

midtown PAPER

A PUBLICATION OF MIDTOWN MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

1st QUARTER 2005

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EMBRACING THE PAST

BUILDING

FOR THE FUTURE

A REVIVAL FOR TWO HISTORIC MIDTOWN BUILDINGS

Preserving a historic structure, either in part or in its entirety, is all about 'stepping up to the plate.' It's believing in the quality and craftsmanship of yesteryear; taking the initiative, the time, and often the inconveniences, and making a piece of history work for today. In the case of these Midtown businessmen, the leap to invest in an older, dilapidated building becomes a testimony to the community that 'Yes, it can be done' and done with great success.

1218 WEBSTER

If buildings could talk, particularly the Benjamin Building, it would utter a resounding 'thank you' to Patrick Van Pelt. Taking a shell of a building in 1999 to award-winning grandeur three years later was a feat in itself. Van Pelt's penchant for recapturing the building's history and the character of those that passed through its door was just icing on the cake.

Tackling a restoration project like the Benjamin Building is best accomplished with collaborative efforts early in the timeline, particularly when accuracy is part of the restoration. Questions arise like.. *How does the architect perceive the renovation? How does the owner envision the work? and What can or cannot be compromised from a historical aspect?* Often times, each participant preconceives the answers differently. Involving historic preservationist Anna Mod was the ideal solution.

Mod is unique as an independent businesswoman with the ability to road map a client's preservation plan and act as a liaison with state and federal agencies, providing design guidelines, condition assessments and materials specifications. As the former director of residential programs for Galveston Historical Foundation with ten years of profes-



Balcony at Benjamin Building.



Meditative garden at Wilson, Cribbs & Goren.



Fashionable color scheme inside 2500 Fannin.

sional experience, Mod has experienced a number of scenarios. Hire a consultant early in the process to get you through the project are her words of wisdom for those considering a historical renovation.

"From the beginning, we agreed we wanted to keep as much of the original structure as possible," explains the Midtown businessman. Functionally, the building would serve as headquarters for The Mid-Continent Companies, Ltd., the Van Pelt family's financial services business.

The Benjamin Building, formerly the Benjamin Apartments, was commissioned by Benjamin Cohen and designed by local architect Alfred Finn in 1924 to meet the growing need for housing in what was then known as Houston's "South End." In 1945, the building

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A GREAT DAY FOR CANCER SURVIVORS

A new tradition for Midtown

MIDTOWN'S FIRST 5K BRINGS OVERWHELMING SUPPORT

Camelia Cruz was thirteen years old when she lost her left leg to cancer. Cancer stole almost all of Blake Boudreaux's sight by the time he was three. For Camelia, making ends meet as she grew older was a struggle, and college only a dream. And although Blake's drive and determination made him the only blind football player in the history of Deer Park High School, the

drain imposed on his family's finances by cancer treatments made his academic future cloudy.

That was before they met Yeshim Yonter, the founder and "guardian angel" of Houston's Cancer Survivors' Fund (CSF). Yeshim has inspired and supported deserving young cancer survivors like Blake and Camelia since she and her husband organized the CSF over five

years ago. Today, Camelia is an honor student at Lee College, studying to become a social worker. Blake is a sophomore at Texas A&M studying to become an attorney at law.

On November 13th, Blake and Camelia joined 550 runners for Midtown's First Annual Survivors' 5K/1 Mile Run/Walk benefiting CSF. Hosted by the Midtown Management

District, the event was an overwhelming success, enabling runners to combine what they do best, and in turn, raise over \$9,000 for CSF.

The closed loop course began at Louisiana and West Gray and continued

throughout Midtown, giving runners and cheering onlookers a chance to see the



beauty and growth of our community. Houston Mayor Bill White fired the start gun and partnered with young cancer survivors and participants along a one-

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in & about

Check out what's happened, is happening and will happen. Where else, but **Midtown!**

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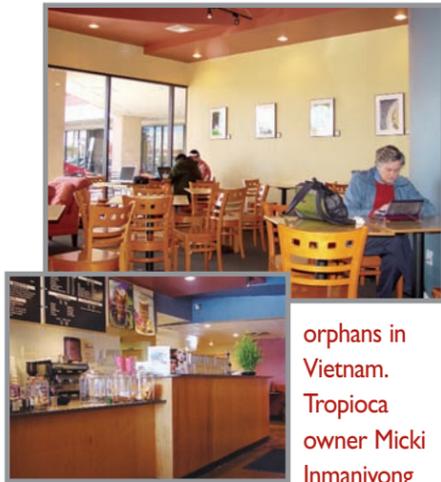
The storm didn't dampen the spirits of a team of students from Houston Community College System (HCCS) Central campus when, during a wall



painting project at Dowling and Elgin Streets, the students' creative efforts were washed away by the wind-driven rain. The mural was a collaborative project between HCC, Interfaith Ministries, and Project Row Houses. The project was overseen by adjunct professor Beth Secore and included individuals majoring in fine arts and design, math, and nursing. Mural painting will be offered again in the summer of 2005. Log on to www.hccs.edu or call Central College Art Department at 713-718-6600.

On December 4, 2004, Tropioca Tea and Coffee Bar partnered with Hope Initiative to raise money and awareness about the growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS throughout the world. Hope Initiative seeks to develop vibrant and prosperous Vietnamese communities abroad and in Vietnam through poverty reduction, child development, and community

enrichment programs. Artwork from the 2005 Ta Ao Sinh Vien Calendar and selected pieces by photo artist Billy Ho were on view. The silent auction raised over \$1,000 that will be donated to



orphans in Vietnam. Tropioca owner Micki Inmanivong

hopes more Midtown businesses will become involved in helping raise funds for organizations like Hope Initiative. "It's a great way to introduce new people to Midtown and, in turn, have customers come back for repeat visits," she explains. "There are many organizations that need our help. This is just one small way to make a difference." Stop by Tropioca and satisfy your taste buds with a delicious hot, cold or frozen drink. Wireless Internet, a relaxing atmosphere, and great desserts—why not? Tropioca is located at 2808 Milam. Store #2 is in Commerce Towers at Main and Walker.

Metro police confirm they have added six additional motorcycle officers to patrol the Main Street Corridor, which includes Midtown. That equates to a total of ten officers for the busy business and residential area.

Houston Community College System recently announced the appointment of a new president for their Central College. Dr. William W. Harmon, Ph.D. brings many years of expertise, including his most recent tenure as senior vice president of the University of Virginia. Dr. Harmon will take on the challenge of major building projects with HCCS Southeast's newly elected president, Dr. Orfelina "Fena" Garza, Ph.D. to implement a \$150.8 million Capital Improvement Plan for both colleges. Congratulations, Dr. Harmon, and welcome to Midtown!

The weather was appropriately chilly for the ribbon cutting ceremony sponsored by the Midtown Management District for the new Italian Ice Hut on December



18, 2004. Councilwoman Ada Edwards performed the honors. "Italian Ice Huts are really popular back east," explained owner Bob (Naeem) Creekmur. "It's a texture something like soft ice cream, smooth and icy with no worry about calories. Really great in the summer but you'll love it all year 'round!" Midtown's Italian Ice Hut is located at 2905 Travis, Suite C. Hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 12 noon to 9 p.m. on Sunday. With 23 different flavors it's worth visiting again and again.

