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Q&A with Alison Alter: Representing Constituents, Not the Special Interests

By Paul Sweeney

Allison Alter, the newly elected city council member from District 10 — a sprawling district that takes in much of West Austin — was sworn into office this month following her defeat of incumbent Sheri Gallo in a special election. Unpopular development projects known as “The Grove” and “Austin Oaks,” as well as transportation, and rising property taxes are deemed to have played a role in Alter’s landslide victory. In an interview with the *West Austin News*, the new council member declared “I was elected to represent my constituents and not the special interests.” At a small conference table in her spare office, Alter was cordial but all business. She still needed to fill key staff positions — including a policy adviser and a communications/constituents’ outreach aide — and she said she would be looking for capable, civic-minded people to fill a roster of positions on boards and commissions. She also said that she would seek appointment to CAMPO — the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organi-



Alison Alter

A: My voters wanted somebody who genuinely cares about their concerns and works with them to solve problems. I’ve been working since my first day as a council member-elect to meet and exceed their expectations. On my first official day at work I was at Capital Metro advocating for keeping our north-south bus service.

Q: That seems to segue right into transportation. What are your thoughts on the \$720 million bond referendum.

shouldn’t be deluded that we’ll do this and then be done with it. The success of this bond will determine our ability to fashion a rail option.

Q: Let’s talk about development. The Grove has been approved. Will Austin Oaks be getting more scrutiny?

A: Yes, I am going to be working with all the different neighborhood groups, all the stakeholders as well as the developer to make sure that Austin Oaks is the best possible development, delivering high-quality community benefits. The developer has agreed not to object to a postponement of two weeks. So it will be on the February 16 agenda, assuming my colleagues agree to it. But the developer has agreed to the extra time.

Q: I wanted to ask you about that monstrosity at 35th Street and Exposition. I understand that it’s a very different project from what’s been proposed.

A: Developers take advantage of ambiguities in whatever zon-



City Council Member Alison Alter sworn into office on Jan. 6, 2017 by Judge Sherry Statman of Austin Municipal Court

ing documents are governing. And it will allow us to be creative and collaborative. The city and UT could really be great partners on how this evolves. I welcome that overture.

Q: This sounds like hopeful news.

A: I am hopeful on Muny. But it’s going to take a lot of hard work and a lot of engagement to get the best possible outcome for all of us.

Q: Austin musician’s venues are closing and they’re having a hard time finding a place to hang a guitar. What can we do to make Austin more affordable, more livable?

A: I think you’re right to jump from we’re losing our musicians to the question of affordability. But our creative class — not just musicians but our creative class, just like the average citizen — needs to be able to afford to move here. There are a lot of dimensions to that. Housing is one of them. But transportation is another. And health care also I

Q: You said appointments to boards and commissions were going to be a priority. You had served on Parks and Recreation Board. What do you take from that?

A: Our boards and commissions are an untapped resource. We are not taking advantage of the knowledge and expertise and passion that these citizens bring to our boards. We need to broaden that discussion to think about how we leverage these boards and commissions. They’re supposed to be the eyes and ears of the city, and how each councilmember uses them varies. I’ll be advocating that we need to listen to them more at the council level.

Q: Tell me about your view of public service.

A: I was not happy with what I saw. And sometimes — when you speak up — you get drafted to be the one to carry the banner. We have to get back to where we value public service. In District 10 we have a real opportunity to lead the way on civic engagement. My vision of public

happen. So I’m relying a lot on that. But you’re given a tremendous amount of different kinds of policies to deal with on the city level and the magnitude and scope are not always appreciated by the man on the street. So my training allows me to learn really quickly. And that’s where I am now — very much in a learning and listening mode.

Q: In the modern era, the city is part of the global economy too.

A: I definitely see that. I ran a state-funded center when I was in Wisconsin that was helping businesses and local and state governments compete globally. I see the city as being part of that global economy and cities are where innovation is taking place in terms of government too. Austin with all of its great assets and its creativity and entrepreneurship is well placed to be a leader. We can be the most livable city in the country, and we can do it in our own way.

Q: There’s a medical school coming to UT. Does Austin see itself becoming a regional medical center?

A: The city is participating in a major way with the funding process for central health and Dell Medical. And it’s an exciting opportunity for the city and for the university. We talked about Muny before. But the medical school is another example of how the city and UT are working together to improve people’s lives. A whole slew of innovation goes along with that. We have a lot of D-10 folks who are in the leadership over there.

Q: Is there something on your mind that we didn’t get to?

A: I ran to represent District 10 and I won’t always get everything right. But my success ultimately depends on the relationships we mutually build and the constructive engagement of my constituents. And I look forward to working with and for people to make Austin the kind of place where we all want to live.

“Developers take advantage of ambiguities in whatever zoning documents are governing them. I think it’s something that we as a council need to pay attention to.”

zation — which is responsible for transportation planning for Williamson, Travis, Hays, Bastrop, Burnet and Caldwell counties. With a doctorate in political economy from Harvard, Alter’s thoughtfulness about government came through during the interview. Here is an edited version of the interview.

Q: What are you hearing from voters since the election?

A: I think it’s an important first step in addressing our mobility needs. But we have not invested in our transportation infrastructure, so there’s a backlog of projects. I’m focused on making sure that we spend our taxpayers’ money wisely. We have to recognize this is a really big amount of money and it’s going to require oversight and collaboration to get it right. We

ing documents are governing them. I think it’s something that we as a council need to pay attention to. I’ve heard concerns with the property at Exposition and 35th — that there are deviations. We’re not currently monitoring well. It’s a policy issue but it’s also an oversight role. And I need to work with my colleagues on the council and staff to make sure that I understand the legal framework within which we might be able to remedy that. There are state law restrictions that constrain what we can do, but it’s something people are concerned about.

Q: You said Code Next is a big priority.

A: Yes. Code Next is the rewrite of our land development code. It’s kind of like our DNA as a city. It helps us figure out where we’re going to grow — and how — and gives us a road map. I want to ensure that Code Next finalizes and embraces the values that have made Austin a unique, attractive and vibrant city.

