



TEXAS PRISON NEWS

THE ECHO

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Unashamed, undaunted:

Despite adversity, Lee College president leads students to academic excellence

John Walter Flagg — ECHO Staff

“WHEN I INTERVIEWED FOR THIS JOB AND WAS ASKED WHY I WANTED TO be a college president, the first thing I said was, ‘Look at the Huntsville Center—it is the most sensational story; who wouldn’t want to be the president of a college like that?’ It was the most inspirational story I ever heard!” says Lynda Villanueva, Ph.D., president of Lee College and role model for Lee students incarcerated in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

Villanueva, who is relatively new to correctional education, is the tenth president to lead Lee College since its Baytown beginnings in 1934. She is the third woman to hold this position and the first minority president at Lee College.

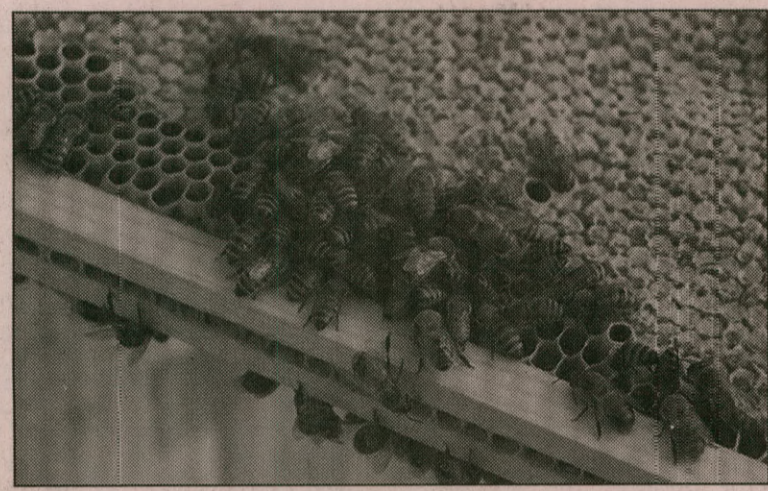


Dr. Villanueva
Photo courtesy of Lee College

“The students at the Huntsville Center [those programs within the TDCJ] have many strengths and points of diversity that can be turned into valuable lessons. Every student who crosses the stage and overcomes so much difficulty and hardship is a stand-out success story,” she says.

In 1966 TDCJ and Lee College partnered to form the Lee College Huntsville Center, the largest post-secondary correctional education program in Texas and the second largest in the nation. Today it offers academic and vocational instruction to eligible TDCJ residents while maintaining its freeworld student population. In the fall of 2020, the student population of Lee College was 7,749, including 989 students in TDCJ in Huntsville, Texas.

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Bees swarm on honeycomb at a TDCJ facility hive. Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

The Buzz:

Honeybees sweeten prison crop production

HONEYBEES WERE RE-INTRODUCED INTO THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE (TDCJ) Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics (MAL) Division’s Agribusiness, Land and Minerals (ALM) edible crop production in 2006. The project began when two hives were captured, including one found under a prison recreation yard table. Additional colonies were later purchased and, to date, TDCJ has 13 units establishing viable beehives and colonies within the edible crop programs, with some units housing multiple boxes/hives. These colonies continue to be a mix of both purchased bees and relocated wild beehives and swarms.

The most important thing bees do is pollinate (move pollen between plants), allowing fertilization. While wild bees and other natural pollinators provide pollination to the ALM crops, the addition of farm-raised colonies improves pollination, which in turn increases the amount of vegetables harvested.

BUZZ continued on pg. 5 >

Excellence in teaching:

Windham teacher Juarez uses past to build futures

William Hill — ECHO Staff

THE PAST YEAR PROVIDED tremendous life challenges on a global scale: the COVID-19 pandemic, hurricane-induced evacuations and the rapid rise of distance learning. Fortunately for students in R. Juarez’s CHANGES 3 class at the Sanchez State Jail, their teacher is not one to back down from a challenge. Instead, she embraces it. That is just one of many reasons Juarez is one of Windham School District’s (WSD) 2020 Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching (LMET) honorees for her work in teaching life skills. The LMET initiative acknowledges teachers’ contributions to both the success of their students and the success of the instructional program itself.

Before joining WSD, Juarez taught junior high science in El



R. Juarez, Courtesy of Windham School District (WSD)

Paso in a large public school system. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she was also science fair coordinator, head of the science department and track coach.

Despite a demanding and active career, she traded public school days for WSD classrooms within the state prison system of Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

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Serving salads while serving time:

Future of sustainable food found in Texas prison program



Photo courtesy of TDCJ Communications

In addition to the therapeutic and health benefits for the residents at the Michael Unit, the aquaponics program also serves the community that the residents will eventually reenter. This photo was taken before the pandemic.

Essay for The Houston Chronicle, By Ariella Simke (Nov. 25, 2020; Updated online: Nov. 27, 2020) Article reprinted in The ECHO with permission.

ON A 400-ACRE farm in Anderson County, goldfish roil a huge water tank. The water, thick with nutrient-dense fish droppings, is pumped through rows of PVC pipes where thousands of heads of lettuce poke out from holes drilled in the plastic. Tangled white roots sway in the water, drinking nitrogen as the plants grow. The farmers in white jumpsuits tending these systems are incarcerated residents of the Michael Unit, one of the largest maximum-security prisons in Texas.

Three years ago, when the prison’s aquaponics farm started, residents rarely ate fresh greens. For many, that remains the case, but the program could eventually

This is a blueprint for what institutional food systems could look like.

grown enough vegetables to feed all 3,800 residents. Despite their many constraints and for most of them a lack of higher education, these residents are pioneering one of the best models we have for feeding

ourselves efficiently and sustainably in the future.

