

# **EL PASO COUNTY**

### Commissioner David Stout Precinct 2

Newsletter - Volume 3 - Issue 4 - 2017



### **County Commissioners Court Appoints New County Judge**

This October, the Commissioners Court voted, 4-1, to appoint Judge Escobar's Chief of Staff, Ruben Vogt, as the Interim County Judge.

Throughout the long process to select a finalist, we were in a very, very good position because we had so many viable candidates. It was a tough decision to make, but I was confident that Ruben would be the candidate with the most institutional knowledge and experience with the organization.

For me, it was important to choose somebody with experience in County government and whose learning curve would not be steep. The remainder of this term is less than 15 months, and it would have been a disservice to the County to appoint someone who would have to spend 6 to 8 months just to become familiar with everything.

I also thought that it was important to choose somebody who may have some of the same values and beliefs as the County Judge, because the County Judge was the person that the people elected to this position.

Ruben has 11 years of experience working at the County. Ruben has a Master's degree from UTEP and a vocation for public service. I have no doubt that he will do a fantastic job in the role and look forward to continuing working with him to advance the County's mission and strategic plan.

### Investments in Ascarate Park

Recently, the Commissioners Court purchased a new boat for Ascarate Park.

The purpose of this boat is to remove the excess algae that typically appears in the summers due to the high temperatures and the sunlight that hits the water. Algae blooms are not harmful to human or fish but aesthetically unpleasant and make fishing difficult because fishing lines get caught on the algae. The County has an old boat that serves no purpose in the removal of the algae. Because of this, we allocated funds to purchase a new one.

The cost of the new boat, a TigerCat (image below) is approximately \$74,000. The TigerCat has a side cutter that will drop 5 feet underwater and trim the weeds that will float to the surface where they can be picked up with the front bucket of the boat making it a more effective process.

In addition to the boat purchase, the County also allocated funds for a new well at Ascarate Park.

The County currently has two wells that feed the lake and run 24/7. The drilling of the new well will allow us to alternate between wells, thus prolonging the life of the wells and allowing us to maintain the appropriate water levels at the lake. The cost of the new well is \$187,008.95. With these new investments, we hope to see an improvement in the water quality of the lake.



## **Commissioners Court Approves Updated Fees at Ascarate Park**

Recently, the Commissioners Court voted to change several fees at Ascarate Park. The changes took effect on November 1, 2017.

One of the biggest changes includes a new range of parking fees at Ascarate Park during special events. Now, depending on the number of attendees for the event, the parking fee will vary. We have also instated a pedestrian fee for any visitors walking into the park for special events. Below is a breakdown of the fees:

Number of Attendees	Parking Fee
Less than 750	\$2
750 - 3,000	\$5
Over 3,000	\$10
Number of Attendees	Pedestrian Fee
750 - 3,000	\$1
Over 3,000	\$5

#### **Fees for Special Events**

The Commissioners Court also voted to eliminate the \$5 parking fee on Columbus Day. This is great news, because I know several of my constituents called my office to voice their opposition to having a \$5 fee on Columbus Day and I was glad we were able to address these concerns.

The Commissioners Court also discussed potentially eliminating the \$5 parking fee for the day after Thanksgiving. However, this fee was ultimately kept the same. I know several of my constituents also complained about this "Black Friday" fee and so I have directed our County Administration department to evaluate the revenue from parking fees on the day after Thanksgiving and decide if it's worth keeping the fee—or eliminating it in order to encourage more families to use the park on this holiday.

A couple of other fees were increased, such as the rate of the pavilion (now \$150 with an additional \$64 housekeeping fee). The cost to book the pavilion for commercial/for profit events increased from \$250 to \$300. A \$250 fee was also added for event organizers for all special events in order to designate a staff member to be on site at all times. Examples of special events would include any special run (such as a 5K race), Sun City Fair or Taco Fest. Lastly, the changes include a non-refundable fee for any special events application.

