

News & Notes

February 16, 2016



Robotics Team members Connor White and Andrew Archer.

WCS Robotics Team Excels at Tournament Competition

Westbury Christian School's first middle school robotics team — CATaclysm 1815 Delta — qualified for the North Texas Regional Championship by finishing as a member of the Tournament Champion alliance at the McKamy Middle School VEX Tournament in Flower Mound, Tx., on Saturday, Feb. 6.

1815D also received the Excellence Award, the highest honor presented in VEX Robotics Competition, for exemplifying overall excellence in building a well-rounded VEX robotics program.

"This team excels in many areas and is a shining example of dedication, devotion, hard work and teamwork," said Colleen Leeson, WCS engineering teacher and robotics team sponsor. "As a strong contender in numerous award categories, these students deserve to be recognized for building a quality robot and a 'team' committed to quality in everything that they do."

In addition to the latest honors, 1815D has already registered for the South Texas Championship, a VEX World Championship qualifying event, to be held in League City on Saturday, Feb. 27, and is qualified "twice over" for the CREATE U.S. Open Robotics Championship, to be held in Council Bluffs, Iowa, April 7-9.

Westbury HS Community Meeting

Here an update on design plans for Westbury High School's bond project at a meeting on Thursday, Feb. 18, at 6:30 p.m. in the school's lecture hall. The scope of the Westbury project includes partial replacement and general renovations to the existing building, which will accommodate 2,300 to 2,500 students.

The new \$40 million facility will feature flexible learning centers, new replacement athletic facilities, and a commons area designed to serve a dual purpose as new dining cafeteria and gathering space. The design will help enhance the image of the school by creating a well-defined and more prominent main entrance.

The project is still in the design development phase and the construction schedule and substantial completion date are currently being evaluated.

Cardinal Kickoff

Bellaire High School will host Cardinal Kickoff: A Night for Prospective students, Feb. 24 at 6:30 p.m. The evening will provide the following information to prospective families:

- Learn about outstanding Academic Programs including AP, IB, and Dual Credit
- Discover opportunities to participate in award winning Visual & Performing Arts Programs
- Visit with coaches from 13 UIL Athletic Programs as well as additional Club Sports
- Explore your interests by attending Club Jamboree and meeting representatives from over 110 clubs and student organizations

- Get connected and begin to receive information about the Class of 2020
- Find out how the 2012 Bond and the rebuilding of Bellaire High School will affect members of the Class of 2020.



HISD Trustees Ignore Community,

Vote to Change Lanier & Johnston's Names

By Michelle Leigh Smith

The Lanier parents and students sat motionless, with some tearing up after the trustees of the Houston Independent School District voted Thursday 5 to 4 to change the names of their schools.

Emotion and reaction ranged from disbelief to frustration at the clear disregard for community survey results reflecting that neither parents nor students wanted a change.

Muyi Aghedo, a 7th grade minority student, sat pa-

tiently through the first hour of unrelated HISD presentations, including a segment where each trustee thanked the outgoing Terry Grier for his service as superintendent. Grier did not stay for the parent comments or the vote on the name changes.

"Sidney Lanier was not a person who enjoyed slavery," said Aghedo, 13. "To change will bring a plethora of tribulations. It's not a good idea."

Eighth grader Ioana Nechiti said, "For the sake of the best interests of Lanier's

community, we need to protect the people's wishes as well as the democratic process. Changing the name will not affect racism. The inequality has already been identified but it has nothing to do with Lanier."

Although trustee Jolanda Jones had pledged to consider the voices of the community, her grandstanding about slavemasters separating families and rape in front of the young students in the audience reflected that her mind had been made up for quite some time.

She stated, "I find it incredibly interesting that the majority of people who are proud of the Lanier name are white," however survey results from the Lanier student community indicated that although the school's population is only 37% white, at least 75% of the students voted to keep the name.

The board voted following a motion by trustee Harvin Moore to separate the three schools — Sidney Lanier, Albert Sidney Johnston and Jefferson Davis

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New Officer "Legacies" Join Bellaire PD

By Michelle Leigh Smith

One of Texas' proudest traditions, tracing back to the early days of the Texas Rangers, produces sons who follow their fathers' footsteps into law enforcement.

