

Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

Jan
Feb
2017

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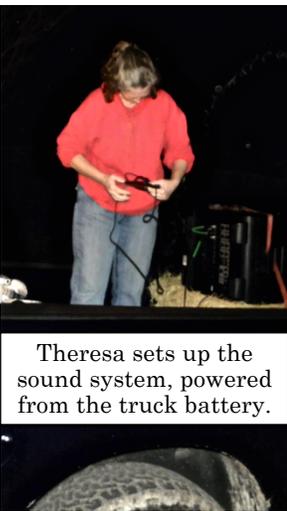
Hayride Caroling on a Great Night!

The end-of-year holidays bring out an impulse to get together with old friends and new and, given the right circumstances, sing together in the spirit of the season.

The Sixth Annual Christmas Caroling Hayride provided that opportunity once again on the last day of class for most Austin primary students. And like the fourth one, again we had great luck with the weather: December 20th was a sunny day reaching near 70 degrees and sliding to around 60 at departure time, with no significant wind. Thus it was when kids of all ages began to show up at the entrance to our park, "Walnut Bluffs Park", where the "sleigh" awaited the start of the trip. This year there was near equilibrium between young and old - from under 10 years to the oldest, John Fields at 91. Perhaps this mix explains why the harmony was notably better than in previous years when youngsters dominated.

As in the previous three years, the "horses" were supplied - under the hood of their Dodge Ram pickup - by Mike Crawford and Theresa Jones (you know, with the dinosaur mailbox). Theresa also provided the trailer and hay, decorated the truck and trailer, set up the sound system and "directed" the hayride (including getting people into the right places at the right time).

The caroling hayride is the brainchild of Jill Leberknight, who advertises and organizes the caroling, and, along with Santa (skillfully played by Wayne Tobias) and Santa Helper (her son Sullivan) leads the caroling from the back of the pickup, I mean sleigh. Jill provides the sound system and the music sheets and some of the personal decorative lighting, as well as the Christmas Spirit in her dress as a Victorian caroler.



Theresa sets up the sound system, powered from the truck battery.



Santa, aka Wayne, and Theresa discuss the outing after returning to the park.

So off we went (like the down on a thistle), from the park entrance around the neighborhood at a walking horse pace. A number of neighbors had contacted Jill about having the entourage stop in front of their homes to sing a carol, and this was done (to the extent possible; The sleigh couldn't back up nor go onto a major street, which limited the route a bit). As we moved along hayriders would leave and new riders would join the group, so more than a trailer-full of folks were able to participate.

Near the halfway point - at Jill's home to be specific - the posse paused for sufficient time to allow participants to get off and enjoy cookies, hot chocolate, and candy (and a bathroom break) before completing the route around most of the neighborhood. The singing was enthusiastic and - sometimes - quite good, but everybody enjoyed it regardless. Recorded music sometimes supplemented the voices, and the mix of voices and the harmony were notable.

The Caroling Hayride has become a staple activity for the Association and the neighborhood. If you would like to join us next year, and especially if you can help lead the song or play an accompanying instrument, please put the week before Christmas on your calendar to remind yourself of the opportunity when the time draws near. We guarantee you'll have a good time, even if we can't guarantee the weather will always be so good.



Santa, his helper Nathaniel (aka Sullivan) and Victorian caroler Jill pose with some participants before the "sleigh ride".

Wow! Did you notice? They're working on Walnut Crossing again!

Heavy machinery and occasional orange cones blocking the right lane of northbound Lamar began showing up just before the start of the new year. Work is intense as the "deceleration lane" for cars turning onto Walnut Crossing is starting to be established. Enough road base to build the interstate system has been deployed there and along the west end of the new street, Walnut Crossing, which we hope will greatly mitigate our cut-through traffic problem. Most of the road between the work here and Park 35 Circle is already ready to pave: Completion soon???



Some serious machinery is working at Walnut Crossing and Lamar again!

Is It Fake News?