## **Pool Schedule and Fees Updated**

Within the changes made by the Commissioners Court, there were also several changes to the pool schedule and fees. The admission prices for the pool went up. The prices are now \$3 general admission, \$3 junior youth, \$2 senior citizen, and \$2 military. The rate for family night at the pool has increased to \$1.

The hours of operation of the pool have also changed. The pool will be closed on Monday and open from Tuesday – Sunday (12 PM – 5PM). The swim team hours have changed to 5:30 AM – 11:30 AM—with one standard rate for use. The pool will remain open on Memorial Day weekend for the community, but will close the weekend after Labor Day. The pool will also close on days of inclement weather.

Lastly, we will also begin offering swim lessons to promote water safety for \$40.



### UTEP Students Offer Presentation for Ascarate Park projects



Students from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) recently presented findings to the Commissioners Court for proposed projects at Ascarate Park. As the largest park in the County, and one that many residents use and take pride it, I find it imperative that the County look at ways to solve park challenges and make improvements.

This process began in August 2016, when the Commissioners Court approved collaborating with UTEP to conduct a Civil Engineering Capstone Design Course. The Court then approved four design components for the project, which included walking trails designed to be compliant for disabled residents; stormwater drainage improvements to prevent ponding and promote rain harvesting; athletic fields; and an outdoor scenic outlook and amphitheater.

Over the past year, UTEP students and professors have spent a lot of time at the park conducting water samples in the lake and conducting instrumental work towards proposing important projects at the park.

The students suggested solutions to help with keeping our lake clean so that wildlife can continue to have an improved habitat to thrive, and to offer more scenic views to the public. In addition to the serenity of the park, one recommendation was the creation of a scenic view event space near the lake. Near that could be the creation of an amphitheater. The proposal was for a 13,000 square foot amphitheater with more than 1,300 seats.

The students further suggested improvements to our walking trails, with additions to allow residents in wheelchairs to better access the trails and spend more time in the park. Added to possible improvements would be a stormwater drainage system with the creation of dry wells and a detention pond to catch rain water.

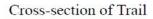
#### **UTEP Students Offer Presentation for Ascarate Park projects (continued)**

#### Walking Trails: Pavement Rehabilitation



- ADA
- International Building Code (IBC 2015) compliant
- Pedestrian Safety





UTEP students also recommended the addition of seven soccer fields throughout the park and two new parking lots.

Most important were the recommendations on the lake's remediation. In the past, the lake suffered from a golden algae plague which resulted in the death of many fish. The students suggested a number of mitigation efforts to improve the water quality in the lake. In many cases, that includes increasing dissolved oxygen in the lake and controlling nutrients. One method is placing three solar aerators for increasing dissolved oxygen levels in the water. Another includes placing more trees near the lake to soak up some nutrients that are harmful to the lake, which is one biological solution. And a major method for cleanup is placing floating islands in the lake near the shoreline. Those roots will act as a natural source for containment and nutrient cleanup, in addition to adding a nice aesthetic feature and offering a new habitat for wildlife.

While the total cost for all projects nears \$1.8 million, it is very possible that the County can act in a step-by-step process for the most important projects.

I would personally want to rethink the size of amphitheater so that we can host larger events and bring a greater impact by bringing more people to the park. Most of the calls I get from constituents are about the park. And I believe the recommendations from the students are good solutions to possibly work on and talk about with the public. Ultimately, this is a win-win situation for us, which offers hands on, real life experience for the students.

We also get the benefit of the work that students are doing. This is a great program and I want to look for ways to fund some of the projects, especially towards the lake. I want the fish to thrive and have a good habitat. I appreciate the work UTEP did with us, and I will advocate that we move forward with some of the solutions.

