

March



April

2013

# Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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Local News

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Your Home:  
Security, Safety and  
Value

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City News and Events

## Section 4

Event Calendar and  
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## ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR MARCH 26TH, 6:30-8:00 p.m.

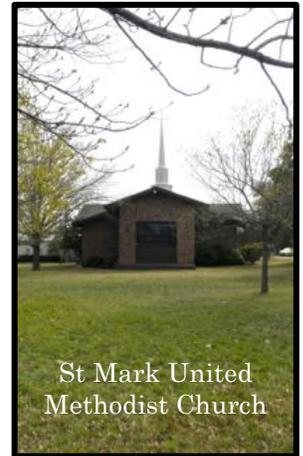
**St. Mark United Methodist Church**  
**601 W. Braker Lane**  
Lawshae Building on Southeast side

**Enjoy yourself** while helping to make your neighborhood a better place to live. With refreshments provided, review what happened in the neighborhood in the past year and the activities of your Association. And, of course, elect new board members - and/or re-elect (willing) current members whose two-year terms are ending (Also, you can volunteer yourself or nominate someone else to fill the several available positions on the board.)

As usual, it's been a pretty busy year for the Association. Zoning and city code violations are always priorities, and there have been several notable cases of lack of respect for these. In addition, we've had spikes of break-ins and vandalism in our and nearby neighborhoods. These will be discussed in the context of the annual State-of-the-Neighborhood presentations, with supporting inputs from the City Code Compliance Department and our Travis County Constable.

Reinvigoration of our Neighborhood Watch will also be a major topic, with special emphasis on plans to start a daytime patrol to help early detection of potential miscreants or, at least, help to discourage them during the period of highest criminal activity. Status of the city 10-1 redistricting process and relevant activities in sister neighborhoods will also be presented.

Again this year, **free babysitting** will be provided so young families can come and meet and enjoy the fellowship of the wonderful, diverse residents of our Walnut Creek Neighborhood.



St Mark United  
Methodist Church

## **Neighborhood News and Social Media**

WCNA manages three internet groups for communication within the neighborhood, with one which can share information with sister associations. These three groups are quite different in many aspects, and because the members don't completely overlap some messages and/or announcements aren't seen by some groups unless cross-posted by volunteer action. In addition, some groups support functions that others don't; e.g., the Yahoo newsgroup facilitates surveys while the NextDoor site currently doesn't. For this reason, you may want to join at least two of the groups to improve your chances of seeing all important messages. The three groups are:

**Yahoo:** **WCNAnews**, at [www.groups.yahoo.com](http://www.groups.yahoo.com) This is the oldest group and currently has the largest membership. Join this group by going to the site using the URL above and entering wcnanews in the search box, then clicking on "Join This Group!" under the icon shown with this name above it. When your membership is completed you can set up your personal preferences for your identification and how you receive messages by clicking on [Edit Membership](#) at the upper left. You can choose to have every message sent to you, only a daily digest of messages, only special announcements, or none (in which case you must go to the site to read messages by clicking on "Messages" at the upper left). You can send messages to the group using your email app by sending your message to [wcnanews@yahoogroups.com](mailto:wcnanews@yahoogroups.com). This site supports storage of files, managing databases, running surveys of membership and other functions, but file size and total storage are limited.

**NextDoor:** **WCNA.NextDoor.com** This group is restricted to physical addresses inside a physically defined boundary, namely the nominal edges of the neighborhood (Lamar, Walnut Creek, IH35, and Braker Lane). To join this group you must have an address within this boundary and receive an invitation from a current member. You can request an invitation from anyone you know/meet who is a member or by contacting a board member (See Section 4) . The site also provides features not found in the others; e.g., instant notification for emergencies, attachments to postings, and storage of large files in the various subsections, as well as similar choices of how you receive messages posted to the group.

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/groups/wcnanews/> You must be a Facebook member to join this group, and its structure is essentially the same as your personal page.

### Smoke From Southeast Austin

The smell of smoke in the air noted all over the neighborhood on March 3rd turned out to be from burning compost at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant in SE Austin. The wind changed direction and pushed the smoke the five miles or so from the facility to our neighborhood. Probably started by spontaneous combustion, the fire could smolder for a couple more weeks. Trying water to douse it could actually cause it to worsen due to increased bacterial activity; i.e., compost suicide.

