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West Austin's oldest newest synagogue



From 1894 to the mid-sixties, the B'nai Abraham Synagogue served the Jewish population of Brenham, Texas. Now, it's right here in West Austin.

BY SUSIE COHEN

Don't let the façade of West Austin's newest synagogue fool you.

"Although easily mistaken for a white-framed country church on the outside," says Jay Rubin, chief executive officer of Shalom Austin, "B'nai Abraham radiates the warmth of an Eastern European synagogue on the inside with the bimah (prayer platform) at the center of the main level facing the aron kodesh (ark) and a balcony reflecting the traditional separation of men and women during Orthodox worship."

It's the newest addition to the Dell Jewish Community Campus AND the oldest of its kind in the state.

"B'nai Abraham Brenham Historic Synagogue is the oldest synagogue building in Texas," explains Rubin. "From 1894 through the mid-1960s, B'nai Abraham Synagogue served as Brenham's sole and regular Jewish house of worship."

But the building, which is also a registered Texas Historic Landmark listed on the

National Register of Historic Places, was falling on hard times, thanks to a dwindling Jewish population in Brenham.

"Longtime Brenham civic leaders Leon and Mimi Toubin, the only Jewish family living in Brenham, have lov-

worship and learning and to be cared for by a larger Jewish community."

That's when they contacted Rubin, whose Shalom Austin organization also oversees the Jewish Federation, Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Service, Jewish Foun-



It hasn't been an easy journey or a fast one, but soon the state's oldest synagogue building will be back in business on the campus of the Dell Jewish Community Center.

ingly maintained the synagogue," explained Rubin. "Descendants live throughout Texas and the U.S. The Toubins wanted the synagogue to serve again as a place of Jewish

dation and manages West Austin's Dell Jewish Community Center Campus.

"Leon called the Jewish Federation more than two years ago," recalled Rubin.



Moving an historic building from Brenham to Austin isn't easy. Here, workers in cranes and on the ground work to reset the roof on the building.

"We visited him in Brenham the following week and began the process of working with him and others to plan, arrange and fund the relocation and renovation."

But moving this particular piece of history from Brenham to Austin required a pile of paperwork.

"Architectural feasibility study, fundraising, approval by governing boards, more fundraising," ticked off Rubin, "site permit, more fundraising, building permit, general contractor bids, removing and storing the interior contents, preparing the Austin site, separating the synagogue building into three parts for the move, transit permits, a rainy January, transporting each piece over 90 miles, subcontractor delays, reattaching the three parts, and beginning extensive renovations and construction of a new restroom facility. It's taken over two years to get to this point."

Now that the building has survived the journey, it's time to update and renovate.

"The renovation of B'nai Abraham will take place over the next several months," says

Rubin. "The building will undergo major upgrades, including new HVAC, electrical wiring, insulation, restrooms and handicapped accessibility, while retaining its historic character."

B'nai Abraham will one day provide a new home for one congregation that up until now had to hold services in a classroom on the Dell Campus—and serve as a new venue option for other services and celebrations..

"Congregation Tiferet Israel, Austin's Modern Orthodox congregation, will hold daily Shabbat and Jewish holiday worship services in B'nai Abraham's sanctuary," explains Rubin. "The Jewish Community Center also plans to conduct a variety of programs in the building and to make the space available to other Jewish religious and educational organizations and for Jewish lifecycle ceremonies.

While the move means the building will no longer have status as a Texas Historic Marker, Rubin says the benefits of bringing B'nai Abraham to Austin are many—for

the building and the community.

"Although B'nai Abraham will not retain its official historic status as a result of the move," he explains, "it will visibly and meaningfully link past generations of Jewish individuals and families from small towns across Texas to a vibrant Jewish future in Austin."

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Bluebonnets, bookcases and book fair at Highland Park

BY ALANA MOEHRING MALLARD

Bluebonnet Book Award frenzy has calmed down at Highland Park Elementary, and the school's winner was "The Neptune Project" by Polly Holyoke. "The kids are already asking for the new Bluebonnets," said Highland Park librarian Cheryl Mullins.

Statewide, the Bluebonnet Book Award winner for 2015 was "The Day the Crayons Quit" by Drew Daywalt.

Highland Park's recent Scholastic book fair brought several thousand dollars profit to the library, four to six thousand, said Mullins, after selling

more than \$24,000 in books. And Mullins plans to buy more books with the book fair money. Stacy Mendelson, Suzanne Gonzalez, and Lynn Steen co-chaired the book fair, which included two breakfast visiting times and a poetry slam.