#### **UTEP Students Offer Presentation for Ascarate Park projects (continued)**

#### Lake Remediation: Golden Algae Mitigation

- Influential growth factors include:
  - pH
  - Salinity
  - Temperature
  - Nutrient Availability
  - Oxygen Levels
- Toxic blooms repel beneficial algae, and cause gill damage to fish
- Have historically bloomed on north end of lake

Methods of mitigation include:

- 1. Increase Dissolved oxygen and mixing
- 2. Control nitrogen and phosphate input from golf course
- 3. Nutrient and contaminant control/clean up
- 4. Salinity Control

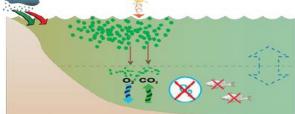
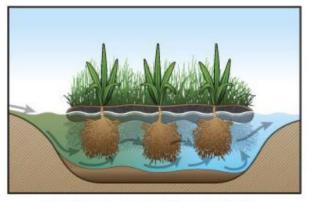


Diagram of oxygen depletion by algae bloom

#### **Floating Island Wetlands**

- Roots act as natural source for contaminant and nutrient clean up
- · Add unique aesthetic feature
- \$25 \$29 per square foot
- Recommendation:
- Floating Islands near the shore line of the lake



Typical cross section of floating island wetland

# **Lights on the Lake**



This holiday season, Lights on the Lake was back at Ascarate Park for the third year in a row and I'd like to thank everyone who came out for this wonderful County tradition!

The event had a great turnout of families who enjoyed music, dancing, food vendors, and a drive-in movie. I also want to extend a special thanks to our Parks and Public Works staff who put on a tremendous event!

### UMC Opens New Neuroscience Services ICU



In November, UMC held a ribbon cutting ceremony for their brand new Neuroscience Services ICU.

This ceremony marked the completion of an important addition to our hospital that has continuously grown in the last couple of years. We are so fortunate to have a hospital that continuously invests in offering the best care for all residents, regardless of their ability to pay.

Unfortunately, too many people die from strokes in the US. In fact, stroke is the fourth leading cause of death, killing 137,000 people each year in the United States. It is also the leading cause of serious long-term disability in adults.

However, about 80% of strokes are preventable.

Now, thanks to our hospital's dedication, UMC is the first and only hospital in El Paso to have 24/7 neurointervention, stroke, neurocritical care and neurology coverage. I know that UMC's Rehabilitation Department will play an important role in stroke recovery, and is already providing therapy services to patients.

## El Paso Children's Hospital Board Appoints New CEO, Cindy Stout



In September 2017, Cindy Stout, the former Chief Nursing Officer for University Medical Center, was named the new Chief Executive Officer of the El Paso Children's Hospital. Ms. Stout replaces Mark Amox, who served as President and CEO for the Children's Hospital for about one year. He recently left the hospital to pursue other business opportunities.

Ms. Stout earned a Doctorate in Nursing Practice at Duke University and has over 25 years of experience in El Paso healthcare. Prior to her role as CNO at UMC, she served as the CNO at Del Sol Medical Center and the Chief Nursing Executive for Las Palmas/ Del Sol Healthcare.

Ms. Stout is also a member of the Adjunct Faculty at UTEP and serves on the Advisory Boards of UTEP's School of Nursing and the

Texas Tech Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing. In fact, she has continuously served on numerous civic boards and committees in the community, such as the Nursing Advisory Committees for EPCC College of Nursing and the Doña Ana Community College.

Ms. Stout is an experienced professional, dedicated to advancing the El Paso Children's Hospital as an institution that will continue providing the best pediatric care, research and education in the Paso del Norte region. Over the next couple of months, Ms. Stout will be meeting with hospital staff as well as doctors and partners in our community in order to outline operating goals for the hospital.

I wish Ms. Stout the best of luck in her new position and look forward to working with her in a collaborative manner to offer the best possible services to the children of El Paso.

### El Paso Welcomes 700 Jobs through Joint Effort by the County, City and Borderplex Alliance



On December 4, 2017 both the El Paso City Council and County Commissioners Court approved incentives for Pacific Union Financial, a Dallas-based mortgage company that will bring about 700 jobs to El Paso over the next five years.

The incentive packages were worth about \$366,000 over the next ten years in exchange for the company's investment in quality jobs and over \$1 million in our city.

These are exactly the type of projects I believe the County should be incentivizing. Pacific Union Financial is a successful firm with about 50 offices in the United States. Their residential mortgage loan portfolio is values at about \$23 billion.