Q: Is there any daylight on saving Muny [Lions Municipal Golf Course]?

A: There was a letter that the mayor and I received from the University of Texas that essentially opened up the possibility for beginning negotiations earlier. It will open the lines of communications so that we don’t have to feel the pressure and the rush of time in 2018

“We can be the most livable city in the country, and we can do it in our own way.”

would include. And then there’s also wages and what are people being paid. With respect to the creative classes and the venues and different kinds of ways that we can facilitate making it easier for them to add to our city and keep us unique and weird, I think we’ve made some strides in at least refocusing attention on those issues. And I know that District 10 very much values the artistic vibrancy of our city. We do have to make sure that we are nurturing our home-grown businesses and our home-grown artists.

service is to engage people but also to get leaders together so that we can solve problems and learn from one another. So I’m hoping to operate with a different model of engagement with the community.

Q: What in your background do you feel like you’re relying on most?

A: I’ve always been involved in student government and in my professional career I’ve done a lot of things where I bring different people together across disciplines to find that meeting point where exciting things can

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WESTSIDE STORIES

Winn Wittman

Winn and his wife Shaina on a sailing excursion.



By Forrest Preece

I don't use the term "Renaissance Man" often, but then I meet someone like Winn Wittman, an outstanding architect and designer. When I entered his condo in a downtown high-rise, you might have thought that he would start our conversation by showing me photos of his favorite design projects. But no, as I walked down his front hall, he began showing me first editions of authors from William S. Burroughs, who he has met, to Ayn Rand (every architect needs to read about Howard Roark). He also pointed out a novel written by his mother that was published by Simon & Schuster. Yes, he has an artistic pedigree and he reads at least two books a week, mostly nonfiction. In his living room, he has a stunning original Rauschenberg construction and a gorgeous glass sculpture that he created himself. To be honest, I thought it was a Chihuly before he told me that he did it. He also has a baby grand piano and a guitar, both of which he plays well.

Yes, this is a man who did \$40 million worth of design work on his laptop in his home office last year, working about three hours a day. His homes have appeared in 50 design magazines and on HGTV and the Discovery Network. He also recorded a musical album "Beautiful Disaster" in 2013 with some of the best musicians in town, such as Don



"Soaring Wings" is the magnificent home in Westlake that Winn designed.

Harvey, Scrappy Jud Newcomb and Sally Allen. It is available on iTunes. Little surprise that Spaces Magazine has called him "America's most rock and roll architect."

Oh, and last year he was invited to go spend five days with 15 other entrepreneurs from around the country with Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Group fame on his private island. Branson is a man who walks around barefoot and passes out hugs like others do handshakes. He operates 400 businesses, but he does not have an office in any of them. "That validates my way of doing things," Winn says.

When he was 16 and growing up in Boston, Winn got very hands-on with architecture by helping his sister's boyfriend tear down houses in nearby Cambridge. Spending hours swinging a sledgehammer and wearing a dust mask, he learned

house deconstruction, which had an influence on him. But Winn says his outlook was totally changed when he travelled to Europe and saw the work of Le Corbusier, a man who split his time among disciplines — painting, architecture and writing — a true artist who also happened to design buildings.

So how did he come to Austin? When he was finishing his bachelor's degree at Tufts his art history professor told him that he should go to Austin to get his master's in architecture. In her mind, Boston was "too parochial" and he would do better down here. Winn says that when he visited Austin he had never had a margarita or fajitas before. After trying both of those treats and then seeing the gorgeous women on Sixth Street, he decided that the Capital City was the place for him. That opinion was underlined when he met Hal Box, the legendary architecture school dean at the University of Texas who became his adviser and mentor.

When Winn graduated from UT, the local economy was in the depths of the S&L/real estate bust. To put it mildly, there was not much work out there for young architects. Adapting his talents to the times, he began rehabbing and selling houses in West Austin and then purchased an unfinished, vacant office building on Bee Caves Road which he reworked and sold to

noted designer Michael Reese who specializes in crafting interiors for luxury jet airplanes.

It was only about 15 years ago that Winn started taking on clients rather than developing. He let his love of building drive his practice of architecture. Getting back to his overall take on design, he feels that a home or building should be a functional work of art. Far too many structures are too boxy and inelegant, in his opinion. "Goethe said that architecture is frozen music," Winn says. The way he sees it, structures possess the qualities of music, with rhythm and spaces. With that kind of thinking prevailing, he has found that he can only work for about 45 minutes at a stint and then he needs to go play his piano to jumpstart his creative process or to keep it flowing. In the past, he worked out of an office building, but one of his proudest accomplishments was figuring out how to work virtually. A project of his for 2017 is to teach young architects how to work in this manner. He will be conducting a master class called "The Rogue Architect" which will show young professionals and those in unsatisfying mid-career employment how to build their practice around their life. This way of doing things is especially important to Winn now, since he and his wife Shaina are expecting their first child in May and he wants to have plenty of time to participate in rearing the baby.

Now about his homes — one of them, named "Soaring Wings" in Westlake Hills, has attracted a spate of national publicity. To say that this house (shown in a photo here) produces an immediate "wow" is an understatement. Winn built it on spec, with the help of Gary Robinson of Home as Art, believing if he built it, they would come. It is a work of art that harmonizes effortlessly with the rugged Texas Hill Country and he has received attention from students wanting to review it from as far away as Pasadena and Ber-Zeit University in the West Bank. It is separated into a public volume containing the living, eating and entertaining spaces and a private volume containing the bedrooms, separated by a two-story glass and steel bridge.

Two large wings face the west façade, clad in copper, which provide sculptural expression and shading. Motorized mesh shades programmed to an astronomical clock raise and lower with the sun. The home is energy-efficient, despite all its expansive windows, and features rainwater collection. There is a three-story elevator which makes the entire



Last year, Sir Richard Branson (The Virgin Group) invited Winn and some other creative entrepreneurs for a visit on his island.



