

UHD **DATELINE**

Student Run Since
Volume One

Friday December 11, 2020 | Vol. 65, Iss. 8

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UHD student publishes self-help book By Sheryl Sellers

UHD students continue to rise to new levels, and that is exactly what UHD senior, Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr. accomplished in publishing his first book, “Develop a Genius Mindset: Unleash your Full Potential and Achieve Unimaginable Success.” Rodriguez is a projected spring 2021 graduate majoring in Technical Communications with a minor in English. His passion for writing ignited in 2013 while completing his Associate degree at Lone Star College.

After Rodriguez learned the fundamentals in creative writing and wrote a few short yet unpublished stories, he

began to wonder what other types of writing were available. He felt he had hit rock bottom but that there must be other opportunities to write.

In 2016, Rodriguez began studying technical communications, the type of behind the scenes writing that includes documents, memos, executive summaries, scientific writing, and presentations incorporating visuals and text.

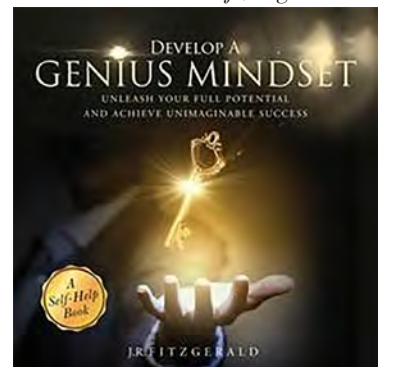
In order to improve his writing and communication and to create more value for himself, he started researching successful women and men. He wanted to know if there was something they had in common.

He watched webinars of people like Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Sam Walton. He found that they all set goals, managed their time, had mentors and coaches and continued to study to benefit themselves.

He also studied self-help authors, such as John Maxwell and Oprah Winfrey, whose books he found influential. He further found that they had the same successful traits as the others he researched.

As he began to utilize those same principles, Fitzgerald realized that these were principles that others could use also. The book came out of a reflection of himself.

Fitzgerald started the outline of his book in 2019 and finished the initial draft this past October. Via online searches, he located editors and illustrators for the book cover and the graphics between each chapter. He also held auditions for an audible version of the book which should be out by Dec. 25. *Continued on Gator Life, Page 2*



Cover of self-help book by UHD TCOM major, Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr. Image courtesy of Jesse Rodriguez.

Director of Emergency Management discusses UHD COVID-19 regulations By Sheryl Sellers

In Volume 65 Issue 2 The Dateline published an article evaluating COVID-19 safety procedures and regulations on campus. Noticing violations and inconsistencies of some precautions put in place, The Dateline requested an interview with Ms. Cynthia Vargas, Director, Emergency Management and Fire Safety. She had announced the procedures during the Sept. 1 Faculty Senate Meeting.

However, Director of Communications, Mike Emery, allowed only for an email interview, so that

follows. There was not an opportunity to have a direct dialogue, so a back-and-forth discussion on the topic is lacking.

Our initial questions inquired if the department was happy with the steps initially put in place and if/how were they monitored.

“UHD has implemented several different procedures and programs to improve campus safety and reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases on campus. Below are some of the processes and programs that have been implement-

ed since March 2020. All of these programs are assessed on an ongoing basis for effectiveness and are revised as needed to comply with new CDC and State of Texas guidance. It is an ongoing process that will continue through the duration of the pandemic.”

One of the procedures described at the September Faculty Senate meeting, was that pens would be put at each entrance on the sign in tables and there would be one for each person signing in to keep. However, the next day Dateline staff noticed that

there were only a few pens, none sanitized, and not one for each person to keep, and staff had to be asked that the pen available be sanitized prior to its use.

“We noted the same issues and have since changed the check-in procedure at the designated entrances. In October the check-in process was digitized and plexiglass shields were added to protect the workers that are staffing the desk and the person checking in to enhance safety.”

Continued on Gator Life, Page 3



THE DATELINE

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The Dateline is the official student newspaper of the University of Houston-Downtown. Since its first issue in 1982, The Dateline is proud to be "Student Run since Volume One." We strive to meet the needs of a growing university as well as the growing metropolitan city that surrounds us.

Submission Policy

The Dateline staff consists of students from the University of Houston-Downtown who complete all tasks required to produce the newspaper, which serves all UHD campuses. The opinions and commentaries expressed within reflect the views of the contributing writers. No opinions expressed in The Dateline reflect the viewpoints of the University of Houston-Downtown, its administration, or students.

The Dateline reserves the right to edit or modify submissions for the sake of clarity, content, grammar, or space limitations. All submissions become property of The Dateline and may not be returned.

All paid writers must be currently enrolled students at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Press releases, story ideas, news tips and suggestions are always welcomed. We encourage all students to contribute.

Any student interested in joining The Dateline staff may request more detailed information sending an email to the editors at editordatelinedowntown@gmail.com.

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Student publishes self-help book Continued from front page

Rodriguez wants to expand his fiction writing, and he has an idea for a children's book series. Along with writing courses, he has 15 course credits in classes on how to teach children to read and write. He has studied how to write not only for small children but also for older adults to determine the reading habits of all age groups.

Following graduation, Rodriguez hopes to find a career in writing, maybe within the university system or in publication. In time, he wants to start his own publishing company.

Describing his

book, Rodriguez says it is for anyone who thinks they have hit rock bottom, to let others know it is possible to get better at your craft.

"It's a process," said Rodriguez. "It's not something you learn one month to the next, but if you are really interested and serious about taking your fiction, non-fiction or business writing to the next level, study your craft, study everything there is to know. We are not going to reinvent the wheel."

Currently his book can be found on Amazon. He purchased an ISBN number, so eventually it

will be available in libraries and bookstores.

His advice to future authors is, "Don't give up on your dreams and aspirations and goals. Anything is possible with hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Do what's difficult now, you can get your leisure back later. Where there is difficulty, there is opportunity and where there is opportunity, there is difficulty."



UHD TCOM student, Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr., publishes his first book. Image courtesy of Jesse Rodriguez.

UHD plans for new Master's program

By Jeremy Barrientos

UHD recently reported a record enrollment of 15,251 undergraduate and graduate students for the fall 2020 semester, a 4% increase over the last year. As the university continues to grow, many students are eager to continue their education and attend graduate school at UHD, but the choices are limited. UHD currently offers nine graduate degree programs.

The Marilyn Davies College of Business offers a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Professional Accountancy, and a Master of Security Management. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences offers an M.S. in Technical Communication, an M.A. in Non-Profit Management, and an M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition. Students can pursue an M.S. in Data Analytics at the College of

Sciences and Technology or an M.S. in Criminal Justice at the College of Public Service as well as an M.A. in Teaching.

As the second largest university in Houston in terms of student enrollment, UHD faculty are advocating for more programs and curriculum based on the demand of its students. The Communication Studies faculty are hoping to launch a new Master of Arts in Strategic Communication by Fall 2022. The UH campus currently offers a Strategic Communication B.A. degree, at the Jack J. Valenti School of Communication, which provides basic knowledge, skills and ethical considerations to prepare students for entry into the fields of advertising, integrated communication, organizational/corporate communication and public relations. The master

program offered at UHD will focus on community engagement here in Houston, which will appeal to all UHD Communication Studies students hoping to grow and enrich their academic careers.

Before a new master program is approved by the UHS Board of Regents, many steps that need to be taken. A proposal must be submitted that outlines the recommendation report to ensure that all criteria for the new degree program are met. Typical criteria are based on the need for such a degree, student success, employment rate after graduating, and faculty resources to name a few. There are 24 master's degrees in communication programs in Texas with only three offering a Master's in Strategic Communication. If approved, the UHD will increase the growth of its student body by appealing to and recruiting prospective graduate students in Texas and around the country.

Director discusses COVID-19 regulations *Continued from front page*

Though there were masks in vending machines, these machines were several floors above the check-in areas, which was not helpful or efficient.

“The vending machines are loaded by a third-party vendor and are on a regular restocking cycle. In addition, disposable masks are available at the designated entrances, and masks and hand sanitizer can also be purchased in the bookstore. We encourage all members of the UHD community to have a mask upon arrival and even a back-up in case they need it.

“Additional information regarding masks and face coverings on campus can be found in these FAQs [on the UHD website: ‘FAQ About Covid-19 > Face Coverings’].”

Upon visits to the university, Dateline staff noticed many procedures were not followed, and discussed this in the Sept. 18 issue of The Dateline. Was there follow-up on the procedures that were not followed?

“Unfortunately, I have not seen the article... I would be happy to address these issues when I have additional details. I’d also like to maintain an open channel of communication with Dateline and its readers, so we can continue to share information and enhance campus safety.

“UHD has formed the COVID-19 Taskforce to address the

need for procedural changes and monitor the effectiveness of our strategies. The Taskforce is made up of 18 members from various Departments and Colleges and includes a representative from the Student Government Association. If anyone on campus has questions or needs to report procedures not being followed or people not adhering to the appropriate protocol, they should email Coronavirus@uhd.edu “

How does the department confirm that procedures are being followed, including nutritious food items in the vending machines?