### North by North Austin Garden Tour

The North Austin Coalition of Neighborhoods is presenting its first-ever garden tour Saturday and Sunday, June 1 and 2, 2013. This inaugural North by North Austin Garden Tour is a fundraiser for the design and construction of demonstration garden projects at three North Austin schools: Lanier High, Dobie Middle and Wooldridge Elementary. The tour of private gardens will be on Saturday, June 1 only. Classes and demonstrations will be held on Sunday, June 2 at one of the beneficiary schools.

### Threat to Large Trees on the Greenbelt

The Gracywoods neighborhood, just to the west of us, has become quite concerned about the tree trimming/removal program that Austin Energy intends to carry out in the North Star Green Belt. This was the primary concern at the monthly meeting of the Gracywoods Neighborhood Association (GWNA) on Tuesday, 5 March 2013, at the Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ. Robert Meadows attended the meeting, which was also attended by four Austin Energy (AE) representatives who made presentations and answered questions about the program. This is a summary of his report.

The North Star Green Belt runs from the AE's McNeil Substation (just southwest of the church) more or less west almost to Metric (If you haven't used it, it's a good. Because it runs under high-voltage transmission lines operated by AE, this utility has an easement on the land and periodically trims/removes trees to maintain a certain distance between the trees and the transmission lines in accordance with many layers of norms and regulations. AE carried out extensive such operations in 2004 and 2009, resulting in significant damage to – and even removal of – some of the larger trees in the greenbelt. Austin Energy has now returned for another round of trimming on their 4-to-5 year cycle, and GWNA was looking to try to affect the process. The ideal solution to the problem is to increase the height of the two towers causing most of the conflict. This would eliminate the need for AE tree work , but the estimated cost between 400 and 500 thousand dollars precludes that from happening before the current actions. AE indicated that they had no option but to trim in the near future, but stated that they would refrain from removing any trees. Meanwhile, Gracywoods residents have formed a working group with the Urban Forestry Board in order to make recommendations to minimize damage in the process. It is hoped that the recommendations, even if not in time to affect this round, can be implemented in the future to prevent this periodic conflict. And numerous Gracywoods residents vowed that those towers will be raised. We wish them luck!

### New Neighborhood Restaurant

In case you haven't noticed, one of our neighborhood restaurants, Me & U Bistro, has changed hands and is now Santorini Cafe, specializing in Greek food. If you haven't tried their gyros, tzatziki and hummus you're in for a treat (not to mention the Mediterranean desserts)! Hours are long: 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. except Fri/Sat 10:00 to midnight.

Orestis, the owner, and Vince are still developing the menu, but the daily special and categories of items offered can be found on their Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Santorini-Cafe/186609728147903>. They recently obtained their liquor license and now offer the range of spirits indicated there.

WCNA board meetings have (mostly) been held in this facility for the last couple of years, and this will continue for the immediate future unless notified otherwise.

We now enjoy four establishments in the center at 11800 N. Lamar, anchored by long-time Ross' Old Austin Café, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ross-Old-Austin-Cafe/197377780276490> . In fact, we enjoy a wide and eclectic selection of eating establishments very close to our boundaries.

### Church bulletins reported posted over the last year

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

### Neighbors & Kids Turn Out for Austin's "It's My Park Day"



On March 2nd, fueled by breakfast tacos, coffee and snacks donated by Wheatsville Coop, about 17 adult and 8 kid neighborhood volunteers turned out with gloves and tools to participate in the city-wide IMPD program - and to earn T-shirts in the process. With the always-reliable Gary Brewer (and Margaret as well) providing his tractor and trailer, mulch provided by Austin Parks was spread from the entrance to the hiline. Several large trees that had succumbed to the severe drought conditions of 2011 have been blown down by the high winds we have experienced recently, and the crew also spent considerable energy cutting and moving these out of the path (thanks once again, Gary!). Best of all, the kids who came with their parents and grandparents had a blast "helping" and riding on the trailer (see the picture at left), capably overseen by Gary and Margaret's 10-year granddaughter Chloe.

Thanks and kudos to all who helped in this very successful endeavor, especially our Parks Director Dorsey and Jill Leberknight, who organized the process.

On a serious note, Gary reports that conditions are extremely dry in the greenbelt, and another Spring like 2011 will put some properties on the periphery of the park at risk.

Be alert for conditions and anyone who might be acting thoughtlessly with cigarettes or other lighted materials in our park.

### The Continuing Saga of Jonah, the Bluff Bend Dog by Val Henson

Jonah, a.k.a. Dog in the Park and the Bluff Bend Dog (in the last issue) is finishing rehab from his hip and mouth surgeries and has been given a clean bill of health by the vets at Tech Ridge Pet Hospital. Jonah is estimated to be about six years old, likes people and gets along with other dogs. All his previous issues like anxiety and slight food aggression are almost gone.