Italian Ice Hut partnered with the breakfast klub (yes, lowercase is correct!) for a win-win for Midtowners. January patrons purchasing at least one item from Italian Ice Hut's menu were able to register for a chance at a weekly drawing, a Double Your Pleasure Dinner for Two, sponsored by breakfast klub. Sports favorite Ralph Cooper, radio KCOH host, drew a lucky winner each Monday. Winner or not, there's always something good to eat at breakfast klub, 3711 Travis @ Alabama and Italian Ice Hut at 2905 Travis.

Over the holidays, HCC-Central's Chef Eddy Van Damme, with the Houston



Chef Eddy Van Damme with a copy of his book, *On Baking*.

Community College culinary arts department, learned that the textbook he co-authored won Gourmand International's top prize in the category of Best Professional Cookbook in

English. The textbook, *On Baking* (Pearson/Prentice Hall 2004), is now competing along with nine other non-English language cookbooks to be named "Best in the World" in any language. The ceremony will be held in Orebro, Sweden and awards will be given in the presence of the King of Sweden on February 11, 2005. Chef Eddy, a full-time professor at HCC for the past 13 years, teaches baking and pastry fundamentals. His book can be found at Barnes & Noble, Borders and on the Internet. Congratulations, Eddy!

A Woman's Perspective, an exhibition of four women photographers with an ability to transform the known image into the unknown, opened January 4 at Travis Tower, 1301 Travis, in downtown Houston. The exhibition features works by Michele Grinstead, Tamara Morton Johnson, Debbie Riddle, and Royce Ann Sline and will run through April 5, 2005. Organized by Midtown's Kinzelman Art Consulting for Behringer Harvard and Trammell Crow Company, the photographs are on view weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. through April 11, 2005. The exhibit is free and open to the public.

St. Luke's Episcopal Health System's recent expansion to 3100 Main Street brings the Med Center to Midtown. Houston Community College System (HCCS) owns the 139,424 s.f. space that will now be leased to St. Luke's for administrative offices. According to a feature story by GlobeSt.com on October 22, 2004, Philip Thompson, Senior Vice President with CB Richard Ellis (CBRE)/Trione & Gordon, relates the economic advantage of the move. "Rental rates per s.f. in Midtown are in the mid teens versus \$30 or more in the Medical District. The bottom line for St. Luke's is that there are major savings involved in doing the deal in Midtown." CBRE/Trione & Gordon represented HCCS in the lease agreement.

Resolved to eat healthier after the holidays? Try the Superb Seafood Symphony, a great selection of fresh seafood, salads and vegetables at Charivari Restaurant, 2521 Bagby. And while you're there, make reservations for a special Valentines Day. Chef Schuster shares the week's menu, upcoming cooking classes, and more with a weekly newsletter. Sign up at www.charivarirest.com

Photographers Phuong Nguyen, Thanh Nguyen, Helen Le, Phong An, and Viet Nguyen were featured photographers at a recent exhibit at Crossline Gallery, January 7 through January 31, 2005.

Midtown made a clean sweep, streetwise that is, with its endeavors the week of January 10, 2005. Street cleaning crews spruced up the Midtown area with men and machines, tidying up streets throughout the district. Next scheduled street sweeping will be the week of March 7, 2005, weather permitting. Help out the sweepers by moving your vehicles off the street for these few days.

Learn more and enrich your knowledge of children at a unique Christian parenting seminar titled *Delightful Differences: Boys and Girls*. Janet Fox, LPC, LMFT, a family therapist and child development specialist with 20 years experience in the Houston area will be the seminar leader. Mark your calendar for February 13, 2005 from 12:45-4:00 p.m. at South Main Baptist Church, Loessner Building 206. A lunch will be available for \$6 beginning at 11:45 a.m. Registration is free; call Aurora at 713-529-4167. Come, sign up for this informative event!

Cold Stone Creamery's offering ice cream cake tasting EVERY week at their Midtown location at Smith & Gray. Sometimes it's Monday, maybe it's Thursday; call 713-651-3999 and see when this week. Try a slice of their MINT Chip. Cold Stone offers Kids' Cakes for the Barbie or Winnie the Pooh in you! AND, coming February 1, they'll be introducing

Red Pan, a new and exciting flavor each month displayed in a unique red pan in every store across the country. Kicking off the Red Pan with a bang will be Red Hot ice cream—a new flavor with a fiery spark (real Red Hot candies!) A perfect flavor for Valentine's Day! How about an ice cream cake like Cupid's Arrow—Red Hot ice cream mixed with rich devil's food cake and chocolate shavings, covered with ganache and chocolate hearts. What's not to love!

Don't stop celebrating with Valentine's Day. There's something always hopping in Midtown, 'specially in March! Something fluffy and furry and full of surprises will be paying a visit to Main Street in Midtown around Easter. Join in the fun of decorating on March 21. Give a call to Cynthia Alvarado at the Midtown Management District office, 713-526-7577, and help Midtown put on its best Easter attire!

Charles Phillips, President of Oracle Corporation, will lead HTC Houston Technology Forum's informative discussion of the *The Evolving Information Age*—why information matters and how it creates value for your company—on February 17,



2005 at the Hilton Americas from 11:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Individual tickets are \$65, reserved table for eight guests \$75. Registration is available online at www.houstontech.org or by phone by contacting Sharell Harris 713-658-1750.

Concertgoers...hear this! Listen to beautiful music and grab a front row seat on Friday evenings in February, March and April when South Main Baptist Church (SMBC) will host three concerts for the general public at their campus at 4100 Main. Everyone is invited and there is no charge for admission. All three concerts begin at 7:30 p.m.

Remember the incredible works of *One Color Only?*—Gallery Sonja Roesch's remarkable showing that met with rave reviews in the



Melanie Crader dust paintings.

summer of 2004? Good fortune returns for admirers of Melanie Crader and Thomas Deyle, with solo shows slated for 2005. The creative energies from *One Color Only?* were lauded in *GlassTire*, Texas visual art online, as "a healthy batch of contemporary

painters (and sculptors) you might call color revisionists; artists who transgress the old-way orthodoxies through a heightened sense of their making process." Opening receptions and durations of upcoming shows are listed in the Midtown Paper Calendar of Events or log on to www.gallerysonjaoesch.com

Enjoy the weekend at Lawndale Art Center during their Modern Market, March 18-20, 2005. Exhibits of modern design and decorative arts of the 20th century will be featured throughout all three galleries. Tickets for the preview party on



Friday, March 18 are \$25 for members, \$35 for non-members. Tickets guarantee weekend admission to the market on March 19 and 20, 2005. General weekend admission is \$5.00.

The 4th Annual Fashion Show & Luncheon, hosted by Sisters at Heart and benefiting Lord of the Streets Episcopal Church/Community of the Streets, will be held April 12 at The Dunstan in Rice Village from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. For tickets or information on sponsorship, call Myra Mitchell at 713-526-0311. Come and bring a friend.