“UHD has various departments that monitor daily operations related to the list here that includes Facilities Management, Emergency Management, and University Business Services.

“If anyone sees something they need to report or a short supply of masks or hand sanitizer in the vending machines or the bookstore, please email Coronavirus@uhd.edu”

Are employees aware of the importance of following the guidelines?

“UHD communicates to the UHD community by way of UHD News, Email and virtual townhalls that are open to faculty, staff, and students. For a digest of all official University COVID-19 related communication, please visit the website. As a reminder,

the UHD COVID-19 website is a resource for the campus community.”

What procedures take place daily to ensure student, staff and faculty safety among the COVID-19 pandemic?

“The following safety protocols have been implemented at UHD to ensure a safe return to campus:

“Online COVID-19 training module and certification required of students, faculty and staff before return to campus.

“Public awareness campaign, COVID-19 website, and signage throughout campuses to provide education and communicate messaging.

“Face coverings while on campuses unless the individual has an approved accommodation.

“Physical distancing implemented – reduced capacity in classrooms, campus spaces, auxiliaries, rearranging of classroom seating and workspaces; assess installation of barriers; flexible work schedules; online learning options; and encouragement of virtual meetings.

“Enhanced cleaning protocols employed throughout campuses, including daily cleaning of instructional spaces and high-touch points, and cleaning response protocol for disinfection of areas impacted by positive COVID-19 cases.

“Hygiene

enhancements throughout campuses, including availability of hand sanitizer, cleaning products, and assessing HVAC systems.

“A range of academic options available to provide for multi-modality of instruction.

“Mandatory training on safety procedures for all faculty, staff, students and visitors.

“Faculty, staff, and students required to perform daily self-health assessment to screen for symptoms before coming to campus; visitors and vendors required to perform self-health assessment to screen for symptoms before coming to campus.

“Protocols in place for students, faculty, and staff for reporting of COVID-19 symptoms, positive case or diagnosis, or potential exposure including: self-quarantine if exposed, self-isolation upon positive case or diagnosis, contact tracing to identify exposed UHS community members, handling of return to campuses following self-quarantine/self-isolation, and establishment of a COVID-19 Response Coordinator as point of contact for handling of positive case/exposure issues.

“If you are a student who is experiencing anxiety or stress because of COVID-19, please consider contacting Counseling Services by phone or video at 713-500-3852. Student Health Services will answer health-re-

lated questions by phone – 713-221-8137.

“Students, faculty and staff must report COVID-19 diagnosis and possible exposure. In addition, individuals who have been quarantined must request permission to return to campus.

“As a reminder there are individual procedures that those coming to campus should also take on a daily basis.”

It has been anticipated that UHD would move to Stage 3 for the spring semester. What procedures will be implemented, and how would students, faculty, and staff become aware of the guidelines?

“The same procedures that we have now will continue to be in place. Any new changes will be introduced via formal communication to the campus community. Email is a primary tool for reaching faculty, staff and students. Additionally, students receive a weekly news digest, Gator Update. Faculty and staff receive UHD News twice a week.”

The Dateline noted that some persons were not wearing masks when we went to their offices.

“Everyone is required to wear a mask on campus. If you are around someone who is not wearing a face mask, politely step away from that person. Then please contact the faculty or staff member who

is supervising the person or the space where the infraction occurred or the nearest department office. The department head or building leadership will be in a position to ascertain whether the person has an exemption and, if not, politely direct the person to wear a face covering or vacate the public area.

“For additional information, please visit the Face Coverings FAQ’s.”

The Dateline allowed Ms. Vargas the opportunity to add her own information to those reading The Dateline.

“One of the most important ways of preventing outbreaks and community transmission on campus is through quarantine and isolation practices for persons that have symptoms, have a diagnosis, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. It is extremely important that UHD Community members report those conditions to the Contact Tracing Team. Forms to report [can be found on the UHD website].

“Continue to follow CDC guidance for wearing a mask and staying home when you are sick or exposed. Students should feel free to report anything related to COVID-19 to coronavirus@uhd.edu”

The Dateline thanks Ms. Vargas for her responses to our request, although a direct communication may have allowed opportunity for further discussion.

Writing Tutoring from the



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Fall Semester 2020



Our Hours

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Friday-Saturday 9-3 p.m. (online only)

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Interested in-person tutoring? Email us at wrc@uhd.edu.



Faculty Spotlight

Lori Ramirez, M.B.A.

By Anthony Raul Ramirez

It is a beneficial for students to see how alumni succeed after graduation. Professor Lori Ann Ramirez, M.B.A., is one these alumni who is not just a business owner, but also a professor at the very college she graduated from. Professor Ramirez began teaching in 2018; she currently teaches Principles of Management (MGT 3301), Business Communication (BA 3350), and Introduction to Business (BA 1301) at UHD.

Professor Ramirez graduated from UHD in 2013 and received a Bachelor's Degree in fine arts with a concentration in art history. She graduated with an M.B.A. in 2017 with a concentration in leadership and became the first student commencement speaker in history of the M.B.A. program.

She was also the fitness coordinator for UHD's Sports and Fitness department from 2014 to 2017 where she oversaw all fitness events and classes taught in the

Student Life Center, and even taught some aerobics classes herself.

Professor Ramirez has served on the UHD alumni council board since 2018. The board plans alumni events, searches to fill UHD faculty positions, assists with student orientation, and speaks with potential students and their parents about the UHD experience.

Thanks to her determination in the business field, Professor Ramirez currently runs two of her own

businesses: Inspire Fitness Training Center and Red Ride Cycling Studio. She used her enjoyment of physical fitness to create local businesses in her hometown of Houston, Texas that has a history as one of the most overweight cities in America. Professor Ramirez is also a co-founder of the Beyond Great Corporation, a non-profit organization run by a group of UHD alumni. Beyond Great focuses on young women leadership by providing mentoring roles to fe-

male students in middle and high school. The organization's co-founders consist of eight female minorities who have a position as either a manager or small business owner and who have graduated from UHD with an M.B.A.

Professor Ramirez is also currently pursuing her doctorate at Creighton University to obtain a Doctorate of Business Administration in organizational behavior. We typically think of our success as being independently based on ourselves. The

success of both of Professor Ramirez's jobs - running fitness businesses and teaching - are measured in terms of how well she can help others.

Whether it be instructing someone on how to perform a proper push-up or on the relationship of supply and demand, she is using her expertise in both of her fields to give back to the community and pass that knowledge forward.

Local Business Spotlight

7th Heaven Coffee and Eatery

By Anthony Raul Ramirez

COVID-19 has severely damaged small businesses this year because of lockdown restrictions and fear of further spread. However, a business owner, Davy Quin, I recently spoke with has used this time to restructure and improve their business. Quin opened Grindbreak Café in December 2016 hosting a combination of food, coffee, and video games, even referring to drink additions as “XP boosts.”

Unfortunately, Quin eventually closed Grindbreak Café. However, instead of giving up, Quin chose to restart with a new location in Humble. That was the beginning of 7th Heaven Coffee & Eatery.

What are the differences between your new eatery and the previous one?

“We now have an excellent menu from vegan options to fresh burgers with a focus on freshness and quality meals. 7th Heaven was then born as a reference to Seventh Heaven from the video game ‘Final Fantasy 7.’ Since we cannot host events anymore, the current location is smaller. But we have a drive-thru so we can get your drinks and food out faster. We are currently working on getting our website polished so you can order from online quickly for pick up, as well. Imagine a

Starbucks, but with better coffee and fresh cooked food!”

How has the transition been with moving to a new location?

“The transition has been difficult, but we have gained several new repeat local customers as well as older clientele. Due to tough times, however, people don’t go out to eat as often as before so we are still struggling through. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel in that we are close to a vaccine.”

Were you able to hire back any of the staff you had?

“Most of our previous staff, also college students, stayed on board because they love what we serve. Some students who have graduated moved on to their career jobs.”

Do you have any advice for entrepreneurs attempting to start their own businesses in the future?

“My advice to any entrepreneur is to make sure to plan for the first year, then the next five years. Have projections and a backup plan. Think over your idea 100 times and see if there is a market for it through research and talking to different people, because in business, not everything goes as planned. You need to know what to do during the worst times. Also make sure you are

passionate in what you are doing and what you bring to the market. If you want to start a business for a quick buck, then think again. We would not recommend starting a business during COVID unless you have plenty of experience. Make sure to support small local places that you love, otherwise they will disappear.”

Quin’s story is the story of many small business owners today. After years of

preparation building a clientele base, testing menu improvements, learning what your customers enjoy,

determining how to improve your establishment you’ve built – all for it to be torn down within months.

Support local small businesses whenever you can because don’t know what you have until it’s gone.



