

## Underground Improvements Bring Drainage Advancements to Walnut Bend Lane

*Westchase District roadway receives above-ground and below-ground upgrades*



**Something for Everyone:** Motorists, cyclists and pedestrians will all enjoy the new amenities coming to Walnut Bend Lane.

Westchase District’s largest ever capital improvement project is underway on Walnut Bend Lane. Workers are rebuilding nearly 6,000 feet of the roadway between Westpark Drive and Westheimer Road. The project scope includes some features that everyone will see and enjoy including enhanced sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, dedicated bike lanes, custom bus shelters, bike racks and extensive landscaping. But some of the most impressive improvements are the ones you won’t see.

Walnut Bend Lane was built in the mid-1970s. Some years ago, Westchase District considered resurfacing the street to address failing concrete, shifting panels and uneven sidewalks. “Once we delved into the project, engineers discovered larger issues with underground water and sewer lines in dire need of repairs,” said Irma Sanchez, Westchase District’s vice president of projects.

Any roadway built two and three decades ago doesn’t meet current criteria, which means the engineers designing the project start at ground zero. “You only get one chance to tear up the road and make it right,” said Ricky Gonzalez, of the engineering firm Lockwood, Andrews and Newnam (LAN), which designed the project.

“These retrofit projects tend to be really challenging,” added Matt Manges, LAN’s stormwater practice lead. “First we try to understand the historic issues. Is there a history of flooding? Are there resident complaints? Are there City of Houston issues? We want to resolve historical issues and bring it up to current design standards.”

Through all the recent “rain events,” businesses and apartment communities along Walnut Bend had not reported any structural flooding. But engineers knew

they had an opportunity to reduce the flood risk along the roadway.

Unlike a new greenfield development, where a detention pond would be built to accommodate runoff, Walnut Bend is being re-built using existing right-of-way. “When you’re not expanding the roadway, you have to make do with what you have. You can’t take the problem and send it somewhere else,” said Manges.

“You have to get the water into the inlets and get it quickly off the roadway,” said Gonzalez. “You have to store it somewhere while the water in the channel recedes. We can’t store it on the ground, so we store it underground. It’s called underground storage or inline detention.”

*(Continued on Page 8)*



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## The Back (of curb) Story

Please forgive the pun in the headline above, but it really captures today's cultural trend of wanting to look behind the scenes. It also reflects a very important construction element of our largest infrastructure project. In this issue of *Westchase Today*, you can read about the \$20 million total reconstruction of Walnut Bend Lane (see page 1). It seems fairly clear cut: use public funds to replace a worn-out street and maybe freshen things up a bit. True enough; but as you'd expect, there is a back story and the work being undertaken that we refer to as "back-of-curb" really sets this project apart.

The funds for the project started with the Westchase District's 380 agreement with the City of Houston. Originally, Walnut Bend was slated for a low-budget overlay, but our investigation found it needed far more help and should be replaced. That brought about an opportunity to re-imagine the roadway and facilitate more cars plus transit (including school buses), bikes and pedestrians. We did this and used the resulting design to secure a \$9.7 million federal grant to build the project. We then incorporated a portion of the funds from the City's budget for Walnut Bend, plus funds from the Westchase District 380 program to complete the budget. By combining federal, city and local funds, we were able to leverage each of the partners' investments and provide for a much higher-impact project. All of this took years to complete and necessitated securing easements from dozens of owners (thank you!) and successful negotiations of complicated inter-agency agreements. So that is one back story, but what we achieved through the design is the second back-of-curb story -- and probably of much greater impact for our stakeholders.

It was clear early on that the entire roadway would need to be replaced. That meant not just new paving, but new sidewalks and storm sewers and created a significant design opportunity for all the elements in the right-of-way that were not streets, curbs or sidewalks. We found that we could incorporate bike lanes, new landscaping and pedestrian lighting for starters. Our team worked with METRO and Alief ISD (thanks business partners!) to ensure we had safe, consolidated



Westchase District Board Chair Philip Schneidau

locations for picking up and dropping off bus passengers. And METRO has gone further, helping fund the custom bus shelters in the project area.

The plans for the project were also adjusted to upsize the storm sewers in the project area. This was not a result of Hurricane Harvey – fortunately Westchase District experienced no structural flooding from the storm. Rather, it was a cost-effective way to reduce the impact of future floods and provide the increased capacity needed for future development.

We're not handing out trophies, but everyone is a winner with this project. Taxpayers win as their funds are leveraged and multiplied. People who use the corridor – motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders win as each element is accounted for and enhanced. The community wins with the development of an attractive project that supports additional development and finally, Westchase District's neighbors secure the benefits of reduced flooding risk.

So yes, it is an infrastructure project. But now you know the back stor(ies).