It's great to be a winner! Summer Dajani and a guest enjoyed dinner at Julia's Bistro and later, The Ensemble Theater as the lucky winner of "A Night Out on Midtown," Midtown's recent website promotion. Summer was chosen by use of a random number generator that selected her number from the list of registered members on the site. Check out the Midtown site for the latest updated web addresses and phone numbers of Midtown restaurants, clubs, galleries and more. Log on to www.houstonmidtown.com

Mark your calendar for May 5, 2005 for a gala event. And guess what? You can dress casually! The Annual Casual Gala benefits the Emergency Aid Coalition and the Silent Auction promises to offer approximately 120 outstanding items. Hosting the event is Congregation Emanu El, located at 1500 Sunset. For more information on reservations and donating auction items, please call Executive Director Jean West Evans at 713-522-5903.

Save the month of May for the Midtown Art and Soul Festival. Follow the plans as they unfold at www.artandsoulfest.com



Baldwin's Rebirth Continues

MIDTOWN CELEBRATES GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY

The Midtown Redevelopment Authority and area supporters joyfully celebrated the official groundbreaking ceremony of the revitalization of Elizabeth Baldwin Park on December 9, 2004. Rhythmic ensemble Percussion One provided entertainment while area officials and businessmen and women contributed to the park's profile.

Councilwoman Ada Edwards reflected on her memories of the park from years past and spoke proudly of its upcoming improvements. "This project is about what people coming together can accomplish. It shows what partnerships and communities can do."

Joe Turner, Parks Director for Houston Parks and Recreation Department shared a timeline of Baldwin's past from former news accounts.

"In 1912, it was stated 'no improvements by civic club or city.' In 1936, (the paper stated) 'a popular picnic site.' Now, 100 years later we are still admiring the trees and preparing once again for the park to be a popular site for family outings."

Park improvements are scheduled to begin in the

fall, which include a crushed stone pathway, new lighting, irrigation, tree additions and general landscaping. Elizabeth Baldwin Park was designated by the Midtown Redevelopment Authority and the City of Houston to help fulfill the area's growing need for enjoyable urban park space.

The Midtown Redevelopment Authority has earmarked over \$700,000 in park improvements for the project and has assumed responsibility to maintain the park, once park improvements are complete. Eventually, the maintenance of the park will be assumed by the Management District. One of the first steps is to prune and fertilize the numerous live oaks on the property.

Chairman of the Board Robert Sellingsloh explained Midtown Redevelopment Authority's role not only in reference to the park but also to the Midtown community as a whole.

"We (Midtown Redevelopment Authority) use Midtown property taxes to improve the quality of life in the area. Some of the improvements so far have included sidewalks and



Left to right: Ian Rosenberg, Robert D. Sellingsloh, and Trang Q. Tran.

curbs, trees and general landscaping, park benches, 1000 new street lamps, new signage, the Houston Technology Center, the new Midtown Park and of course, the renovation plans for Baldwin Park. Baldwin Park is our biggest project to date," Sellingsloh explained.

He continued, "Capital improvements to the Midtown area to date have totaled approximately \$20 million. I think this shows that the TIRZ (Tax Increments Reinvestment Zone) works to put tax money back into the neighborhood."

Elizabeth Baldwin Park is located on Elgin between Crawford and Jackson Streets; off street parking is available within the park and on the side streets.

To learn more about the history of Elizabeth Baldwin Park, stop by the Midtown Management District's office at 3401 Louisiana, Suite 355, and pick up a copy of the previous edition of the Midtown Paper or log on to a neighboring site, www.baldwinsquare.org/bldwnpark.htm. ■



From left to right: Abe S. Goren, Robert D. Sellingsloh, Allison E. Bell, Councilwoman Carol Alvarado, F. Charles LeBlanc, Councilwoman Ada Edwards, David Edwards. Inset: Allison E. Bell looks on as Parks Director Joe Turner recalls some of the history of Baldwin Park.

"Now, 100 years later we are still admiring the trees and preparing once again for the park to be a popular site for family outings."

Joe Turner, Parks Director
Houston Parks and Recreation Department

credits

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dining out

IN MIDTOWN

by Sally Strong

Pho Saigon

SOUP'S ON AT PHO SAIGON

Pho Saigon shines as the original star in Phuong and Rosie Tran's young restaurant franchise. The eatery at 2808

Milam serves hungry Houstonians countless bowls of pho, the Vietnamese rice-noodle soup that is setting a culinary mark across this country.

A bowl of pho can be as simple or elaborate as mood dictates. Either way, it's a fast meal and a bargain.

Pho works like this: You either pick a soup from the menu-like Pho Tai (with noodles and beef), Mi Bo Vien (with egg noodles and meatballs), Bun Mung Gu (with vermicelli noodles, chicken and bamboo) or The Special with everything. Or once you learn your way around a bowl of pho, you can build your own soup. Start with one of six meats or go vegetarian. Round out with extras, such as French bread or fried egg or rice.

You get a big bowl of soup, prepared to your tastes, accompanied by bean sprouts, basil, sawtooth basil and lime. Condiments at the table spice it up to your taste.

Confused? Then just ask for chicken noodle soup and let Pho Saigon take it

from there.

The menu offers non-soup items, too, like egg rolls and spring rolls, Steamed Rice

Plates or Vermicelli meals. Save room for desserts and drinks of coffee, coconut, red beans or tapioca. There's

even a smoothie with durian—the infamous fruit that gets either revered or saddled with a rep, depending on who's talking.

Pho Saigon started six years ago, but that's not when

the story begins. Phuong Tran and his wife Rosie married in Vietnam in the 1970s, explains daughter Mechelle. After South Vietnam fell to Communist forces, the couple made a desperate plan. Rosie, with baby Mechelle, would join escapees on a boat headed to a nearby island.

Trying to say goodbye as the boat was leaving, Phuong Tran knew he could not watch his young family sail away. So he jumped on board, too.

After years in refugee camps, sponsorship by a Texas couple brought the Trans to Houston. Here, the parents worked available jobs, struggled with English and raised Mechelle and Houston-born twin daughters. After a few years, a friend got Phuong Tran a job busing tables at a pho restaurant, where he rose to management.

Her family's story is dramatic but lit-

tle different from lots of others', Mechelle insists.

"Every refugee has an incredible story," she says, "whether they're from Vietnam, India, South America or wherever."

After learning the business for almost 20 years, Phuong Tran at first targeted his new restaurant at shoppers in its small center. Pho Saigon caught on quickly, and the Trans continue to expand the business.

Friends and family run the other seven Pho Saigons in Houston, Sugar Land, Dallas and Las Vegas. In summer 2005, two new restaurants will open in Houston, one at Hwy. 290 at Tidwell, the other at FM 524 at Hwy. 6.

Pho Saigon

2808 Milam Street • 713-524-3734

Open 7 days, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Midtown
has the
BEST
Vietnamese
food in town

Mai's

TRADITION AHEAD OF THE TREND

If you grew up enjoying Vietnamese food in Houston, chances are Mai Nguyen helped you to fall in love with the cuisine.

Claiming the spotlight as the city's oldest Vietnamese restaurant, her



eatery, also called Mai's, is about to mark its 22nd year at its Midtown location at 3403 Milam. Long-time natives will remember Mai's pre-1984 location for five years at Bell and San Jacinto Streets.