With the global population expected to reach nearly 10 billion people by 2050, the need to grow food efficiently and sustainably is more important than ever. As a writer with a background in environmental science, I have reported and seen up close how traditional agriculture uses our finite land and water resources inefficiently: upwards of 70 percent of freshwater and more than half of arable land are used to grow food.

FOOD continued on pg. 5 >



Kimberly Walker. Photo courtesy of Windham School District (WSD)

Wired up for change:

Walker forges new life with CTE training, apprenticeship

John Walter Flagg — ECHO Staff

AVARIETY OF ENTRY level jobs were the pre-incarceration work of Kimberly Walker, a former Windham School District (WSD) student and resident of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Post release, she now has something she considers to be her career. Walker is a full-time electrician apprentice at Facility Solutions Group (FSG), a national provider of residential and commercial electrical

services based in Austin. She is also a part time customer service representative at Home Depot. Walker says she had a vision of the life she wanted and then turned her obstacles into opportunities.

“You never know what opportunities are available to you unless you take that first step,” she says.

A brief interlude within the TDCJ provided Walker with the clarity to see how choices and consequences can impact

one’s life. Instead of seeing her situation as hopeless, she began to align positive choices with a drive to succeed. Immersing herself into academics at Windham, Walker soon earned a high school diploma at the San Saba Unit, and after graduation, became a tutor. Later, Walker was presented a Distinguished Student Award for her devotion to learning and assisting her peers.

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STOP COVID-19  COVID INFO on pg. 4 >



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the editor,

I need a previous issue of The ECHO about the ARMATUS incarcerated veterans program. In 2018 at the Holliday Unit I was attending ARMATUS meetings. I have been unable to find an address to write the program with questions about available resources for us veterans. Can you please publish an address where we can reach ARMATUS? Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Ronald Peroni Dominguez State Jail

To the reader,

The ARMATUS program can be reached by writing to:

Armatus Reintegration Program P.O. Box 9775 Huntsville, TX 77340.

Thank you for your inquiry.

To the editor,

I am writing in regards to the 2020 writing contest results that was printed in the November 2020 issue of The ECHO. I am not an avid reader of your paper at least not until the March issue where I read a finalist in the 2019 writing contest entitled "Jefito is a Word." It was awesome! It spoke to my soul as a good book does—and this was just a short essay. I guess it is because I could relate to the cultural side of it. So, since that time I have been on the lookout for more. Is there any way to request some

of the essays from the list that was printed in the November 2020 issue? There are a lot of titles that sound interesting to me. The article said The ECHO would be releasing more in the upcoming months. This raises the questions of which ones and are we gonna have to wait until next year to read them. Maybe The ECHO can release an issue with all of them, sort of like a special edition? Just a thought. Please let me know.

If we are allowed to request just one or two here are the ones that I would like to read.

1). "Lost Boy of the Barrio" by Richard Vasquez, Eastham Unit, Honorable Mention.

2). "The Devil Inside of Me" by Filbert Watson, Scott Unit, Honorable Mention.

3). "The Other Chain Gang" by Lily Archuleta, Murray Unit, Finalist.

I fear I already know the answer but it never hurts to ask. Thanks for your time to read and respond to my inquiry.

Moises Flores Ellis Unit

To the reader,

Thank you for writing; we're glad you've enjoyed these contest entries! Your letter is a compliment and encouragement to the writers who send in these special pieces. Look for The ECHO to continue publishing contest finalists and honorable mentions in future issues, although we cannot guarantee which entries will make it to print, or when. Check in this issue for more printed contest submissions. And—"Jefito" struck a chord with a lot of folks, including us.

To the editor,

I am wondering if you have thought about a poetry contest. Also, do you have a date in mind for a new writing contest? Eastham is having a poetry contest this spring, ending April 2021. I will be writing an article for the Eastham Unit about the winners when the contest is finished.

Sincerely, Johnny L. Wooten Eastham Unit Reporter

To the reader,

Thank you for writing and being a

faithful and punctual ECHO contributor as the Eastham Unit reporter. Keep up the great work. We currently have no plans to hold a poetry contest, nor have we scheduled the next writing contest. We do, however, encourage our readers and aspiring writers to send in material for consideration and possible publication in The ECHO—no contest required!

To the editor,

I just want to say thank you to the mail room personnel here at the Wynne Unit. All through this pandemic, they have done an exceptional job with handling this overflow of mail. I just wanted to say thank you.

Arthur Bass Wynne Unit

To the reader,

Mail room workers (at every facility!) have an often overlooked and underappreciated job. Thank you for your recognition of their efforts to serve the resident population, especially in the times of COVID.

To the editor,

I am to be released here in a few months. I was wondering something. A few months ago you ran an article on how to set up the phone. You had three different ways to do this. Is there any way you could send me the instructions on those three ways to set up the phone? My mother is also in prison and I want to call her when I get out.

Thanks for your time and consideration!

Sincerely, Nate

To the reader,

When you are released, go to the website www.texasprisonphone.com. This site is where callers enroll. More information is available at www.texasprisonphone.com/faqs_general. In the meantime, here are the basics:

- Registering post-paid cellphone or landline phone: You will need to upload a copy of your phone bill that includes your name and billing address, telephone number, bill date and company logo.

- Registering pre-paid cellphone: You will need to upload a copy of your phone bill that includes your name and billing address, telephone number, bill date and company logo. If you do not receive a phone bill from your pre-paid provider, you will need to send a screenshot from your online account that shows your name and billing address, telephone number, cell phone company logo, and the billing date.