## Putting our West Foot Forward

### *Granite Properties' Steve West joins board of directors*

Committed. Fair. Team-oriented. Gregarious. Those who know him best would use these words to describe Steve West, the most recent addition to the District's Board of Directors. And it's no wonder he is so well-liked among his peers. Having attended nine different schools by his junior year of high school, West quickly adapted to meeting new people on a regular basis. Unknowingly he was being equipped for his future, as relationship building would prove an integral part of his success in commercial real estate. "When I meet people, I develop relationships and establish a strong rapport quickly. It's all I've ever known. And people would always rather do business with someone they like."

### The west is history

The product of two parents in education, West saw the value in obtaining a degree that would afford him the widest range of career possibilities. After obtaining a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Texas State University, West found a career he enjoyed in new home sales. Once married with a child, however, he quickly realized the need for a career that allowed him more time to enjoy his family.

That's when a friend introduced him to the world of commercial real estate, and he has never looked back.

"I always knew I needed to be in sales," West said. "Letting others know the benefits a particular product would give them...I enjoy that." West has done just that as Director of Leasing for Granite Properties since 2001.

### Best of the west

Granite Properties maintains a unique position in the industry. "We do most purchases and developments on an all-cash basis, giving us an advantage over the competition," West said. "It allows for quick decision making, which is of the utmost importance. Speed of execution is the name of the game."

Granite, a commercial real estate investment, development and management company, owns and manages properties in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Denver and Southern California. As an office building owner, Granite provides customer-centric and hospitality-driven property management, which attracts an array of customers including law firms, energy companies and accounting businesses. "We like



# Big Business for Small Farmers

*District's farmers market ranks among Texas' top earners*

Since Westchase District launched its weekly farmers market in 2013, Texas has seen steady growth in the number of certified farmers markets offering customers fresh, local products. Added together, these relatively tiny markets produce some huge windfalls for their vendors – about \$23.7 million in reported annual profits.

According to Scott Sroufe with the Texas Department of Agriculture, the department's Certified Farmers Market Program has certified 49 markets or market associations operating 97 separate markets throughout the state this year. "Some are operated by a food bank or a cooperative of area growers," he said. "Those market associations sometimes have more than one location for markets or host markets during multiple days throughout the week."

With an economic impact of \$240,000 in reported revenues in 2018, the Westchase District Farmers Market is the highest-grossing, single-day, weekday certified farmers market in Greater Houston, Sroufe said. "Statewide, Westchase is the fifth highest-grossing single-day market – that includes both weekday and weekend markets," he added. "And the market is Texas' tenth highest-grossing farmers market overall."

Whichever number you choose to focus on, each one underscores that over the past six years, the Westchase District Farmers Market has become a big deal. "Our market generates nearly a quarter of a million dollars for local vendors," said Sherry Fox, Westchase District's vice president of communications. "That's an economic development success story we want to shout from the rooftops."

When researching farmers markets years ago, Fox said she repeatedly noticed three factors contributing to a market's success or failure: location, vendor mix and management. "We're located on Westheimer Road, one of the most-travelled

roadways in Texas, and we've grown to regularly feature about 30 vendors offering a variety of products," she said. "But the real Miracle-Gro for us has been the excellent work of John Carey, our market manager. He relates to, and empathizes with, our vendors and has earned their respect. He understands how to welcome and nurture new vendors and encourage their success."

## Holiday shopping underway

The market always experiences a boost in sales during the holidays. "Whether you're shopping for your holiday meal or holiday gifts, we have some excellent selections at the farmers market," said Carey. "You can pick up farm-raised meat from Katterra Exotics and all the vegetables for the sides are

to refer to tenants as customers because they are, in fact, our customer. We want to be as service-oriented as possible. Our goal is that once a customer leases in one of our buildings, they'll have no reason to want to leave."

Granite has long been invested in Westchase District. Currently they own and manage Granite Briarpark Green (3151 Briarpark) and 2925 Briarpark. They maintain their Houston corporate offices on the second floor of Granite Briarpark Green. "We love being part of the District. Its accessibility to all parts of town is quite appealing," he said.

## On the homefront

While West has garnered much success in his career through building and maintaining relationships, this skill is most evident in his personal life. Happily married for 40 years with four adult children, he says his family is his biggest accomplishment. "We all still really enjoy being around each other and spending time together. That can't be an accident after all this time, and I'm very proud of that."

While not working or spending time with his family, West enjoys time on the golf course.



**Seasonal produce:** *We have all the farm-fresh vegetables for your holiday meals at the market.*

available from PEAS Farm. Everyone wants tamales at Christmas and we have that covered too, thanks to Tamales Mamá Belen."

Rio Grande Organics has pecans for all your holiday baking. Tasty wines for your Christmas meal or for gifts are available at the Houston Winery booth. For gift giving, we have one-of-a-kind handcrafted jewelry (Earth Friendly Designs), essential oils and lotions (Float-A-Way) and salt scrubs (Dr. Lucy's Optimum Wellness Club).

For those who like giving edible gifts, consider Texas olive oils and balsamic vinegar (Texas Olive Ranch) or homemade fresh fruit and pepper jellies (ShoSho's Kitchen).