"We had 72 kids at the poetry slam," said Mullins, "and it gave them a chance to get up and show their creative side."

Mullins is looking forward to a summer renovation and makeover in the library – more space, new carpet, new bookcases, new furniture. "Some of these bookcases are original to this library," said Mullins of the glossy, blue bookcases



Katie Sue McCann

at the front of the library." An enlarged library will mean a larger space for author visits and book events.

"It's so exciting to think of everything that will happen to the library over the summer," said Mullins, with a huge, hap-

St. Francis School national geography bee competition



Winner Parker Brandt and his father, Allan Brandt

The final round of the National Geographic Society - National Geography Bee was held at St. Francis on Wednesday, January 21. Ten finalists representing the 4th - 8th grades competed in the school final. The results were as follows:

Champion: **Parker Brandt** (8th); Runner-up: **Jesse Hunter** (7th); 3rd place: **Ben Coleman** (5th). Other finalists: **Zoe Armstrong** (4th), **Dylan Osborn** (4th), **Colby**

Jones (5th), **Dylan Kadas** (6th), **Ryan Pinto** (6th), **Charlie Lewis** (7th), **Andrew Scott** (8th)

Parker now advances to the next round of the statewide competition. The top 100 ranked students in each state qualify to represent their school in the state Bee, held on March 27, 2015. The state champions attend the national championship in Washington, D.C., May 11-13, 2015.

A revolution at O. Henry Middle School – Revolution Foods, that is

O. Henry Middle School has entered into a partnership with Revolution Foods, which will feature sustainably raised beef hot dogs, vegetarian green

focus on whole-child education, giving our students access to high-quality, nutritious food is an important step to ensuring they can give their best in

O. Henry's commitment to whole child education.

"Frankly, very few students wanted to eat lunch in the cafeteria," said Erika Brown, a

every day to eat fresh, eat real, and eat in the lunchroom."

Revolution Foods kitchens across the nation fresh prepare approximately 1.5 million meals and snacks each week for approximately 1,000 schools nationwide. The company is owned by two moms, Kristin Groos Richmond and Kirsten Saenz Tobey.

Seventh grader Benn Campbell said he brought food from home because the cafeteria food was unappetizing and the line was too long, and he wanted to spend time with his friends. He now eats a Revolution Foods lunch every day. "I like the food, especially the tamales," Benn said. "It's really good, it's different, and kids like it because it tastes like real food."



O. Henry Middle School Principal Pete Price

chili cheese tamales, smoky BBQ chicken wraps, and build-your-own sunbutter and jelly sandwiches in the school cafeteria for lunch.

"We are thrilled to partner with this company and bring new, high-quality food options to our students," said Pete Price, O. Henry's principal. "There is so much science behind the correlation of eating healthy and a child's ability to focus and learn. Given our fo-

math, science, art, English - wherever their afternoon takes them."

O. Henry Middle School is the first of the district's schools to partner with Revolution Foods, a pilot project approved in late November by the Austin Independent School District. The partnership will give O. Henry's more than 900 students cafeteria food that meets or exceeds the USDA nutrition requirements and supports

parent who was part of a team that sampled food from various vendors before choosing to partner with Revolution Foods. "Students didn't like the food, didn't like their choices, and were stuck in their ways. It was time to shake things up. We appreciate our school and district leaders for working with us to bring a new, innovative, and exciting option to school for our students. In the end, we want our kids who are here

St. Michael's women's basketball district champs



Class of 2015 seniors Shelby Espinosa, Rebecca Wells, Olivia Bregger with head coach Darrel Smith

Congratulations to the St. Michael's Catholic Academy women's basketball team for winning the TAPPS 4A District 3 District Championship. The Lady Crusaders took the crown after defeating Waco Reicher 58-43 on February 13. Senior Shelby Espinosa led the scor-

ing with 25 points and defensively with 11 rebounds. Other points came from junior Mary Grace Copa (11), senior Rebecca Wells (7), senior Olivia Bregger (6), junior Ally Weichert (5), and freshman Gabi Pulsifer (4). Bregger and Wells added to the excitement of their Senior

Night by sinking 3-pointers for the Crusaders : Bregger had two and Wells one. In addition to Espinosa, rebound leaders included Wells and Copa with 6 each.