Pacific Union Financial will bring higher wage jobs that will tap into the educated workforce our universities and colleges are graduating each year and the return on investment we will see will be outstanding. The positions will include loan officers, analysts, mortgaging service representatives, underwriters, operations managers and sales managers.

#### El Paso Welcomes 700 Jobs through Joint Effort by the City, County and Borderplex Alliance (continued)

Every job will be compensated above the median county wage, with the average salary at about \$48.5K.

I am so excited that Pacific Union Financial has chosen El Paso as the location for their new expansion project. The company evaluated different cities in California and Arizona and decided to make El Paso their new home.

I am also proud that the County was able to work with the City and the Borderplex Alliance to offer Pacific Union Financial a competitive incentive package.

I look forward to evaluating similar companies in the future through our newly improved economic incentives policy, which can be found here:

http://www.epcounty.com/economic/documents/381\_Comprehensive\_Incentives\_Policy.pdf

### County Partners with UTEP for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program

Recently, our County Judge had a meeting with professors from UTEP. In this meeting, they discussed the potential for El Paso County (in partnership with UTEP) to apply for an opportunity to submit an application to the U.S. Department of Transportation to serve as one of five pilot program sites to partner with private sector entities, such as operators/ manufactures to accelerate safe unmanned aircraft systems integration.

This comes after President Trump issued a Presidential Memorandum on October 25, 2017 calling for the U.S. Department of Transportation to select 5 sites to conduct this research in working to expand unmanned aviation and automated technologies. The program is designed to achieve the goals laid out in the President's memo by enabling effective collaboration between the private sector and state, local and tribal governments to test and validate cutting edge drone applications.

After evaluating the opportunity of the program, the Commissioners Court authorized the County of El Paso to submit a notice of intent as the Lead Applicant for participation in the Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program.

#### County Partners with UTEP for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program (continued)

Although it may be difficult for our site to be chosen for this program, it would be very exciting to elevate our community for this kind of opportunity. If chosen, this could increase our quality of life and spark further economic development in our region. For example, if chosen, Google, Amazon, Intel, DJI, and Precision Hawk will each partner with El Paso to advance this program's mission. This opportunity would ultimately springboard El Paso and UTEP into national leadership for a primary future industry in our region.

### **County Commissioners Court Votes Against Invocation Policy**

In December, the Commissioners Court took action on a proposed invocation policy to hold a prayer at the beginning of our weekly meetings.

I, myself, am religious and I know that many people find comfort in prayer or an invocation and although I am not against any prayer or religion, I had several concerns about this policy.

I do believe in the separation of church and state, and I'm concerned that if we adopt an invocation policy and limit who is allowed to administer the prayer, or which religion it comes from, we could become exclusive of other people's beliefs and values.

Further, we could leave the County open to a lawsuit if we adopt an exclusive invocation policy. Just like the public comment part of our meetings, we may not agree with all that is said, but we still listen to it. The same could be said of an invocation period of these meetings.

While the Supreme Court has ruled that we may have meetings that have ceremonial prayers, there are limits imposed by the First Amendment.

That includes allowing such speakers to offer an invocation without regard to one religion over another. As a County government, if we adopt an invocation, we must adopt a policy that does not discriminate, but rather one that is representative all views.

The fact is, we live in a pluralistic community that represents many people of many faiths and I don't want this Court to divide our community.

That's why I joined two other colleagues to vote no and not pursue that policy.

### Commissioners Court Approves First Chance Program for First Time Offenders of Marijuana Possession



In October, the Commissioners Court unanimously approved of a new program called First Chance. This is a program that will apply to first time offenders who are solely apprehended with a misdemeanor possession of marijuana, 2 ounces or less.

Our District Attorney estimates that there are only about 700 to 1,000 of these cases per year. In the event someone qualifies for this program, they will not be arrested, but will still be held accountable. They will have five days to report, pay a \$100 fee, and do 8 hours of community service within 60 days.