## Sights, sounds and smells of the season

Beyond the financial impact to Houston's economy, Fox said the Westchase District Farmers Market has grown to become a public gathering space in West Houston for residents and workers to mingle with vendors and be exposed to new foods and products they might not otherwise have discovered. "The market provides an opportunity for customers to connect with the local farmers and artisans who actually grow the food and make products by hand," she said. "Those connections are what help sew Westchase District into a tight-knit community, during the holidays and all year long."

### Westchase District Farmers Market

Year-round, rain or shine, Thursdays @ 3 p.m.

St. Cyril of Alexandria Catholic Church

10503 Westheimer Road (at Roperdale Road, one block west of Beltway 8)

[www.westchasedistrictfarmersmarket.com](http://www.westchasedistrictfarmersmarket.com)



**West Foot Forward:** *Steve West may be new to the board, but he's not new to the District. His Westchase District office gives him a good view of the District's assets.*

# Expanded Educational Options

## Public charter schools offer access, assistance and accountability

The number of tuition-free, public charter schools has spiraled upward in recent years as parents demand more accountability and flexibility from their local school districts. Westchase District is served by two school districts. Students who live north of Westheimer attend schools from the Houston Independent School District while students living south of Westheimer attend Alief ISD schools. Now, for the first time, families living in Westchase District have the option of two public charter schools as well.

### Now serving kinder and first grade

Westchase Classical Academy welcomed its first two classes of new students this past August on the campus of First Methodist Houston Westchase. Operating under the ResponsiveEd charter, Westchase Classical Academy seeks to provide hope to students through educational options that promote a free society and cultivate moral and academic excellence.

School Director Diana Castillo knows first-hand how educational opportunity can bring hope and change. Born in Mexico, Castillo moved



**Now Enrolling:** Westchase Classical Academy's open enrollment lottery for the 2020 school year is already underway.

to the United States with her family at the age of three. Enrolled in Kindergarten a few years later, Castillo struggled in class until her mother, concerned about her lack of progress, moved her to a different school. With only two months until summer and under the guidance of an excellent teacher, Castillo quickly became the top reader in her class. She transferred to KIPP Academy in the 5th grade and continued to excel. "My mother knew education was something she could offer us in the United States," said Castillo. "But the system seemed complicated and, at times, hopeless. Without the help of my teachers and administrators to navigate my educational options, I wouldn't be here today."

Ultimately, she graduated with a degree in Spanish Literature from Cornell University and returned to Houston to work for Teach for America, simultaneously obtaining her teaching certificate and instructing both first and second grade classrooms for 10 years.

### Two classrooms and growing

Westchase Classical Academy's program is based on the belief that successful students become successful adults. The curriculum emphasizes American civics, arts, phonics, and blended learning math curriculum. Classroom size is limited to 25 students and all students have access to technology. Scholars are required to take weekly art and physical education classes, and lower school students have two, 20-minute recesses daily.

Westchase Classical Academy currently serves students in Kindergarten and first grade, but plans to increase its offerings up to eighth grade. When asked where she'd like Westchase Classical to be in five years, Castillo expressed her desire for a neighborhood school that people see as a resource, one that reaches

into the community to offer hope and assistance, creating scholars who are kind, compassionate and looking to impact the community in a positive way.

### STEM and character-based learning

Tucked away on a quiet Westchase cul-de-sac, the School of Science and Technology's exterior does not reveal the magnitude of all it has to offer its students. SST is a Pre-K through eighth grade college preparatory charter school focusing on math, science, engineering and computer technologies. In only its third year in Westchase District, the School of Science and Technology is bursting at its seams with 382 students. Principal Matt Dilli is proud of all the students have accomplished in such a short time, including all possible state Texas Education Agency (TEA) distinctions, and their most recent honor as a National School of Character and TEA A-Rated School.

The mission of the School of Science and Technology is to drive academic and socio-emotional development through a college prep, STEM-based learning model. This model is anchored in 21st century skills, embraced by a character-building approach delivered in an enriching, safe and student-centered learning environment. Throughout the hallways of SST, there is evidence of how much the teachers and students love their school. Bulletin boards boasting desired character traits, hallways marked with street signs named for pathways to success, and get-to-know-you questions answered by all teachers enable students and staff to make relationships a priority for a healthy learning environment. Fifth grade ELA teacher Courtney Rosok said her class makes a covenant at the start of each school year. "Not only does this enable the students to be part of making class rules they think are important, it also helps them to understand that we are all in this together, invested in each other's success, both emotionally and academically," said Rosok.

Display cases in the lobby showcase the many awards SST students have received. From poetry and fine arts competitions to robotics, math and science olympiads, students are encouraged to compete, not only to build character, but to stretch the limits of what they think is possible.

SST enrolls students through a lottery system. Classroom size is limited to approximately 25 and all classrooms have access to technology. Dilli says what makes the School of Science and Technology different from other public charter schools are the relationships between teachers, parents, students and staff. "We want students to feel safe and cared for at school so their level of academic success rises," said Dilli.