7th Heaven burger. Image credit: Anthony Raul Ramirez.



7th Heaven shows appreciation for their customers. Image courtesy of Dharminder Tiwana.



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UHD's search for new president continues with Presidential Candidate Forums

Junius J. Gonzales, Ph.D.

By Sheryl Sellers

Nov. 16 marked the first of many candidate forums in UHD's search for its new president. Junius J. Gonzales, Ph.D., discussed his belief in engaging for a common goal, with the ability to think, act, and influence strategically, and following a path of reach, touch, and inspire. He remarked that one can drive innovation with diverse talents.

Using a theme and core components



Image courtesy of NYIT website

was one of his visions for the future. He asserted that UHD is recognized nationally in academia, as an indispensable life force and a leader in the vital face of community impact.

Taking that a step further, he described vital in this way:

V – visioning

I – impact

T – technology put in hands of every student

A – agility

L – liberating

He used stories throughout the presentation to make his points clear and often mentioned his effectiveness

as a team player. His soft tone alluded to an approachable persona.

He spoke vividly about his past professional experience; however, concrete actions were missing from this discussion, and his stated goals were ambiguous and generic.

A question-and-answer period followed his remarks. Michelle Moosally, Ph.D. commented that his ideas sounded exciting for UHD's future and na-

tional profile. But she queried how finances would play into his vision.

In answer, Dr. Gonzales spoke about his vast experience in fundraising, and his place on the board of directors of several non-profits where he garnered many contacts. His first non-profit benefactor was in the realm of theatre, then social service, and then with LatinX populations. He believes in two degrees of separation between people. He furthered that he would call anyone if needed and mentioned a fundraising campaign he assisted with in Chappel Hill, Texas, where he helped fund crowd-sourcing for an organization. This would

help him achieve more contacts for the future.

Ed Cueva, Ph.D. asked Dr. Gonzales to talk about shared governance and transparency. The response centered around building a slow growth of trust and having a common mission.

He was queried about the impact of COVID-19 and what would he expect on a long-term basis. Dr. Gonzales stated he would put in as much inclusion as possible.

When asked about the most successful program for students he responded with "You First" - a first year transition wherein students have a Professor Advisor, a Peer Advisor, a

Faculty Advisor, and a Career Advisor.

Dr. Gonzales ended his presentation, stating that UHD has a real sense of belonging.

Dr. Gonzales is a first-generation college student, son of poor immigrant parents and is a psychiatrist by training.

He has held several positions in academia, most recently as the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at New York Institute of Technology (NYIT). Prior to joining NYIT, he served as senior vice president for Academic Affairs for the University of North Carolina System, and as its interim president from Jan.-Mar. 2016.

First-generation college student, Rhonda M. Gonzales, Ph.D., earned a Bachelor and Master of Arts from the University of California. She went on to complete a Doctor of Philosophy from the same university. Gonzales also has a K-8 Bilingual Teaching Certificate from California.

Since 2004, Gonzales has held various positions at the University of Texas at San Antonio including the Professor and Chair of History Department, Vice President for Student Success, and Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives. For her work at the university, UTSA awarded

Gonzales with Distinguished Achievement for Excellence in University Service in 2016.

Gonzales' areas of expertise include Linguistics, Diaspora, and Mexican History, but the majority of her professional research surrounds African American studies. It delves into the histories, literatures, religions, societies, and psychology of the African culture illuminate social classifications and the ways in which these classifications impact individual development. Gonzales' research seems innovative and progressive, as it aims to understand how these classifications

interact in society to create systems of discrimination and oppression.

With this awareness of intersectionality, Gonzales has also held various positions with organizations that are dedicated to student success. Some of her past experiences in this arena include: Director of "PIVOT for Academic Success," a Fellow of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Fellow of the American Council on Education.

Gonzales' experiences in these areas could apply to and greatly impact UHD's many centers and organizations that are dedicated to stu-

dent success (i.e. Association of Latino Professionals for America, Black Student Association, Center for

Critical Race Studies, among many others).

For her work in diversity, Gonzales and team were twice awarded with UTSA's San Antonio President's Distinguished Diversity Award in 2013 and 2016. Gonzales' USTA bio describes her as a "strategic, energetic, relatable and considerate leader."

Much of her work focuses on the ways in which to prepare students for

Rhonda M. Gonzales, Ph.D.

By Jaida Doll



Image courtesy of UHD website

academic success by taking action against the systemic oppression that often resides in the education system.

"Her definition of leadership is a simple one: It's creating pathways of success for others," stated Tricia Schwenesen of UTSA.

Gonzales' has created many of these pathways for student success at UTSA - she has founded both UTSA's Women's Professional Advancement

and Synergy Academy and the UTSA's First Generation and Transfer Student Center.

Her definition of educators is quite similar. Gonzales' states "Educators... are trying to prepare people to walk through doors that they otherwise wouldn't be prepared to walk through."



UHD's search for new president continues with Presidential Candidate Forums

Loren James Blanchard, Ph.D.

By Stephanie Alvarez



Image courtesy of UH website.

Loren James Blanchard, Ph.D., is the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs at the California State University - the largest and most diverse system of higher education in the US. Blanchard is a first-generation college graduate, obtaining his Ph.D. in education psychology

from the University of Georgia.

As president of the UHD, candidate, Blanchard plans to stimulate an equity minded education program for UHD students, staff, and its community. His personal values were set forth by his parents who bestowed three fundamental values in daily life. These prin-

ciples are: education is the pathway of advancement; their children lives had to be better than their own; and lastly, it is important to place intentional support.

Blanchard's plan is to set forth an equity-minded education program which will bring forth a comprehensive structure necessary for student retention, catering to all UHD students, but also giving particular notice to the needs of

the demographics of first-generational college student. Through this educational program, Blanchard's goal is to enhance student retention and help them obtain a degree of value from UHD. To improve student degree completion, Blanchard's initiatives will focus in the following six areas: Academic preparation, enrollment management, student engagement and well-being, financial assistance, data analytics, and administrative barriers. For the strategies to work, it is critical for UHD faculty and com-

munity members to support the program. UHD system also needs to provide the essential resources for faculty preparation which must include training and professional development.

According to Loren Blanchard, "It is not in what we say but in what we do when they leave us."

Being able to create value to the degree that UHD students will obtain is essential to the future outcomes of the UHD institution. As president, Dr. Blanchard seeks to create more opportunities for UHD

students by working with community members to create jobs directly benefiting UHD students. He also wants to create a pipeline program to provide a smooth transition from grade school to the UHD higher education system. Through his initiatives, Dr. Loren J. Blanchard aims to make UHD and equity minded educational institution which will cater to all students, while also targeting to enhance the opportunities for degree completion for first-generation students.

On Dec. 1, current UHD interim president Antonio Tillis, Ph.D., presented at the Candidate Forums. Dr. Tillis is a first-generation college student; he pursued a corporate career in Washington D.C. after receiving his bachelor's degree in Spanish from Vanderbilt University. Following a trip to the Dominican Republic and working with an orphanage there, he found his true calling - teaching.

Having had affiliations with many universities, the question is: why UHD? He stated that while UHD is "outside the shadow of the University of Houston (UH), we are Houston's university."

Dr. Tillis mentioned his passion for serving and making UHD a place where activists and students

would want to be.

Tillis stated that the UHD mission "speaks to my core." He is attracted to the diverse demographic and the volume of first-generation students who will become the "game changers for their family." He contended that UHD is affordable and comprehensive and has a great opportunity for community outreach.

His goals for UHD include student-centered internships, and aggressive branding of the university, highlighting affordability and uniqueness.

He commented that the FTIC graduation rates are good, but they can be better. He would contemplate funding for scholarships, post-doctoral programs, corporate and community part-

ners and faculty and staff development.

Questions involved improving distance relations with UHD remote campuses. Dr. Tillis answered that he would integrate them into the university community and determine what other impact they can have.

Tillis discussed adding doctoral programs at UHD, but he implied that this may conflict with programs at UH. When inquired about bringing a School of Journalism to UHD to strengthen The Dateline, Dr. Tillis answered that UH has the [Jack J.] Valenti School of Communication so adding the program at UHD would be a challenge.

He suggests looking at ways UHD can find a niche and ask how UHD can differentiate

itself from UH

When asked how he would engage students, Tillis responded that the Dean of Students would work to instill pride in students and the ability to see themselves as alumni. He suggested communication with student organizations, offering "Pizza with the President" from time to time.

He sees UHD getting a better footprint in STEM. He would lobby for programs that UHD wants to add, within the structure of the UH System. He suggests looking at ways UHD can find a niche and ask how UHD can differentiate itself from UH.

Other issues he would address as UHD president include:

Open com-

Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D.

By Sheryl Sellers

munication between faculty and administration; tuning into online classes to see how faculty engage with the students; seek out community partners for opportunities for students who learn differently; keep the campus safe; attentively listen to learn; bringing out "the jewels" that are hidden in the graduate programs; determine if the university is organized correctly.