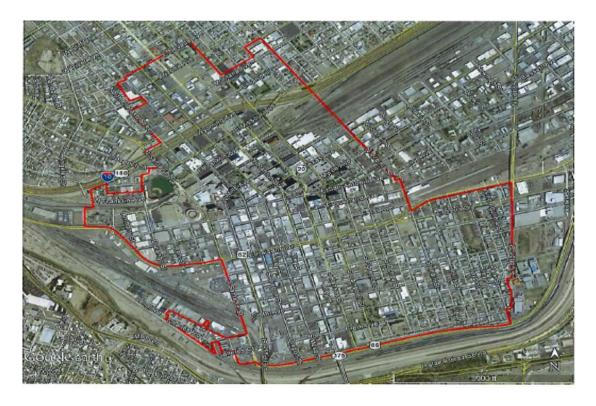
Most of those offenders of this charge are below the age of 25 years. This process will provide more time for City and County police officers to remain patrolling the streets, and result in cost avoidance for police officers, booking staff, and court staff.

Our staff believes this could result in a savings of between \$100,000 to \$300,000 annually.

Again, this applies only to individuals apprehended solely for misdemeanor possession of marijuana. It will not apply to someone facing the possession and another charge.

Since then, the County has moved forward and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of El Paso-El Paso Police Department to proceed with the program.

### Historic and Architectural Survey Makes Advances



Close to two years ago, the Commissioners Court voted unanimously to approve a historic and architectural resources survey of downtown El Paso, Segundo Barrio, Chihuahuita, and Union Plaza.

The purpose of the survey was to inventory our stock of historic buildings, of which there are many. Once complete, we aim to create a national historic district through the National Register of Historic Places.

Once that is done, certain buildings in the district will become eligible for federal and state historic tax credits, worth up to 45 percent of the cost of rehabilitation.

The historic/architecture consultants we hired, Hardy Heck Moore (HHM), completed their survey and delivered us with a draft report.

The firm surveyed 1,715 historic resources. Of those, they recommend that 169 or nearly 10 percent are eligible for individual listing with the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition, HHM recommended creating a single national historic district which encompasses most of the survey area south of I-10, which includes 1,390 historic resources.

HHM also recommended adding to a local historic district north of I-10, which includes 105 additional historic resources.

After a brief roadblock, the County decided to take time to review the survey report before moving forward. We directed our staff to work with HHM to pause the contract temporarily, leaving the comment period open until we have chance to work with the City to review ordinances and the impact on the survey.

This action extends the contract deadline by about three months.

But I'm excited and proud that we've come this far towards identifying and preserving our history and culture, as well as adding to our economic development set of tools.

Ultimately, I hope this process will work towards improving heritage tourism and adding greater to downtown revitalization efforts.



### **Precinct 2 Resolutions**



#### **Veterans Caregiver Month**

In order to recognize the work of our Veteran caregivers, the County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized the month of November 2017 as "Hidden Heroes Month." In the United States, there are more than 5.5 million caregivers for current and former military service members, with about 20 percent of those caregivers supporting Veterans since September 2001. The vast majority of Veteran caregivers are women. These caregivers are a family member, spouse, friend, or acquaintance who assists or manages the care of a current or former military service member with a disabling physical or mental injury or illness.

However, Veteran caregivers are less likely to have their own networks of support and are three times more likely to spend 40 hours a week caring for their Veteran as opposed to other types of caregivers, often to the detriment of the individual's employment and economic security. Therefore, due to the love and sacrifices that our unsung heroes offer to our Veteran community, I was proud to sponsor this resolution and present it to several caregivers at their appreciation dinner in November.

#### **NICU Resolution**

Recently, The El Paso Children's Hospital's NICU received a level IV designation. This indicates that our very own hospital offers a full range of pediatric subspecialties in order to provide the children in the El Paso and surrounding areas with the highest level of care possible for neonatal babies.

In order to recognize this achievement and raise awareness for neonatal intensive care, the County Judge and Commissioners Court passed a resolution designating the month of November 2017 as Prematurity Awareness Month.