In the next 5 years, Dilli sees the School of Science and Technology expanding to approximately 700 students, necessitating a move to a new school building. Construction is already underway, and SST hopes to open these doors as early as next fall.



**Early Learning:** Beginning in Pre-K, SST students are introduced to a STEM-focused curriculum.

#### Westchase Classical Academy

10570 Westpark Dr. • 281-968-6835  
Classicaledu.com/westchase

#### School of Science & Technology Advancement

10550 Westoffice Dr. • 713-266-2522  
sstadvancement.org

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# Husband and Wife Team Find Success in First Houston-area Vegan Mexican Restaurant

*Changing hearts one taco at a time*



**Cool Beans:** Jesse and Denise Hernandez are proud to bring the first-ever vegan Mexican food restaurant to Houston.

The Mexican culture is steeped in rich tradition, and one of the most celebrated elements of the tradition is food.

Uno problema: once Jesse and Denise Hernandez learned the specific details of how meat gets to market, they knew animal products could no longer be a part of their lives.

A unique opportunity was staring Jesse in the face, but he knew it wouldn't be easy. How does one recreate traditional Mexican dishes using only plant-based products? This would require an expert, Hernandez thought. He enlisted the help of the best down-home, authentic Mexican food chef he knew: his mom. They rolled up their sleeves and began

experimenting in the kitchen. And thus, Veegos Mexican Restaurant was born. "It was never about our health, although that is an amazing added benefit," noted Hernandez. "We couldn't bear contributing to the mistreatment and slaughter of animals, especially knowing that so many plant sources exist that fulfill all our dietary needs."

## Planting the seed

Hernandez spent the early stages of Veegos partnering with local breweries and other businesses to set up canopies outside their establishments and sell a few items to their customers. The response was so positive that a physical location was the natural next step. Hernandez assumed a small space would do, so he leased a quaint location in Westchase District. Within months, growth demanded they move to a larger space. Veegos moved across Westheimer and settled in at 10932 Westheimer. "I am a big fan of this area of town and the people who work and live here," said Hernandez.

Freshness is key at Veegos and it shows in the quality and taste of the food. Using only locally-sourced ingredients from area

farmers markets, everything is preservative free and created from scratch on site. The customers take notice. "We have customers tell us constantly that our food takes them back to their grandmother's kitchen in Mexico, and that's an incredible compliment to receive. There's nothing better than grandma's comfort food," said Denise.

The menu includes traditional favorites like tacos, nachos, enchiladas and horchata, plus a few American staples like burgers and loaded fries.

## Cultivating the garden

When asked about the best part of being in this business, Denise explained, "Converting non-vegans to a no-animal product lifestyle, we're saving animals lives, one human at a time. Educating people and changing their mindset toward food, showing them that you can still enjoy traditional dishes without the use of animal meat, it's why we do what we do."

The future of the business is promising, and the Hernandez team is taking it one step at a time. They're currently building a food truck and hope to expand in the coming years. "The goal is to have a few food trucks in different areas of town to test receptivity," Jesse says. "And wherever we find success, we'd like to add another physical location to that area."

### Veegos Mexican

10932 Westheimer Road • 281-888-5030 • [instagram.com/veegoshouston](https://www.instagram.com/veegoshouston)



**Lettuce eat:** (left-right) The enchilada plate and the burger are among the most popular dishes.

# Fifty Years of Extending Grace

*Leaving a lasting legacy looks like loving neighbors*

In 1969, all eyes were on the moon or the little town of White Lake, New York as the first manned space mission landed on the moon and half million people turned out for Woodstock. Closer to home, the Houston faithful were making plans for the first-ever worship of what would become Grace Presbyterian Church.

On the first Sunday in December 1969, the new combined church of St. Matthews Presbyterian and Second Presbyterian worshiped together for the first time at Walnut Bend Elementary School. The very next Sunday, the congregation voted to name this church Grace Presbyterian Church. Fifty years later, after more than 2,600 Sundays together, Grace has grown, not only in its physical space and membership, but in its impact across Westchase District.

Starting with nothing but a dream, a prayer and open land, the vision for what Grace Presbyterian would become had only just begun. For three years, weekly activities were held off site until the completion and dedication of the gymnasium, fellowship hall and education building in March 1972. The congregation and staff voted to begin with the gym so that the new space could be multi-functional, serving both as the worship center and an outreach opportunity to West Houston. Seeing emergency needs for food, clothing and shelter in the community, Grace was one of the founding members of what is now known as West Houston Assistance Ministries (WHAM).

By September of 1975, Grace School was launched as a mission of the church to serve families in the surrounding area through Christian education. The Founders Chapel was dedicated in 1978, unveiling the original 1903 Kimball Moller pipe organ, bringing familiar sounds from Second Presbyterian Church and a beautiful space for the community to worship together. Seven years later, a larger sanctuary was constructed to accommodate a growing membership. Today, Grace continues to look beyond itself and has become a congregation known for "living to make Jesus visible," by loving and serving others across the street and around the world.