Another remarkable businessman, John Paul DeJoria, and Winn share some time together.

house accessible. The courtyard, carved from the hillside in back, contains a salt-water pool and a Zen-like rock garden. The owners believe the home is a complex, rich, and satisfying framework for their life. Winn sees "Soaring Wings" as a glimpse of the world as it might be. Other homes Winn has designed, such as "Aquavilla," which seems to merge with its lake view, are shown on his website, winnwittman.com.

By the way, you heard it here first: soon, one of his homes, the largest and most expensive one he has ever designed, a striking, curvy creation, will be a landmark on the hill across from Hula Hut and Mozart's.

As for advice that he would give to people starting out in the business world or those who would like to change the way they do things, Winn had some specifics. First, don't be too concerned about others' opinions — you must become yourself and be selective regarding what you care about. "Get out and see the world," he

says. "The way to learn about the world is by doing." He adds a person should never become stagnant. The world is changing rapidly and certain types of jobs are disappearing; you need to commit to a lifetime of learning.

Also, he says, "If you aren't happy when you come home, you won't be doing your best work." He tries to limit his work to three hours a day, as I noted. Winn gets up early, makes a cup of coffee, then plans the day, isolating three action steps that are priorities. He adds that music, laughter and exercise are critical to mental health and high-drama people are a drain on your energy. "Focus on building the right relationships. Everything else in life flows from that." Diet is also essential — he says to go with low carbs and high fat. One more lesson from Winn's playbook — faith. "The cliff divers in Acapulco know that you jump from the cliff when you see the rocks — you have to trust that the water will come back to meet you."



"The Bat Tower," Winn's homage to the City of Austin. Location TBD

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Dancing with the Stars 10th Anniversary

Over 900 attended the 10th anniversary of Dancing with the Stars benefitting the Center for Child Protection. The event's chairs were Jeanne Parker and Venus Strawn who presided over a live auction for a VIP trip for four to the NCAA Men's Final. The Center for Child Protection provides forensic interviews, medical exams, counseling and intervention programs. Their mission is to reduce trauma in children who are involved in criminal investigations, like cases of child abuse.

"The Center for Child Protection is honored to have celebrated 10 years of dance, philanthropy and advocacy at this year's Dancing with the Stars Austin," Michael Torres, Center for Child Protection executive director, said. "It is only because of the generous support of the Austin community that the Center is able to continue to provide high-quality services to child abuse victims and their protective families."

Board members, Maria Orozova, Scott Thomas and Andy Black and Center for Child Protection supporters Katie and Jordan Jaffe, Tobie Funte Flannery, Joanie Bentizen and Mary and Bob Wilbur were in attendance. Celebrity dancers included Susan Lubin, Jackie Mooney and Katrine Formby.



Amanda Koziel and Dan Connolly



John and Nikki Williams



Audon and Kenyon Aguillon



Bill Strawn, Renata Marsilli, and Grant and Barbara Foster



Blair and Amy Beard



Bob and Tammy Carter



Danny and Kathleen Pierro



Harold and Jan Schneider



Oze Paya and Teitsa Mann



Nick and Emily Albino



Valentina Mitzkat, Stacey and Rayden Marcum, and Khrista Mitzkat



Vicki Roberts, Debbie Tate (director of Development and Community Relations for CCP), and Cassie Lamere

Black Ball benefitting Black Fret

The 3rd annual Black Ball Gala took place on Saturday, Dec. 10 at The Paramount Theatre, where its 2016 nominees performed and final grant recipients were announced. This year Black Fret nominees featured 20 different local artists who also performed for Black Fret's loyal members.

This year's grants were \$17,000 each and given to Suzanna Choffel, Dan Dyer, Walker Lukens, Ray Prim, Nakia,

The Peterson Brothers, Bee Caves, Carson McHone, Wendy Colonna, and Swimming with Bears. Minor grant recipients were Name Sayers, Magna Carda, Harvest Thieves, Leopold and His Fiction, Daniel Eyes and The Vibes, Dana Falconberry, Brownout, Golden Dawn Arkestra, Sweet Spirit, and Callopie Musicals.

Co-founders Matt Ott and Colin Kendrick started Black Fret in order to empower musi-

cians with the resources to create new music. Our local Austin economy is better supported and musicians better served, because of this organization's mission.

"Black Fret couldn't be more proud of this year's nominees... And our continued growth in membership means we are able to provide over \$200,000 in grants this year," said Matt Ott, co-founder of Black Fret. "We've grown to

well over 300 members and gained support from some of Austin's leading corporate citizens and from the City of Austin. The strength of our growing community of patrons allowed us to host more than 20 performances last year while significantly increasing our giving to Austin's exceptional artists," — Colin Kendrick, Founder and President.



Paige Wilson and Theresa Ballon



Robert Rankin and Nakia Reynoso (Black Fret Grant Recipient)



April and Stephan Martini



Kerry and Kristin Millar



Kym Olsen, Sarah Sharp, Roggie Bear, and Elizabeth McQueen



Tracy King, Lisa Pollard, Randa Becker, and Kym Olsen



Ken Brand, Cindy Mingea, and Robyn Brand



Linda Willis and JoAnn McKenzie



Serena Kuvet, Mary Ellen Fine



Lisa Shear, Holden Ott, Joe Roddy, and Micheal Enright



Kim Couch, Karen Hennessy, and Michele Negley

St. David's grants over 20 million to Austin community

St. David's Foundation recently announced over 20 million in December grants at Meals on Wheels Central Texas. A few of West Austin's own attended the event to show their support — Lisa Trahan, Alan Graham, founder of Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Dan Pruett, CEO, Meals on Wheels Central Texas, and Thad Rosenfeld, VP for Communications, Meals on Wheels Central Texas. The Singing by Seniors from Mike's Place,

a program of Meals on Wheels Central Texas, provided entertainment for the festive event.

"As our population grows, we are seeing an escalating demand for more healthcare-related services for our rapidly growing community. By partnering with organizations who are developing facilities and programs to address future healthcare needs, from mental health to homelessness to the needs of low income families,

we hope to anticipate future demands and provide targeted solutions," said Earl Maxwell, CEO of St. David's Foundation.