Specifics for all phone registrations:

1. The name on your driver's license must match the name on your telephone service bill/listing.
2. You must agree to the following conditions:
 - You are the registered owner of the phone that will receive calls from the inmate.
 - You will allow inmate calls to this phone.
 - You are at least 18 years old.
 - You will not forward calls, make 3-way calls or use a speakerphone on calls received from the inmate.
 - You understand that eligible inmates are not allowed to speak to any adult that is not listed on their Approved Calling List.
3. If you don't possess a Texas Driver's License or State ID, you will be asked to upload a photo or photocopy of your out-of-state driver's license.
4. If you have a cellphone, you will be asked to upload a legible copy of your last cell phone bill that shows:

- Cell Phone Number
 - Customer Name
 - Cell Phone Company Logo
 - Billing Address (Note: Usually on the first two pages)
 - Monthly Basic Phone Charge (Note: This is usually on the Account Summary Page)
- (If you are registering a pre-paid cell phone and you do not receive a phone bill from your prepaid provider, you will need to send a screenshot from your online account that shows your name and billing address, telephone number, date and company logo.)

TEXAS PRISON NEWS THE ECHO VO... 93 NO. 1 FEBRUARY 2021 • 12 PAGES • PUBLISHED FOR 93 YEARS, SINCE 1928 CIRCULATION: 147,000 PER ISSUE —MANAGEMENT— Kristina Hartman — Superintendent Bambi Kiser — Managing Editor Mary Partida — Graphics Consultant —STAFF— Todd R. Carman — Staff Writer & Graphics John W. Flagg — Staff Writer & Graphics William E. Hill — Staff Writer & Graphics Bryan J. Moore — Staff Writer & Graphics John J. Phippen — Staff Writer & Graphics Tim G. Scoggin — Staff Writer & Graphics —CONTRIBUTORS— Sergio D. Alvarez — Hightower Unit Lauren Aycock — Crain-Sycamore Unit Laura Anne Cloy — Murray Unit Ruben Constante Jr. — Released Ashley Dack — Mountain View Unit Jim Den — Polunsky Unit Greg Freeman — Allred Unit Robert Fridell — Roach Unit Joseph L. Fritz — Estelle Unit Joe Hernandez — Jordan Unit Lisa Jackson — Murray Unit Daniel P. Meehan — Darrington Unit Michelle Orduna — San Saba Unit James Pimentel — Ellis Unit Roger R. Reister — Coffield Unit Tim Rovell — Dalhart Unit Bruce Ruckman — Estes Unit Eva Shelton — Lockhart Unit Jennifer Toon — Released Raymond Trinidad — Powledge Unit Damon West — Released Michael Wiese — Luther Unit —UNIT REPORTERS— Alfred Unit — Kenneth Gardner Beto Unit — Kyle Bankston Beto Unit — Quincy Patterson Boyd Unit — Michael Master Clemens Unit — Joseph Facundo Coffield Unit — Christopher Stratton Cole State Jail/Moore Unit — Kelsie Whitten Jr. Crain Unit — Jane Callaway Dalhart Unit — Ryan Forbes Dalhart Unit — Kenneth Dapp Darrington Unit — Paul Gillette Duncan Unit — Jim Brannen Eastham Unit — Johnny L. Wooten Ellis Unit — Thomas Quinones Estelle Unit — Ervin Kay Ferguson Unit — Broderick Brown Hobby Unit — Misty Weaver Hodge Unit — Mark Garrett Hughes Unit — Toby Rod Huntsville Unit — David McKay Jester III Unit — Lucas Morgan Luther Unit — Clifford Suranofsky Lymaugh Unit — Larry A. Harris McConnell Unit — Patrick Hoza Michael Unit — Kenny Brooks Middleton Unit — Benjamin Romero Middleton Unit — Ismael Pagan Ney Unit — Alfredo Arizmendi Powledge Unit — Joshua Garrison Ramsey Unit — Paresh Patel Roach Unit — Jose Martinez Smith Unit — Roger Taylor Stevenson Unit — Landon Brook Stiles Unit — Arthur Sterns Stringfellow Unit — John Stephens Torres Unit — Stephen Unger Woodman State Jail — Kathleen Miller

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Dear Darby,

I've been in prison 18 months, and with all the weirdness of reserved dayroom seats, the "how the phone line works," the "how the dorm fan works" and how "We" decided this or that; I have but one question—who the heck is this "We"? I was going to tape this on the dayroom bulletin board, but I used my head instead and wrote to Darby! So here's the story about the elusive "We" who's decided everything for you and me:

Who is "We"? IS "WE" A HE OR A SHE? IS IT SPELLED WITH ONE "E," TWO OR THREE? OH, WAIT, IT CHANGED AFTER COUNT, YOU SEE, AND IT KNOCKED OUT YOU AND ME BECAUSE, SADLY, WE AREN'T PART OF "WE." NOW MY FRIEND'S HOME ALONE, AND I CAN'T GET TO THE PHONE UNTIL I'M TOLD BY THIS RULE-SETTING "WE." SO, WHO IS THIS ELUSIVE "WE"? FOR WE'RE ALL IN WHITE, YOU SEE. IS IT ONE, TWO OR THREE? IS IT YOU OR ME? PLEASE COME FORWARD, ALL-POWERFUL "WE," SO WE MAY PROPERLY WORSHIP THEE!

Thanks, Darby, for letting me get that off my chest. Now please excuse me so I can check with "We" and get on the phone list so I can call my friend in the free!

Just Askin' Murray Unit

Dear Askin',

Oooh-we! You've got a point, you see! There's many a "We" throughout the system, not just two or three. "We" seems to be both he and she, because "They" (We's cousin) are on every unit and facility, both men's and women's. Sometimes folks just go along because that's the way that "They" always did it. No matter what "We" or "They" say, there's always another way. Still, "We" just want to get along, so many just go along with what "They" are doing.

Dear Darby,

I've been meaning to write. In one of the last few issues of The ECHO, I don't remember which one, someone wrote about healthy choice changes in commissary. Now, I'm all for health, though I admit that I love my cookies just as much as I do items such as mackerel. But when I got to the part in the letter about decaffeinated coffee, I had to take a stand. What's the point?! Well, a few weeks later I received my Consumer Reports magazine, and it was the "Best of Health" issue. In this issue the magazine

talks about whether or not instant coffee increases cholesterol. It doesn't. The two compounds in brewed coffee that could raise cholesterol, Cafestol and Kahweol, are removed in instant coffee. That said, everyone should leave our instant, caffeinated coffee alone!