Specialties at Mai's include the Spring Rolls and Egg rolls, the Garlic Beef and the Vermicelli with Barbecue Pork. When possible, Mai's welcomes special requests, and sometimes the experiments score a lasting hit on the menu. For example, Garlic Chicken was added when Garlic Beef fans asked for a lighter twist to their favorite.

There have been some requests that Mai's simply won't honor. "Today a customer wanted to order Garlic Chicken and Garlic Beef-half and half. We said 'No, it would ruin the flavor,'" Nguyen says. Instead, the staff compromised with two small portions of each, prepared separately.

Nguyen is now pleased to witness the current boom of Vietnamese cuisine. "When my parents first started, it took five years for Americans to try it and like it," Nguyen says. The light, fresh ingredients of Vietnamese cooking seem a natural fit now. But her mother and father's early Southeast Asian cooking met a skeptical Houston public.

The establishment was named for Nguyen because her siblings' Vietnamese names were hard for American tongues to pronounce. Her parents reasoned that the short, English-friendly "Mai" would have the best chance of drawing the public.

On weekends, Mai's serves until 4 a.m. Among weekend pub-and-club crowds, Mai's is an interesting alternative to chain breakfast houses and fast food staples of very late-night dining.

What's ahead for the Houston institution? Nguyen is unsure but an upstairs lounge is being discussed—along with cocktails and spring rolls, perhaps desserts and coffee. A natural for the Midtown boom, Mai's continues to grow with the times.

Mai's

3403 Milam Street • 713-520-7684

4

Van Loc

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CUSTOMERS

eateries come and go. Even with so many choices, customer loyalty never wavered at Van Loc, the Vietnamese and Chinese restaurant Nguyen started 19 years ago with her son-in-law.

For many customers, Van Loc is THE place to go for Vietnamese-style soups, noodles and heartier dishes. Always at the same 3010 Milam location, the staff is still serving some customers they got to know in the early days.

"I love my customers. They're like family," says Kim Phan, Nguyen's daughter and manager of Van Loc for the past 14 years. Children of many longtime patrons have stayed Van Loc regulars, recruiting new family and friends as they grew up.

Phan knows her loyal customers so well that she is certain who will order what—perhaps the Ga Xao Lan (a spicy curry chicken) or the Com Tam Suon Bi Cha (crushed rice with pork and egg) or the Ga Luc Lac (chicken steaks with lettuce and tomato) for which Van Loc is renowned.

Most "beginners," unfamiliar with Vietnamese cuisine, will choose the menu's Chinese dishes at first, she says. Or at midday, perhaps they'll favor the lighter Bun, or vermicelli, dishes with chicken, shrimp or pork. A lunch bargain at \$4.95, they make a filling meal, especially when paired with appetizer egg rolls or spring rolls.

For almost two decades, Huong Nguyen's family watched neighborhood



Special Thin Vermicelli plates are other popular choices, along with tofu-based foods with curry or coconut. The Rice Paper Dishes, considered breakfast foods in Vietnam, are popular American-style lunches.

Experienced diners can gravitate toward the soups and curry plates or the dishes accented with fish sauce (a taste new to most non-Vietnamese). Or maybe they'll pick the menu's star-Bo Luc Lac, filet mignon chunks stir-fried with garlic and pepper. It's also offered with chicken, shrimp or softshell crabmeat.

A family place with an open atmosphere, Van Loc bustles with busy staff. Phan's 19- and 18-year-old daughters help out, along with her sister, aunt, brother-in-law and other family members.

In the beginning, customers of the once tiny buffet eatery were mostly Vietnamese locals or downtown workers on a fast lunch break. As word of Van Loc's cuisine grew (along with the neighborhood), so did its popularity. The restaurant switched to menu service, served more dinner meals and thrived over the years.

The menu remains mostly unchanged throughout the year, but keep an eye on Van Loc over the next few months. A few summertime adaptations are in the works.

Van Loc

3010 Milam Street • 713-528-6441

Open 7 days, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Her Passion is People

REVEREND FRANCES LEAVES LORD OF THE STREETS, BUT HER MINISTRY CONTINUES

by Elizabeth C. Searcy

After four and a half years of dedicated service to the people of Midtown, vicar and executive director Reverend Martha Frances of Lord of the Streets Episcopal Church/Community of the Streets Outreach, will be relocating, leaving behind many memories for her staff and parishioners to cherish. In the summer of 2000, The Episcopal Church assigned her to the Midtown ministry to provide leadership and to help regain stability to a depressed economic time in the organization's history. Now four and a half years later, programs are flourishing, volunteers are increasing and lives are changing.

To all those who know her, Reverend Frances has allowed herself to be used as an instrument in God's hands. Common problems experienced by many parishioners are fractures or estrangement in the family structure. Her love for God and respect for people has caused a natural assimilation to take place—a type of nurturing role where she enters into the world of her parishioners simply by caring and listening to them. Affectionately known as “Mother Martha” or “Mama” to many, Reverend Frances has become an endearing, maternal example and provides the encouragement and compassion that has been non-existent in people's lives. After all, Reverend Frances' passion is people.

Volunteer Coordinator Myra Mitchell speaks of Reverend Frances, whose inspiration has become a cornerstone of the ministry. “She has a heart for people who can't defend themselves. She feels comfortable interacting with a person facing multiple challenges and knows no barriers when serving an individual.”

Reverend Frances continually compliments her staff and volunteers and gives them credit for their efforts, taking none for herself. The team at Lord of the Streets is extremely competent and passionate about the people they serve, as Reverend Frances

points out. “I have an outstanding staff and I don't have to micro-manage them. The programs can grow that way.”

Numerous programs thrive under Reverend Frances' leadership and a sincere concern for the parishioners filters down to each staff member and volunteer. They have their hearts prepared and ready to serve persons needing assistance and thus a very real sense of God's love and compassion flows through every area of Lord of the Streets.



Reverend Martha Frances.

The Caritas Health Care Clinic is just one such program that is thriving and works in conjunction with Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston. The clinic has grown to be an organized and modern “infirmary for the homeless,” staffed by exceptional medical personnel. Student doctors and preceptors from Baylor College of Medicine, University of Texas Medical and Public Health Schools, and the University of Houston School of Pharmacy, travel to Midtown to treat parishioners at three weekly clinics. Goals for patients of the clinic include tracking their medical care as well as lending support in the application

process for the county health insurance gold card program.

The Sisters at Heart and Brotherhood of St. Andrew provide their members' care, an opportunity to grow and the love of a close community. Group bible studies minister to the spiritual needs, while the clothes closet provides necessary items for basic living. Outreaches to patients in treatment centers and hospitals as well as inmates are also ongoing. The Sunday morning Eucharist and a bountiful, sit-down breakfast feed body and soul and has grown to serving approximately 200 individuals weekly.

A warm and heartfelt thank you, Reverend Martha Frances, for being a guiding light to the ones who need a helping hand and hope for the future. Thank you for leaving our “world” better than you found it. ■

Taking out the Trash

MIDTOWN'S 3rd ANNUAL PICK UP & PEDAL

Many times the journey is just as gratifying as reaching the end...even when you pick up trash. Midtown's 3rd Annual Pick Up & Pedal was another great success but equally successful was the collaboration of time, talent, and resources that made it all happen.