Verbiage presented as "news" going viral on one or more internet sites has become "everyday", and we now know that it must be treated with skepticism. In fact any "news" that appears on the internet must be vetted before accepting its veracity. The suggestions below are a highly condensed treatment of such vetting. This problem is so complex that accuracy can be nearly impossible to verify one way or another. A more expansive conversationally-written and well-referenced exposition of this issue can be seen at <https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/10-ways-to-spot-fake-news-story10.htm>, among many other such online and hard-copy treatments. What follows was extracted from a recent article in the New York Times:

Among ways to sift the true from the false:

Check the source

Some hoax sites, designed to draw you in for advertising revenue, feature designs that resemble legitimate, well-known websites. Such "spoofing" can be quite effective — but there are often telltale signs to indicate their true nature.

For example, you should be wary of articles on sites whose addresses, or URLs, end in "com.co," writes Melissa Zimdars, a communications professor at Merrimack College whose own list of "fake news" sites went viral. (She has since taken it down and published a more general guide.) You can also check a website's "about" page, its list of contacts, and other stories and photos on it. Poke around a little; if things look less than official, you're probably on a spoof site.

Grammar and emotions

Random use of ALL CAPS? Lots of exclamation points? Does it make sense when you read it out loud? Can you imagine a TV newscaster reading it out loud? Is there something just "off" about it? Does it sound very angry, inflammatory, emotional? None of these are good signs.

Sources, sources, sources

Anonymous sources can appear in legit as well as made-up news stories. But Googling the people who are named in a story is a good way to check whether the story itself is real. They might have a LinkedIn profile, or appear in other news stories, for example. Someone says they are a university professor? Google the name of the university. Is it a health study on a new cure for cancer? Look it up.

On Facebook

Facebook users often share articles without reading them. Don't be that person.

Instead, click on the link and read the story before hitting the "share" button. If you believe a story someone shared is fake, you can post a comment, or report it to Facebook for outside fact-checking by clicking on the gray arrow on the upper right corner and selecting "report this post." You'll get an option for "It's a fake news story."

Two Simple Steps to Protect the Quality of Walnut Creek Neighborhood by Sharon Porter

The more eyes that help, the better we can assure that our neighborhood values are represented when significant changes are planned in the Walnut Creek Neighborhood. The earlier we know about actions that might require neighborhood representation, the better prepared we can be to make decisions that impact the quality of life that drew us to live in this neighborhood.

What to Report:

Critical signs that may indicate we may need to represent ourselves and take action: orange signs, yellow signs, and surveyors. Orange signs mean that a variance has been applied for at the City of Austin (COA); yellow signs mean that a zoning change (always an upzoning) has been applied for at the COA; and surveyors mostly mean that a property is changing hands.

Report immediately by:

Posting on social media: FaceBook or Nextdoor, either one is ok, both is better. Give location in neighborhood.

Calling Robert Meadows, President, Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association at 1-512-339-0229.

These signs indicate changes that give us an opportunity to be represented at formal COA hearings. The COA does listen to community input and the opinions of the neighborhood and its neighbors can impact final decisions. Immediate reporting gives us time to research the issues and establish a consensus with neighbors affected by proposed changes. It allows us to communicate options to neighbors who may want to take action. Using social media provides a forum for neighbors to add their observations and issues, quickly compiling a more complete picture of concerns, and providing a forum to mobilize neighborhood involvement where that can make a difference.

As a Board, and as neighbors, we are currently monitoring two situations that impact our greenbelt and the safety of our neighbors. We are grateful for the teamwork that helps us to manage these situations. They are not fast to resolve, they are not simple to resolve, they do not resolve completely to our satisfaction, but our involvement does help to conserve the quality of our increasingly urban life.

Wow! We can still do good work!

