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December 10, 2021

Conroe's Dining & Entertainment Guide

**Saturday**  
First Methodist Conroe  
*Messiah Sing-Along*

Dr. Robert Hartman  
Artistic Director  
MCCS

75 cents | Vol. 129, No. 204

Friday, December 10, 2021

AN EDITION OF HOUSTON CHRONICLE

## Safe room for first responders planned

### County, Covenant Christian partner secure shelter during major disaster

By Catherine Dominguez  
STAFF WRITER

Montgomery County commissioners approved a land lease agreement with Covenant Christian School in Conroe for a multi-million-dollar hurricane safe room with a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Jason Millsaps, executive direc-

tor of the county's office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, said the school was awarded the grant in 2020 based on Hurricane Harvey. "They chose Covenant as a strategic location based on our proximity to Houston and other areas that see these types of disasters where a bunker-like facility is needed to house first responders," Millsaps said.

According to the agreement, with the county's assistance, the school will construct the facility with grant funds on the county leased property and maintain it for 30 years at no expense to the county. When not in use as a bunker, the school will use the facility as a gymnasium. In January 2020, school, county and city officials came together to announce the project. According to information from the school, the project is a 19,000 square foot monolithic concrete dome gymnasium that will pro-

vide "near-absolute life safety protection" for first responders and other emergency personnel who cannot evacuate when a hurricane is imminent. During a hurricane or other major disaster, the safe room/gymnasium would be turned over to local emergency management officials from Montgomery County and the city of Conroe to serve as a base of operations and secure shelter for first responders and other emergency personnel. The facility will hold more than 650 first responders and will pro-

tect against winds over 200 mph from hurricanes and tornadoes. It will also protect against fire, terrorism and riot. "This an exciting day for our school," Covenant Christian School Head Administrator Glenn Slater said during an event to announce the project. "Our school family is so excited about this opportunity to serve our local community, especially our first responders." Slater said the process to apply for the grant began about 18 months ago. **Room continues on A3**



Love Heals Youth founder Rebecca Smith and her therapy dog, Charlie, offers free counseling to kids in foster care system homes and behavioral training and support to the staff members.

## Therapist launches effort to help kids in foster care

### Love Heals Youth nonprofit puts passion to work

By Jamie Swinnerton  
STAFF WRITER

For years, Rebecca Smith has been offering the services of her counseling practice to children in foster care for free. Last year, she created a new nonprofit, Love Heals Youth, to grow and expand this work. There are around 55,000 children involved somehow with the foster care in Texas and the state has been facing a federal lawsuit about unsafe foster care conditions for nearly a decade. Smith is frustrated with seeing Texas making these kinds of headlines and wants to help the Lone Star State reform its fos-

**"If we are able to get the family services, help them from a therapeutic standpoint, then ideally we'd be able to get more kids placed back in their homes."**

Rebecca Smith, founder of Love Heals Youth

ter care system. But first she's starting local. Smith started her own private therapy practice about 15 years ago and in 2008 was approached with the opportunity to offer therapeutic services at Montgomery County Youth Services. In 2011 she started a group practice, the Counseling Center of Montgomery County, and the center started receiving

calls to bring services to group foster homes. She's been offering these free services for years but when officially formed the nonprofit in 2020 to be able to do more. She has worked in family court for years and has seen what can happen to families that are separated and the emotional trauma that can cause to children. "One of the things that really drove that home for me, in understanding the importance of having your mom and or dad in your life, is working in the family law cases with divorces and custody modifications, and the damage that's done whenever a child doesn't have access to their parent," Smith said. She's been involved in several organizations over the years that work in these areas, including Access Builds Children, which focuses on keeping

**Kids continues on A3**

## Montgomery holiday event set for Saturday

By Noor Adatia  
STAFF WRITER

The city of Montgomery will hold its annual 31st Christmas event Saturday, complete with a festive parade and holiday market featuring local vendors to get residents into the holiday spirit. The festivities begin at 10 a.m. Saturday in downtown historic Montgomery with the city's holiday parade, which attracts more than a thousand people. The parade's theme, which changes

### Snow in forecast

» For the first time, Montgomery's Christmas celebration will include a snow party with truckloads of snow imported for the event.