Midtown neighbors appeared at Baldwin Park, trading their cozy beds for broken beer bottles, old cola cans and used baby diapers. Lord of the Streets, always willing to help, offered manpower while

Nine and one-half street blocks, a total of five lots, 2540 pounds of trash (that's 1.27 tons for you math majors!) in just three hours on a Saturday morning!

Keep Houston Beautiful loaned the equipment delivered and picked up by Bee line Services—mowers, weed eaters, rakes, gloves and most importantly, trash bags. AMLI

Midtown and Washington Mutual kept everyone hydrated with water, Post Properties kept everyone happy with lunch and HPD Captain Dwayne Ready kept everyone mesmerized with his “therapeutic lawn mowing!” On the spur of the moment, The Italian Ice Hut brought out, what else...Italian Ice... to a select group of vol-



unteers (lucky group for that lot!!) while the arts and recreation—Houston Symphony, Houston Rockets and the Houston Comets—added their donations to the goodie bags. Midtown's PrimeWay Federal Credit Union

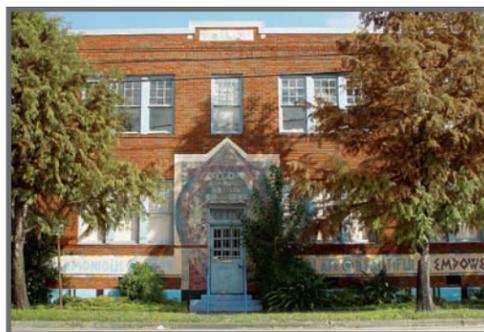
and landscape architects, Clark Condon Associates, added necessary funding for the t-shirts and incidentals. Finish it off with an HPD-led bike tour of the District and the great crew of 1-800-GOT-JUNK? to pick up the bags of trash. What a journey! What a great result! Thanks to everyone! ■

Ready, Set, Begin...

MIDTOWN NATIVE PLANS NEW DEVELOPMENT

“We never saw ourselves as developers. We saw ourselves as neighbors. Most importantly, we're here to stay!” confirms Community Artist Collective's Michelle Barnes. She and associate Sheila Frey are launching the Collective at Baldwin Park, a mixed-used, mixed-income development in Midtown at the site of their current building and promise it to be another beautiful addition to the Baldwin Park area.

Being part of the neighborhood is a natural for Barnes, a native Houstonian and long-time resident of the area. She recalls



fond family memories and weekly trips to piano lessons from her home on Dowling. She can testify to the neighborhood's

growth as well as to a period of unfortunate neglect. The revitalization of Midtown is a welcomed asset to an area she believes in.

“When we moved in '89,” explains Barnes, “I had the vision of developing and preserving the little wooden house behind the building but, unfortunately, because of the development culture at the time, it just wasn't feasible. I feel the plans we have today are a commitment to the community to make the block even better.”

Barnes and Frey will be introducing new retail space to Midtown as well as increasing their original art space by 1000 square feet. Fifty-six units will be added as condos, seventeen of which will be affordably priced for first time homeowners. Plans for innovative financing are also in the works.

The project is a collaborative effort between British American Properties and Community Artist Collective. Jack Preston Wood is the architect. Pre-sales are under way with groundbreaking tentatively scheduled for late spring. ■

Who do I Call?

Emergency Calls: **9-1-1.**

Non-Emergency Houston Service Center: **3-1-1** (broken traffic signals, potholes, broken curbs, water leaks, etc.) Be sure to request the reference number in case you have to call back.

Midtown Redevelopment Authority
713-526-7577

Midtown Management District
713-526-7577

City of Houston – Public Works
713-865-4101

City of Houston – Public Utilities
713-224-2500

City of Houston – Solid Waste
713-837-9100

City of Houston – Illegal Dumping
713-525-2728

City of Houston – Code Violations/Neighborhood Protection
713-525-2525

Center Point (gas)
713-659-2111

Reliant Energy (electric)
713-228-7400 If you are calling about a non-working street light, please provide the 6-digit pole number located approximately 6-7 ft high on the pole.

SBC (telephone)
713-961-2397 (new service)
713-881-8181 (repair)

Time Warner Cable
713-462-9000

Mayor's Citizen's Assistance
713-247-1888

METRO
Light Rail and Buses **713-635-4000**
Rail line **713-881-3313**

METRO Police Dispatch (concerns along the rail/bus stops)
713-881-3313

Houston Police Department
713-222-3131 (Non-Emergency)

Central HPD Station
713-247-4400

South Central HPD Station
713-651-8100

Houston Fire Department
713-222-3434

Harris County Sheriff's Department
713-221-6000

Harris County Constable's Precinct 7
713-643-6118

Crime Stoppers
713-222-8477

Poison Control
800-764-7661

Mayor Bill White
mayer@cityofhouston.net

Carol Alvarado, City Council District I
districtI@cityofhouston.net

Ada Edwards, City Council District D
districtD@cityofhouston.net

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Come listen, learn and be heard...

Midtown Management District Board Meeting
February 2, March 2, April 6
First Wednesday of each month @ 11 a.m.

Public Safety Committee
February 15, March 15, April 19
Third Tuesday of each month @ 3 p.m.

Visual Improvement and Services Committee
February 17, March 17, April 21
Third Thursday of each month @ 4 p.m.

Midtown Redevelopment Authority Board Meeting
January 27, February 24, March 31, April 28
Last Thursday of each month @ 12 p.m.

Meetings take place at the Midtown Management District and Redevelopment Authority offices, 3401 Louisiana, Ste. 355, 713-526-7577. Please call ahead to confirm time and dates.

Midtown Civic Club
February 8, March 8, April 12. Second Tuesday of each month @ 7:30 p.m. Held at Augustana Lutheran Church, Multi-purpose room, 2001 Wheeler. midtowncivic@yahoo.com

housed Home Hospital (later Physicians & Surgeons Hospital), a small private facility with a capacity of 55 beds, one of many facilities common in the era. The building served Houstonians until 1960 when it was converted back to residential use. Abandoned in 1997, Van Pelt happened upon it in 1999 with its boarded and broken windows and gutted interior.

"It (the renovation) was never about bricks and sticks. It was always much more," explained Van Pelt. "The ethos of the building is the craftsmanship." Those who worked side-by-side with Van Pelt on the project understood his appreciation of the structure.

Office Administrator Nelda Hebert recalls the intricate details that were undertaken to regain as much of the building's historic accuracy as possible. For example, Van Pelt had the mortar chemically analyzed to closely match composition and color tone for the repointing work that needed to be done. The original Benjamin Apartments boasted awnings over the sleeping-porch windows. Hebert recalls looking through page after page of various sizes and shapes, trying to find scallops that emulated the same design. And when the city's road department made room for progress, old curbs were torn out and were replaced with new ones, thus a part of the history was lost. Van Pelt and his crew, much like a game of Scrabble, recreated the blue and white tiled letters and numbers that when pieced together, displayed the original address in

the curb in much the same 1920s style.