The St. David's Foundation supports our community through these generous grants. Some of the money will be used to build new facilities for Meals on Wheels and Mobile Loaves and Fishes' Community First Village. In addition, St. David's grants provide support for preventative programs like Mara-

thon Kids and the Sustainable Food Center; providing scholarships and grants for professionals pursuing healthcare careers, and those serving underprivileged populations. All of the grants announced will help serve a wide range of people in our community — elderly, families dealing with mental illness, homelessness, and other healthcare-related needs in West Austin.



Dave Thomsen (executive VP of Operations at St. David's Foundation), Dan Pruett (CEO and president of Meals on Wheels Central Texas)



Dennis Borel (Coalition of Texans with Disabilities), Andrew Leveck (senior program officer at St. David's Foundation) and Denise Ellison (Coalition of Texans with Disabilities)



Dr. Paul Cruz (superintendent of AISD), Earl Maxwell (CEO of St. David's Foundation)



Darrell Pierce (chair of Austin Ed Fund), Thad Rosenfeld (VP Communications at Meals on Wheels Central Texas)



Earl Maxwell (CEO of St. David's Foundation)



Seniors from Mike's Place entertain the gathering, with Santa's help



Dan Pruett (CEO and president of Meals on Wheels Central Texas)



St. David's Foundation grant recipients at Meals on Wheels Central Texas



Steve Jackobs (Capital Idea), Earl Maxwell (CEO of St. David's Foundation), Thomas Miranda (ACC board member)



Sergio Delgado (UT School of Nursing), Rob Bacchus (UT School of Nursing), Joyce Lauck (AGE of Central Texas), Dean Alexa Stuijbergen (UT School of Nursing)

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Dianne Donovan (vocals)
accompanied by **Mitch Watkins** (guitar)
and **Pat Harris** (bass)

In The Gallery -
5PM - 7PM
Fernando Miramon (piano)
7PM - 10PM
Kris Barnes (vocals)
accompanied by
Fernando Miramon (piano)

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Girl Scouts of Central Texas names 2017 Women of Distinction

For more than two decades Girl Scouts of Central Texas has honored women who strengthen the Austin community and provide a path of leadership for local Girl Scouts at its annual Women of Distinction luncheon. The honorees are nominated for recognition by friends, colleagues, family, and loved ones.

"The women we honor are the architects of Austin's cultural, business, and society scenes. What makes them distinct is not only their professional achievements, but their commitment to serving others," GSCTX CEO Lynelle McKay said. "They embody what we want our girls to strive for. They created the path to follow and are very inspiring to us all."

A Women of Distinction honoree this year is Sarah Butler, who with her husband Dr. Ernest Butler, is one of Austin's most prominent philanthropists. Among their many gifts was a \$55 million naming endowment to the University of Texas for The Butler School of Music. Sarah, who was both a Brownie and a Girl Scout, said that scouting was a strong early influence on her life. "It taught me how to work on a team, it sparked my interests in both art and science, and those badges gave me a sense of pride in achievement."

The accomplishments of this year's other honorees range from leading a team that revolutionized treatment for HIV/AIDS patients to securing critical endowments and scholarships so that students can continue their education.

GSCTX also honors a business that has proven to be exemplary in efforts to support the upward mobility and professional development of women. HEB receives this year's Work-



place of Distinction Award. The grocery store chain currently partners with Girl Scouts of Central Texas to teach girls health and wellness through a monthly patch program.

H-E-B and this year's honorees will be formally honored at the Women of Distinction Luncheon to be held at noon on Thursday, April 27 at the AT&T Conference Center, 1900 University Avenue. Past recipients include the Hon. Wilhelmina Delco, nationally known en-

trepreneur Ingrid Vanderveldt, Judge Judith Loredo, Lammes Candies, Kendra Scott Jewelry and T3 Advertising.

Girl Scouts of Central Texas is over 17,000 girls and 13,000 volunteers strong. Serving 46 Central Texas counties and headquartered in Austin, Girl Scouts of Central Texas has service centers in Brownwood, College Station, Killeen, San Angelo, Stephenville, Temple and Waco. For more information visit www.gsctx.org.

The 2017 class of Women of Distinction:

Terri Broussard – Williams, Vice President of Government Relations for the American Heart Association—Southwest Affiliate, named "One of Five Most Influential Women in Central Texas" by Austin Business Journal

Sarah Butler, philanthropist, Ballet Austin Foundation Chairwoman, University of Texas Butler School of Music namesake

Dr. Beverly Dale, retired microbiologist, pharmaceutical innovator, community advocate, philanthropist, and member of the University of Southern Mississippi Hall of Fame

Jacquelyn Hawkins, University of Texas at Austin Precursor, community advocate, former advisor to United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and IT Consultant for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Gerry Tucker, Vice President of Human Relations at Austin Community College, lawyer, education advocate, columnist, author

Pictured above: West Austinite Sarah Butler, one of the city's most prominent philanthropists, in her Girl Scout days.

Pi



By Paige Alam

Sisters debate all kinds of subjects. Since I never had a sister, but I was keen on telling people that "my brother does," I marvel at the intricacies and delicacies of the tender relationships between our three daughters.

Because certain types of anxiety run in our family, we really never know what subject or experience might trigger one of our three daugh-

tried to explain Pi to Quincy and said it was an "irrational number" and that it "never ends". Well, that was completely irrational to Quincy. She began to cry, probably mostly from being overtired, but also because that didn't make sense to her. "What do you mean it never ends?" she asked emphatically. Riley said, "It just doesn't. And there is no obvious pattern to it."

Quincy was so upset at the thought of something that doesn't end, and the idea of something not having a reasonable or detectable pattern completely derailed her. In a house full of girls, sometimes the problem or math problem is not the real problem. However, I believe Quincy was

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height no depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

ters. The youngest girl, newly 12, came home from a taxing workout at the cheer gym and was asking our middle daughter, newly 15, a math question. I'm not sure the exact nature of the conversation, but I do know the two ended up arguing about pi.