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each year, is 'Let it Snow.' City administrator Richard Tramm said more than 1,500 people will be participating in this year's parade, ranging from small. **Holiday continues on A3**



The city of Montgomery will hold its annual 31st Christmas event Saturday, with a parade and holiday market.

## GOP field for Brady's seat at 9

### Crowded field looking to replace longtime legislator

By Jasper Scherer  
STAFF WRITER

At least nine GOP candidates are running to succeed retiring U.S. Rep. Kevin Brady in the newly configured 8th Congressional District, drawing the interest of prom-

inent elected Republicans who are aiming to shape the outcome of the crowded Houston-area primary.

The race is developing into a proxy battle with former Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw endorsing former Navy SEAL Morgan Luttrell, and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz backing his former campaign aide, Christian Collins.

At least seven other candidates are running active campaigns or have filed paperwork with the Federal Election Commission indicating they will run for the seat, though none have attracted such heavyweight GOP endorsements.

"Endorsements can matter a lot if the endorser gets involved, campaigns for you on the stump, opens up their Rolodex and helps you raise money," said Texas Republican strategist Brendan Steinhilber, who is not involved in the race. "If they actually put some weight behind it, it can actually go a long way to helping a candidate, especially a candidate who may not be that well known in the district."

Brady, a Republican from The Woodlands who has represented the district since 1997, set off a scramble for his seat when he announced in April he would not seek re-election. The district, one of the most conservative in the country, has long been anchored in Montgomery County, extending north into the Piney Woods region of East Texas.

But state lawmakers dramatically reshaped the district earlier this year when they approved new political maps to reflect population. **Primary continues on A3**

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NEWS | FROM THE FRONT

# Snow party added to city's holiday festival

By Noor Adatia  
STAFF WRITER

The city of Montgomery is holding its first-ever snow party event on Saturday, which will be bringing snow and live entertainment to the historic downtown area.

The event will be taking place on the same day as Christmas in Montgomery from noon to 5 p.m. at 777 Clepper Drive across from

Fernland Historical Park, which is only a few-minute walk away from downtown.

City administrator Richard Tramm said the city is hosting this event in order to expand offerings during the day to appeal to families of younger children. He noted that other events going on in the city that day mainly appeal to adults and older children.

"This helps to broaden the appeal for what's going

on the whole day," he said. The outdoor event will not only include truckloads of snow, but also a bill for sledging and a play area for smaller children.

Lee Express is the name of the company responsible for generating the snow for the event.

The snow party will also feature a local DJ to entertain the crowd. Montgomery's very own DJ Kevin Smith will be playing hol-

iday music and hosting a game of trivia with gift card prizes throughout the party.

"I'm looking forward to having fun with the parents and assuming a different persona for each of the songs," Smith said.

He said he is also excited to see kids play on the snow hill — which is something they don't normally experience in Texas. The Michigan native said

he is also looking forward to sledging, which was an activity he grew up around.

Hot chocolate and coffee will be for sale at a hot beverage and bakery food truck parked nearby in accordance with the winter theme. The event is also free to the public to attend — there is no cost to participate in any of the snow activities.

Tramm said he hopes the event will be popular

enough this year for it to become an annual event in the future.

He said he thinks the party will add to the overall holiday atmosphere in the area.

"We're hoping to provide an outlet for fun and enjoyment and for people to get in the Christmas spirit with the other events that day," he said.

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# Board rules Astroworld festival suits to be handled by one judge

By Juan A. Lozano  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — The more than 300 lawsuits that have been filed so far in Houston following a massive crowd surge at the Astroworld festival that left 10 people dead have been consolidated and will be handled by one judge as the cases proceed through the court system, a judicial board ruled.