You probably already knew this intuitively: Austin has four of the most dangerous intersections in the state! And the ones you know the best recently have been modified to improve safety. One is Lamar at Parmer, where last summer islands were added at the right-turn lane from northbound Lamar to eastbound Parmer and also the right-turn lane from southbound Lamar to westbound Parmer. The narrow turn lanes run behind the islands, forcing drivers to take a tighter, slower turn and thereby reducing the previously high rate of rear-end crashes here. The islands also take away the ability of east- and westbound traffic to move quickly into the Parmer entry ramps for traffic turning off Lamar as the cars on Parmer cross the intersection. A new traffic signal also was added along with high-visibility crosswalks with flashing crossing lights for pedestrians. The result: The average rate of accidents fell by 43% from the rate before the upgrades were made. This is a dramatic result, and provides

credibility to Austin's Safety Improvement Program under the Vision Zero Action Plan to eliminate all types of accidents, including vehicle-pedestrian ones.

The other project under this program in our area was between Rutland and Rundberg on Lamar, where a median was added to prevent traffic from crossing this stretch of Lamar to enter or leave shopping areas on either side of Lamar. High-visibility crosswalks and better pedestrian ramps also were added, together with a flashing crossing light for pedestrians. The crash rate here dropped by 22%, another dramatic demonstration of good planning and implementation.

It's good to know that good engineers and work forces can perform successful strategies in our city. But it will take even more smart effort and money to make that Rutland-Rundberg stretch of Lamar really safe.



Looking west at Parmer/Lamar: The islands and crosswalk improvements made to this intersection dramatically lowered the accident rate.



Looking south on Lamar just north of Rundberg: A raised median, improved ramps and signal lights impressively reduced accident rates here.

Walnut Forest Resident Harold Hans Honored by UT by John Byers, writer/friend

On 11 November 2017 the University of Texas at Austin hosted a special "retirement" reception for **Harold Hans**, who has lived in the neighborhood since 1957. He was recognized for having served as an usher at UT home football games for 60 years! Of course Harold has a lot of great memories of some thrilling games, and he now is the proud possessor of an orange and white NCAA regulation football signed by every living current or former UT head football coach, with the exception of Charlie Strong. Coach Strong will also sign it after the end of his current season at South Florida.



Chris Ford, Assistant Events Manager at the Frank Erwin Center, presents a unique autographed football to Harold Hans in recognition of 60 years of service.

Through rain, freezing cold, lightning-laced thunderstorms and scorching heat, Harold faithfully helped Longhorn fans locate their seats: more than 300 games! He displays a satisfied grin when reminiscing about the "ups and downs" of UT's football fortunes.

On a December day, he sits in his large, open kitchen sipping on "turkey vegetable soup" made by Anna, his wife during those many years. Their home on north Whitewing Avenue in Walnut Forest - surrounded by majestic live oak trees - was built by Harold himself. "Yeah, we started building in 1971 but he didn't finish it until 1975", Anna volunteers as Harold rolls his eyes.

Actually they moved into a smaller house on the property in 1957, then began building the "big house" in 1971, finishing it in 1975. They had their seven children in the smaller home during those years, and they cherish their thirteen grandkids and fourteen great-grandkids, some of whom have (and still do) lived with their own families in this home.

They are devout parishioners at St. Louis Catholic Church on North Lamar. Anna retired from her teaching career at U.T. nursing School in 1993 and she and Harold - both octogenarians - are still quite active around home and in the neighborhood, in addition to doing the usual shopping and all other everyday activities required to maintain a homestead.

Harold recently suffered a fall at home which put him in the hospital with broken bones. After some issues with medications he's out of hospital care and we hope on a rapid recovery in rehab.

Airport Blvd Access From Southbound IH35 requires 51st Street Exit

If you've tried to use the usual exit onto Airport from southbound I35 recently you know it's not possible. And yet it is: You just have to exit at 51st Street. There you'll immediately run into the mess from ongoing construction rather than the confusing setup we're accustomed to. You have to navigate around various barriers with the intention of remaining on the I35 access road; i.e., to go straight through the 51st street intersection. The situation here is in flux, but keep calm and carry on, staying aware of a potential requirement to turn left or right on 51st. Passage through here has been reduced to a single lane approaching the 51st Street intersection, making it usually easy, but it could be different at any given time. Your intention is to cross 51st and continue on the access road to the Airport intersection, which remains as it was but has no access from the old I35 exit (actually, this makes the procedure much safer than it was using that exit and diving across two lanes of traffic in what always felt like about fifteen feet).