The night opened and closed with ceremonies recognizing the team's three graduating seniors and captains, Olivia Bregger, Shelby Espinosa, and Rebecca Wells. The three women share captain duties for the team and have each played for the Crusaders for four years. Espinosa will play Division II basketball next year for Regis University in Denver. Having passed 2,000 career points earlier in the season, Espinosa ended the regular season on several Central Texas area high school basketball leader lists. As of February 17, she was the third leading individual scorer, in the top 15 for rebounds, and in the top 15 for steals.

Head Coach Smith and Assistant Coach Alvis Dunlap have provided critical leadership to the team all year. Celebrating the district championship, Coach Smith told the team and parents, "It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and it also takes a village to build a champion! Thank you all for your support of our girls, coaches, and program... we could not do this without you."

The TAPPS 4A District 3 Champion Crusaders are awarded with a bye for the first round of play-offs and will compete next in Area play-offs on February 27.



Back row: Anna Batchik, Gabi Pulsifer, Mary Grace Copa, Sofia Cornide, Caitlin Rodgers, Ally Weichert. Front row: Rebecca Wells, Shelby Espinosa, Olivia Bregger.

★★★



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Dyslexia awareness at the Capitol

BY SUSIE COHEN

Lawmakers may have been busy kicking off the latest session of the Texas legislature, but that didn't keep them from recognizing and honoring a group of high school students from West Austin's Rawson Saunders School for students with dyslexia.

"Mr. John Pomeroy, assistant head of the Upper School, took his 9th grade class of students to the Capitol to sit in the galleries and listen as Dyslexia Awareness Day resolutions

were read in both the House and the Senate chambers," explained Jamie Nettles, Rawson Saunders's director of dyslexia. "For me, the highlight of the visit was listening to Joan Huffman as she introduced and read the senate resolution. She gave an emotional introduction that highlighted the accomplishments and contributions of famous dyslexics. She then went on to explain that we must provide our students with the instruction they need today so that they can make great contributions to our citizenry to-



Mandy Tucker (right), Rawson Saunders director of professional development, with participants of the dyslexia simulation



Perry Stokes (right), Rawson Saunders director of academic language, with participants of the dyslexia simulation



Rawson Saunders teacher John Pomeroy with Rawson Saunders 9th graders Sam Putnum, Jack Palazzuoli, Faith Brasher, Surya Garcia-Crow, and Devin Spanjersberg

tomorrow. I watched with a tearful grin as one of our 9th grade students nodded his heads in a passionate agreement."

Then, she said, as if that wasn't enough of a highlight, "The students stood with the roughly 70 other supporters as the legislators recognized them with applause and thumbs-up."

It was all part of a day designed to bring awareness to the realities facing folks with dyslexia.

"Dyslexia Awareness Day (DAD) is important to the community because it brings to the spotlight a learning difference that affects up to 20 percent of our population,"

said Nettles. "It provides supporters and advocates a day to gather at the Capitol and give a voice not only to students in our schools who are not receiving the instruction they need but also to school personnel who do not have the training or resources to provide this instruction."

Representatives from Rawson Saunders also provided legislative staff members with dyslexia simulations, educational sessions, and one-on-one discussions.

"We spoke of the needs for funding student services and teacher training," said Nettles. "We also shared our desires for

Texas to keep the licensure it offers to individuals who are highly trained in the research-proven instructional strategies that are effective for students with dyslexia."

It's too early to tell how their hard work will pay off.

"Unfortunately," said Nettles, "we will have to wait for the passage of an education bill to get our answer."

In the meantime, a group of 9th graders can still revel in a Dyslexia Awareness Day to remember.

Dog park capitol of Texas

BY SHEILA MARIE FLEMING

Yes, it's Austin! We have more dog parks than any other city, a total of twelve so far!

Here in West Austin, there are the top five: Red Bud Isle, Town Lake, Zilker, Pease Park, and my fav, West Austin Park on 10th Street. The dog park has a fenced area so that dogs can run leash-free and socialize. The owners seem to be friendly and love to talk about their pets and share training tactics and advice. There are a lot of shade trees for the hot summer, and large watering stations with big bowls. There

is a hose as well.

Dog park hours are from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends.

There is a doggie code of conduct for the fenced play area; you can call 311 to report offenders. The fine for dogs not on a leash on city property is \$500.

These are the rules posted on a big green sign: 1. Dog handlers must have dogs on a leash outside of the fence, and keep your leash handy; 2. Aggressive dogs must be leashed or muzzled at all times; 3. Dogs with a history of dangerous behavior are



Four dogs playing

banned; 4. Dog people must accompany their pets in fenced area; 5. There is a three dog limit per person; 6. Dogs must have tags, license, and registration. 7. Pick up your poop.

