



Greater Mission Bend Area Council On-Line Newsletter

Providing a Voice for the Citizens of Greater Mission Bend

GREATER MISSION BEND AREA COUNCIL UP-DATE

May, 2010

Comments from the President

Mike Martin - President

Community Update

Ever notice how fast the months just go flying by? It just seems like yesterday I was sitting here pondering the happenings of our neighborhood and wondering about what of these events was noteworthy. This month is a little bit easier. Once again your Council has put together a great program. We invited speakers to come in and present a training program for board members of homeowners' associations.

No, this was not a public event, but it was an important event. By bringing together HOA board members with members of the management companies with which the HOA's contract we are doing important networking. We are getting our name out in the professional community and we are gaining recognition. And recognition by decision makers is going to be critical as the GMBAC moves forward with its mission to improve the quality of life in our service area. We cannot accomplish this mission entirely by ourselves. It was interesting that we had people from Tomball attend our training session. We have already worked with leaders in Copperfield. This is important because collectively the communities of the unincorporated areas will have to join forces to fight the blight of urban decay which stands just outside our borders. We will most likely have to join forces with these other communities as we approach the state legislature with proposals we want to put into law to allow us to address many problems for which there is no legal solution at this time.

What are these problems? As they

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Another Greater Mission Bend Area Council Sponsored Event

Crime Prevention Town Hall Meeting

Saturday, June 26th, 2010

8:45 am – 1:00 pm

(Location to be Announced)

The Public is Invited

- Do you feel like a chained prisoner in your own home at times?
- Do you notice strangers in your neighborhood during the daytime or at night?
- Has your home or vehicle been broken into and burglarized?
- Do you feel your community has left you isolated to deal with these issues alone?

I think we all have had such feelings.

It is time that **OUR COMMUNITY** did something about this.

Mark June 26th on your calendar.

GMBAC is sponsoring a Crime Prevention Town Hall Meeting.

The Seminar will include various law enforcement officials to give valuable information on how to better approach and combat crime in our community.

More details to come.

The Greater Mission Bend Area Boundaries:



Newsletter Ideas Welcomed!

Please email

pictures & articles to:

GMBACouncil@SBCGlobal.Net

This will be a monthly newsletter filled with information that relates to the Greater Mission Bend area as well as "News You Can Use!"

GMBAC Contact Information

Email

To receive Newsletters & Up-Dates, please send us your email address to:

Information@gmbac.net

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 720692

Houston, Texas 77272

Join the LinkedIn Group

<http://www.linkedin.com/>

Join the Facebook Group

<http://www.facebook.com/>

Fax Number

713-634-2861

Website & Blog

www.GMBAC.Com

Non-Emergency

Harris Co. Sheriff

713-221-6000

Mission Bend Store Front

281-564-5988

Fort Bend County Sheriff

281-342-6116

Emergency 911

HOA Workshop Highlights

The HOA Workshop, which was the first training event ever held by GMBAC, was quite successful. The enthusiasm and momentum, instead of waning as so often happens at training sessions, increased as the day progressed. The speakers were dynamic and highly qualified. They were open to discussion and answered many, many questions.

Margey Meyer, a faculty member of the Community Associations Institute (CAI), described the information available on CAI's website and the many benefits of becoming a member. CAI provides videos on pertinent topics, an online research library, seminars, and discounted publications. The organization assists HOA board members as well as management companies. The CAI staff provides information regarding HOA's to state legislators and will provide legislative updates to anyone who is interested. For more information, you can contact Stephanie@caihouston.org.

Next up was Sherri Carey, a Professional Community Association Manager (PCAM). She spoke about the roles of HOA board directors and property managers. She stressed the importance of communication, professionalism and educating new board members. Emphasis was also placed on learning and following the HOA By-Laws. She then reviewed the responsibilities of the management companies. Both Ms. Carey and Ms. Meyer spoke on ways to motivate homeowners to attend meetings and gave suggestions on how to facilitate communication if there are language barriers.

Our third speaker was Kathy Terry, Attorney at Law. Ms. Terry represents forty HOA's. The focus of her talk was legal issues faced by HOA's and the role of their attorneys. One of her first topics concerned the importance of governing documents such as Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, Rules and Regulations and ACC guidelines. This was followed by a discussion of the rights of homeowners and the prerequisites to be followed before pursuing enforcement action. She likes to work with the homeowner and the HOA's to find common ground, facilitating solutions outside of court whenever possible. After answering many questions throughout her talk, Ms. Terry graciously agreed to a second question and answer period at the end of the program as it was clear that there were many more questions than she could answer in the time allotted.