Furthermore, he would want to add faculty that represents diversity, a small representative of Ph.D.'s from underrepresented demographics. Students need to see themselves in leadership positions.



Image courtesy of UHD website.

Tillis also commented that he would not be in favor of a higher rate of online courses vs face-to-face in the post-pandemic climate.

Concerning the impact of I-10 construction on UHD campus, Tillis said one needs to be aware of how to handle surprises. TXDOT may create opportunity to have more of a campus feel. They would need to address parking issues and acquire first right of refusal on property owned by the State. UHD will need a continuity of operations plan, and how best to utilize satellite campuses.

Houston prepares to deliver COVID-19 vaccine By Riyasa Shrestha

The COVID-19 vaccine is on its way. Pharmaceutical company, Pfizer, is in the process of applying for an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for its vaccine. The vaccine has proven to be 95% effective during trial sessions, an efficacy level considered remarkable.

The FDA announced it will review Pfizer's EUA on Dec. 10.

Operation Warp Speed, the US based organization tasked with expediting and distributing the vaccine, stated that once is approved, 40 million doses will be distributing right away. Houston-area hospitals are preparing for the first shipment, likely in

mid-December.

Texas Children's Hospital, Houston Methodist, Memorial Hermann and MD Anderson Cancer Center confirmed they are in talks with the local, state and federal officials about the shipments.

These discussions will help coordinate other factors regarding the vaccine,

from storing it in ultra-cold freezers, to then thawing it and distributing it to the public in a short period.

"We're going to get it down to the state. States are going to tell us exactly where they want it to be, and we can put it in one place in the state or we can put it in 10,000 places in the state," the U.S.

Army General Gustave Perna said.

Mark Wallace, CEO of Texas Children's Hospital wrote in an email announcing TCH's participation, "I can think of no greater challenge we have to overcome together, and I can think of no better news to hear than that Texas's Children's will be given such a vital tool in combat-

ing this highly infectious disease."

The FDA says its process will be meticulous and transparent when considering Pfizer's vaccine, and will stream its Dec. 10 meeting on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and the FDA website.

Pope Francis appoints first Black cardinal By Salvador Hernandez

On Nov. 28, Archbishop Wilton Gregory was elevated to the status of cardinal by Pope Francis in a ceremony held at the Vatican, becoming the first Black cardinal in the Catholic Church.

Due to the pandemic, the ceremony was far different than most years. Instead of the thousands of guests that attend the papal

ceremony, each cardinal as restricted to 10 guests each.

In addition to Archbishop Wilton Gregory, 11 other men were chosen to receive the honor of the cardinal position. These men came from the Philippines, Rwanda and Chile, to name just a few.

These nominations are a step forward for the Catholic

Church as Pope Francis has envisioned a goal for there to be more diversity and inclusion within the church hierarchy.

Gregory commented on his ascension in the Church hierarchy to the position of cardinal.

"It's been a time to thank God for this unique moment in my life and in the life of the church in

the United States." Gregory further went on to state "I hope it's a sign to the African American community that the Catholic Church has a great reverence, respect and esteem for the people, for my people of color."

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "There are 3 million African

American Catholics in the United States. Of Roman Catholic parishes in the United States, 798 are considered to be predominantly African American. Most of those continue to be on the East Coast and in the South. Further west of the Mississippi River, African American Catholics are more likely to be immersed in multicult-

tural parishes."

The Catholic Church now has 229 cardinals. Of those, 128 cardinals are eligible to vote for the next pope once Pope Francis retires or passes away. Pope Francis has chosen 73 so far, meaning that the new Pope selected will most likely have the same slant toward his policies.

Poll Hero Project recruits over 37,000 workers By Keven Balderas

Elections experts feared the pandemic would cause a devastating shortage of poll workers, roles the middle-aged and elderly have traditionally filled. However, that concern never materialized, thanks to a number of organized efforts which recruited thousands over several months to work the polls just in time for Election Season, 2020.

One such effort was the Poll Hero Project, a non-profit organization comprising mostly of high-school and college students. It succeeded in recruiting in about

100 days over 37,000 young people to be poll-workers. The volunteers exceeded the organization's original goal of 1000 in less than two weeks.

"And we were just like, 'whoa,' maybe this is a thing, you know," says Avi Stopper, one of its co-founders, of passing that first milestone. "I think that that was a really remarkable moment."

A couple of weeks had elapsed between that moment and when Avi first teamed up with the students from Denver East High School or

Princeton University who would go on to form the Poll Hero Project. What contributed most to them coming together was, ironically, the pandemic. As businesses shuttered and schools cancelled class, college students were losing job and internship opportunities left and right. Many universities, including Princeton, ran to their rescue, recurring to their alumni networks to see whether anyone would assist them.

"The Center for Career Development [at Princeton] developed initiatives to quickly connect

students with alumni to get hands-on experience, develop new skills and grow professionally," said Kimberly Betz, the Center's executive director, at the end of June in an online blog which Princeton launched to promote its campaign to assist its students during the pandemic.

According to the Election Administration and Voting Survey on the 2018 general election, 8 out of every 10 poll workers of the 637,713 reported by 45 states were 41 years old or older. Meanwhile, 3 out of

every 10 of those poll workers were between 61 and 70 years of age. 26.9 percent were 71 and over.

The country had already witnessed closed polling locations and long lines in connection with the primaries. For instance, in Georgia's primary election in June, a host of issues, including four-hour lines, malfunctioning ballot machines and unprepared poll workers, resulted in many voters leaving the polls without casting their votes.

Additionally, the pandemic posed serious risks for

older Americans, who could by and large abstain from participating as poll workers in 2020 to protect themselves amid a potential second wave of the coronavirus. With these issues in mind, the threat of not having enough poll workers during Early Voting and Election Day loomed.

Avi and his young colleagues resolved to tackle this need, and their initiative, rebranded as the Poll Hero Project, quickly grew as a result. By Election Day, its volunteers numbered roughly 115.

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Judge restores DACA, allows new applicants

By Indira Zaldivar

On Dec. 4, a federal judge in the Eastern District of New York directed the Department of Homeland Security to publicly announce by Dec. 7, that first-time applications, renewal requests, and advance parole requests for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program will be accepted.

U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis has ruled to restore DACA as originally established on June 15, 2012 by the Obama Administration. The DACA program temporarily allows Dreamers, immigrants brought

to the U.S. as kids and who meet specific criteria, to work and reside legally in the U.S. for a two-year period subject to renewal. For the first time since September 2017, new applicants will be allowed in the program and be able to secure their status at least for two years without the threat of deportation.

Garaufis' new ruling in the *Batalla Vidal v. Wolf* lawsuit invalidated the July 28 memorandum by acting DHS secretary Chad Wolf which reduced to one year the period of renewed deferred action. He directed DHS to automat-

ically extend to two years the one-year DACA grants and work permits given to 65,800 DACA recipients following Wolf's memorandum policy.

Garaufis, an appointee of President Bill Clinton, ruled on Nov. 14 that Wolf was "not lawfully serving" when he issued that memo.

While human rights organizations have applauded this victory, many also advise the immigrant community to remain vigilant as other efforts to dismantle the program persist. On December 22, a Texas court, led by Judge Hanen, will hear the *State of Texas v.*

Nielsen case on the legality of DACA. Juliana Macedo do Nascimento, DACA recipient and state and local policy manager, of the youth-led immigrant network, United We Dream, warned in a press release on Dec. 4 that "Trump allies could attempt to destroy DACA and expose millions to deporta-

tion."

"Although this is a victory for immigrant youth, loved ones and allies who have fought every step of the way, DACA does not give us permanent protection from deportation," Macedo said. "Living from court to court ruling, on the whims of politicians or which way the

wind is blowing, is cruel and dehumanizing. The incoming Biden-Harris administration must use every tool at their disposal to move on permanent solutions for immigrant youth and over 11 million undocumented people living in this country."



DACA supporters rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court on June 18, in Washington, DC on the day the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, rejected the Trump administration's attempt to end DACA. Image courtesy of Drew Angerer via Getty Images.

Researchers identify COVID-19 super-spreaders

By Lauren Anderson

Upon onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers estimated that people with SARS-CoV-2 could infect 2 to 3 people, but it has recently been proven that they can infect a much larger amount of people that can range from 14 to 40 people at a time. The existence of super-spreaders can accelerate the rate of new infections and expand the geographic distribution of the disease.

Whether or not someone is a super-spreader will depend on a combination of the virus, the person's biology, and their environment or behavior. Recently, researchers have identified the biological features that could

make an infected person a COVID super-spreader. Scientists from the University of Central Florida's Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering used 3D modelling and numerical simulations to digitally recreate sneezes from people with different physiological features. They studied how different facial features, such as a blocked nose or a full set of teeth, can contribute to super-spreader events by examining these sneeze droplets for the length of travel and amount of time they linger in the air.