**Leading the Way:** (left-right) Pastors Chris French and Trey Little lead the staff (and the prayers) at Grace Presbyterian Church. They are pictured in the newly-remodeled Massey-Tucker Hall.

## Living to make Jesus visible

On any given day, Grace Church members can be found working in the West Houston community - leading cooking classes for clients at WHAM, mentoring students at Paul Revere Middle School, and making meals with

the Manna Ministry to provide for those in need. According to Rev. Chris French, pastor of Missional Living, God is working through the people of Grace Presbyterian Church. "Loving our neighbors means more than just inviting them to church," said French. "We need to look around, know our neighbors, be in a relationship with them and love them in such a way that we're not just giving them a message, but we're demonstrating our love for God by caring for the needs that they face every day."

Long-time member Bill Aldridge, who was in the first confirmation class at Grace, knows the power of transformational love firsthand. "This church came here when there was nothing out here but a community," observed Aldridge. "We drew in people from Briargrove Park, from Walnut Bend and Lakeside Estates. People came to church and heard the word of the Lord and lives were changed. This is the place where I learned that God loves me and where I learned to love God."

Grace can also be found loving those beyond the borders of West Houston through mission partners like Habitat for Humanity, Living Water International, Medical Benevolence Foundation, Youth with a Mission, Star of Hope, Boys and Girls Country, Grace Girls School in Kenya and many others.

## To the beltway and beyond

In the next fifty years, Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Trey Little, would like Grace Presbyterian Church to be known as "so much more than a nice building in the Westchase District. I'd like Grace to be remembered as a group of courageous people authentically partnering with Jesus to build His kingdom in Houston and beyond," said Little.

The membership of Grace Presbyterian Church celebrated its 50th anniversary at a combined worship service on December 8. The 50th anniversary celebration also recognized a milestone in Grace Church's "Ready" campaign, which brought \$6 million in physical improvements to the church, including a remodeled Worship Center, updated Founders Chapel and a modernized fellowship hall.

### Grace Presbyterian Church

10221 Ella Lee Lane • 713-781-7615 • [gpch.org](https://www.gpch.org)



PROPOSED BUILDING FOR GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FIRST UNIT  
SMART & WHITEHEAD AIA ARCHITECTS

**Big Dreams:** This early rendering shows the original Grace Church façade. The gym, which faced Seagler Road, doubled as worship space.

# Digging Deeper into Geolog Americas

*Oil & gas business brings greater value to site of former muffler shop*



**Corner View:** The 21,000-square foot Geolog building is a distinctive addition to the Westchase District skyline.

**G**eolog Americas is making a global impact - from the corner of Valley Forge Drive and Beltway 8 in Westchase District. Although not completely new to the Houston area, this innovative oil and gas company has only been in its current location since October 2018.

Geolog Americas is a subsidiary of parent company

Geolog International B.V., which was founded in Italy in 1982. Touted as the largest independent mudlogging company in the world, Geolog provides oilfield services and solutions to assist other oil and gas operators during the drilling process. Eventual expansion into the US, and specifically in Texas, led to the formation of Geolog Americas in 2014. Houston is important on the global map of the oil and gas industry, so it made sense for the main Geolog Americas office to be in the prominent Texas metropolis. The subsidiary is small but mighty, with fewer than ten employees in the office on a day-to-day basis and approximately 40 total employees, including those in the field.

## Moving on up (and west)

Before finding a permanent home in Westchase, Geolog Americas started out in the Clear Lake area. As North American Region Manager Andres Matheson explained, the Clear Lake location was not conducive to conducting a successful business in the oil and gas industry. They needed a location better situated for their business, their clients, and their employees. Traveling in and out of George Bush Intercontinental Airport was more taxing when the route included a 45+ minute trek across Houston. Westchase District provides a plethora of advantages for Geolog,

from its relative closeness to the airport and other oil and gas companies to the bevy of great restaurants and hotels. Geolog's clients and employees could remain relatively close to the new company headquarters without sacrificing any necessary amenities.

## New digs

The idea for a new office evolved from renting space in an existing building to demolishing a former automotive and muffler shop and custom-building their own office, with three levels of streamlined and functional space that perfectly serves the current (and future) Geolog employees, as well as potential tenants. The glass walls provide structure while enhancing an atmosphere of open work flow. The exterior is definitely different from other nearby office buildings; it is bright and square, a stark contrast from the sleek, mirrored designs found nearby. The building includes another unique feature - special panels that form an inverted "L" over the windows, blocking sunlight and making the interior space more energy-efficient. The decor of the office is both a nod to the earlier muffler business and a showcase of the owner's love of fine Italian sports cars.