Thanks, Chad Brubaker Clements Unit

Dear Chad,

I'm with you—they can pry my coffee cup from my cold, dead hands! Still, the guy was talking about decaf coffee, not de-cholesterol coffee, so you kinda missed the point. Still, I'm with you: caffeinated coffee—good; decaf, not so much! Oh, while we're talking healthy, the Chowhound told me to tell y'all that the new no-salt seasoning is awesome! So, those of you watching your salt intake, check it out! Now, did you ever dream it would be a guy as salty as Darby offering health tips?

Dear Darby,

I imagine you have some pull there in Huntsville. Can you convince commissary to sell a tattoo fade cream like they sell in the world, like "Wrecking Balm?" I have a few tattoo regrets that I'd like to get rid of. Thanks!

Eric Roach Unit

Dear Eric,

As a matter of fact, I DO have a bit of pull with commissary—I pull that commissary bag all the way back to the house, making sure my pint of Buttered Pecan is on top so I can get to it first! If you have a suggestion on a product (and by your letter, you do,) send them an I-60 or letter. If folks see enough demand for a product, you just might see it show up on the shelves, just waiting for you to put it on your SO-7 (commissary slip). In the meantime, just say "No!" to prison tattoos—besides it being against the rules and a possible vector of infection, you just might have buyer's remorse for that rad tat!

Dear Darby,

First and foremost, thank you for your time. My name is Edward Luthi. I am in the East Texas Treatment facility. I'm a skilled writer of heartfelt poetry. I'm sending one hoping you will have time or space to share with others. I have lots more and am more than willing to share, so share if you can!

Respectfully, Edward Luthi East Texas Treatment facility

Dear Eddie,

Poetry is, by far, the most-submitted material sent to The ECHO. Almost all of it is heartfelt, at least to the authors. Some are skilled, some not so much, but they all tell an emotional tale from the author's perspective. We added your contributions

to the poetry pile, so stay tuned and keep reading—you just might make the cut and get placed in the creative corner!

Dear Darby,

I was thinking about how miserable many of us guys are when our names aren't called at mail time. Then I started thinking about how surely there are female residents going through the same thing. It occurred to me that it would be a great idea to have an inmate pen pal list of inmates, male and female, who wanted to receive correspondence from other inmates. We could encourage each other to set some educational goals, pray, and just help each other develop a fly attitude, 'ya dig? On the real, Darby, I've seen pictures of some beautiful, smart women in The ECHO who would definitely be a blessing in a man's life if he wants to fall in love with someone who shares his same struggle.

Indigent Brothers Need Love, Too, Brother Adkins

Dear Indigent Brother Adkins, So the truth finally came out at the end of your letter. This ain't about concern for the lonely, and it ain't about no education or no prayer, or any of that stuff, either. This is about you finding yourself a penitentiary princess and living happily ever after. Well, let me tell you: it don't work out the way you imagine it does. See, once upon a time, the Darbster had a female pen pal. She got out and sent me a few dollars and pictures of herself. Let's just say I'm sure she needed a clipper shave pass. 'Course that was way back when we were allowed to write other residents. This is not allowed anymore... somethin' you'd know if you weren't a drive-up with a two million number. Ya' dig?

Dear Darby,

Recently I experienced some health issues, but I was greatly helped by the medical department at the Daniels Unit. Those folks saved my life! I am eternally grateful to God, and to these medical personnel for seeing me through some very difficult times. They were truly angels for me!

A Saved Man John Doe Daniels Unit

Dear John,

God bless you for havin' an attitude of gratitude to the frontline workers in medical. They have gone above and beyond time and time again in these difficult, COVID-tainted times. We might not like being in here, but being in prison doesn't mean we don't have blessings in life, and the folks giving us medical attention are definitely one of those blessings. Thanks for YOUR thanks to those helping us who wear white!

Each month, *The ECHO* features articles from contributing writers within TDCJ, as well as from those who have been released and want to send hope and insight back inside. This page features a variety of columnists. Enjoy!

Renew your sense of purpose in 2021

Ruben Constante Jr. — ECHO Contributor, Released

“WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?” That seems to be the most popular question asked nowadays. Whether I’m scrolling through social media, engaged in conversations at work, or simply raising a 13-year-old girl, I see how prevalent the purpose talk is. And as a Bible teacher and mentor, I see how profoundly this affects us all. Recently, a Distance Mentorship Program (DMP) participant asked, “How can I find my purpose?” My answer was printed in the “Cross Counsel” section of September’s issue of our monthly newsletter. Here, I will share a portion of it. The brother had asked, “How do I find my purpose?”

“You don’t. See, the problem with ‘finding’ your purpose is it places the emphasis on your own work. It puts you in charge of finding something that is assumed to be lost. (I mean, only things that are lost can be found, right?)” I answered.

When I served my time in TDCJ, I felt for the longest time that I had to “find” my purpose, as if there was some grandiose design for my life that I had somehow lost along the way. As a result, I began to search. I wanted to find what I had lost. ...

I learned through countless trials and errors that my special task isn’t what I do in this world but who I become. We live in a highly competitive world where everyone seems to be vying for the most prestigious position or the most powerful role. Regardless of the arena, competitiveness is present, and while healthy

striving is good for discipline and growth, many times bitter rivalry creates more harm than good.

In this sense, my reason for existing may lose its true significance, because I’m too busy trying to accomplish great things which oftentimes are at the

When I served my time in TDCJ, I felt for the longest time that I had to “find” my purpose, as if there was some grandiose design for my life that I had somehow lost.

expense of being a decent human being.