Jonah is now looking for his "forever home". If you are interested in meeting Jonah, please contact me, Valerie, at 512 762-5840. I want to give special thanks to the WCNA board of directors and my neighbors who donated so generously for the cost of the hip and dental surgeries.

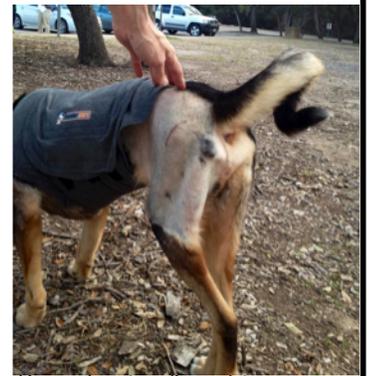
A video of Val's odyssey with Jonah made by her trapping cohort Kate Robinson (KateToTheRescue) can be viewed here: <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10200426407125278>

Kate's Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/Katetotherescue>

All the pictures collected by Val with her wildlife camera can be viewed at her Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/valerie.henson.777>



Jonah after being trapped in December



Convalescing from hip surgery in January

## Section 2 You and Your Home: Value, Beauty, Safety, Security, Health

### Austin Housing Shortage: Prices rising

Contributed by Jill Leberknight

On a recent tour with home buyers here in Austin I stood in line with three buyers waiting to see a property in front of us. Once we finally got inside the home four more arrived and queued up after us. Nearly every agent had a blank contract in hand ready to make an offer. There were lines all day to tour the home - and this was its first day on the market! This scene is literally changing the way Austin Realtors do business and how we serve buyers and sellers. Right after Christmas 2012 Austin saw a significant increase of buyers in the market. More than 55,000 new residents moved to our city in 2012 and many of them rented first until their jobs were secure or they better understood the neighborhoods and schools. When they geared up to buy their dream homes this year they were surprised by low inventory, multiple offers, and homes selling without ever being advertised. It's a situation quite unlike any I've ever seen.

So what does this mean for Walnut Creek? Obviously if you plan on selling anytime in the near future we are in one of the strongest sellers markets we've seen in decades. Homes are and will continue to sell quickly and at higher than normal prices. As long as you have someone with experience navigating through multiple offers and success with high bidding sales scenarios you will be fine. The bad news is if you need to purchase another home in Austin you need to be prepared for a bit of a fight.

The price point of Walnut Creek homes is also in the ideal ROI (return on investment) range for investors. Our inventory of low condition/low priced sales is higher than normal. Combine that with our exceptional original builder quality homes, large lots, mature trees, close access to major roads and employers and Walnut Creek is an attractive investment opportunity.

The downside is we must remain watchful and protect our residents who might fall prey to these "I'll give you cash for your home" investors who may not provide them with the most accurate perspective on their homes value and potential. Sometimes a home simply needs a few inexpensive adjustments to maximize its selling potential in a strong sellers market. I see far too many properties move in our neighborhood at astonishingly low prices because families had no idea the potential investment they were sitting on.

As always, call me if you need another perspective. It's an exciting time for the Austin Home market and great news for Walnut Creek.

## Crime wave sets neighborhood reeling:

### Burglaries, attempted burglaries, and suspected prostitution

Contributed by Sara Breuer

An unusually high number of burglaries, attempted burglaries and suspected prostitution incidents in January and February throughout the Walnut Creek neighborhood sent neighbors on high alert. Break-ins or attempted break-ins were reported on Oakbrook, Oakwood, Pollyanna, Covington, Hunters Lane, and Tedford. All but one of the attempts were made during the day. Most of the thieves gained access by kicking in front doors. Note that none of the homes that were burglarized had armed alarms in place.

One positive side effect of these is an increased awareness and level of engagement among neighbors. Information is shared quickly, sometimes in real time, on the online groups like Nextdoor.com, the Yahoo group, and the Facebook group. Dozens of neighbors attended the neighborhood association board meeting on Feb 27th to discuss ideas for addressing the problem.

Neighbors should be alert and "do the (Neighborhood Watch) 5." *Burglaries are almost never solved.* The only way we will stop them is to PREVENT them. Pay attention to what's going on. If someone looks suspicious, call 911 and report them. Don't be embarrassed. Don't be worried that you are overreacting. The Police Department encourages these calls. This is the only way that crime can be accurately tracked and officers assigned.