What does Geolog Americas bring to Westchase? Promise of expansion as the subsidiary continues to grow. Unlike other O&G businesses, Geolog weathered the industry downturn and is now moving in a steady and positive direction. Matheson hopes to see the company maintain its expansion. He also hopes to see the top floor of the building filled with new tenants, possibly other newer businesses who, like Geolog Americas, are spreading their wings and gaining momentum in a part of Houston also known for growth and innovation.

## Geolog Americas

10402 Valley Forge Drive  
832-652-2333  
geolog.com



**Space for Rent:** Geolog occupies space on the ground floor and second floor of the building. Approximately 7,000 square feet of space is available to lease on the third floor.

# Talk of the Town

## The Omni-functional business of translation

**W**hen it comes to translation communications, Omni Intercommunications is just like its name - all things to many companies in Houston and around the world. Founded in 1978, Omni has been a mainstay in Westchase District, still going strong after more than 40 years of bridging the communication gap for a variety of clients in multiple industries.

Founded by Hervé Chain, a French-born chemist who came to Houston to study chemical engineering, Omni Intercommunications is a foreign language communications company that specializes in helping multinational organizations with translation communication services and products. Omni not only provides translation services, but also creates products that strengthen the communication effectiveness for organizations around the world.

## Not all bilingual is the same

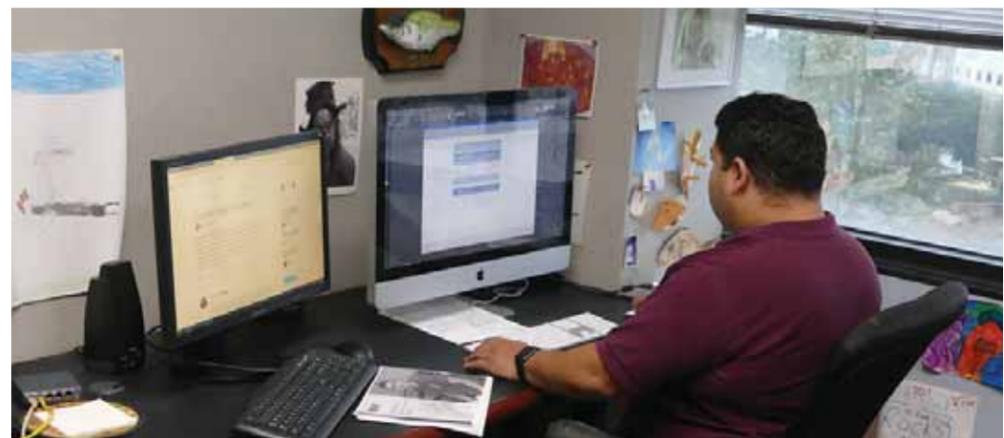
While studying at the University of Houston, Chain saw a great need for translation services in his industry. "I realized that communications and actual work were hindered by the lack of reliable translations," he said. His solution was to "create a highly-technical translation agency employing bilingual engineers rather than simply bilingual people."



**Note From the Boss:** Hervé Chain understands the importance of making strong connections with his clients in order to maintain and grow his business.

Chain did not have to look beyond Westchase District for the ideal office location. He wanted to be close to Houston and his clients without being too far from his home. "I drew a circle around my home so my commute time would not exceed 10 minutes," he said. Chain and Omni have been in the same office since 1982 "expanding and contracting office space to ride the economic waves," said Chain.

What sets Omni Intercommunications apart from other translation businesses, according to



**Personal Touch:** Each client at Omni works with the same dedicated team on each project.

its founder, is their "boutique" business approach. "We can do big projects with a very personal relationship," Chain said. "We use the same translator who becomes used to the terminology of that industry, so we get a better result at the end."

## Rolling with the Houston economy

Being a small business owner in Houston can be challenging, especially when the business is connected to the energy/oil & gas industry. What has kept Chain and his company afloat during turbulent years is his willingness to diversify. "We started in 1978 and everything was good. But then everything collapsed [in 1986] and we lost all our business basically overnight." Chain's response was to seek out clients in other industries. Nearly forty years later, Omni Intercommunications is much more diversified and no longer relying so heavily on the oil and gas industry.

For Chain, customer service is the most important aspect of his business. Offering a good product isn't enough without a high level of customer service. At Omni, all clients, whether big or small operations, receive the same preferential treatment. Hervé Chain does not know what the future holds for the translation industry, but it is a good bet that Omni Intercommunications will still be moving forward.

## Omni Intercommunications

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## FROM CPA TO HPD

### Officer DeAndré Hutchison fulfills childhood dream by trading his calculator for a badge

“Police work is too dangerous.” “They don’t make much money.” “You don’t want to put yourself on the line.” As a child expressing his hopes of one day joining the police force, DeAndré Hutchison heard all these responses and more. Nevertheless, it remained his goal. After all, he always chose to be the cop in those childhood games of cops and robbers. Why not turn childhood fiction into adult reality?