The parks are maintained by PARD as well as by the Friends of Austin Dog Parks.

These dog friends are a nonprofit working to advocate maintenance, support and improvements to off-leash dog areas and fenced parks. The group also promotes continu-

ing education to dog owners and handlers on dog health and safety, and strives to protect the natural beauty of our parks. They have achieved their recent fundraising goal of \$50,000, so bring your furry friend and have some fun!



Fundraiser bones on fence



Dogs at water station



View of park

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Twenty-four times = \$180 / ad

6
Around the world at Anderson High library

BY ALANA MOEHRING MALLARD

Librarians from five schools came together this weekend for a literacy adventure at Anderson High School library – Anderson, Murchison Middle School, and Doss, Davis, and Hill elementary schools were represented by kids and librarians.

“This is a way of introducing younger kids to the Anderson library,” said Rebecca McMahan, library assistant at Anderson.

Kids did a variety of activities, said Doss librarian Bonnie Lang, including doing book sculpture, origami, making sushi rolls, writing their names in Chinese, and doing a Google Earth project. As the literacy day ended, Hill librarian Celeste Pustka read a couple of stories to kids as an Ander-



Rebecca McMahan, Christi Cochran, Elizabeth Bartell, Bonnie Lang, Lauren Meyer, and Celeste Pustka

son Trojan did an impromptu reader’s theater to the delight of little readers.

“This is a project of our vertical team of Anderson, Murchison, and our elementary

schools,” said Anderson librarian Elizabeth Bartell.

Murchison librarian Christi Cochran said the literacy day focus on South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia was



Librarian Celeste Pustka and photo-bomber Trojan Richard Frazier

a way to emphasize the One World School programs at all of their schools. “Our IB programs and languages are part of the One World Schools emphasis,” she said.

Anderson High student

Shelby Stebler coordinated student volunteers for literacy day as part of an IB initiative project. Participating schools and librarians were Elizabeth Bartell and Rebecca McMahan from Anderson, Christi Co-

chran from Murchison, Bonnie Lang from Doss, Lauren Meyer from Davis, and Celeste Pustka from Hill.

Project Linus at Highland Park Baptist Church

BY ALANA MOEHRING MALLARD

Much knot-tying and fringe-cutting happened at Highland Park Baptist church after worship a couple of Sundays ago as kids and adults

of the congregation made 35 blankets to donate to Project Linus of Central Texas.

“This is really a good thing to do,” said Lorene Denney, of the project. She and several others took a pile of polar

fleece home to tie knots and finish blankets so that a total of more than 60 blankets can be donated to Project Linus.

Project Linus gives blankets to children from infants to teens who are in crisis, trauma, or illness. Brenda Kilburn, who heads the local Project Linus, said her group shares blankets with around 30 different agencies and organizations in the Austin area of Williamson, Travis, Hays, and Bastrop counties, with blankets going to hospitals, police departments, shelters such as Safe Place and Austin Recovery, American Red Cross and many others.

At the Highland Park Baptist Sunday afternoon “tie-in,” people of all ages gathered around colorful, whimsical pieces of polar fleece on tables lining a fellowship hall -- including a busload of teenagers just back from a youth retreat in the Hill Country.

Project Linus of Central Texas accepts homemade blankets of all sizes, including quilted, crocheted, knitted, and tied. In its 10 years, the chapter has distributed nearly 18,000 blankets to ill or traumatized children.

Trinity students raise over \$3,000 to send bed nets to Africa

Trinity Episcopal School students recently concluded a fundraising drive to send protective anti-malarial bed nets to countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Students raised a grand total of \$3,124.52, which is equal to 260 nets that will be donated to people living in African countries at high risk of malaria. The money will be donated to Nets for Life, a relief initiative sponsored by Episcopal Relief and Development.

“Until the day comes when there is some kind of immunization that can really stop malaria, these nets are the only effective means of prevention,” said Richard Hoff, major gifts officer for Episcopal Relief and Development. “Nearly a million children die each year from malaria, although with programs like Nets for Life, that number has been dramatically reduced.”