Although I may not have received the mathematical gifts my husband has, I do remember knowing this number, known as the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter (okay, I had to look that up!), is a little more than 3. To be exact, it is 3.14159265. That stresses me a little just writing that, because honestly, I don't really understand what it means. But who knew how much it would upset our youngest daughter?

Middle daughter Riley

pondering something very interesting, and I wasn't about to ignore this conversation.

I told her I could not explain this number situation. Pi was incomprehensible to me, but it brings up many good questions. She wasn't really buying it, but I attempted to parallel God's love and the mysteries surrounding Him. We believe "Love never ends," (1 Corinthians 13:8), that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9), and that "great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). I have no idea why pi or God's love have endings, but I like the correlation. What lasts forever these days, anyway? Perhaps pi and God's love are symbols of the faith we have in what can withstand the test of time.

What are you reading?

It's a week before Bluebonnet voting

By Alana Moehring Mallard

I'm hustling through a list of 2016-17 Texas Bluebonnet nominees, trying to get all 20 books read before the kids across the state vote on their favorites. Just finished *Crenshaw* and *Woof*, couldn't get through *The Fog Diver*. *The Fog Diver* was a little too fantasy for me, but then *Crenshaw* is about a human-sized talking cat invisible except to one kid, and *Woof* features a rescue dog, Bowser, whose thoughts are in the book. So, yes, I am OK with fantasy.

My favorite of this year's Bluebonnets so far is *Circus Mirandus* — whoops, more fantasy because the circus only appears to those who believe in magic. But such a precious grandson-granddaddy, feel-good story. Katie Sue's favorite all year has been *Roller Girl*. Bluebonnets are a little out of Katie Sue's reading ability since she's only four and Texas Library Association's Bluebonnets are aimed at kids in third grade through fifth grade. But it's a graphic novel, and she loved just turning to a page and asking me to tell her what those pictures were about. Sometimes she would just make up a story and tell it to herself. Another favorite of hers this Bluebonnet go-round is *Mesmerized: How Benjamin Franklin Solved a Mystery that Baffled all of France* — pages covered with sketches and mechanical drawings and all kinds of busy-ness. She told her Mama that she loved it because she is going to be a scientist.

I do know that I'm beyond the age of voting for Texas' favorite among all the Texas Bluebonnet nominees, but I love to read what is being written for kids these days. And I always wonder how our tastes match up. I'm currently in *Echo*

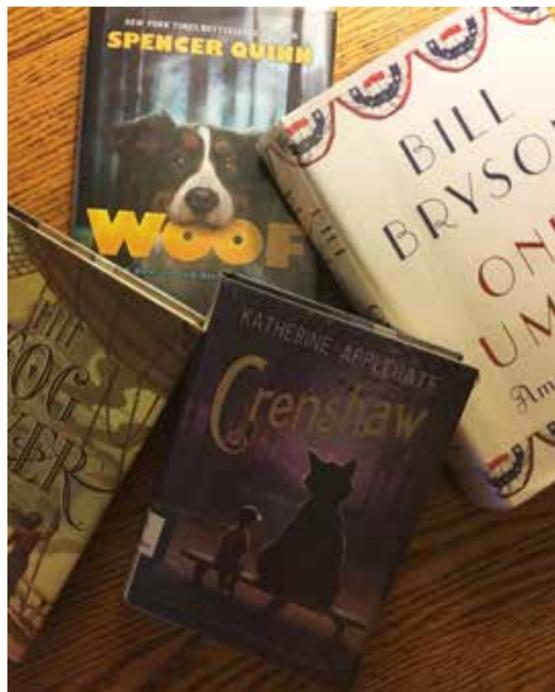


PHOTO BY ALANA MOEHRING MALLARD

Texas Bluebonnet nominees and Bill Bryson's *One Summer: America, 1927*

— harmonicas, Hitler, enchanted princesses — and I have five more of this year's nominees to read.

One of my grown-up book groups is reading Bill Bryson's *One Summer*. I laughed myself silly with his *A Walk in the Woods*, so I'm expecting to like this one. We just finished Philip Meyer's *The Son* in another book group — a fabulous Texas epic about ranching, oil, family secrets, Texans, Tejanos, and Comanches. We read it because one of our members has a couple of grown kids working on the TV miniseries based on *The Son*. His boys do special effects: They blow things up, my friend said, and pump fake blood.

The new list of Texas Bluebonnet nominees came out a couple of months ago, another



20 good books in all genres for our kids in third, fourth, and fifth grades. And later this year a movie based on a Bluebonnet nominee from several years ago, *Wonder*, will be released. So many books.

2016-17 Texas Bluebonnet Award nominees

- Applegate, Katherine. *Crenshaw*
- Barnett, Mac and Jory John. *The Terrible Two*
- Barton, Chris. *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch*
- Beasley, Cassie. *Circus Mirandus*
- Camper, Cathy. *Lowriders in Space*
- Cronin, Doreen. *The Chicken Squad*
- Gibbs, Stuart. *Space Case*
- Grimes, Nikki. *Poems in the Attic*
- Jamieson, Victoria. *Roller Girl*
- Jenkins, Emily. *A Fine Dessert*
- Jones, Kelly. *Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer*
- Lieb, Josh. *Ratscalibur*
- Lord, Cynthia. *A Handful of Stars*
- Quinn, Spencer. *Woof*
- Robertson, Robbie. *Hiawatha and the Peacemaker*
- Rockliff, Mara. *Mesmerized: How Ben Franklin Solved a Mystery that Baffled All of France*
- Ross, Joel N. *The Fog Diver*
- Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Echo*
- Segel, Jason and Miller, Kirsten. *Nightmares!*
- Vernon, Ursula. *Hamster Princess: Harriet the Invincible*

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Anderson High All-State Choir

Anderson High School students Katherine "Kat" Cruz and Brooks Taylor were selected as members of the All-State Choir, which will perform at the Texas Music Educator's Association Convention in February in San Antonio. Cruz will be singing with the All-State Treble Choir and Taylor will be singing with the All-State Treble/Bass Choir. Taylor is the only male singer from the Austin Independent School District to have been selected for the choir, and Cruz is one of only two females in the district chosen. Cruz and Taylor joined Anderson High School students Lauren Ault, Tristan Dull, Dylan Dunda, Daehan Jung, Tab McCarty, Tess McCarty, Jake Nunis, Brooke Payton, Alex Pitman, Rachel Rowe, Casey Sullivan, Lucy Taylor and Griffin Tyler in auditioning for the All-State Choir at the All-State Area competition in San Antonio in January.