The 51st street intersection will become a "roundabout" when the project is "supposed to be completed" sometime this year, if the pace is accelerated this Spring as planned.

Oh, no! We're losing our Sears store!!

The Sears Grand store at 12625 N. Interstate 35 in North Austin has announced that it will shut down its automotive operation by the end January, and then close the store itself sometime in April. The parent company, Sears Holdings, announced plans last year to downsize the Sears Grand store operation and lease 45,000 square feet - about half the building - to AMC, which plans to open a new 10-screen movie theater there in 2019. The writing seemed to be on the wall, but it's still a shock to realize we're losing such an iconic institution so close by.

Thinking of Solar? Some Things You May Need to Know.

by Pat Pitt

Solar panels are appearing more and more in the neighborhood despite our biggest drawback: Too many big trees! What a tradeoff to have to make: Trees can provide significant "solar energy" themselves, in a couple of ways: They can shade roofs and windows to keep down solar heat transfer into our attics and rooms in the hot months (which means most months of the year) and they can provide shade which keeps us and our lawns and foliage from frying in the summer and reduce the amount of water needed to maintain same. (And - generally - they beautify and increase the value of our property.)

The problem with solar energy generation around trees is, of course, that shade falling on the panels reduces the amount of power they produce. Another issue: shade on the panels can prevent receiving the Austin Energy rebate available to help with initial cost. In fact, for panels to qualify for the city rebate (which is currently 40 cents per watt <https://austinenenergy.com/ae/green-power/solar-solutions/participating-solar-contractors/current-solar-incentive-levels>) a panel must be in full sunlight from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. every day of the year. Because of the many large trees in WCN, solar companies typically will look on Google Maps to decide whether a particular house may be eligible for the city rebate, then not bother even to commit to consulting with us if it's unlikely we'll qualify. This happened with the first three companies we contacted: It took months to find a solar company that would even come and look.

The requirement for solar exposure to qualify for a city rebate can be determined by a simple but ingenious instrument called a Solar Pathfinder. The instrument shows the reflection of surrounding trees on a clear dome with flat charts underneath. The chart, which is selected based on the approximate latitude of the measurement (i.e., the house) has scales showing time during a day for each month of a year. The instrument is held level with a reference pointing south. If a tree reflection crosses the scale between the prescribed hours of the winter solstice, a panel at that position will not qualify. The reflection allows estimation of how much foliage would have to be removed from a tree(s) for the panel to qualify. It's a simple process but does require some effort and time to use, so some companies are reluctant to try if qualification is considered unlikely. And this was true even when we indicated that the rebate wouldn't be a deciding issue for us!

In our case, many of the panels would not pass without reducing the height of several trees. We were willing to do this in some cases and willing to have panels installed which would not qualify in others. Disqualification of panels is on an individual basis and independent: All do not have to qualify to receive some rebate.

Installation was pretty quick, even for our somewhat complicated situation. After initial testing by the installer a city inspector was scheduled (Note that the Solar Inspectors are separate from the regular AE Electrical Inspectors). On arrival the solar inspector saw that some of our panels hung past the edge of the roof they are bolted to (see the picture at right, deemed this unacceptable and left without walking onto the property. It took some time to show in the complicated rules that the code doesn't disqualify this situation as long as a qualified structural engineer declares the installation safe. Meanwhile weeks went by.