The last speaker for the morning was Judge Cagle, who is the Judge for Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 1. His topics included following proper procedure, being careful to file at an appropriate time, and being mindful of legal expenses. Judge Cagle mentioned that some HOA business can be handled in Justice of the Peace Courts rather than in civil courts, depending on the circumstances. His talk also covered proper attire and conduct during court proceedings. He addressed the value of having an HOA board member present in the court room. Even if there is a judgment against the homeowner, the judge may order the HOA to try one more time to work something out.

After lunch, Ms. Carey gave us a legislative update. Her focus was on bills introduced during the last legislative session that would have undermined the ability of HOA's to perform their duties. Several of the bills from the last session are expected to be reintroduced in the next session, including House Bill 1976. When asked about the source of the anti-HOA legislation, she said much of it came from legislators from the Dallas area. She was not familiar with the bill introduced by Rep. Hubert Vo. After Ms. Carey's talk, Ms. Terry fielded a number of questions and Mike Martin, GMBAC President, made a few closing remarks.

We wish to thank all of the wonderful participants for an exciting and informative day. GMBAC recognizes the importance of homeowner associations and was pleased to be able to offer this educational opportunity.



Judge R. Jack Cagle



**Kathy Terry
Attorney at Law**



**Sherri Carey,
PCAM President
of High Sierra
Management**



**Margey Meyer,
CMCA, PCAM
Vice President,
Associa and Dean,
Associa University**

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say, they are legion. Just look around your neighborhood and note any issues which you think are not being addressed, from the tidal wave of rental property to blatant disregard for deed restrictions. Your HOA stands between you and the chaos which would wash over your community if left unchallenged. Which brings up our ongoing concern. In the last legislature, over 100 bills were introduced which were designed to basically wipe out the HOAs in this state. Now think about that for a moment. Maybe you don't like paying those HOA assessments. And maybe you don't like having to go before an architectural control committee to repaint your house. Then you are just like most of us. Most homeowners don't particularly like either of these aspects of HOA control in our community. BUT, now pay attention here, what do you think would happen if there were no HOAs to protect your investment? What if the guy next door sells his house to an "investor" who lives out of state and whose only concern is "cash flow" as all the real estate commercials state. "Cash flow." Has a nice ring to it doesn't it?

Well it does until the new renter does like a guy on Winkleman (across from Petrosky Elementary School) did. This budding entrepreneur asserted his right to use his rented property any way he chose. So he opened up an auto repair shop. You get that? This guy rented a lovely little home which formerly was owned by residents who raised their family in Mission Bend and moved out once the children were grown. And not caring two cents for any of his new neighbors who continue to live in their homes, he opened an auto repair shop right on Winkleman. Next thing you know there are cars parked all up and down the street awaiting his attention. Auto parts, hoods, door panels, etc., were leaning up against his fence and cars were in his driveway in various stages of disassembly. Get the picture?

All that stood between the neighbors' property values and this guy's ambition to run an auto repair shop was – you guessed it – the HOA. The same big bad HOA which is being attacked by forces in the State Legislature as being heavy handed, un-American and several other non-too-pleasant terms. You see, in our current political climate, the rights of this one individual outweigh any concerns for the interests of the community.

It seems as though every legislator is jumping on this Populist bandwagon. Our own State Representative, Mr. Hubert Vo, isn't just jumping on the bandwagon. He's leading the

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charge, having offered one of the first pieces of legislation to gut the HOA's of their power to maintain control of the community by the homeowners in the community. Did you catch that phrase, "by the homeowners in the community?" The HOA isn't "them." It is you and it is I. We are the HOA. The HOA is there to represent "us" and to protect "us" from "them," those who want to destroy our communities. And to this date, Mr. Hubert Vo has become a voice for "them."

Now some of you might think I am just grinding a political ax here. That is not the case. Mr. Vo and I may support different political parties, but he stood with our community in its fight with TxDOT and we were pleased to have him as our representative in the State Legislature. We thought of Mr. Vo as our champion. Now imagine our shock when his bill was introduced which would effectively destroy the one agency which stands between the homeowner and total urban blight. We attempted to have a meeting with Mr. Vo but he has avoided this for the past year. Now one year is a very long time for our elected state representative to be too busy to meet with us. But that is the fact of the matter. Now that elections are upon us, we can only wonder if Mr. Vo will finally take time from his busy schedule to address our concerns. We don't have much hope.