As it often does, life took him in a different direction. Having an interest in and skill with numbers, Hutchison decided to pursue a degree in accounting from the University of North Texas. After obtaining both a bachelor’s and master’s degree, he landed a lucrative accounting job with the prestigious firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

### A change in the equation

Hutchison remembers a work day like most others during the busy tax season when he looked around the windowless conference room full of employees plugging away on their laptops. At 11 p.m, one of his colleagues yelled, “Oh no! I forgot my kid’s birthday!”

Hutchison vowed that would never be him. As luck would have it, the Houston Police Department’s recruiting office was located just across the street. And that’s the moment he decided to pursue his childhood dream of law enforcement.

Once a week, Hutchison patrols Westchase District on bicycle, keeping the streets safe and making friends along the way. One of his favorite community members is a breakfast cook at Homewood Suites named Beatriz. “She always greets me with a smile and a hug and refers to me as her son. She’s even helping me to learn Spanish,” said Hutchison. He noted all the friendly members of the Westchase community like Beatriz are why he loves serving the District. “Everyone is so friendly. The relationships I’ve developed are like none other. They know they can count on us, and that’s a responsibility I don’t take lightly,” said Hutchison.

### Committed to the cause

Hutchison, who has been an HPD officer since 2012, is the current Vice President of the Afro-American Police Officers League (AAPOL). “We’re all about community policing, bridging the gap between police officers and the community



**Two Wheels or Four:** Ofc. Hutchison finds himself driving a Westchase District Patrol vehicle on a day that started out too rainy for his usual bike patrol.

we serve,” said Hutchison. “The ultimate goal is a safer environment for all.”

On the home front, he continues his efforts of making work/life balance a priority. “My wife and I agreed that nights and weekends would be designated family time. I leave a lot of money on the table by not picking up shifts during those times, but I won’t compromise on my priorities. Family is the most important thing to me,” said Hutchison.

### An officer and a gentleman

Hutchison has been happily married to his college sweetheart, Delesa, for six years. Their shared passion for marriage ministry led to the creation of a podcast called “Marriage Unlocked,” in which they engage listeners with real talk and witty banter. “People’s perception of marriage is often so negative this day and age, and the divorce rate is through the roof,” said Hutchison. “We strive to shine light on how wonderful marriage can be if you’re willing to work at it.” If he weren’t on the police force, Hutchison said he would love to conduct marriage conferences and speaking engagements in an effort to create a culture that celebrates marriage.

The couple share two girls: Dionne, 5, and Dior, seven months. In his spare time, he enjoys a rousing game of dominoes, proudly referring to himself as “Dominologist Dre.”

## Parks coming soon to Westchase District

### Greenspace for Westchase campaign aims to “make parks great again”

Westchase District is home to 31,000 residents living in multifamily communities, ranging from modest workforce housing to luxury living apartments. While these residents enjoy the benefits of superior mobility, public safety and beautification as maintained by the District, there’s one aspect missing from their lives: nearby parks for recreational and social opportunities.

All that is about to change. The City of Houston has purchased two park sites in the area and Westchase District will develop and maintain the parks.

“These parks have been a long time coming,” said Irma Sanchez, vice president of projects for Westchase District. “It’s been like constructing a jigsaw puzzle. Piece-by-piece, we’ve been putting into place the various elements that put us in position to break ground on the first of our two new parks.”



**Park desert no more:** Greenspaces like Woodchase Park were envisioned back in 2006 as part of Westchase District’s long range plan.

Trail, which runs along the utility corridor between Gessner Road and Briarpark Drive. Wilcrest Park is located on a 3.5-acre parcel on Wilcrest, just north of the District’s Library Loop Trail.

### Next puzzle piece: design

The parks are being designed by the Office of James Burnett, the award-winning firm which designed Houston’s Levy Park. Both parks will feature a children’s play area, activity lawn, pavilion, dog park, public art and restrooms. “Woodchase Park will be a fantastic recreational and gathering space for Westchase residents,” said Sanchez. “Wilcrest Park will be more of a destination park. We’ll add a performance pavilion, promenade, table games area, exercise stations and a food kiosk.”

### First puzzle piece: land

“Westchase District encompasses some of the most park-deficient sectors in the city,” said Sanchez. But the City of Houston purchased two parcels of land using money set aside by multifamily developers as required by the Parks & Open Space Ordinance.

Woodchase Park is located on Woodchase Drive just north of the Westpark Tollway. The two-acre parcel connects to the Westchase

### Last puzzle piece: funding

Money has been budgeted for the development of both parks through Westchase District’s 380 Area Program with the City of Houston. The entire \$3.2 million construction budget for Woodchase Park is earmarked. Park design is complete and the District has applied for all the appropriate City permits.

“We anticipate putting the project out for bid in January, so that construction can begin in the spring,” said Sanchez. It will take approximately one year to complete construction of Woodchase Park.

Another \$4.1 million is available for the development of Wilcrest Park, including a \$500,000 grant from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. “That amount of money would build a good park, but we want to build a great park,” said Louis Jullien, Westchase District projects director. Jullien is leading the campaign to raise the additional money needed to make Wilcrest Park the same kind of transformational space that Discovery Green and Levy Park have been for downtown Houston and the Upper Kirby area.