#### Suspicious activity that you should call 911 for:

- A car or truck backed into your neighbor's driveway that is not normally there, especially when they are not typically home.
- Someone selectively approaching homes and knocking on doors.
- Someone parked in front of a home or in the driveway while someone else is going back and forth from the home to the vehicle.

#### Suspicious activity you should note:

- Older cars driving slowly through the neighborhood with temporary plates.
- Children and teens carrying backpacks during the day.
- Solicitors who are selectively calling on homes.

#### 5 tips to protect your home from break-ins

1. Keep your deadbolts locked.
2. Replace the screws in your exterior door hardware with 3-inch screws, to keep people from being able to kick your door in.
3. Close & lock your garage doors at all times when you are not right there; They're very vulnerable.
4. Lock your windows. Install secondary locks if you feel the locks are not strong.
5. Put a secondary lock or pole on any sliding glass doors.

Inexpensive secondary window and door locks are easily found at home improvement stores.

Three-inch screws for lockplate  
photo © Family Handyman



Secondary Locks  
Sliding door (right),  
Window (below)



## Section 3

## City News and Events

**Austin Redistricting Procedures Underway**

North Austin Coalition of Neighborhoods sponsored a workshop held on January 21st at St. Albert Catholic Church to explore residents' priorities for involvement with the 10-1 single-member district plan approved in the November election. The process underway consists of the City Auditor selecting a 4-member committee of "qualified CPA firms" who will implement selection of the 14 members of the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission, which eventually will define the boundaries of the 10 districts. Ed English from Austinites for Geographic Representation ([info@AustinGeoRep.org](mailto:info@AustinGeoRep.org)) described and joined with NACN president Francoise Luca and Gracywoods' Mary Rudig to facilitate the workshop. The process broke the ~60 attendees into subgroups, each of which generated a priority list of the primary issues facing the neighborhoods which compose NACN. After identifying these "most urgent issues" in our 'hoods (crime/drugs/safety being at the top of most lists), the workgroups considered the formation of a "super group" from our coalition which would lobby on behalf of these needs and interests with the elected district representative(s). After concluding that there was a consensus on forming such a group, the form and rules/ethics which would guide representatives from this supergroup were also voted on within the subgroups. The results of the workshop are being consolidated and will guide the process to follow.

While the districts are yet to be defined, it is felt that the member neighborhood associations would have greatest leverage if we end up in the same district, and the super group would work toward influencing that outcome. Toward that end, all attendees were encouraged to apply for membership on the Commission – and talk our neighbors into doing the same – to try to assure that "North Austin" has a representative directly involved in defining the district boundaries.

**Proposed School Bonds**

As generally the case the city is proposing to raise more money, at this time by far the largest amount for the school district. The process has been approved and effort is underway to promote a bond issue for \$892 million for the AISD election on May 11th. The proposal is being described in terms of four areas:

- \$140.6 million for health, environment, equipment and technology
- \$233.9 million for safety, security and relief from overcrowded schools
- \$349.2 million for academic and building infrastructure renovations and repairs
- \$168.6 million for academic initiatives, fine arts and athletics

This proposal is for more than the previous elections combined, which proponents say is to make up for under-spending on maintenance and additions over many years and to partially compensate for the funding cut by the state legislature over the past two years.

**City Offering Free Composting Classes and Equipment Rebates**

The city is offering free classes in composting at several locations during March. Designed for people who want to reduce the amount of kitchen waste generated, the classes are under the Austin Resource Recovery program, which offers rebates for participating in home composting. Residents who attend a class and use a 24 or 32-gallon trash cart are eligible for a 75% (not to exceed \$75) rebate on the purchase of a home composting system. March classes are 2 to 3 p.m. on the 16th at Recycled Reads, 5335 Burnet; 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. on the 23rd at the Sustainable Food Center Farmers' Market at Sunset Valley; and 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. on the 27th at City Hall, 301 W. Second St. Signup and more information can be found at <http://austintexas.gov/composting>.

Poppies on Tedford



Jonquils on Whitewing



Cluster Lilies on Indianhead

Redbud on Whitewing



Section 4

Events and Contact List

Here you'll find dates of important events and notices of, and information about, activities important to the neighborhood. This section will also include the names and contact information of people who can provide help and information about neighborhood and city activities.

**Don't Forget!**

**SXSW Film runs through March 16th; Music through March 17th.** (Don't go downtown unless you're into it or have no choice!)