"This is the first study that aims to understand the underlying 'why' of how far sneezes travel,"

said study co-author Michael Kinzel from UCF. "We show that the human body has influencers, such as a complex duct system associated with the nasal flow that actually disrupts the jet from your mouth and prevents it from dispersing droplets far distances."

The researchers made four models using computer-generated subjects - a full set of teeth with an uncongested nose, no teeth with an uncongested nose, no teeth with a congested nose, and a full set of teeth with a congested nose.

They found that when a person has a congested nose and a full set of teeth, spray distance of droplets expelled are

about 60% greater than when they do not have these features.

The researchers also simulated thin, medium, and thick saliva. They found that thinner saliva, that are composed from smaller droplets, stay in the air longer than medium or thick saliva.

The researchers also stated that when people with an uncongested nose blow into a tissue, the speed and distance that sneeze droplets will travel decreases. This is because an uncongested nose provides a path for the sneeze to exit. With a blocked nose, the mouth becomes the only exit for the sneeze, and having more teeth can also restrict the exit area.

If everything is condensed to one exit or has less area, the force of expulsion, the velocity, and the distance are greater. Those with less or no teeth have a weaker sneeze expulsion as do those with a clear nose. Because it can help reduce germ-spread, researchers suggest blowing the nose regularly and keeping it free-flowing.

"Teeth create a narrowing effect in the jet that makes it stronger and more turbulent," Kinzel said. "They actually appear to drive transmission. So, if you see someone without teeth, you can actually expect a weaker jet from the sneeze from them." They also ex-

plored producing a COVID-19 cough drop to thicken people's spit and drag any sneezes to the ground faster to reduce the likelihood of transmission in the immediate aftermath of a sneeze.

"The results show exposure levels are highly dependent on the fluid dynamics that can vary depending on several human features," says Kareem Ahmed, an associate professor in UCF's Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and study co-author. The researchers are hoping to conduct clinical trials with a variety of volunteers from multiple backgrounds to further validate the results.

Houston Police Review Board is deeply flawed

By Riyasa Shrestha

Kinder Institute conducted a study and found that the Independent Houston Police Oversight Board, was deeply flawed. The report found that civilian police review boards in Dallas, Austin and Fort Worth adhered to the national standards of independence, but the boards in both Houston and San Antonio did not meet these standards.

Stephen Sherman, co-author of the report writes that the current civilian review board relies almost exclusively on

reports from Houston Police Department Internal Affairs, lacking the ability to independently investigate incidents. “When you have full-time monitors, they can more closely not just at individual instances, but also perhaps the policies that might lead to these instances.”

After the finding was reported, a group of local community leaders proposed that the IHPOB create transparency between the community and the Houston Police Department. The board consists of community mem-

bers from multiple organizations and the law schools at Texas Southern University and the University of Houston. The board would subpoena documents, interview witnesses, suspects and police officers. It would investigate possible misconduct by police officers and make the final decision on discipline.

In June, Mayor Sylvester Turner signed an executive order regarding the use of deadly force and no-knock warrants. Turner also appointed a Policing Reforms Task Force to review Houston

Police Department policies and practices. The Kinder research supports the recent finding of the Mayor’s Police Reform Task Force which recommended the current review board to become a publicly-funded, independent, investigate entity, promoting transparency, deterring officer misconduct, and ensuring accessibility to citizens seeking accountability.

“Until we make a change, until we come together, until we look at documents like this, and afford us an opportunity for a solution, we are not moving,” said civil rights activist Cynthia Cole.

Poll Hero Project

Continued from News, Page 8

One of those volunteers who joined Avi and his fellow founders in their quest to ensure a functioning democracy was Abby Johnson, a high-school student from Vermont. She found out about the Poll Hero Project through Instagram in August.

“And I thought, ‘Wow, this is a great way to be even more civically engaged, and one that I really hadn’t thought of,’” expressed Abby.

After signing up, one of the organization’s members contacted her, asking whether she would be willing to be a part of the team. She promptly accepted, and, found herself on the college outreach team, recruiting college-age students to become poll workers. Her team’s efforts involved reaching out to professors, student organizations, sports teams and newspapers.

“It was a very interesting experience,” Abby remarked. “Most of the time, it was failure. For every fifteen to twenty noes, we would get a yes.”

The Poll Hero Project leveraged social media particularly well to promote its work and gain influence. On TikTok, it garnered views in the hundreds of thousands, and on Twitter, it gained thousands of followers.

Its savvy marketing is clearly displayed on its Twitter page, where the organization ranked

universities in terms of where its recruits went to school, posted videos of the celebrity endorsements it had won, including Ben Stiller’s, and frequently uploaded pictures of its new recruits, who appeared more than pleased to publicly announce their contribution to the organization’s efforts.

As the organization gained traction on social media, the volunteers contacted major publications, and the national press zeroed in on it. By mid-November, NBC, NPR and ABC, had featured the Poll Hero Project in its news coverage.

The 2020 presidential election was not understaffed in the vast majority of polling locations nationwide. Many individuals and group initiatives like the abovementioned successfully filled in the gaps: Some counties even claim they had to turn away volunteers because there were too many. What is clear is that Americans of all ages were left after the election with a novel and profound appreciation of what it means to live in a democracy.

“I think it’s what so many members of our team have come to appreciate, which is that democracy is a participation sport,” expressed Avi. “We all need to be active members and participants engaged in defending our democracy.”

‘Wipeout’ contestant dies after completing course

By Lauren Anderson

A competitor on the television competition show “Wipeout” required medical attention from on-site emergency medical personnel on Nov. 18 after completing an obstacle course. After 38-year-old Michael Paredes was rushed to the hospital, he died on Nov. 19.

Law enforcement told TMZ that they received a call about a person experiencing cardiac arrest on Nov. 18. Paredes was treated with a defibrillator because he “was experiencing chest pains after completing the course.” Contestants underwent medical examinations, including COVID-19 testing,

before participating in the show.

A spokesperson for TBS said, “We are devastated to have learned of his passing and our deepest sympathy goes out to the family.”

Endemol Shine North America, the production company for the series, added, “We offer our heartfelt condolences to the family and our thoughts are with them at this time.” Paredes studied

at the ITT Technical Institute before he started working as a marketing director at Ultimate Weight Loss Solutions, along with his girlfriend, in 2011. The show, in which contestants must navigate an obstacle course that features giant balls

and pitfalls, ran on ABC from 2008 until 2014 and is being rebooted by TBS and production company Endemol Shine North America.

Production on “Wipeout” was paused on Nov. 19 and Nov. 20 and resumed after the planned break for the Thanksgiving holiday.



Michael Paredes with his girlfriend before he died competing on “Wipeout.” Image courtesy of Heavy.com

Art Car Museum features local artists, impacts Houston

By Aansa Usmani

The Houston Art Car Museum, located in the Heights, continues to showcase “art cars” in its gallery from local-based artists to outsiders amid the pandemic. In addition to the “art cars” the museum also focuses on other local artistic works ranging from sculptures to paintings and everything in between. Each exhibit is on display for three to four months and is then replaced with newer pieces, giving a unique experience to visitors both new and returning.

An eye-catch-

ing exhibit were the small, bulky televisions from the 1990s, documenting the process of creating one of the displayed attractions. Each of the televisions showed a different angle of the artist revamping an ordinary car into an artistic masterpiece. In the end, he drives the car on the road and notes the visible reactions received from other drivers.

Assistant Director, Alicia Duplan, talked about the impact of the museum on both the community and herself.

“I love being

in a situation that I’m surrounded by beautiful art and cool cars, and... be a joy ringer with our wonderful exhibits here and helping people enjoy a different kind of approach to what many... would think is an art museum and adding a little spice of the cars,” Duplan said. “I just enjoy seeing people from all over the world... it’s a nice place to be, and it’s always different.”

The Art Car Museum is often confused with the Art Car Parade. Although the Art Car Museum does participate by con-

tributing a few of its vehicles, it is not in charge of the parade

itself. The Orange Show, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, hosts the annual parade* and asks for donations from the museum and other independent vendors. This year the Art Car Parade was canceled due to the pandemic.

The Art Car Museum is open to the public from Friday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and adheres to CDC guidelines requiring face masks for entry. Photography without flash is allowed.



“Fruitmobile” by Jackie Harris. Image credit: Aansa Usmani



Image credit: Aansa Usmani

Review: ‘Over the Moon’ on Netflix

By Varah Thornton

Netflix musical, “Over the Moon” follows a young girl, Fei Fei, who flies to the moon on her homemade rocket to prove that the moon goddess is real.

The moon goddess Chang’e was separated from her true love Houyi after drinking an immortality potion and floating away to the moon where she searches for a way to find her lover’s soul with her only companion, Jade Rabbit.

