

GIVING CITY

New housing for disabled to break ground in 2019

By Monica Williams
Giving City Austin

Thanks to a multi-agency, cross-sector collaboration, a nonprofit will break ground in early 2019 on a new 27-unit apartment complex specifically for people living with disabilities, perhaps the first of its kind in Austin. The \$5.5 million Briarcliff complex will be funded by a number of creative and innovative sources.

Low-income people with disabilities have unique housing needs, says Jolene Keene, executive director of Accessible Housing Austin, the lead nonprofit on the project. Their physical space must accommodate situations ranging from wheelchairs,

hearing and visual impairments, and other disabilities, and have access to public transportation and proximity to healthcare services. That means they may need wider doors, ramps and elevators, lower countertops and other accommodations. And since people with disabilities often can't drive, they may rely on public transportation to get around.

It's equally important, she says, that they be integrated with the rest of the community. To that end, Briarcliff will be one mile north of the Mueller development and one mile east of Capital Plaza, which is near two bus lines and with access to grocery stores, medical offices and

other facilities. The Housing Authority of the City of Austin owns the land and will lease it to Accessible Housing Austin for 99 years for one dollar. "Because it's owned by the housing authority, and we're a governmental entity, AHA will not have to pay taxes on the land," said Ron Kowal, vice president of housing development for the housing authority. "This is an opportunity for them to keep their rents substantially lower."

This month, the Austin Community Foundation announced it would contribute to the development with a \$250,000 investment in the Texas Impact Fund, a loan program administered

by a statewide nonprofit, the Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation. This amount allowed the housing corporation to increase its financing for Briarcliff from \$695,000 to \$995,000, with a reduced interest rate of 2.5 percent during the two-year construction period. The Austin Community Foundation's investment is not a donation or grant, rather it's part of FundATX, an investment program that offers below-market-rate loans to nonprofits while also generating financial return for its donors.

"We know grant making can only go so far and we're committed to maximizing the Austin Community

Foundation's resources through new and innovative solutions, such as impact investing, to help close the opportunity gap in Central Texas," said Mike Nellis, chief executive officer for the Austin Community Foundation.

Additional funding for the project will come in the form of grants and loans from the city of Austin and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Lola Wright Foundation, the Bank of America Community Foundation, and Frost Bank in partnership with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas. "We couldn't do this without the partnerships we've had," said Keene.

COMMUNITY NEWS IN BRIEF

TRAVIS COUNTY Free recycling offered for Christmas trees

Texas Disposal Systems will accept Christmas trees to be recycled for free this holiday season starting Wednesday.

Live trees, as well as organic holiday decorations such as pumpkins and holly, can be dropped off from 7 a.m. to sunset Mondays through Saturdays at the TDS Landfill, 3016 FM 1327 in Creedmoor; from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays at TDS/Garden-Ville, at 4001 RM 620 South in Bee Cave; and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays at TDS/Georgetown at 250 W.L. Walden Road in Williamson County.

Trees and decorations must be free of lights, ornaments, metal and other nonliving contaminants. A \$45 contamination fee will be assessed for trees and decorations that have not been cleaned. When bringing loads for drop off, ensure that materials are tied and secured, per Texas law.

For more information: texasdisposal.com/christmas-tree-recycling.

PFLUGERVILLE Police seek volunteers for Victim Services

The Pflugerville Police Department Victim Services division is seeking volunteers and will host training classes from 7 to 10 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays beginning Feb. 11.

A mandatory orientation will be at 7 p.m. Jan. 30 at the Pflugerville Justice Center, 1611 E. Pfennig Lane.

Topics will include how to work with victims of family violence, sexual assault and other violent crimes; child victims; elderly victims; and survivors of suicide and homicide.

Interested residents ages

21 and older are encouraged to apply. For information: 512-670-5701; jallen@pflugervilletx.gov; pflugervilletx.gov/victimservices.

ROUND ROCK Chamber announces Chatsworth expansion

The Round Rock Chamber has announced that Chatsworth Products Inc. will expand its manufacturing capabilities in Round Rock through the lease of 33,922 square feet from owner and developer EastGroup Properties LP at Settlers Crossing building 2.

CPI plans to manufacture its power distribution product line at the Round Rock facility. The CPI Round Rock location will employ 40 full-time employees, and the company plans to invest \$1,200,000 in equipment and building improvements.

CPI designs and manufactures information and communications technology infrastructure products and industrial enclosures that protect information and communication technology equipment.

GEORGETOWN Learn about composting, drought-tolerant plants

The Williamson County Master Gardeners will host a class in its Hands On in the Garden series from 9 to 11 a.m. Dec. 29.