Given the extensive vandalism, only a few original aspects of the building's interior remained at the time of the acquisition. The original oak and heart pine floors as well as the intricate herringbone-tiled foyer and brass mailboxes were salvageable and still exist as a



From rubbish to refinement, the Benjamin Building regains its former elegance.

reminder of the 1924 artisans. Venetian blinds typical of the era now enhance the interior. A handicap lift, installed to meet current ADA codes, was placed at the rear of the building

—with no impact on the building's primary façade. Upstairs offices offer an abundance of light and a view of the 100+-year-old pecan tree that arches across the second-floor patio.

In December 2004, the Benjamin Building was named a Historic Landmark by the City of Houston. The commendation joins the building's additional credits that include the National Register of Historic Places, designation as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and a Good Brick Award from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. These historic markers flank the Benjamin's main entrance. ■

2500 FANNIN STREET

Wilson, Cribbs & Goren, P.C. officed comfortably in the Lyric Center for 15 years, then announced in 2002 that they would relocate to Midtown. Their destination was a two-story building on Fannin Street that had served as a halfway house for women just released from prison. There were small cubicles for beds, a few sparse offices and a large industrial kitchen but time and tenants had weathered even the inside of the building. Enter the vision of Reid Wilson, Ferd Cribbs, Abe Goren and Fred Cook, whose 20-year-old law firm specializes in representing the commercial real estate industry.

"We could see the growth in Midtown and the actual building, 2500 Fannin, was right in the middle of all of the action. With METRORail running right behind us on Main Street, it was the perfect answer for our firm," Wilson explains.

The attorneys liked the look of the 1947 international style building and wanted to preserve the exterior; but the interior had to go.

"For months, we wouldn't even let our employees come look at the place!" explains Wilson. "It was so claustrophobic inside. The original interior had long since been destroyed by years of poorly executed remodeling projects. Originally a single use office building for an insurance company, it became a multi-tenant office building catering to lawyers. Then, in the early 1990's, when Midtown was at its lowest ebb, it was converted for residential use as a halfway house. It was beyond ugly! After our demolition, all that was left were the rusted support beams, the gouged concrete and the brick walls."

Completed in May 2003, the renovation was a collaborative effort of several award winners: PowersBrown Architecture and the team of Shirene O'Connor, ASID and Gail Lane, ASID as interior designers. The

contemporary, high-end result more than satisfied the Firm's expectations and stands as a showplace for creating a fashionable, state-of-the-art environment within a historical presence.

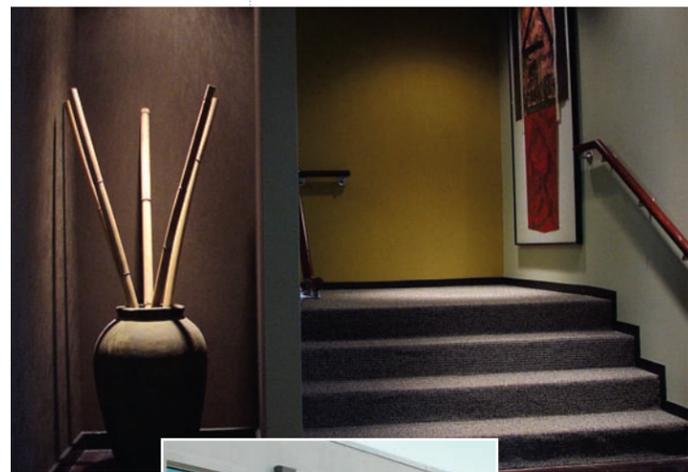
Floating ceilings, uniquely textured walls, and exposed structural elements combine nicely in the overall rectilinear design of the building, a far cry from the original interior of 1947. Rich, warm colors of umber and mustard canvas the first floor walls through both paper and paint while soft lighting and a relaxed, flowing floor plan alleviate any preconceived stuffy stereotype of lawyers. The original concrete flooring, handsomely reflecting its remodeling battle scars, is a dramatic reminder of the building's past. Clerestory windows added in a "pop-up addition" on the 2nd floor added natural lighting and increased the ceiling height from 10' to 18'. Together with contemporary lighting and a Mondrian style, the second floor is practical as well as attractive.

"We are focused on the real estate industry and deal with clients who understand development. Uniformly, they have applauded our move and enjoy our new space. Many lawyers have inquired about the process to buy and remodel their own buildings, and some have taken the plunge. We wanted to make a strong statement with our office. Basically, we wanted a space which was comfortable and practical, but also interesting architecturally and with a modern design component," explained Wilson. The decision to retain the distressed concrete floors and open ceiling in the first floor, together with highly finished glassed conference rooms, answers the call.

The exterior of the building remains unchanged from its original design with the addition of a new Fannin Street storefront, bricked sidewalks and drives, fresh landscaping and new signage. The Fannin Street sign was specially designed to hide a former entrance that was the unfortunate result of a botched remodeling. The scar from that door was impossible to repair consistent with the architectural style of the building, and the solution designed by Architect Joe Powers did the trick.

A meditative garden with fountain and special landscaping designed by Nelsons Water Gardens, dedicated to the memory of former attorney, Mimi Trueheart, confirms that even within the confines of a busy Midtown, tranquility can be found.

Abe Goren, a partner in the Firm and a current board member of the Midtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, is pleased with the renovation project and its message. "I think it's important for both small and large businesses to look



Contemporary designs accent 2500 Fannin, above. New entrance to the building, left.

at the opportunities that renovating a historic structure offers. So often, we tend to take the easy route and

demolish a piece of our city's history. 2500 Fannin is proof that adaptive reuse of historical buildings is practical and provides a unique result. I am very proud of what our Firm has accomplished in the neighborhood and we look forward to practicing law at our new location for many years in the future."

The Firm continues ongoing preservation with their personal dedication to keeping the entire block, bordered by Main, McGowen, Fannin and Bremond, manicured and litter-free. For Wilson, Cribbs & Goren it's a commitment to the past and the future. ■

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Remember when...

Dr. Joseph M. Loewenstein was 13-years-old back in 1924, a tenant occupying Unit #4 of the Benjamin Apartments. Keeping with his desire to celebrate the building's history, Patrick Van Pelt located Dr. Loewenstein in 2002 and invited him back to the building when the renovation was complete. Dr. Loewenstein was 92 years old and came to the dedication ceremony held on June 22, 2002. Today, at age 94, Dr. Loewenstein resides in Midland, but took time by phone to share fond remembrances of what was then Midtown, and a city once connected by interurban trolleys and streetcars.

"My father and his father owned a tobacco store, Loewenstein's Cigars, down at 216 Main. They were jobbers; they sold to other tobacco stores. There's actually part of the originally tiled



Dr. Loewenstein's parents, Lena and Ed B. Loewenstein, in front of Benjamin Apartments, 1926.

sign still remaining with the family name on it. It's in the park where the old City Hall used to be on the corner of Preston and Milam, just around the corner from where the store used to be. Only problem is the "L" is missing... I remember the Benjamin Building as a kid. There were two apartments on the top, two on the bottom and four garages and a big pecan tree in the back... It was a very nice neighborhood. Main Street was just three blocks away... There used to be a Farmers Market down on Commerce. You could buy your vegetables right from the wagon... There was an electric streetcar called the Bellaire Shuttle. It used to take you out Fannin all the way to Bellaire. There was a streetcar on Pease. You'd catch it to get a ride downtown and get a transfer. You always had to get your transfers downtown... I remember Bennett's Drug Store at Main and Webster. Bennett's had a drive-in; they'd bring drinks to your car. You could hang around and somebody would always give you a ride to school. I was going to school at Rice and somebody would always be going that way..."