Three new Bellaire Police officers will follow a path etched by their fathers, Lt. Bill Bledsoe and Officer Gerald Clisham as well as Sgt. Joe Marroquin, who will

become Chase Licchetto's father-in-law when he marries Morgan Marroquin on February 26.

Ryan Bledsoe, 29, became a new father three weeks ago. He comes to Bellaire from Sugar Land, where he worked as a firefighter.

"His strong suit is that he's going in at a mature age," says dad Lt. Bill

Bledsoe, who retired in 2014 and is now a full time grandfather. "He's a smart kid."

For Christmas, he gave him ear silencers for the shooting range and other vital equipment.

"I enjoyed watching him play football for the Kempner Cougars - Ryan was captain of the defense - and he'll bring those same leadership skills to his work," says

Bledsoe.

"Ryan has wanted to be a police officer for as long as I've known him," says Jayda Bledsoe, his wife and mother of three-week-old Austin Bledsoe. "He enjoyed firefighting, but I think he always had it in his heart to be a police officer."

Bledsoe will complete his training at the academy and

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Construction Mishap Causes Massive Phone Disruption

Homes and businesses in Bellaire had trouble communicating last week after a major telephone trunk line was cut Monday during leveling of the Bellaire Trolley Pavilion, interrupting phone service throughout the area.

The unkind cut was located in the esplanade at S. Rice and Bellaire Blvd. Residents and businesses in the immediate vicinity were without phone service most of the week. But residents over a mile away said they, too, were without service. The trunk line that was cut carries phone service from the AT&T building in West University, corner of Bellaire Blvd. and Academy, to phones throughout the area.

Crews worked day and night to remedy the problem, and some affected phones were patched into other trunk lines as a quick fix.

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AT&T employees worked round the clock to repair a trunk line severed by construction crews leveling the trolley pavilion. Photo by Michelle Leigh Smith

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High - for individual votes. His motion that Lanier be considered separately and first passed 5 to 4, with Jones, Rhonda Skillern-Jones, Wanda Adams and Diana Davila dissenting.

Before the Johnston vote, trustee Mike Lunceford said he was the only board member in attendance at the Johnston community meeting and he said the entire community was against a name change primarily because they were concerned about the costs. His research that reflected the view of the community he pledged to support was negated by Jones, Skillern-Jones, Davila, Rodriguez and Adams.

Lenny Schade, the interim Chief Operating Officer said a name change at each of the schools would cost an average of \$250K per school, but architect Carolyn Foug outlined the costs for Lanier at the community meeting.

On her own time, Foug prepared a budget with estimates from contractors that were non-binding and provided as a courtesy. She cited a \$265K minimum for removing the entire stone entablature and reassembly, including new stone, assuming that some stone pieces could be turned around, cleaned and reused.

"If the entire frieze must be replaced, the cost may go up by \$10,000," Foug said.

"Changing out two sign panels on the school marquee would cost \$4,750, a new athletic field sign would be \$2550, to sand, repaint and refinish the LMS on the gym floor would cost \$10,300 and replacing the brass letters in the original terrazzo floor in the front entry would cost \$7185. Replacement of the custom floor mats in the Lanier entry would begin at \$2500, and replacement of the four etched glass panels in the attendance office with new panes a \$225 per pane would be \$2700."

None of these cost estimates considered the additional burden of school uniforms, athletic and arts uniforms, portable signs, banners, materials, spirit gear and other supplies with the logo.

L.C. Kirpatrick, a African American track coach at Lanier, made a strong case for spending the same money for a much needed track that it would cost to resurface the

magnificent stonework that bears the Lanier name.

After the vote, there was sadness and shock at the lack of civility displayed by Jones during rants that had little to do with business before the board.

"Jolanda Jones came in with a preconceived plan and gave only lip service to the idea of democracy before flouting it completely," said Lanier mom Annette Harris. "The people she accused of being racist are the very people who embrace diversity by educating their kids in the public school system. Her attacks on those trying to protect the Lanier name amount to racism in another form and are a shameful example to set."