The class will be at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Demonstration Gardens, 3151 SE Inner Loop, and will focus on drought-tolerant gardens. Master Gardener Tommy King will talk about the composting process including setup, helpful tools and common problems with composting.

For more information: 512-943-3300; klwhitney@ag.tamu.edu.

BUDA City announces upcoming projects

The city of Buda has announced its upcoming list of city drainage and street construction projects.

The first street project is on Old Goforth Road and will start in January. It is scheduled to last until October. Aspects of the project include new dedicated left and right turn lanes at Tom Green Elementary School, intersection safety improvements at FM 2001, an increase in pedestrian connectivity between subdivisions and school and aesthetic enhancements.

The first drainage project will start in January in the Oxbow neighborhood with channel improvements and culvert upgrades. Construction is expected to last through August.

Upcoming street projects include Main Street in March, the intersection of Main Street and RM 967 in July and the ongoing project on San Antonio Street and Garison Road.

Upcoming drainage projects include the ongoing construction along Houston Street, which is scheduled to end in February; flood diversion improvements along Bluff Street starting in August; and channel improvements along West Goforth Road starting in December.

VETERANS' BIRTHDAYS

World War II veteran Willie "Bill" Meuth of Dale turned 99 on Tuesday.

World War II veteran Dr. Bengé Elliott of San Marcos turned 96 on Sunday.

We print birthdays for World War II veterans from Central Texas on Sundays as space allows. Email the name, birth date and current hometown to communitynews@statesman.com.

American-Statesman staff

Federal tax fraud trial for Bastrop restaurateurs delayed once again

By Brandon Mulder
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A federal judge has granted requests made by attorneys for two Bastrop restaurateurs accused of tax fraud to delay their trial by three months, according to court filings.

Michael and Cynthia Herman in 2017 were accused of federal tax crimes stemming from personal expenses they reported on business tax returns. Both have pleaded not guilty to seven counts of tax fraud occurring between 2007 and 2014 and one count of conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service. The married couple formerly owned two downtown Bastrop restaurants — Cindy's Downtown and Hasler Brothers Steakhouse — and one restaurant along Texas 71 near the Bastrop-Travis County line, Cindy's Gone Hog Wild. The three restaurants are now either closed or under new ownership.

Their trial has been scheduled for May 20 after being previously set for February. It is the fifth time Judge Xavier Rodriguez has granted attorneys' requests for delays.

"The government has been investigating the case since at least 2013. The discovery it has provided thus far includes approximately 27,000 pdf pages of discovery, a number of audio/visual recordings, 44 boxes of materials seized during the execution of several search warrants in 2013, and one hard drive. ... When unencrypted, the terabyte of data on that hard drive is equivalent to 340,000 banker's boxes of discovery," public defender Maureen Scott Franco wrote in the latest continuance request.

The couple's attorneys have also retained an additional expert witness to assist with the analysis of eight years'



Cindy Herman, one of the owners of Hasler Brothers Steakhouse in Bastrop, stands outside the steakhouse. [FILE PHOTO]

worth of ledgers for one business and five years' worth of ledgers for a second business, as well as all the pertinent tax records.

According to the indictment, the Hermans concealed "the true income of their businesses by depositing only a portion of the businesses' cash receipts into their business bank accounts. ... And did report as income to their tax return preparer only those deposited cash receipts."

Federal prosecutors allege the couple also paid personal expenses out of their business accounts — including \$1,108 for a pool repair, utilities for their home and the salary of a household employee — and reported those as business transactions.

The defendants now have until April 5 to enter a plea agreement if they choose not to go to trial.

If convicted, they face up to five years in prison for conspiracy to defraud the IRS, and a three-year sentence for each of the six charges of filing a false document. Fines can reach up to \$250,000.

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To donate goods or services, please contact Interfaith Action of Central Texas at 512-386-9145, Ext 7.

The charitable Statesman Season for Caring fund was established to solicit holiday donations and is administered by the Austin Community Foundation. All donations go to participating charities. Tax receipts are sent via email. Donor database will not be sold or used for marketing purposes.

More Info: statesman.com/community • 512-445-3590

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MEET BUSHRA HAROUN

After emigrating from Iraq, Bushra Haroun cares for her husband Idris, who has is physically disabled, and her four children, including a 3-year-old daughter with autism.

Their wishes:

- A van for the whole family
- Job training for Bushra
- Help paying off travel loans and for college tuition, car insurance, phone bills and rent
- Sheets and towels
- Grocery gift cards
- Kitchen table and chairs
- Comforters/bed covers
- Computer desk
- Dresser with mirror
- Vacuum cleaner
- Reusable Christmas tree



PHOTO BY NICK WAGNER/AMERICANSTATSMAN

Nominated by: Interfaith Action of Central Texas
512-386-9145, Ext. 7, interfaithtexas.org