For example, as I type this article at my desk, my 19-month-old son is fussing for my attention. He barges in between my legs and demands my attention. I give him some snacks and put on his favorite cartoon to keep him busy so that I can get this piece done. I’m trying to type a great article and inspire men and women behind bars; I’m trying to be a great example and fulfill some grand plan in life, but as I attempt that feat, I can easily neglect the greatest ministry I have been given: to be a good father for my son.

And that’s what real purpose is, my friends.

Purpose is being a decent person — being loving, kind, compassionate, faithful, and present. Sure, we each possess a skill set that can advance great causes, but

we must also be mindful of how quickly we can forget the mission right under our noses. (In my case, it’s an energetic boy who wants to knock down my printer!)

As we enter the new year, let’s remember that.

Let’s be modest in our quest for transformation. Let’s be humble in our search for greater things. Because as I told that DMP participant, “When we equate discovering our gifts and talents with divine purpose, then we’ve missed the point of God choosing the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God doesn’t want your talent. He wants your obedience and submission.”

In short, our gifts and talents do not determine our “purpose.” Our reason for existing is to reflect God’s image, and many times that simply means loving your neighbor as yourself. It’s not about special talents, because if we make that the standard of why we’re here, then when we can’t exercise those talents (especially as an inmate who has no control over his/her environment), and then we’ll be filled with a sense of defeat. We’ll feel worthless. When that happens, we’ll realize we weren’t truly looking for our purpose.

We were just infatuated with our skillset and wanted to show it off.

Editor’s Note: Writer Author Ruben Constante is a former member of The ECHO. He is now enjoying life in the freeworld with his family and serving others through Blueprints for Living Ministries Inc. The ECHO appreciates his continued contributions. ★

Staying positive through change

WSD implements innovative education methods

Jane Callaway, Crain Unit Reporter



Editor’s note: When Texas school closures took place in 2020 due to COVID-19 protocols, Windham School District (WSD) correctional educators began innovating new approaches to teaching within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Innovative efforts by TDCJ and WSD kept students engaged and learning—even while restricted to their dorms and cellblocks. WSD and TDCJ were able to continue supporting students via distance learning with individualized lessons, library books and a lot of encouragement. When students were able to return to classrooms, what followed next was implementation of the current hybrid model of instruction with small groups of students. Completion of courses required by the Board of Pardons and Paroles, assessments associated with Career and Technical Education (CTE) skills and certifications, literacy level advancements and High School Equivalency (HSE) exams have remained a focus throughout the pandemic. Writer Jane Callaway shared responses to these new learning models at the Crain Unit in Gatesville.

“UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, CLASS meetings are suspended.”

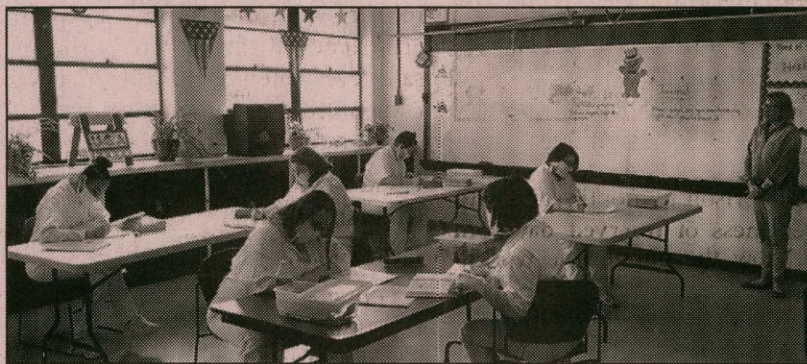
When these words were spoken at the beginning of last year’s pandemic, silence fell on classrooms of the Windham School District (WSD). COVID-19 changed our lives as residents in TDCJ to a great degree. In all of the adjustments that were implemented, however, many positive developments became evident.

At the Crain Unit, I saw a renewed vigor and dedication in our teachers to conduct remote classes through handouts and lessons delivered to cells, thereby enabling students to continue receiving their credits.

J. Brookshire, who teaches WSD’s Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) class at the unit, said that teaching remotely was a challenge and, at times, somewhat difficult as teachers were required to work from home and students were restricted to living quarters. She expressed being grateful to her students for the outstanding job they did of communicating on paper and said she missed the one-on-one interactions and camaraderie with her students. Brookshire noted the difficulty of teaching a life skills class without one-on-one approaches to the required topics. She and her students definitely made the best of a less-than-desirable situation. Both she and L. Bates, who teaches Literacy I, II and III and the Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP), said their students had done “exemplary work.”

Response to the pandemic also brought forth a stronger collaboration of WSD educators and TDCJ employees.

P. Dale, the Education & Recreation (E & R) officer at the unit, was very organized in collecting homework from the teachers and distributing it to students in a timely manner. The students turned in their work to her and she made sure the teachers received it. All



of this was made possible by the education officer, guided by WSD Principal J. Gardner.

Students shared their thoughts and observations after experiencing these new methods of learning:

- “It felt like more work, but I learned a great deal,” resident Ginger M. said. “I would have rather been in class, but I made the best of it.”
- “I grew closer to my roommates, because in CHANGES class, we had to interview other TDCJ residents and ask them very thought-provoking, insightful questions. The personal touch that Ms. Brookshire incorporated in our work made it extra special,” Jamie D. said.
- “I prefer actual class time, but I was proud of myself for accomplishing the work without the teacher present, which really enhanced my self-image. It also made me appreciate the class time that we often take for granted,” Hope B. said.
- Brookshire’s teacher’s aide, resident Alex V., observed, “I felt all the students were really digging deep. We all missed our regular routines but maintained positive outlooks. We all missed interacting with the other students.”
- “I learned how to successfully work alone and do research,” resident Dari N. said. “I would send questions to Ms. Bates and would receive

very prompt, thorough answers from her. Mr. Gardner also included “brain teasers” in our lesson packets, which really made me think. ... I feel that Windham School District is doing an outstanding job in less than great circumstances. I was glad and felt very fortunate to be in Ms. Bates’s class.”