Finished with School? Think again!

CONTINUING EDUCATION REFINED AND REDEFINED AT HCC CENTRAL

Think you're too old to go back to school or maybe you're thinking there's nothing that'll fit your crazy schedule? Well, think again and this time, think Houston Community College (HCC) Central campus, right in the heart of Midtown.

Many are surprised to know the average student at HCC Central is 28-years-old. And even more surprising is the course schedule—a far cry from Freshman English or Eco 101. Employers and employees have discovered HCC-Central for courses like Grant Writing or ESL to open new business opportunities while Construction Building or Animal Behavior Management might just be the springboard for someone considering entrepreneurship. Whatever the venture, HCC Central is the ideal training ground to make it all come together.

HCC's slogan is "We Make Houston Work" and no one does it better than the Corporate Training and Continuing Education Department. "There's over 3000 non-credit courses to choose from at HCC," explains Public Information Officer Carole Keeney, "and with offerings 24-7, nights, weekends—you pick the schedule that's right for you."

HCC realizes that employees are an employer's greatest asset and in turn, offer a full range of courses geared to meet the ever-growing need for occupational and professional development.

Certificate Programs are very popular, but students can also elect to take any individual course separate from the certification requirements to enhance their general knowledge. Many curriculums can be modified based on the previous educational background or needs of the individual. Additionally, there are often multiple start dates that allow the student to enter the program at dates other than the traditional registration period.

The HCCS-ACT Center provides professional certification and licensure testing. The testing center is an authorized site for Prometric testing as well as Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS)

XP, 2000 Certification and Internet and Computer Fundamentals Certification (IC3).

MEETING OF THE MINDS

One of HCC Central's finest offerings to employers is their state-of-the-art Conference and Training Center located at 3100 Main in the multi-story building that houses their administrative offices. Small groups of 15 to auditorium seating of 200 can be accommodated with ease. Whatever your set-up—classroom or board room; whatever your equipment need—laptops to plasma screens; whatever your reach—across town or international video conferencing, HCC Central's Conference and Training Center can make it happen. And if planning's not your forte, there's a professional event staff that will work with you from beginning to end, even be there "in the middle" for all the technical and last minute extras that you need to make your meeting or training session a success.

Breakfast forums and event planners have discovered the convenience of the Midtown location midway between Med Center and downtown. Catering is available from some of Houston's most up-and-coming chefs at NEO Market & Café. Parking is worry free with the adjoining covered garage. METRORail is an equal asset.

HCC Conference & Training Center offers competitive rates for facility and equipment rental with special pricing available for non-profit organizations. For example, the 3300 sq. ft. auditorium with adjoining 2162 sq. ft. foyer seats 135 people classroom style, 200 people theater style. Non-profits can rent the facility for an accommodating \$250 for the day. A 35-seat classroom can be rented for as low as \$50/day.

For more information about campus locations, class schedules, and general information access www.hccs.edu. For information regarding the HCC Conference and Training Center, log onto www.hccs.edu/ctc ■

Helping Hands...

REACHING INTO THE HEARTS OF OTHERS

by Elizabeth C. Searcy

Since 1983, the staff and volunteers of the Emergency Aid Coalition (EAC) have endeavored to be a hand extended to individuals that are homeless or near homeless and living without a network of support or have little or no family structure. And what amazing services they provide!

Well-developed programs of the EAC give support to men, women and children. The sack lunch program, food pantry, clothing center, and aid to families are just some of the ways people are helped. Volunteers are at the heart of the organization and 310 kind souls, ages

ranging from teens to a 96-year-old senior, unselfishly gave 14,650 hours of their time in 2003.

The newest service of the EAC called "Faithful Friends" matches volunteers with residents of Midtown who are frail or disabled and may not be able to do simple tasks because of illness or the inability to drive. A yard raked, an errand run or a friendly telephone call provide encouragement and a needed human connection. The EAC welcomes new volunteers! Please call Carol Burrus, volunteer coordinator at 713-522-0879. ■

MIDTOWN'S

calendar of events.

January

08 Just in time for spring. Solo works by Melanie Crader. Opening reception 6 - 8 p.m. Gallery Sonja Roesch. Through February 26. www.gallerysonjaroesch.com

14 Working Spaces. Tommy Fitzpatrick. Inman Gallery. Through February 19. www.inmangallery.com

14 New works on paper. Heyd Fontenot. Inman Gallery. Through February 19. www.inmangallery.com

15 Kendall Buster. Monumental sculptures. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Through March 20. www.crafthouston.org

15 Donald Fortescue. Human scale pieces using stack lamination and segmented turning. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Through March 20. www.crafthouston.org



15 Juncture: Physical & Conceptual Connections in Contemporary Jewelry. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Through March 20. www.crafthouston.org

27 Lineage. Large scale sculpture installation by Amy Gerhauser. Opening reception from 6 - 8 p.m. Art Gallery at HCC Central. Through February 24. 713-718-6600.

February

04 Eleanor Williams. Main Gallery. Lawndale Art Center. Through March 12. www.lawndaleartcenter.org

04 Tech Champs. Networking of entrepreneurs, investors, service providers and business leaders. Houston Technology Center. 7:15-9:00 a.m. www.houstontech.org

04 Beloved Country Vietnam. Works by multiple photographers. Opening reception 6:30 - 9:00 p.m. Crossline Art Gallery. Through February 28. 713-817-1126.

04 Betsy Odom. Sculptures. Mezzanine Gallery. Lawndale Art Center. Through March 12. www.lawndaleartcenter.org

04 Kenneth Beasley. Drawings and wall sculptures. Small Gallery. Lawndale Art Center. Through March 12. www.lawndaleartcenter.org

11 Piano Recital-Dr. Steven Scott. S. Main Baptist Church. 7:30 p.m.

16 HTC University. Series of workshops and seminars for launching and growing your own business. Houston Technology Center. 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. www.houstontech.org

22 Two Trains Running. Non-musical by August Wilson commemorating Black History Month.

The Ensemble Theatre. Through February 20. www.ensemblehouston.org

25 Recent Pictures. Amy Blakemore. Inman Gallery. Through April 2. www.inmangallery.com

25 New Paintings. Yuko Marata. Inman Gallery. Through April 2. www.inmangallery.com

March

03 Visual AIDS: Lightbox Exhibition (from the national registry of artists with AIDS.) Opening reception March 3, 6 - 8 p.m. Art Gallery at HCC Central. Through April 7. 713-718-6600.

03 Elizabeth Marran. Digital prints. Art Gallery at HCC Central. Opening reception March 3, 6 - 8 p.m. Through April 7. 713-718-6600.

04 Spring. Photography by Dorothy Wong. Crossline Art Gallery. Through March 28. 713-817-1126.

05 Scarabaeus. Solo works by Thomas Deyle. Opening reception 6 - 8 p.m. Gallery Sonja Roesch. Through April 30. www.gallerysonjaroesch.com

05 The Story. Off Broadway premier of Tracey Scott Wilson's drama. The Ensemble Theater. Through April 10. www.ensemblehouston.org

07 Midtown Street Sweep. District-wide street cleaning. Through March 11. For more information, contact Midtown Management District at 713-526-7577.