“Wilcrest Park will create a unique environment for free community events such as yoga, tai chi, movie nights and concerts,” said Jullien. “We want this park to be a destination for West Houston residents.”

“I’m already meeting with Westchase District businesses and Houston’s philanthropic community to raise money for Wilcrest Park,” said Jullien. “We call our campaign ‘Greenspace for Westchase’ because it will bring exciting new public gathering spaces and outdoor recreational opportunities to Westchase District residents and all of West Houston.”

For more information, visit [westchasedistrict.com/parks](http://westchasedistrict.com/parks)



**Destination Westchase:** Transformational parks benefit everyone living and working in Westchase and provide a catalyst for redevelopment.

(Continued from Page 1)



**Drain pipes:** In another project engineered by LAN, these reinforced concrete boxes are being installed in Sugar Land. They are similar to the boxes that will be buried under Walnut Bend Lane to drain rainwater to the flood control ditches before it's ultimately carried to Brays Bayou. (Photo credit: LAN)

## The secret is underground

Manges and his fellow engineers at LAN used sophisticated hydraulic modeling software to analyze current conditions and evaluate future rain and drainage conditions. They recommended the installation of reinforced concrete boxes. These giant concrete boxes, ranging in size from 18-inches by 60-inches to 10-feet by 6-feet, are buried underground. They're designed to hold the water until it can be drained into the appropriate channel.

A lot goes into the analysis and modeling to make sure there is no adverse effect downstream, according to Manges. "You take out the old pipe, put in the new bigger pipe and put in a restrictor at the downstream end so you don't send that problem somewhere else. You can't send more water downstream than you were before" said Manges.

Right now, underground utilities are being moved to make way for the new reinforced concrete pipes and boxes. For the team at Westchase District-based LAN, it's rewarding to see their plans moving into the construction phase. Approximately 10 LAN engineers, CAD drafters and constructability review professionals worked 18 months to design the project.

Gonzalez is most excited about the new pavement and the mobility improvements. "When the concrete paving is installed correctly, it should last 50 years. Plus, we're adding bike lanes and wider sidewalks. We're replacing driveways, utilities, everything. The quality of life on Walnut Bend will be drastically improved," said Gonzalez.

The District's 380 Program with the City of Houston covers about \$4.4 million of the \$20 million project. Houston Public Works has contributed another \$4.6 million and funding from the Federal Highway Administration covers the rest of the project. The Texas Department of Transportation is overseeing the construction process, which is expected to be complete in the summer of 2021.

Visit [westchasedistrict.com/walnutbend](http://westchasedistrict.com/walnutbend) for construction updates.



**Shovel Ready:** Westchase District board members (left-right) Harry Greenblatt and Philip Schneidau are joined by Andy Icken, chief development officer for the City of Houston, at the District's ceremonial groundbreaking for the Walnut Bend project.

## Neighborhood News

New and renewing leases at Westchase Park I and II total 187,054 square feet. **LJA Engineering** leased 90,989 square feet of office space and will be moving from 2929 Briarpark. **Centurion Pipeline Co.** leased 28,978 square feet. And **ABB** renewed its lease for 67,987 square feet. The 569,825-square foot, two-building office complex is located at 3600 and 3700 W. Sam Houston Parkway North. It features a freestanding amenity center with fitness center, tenant conference space and Citrus Kitchen Restaurant.



### American Liberty

**Hospitality** and its owners Nick & Vicki Massad are getting ready for the rebranding of their Best Western Westchase Mini Suites to a **Baymont by Wyndham** in December 2019. The Massad's mission for the company is to provide the best guest experience, career opportunities and profitable investment while spreading the spirit of hospitality and improving the communities where they operate. "To be successful in life we must be passionate, spread hospitality, appreciate people, always do the right thing and create value," said Nick Massad.



**A Hospitable Duo:** Owners Vicki and Nick Massad of American Liberty Hospitality have been a staple in the Westchase community for more than 20 years.

Mark your calendars for two big 2020 events. Westchase District will host a real estate forum on Wednesday, February 12, entitled "**Westchase: Today and Tomorrow.**" This event will feature panels comprised of expert real estate professionals and a keynote address by Phillips 66 CEO Greg Garland. Participants will get an update on the Westchase District real estate market as well as all the infrastructure projects that are being led by our team. Tickets will go on sale before the end of the year.



The 23rd annual **Westchase District Corporate Challenge** will be held on Friday, April 3. Athletes and non-athletes alike enjoy this field day for adults, benefitting the Westchase District Community Fund and Quillian Center's summer day camps. Over its 22-year history, the event has raised more than \$280,000 for charity. Area business professionals participate in a day of dodgeball, soccer, basketball, kickball, and the regionally-famous briefcase relay. Online registration will be available soon at [westchasedistrict.com](http://westchasedistrict.com).



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