• “I enjoyed my homework, though, I missed being in class where we have our folders and notes,” Princess W. said. “I am glad to be back in class, though, I used the time wisely in completing my homework, Ms. Bates is a good teacher — she assists us in class, intermingling with the students.”

- “The experience helped me bond with other students in the dorm to complete the homework. We bond with the teacher in class, but this offered us a different way of teaching and learning, inspiring us to really try to improve ourselves,” Crystal B. said.

Bates said, at the end of the completely suspended classes, everyone had come through this situation transformed. She remains optimistic and expressed the timely message of “staying positive.” She said the “new reality” has been hard for all concerned, but much has been learned.

Students in both classes expressed tremendous appreciation for their teachers and how they presented the school assignments when classes could not meet in person. It is obvious that both teachers have made a positive impact on their students while dealing with distance learning and new methods of instruction.

No one knows when the pandemic will end, but, until then, it is very apparent that WSD’s approach to distance learning has had a positive influence and effect on residents. Thanks for all your hard work, WSD! We may not be able to control our circumstances, but we can control our attitudes toward them. ★

In the shade of the El Camino

Iliana “Lily” Archuleta — Murray Unit
2020 writing contest non-fiction finalist

I WAS ONLY EIGHT YEARS OLD WHEN I WAS PUT IN charge of a huge business transaction. You see, I had the responsibility of acting as translator between my dad and the owner of a cotton field in Morton, Texas. This was a business deal that would potentially feed not only our family but also dozens of families. Our family mostly picked cotton, though we were fully trained to clean and pick fields that grew beets, onions, corn and watermelons as well. With this huge responsibility on my young shoulders, I knew I could not afford to mess up by misinterpreting what was said by either my dad or the cotton field owner. Apparently, my skills as a translator were up to par, because we secured the contract to clean the cotton fields of that plantation. I was so happy to see the smile of triumph on my dad’s face. Although he didn’t say it to me, I could tell he was proud of me.

This began a longstanding family practice. As the years progressed, I would translate many more negotiations and secure dozens more contracts. Even now, my father still does not speak English; I was acting

as his translator up until the moment I was sent to prison.

Whenever I close my eyes, I re-live the beautiful memories of my siblings and I sitting under the tailgate of my dad’s grey El Camino to shield ourselves from the scorching hot summer sun while we enjoyed a lunch of delicious chorizo and refried frijoles tacos. The aroma of spices and homemade tortillas had the effect of melting away the pain of callouses on our feet and sooth the ache of blisters on our chubby fingers.

My mom always made sure my dad had his chiles toreados. In my young mind, the smell of the chile toreado was the smell of power. Only a strong man like my father could eat such a chile and not break a sweat. After our meal we were always so full that we needed a siesta, which could never happen as my father was afraid it would cause us to get fired if we were found us in the fields asleep. Instead, making a joke of our painfully full bellies and sleepy eyes, my dad would point at my mother and tell us to blame her for feeding us so good.

Along with the spicy salsa and avocado we passed



among us, we also shared our cotton-pickin’ mishaps of the morning’s work. For me, it was how I always ended up with the dullest hoe which always caused my family to laugh nonstop. Surrounded by food, family and laughter, life seemed like a fiesta, one where my dad had to stay sober. Most of the counties we labored in were “dry”; buying or selling alcohol was illegal, which meant my dad, who struggled with alcoholism, was sober for five to six months of the year.

I am thankful for this chapter of my life and all of the good things that it taught me. Those blissful moments of peace made the sweat and tears worthwhile. They made us seem like a normal family, like the ones you see on T.V. with tight-knit bonds between them. And just like a television family, our peace lasted only for a season. ★

'Deerly' departed

Patrick Bentley, Dalhart Unit,
2020 Writing Contest Finalist

OF ALL THE THINGS I LOVED, I believe I cherished her the most. I could still remember her smell; remember the fond memories of when I was younger; remember back to the times we used to spend together. Once, that was all it had taken to put a smile on my face. But today, indeed today, there were no smiles—only pain and grief.

"Are you alright?" my father had asked, his words ominously falling in sync with the emergency lights dancing off Interstate 35.

I nodded, though I was certain the gesture wasn't all that convincing.

My eyes had yet to move from her broken, twisted form and the officers conversing nearby with the ambulance driver. None went to help her—that alone spoke volumes, though I had, once, desperately clung to hope.

"What happened?" they'd asked.

"A deer," I'd said, as if that explained everything—as if such could clear up the confusion I felt inside. I'd never loathed an animal more than I had at that moment.

"At least you're alright," my father had said, as if it was a small consolation... as if that just made everything better—as if it could, put her back together. Still, reality calls, and I am thrust back into the present.

"But what about her?" I spat, my tone betraying how I felt. The words came out bitter, venomous.

"Son, she's gone."

And then it hit me, all at once, the realization I had fought hard to deny for the last half-hour. Still, I had known from the moment I'd hit the shoulder, when we'd flipped—from the moment the emergency workers arrived shaking their heads... I had known.

It was an accident, but I felt the guilt as I watched the way they whispered in groups, occasionally shooting their eyes in my direction.

Yes, she was gone—and with her my childhood. Innocence was forever changed by harsh reality and ever jealous winds of change. Yes, that which I had cherished most lay in a

ditch but 10 feet away. Life wasn't fair! And so, I wept.

My father placed his hand on my shoulder, "Son, it's alright," he said, attempting to graft me into a reassuring hug. "It's just a car."

"It's not just a car!" I shouted, making a bigger spectacle of myself. "It was my car!"

"I know," he said, "I know, but we'll get you a new one." But I didn't want a new one. I wanted her, my baby—the one I had slaved four years to buy.

I watched morbidly as the tow truck scooped her up and drug her out of my life. Somehow, I knew this would be the last time I'd see her.