Unsure about his father’s new love interest, Mrs. Zhong and her son Chin, Fei Fei puts her faith in the fable of the moon goddess and causes an uproar during her family’s Moon festival celebration. An astute studier of

astrophysics at the top of her class, she devises a homemade mag-lev rocket in the image of her pet rabbit Bungee and manages to take off only to learn that her soon to be step brother has stowed away and risked their lives. As they are tumbling back to Earth, they are suddenly saved by a beam of light, and they crash into the moon. Two winged lions fly them to the magical city of Lunaria where they are welcomed with a spectacular pop introduction by the moon goddess herself and set to the task of locating her gift in exchange for proof that the goddess is real.

The film touches on Chinese family traditions such as making mooncakes

and honoring family. Fei Fei and Chang’e are both going through their own struggles of learning how to move on after the death of a loved one. The other characters in the film serve as optimistic foils of different ways in which each can move on. One particularly cheerful character is Chin, Fei Fei’s soon to be little stepbrother who is characterized as annoying with endless amounts of energy. His quick acceptance of such a large change in both their lives is very off putting to Fei Fei, but it does not stop Chin from helping Fei Fei in her quest to attain the treasured “gift” requested by Chang’e. The best example of his optimism takes the form

of a cosmic game of ping pong against Chang’e herself that is as impressive in its animation as the lyrics that are flung between the two.

Despite her self-indulgent introduction, Chang’e proves that her pursuit is not out of vanity but a genuine connection in which she has placed all her hope and for which she will do anything to achieve. The interweaving of fable and science is beautifully balanced in Fei Fei and Chang’e’s belief that love lasts forever. That feeling is made even more poignant by the loss of Audrey Wells, the film’s screenwriter and original director who passed away in 2018 during initial production.

The film is engrossing from the start with memorable and catchy songs, stellar animation and a tight plot. There is also plenty of Chinese symbolism like the lucky color red, sentient moon cakes and even a cameo of

the real-life Chinese moon rover, Jade Rabbit. It is an enjoyable film with something for the whole family.

“Over the Moon” is now streaming on Netflix.



Image courtesy of Netflix

Review: 'Lego Star Wars Holiday Special'

By James Jurewicz

"Star Wars" is celebrating the holidays early this November with the release of their Lego Holiday Special on Disney+. The 40-minute ride viewers take with Rey is a delightful journey into the lore of Star Wars past. In a similar fashion to Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol" Rey and her loyal droid, BB-8, time travel into some of the most iconic scenes in the original "Star Wars" Trilogy and the more recent "Star Wars" "prequels.

In the special, the Resistance forces are all celebrating Life Day, their version of Christmas, Thanksgiving and

New Years all combined into one holiday. Life Day is complete with presents and "Tip-Yip", the space version of roast turkey. Poe Dameron, Rose, and the Wookiee Chewbacca and family come for their first visit and to enjoy the Life Day festivities. BB-8 and Rey leave to investigate a mysterious message found within an ancient Jedi Book, sending them to the distant planet, Kodoku. This planet is where Rey intends to continue her Jedi training. The group is disappointed Rey had to miss the party, but everyone quickly forgets when they are overrun with Chewie's rowdy Wookiee

family.

On Kodoku, Rey comes across a time-traveling key that transports her to iconic Star Wars scenes. Unlike "The Christmas Carol" where Scrooge sees only one-way flashbacks, Rey and BB-8 actually interact with the characters and arguably change events in the past, breaking the time-space continuum. Rey has interactions with iconic characters like Finn, Lando Calrissian, Kylo Ren, Darth Vader, Emperor Palpatine, Yoda and Luke Skywalker who all appear during the time traveling scenes. There is even an appearance by the

Bounty Hunter from "The Mandalorian," another popular Disney+ original series (currently streaming its second season). Don't worry, Disney didn't forget Baby Yoda. He is also present, looking as adorable as ever slung over the Mandalorian's shoulder.

The Lego films have a certain lightheartedness in their DNA. Every character injects a strong dose of goofiness. This character quality combined with the immature, but layered and humorous dialog, offers quality entertainment for adults as well as children. The film would make an

appropriate choice for the holidays when the family is discussing their post-meal watch party. The Star Wars special is fun enough to be an annual tradition added to the long list of quality holiday specials already in existence.

The "Lego Star Wars Holiday Special" is perfect for fans, though people with no "Star Wars" experience will be entertained (but left slightly confused).

The iconic scenes will



Image courtesy of DailySuperhero.com

be instantly recognizable for fans who get to see beloved characters from different film eras interact with each other. One standout scene includes two Darth Vader's humorously sizing each other up for a possible lightsaber duel. There are also plenty of fan easter eggs and inside jokes to enjoy. Now it's time for a large serving of piping hot Tip-Yip.

"The Lego Star Wars Holiday Special" is available to stream on the Disney+ App.

'Wonder Woman 1984' delayed again

By James Jurewicz

"Wonder Woman 1984" has officially been announced as a release on the streaming service HBO Max the same day that the film is supposed to hit theaters Dec. 25, Christmas Day. This release news came from Warner Brothers Studios in November 2020. "Wonder Woman 1984" was supposed to be the last major wide release of the year after the numerous release date push-backs.

"Wonder Woman" and "Wonder Woman 1984" were directed by Patty Jenkins. Jenkins also directed the 2003 film "Monster" starring Charlize Theron and Christina Ricci, a serial killer biopic about the life and crimes of Aileen

Wuornos. For her performance in the film, Theron won the Best Actress award at the Academy Awards for her dynamic portrayal of Wuornos. DC Comics and Warner Media believed in Jenkins, handing her the reins to direct one of their beloved characters, and she delivered big time. An inevitable sequel followed the success generated by the first "Wonder Woman" film, released in June 2017. "Wonder Woman 1984" was expected to garner large ticket sales at the theater and the film was given a \$200 million budget. 1984 was supposed to be released in late 2019 though the film was ultimately pushed to June 5, 2020 due to the world-wide pan-

demic. Release was pushed until Aug. 14, then Oct. 2. When it became evident that there was no slowing the spread of COVID, a final hopeful Christmas Day release was announced.

Both Warner Brothers and Jenkins were hopeful things would pick up by the time Thanksgiving 2020 came around that there would be indicators that ticket sales have improved. This optimism was curbed by recent spikes in the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Seeing no other choice than to cut their losses, Warner announced in November 2020 that "Wonder Woman 1984" was going to be released both in theaters and on HBO Max on Christmas Day.

This is a very serious situation for theaters, and everyone in the industry hopes that this development is an exception and not a financially dangerous precedent. The film stands to lose massive ticket sales through this move. HBO Max already has subscribers, they will be getting access to the film without kicking in anything extra. Disney released Mulan on Disney+, though early access to the live action remake of the animated original cost extra through the app. By waiving any additional fee, subscribers of the \$15.99 a month HBO Max get access to "Wonder Woman 1984" on Christmas Day. On Dec. 3, Warner announced that the app will no

longer have a free trial due to the release of WW84.

Is this going to be the standard for movie releases? Are the nights out at the movies going to become nights in? There are still people who listen to vinyl records because they believe they have superior sound, but record players are small and do not take up very much space. Movie theater screens don't fit in private homes, and there is definitely a difference between home theaters and multiplexes. There is also a mixed message from the film industry. They stress safety and the importance of social distancing and all that comes along with a pandemic. Yet they are also talking up the cleanliness of

movie theaters and the sanitization and sterilization techniques practiced by the cinema employees. Warner Bros. announced Dec. 3 that every movie the studio will release in 2021 will be in theaters and on HBO Max. Though they state that it is only for this next year, the outcome of such an announcement could significantly change the film industry for next year. So which is it? Stay home and screen the film on HBO Max, or enjoy "Wonder Woman 1984" the way Warner Brothers originally intended?

"Wonder Woman 1984" runs 151 minutes and is scheduled to release in theaters and on HBO Max on Dec. 25th.

U.S. should abolish Electoral College

By Aansa Usmani

Every leap year (four years), the U.S. holds its presidential elections. Its citizens determine which of the two major political parties (Democratic or Republican) will govern for the next four years. In addition to the popular vote, the electoral college also plays a crucial role in determining the elective winner.

Its results have been the subject of controversies in two separate elections. Within those instances, the electoral college's fate is challenged, with some calling for its abolishment and others wanting its historical structure to remain intact. According to PewResearch.org, 53% of Americans favor repealing the outdated system, compared to 40%

preferring to maintain the Electoral College, believing that whoever attains over 270 electoral votes wins the election.

The historical origins of the Electoral College stem from our Founding Fathers in the late 1700s. According to Vox, the electors were a small group of people who would determine the nation's next president—in addition to the popular vote. At the time, American society was mostly rural farmers, and most of its members were illiterate and simple-minded, and concepts of civic participation or electoral decorum were within their infancy stages. Thus, the electoral college was created and would serve as “checks and balances” to decide who would be the actual president.