In the meanwhile, the 100 bills which would allow urban blight to sweep over your community like that tidal wave are poised and waiting for the next legislative session to open. We are working feverishly to prepare to speak on behalf of the homeowners of Texas, but do not take for granted that we will prevail. Stay tuned.

Mike Martin

President

Greater Mission Bend Area Council

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www.gmbac.com

Whose homeowner insurance pays for cleanup if my tree falls into my neighbor's yard?

If your neighbor's property is damaged by your tree, then he should file a claim with his insurance company. But in most cases, nobody's insurance policy will pay if the tree falls but doesn't hit anything. If that happens, it's probably up to you to pay for cleanup if you want to keep your relationship with your neighbor cordial.

<http://www.kiplinger.com/columns/ask/archive/when-your-tree-falls-in-your-neighbors-yard.html>

Is Your A/C Unit Ready for another Houston Summer?

It's getting hot, but the dog days of summer are still a few weeks away. To make it through another heat wave, you need to keep that air conditioner running.

That's a very good reason for an AC system spring cleaning. It can keep your power bill down and save you money over the long run.

<http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=news/>

A good neighborhood watch suggestion..

Thanks Chet Machan, with Southwest Houston Information Network for sharing this very useful security tip.



What to take to bed with you - not a joke.

Put your car keys beside your bed at night.

If you hear a noise outside your home or someone trying to get in your house, just press the panic button for your car. The alarm will be set off, and the horn will continue to sound until either you turn it off or the car battery dies.

This tip came from a neighborhood watch coordinator. Next time you come home for the night and you start to put your keys away, think of this:

It's a security alarm system that you probably already have and requires no installation. Test it. It will go off from most everywhere inside your house.

It works if you park in your driveway or garage. If your car alarm goes off when someone is trying to break into your house, odds are the burglar/rapist won't stick around. After a few seconds all the neighbors will be looking out their windows to see who is out there and sure enough the criminal won't want that.

And remember to carry your keys while walking to your car in a parking lot. The alarm can work the same way there. This is something that should really be shared with everyone. Maybe it could save a life or a sexual abuse crime.

Would also be useful for any emergency, such as a heart attack, where you can't reach a phone.

GMBAC Board Members

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Kevin Jackson

Parkside @ Clayton Park

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Dianne Williams

Wingate HOA

<http://www.wingatehoa.com/>

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At Large Members

Winetta Billings

Terry Blair

Bert Garner

**Non-Emergency
Harris Co. Sheriff
713-221-6000**

**Mission Bend Store Front
281-564-5988**

**Fort Bend County Sheriff
281-342-6116**

Emergency 911

Useful Resources

- **Alief ISD**
<http://www.aliefisd.net>
- **Fort Bend ISD**
<http://www.fortbend.k12.tx.us/>
- **SPCA**
<http://hspca.convio.net/site/>
- **The People Lawyer**
<http://www.peopleslawyer.net/>
- **Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services**
<http://www.hcpes.org/>
- **Report Street Lights out (# on Pole)**
<http://cnp.centerpointenergy.com/outage>
- **Texas Department of Public Safety**
<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/>

**Elected Officials Representing
Greater Mission Bend**

Ft. Bend Co. Commissioner Andy Meyers,
Precinct 3 (281/494-1199)

<http://www.andymeyers.com/>

Harris Co. Commissioner Steve Radack,
Precinct 3 (713/755-6306)

<http://www.co.harris.tx.us/Pct3/>

Fort Bend County Judge

Robert Hebert

(281-341-8608)

<http://www.co.fort-bend.tx.us/>

Harris County Judge

Ed Emmett

(713/755-4000)

<http://www.judgeemmett.org/>

State Senator, Dist. 17

Joan Huffman

(713/662-3821)

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/>

State Senator, Dist. 18

Glenn Hegar

(281/391-8883)

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/>

State Rep. Dist. 28

John Zerwas

(512/463-0657)

<http://www.johnzerwas.com/>

State Rep. Dist. 149

Hubert Vo

(281/988-0212)

<http://www.hubertvo.com/>

Texas Legislature Online

<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/>

State and Local Government

State of Texas

<http://www.texasonline.com/portal/tol>

Harris County Government

<http://www.co.harris.tx.us/>

Fort Bend County Government

<http://www.co.fort-bend.tx.us/>

News You Can Use

Health care law's

massive, hidden tax change

An all-but-overlooked provision of the health reform law is threatening to swamp U.S. businesses with a flood of new tax paperwork.