"Wait!" I shouted in full sprint, striving to catch up with my dreams that were riding away. "Wait!"

But he didn't; he hadn't.

The next morning, Dad drove me back out to the wreck, saying something about coming to terms and needing a clean break. I didn't really understand it then, but I knew I had lost something more than a car. Somewhere along an I-35 service road, I hit my knees in a place where so many dreams had died. Dad wept at a distance as I buried the key to my Grand Prix in the same place my



mother had died, hitting a deer 10 years earlier. It had been her car.

I'm certain life was trying to teach Dad and I something about being grateful, or perhaps, about moving on. But just like the scars in the dirt where worlds collided and dreams had spun out of control, I knew we all bear scars and none of us leave the battle unscathed. Perhaps the hardest lesson in this life is this: everything has its price. Even teardrops are not free. ★

►JUAREZ continued from pg. 1

"What made me decide to come to Windham originally wasn't some sign in the sky," Juarez says. "It was a desire for a better work/life balance. A big part of the decision was the expansion of my growing family; I was expecting my sixth child. I decided it was time for a change after teaching in the public school system for 13 years."

The challenges involved in teaching in public school versus corrections are vastly different, yet also similar. In public school, Juarez previously taught science mainly to teenagers, while in WSD she teaches adult life skills to a wide range of ages. However, she says the objective is the same in both situations.

"In public school, your job is to build students up for their future," she says, "and in the correctional system, you have to help students rebuild their future after release. The content [curriculum] is different, though. In the public school I taught science; now I teach the life skills they will need upon their release. Some of the skills we teach are positive self-talk, how to make amends in relationships, and how to handle conflict in a positive manner. We also teach students how to approach a job interview and complete a job application. Finally, we help them prepare a resume." Many other vital skills are also included in the program.

A challenge common to every educator is how to generate interest in subject matter for students. This is true of correctional educators, teachers in public schools, and even Ivy League professors. Juarez overcomes that challenge by thinking outside the box and using her creativity. When discussing behavioral issues, she says she makes up the most "unexpected, far-fetched scenarios" she can think of, often placing herself in the situation, and then asking students to identify the thinking errors she is making. Then, after they show they have a grasp of the material, she turns it back on them and asks them to consider an episode in their past where they made a poor decision—and determine what thinking errors contributed to that bad decision. More importantly, she asks how they could have handled the situation in a more positive manner with the information they have learned.

Another example of Juarez's creativity was the time she used "someone near and dear" to her students to teach the importance of managing personal finance: their mothers. She created a Mother's Day project where each student had a certain amount of money he could spend for Mother's Day, but he also had to be able to pay his bills. Using printed store circulars, she allowed her classes to practice comparison shopping for the imaginary gift for their mothers. She says that exercise showed her students how the things they were learning in the class could be applied to their lives when they return to society.

The recent acceleration of distance



R. Juarez

Photo courtesy of Windham School District.

learning due to the effects of the coronavirus was another challenge for schools worldwide. Juarez met it on behalf of WSD with her usual can-do attitude, going above and beyond what is required to succeed. In the assignment packages she sent to her students who could not attend class together, she included quotes from famous people and handwritten notes of encouragement to her students to stay positive and safe—and to also understand this was a trying time for everyone. She says that when in-person classes resumed, her students inundated her with messages of gratitude for the notes and quotes.

In the correctional system, you have to help students rebuild their future after release.

One challenge Juarez faces, however, has nothing to do with motivation, a student's age or the subject matter. She says her students often must overcome the misperception many of them form when they see a petite, 5 feet 1 inch tall teacher behind the desk the first time they walk into the classroom. It happens so often that Juarez says she can recognize it in her students' eyes. She says it goes something like this: "What can she know about drugs and alcohol?" Or, she says students assume that because she has an education, she cannot possibly understand the circumstances that led them to incarceration.

That is when she surprises them with her "I know someone who..." story. In the story, she describes a person coming from a background that most of them recognize as being similar to their own. The person she describes grew up in an impoverished neighborhood where drug use and alcoholism was rampant,

bringing social, economic and personal hardships. Finally, once she has set the scene and hooked them with the story, she reveals that she is actually the person she is describing. Juarez says this is when her students learn their first lesson in her class: that she is not simply telling them what she learned from reading books or inside a classroom; she is sharing lessons she learned from her life. She says negative experiences in her life, such as being a runaway and teenage mother, have now turned into positives. She gets to help others who may have experienced the same things that she did.

"I am a living example that there is hope," she says.