Row 1 (l-r): Daehan Jung, Jake Nunis, Lucy Taylor, Brooke Payton and Lauren Ault. Row 2 (l-r): Tess McCarty, Alex Pitman, Brooks Taylor, Tab McCarty, Griffin Tyler, Casey Sullivan, Dylan Dunda, Tristan Dull, Rachel Rowe and Kat Cruz

The All-State Choir audition process requires months of preparation. Sixty-four thousand band, orchestra and choral musicians from all over the state of Texas audition for a spot to perform at the TMEA All-State Convention, and of those, only 1,700 are selected to perform in one of the 15 All-State ensembles.

Choir students begin preparing early in the summer by attending choir camps and working with their private voice teachers to learn and perfect the music required for All-State auditions. After each "Region" in Texas has selected finalists, students proceed to the "Area" rounds, from which the All-

State choir members are selected.

David Beussman, Head Choir Director at Anderson, and Karla Cruz, Assistant Choir Director, are very proud of the effort made by all of the students. Beussman congratulated all of the students who auditioned and stated, "You are all better singers, leaders and musicians because of your commitment to preparing this music and performing it to the best of your ability."

Pictured at right: Anderson Choir students, Kat Cruz and Brooks Taylor selected for prestigious Texas All-State Choirs




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“World House” is Focus of MLK Dream Day 2017 at St. Stephens

By Ann Tarleton

At St. Stephen’s Episcopal School, Martin Luther King Day is no ordinary school holiday. In fact, on Monday, January 16, local and global guest speakers, a live world-music band, and a dance performance crossed cultural and global lines to provide an extraordinary school day.

The school’s tribute this year to Reverend King went beyond his message about racial equality. MLK Dream Day 2017 was underpinned by King’s message that explains how we have inherited a large “world house” and how we must learn to live together, regardless of race, culture, hemisphere, or religion.

The idea for this year’s focus on Dream Day actually began following a trip to India made in 2015 by Christine Aubrey and Sarah Todd, administrators and teachers, at the school. Traveling in January 2015, they attended a Global Connections seminar entitled “Peace Education through Religious Pluralism.” It was there they met Mr. Jayant Lal, another attendee at the seminar, a retired educational consultant from India, and a Hindu.

The three met on a boat ride to an island that housed a Hindu religious site near Mumbai (formerly Bombay). Ms. Aubrey, Associate Head of School for Advancement, Ms. Todd, Director of International Programs, and Mr. Lal spent the outbound journey, almost an hour, engaged in a detailed discussion of Hinduism. Aware that one of the greatest world conflicts is rooted in religious conflict, Aubrey soon recognized that bridging differences in religious views could reduce or eliminate “fear of the other” and would reinforce Dr. King’s “World House” message.

From the discussion, she learned that Mr. Lal traveled throughout India and opened schools. As she commented back in the St. Stephens library, “it’s all about the power of change through education.” Her pri-



The Rev. Todd R. FitzGerald, School Chaplain; Sarah Todd, Director of International Programs, Faculty; Jayant Lal, Scholar-in-Residence; Christine Aubrey, Assoc. Head of School for Advancement; and Christopher L. Gunnin, Head of School, at MLK Dream Day 2017, Living the Dream: An Interfaith Dialogue on MLK’s World House

mary take-away from her visit to India was “how Dr. King’s vision is so relevant today in relation to religious acceptance in addition to racial justice.” She believes that we can erase fear of those not familiar to us “by understanding and being in relationship with” others.

Ms. Aubrey said she wasn’t sure on that trip what it was she hoped to bring back to the school community, but it soon became clear. By employing small group discussions of about 10 students with peer leaders and a defined list of questions, she knew the school setting could provide a venue where young participants could talk safely and openly about personal, family, and cultural experiences.

Utilizing a strategy called “red bench,” group participants take turns holding a stone or rock that gives the one in possession of the rock the right to speak with no interruptions or outside comments. The stone symbolically empowers the student to “speak their truth.” The technique was adopted from the Interfaith Action Coalition of Texas, which spon-

sors travel within the Austin area and instruction on how to manage red bench programs. Throughout this year’s day of tribute to Dr. King, small group discussions were held across the classrooms on campus.

Aubrey acknowledged that it takes hard work to get “beyond superficial chit-chat,” but she also knew that the school, known for its efforts to build a strong sense of community, would provide just the type of environment for open and safe discussions.

In the manner by which Dr King suggested for building a world house, a communication that began between strangers on a boat ride near Bombay served to provide a profound day of learning and cultural experiences on this unique Austin campus. Strangers became friends, a friend visited and made more friends, and a number of different lines of communication – speeches, music, singing, dance, shared meals, interactive groups – were opened.

Scholar from India Shares MLK’s Dream

Jayant Lal, a retired education consultant from India, traveled across the globe to emphasize the universality and importance of Martin Luther King’s message of world peace to the students and personnel at St Stephens Episcopal School when they celebrated MLK Dream Day 2017.



Keynote Speaker Jayant Lal reinforces Dr. King’s “world house” theme in his opening address for MLK Dream Day 2017 in the St. Stephen’s chapel.

As keynote speaker and Scholar-in-Residence for a week, Mr. Lal linked traditional stories and scriptures to contemporary statements and lifestyles for promoting peace and harmony among the societies of the world. Quoting a 3000+-year-old concept from Vedic scripture and speaking in the campus chapel, the invitee stated “the entire earth is but one family,” a concept that includes a truth that “somehow the whole world has to live by some rules like a family.” He recapped how, over time, a multicultural, multireligious society began to grow in India, where a diversity of faiths are welcome.