Section 9006 of the health care bill -- just a few lines buried in the 2,409-page document -- mandates that beginning in 2012 **all** companies will have to issue 1099 tax forms not just to contract workers but to any individual or corporation from which they buy more than **\$600** in goods or services in a tax year.

<http://money.cnn.com/2010/05/05/>

If you are unable to open any of the links in this newsletter, copy and past the website address to your browser.

Some debt-settlement schemes worse than useless

The U.S. Government Accountability Office last week announced the results of an [undercover investigation of the debt-settlement industry](#) that it conducted at the request of a Congressional committee concerned about allegations that such companies commonly charge fees in advance of settling debts, sometimes without providing any services in return.

In fact, those were exactly the problems we warned about in a March 2009 Consumer Reports story that identified [high-fee debt settlement companies as one of five financial traps](#) consumers should beware of in the wake of the economic meltdown.

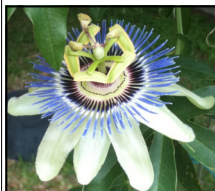
<http://blogs.consumerreports.org/money/2010/04/gao-report-debt-settlement-industry-fraud-deceptive-abusive-practices-consumer-scam.html>

For Information about the Houston Real Estate Market

<http://www.har.com/Newsroom/>

Can't Afford New Plants for the Yard?

By Donna Kinerd



Passion Vine

Want to put a new plant in that vacant spot in your yard but must make a choice between buying a new plant or buying gasoline to go to work on Monday! What would your G-G-Grandmother have done? Before credit cards, people bartered!!

There are options! Most landscaping plants can be propagated from cuttings. There are people willing to give away plants, if you are willing to dig. You have something that you can use to barter, i.e. landscape bricks, stepping stones, books, etc.

Hibiscus bushes are very popular in the Mission Bend area. You can take cuttings and in a few weeks/months you will have a good sized plant to fill in that vacant spot. True, you are not going to have an instant fix, but most plants started from cuttings grow very fast and don't cost anything or very little! Maybe a neighbor or a family member has a plant, bush, vine or small tree that you like and are willing to let you take a cutting or they are trimming and throwing away the cuttings.

It is really very simple and easy. Take a cutting of a branch (hard wood) about 10 to 12 inches long. Make a diagonal cut on the bottom end of a branch just below where a leaf was attached, wet it and dip it in Rooting Hormone, shake off the excess, stick it in a small pot of potting soil with good drainage. A plastic cup with holes will work. Several cuttings can be put in one medium sized pot and separated once they are well rooted. Trim off the large leaves. Leave a couple small ones at the top. Put it in a shaded area and keep moist. Within a couple of weeks, you will start to see new growth. It is best to let it get well rooted and perhaps put it in a larger pot for a few weeks before planting it in the yard. I recommend starting several cuttings because some may not make it. If they all live then you have starts to share, barter, trade or use as gifts. Everybody likes plants!

Complaint database will help consumers make 'safe' choices

<http://blogs.consumerreports.org/safety/2010/04/cpsc-complaint-database-will-help-consumers-make-safe-choices.html>

Hurricane Season Starts June 1st !

How can I be sure my homeowners insurance will cover storm damage?

<http://www.kiplinger.com/columns/ask/archive/prepare-your-homeowners-insurance-for-storm-season>

North Andover

AccuWeather.com reports the upcoming hurricane season could be a top ten-year, a stark contrast from the relatively calm 2009 season.

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/northandover/features/x1560853826/2010-Atlantic-hurricane-season-could-rank-in-the-top-ten>

(Thanks Rich Wyatt, Timbergate HOA President for sharing this link).

Protesting Your Taxes

By Donna Kinerd - Broker

Any home owner can protest the tax appraised value of your home. Harris County and Fort Bend County make it real easy to protest your taxes on line.

Keep in mind that if you sell your home, the appraised value is based on the market value not the tax appraised value.

This year, foreclosure sales can be used as sales comps when protesting your taxes.

I will provide MLS Sales Comps, free, to anyone in the GMBA so that you will know what to base the suggested value of your home on.

Below is a link to a Channel 13 news story and other helpful links relating to protesting your taxes.

<http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=news/consumer&id=7411709>

Harris County Appraisal District

<http://www.hcad.org/>

Fort Bend County Appraisal District

<http://www.fbcad.org/Appraisal/PublicAccess/>

Houston Association of Realtors

<http://www.har.com/HomeValue/>

How to Present Your Case at an Appraisal Review Board (ARB) Hearing, provided by the Texas Comptrollers' Office.

<http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/ARBvid/player.html>