11 Daryl Robinson-Digital and Pipe Organ Music Recital. Westmoreland Chapel, South Main Baptist Church. 7:30 p.m. www.smbc.org

18 Modern Market. Mixed media. Lawndale Art Center. Through March 20th. www.lawndaleartcenter.org

24 Dance Salad. Dominic Walsh Dance Theater reprises a portion of a ballet created for American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company. Cullen Theater. The Wortham Theater Center. 7:30 p.m. Through March 26. www.dwdt.org



April

02 Reflected Light: Mary Shaffer. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Through June 5. www.crafthouston.org

02 Ric Franklin. Blown glass sculptures. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Through June 5. www.crafthouston.org

15 Dr. Joyce Jones-Chapel Organ Dedication Concert. South Main Baptist Church. 7:30 p.m. www.smbc.org

7

Fire Safety, now and then

MIDTOWN'S CONCENTRIC CIRCLING AND THE HOUSTON FIRE MUSEUM

Knowing you have a fire station just down the street is very comforting. Knowing you have two stations is even better. How about if you live in Midtown and you have THREE stations that cover your fire district? Now that's a good feeling!!!

Senior Captain Michael Shrum calls it "concentric circling", a system of overlapping coverage whereby an area like Midtown receives services, when necessary, from three Fire Districts. Station No. 7, located at 1402 Elgin near Austin is the first primary response. Fire Station No. 8 at 1901 Milam near St. Joseph Parkway is ready if the need accelerates or when No. 7 is on response. Fire Station No. 8 is equipped with two ambulances, two engines and houses the District Chief. A third station, No. 16 at 1700 Richmond



Inside Fire Station No. 7.

and Dunlavy, would also be ready to help.

Good coverage has always been consistent to Midtown, even back in 1899 when Fire Company No. 7

looked after the area. Fire Company No. 7 was the first fire station constructed by the city after the department went full paid in 1895.

Equipped with a steamer (rated at 500 gallons per minute (gpm)), a hose wagon carrying 1,000 feet of hose, a 24-foot extension ladder, four horses (two for the steamer, two for the hose wagon) and a crew of seven, the station protected the area quite well.

Today, Fire Station No. 7 is equipped with an engine company, a ladder company and a fairly new grouping to the Fire Department, the squad company. A squad company consists of two paramedics responding in a suburban along with an ambulance. In Midtown's case, an ambulance would come from Fire Station No. 8 or Fire Station No. 16, both of which have two ambulances each. The squad company brings immediate medical response to what may be emergency but non-life threatening situations and, in turn, enables the ambulance to be more readily available for what may be a more serious call. Eighty percent of EMS calls do not require advanced care.

Fire Station No. 7 is staffed 24/7 with a minimum of ten firefighters; four with the engine company, four with the ladder company and a minimum of two men or women for the squad company. During our recent visit, we spoke with Captain Valerie Seymour who spoke of the dedicated crew at Station No. 7. She welcomes Midtown residents to stop by with any questions or concerns, day or night.

HOUSTON FIRE MUSEUM

In 1969, a new Station No. 7 was built at 1402 Elgin and Austin and the old station was used for storage. In 1980, work began to

preserve and restore the original building. Now known as the Houston Fire Museum, the structure is one of the most historic in the City of Houston and serves as a tribute to the history of the Houston Fire Department and those men and women who have served as well as those who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Numerous exhibits, including an 1893 steam engine and a vintage end-stroke hand pumper

(circa 1890) donated by well known firefighter Red Adair, are on display. A piece of charred metal, a stark reminder from the devastation at the World Trade Center, is also on view. Upstairs, glassed cases showcase fire fighting tools, commendations and gear including an early 1900 helmet. Once brandishing a seahorse, helmets are now highlighted by an eagle insignia placed on the brim, a symbol that's become synonymous with firefighters.

Firefighter Hebert Kimbrel is a volunteer at The Houston Fire Museum and enjoys sharing his knowledge and fire fighting experiences with adults and children. Kimbrel admits that many adults first become aware of the museum when they attend a birthday party of a friend or relative at the station. Birthday parties at the museum are a popular venue for kids with a party area and ample room to explore. Adults are often surprised to see what's inside 2403 Milam even though, they confide, they've passed the building many times, never venturing inside.

"For those that live in the area, the museum has a lot of Houston history. I encourage everyone to come take a little time and see what's here. Bring your kids and your grandkids and your nieces and nephews," encourages Kimbrel. Children and adults can climb aboard a fire truck (complete with coat and hat) and slide down the fire pole or leisurely browse through two floors of fire history.

The Houston Fire Museum website, www.houstonfiremuseum.org, explores the history of the Houston Fire Department with vintage photographs of the stations adding a unique perspective into the era of bucket brigades, horse-drawn wagons and ladders that once took six men to raise them safely.

The Fire Museum has plans for a new facility at the corner of Milam and Travis pending necessary funding. Once a new facility is built, the historic 1899 structure will possibly be refurbished as a replica of its early years.

The Houston Fire Museum is a non-profit educational organization located south of the Pierce Elevated at 2403 Milam near Hadley. METRORail's McGowen Station stops just a few blocks away. Parking is available at the meters on Milam, McGowen and Hadley. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., the museum's admission is \$3.00 for adults and \$2.00 for kids, students and seniors. For more information, log on to their website or phone 713-524-2526. ■



History inside and out at the Houston Fire Museum.



MIDTOWN'S FIRST...

from page 1

mile walk. Councilwoman Carol Alvarado joined in the celebration, as did State Representative Garnet Coleman who was pleased with "the real community feel" that the event created.

"The success of the event shown by participation and exuberance shows that Midtown is an excellent area to hold future events like this as well as other community celebrations and fundraisers," said Coleman.

A number of Midtown businesses offered their support including Advantage BMW Midtown, Post Properties, High Fashion Fabrics and PrimeWay Federal Credit Union. Several Midtown companies sponsored their employees



Runners race to benefit CSF.

and took advantage of the opportunity to have their businesses proudly displayed at the post race party.

Plans are already being made for next year's 2nd annual race to the finish line. Maria Espinoza, a long-time Houston resident with ties to the local charitable community, will be coordinating the 2nd Annual Survivors' 5K Run through her new company, Feliznow! Maria's recent work as organizer and director of Midtown's First Annual Survivors' 5K/1 Mile Run/Walk inspired her, along with partner Timothy Lyng, to continue fostering the exuberance and participation of the Midtown community. Young survivors and their families will again receive not only financial support but also encouragement to see beyond their circumstances and realize that joy and hope can be part of their everyday lives. Feliznow! is currently accepting applications for the beneficiary of the support and fundraising resulting from the upcoming 2nd Annual Survivors' 5K Run, tentatively planned for November 5. The 2005 beneficiary will be a local non-profit organization that benefits children and young adults who have debilitating diseases. Applications can be downloaded at www.feliznow.com or you may request a copy by mail by calling 281-236-7580. ■

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