Those who established the Electoral College intended this system to

prevent unsuitable or incompetent individuals from holding the highest office and instilling a corrupt agenda that serves the best of their interests, rather than the American people.

As time progressed, education and literacy levels increased within American society, allowing more individuals to voice approval or dissent for individuals or political parties at the ballot box. The electoral college, however, is a remnant of a different American society, one where civil rights and liberties were mostly for white, cisgender, land-owning men.

The Electoral College is “a vestigial structure... leftover from [an] era in which the founders... did not want...

the American people to choose their next president.” This outdated system has contributed to the rise of viewing states differently during presidential election cycles, giving more weight to specific states than others.

This system has given more stress to “battleground” states (ex: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida) because of a state's potentiality to flip support towards a candidate and their party. Twice within history, it benefited the unpopular candidate (Bush in 2000,

and Trump in 2016), rendering Americans to believe that their vote does not matter.

Another issue that arises with the electoral college is faithless electors. Suppose these appointed electors do not vote following their state's preference. In that case, they are deemed “faithless” and are either fined or removed from becoming a state's delegate or elector.

This system prefers those to abide by the rules rather than state their preferences. American

society has long upheld the freedom of expression, and the electoral college has seemingly contradicted this idea.

In abolishing the electoral college, it will lead to further American civic participation and higher voter turnout. The Electoral College is a system, among many, that continues to hold the American people back. No other country has a system like this, and for a country that touts freedoms for all, it shows that freedom is not truly free.



Protestors demonstrate against President Trump's victory in Philadelphia in 2016. Trump won the presidential election despite losing the popular election by more than two million votes. Image courtesy of Mark Makela/Getty Images via NPR.

Texas is turning blue

By Aansa Usmani

Texas in 2020 is vastly different from Texas 20 years ago; there is more diversity, higher education levels, and more registered voters. Despite holding onto its Red state status in the 2020 election, Texas continues to shift towards the blue side of the spectrum. Although it likely will not occur during the 2020 or 2022 election cycle, the chances of Texas turning blue within the next few elections continue to rise.

Texas' sub-

urbs leaned towards the Democratic party, beginning with the 2018 Midterms. Democratic candidate Beto O'Rourke lost the Senate race to incumbent Ted Cruz (R). The suburbs and inner cities made the margin between the two men close (Cruz 50.9 to Beto 48.3).

That same year, Texas picked up 12 House seats in the Texas Legislature, threatening the once-stronghold GOP controlled chamber since 2001. Additionally, the Texas

Democratic party has continued to focus on the suburbs, helping its voters find better ways to vote and civically participate without further spreading. Zoom fundraisers, phone-banking, and other virtual forms connected voters with other like-minded individuals and encouraged their peers to vote.

The Texas Democratic Party has made many successful efforts in winning elections over the years, whether it be federally, state-based,

or locally. Texas can become blue within the next few election cycles, but much work still needs to be done. Alongside high voter turnout and civic participation, tackling GOP-based misinformation is critical to ensuring the Democratic Party's legacy in the Lone Star State. We need to tackle voter suppression laws by challenging areas that limit universal mail-in ballots or ballot boxes. It is unfair that the Texas Governor and its Supreme Court have implemented partisan-based laws

that further suppress these voters in favor of those who support their agenda. We need to engage with voters and educate them on the facts, rather than be submissive to hostile rhetoric of how socialism is being implemented via the Democratic party. Texas is one of the most diverse states in the country and creating more inclusive voter programs can help change the state's political legacy. It is a challenge, but nothing is impossible for us Texans. Through these massive efforts and programs, we

can ensure that Texas will reflect its voter demographics.

Voter suppressive tactics will further limit civic participation and allow politicians to create laws that will disadvantage specific groups of people. These practices should not exist in 2020 or any other period. For Texas to truly become blue, we need to work hard and continue fighting these suppressive tactics. Hard work does pay off at the end of the day, and if everybody votes, good things do happen.

Parler rises in popularity amongst conservatives

By Salvador Hernandez

Parler is a social media networking site geared toward free speech. The app has grown in popularity as a majority of conservatives and a small number of progressives join the site. This popularity derives from the fact that many in the media have called it an alternative to Twitter, one where individuals are free to engage in political discourse without feeling the need to

be fact-checked or censored. Many fear that Parler could be a failed experiment that breeds extremism and misinformation. In contrast, others view it as a safe haven from the grips of billionaire corporations ever so slightly tightening their control over the public square of ideas.

Although recently, Parler has gained traction, growing in popularity due to the 2020 election, it is not a new site.

Parler was founded in 2018 by John Matze, Jared Thomson, and Rebekah Mercer. It serves as an alternative to those that see tech giants such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram preferring leftist ideas and slanting toward policing of ideas of which those media corporations disagree.

In a letter to Parler users, the CEO of Parler John Matze commented on the goals he had in mind for the site and the

growth in the site's popularity.

"Together we will continue to stand up to cancel culture, defy authoritarian content curation, and reclaim the Internet as a free and open town square." Matze also added that from Nov. 6 to Nov. 10, the site had received an influx of 4.5 million new users.

There are those that describe Parler as an echo chamber for right-wing ideas and

dangerous for its part in possibly furthering partisanship in the United States. The claim of Parler as an echo chamber may have ground, but in the era of MSNBC taking on the mantle of FOX News by using the same tactics it used earlier in the early to late 2000s of portraying one side as ignorant, deceitful, and extreme both sides are at fault, and that is a shame.

Parler promotes itself as a

free speech platform where all individuals are welcome regardless of their color, religion, and ideology. There will be bad actors as there are in all parts of social media. However, Parler's Terms of Service agreement bring measures to combat that. Parler seems like a place for ideas to be discussed instead of obfuscated and stand unchallenged.

Biden's pandemic response ensures truth and safety

By Aansa Usmani

On Nov. 7, it was announced that Joseph R. Biden Jr. would become the 46th president; he and his team wasted no time creating a strong pandemic response team, proving to the country how a true leader responds to a national crisis. Although he is still president-elect, Biden, and his vice president-elect, Kamala Harris, are actively consulting with experts across the country in dealing

with the COVID-19 pandemic and steps the country can take to eradicate further spread and develop "herd immunity."

Biden is tapping into the expertise of Obama-era advisors including former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and Jeff Zients. Marcella Nunez-Smith, also relevant to the Obama Administration will co-chair Biden's COVID-19 advisory board. None of these officials are openly

partisan and merely stick to impartial, factual knowledge; these candidates' diversity and experience will guide the public through this tumultuous era.

President Trump's pandemic response is flakey and partisan, fueling rhetoric that encouraged the decision to fire the country's head expert on viral diseases and pandemics, Anthony Fauci, Ph.D. Other times, Trump's supporters

have championed the anti-mask rhetoric, calling for various governors (i.e.: Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer, California's Gavin Newsom) to lift restrictions on the mask mandates across the country.

In this hyper-partisan era, everything is construed as red or blue, left or right, liberal or conservative; we do not need our health experts to be following a set partisan agenda. Science is not

partial to either ideology; it is factual and non-partisan. It is ridiculous to disregard mask mandates or social distance protocols because of either the official's political stance or for the sake of "freedom."

Biden and his administration want to ensure that we can return to normal by adhering to CDC guidelines. No matter your political stance, it is ridiculous to omit following set rules or disregard scientific

fact because of politics. The virus does not favor one political party over the other; anyone can contract this virus, and it is up to us to make sure that we do our civic duty and wear a mask. Not only will it protect ourselves, but it will also protect those at higher risk (elderly, pre-existing conditions) and allow them to continue being within our lives and beyond.

Federal Departments ensure peaceful transition of power

By Cameron Smith

Peace is always an option, as many have shown us, even in dark times. President Donald Trump is not exempt from that rule, and he will be expected to leave peacefully from the White House after inauguration of the next President, Joe

Biden.

The Secret Service's main goals are as follows: To investigate counterfeiting and other federal crimes and to protect national leaders and their families. Their purpose extends to protect said persons and families even after their term has

ended, thanks to the "Former Presidents Act."

Now, will they try and fight to keep a president in office? No, because the Director of the Secret Service is appointed by the president. However, after the president no longer holds power,

the Director answers to the newly appointed president, in this case, Joe Biden.

So, the Secret Service will not make any moves on behalf of Donald Trump to prevent a peaceful transfer of power.

The military will not do anything also. The military, like the Secret Service, follows a specific chain of command. Furthermore, when President-elect, Joe

Biden is sworn in, he will be Commander-in-Chief. President Trump's powers will be revoked, meaning Biden will hold power over the military.

Nothing Trump says to the military will hold any value after inauguration of the new president.

Another reason why peace is the only option is that obstructing the path of any Secret Service agent while they are attempting to protect

someone is a felony under Section 3056 of Title XVIII. The person, or any persons, doing who attempts to obstruct protection by the Secret Service will be charged with a felony.