In an order issued on Tuesday, the Board of Judges of the Civil Trial Division of the Harris County District Courts in Houston granted a request by attorney Brent Coon to have all pretrial matters in the various lawsuits be handled by one judge. If any of the lawsuits go to trial, the case would return to its original court.

"This consolidation will promote the expeditious and efficient administration of justice," the two-page order said.

All pretrial motions and issues in the lawsuits will be heard by state District Judge Kristen Hawkins. Those who have been sued include rap superstar Travis Scott, who created the festival and was the headliner, concert pro-



Travis Scott performs at the Astroworld Music Festival in Houston on Nov. 5. Amy Harris / Associated Press

ducer Live Nation and other companies connected to the event.

The 10 people who died were among 50,000 who had attended the festival and were in the audience one judge. If any of the lawsuits go to trial, the case would return to its original court.

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Those who have been sued include rap superstar Travis Scott, who created the festival and was the headliner, concert pro-

# HOLIDAY

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businesses to school band groups, and is a great way to start the season.

"The parade is a wonderful way for businesses of Montgomery to experience the Christmas spirit early in the season as well as for various community members to show their holiday spirit," he said.

**Decorated for the holidays**  
While the city puts on the morning parade, the Montgomery Historical Society is responsible for hosting most of the day's events, including guided tours of the historical homes in the area and the holiday market.

Society member Bea Rouse explained the purpose of the tour event is two-fold: for people to learn about the history of Montgomery and to raise money for the society. The annual Candlelight Tour serves as the primary fundraiser for the historic preservation group.

Rouse, who has been volunteering at the tour event for the past 15 years, said she hopes people will experience a taste of historical Montgomery in the late 1800s. The tours, which will be taking place at six homes, are led by docents and current residents, some of whom have a family connection to the home's original owners.

In the past, more than 400 people have paid to go on the historic homes tour, Smith said of children housed here that have a case elsewhere.

While the organization centers its work in group homes, there are still children who wouldn't be served because they haven't even been placed in a home because of lack of available beds. Smith wants to offer therapy services to these children and their families as well.

"If we are able to get the family services, help them from a therapeutic standpoint, then ideally we'd be able to get more kids placed back in their homes," Smith said.

As part of her five-year plan Smith would like to see a group home staffed by therapists open in the county, and a residence for children without placement.

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# KIDS

From page A1

families together. But through her work she also sees the damage that being in the foster care system can cause, including increased substance abuse and need for government assistance in people who age out of the system. Through Love Heals Youth she wants to give children in the foster care system consistent care at no cost.

"(The group homes) have discretionary funds that they can spend on some stuff, but if we're able to offer those services for free then they can re-allocate those funds to do more for the kids," Smith said.

The organization, which recently celebrated its first anniversary, is funded through grants and donations and just recently received its first grant from the Apricity

Foundation, founded by residents Robert and Lindsey Kasprzak.

Love Heals Youth provides free therapy for children in group homes, free training for the staff overseeing the children at group homes, and the organization provides another level of oversight for the care of the children. This past summer when Treehouse Center, a group home based in Conroe, was put under investigation by the DA's office for abuse allegations, Smith knew she wanted her organization to be part of the solution to prevent this from happening again.

Smith works with counseling students getting their Master's degrees to staff Love Heals Youth, which helps keep overhead for the organization low, and offers a framework that can be repeated almost anywhere. These students, in order to com-

plete their degrees, have to do field work, and Love Heals Youth offers students that chance while meeting a need in the community. Ideally, Smith would like to see branches of Love Heals Youth pop up across Texas where they can be useful.

Last year, Love Heals Youth provided 400 services to 50 youth at group homes, all for free. The students have between three to five kids on their case-load, which gives them the opportunity to offer more focused care.

The foster care system is a complicated and messy one. Not all children with a foster care case in Montgomery County are housed in the county, and not all the children living in group homes in Montgomery County have cases in the local courts. Ideally, Smith would like to help all kids in group homes regardless of where their case is housed, or where they are

# ROOM

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months ago as the school board was discussing the future of the school. Board member Greg Casey mentioned the grant and the dome adding Montgomery County was one location pinpointed as an area that could support the project.