Sounding as much like a philosopher as a consultant, Lal stated that subcontinent traditions and festivals are celebrated by everyone, doors are open to each quest who is “equivalent to God,” and diversity is celebrated. He attributed polarization, not to the people, but to power-seekers, who “prey on the fears of people and tend to exploit religious/caste or regional sentiment.”

“Unity in Diversity” is the dictum by which people in his country live, but he points to the increasing difficulty in living by this dictum because of social media and the rapid growth in modern society.

Nevertheless, he continued to reiterate the world house message as shown in modern movies, Nobel poetry, and in a succinct quote borrowed from Dr. King: “People fail to get along because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other; they don’t know each other because they have not communicated with each other.”

He expressed his hope for St. Stephen’s students. He wants students to realize that, even in the angst over current political developments in the world, we live in spite of political divisions. Students need to know that “there is more to life than listening to empty rhetoric.” Looking at the history of politics, he commented that in many instances “politics is the refuge of scoundrels.” Yet he sees a way to counter this nefarious history.

Today’s students, according to this scholar, have an instinct for mass communications, and they can become great leaders. Whether in Texas or in other locales that he visits, Lal works to reinforce the concept of student democracy and how to choose peers for leadership roles. This distinguished man from India wants students to realize that that the world “needs educated people to come into politics, because they are the ones who will shape the future.” They need to “listen as well as hear,” in his words.

Like Dr. King with his world dream of peace and racial justice, Jayant Lal has his own dream for students in this modern world. He sees them honestly thinking about the future, determining what people really need, and becoming well-educated leaders whose minds are without fear of those who are different. In short, he shares the “world house” dream of Reverend King, and he continues to work to keep the dream alive.

Annual Valentine Breakfast honors Austin High teachers and staff



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUSTIN HIGH

Barbara Latham, Tina Hambly, Kelly Friedman, Joni Guerrero, Heidi Harrod, Cherie Mueller, Joy McClain, Ashley Putman, Kellie Farris, Gila McMahan, Tina McCutchin

By Alana Moehring Mallard

West Austin residents Barbara Latham and Tina McCutchin are deep in planning for Austin High’s forty-second Valentine Breakfast on Feb. 14 for teachers and staff.

“This is my first year to chair the Valentine Breakfast Committee,” Latham said, “and I thought it was just going to be a little breakfast. But this is huge.”

Huge is right – fancy invitations with T-shirts for each teacher, food donated by lots of supportive restaurants and stores, student music and performances all through the morning, door prizes for teachers and staff, students and parents buying sponsorships.

And, really, you have to love the name of those sponsorships: a \$25 Friends Forever, \$50 You Had Me at Hello, \$100 Melt My Heart, \$250 Big Crush, \$500 Swoon, and \$1,000 Head Over Heels. Love. These.

And those sponsorships are huge too, because Latham said this Valentine Breakfast is a big fundraiser that is used to cover the Parent-Teacher-Student Association operating budget. Some of the items that are funded by the Valentine Breakfast include back-to-school activities, library purchases, campus improvement projects, College and Career Center school representatives visits, teacher and staff appreciation events, Senior Class activities, Homecoming, and student needs not paid by

the school district, such as bus passes for students who don’t have a district bus to Austin High.

Getting all of this organized with Latham and McCutchin are many more Austin High moms: Tina Hambly, Kelly Friedman, PTSA president Joni Guerrero, Heidi Harrod, Cherie Mueller, Joy McClain, Ashley Putman, Kellie Farris, Gila McMahan, Maureen Carlson, Helen Davis, Amy Sasser, Laura Minnegrode, Victoria Cannon, and Marni Francell.

“This is a great way to honor our teachers,” said Latham.

Austin High’s annual Valentine Breakfast is Feb. 14 from 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. Students, parents, and friends are invited.



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The Bachelors Club of Austin

The Bachelors Club of Austin held its annual Debutante Ball weekend on January 6-7, 2017 to honor its eighteen 2017 Bachelors Club debutantes. The Bachelors was founded in 1933, and debutantes were first presented in 1951. The Club was founded by a group of Austin gentlemen during the Great Depression in the hopes of raising spirits.

The weekend started Friday night at the traditional Patron's Party, held at Austin's iconic Driskill Hotel. Over 700 members and guests enjoyed food, music and a casino night with prizes raffled at the end of the evening.

On Saturday, the party moved to the Omni Austin, as over 900 members, family and friends were hosted by Ball Chairs Leslie and Mark Winter, Chairman Barry Barksdale and President Scott Stewart. The Omni's atrium and grand stairway was transformed by Keith Burnham of Westbank Flower Market into a gorgeous scene full of orchids, hydrangeas, roses and amaryllis in peach, salmon and ivory colors, creating a spectacular platform

for the presentation. Each debutante gracefully descended down the Omni's grand staircase escorted by a Bachelors member, and one by one performed the traditional Texas Dip bow in their beautiful white ball gowns.

Following the presentation, the real celebration began, as live music filled the air throughout the night. First, the debutantes were joined by their fathers for a waltz to the sounds of the High Island Hepcats. The upstairs ballroom then sprang to life, as Austin bands London Calling and Spazmatics played continuously into the wee hours of the night. Guests also enjoyed an extravagant dinner and buffet, a dessert in the Gallery of Debs featuring photos of each year's past debutantes, and late night snacks in Nelson's Diner, named for longtime Bachelors member Nelson Puett. A good time was had by all, successfully fulfilling the Club's founders original intentions for the 84th year.