To raise the money, Trinity’s fifth graders organized a fundraising campaign where other students at Trinity Episcopal School were encouraged to raise and donate \$12 (the cost of one bed net) by doing

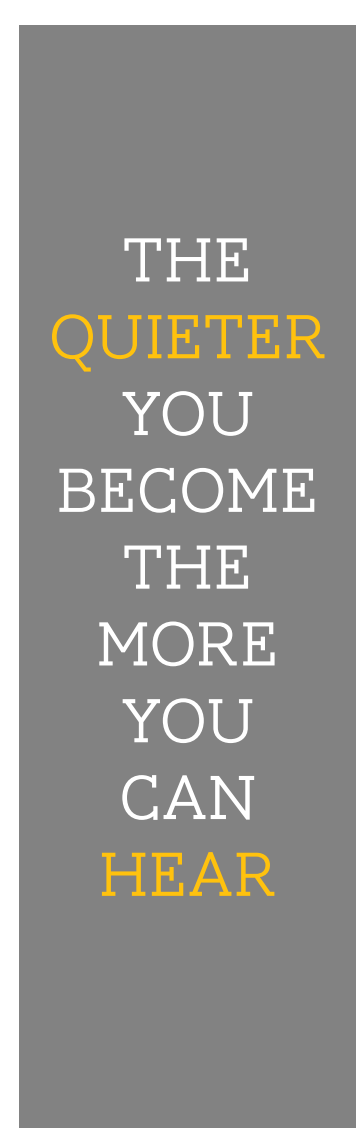
a service activity. The fifth grade students made educational posters and videos with facts about malaria and ideas on how students could help raise money.

Students completed activities such as mowing the lawn, dog-sitting, having bake sales; whatever they could do to raise \$12. The drive lasted about a month, and culminated on Friday, February 6 with a Spirit Night event managed by the fifth graders. The event featured basketball games, contests, carnival games, and concessions to benefit Nets for Life.

“I think fifth grade is sort of a perfect age for this,” said fifth-grade teacher Cat Cook. “When they learn about current events they immediately want to propose solutions and know what they can do to help. They are very wide-eyed about the world.”

Since Trinity’s class of 2013 began this project (it was run by the seventh graders until this year), Trinity has provided 1,392 bed nets to Nets for Life.

★ ★ ★



Emma Cranford, Andrew Glazener



Bell, Chuck, and Courtney Morton; Blaine and Cheryl Kimble

Bishop Honors Five Outstanding Students at St. Theresa’s Catholic School



St. Theresa Catholic Church was honored to host the Annual Celebration of Service and Leadership Mass with the Most Reverend Bishop Joe Vasquez. Left to Right: Grace Usleman, Jack Bradbury, Sarah Christman, Deacon George Zacek, Most Rev. Joe Vasquez, Noah Aziz, Mariette Buzad, Johnston Daboub, Fr. Larry Covington

St. Theresa’s honorees are all from the 8th grade: Elana Alcalá, Jackson Bautch, Cameron Kleiman, Matthew Meskill, and Hawley Pajares.

Students from each of the seven Catholic elementary/middle schools in Austin were nominated for the award. The Bishop of Austin, The Most Rev. Joe Vasquez, celebrated Mass for the students and their families on January 29, 2015 at St. Theresa Catholic Church. The students were presented

with a certificate from the Diocese of Austin.

The St. Theresa’s students honored share a dedication to community service – whether volunteering for Meals on Wheels, Capital Area Food Bank, raising money for breast cancer research or delivering food and clothing to the homeless and working poor through Mobile Loaves and Fishes. These students represent the St. Theresa’s School motto to Learn/Serve/Believe.

Four hundred four students currently attend St. Theresa’s Catholic School from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. Located in northwest Austin, the school is fully accredited by the Texas Catholic Conference

Education Department, and is a key mission of St. Theresa’s Catholic Church.

The Bishop of Austin has recognized five students at St. Theresa’s Catholic School for making a meaningful difference in their school and community. The students were among those honored at the Diocesan Celebration of Service and Leadership for Austin Area Catholic Schools held during Catholic Schools Week. thirty students from the six

other Catholic Schools in the city of Austin were also honored.

“St. Theresa’s was proud to host the Bishop’s Leadership Mass during Catholic School’s Week. It was an honor to see all the students recognized for leadership on their campuses” said Debbie Solcher, interim principal of St. Theresa’s.



St. Theresa’s Catholic School 8th grade students honored recently by the Most Reverend Bishop Joe Vasquez of the Austin Diocese – (left to right) Hawley Pajares, Most Reverend Bishop Joe Vasquez, Elana Alcalá, (back) Matthew Meskill, Cameron Kleiman, Jackson Bautch



Participants in a previous clean-up day pose before going to work.

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