I am very proud of the work that our Children's Hospital has done for the neonatal babies and mothers in the community. The hospital is eager to continue working with their academic partners at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, their NICU's multidisciplinary team of doctors, University Medical Center of El Paso's Women's Services and the specialized nurses and other health care professionals for our community.

#### National Voter Registration Day

In September, 2017, the County Judge and Commissioners Court passed a resolution celebrating September 26, 2017 as National Voter Registration Day. Civic participation is something I am very passionate about because I believe our government is strongest when citizens are engaged in the electoral process. Passing resolutions like this allows us to increase awareness of the importance of voting, especially in the State of Texas, where we are ranked number 47 out of the 50 states in voter participation for the year 2015.

This resolution was also important because our El Paso County Elections Department has been partnering with The Student Voter Initiative in order to encourage high school seniors to register to vote. This initiative has increased the number of young people who are informed about the registration process, and who ultimately register to vote.

#### The Paso del Norte Foundation and El Paso County Sheriff's Office Special Needs Unit

In November 2017, the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized the Paso del Norte Health Foundation and the El Paso County Sheriff's Office – Special Needs Unit for their commitment to address mental health illness and work with those who suffer from mental health illness in our community. The Paso del Norte Health Foundation has generously worked with and funded a program with the El Paso County Sheriff's Office to train Detention Bureau staff in mental health first aid as part of a Mental Health Stigma Awareness Campaign; and

As a result, the El Paso County Sheriff's Office – Special Needs Unit has successfully implemented the program, having been funded \$140,000 from the Foundation over three years to create this necessary and systematic change in our jails through mental health training.

#### EduMobile Awareness Day: Reading is Power

EduMobile Inc. is an organization in El Paso that emphasizes the importance of expanding literacy in our community. The organization works to ensure that every child, regardless of circumstances, is reading at grade level by offering an integrative model that combines innovative reading instruction, one-on-one interaction, mentoring and parental involvement to accelerate student success. On December 4, 2017, the County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized the organization for this important work in our community, especially at Rosa Guerrero Elementary where students are already witnessing improvements in their reading scores.

#### El Paso Coyotes Day

On October 23, 2017 the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized the El Paso Coyotes. The Coyotes are an American professional indoor soccer franchise based in El Paso, Texas and began their second professional season on October 28. The Coyotes have added to El Paso County's roster of professional sports and entertainment items, improving and building upon the quality and spirit of life in the border region. Due to my support for local sports that improve our sense of identity, integration, and pride in our community, I sponsored this resolution, in order to recognize the team, the staff and players.

# **Stout in the News**

Historic designations don't permanently protect buildings from demolition, El Paso Times, 12-17-17

Commissioners vote against implementing nondenominational invocation message before meetings, KVIA, 12-11-17

Estudio indica que 169 edificos en el centro podrian ser historicos, Univision, 12-11-17

County postpones vote on Downtown Historical Survey, KTSM, 12-11-17

Firm suggests County apply for historic district designation, would include Duranguito, KVIA, 12-11-17

Survey: 169 buildings eligible for historic status, El Paso Inc, 12-11-17

Third Annual Lights at the Lake kicked off Saturday evening, KVIA, 12-09-17

Ever heard of floating islands? They could help control algae at Ascarate Lake, El Paso Times, 12-04-17

UTEP students present research to Commissioners Court on ways to improve Ascarate Park, KVIA, 12-04-17

Sheriff's Office Special Needs Unite recognized at Commissioners Court, KVIA, 11-27-17



# Gallery



Commissioner Stout speaking at Project ARRIBA graduation ceremony



Central El Paso Community Organization and Golden Hills Neighborhood Association Meeting



Commissioner Stout at our Monthly Community Meeting in the Ascarate Golf Course Restaurant



Commissioner Stout at Annual Thanksgiving Parade



Commissioner Stout with State Representative Lina Ortega, staff and representatives from the offices of Congressman O'Rourke and Senator Jose Rodriguez



Commissioner Stout speaking at the Cooperative Purchasing Conference



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**Questions?** 

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