be to install the next batch,” he said. “I think these towers add great value to our trails and will attract more people to get out and use them to exercise, recreate and explore the District.”

High school intern Connor Elliott contributed to this article.



Call Install: Workers recently erected eight emergency call boxes at various locations along the Westchase District trail system.

(Continued from Page 1)

Stakeholder benefits

Greg Cardwell is a real estate services manager for Phillips 66, one of the District's major employers. He said the District's continued presence is reassuring to companies like his headquartered in the area. "The city seems to be moving west and many of our families live on the west side of Houston as well, so getting into the office safely and efficiently is important for us to recruit and retain the best employees," he said. "Of course, the beautification of the District and the amenities available here enhance the experience as well. Trusting that those levels of service will continue well into the future gives Phillips 66 confidence about growing our presence in the District."

The service plan extension has potential benefits for residents of the District as well, said Stacy Hunt, executive director with Greystar, the world's largest apartment property management firm. In Westchase District, Greystar manages two apartment communities: Plaza at Westchase and Richmond Townhomes.

"Most apartment communities have a life expectancy of about 50 to 60 years," he said. "What the service plan extension means for the multifamily industry is that investors can go out today and buy existing communities in Westchase District that are 30-35 years old and in good shape, improve them now and know that should they choose to tear down and rebuild a new community, the same controls that have helped create a quality environment will be there."

Hunt added that equity capital firms increasingly are looking at multifamily communities as long-term investments. "It's not build-and-flip or buy-and-flip anymore," he said. "They want to buy for the cash flow for 20 or 30 years. That's a good sign, because flippers have a tendency not to take care of properties, while long-term holders do take care of them and budget for capital expenditures, which helps everybody. So I think the District extending its service plan another 25 years will only attract more long-term, patient capital to the area."

Anticipating needs

"The beauty of this process is that it was owner-generated with zero opposition," said Dave Gilkeson, Westchase District vice president and chief operating officer. "That tells me the community completely supports this effort. It's not just the District saying that we want to go on longer. It's the community saying we want the District to go on longer. Our owners recognize that when we do our job and grow their values, not only does it benefit them, but then the District has more resources and it creates an upward spiral."

Gilkeson said he thinks most owners and tenants intend to be in the District long-term, so they want someone looking even beyond their tenure. "I think our owners see us delivering a value that is necessary to their operations and have confidence in us because we communicate with them frequently," he said. "We're sensitive enough to know what they need, often before they ask for it."

Neighborhood News

The Westchase District Advisory Board recently honored **Verita Duncan, Blair Johnson** and **Tiffany Schreiber** as recipients of the 2018 Westchase District Community Impact Award for exemplifying the best attributes of our community.

Congratulations, ladies, and thank you for your ongoing efforts to make a positive impact in Westchase District! To view a video about the recipients shown at the awards luncheon on January 10, visit [youtube.com/WestchaseDistrictHou](https://www.youtube.com/WestchaseDistrictHou).

Westchase District is fortunate to be surrounded by many good neighbors - both individuals and companies - who are making a positive impact in the community. As you notice these neighbors doing good work in the District, please consider nominating them for the 2019 Westchase District Community Impact Awards. Contact Dave Gilkeson, dgilkeson@westchasedistrict.com, for more info.



Verita Duncan



Blair Johnson



Tiffany Schreiber

It's not too late to join us for the **22nd Annual Westchase District Corporate Challenge**, taking place Friday, March 29 at the Quillian Recreation Center. It's a fun day of networking and team-building where Westchase District businesses compete against each other in six different light athletic events. The prize? Bragging rights and the coveted traveling trophy.

This field day for adults - a fundraiser for the Westchase District Community Fund - is open to Westchase District businesses. Since 1998, the Westchase District's Corporate Challenge has raised more than \$263,000 for area charities, including



Quillian Center's summer day camps. Event sponsorships are still available; contact Sherry Fox at sfox@westchasedistrict.com for details.

Bill.com, the digital business payments company based in Palo Alto, California, is expanding its operations to Houston and will move into 25,000 square feet of office space at CityWestPlace later this spring. The company initially will operate out of TechSpace coworking offices in the same complex.

A leader in the financial technology, or fintech, industry, Bill.com develops software to manage billing, invoices and payments. It processes more than \$60 billion in payments annually. In a press release, the company said it is actively hiring a team including developers and customer support professionals with other roles to follow. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the company aims to hire about 125 employees over the next three years. It will initially ramp up for engineering and customer service but will hire for other roles once it moves into permanent office space.



Aldi, the German-based discount supermarket chain, will open a 18,900 square-foot store in Westchase District at 9525 Westheimer, in the former ACE Hardware location.

Aldi has been in the United States since 1976 and currently has more than 1,800 locations nationwide, including about 30 stores in Greater Houston. According to Kristen Moore with Brixmor Property Group, the store is scheduled to open in Q4 of 2019.