**Rodeo Austin: March 8 - 23**

**Large Brush Pickup: Week of 18 March.**

**Free Composting Classes: 16 March; 23 March; 27 March** (see Sect 3 and <http://austintexas.gov/composting> ).

**Easter: Sunday, March 31st**

**NorthXNorthAustin Garden Tour: 1 June** (See Sect 1)

**Dues can now be paid via PayPal!** Just enter the entire URL below as one line in your browser:  
[https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=\\_s-xclick&hosted\\_button\\_id=ZTNH2TAP75YVLxclick&hosted\\_button\\_id=ZTNH2TAP75YVL](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=ZTNH2TAP75YVLxclick&hosted_button_id=ZTNH2TAP75YVL)

**WCNA Board Meetings** are generally held on the first Wednesday of each month at Santorini Cafe. Everyone is welcome to attend, but check with a WCNA board member (see below) to verify that date and/or time haven't changed.

**City/County Contacts:**

Mayor Lee Leffingwell, 974-2250  
[lee.leffingwell@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:lee.leffingwell@ci.austin.tx.us)

Mike Martinez, 974-2264  
[mike.martinez@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:mike.martinez@ci.austin.tx.us)

Laura Morrison, 974-2260  
[laura.morrison@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:laura.morrison@ci.austin.tx.us)

Sheryl Cole, 974-2255  
[Sheryl.cole@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:Sheryl.cole@ci.austin.tx.us)

Bill Spelman, 974-2258  
[william.spelman@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:william.spelman@ci.austin.tx.us)

Chris Riley, 974-2256  
[chris.riley@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:chris.riley@ci.austin.tx.us)

Kathie Tovo, 512-974-2255  
[Kathie.Tovo@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:Kathie.Tovo@ci.austin.tx.us)

County Commissioner,  
 Sarah Eckhardt, 854-9222  
[Sarah.Eckhardt@co.travis.tx.us](mailto:Sarah.Eckhardt@co.travis.tx.us)

**EMERGENCY:** Police, Fire, EMS, Animal Control: 911

**City of Austin:** All services, codes & code violations, animal reports, etc:  
 Phone: 311 Online: <http://austin-plcsrprodawi.motorolasolutions.com/Home.mvc/Index>

**APD Burglary Unit**  
<http://www.facebook.com/APDBU>

**The Austin Animal Center,** at 7201 Levander Loop – left off Airport Boulevard just before the 183 intersection – provides **free/low cost spay/neuter, rabies vaccinations, and microchip implants** for eligible residents:  
<http://austintexas.gov/department/animal-services> ; 512-974-2000

**WCNA Board of Directors and Officers**

Robert Meadows President  
 339-0229 [robertl@meadows.com](mailto:robertl@meadows.com)

Theresa Jones Vice President  
 832-0404 [tjones72@austin.rr.com](mailto:tjones72@austin.rr.com)

Pat Pitt Treasurer  
 837-6620 [s.pitt@earthlink.net](mailto:s.pitt@earthlink.net)

Jean Ramsey  
 921-7762 [jeanram@gmail.com](mailto:jeanram@gmail.com)

Jill Leberknight  
 294-7296 [jill@weemus.com](mailto:jill@weemus.com)

Brad Wilcox  
 947-9077 [bradwilcox@live.com](mailto:bradwilcox@live.com)

Dorsey and Bunnie Twidwell  
 339-0412 [bunnie@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:bunnie@mail.utexas.edu)

Tasha Bowser  
 731-6863 [Bowser.Tasha@gmail.com](mailto:Bowser.Tasha@gmail.com)



March :: April 2013

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Pre-Spring in Walnut Creek Neighborhood



### About WCNA and the newsletter

**WCNA membership** is open to any resident (owner or renter) or property owner within the boundaries, including perimeters, of the association.

**Membership dues** are \$15 per household for a calendar year. Send a check to: WCNA ; PO Box 82746; Austin, TX 78708-2746  
Dues notices and payment envelopes are included in the Nov/Dec and Jan/Feb newsletters each year.  
Payment also may be made using PayPal: See section 4

**WCNA News** is sent to all members and every household within the boundaries represented by the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association:

Braker Lane, North Lamar, I-35, and Walnut Creek.

**To contribute** to the newsletter, send contributions via email to [wana.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wana.contact@gmail.com) or contact a board member.

The opinions expressed in articles printed in this newsletter are the explicit opinions of the writer(s) and are not to be implied as the opinions of either the editor or the Board of Directors of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association, Inc.