Our installer was excellent, but had not run into a case like our 1955-built house presented. Our power line came from a pole across the street and attached to the side of the house directly above the main breaker, which was inside the house just below the distribution (circuit breaker) panel. Electrical code has changed a great deal since our power was hooked up in about 1970 (we weren't in the city at the time). AE considers adding solar power providing "new electrical service" for the home, and thus invokes all current codes relevant to such, just as if the house were being sold/purchased. This caused some significant changes to our city hookup, starting with adding a disconnect/main breaker outside where first responders (or anyone else) could shut power down instantly. Also required: Connecting power from the city pole at the closest point on the house. (The code also prescribes no more than 75 feet between the city pole and the connection point/meter, but this requirement may be waived depending on conditions.) In our case, moving the connection also required extensive rewiring to the new meter from the solar system, which was already completely wired at the time of initial inspection. Our company - Second Energy / Renner Global - absorbed all of the costs for these changes, which demonstrates extraordinary integrity.

Difficulties with solar companies neighbors have cited on social media clearly indicate care must be taken when picking a contractor. The city has a list of qualified contractors on the AE website, but apparently some of these are more reliable than others.

It took almost six months from first consultation to operational system for our installation, but the panels are producing about 40% of our total power usage even in the lowest solar radiation time of the year with some cloud cover during part of the period. We're happy!



WCNA Dues and Contributions Form for Calendar Year 2018

This form is included in both the Nov-Dec 2017 and Jan-Feb 2018 newsletters, so please check to see whether you sent in your dues in November or December to prevent accidentally paying again with the January issue.

Please make checks out to "WCNA" and return in the envelope provided - or your own - to

WCNA, P.O. Box 82746, Austin, TX 78708-2746

Note: You can use PayPal to charge dues at www.goo.gl/5iQIk

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____

DUES (\$15 per year): \$ _____

DONATION: General Fund \$ _____ Walnut Bluffs Trails (park) \$ _____ Cat Coalition \$ _____

TOTAL INCLUDED: \$ _____

I would like information about participation as/in:

WCNA Board or Officer ___ Newsletter Production ___ Park Projects ___

Neighborhood Beautification ___ Oak Wilt Abatement ___ Cat Coalition ___

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Adan Ballesteros, County Constable,

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**Austin Police Department Animal
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**North Austin Coalition of
Neighborhoods Newsletter is now
a blog site, following a wide
range of general city as well as
neighborhood issues and events.**

Read and Comment:

<http://www.lovenorthaustin.com/>

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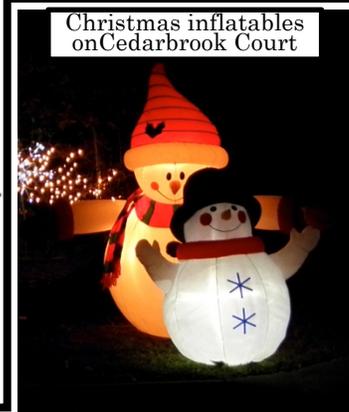
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Lunch Specials Monday to Friday 11:00am - 2:00pm



Christmas decorations on north Tedford from previous page in daylight



Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association membership is open to any resident (owner or renter) or property owner within the boundaries, including perimeters, of the association described below.

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:
<http://goo.gl/5iQIk>

WCNA News is sent to every household within the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association boundaries: Braker Lane, North Lamar, IH-35, and Yager Lane.

To contribute content to the newsletter, send contributions via email to wcna.contact@gmail.com or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620.

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

Calendar of Events

Jan	12	Austin Home & Garden Show – http://www.austinhomeandgardenshow.com
	15	Martin Luther King Holiday – AISD, Banks and P.O. closed
	17	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	21	3M half Marathon – http://3mhalfmarathon.com
	22	Bulk Pickup: Starts on Monday and ends on Friday or when all is picked up
	31	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Feb	2	Groundhog Day
	13	Mardi Gras
	14	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	16	Chinese New Year
	19	President’s Day – AISD, Banks and P.O. closed
	24	Chinese New Year Celebration – http://chinatownaustin.com
	28	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Mar	2	Texas Independence Day
	4	Austin Kite Festival – http://www.abckitefestival.org
	9 - 18	SXSW – http://www.sxsw.com
	11	Daylight savings times begins (set clocks one hour forward)
	12	Large Brush Pickup: Starts on Monday and ends on Friday or when all is picked up
	12	Spring Break
	14	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Apr	1	April Fools' Day