PHOTO BY SUSAN HOERMANN/EVERGREEN STUDIOS



Mark Waugh and Hayden Waugh



Samantha and Stuart Bernstein, Dinah and Barry Barksdale, Leslie and Mark Winter



Molly Suttle and Richard Suttle



Kent Ferguson and Avery Ferguson, Callie Fowler and Edward Fowler



Madison Lauderback and Bill Lauderback



David Kalish and Beatrice Kalish, Zoë Dobson and Casey Dobson



Margaret Cardwell and John Cardwell



Catherine Wendlandt and James Wendlandt



Claire Chlebowski and Steve Wilson



Cathlyn Jones and Buddy Jones



Ellee Cunningham and Michael Cunningham



Miss Margaret Deane Cardwell

Daughter of Mr. John Anthony Cardwell and the late Amy Earthman Cardwell
Escorted by Mr. McCurdy Cardwell



Miss Claire Wilson Chlebowski

Daughter of Ms. Sharon Elizabeth Wilson
Escorted by Mr. Ross Barksdale



Miss Elizabeth Lee Cunningham

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Cunningham
Escorted by Mr. Will Cunningham



Miss Zoë LeGate Dobson

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Casey LeGate Dobson
Escorted by Mr. Thomas Coffman



Miss Emily Anne Edelman

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. David Buck Edelman
Escorted by Mr. Wesley Gottesman



Miss Avery Ann Ferguson

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Ballew Ferguson
Escorted by Mr. Christopher Joseph



Miss Callan Ashley Fowler

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Callan Fowler
Escorted by Mr. Will Duke



Miss Cathlyn Sorrel Jones

Daughter of The Honorable and Mrs. Neal T. "Buddy" Jones
Escorted by Mr. Jason Prideaux



Miss Beatrice Baker Kalish

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. David Daniel Kalish
Escorted by Mr. Ferris Clements



Miss Madison Elizabeth Lauderback

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James William Lauderback
Escorted by Mr. Lyles Carter



Miss Zoe Madalyn Luechauer

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Kirby Luechauer
Escorted by Mr. Ben Winter



Miss Jennifer Anne Pollinger

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Steven John Pollinger
Escorted by Mr. James Rodman



Miss Hallie Hamilton Smith

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Allen Willis Smith
Escorted by Mr. Robert Sjoberg



Miss Molly Mae Smith

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Barton Smith
Escorted by Mr. Billy Bedillion



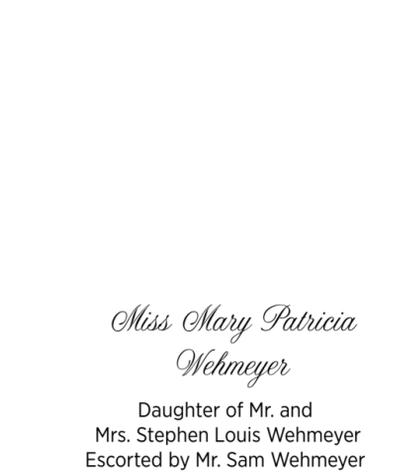
Miss Molly Katharine Suttle

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Towner Suttle, Jr.
Escorted by Mr. Charles Schneider



Miss Hayden Elizabeth Waugh

Daughter of Mr. John Mark Waugh and Mrs. Michael Craig Conner
Escorted by Mr. Warner Eidman



Miss Mary Patricia Wehmeyer

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Louis Wehmeyer
Escorted by Mr. Sam Wehmeyer



Miss Catherine Elizabeth Wendlandt

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Carl Wendlandt
Escorted by Mr. Walker Netherton

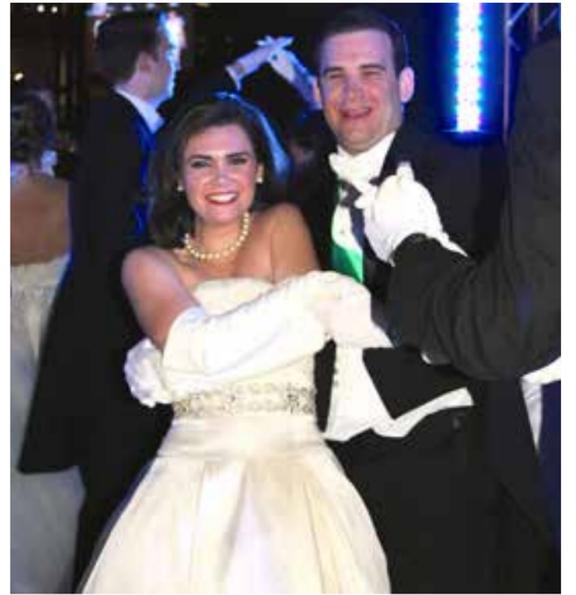




Allen Smith and Hallie Smith



Jennifer Pollinger and Steven Pollinger



Emily Edelman and Wesley Gottesman



Zoe Luechauer and Kirby Luechauer



Molly Smith and Billy Bedillion



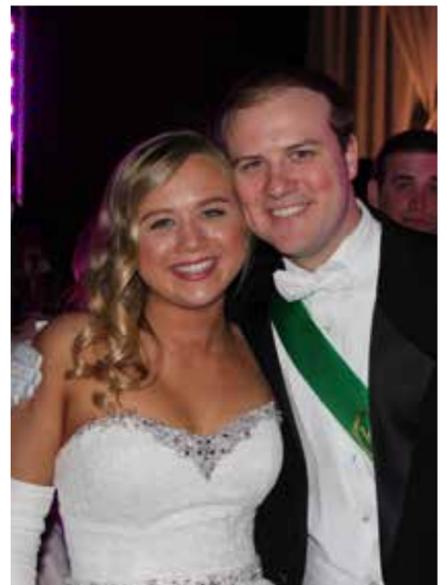
Catherine Wendlandt and Walker Netherton



Zoe Luechauer, Cathlyn Jones and Molly Suttle



Margaret Cardwell, Jenny Pollinger, Hallie Smith, Mary Pat Wehmeyer and Madison Lauderback



Mary Pat Wehmeyer and Sam Wehmeyer



Molly Smith and Zoë Dobson



Emily Edelman and Ellee Cunningham



Molly Suttle and Hayden Waugh



Beatrice Kalish and Claire Chlebowski



Margaret Cardwell and McCurdy Cardwell



Madison Lauderback and Lyles Carter



Callie Fowler and Will Duke



Avery Ferguson and Christopher Joseph



Janet Scott and Julian Read



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