As for the official PTO position, president Adriane Arnold met with parents Friday and considered the next steps. "We listened to the voices of our community, and therefore opposed the school renaming. We went to the board meeting Thursday night to make our position known...participated in the process, and had our voices heard. We are sorry we lost, but we are not sore losers.

"We are still the same wonderful community we have always been, and we are proud of our students and our school," she said.

"The Lanier community looks forward to further dialogue and discourse related to this topic so that we can all return to focusing on the most important thing...Student learning."

"We're evaluating what went wrong with the process that resulted in such an unfair result," said parent Elaine Mut.

Adrienne Murry urged the board to consider tenet 5 of their Code of Ethics that reads, "I shall make decisions in terms of what is best for the education of all students in the District, regardless of an individual's age, race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, handicap or disability, marital status, religion, veteran status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity, and or gender expression."

She firmly believes the resulting vote is a violation of the HISD board ethics policy and the Declaration of Beliefs and Visions and does not further the Goals of Improving Human Capital in HISD, especially not at Lanier.

"Our goal needs to be how

to make this the most constructive experience possible for our kids," Arnold said.

Murry was distressed by the lack of understanding about Lanier's role, both during and after the Civil War. "Soldiers do not make policy, but the leaders do," says Murry. "To think that every young man who has ever enlisted in a war was doing so because he believed wholeheartedly in the cause would be a fallacy. To think that all young men fighting on both sides of the civil war were fighting "for" or "against" slavery is also a fallacy. Let's also remember that Lanier did not live in the same information age that we do now. He was watching towns being burned to the ground, and his fellow men taking up arms. There is absolutely no empirical evidence that we have found that shows that he was a racist or a bigot, but quite the contrary."

Arnold rebutted Jones' insinuation that students were bullied. "No one bullied kids into not voting for the Lanier name to stay," she said. "That is not the Lanier culture."

Lanier moms Angela Foster and Murry pointed to ethics abuses. They were outraged at Jones telling an entire auditorium full of students and parents that she would take their input and then clearly indicating otherwise. "This is personal," repeated Jones time and again. "She made it clear she never intended to objectively evaluate our input," says Foster.

Observed Elaine Mut, "It is one thing to make a pithy comment like, 'I'll take dignity over dollars,'" (as Skillern-Jones remarked) when you are on the top of the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but quite another to be cavalier about money (\$2M+ to change the roster of school names not including all of the uniforms and materials) when HISD is at the base of the pyramid struggling mightily to provide basic essential services and falling short already."

Some parents hoped there would be a second reading of the proposal. "There will not be a second reading," said HISD spokesperson Ashlee Anthony. "The board voted on a resolution, not a policy revision. Unlike policy revisions, board resolutions do not require a second reading."

There will be more community meetings to consider a new name, to be voted on in May.

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veterans with PTSD, 'stress' as Margot calls it."

"We have had amazing support from the community," says Maillet. "Mia's Table donated a case of crayons to help with the cost. (A case contains 3,000 crayons!) Needless to say we are very grateful for their generosity."

The family's favorite Saturday dining spot, Avalon Diner, has also embraced the project - waitresses ask if they can take the hearts table to table to show them to customers. "I didn't buy a heart, but I gave a donation," says Brenda Murphy, who has worked at Avalon for 37 years.

Five hundred hearts later, she is still going strong!

"My schoolwork and studying always comes first," says Margot. "And I always have to make my bed and take care of my dog, Kirby. I'm planning on continuing to raise donations for Camp Hope by selling more hearts. Hopefully my hearts will make people think of our veterans!"

Margot wrote a poem, dedicated to her Papa, that she read on Veteran's Day at ROE this year. "I think the respect they show veterans at Margot's school has left her with an awareness most children don't have at the age of nine," said Maillet.

America's Hope

By Margot Martin
Blue as the river
As Washington crossed,
White as the smoke
From the soldier's gun,
Red as the blood
From those who defend it,
For the land of the free
It has never let our
country down.
We pledge to it everyday.
It's been to the moon
And back.
Sewn by the past
Sewn by the present
And sewn in the future
One who has given our
Country hope
In the darkest hours,
One Country under God
Who are you?
I am America's flag of
hope
'Give me liberty or give
me death'

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