"It seemed like a long shot," Slater said noting Covenant Christian School was one of more than 300 applications submitted for the grant.

Undeterred, Slater began the process to apply and with the help of a \$20,000 donation to the school from student's family member to secure a professional grant writer, Covenant submitted its application. The application process included letters of support from both

people, who make their own items, it's a way for them to make some money," Rouse said. "It's amazing how good these artisans are."

**Cookies by the pound**  
Another fundraising event taking place Saturday is the popular Cookie Walk event, which sees thousands of people interested in buying decorative sweets for the holiday season.

The Cookie Walk is organized by the Montgomery Chapter of the National Charity League, a philanthropic mother-daughter organization. Proceeds from the cookie sales go directly to the Montgomery Historical Society to help upkeep its historical homes.

"The National Charity League helps the Historical Society become the best of the best of our community," said Lisa Pinz, League member and event organizer.

The walk takes place at Candlelight Tour serves as the primary fundraiser for the historic preservation group.

Rouse, who has been volunteering at the tour event for the past 15 years, said she hopes people will experience a taste of historical Montgomery in the late 1800s. The tours, which will be taking place at six homes, are led by docents and current residents, some of whom have a family connection to the home's original owners.

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# PRIMARY

From page A1

changes measured by the 2020 census. Though the district remains solidly red, it has added more than 300,000 residents in west Harris County, while losing about 175,000 residents who live in a chunk of south Montgomery County.

The district will also lose most of its northern rural territory — Grimes, Houston, Leon, Madison and Trinity counties — to neighboring districts, while adding the roughly 50,000 residents of Polk County.

The district will look far different than it did when Collins, Brady's former campaign manager and adviser, was running Brady's re-election campaigns in recent cycles. But Collins, a 33-year-old conservative activist who has organized events aimed at engaging young Republicans, said he

has been involved in conservative circles in west and northwest Harris County "for a long time," giving him a grasp of the new territory.

Collins said he expected to end up in a runoff against Luttrell, who he alleged "is going to do the bidding of the Washington establishment" if elected to Congress.

"He's supported by the leadership of the party, and sometimes the leadership loses their way ... and they do the bidding of the lobbyists and the establishment instead of representing the people," Collins said. "In my case, I'm going to buck leadership when necessary."

Luttrell, an ally of Perry, retired from the Navy in 2014 after a 14-year military career. Since then, he has worked on helping veterans who have PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, like the one he received

from a helicopter crash in 2009. Most recently, Luttrell served as a special adviser at the Department of Energy under Perry, helping create the agency's artificial intelligence and technologies office. Perry is supporting Luttrell in the primary and spoke at one of his fundraisers in late October.

Luttrell's twin brother, Marcus Luttrell, also served as a Navy SEAL and is known for his bestselling memoir, "Lone Survivor," which was later made into a movie. The book describes Marcus Luttrell's experience coming under attack by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2005.

In Congress, Luttrell, 46, said he would focus on national security, including border and cyber security, and would aim for appointments to the House Energy and Commerce, Intel, Armed Services or Veter-

ans Affairs committees. Joining Luttrell and Collins on the Republican primary ballot are Dan McLaughlin, a former Navy helicopter pilot, and Mike Phillips, who has filed to run for the seat but does not appear to have a campaign.

Laura Jones, the former chair of the San Jacinto County Democratic Party, is the lone Democrat to file for the seat. The primary election is scheduled for March 1.

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city and county leaders.

It was mostly a paper work, waiting and prayer," Slater said.

In November 2019, Slater received the news the school board was selected to receive the grant. FEMA is funding 75 percent, or about \$3 million, for the project with the school providing the remaining 25 percent. Slater said the school is taking donations to raise the \$1.5 million its needs for the project.

"My heart is full of gratitude to God for doing something amazing for our campus," Slater said. "My heart is overflowing knowing we can be light in this community and can help our first responders."

A timeline for the project was not available. cdominguez@cnonline.com