Peace is the only option Trump has when January comes. So, a peaceful transition of power will occur, and America can focus on more important things like staying safe from COVID-19.

TxDOT should implement 'Vision C' alternative By Indira Zaldivar

The very least TxDOT must do is accept "Vision C," the community-driven alternative to the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, known as the I-45 expansion. Vision C would min-

and consider multi-modal transportation efforts.

Vision C is the highly feasible alternative that Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner proposed in a letter sent to Commissioner Laura Ryan

ans and cyclists' safety.

The alternative Vision C goals align with PlanHouston, Resilient Houston, Houston Climate Action Plan, Complete Communities, and Houston Bike Plan.

Councilwoman Letitia Plummer, Ph.D., shared information about Vision C during a talk hosted by the Minaret Foundation on Dec. 3 regarding the I-45 expansion repercussions on communities, schools, places of worship, families, and the environment.

Plummer said that when the City of Houston looked at how TxDOT should readjust this program, they wanted to take

those promises made to Houston into account.

"Vision C is what we need to get happen," Plummer said. "We're not going to be able to stop the project from happening at this point. It is literally the 12th hour, but we can at least save our city as best as we can. And make sure that we protect our core, and we protect the communities that are at stake right now."

According to drawings of the NHHIP, TxDOT's largest displacement would occur in Segment 1 and Segment 2. Segment 1 and 2 could reach up to 20 lanes wide. About 20,000 people would lose their jobs con-

sequently. Plummer stated that Vision C proposed that TxDOT leave those segments alone. Instead, Vision C proposed to improve the current footprint that already exists.

Secondly, Plummer said Vision C aims to provide alternative transportation methods in the suburbs such as Park & Rides and Bus Rapid Transits to reduce traffic volume.

"Have them get on a BRT into Houston, and not have to add more freeway lanes so each one person can get in their one car and cause pollution to communities that we are living in, and they are going back to the suburbs where the air is clear."

Third, Plummer said that Vision C aims to restore the core city and green spaces because "people want to live here." For example, Bagby Street is being rejuvenated to a space where people can have lunch and be "much like other walkable cities."

The NHHIP exacerbates the health issues among Black and brown communities in Houston. For example, the NHHIP would expose Theodore Roosevelt Elementary and Jefferson Elementary within 500 feet of the freeway. The community has shown concern about worsened air quality for the children. TxDOT has argued that they would build indoor playgrounds and implement an

air-filtering system in those schools. However, Plummer counterargued that COVID-19 has highlighted people's need to enjoy the outdoors and that the children should not have to be moved inside for the sake of a polluting freeway. She added that the proximity to the freeway would elevate the number of people with asthma and other respiratory health conditions.

Without a doubt, TxDOT's current design of the NHHIP fails Houstonians big time. The least TxDOT can consider for the resilient Houstonians who have protested harmful health implications and massive displacement attached to the project is to compromise and implement Vision C to its full extent.

"This is the perfect example of racial injustice and socioeconomic injustices, and it continues to happen all over the country," Plummer said during the talk. "Because this entity is so large and so powerful and so influential, when we do find out about this, the only thing we can really do is settle in and make a compromise."

This talk is available on the official Facebook page of The Minaret Foundation.



Protestor with Houston community group, "Stop TxDot I-45," holds signs urging people to "Stop TxDOT" during a demonstration at the intersection of Polk and St. Emmanuel, east of downtown Houston on Sept. 3. Image courtesy of Mark Mulligan via Houston Chronicle.

imize displacement, demand that TxDOT provides grants for Houstonians who it persists on displacing

on May 12. Various Houston city officials and community groups designed it. It considers pedestri-

TxDOT plans for I-45 expansion By Keven Balderas



Bob: "Are we sure a bigger I-45 won't be another Katy freeway? How about first providing for bike lanes, public transport, ramp meters, roundabouts, sidewalks, or any combination of these measures, to decongest?"

George: "Just get on it, Bob. I don't have time for this."

ACC Founder discusses role of business, students, government in climate crisis

By Anthony Raul Ramirez

Benjamin “Benji” Backer founded the American Conservation Coalition in 2017. It is a nonprofit organization “dedicated to mobilizing young people around environmental action through common-sense, market-based, and limited-government ideals.” Backer and his team look to promote environmentalism through a conservative point-of-view. The ACC does this by supporting six principles: conservation, natural heritage, localism, capitalism, innovation, and balance.

During a joint session in 2019 of the Congressional Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs and the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, Backer testified in front of Congress.

“Each of us play a critical role in tackling climate change. To my fellow conservatives: The climate is changing. It’s time to claim our seat at the table and develop smart, limited-government policies to establish American leadership on this issue. There is a reasonable, conservative approach to climate change and we need to embrace it. To those on the left: Without your leadership, this would be receiving the attention it deserves. But now, it’s time for solutions. Politicizing climate change has deepened the partisan

divide and delayed real action. If you truly want to address climate change, work with conservatives who want to champion reforms.”

Recently, the ACC toured the country in the “Electric Election Roadtrip.” The roadtrip lasted 45 days in which several podcast episodes were streamed regarding clean energy.

Some episode included “Nuclear Energy is Saving the World,” “The Economic Power of Offshore Wind,” “Yale Law Professor on Climate Action in America,” and “Turning Poop into Power.” Episodes also involve asking corporate officials about their environmentalism, such as Communications Manager of Duke Energy, Randy Wheelless, who discussed a 39% carbon emission reduction, or Chief Sustainability Officer of General Motors Dane Parker explaining market-driven innovation leading to electric vehicles.

“What is the purpose behind the ACC Electric Election Roadtrip coming to Houston? What did you do while in Texas?”

“Obviously Texas has a massive environmental impact, but that also means it could have a massive positive impact environmentally depending on how it goes about its business. We visited three Texas cities: Houston, Austin, and Dallas.

And Houston specifically is where we met with Representative Dan Crenshaw who’s obviously one of the more well-known conservative elected officials in the country. He has made himself a major voice of the conservative movement and at times can be somewhat divisive with people who disagree with his opinion. But at the end of the day, he does believe that climate change needs to be tackled with a market-based approach and he knows that bipartisanship is important to solving climate change. Having someone like that at the table who has actually been a champion for climate action is really important because if you can get someone like Dan Crenshaw at the table and a lot of people like him, you can actually make a lot of progress across party lines.”

“It says on the ACC mission statement that you promote ‘free market, pro business initiatives, and limited government environmentalism.’ How much do you believe this is different from the status quo understanding of environmentalism?”

“We’ve needed a new environmental movement and that’s because for the last 20 years the current environmental movement hasn’t followed through on its promises or all its

talking points. We need an environmental movement that is focused on partnering government with business to work with business leaders that want to make climate change part of their platform and tackling it as part of the solution. And really at the end of the day, corporations and companies in the market can act much quicker than the federal government can to solve problems like climate change.

“If you see a problem in society, you need to fix it. You need to be a part of that change, whether it’s at the business level, political level, or social level, it starts with you.” - Benjamin “Benji” Backer founder of the American Conservation Coalition

“What differentiates us from other environmental groups is that we believe this needs to be bipartisan, and these market-based mechanisms to solving climate change can spread across the country and across the globe faster than simply with the government. And if you wait for kind of that “holy grail” of a perfect solution to solve climate change, you won’t actually solve it. So we believe that the market plays a big role in that, individuals play a big role in that, each region in the country plays a big role in that, and then if we can work across all those differ-

ent types of ‘divides’ we’re told we have then we can actually start fixing this problem at a global scale.”

“What gave you the idea to start the ACC and who have been role models you’ve looked at to inspire your mission?”

“The idea of ACC came about when I was a freshman in college and thought the climate conversation was far too polarizing and far too partisan. You had

movement and work on this with me, and the rest is history.

“And really what it came down to was that I was in a class that was focused on entrepreneurship and the class was focused on how you, as an individual, can start a business to help fight climate change. ACC is a non-profit... so, it’s a startup mission looking through a bipartisan lens, through innovation, markets, and bringing conservatives back into the discussion. And it really showed me that while you’re in college, those are some of the best years to act on something you really feel passionate about.

“And that’s really where that mentorship came in. I had professors at the University of Washington where I attended school who really encouraged me to keep going on it and connected me with the right folks to get the ACC off the ground... People who run other nonprofits or run businesses in Seattle where I started ACC, those really are the mentors for me outside of my parents who are also entrepreneurs and instilled this...”

“If you see a problem in society, you need to fix it. You need to be a part of that change, whether it’s at the business level, political level, or social level, it starts with you.”

one side, the Democratic party, who was at the side of the table. And then you had the Republican side who wasn’t at the table at all. And anyone who knows politics knows you need both sides at the table to get anything done... If you look at climate change, it needs strong and swift action, and you can’t do that without the conservatives at the table. When we were looking at ‘How can we fix that?’ I was in my college class and just decided to buy a domain name for our organization just to get it started. Then I tweeted out if anyone would want to be a part of this