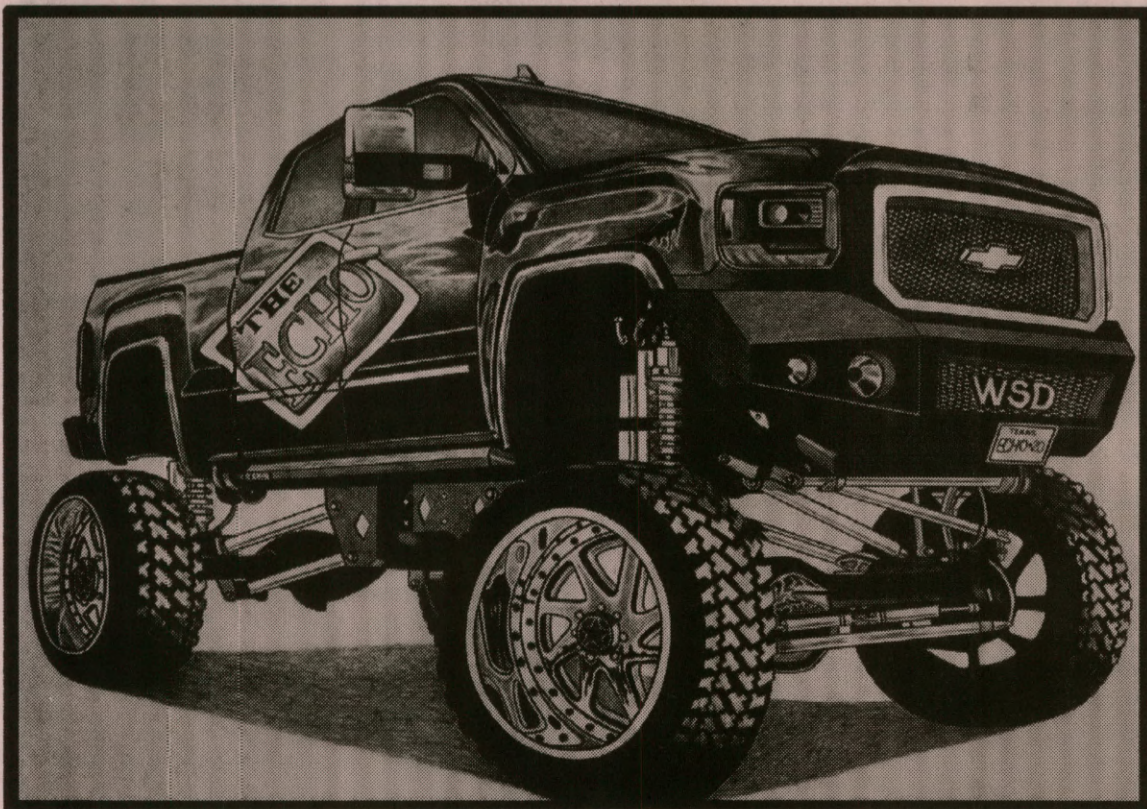
Whenever someone on the outside learns that Juarez teaches in prison, the first question she gets is, "There's a security officer in the classroom with you, isn't there?" She calmly explains that no, there is an officer nearby, but not in the room. Although officers periodically check the classroom, she is usually alone with her students. That query is quickly followed by, "Aren't you scared?" and then someone invariably asks, "Why do you do it?"

While her original reasons for joining WSD were purely pragmatic, Juarez says she stays and faces the daily challenges because she loves what she does.

"For me, I feel it is more rewarding here than teaching in public schools," she says. "Here I am able to incorporate my background. Growing up in a dysfunctional family, I thought those things shouldn't have happened to me, but now I get to use those experiences to help someone's father, help someone's son and help someone's husband change—and see some of the things that he has done—from a different viewpoint.

"I tell people on the outside: one day that student will one day be your neighbor, that student will be someone you meet at your church, that student will be an employee—and we want them to be successful. I get to reach that unreachable student... I get to show him there is grace for him if he puts in the work." ★

Editor's Note: The ECHO thanks and congratulates R. Juarez for all that she does and for being named a 2020 Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching honoree. The ECHO also salutes all of the WSD educators and staff for their dedication and hard work on behalf of TDCJ's resident population. You make a difference.



Big thanks to Amado Reyes on the LeBlanc Unit for sending us the "ECHO Truck." We have it hanging on the wall here at The ECHO central command. We appreciate the art and the chance to use the words "central command."

Protect you Protect us

The strongest protection from COVID-19 is now available to us.

A mask protects you from others. Only the vaccine protects you from the inside. When you are protected, so are those around you. Be as safe as you can be. Why risk your health when your best defense is a shot away? Don't wait. Get your shot now.



T in THIS GETHER

► FOOD continued from pg. 1



Photo courtesy of TDCJ Communications. The aquaponics farm at the Michael Unit stands out as a model for sustainable and locally grown food that could be replicated in other institutions around the world. This photo was taken before the pandemic.

Soil depletion, pesticide use and fertilizer run-off into waterways create far-reaching negative environmental effects.

Environmentalists know that improving the way we grow food is not only smart, it's necessary.

In an aquaponics system, fish and vegetables grow together using minimal space. All of the nutrients the plants require for growth are contained in the water pumped over from the fish tanks. The plants remove these nutrients as they grow, purifying the water for the fish. Neither one can grow without the other. According to aquaponic growers, the system uses 90 percent less water than traditional agriculture does and eliminates pesticides and chemical fertilizers completely. Until recently the systems were developed and improved upon by passionate backyard enthusiasts, but in recent years sustainability initiatives have made their way into prisons, where they also bring therapeutic and environmental benefits.

In addition to modelling environmentally-friendly food production, the farm is a living classroom where students acquire skills and certifications that will help them land better jobs on the outside.

Aquaponics farming is also a way to reduce recidivism and a blueprint for what institutional food systems could look like if we are willing to work toward it.

Historically, 68 percent of people released from prisons in the United States end up back behind bars within three years. This percentage is much lower in prisons that choose holistic rehabilitation and reintegration into society through skill building. Vocational training programs shift prisons closer to a rehabilitation model rather than one of harsh punishment. Research shows that equipping incarcerated people with the social, emotional and practical skills they will need after release through sustainability programs drastically reduces the number of people that return to prison.

Unlikely as it may seem, the aquaponics farm at this Texas prison stands out as a model for sustainable and locally-grown food that could be replicated in other institutions around the world. While the widespread problems within

prisons will not be solved by gardening programs, they could fulfil the dual goals of improving food sustainability and reform within the American correctional system.

Whether or not food sustainability programs like this can succeed on a larger scale depends on several factors, according to Rice University Business professor Doug Schuler, whose research includes analyzing non-profit programs that address food insecurity.

"Usually there's a confluence of social factors that make one program work in a particular context, where if you went into another context it may not work," Schuler said. Advocacy from passionate people who are respected within their

social context can make all the difference. It's not just passion that breeds success, he told me, but social standing as well.

Tommy Norris, who helped the Michael Unit program get off the ground, is one of these people. As a member of the board of the American Correctional Association sustainability committee, Norris connects prisons wanting to start green initiatives with difficult-to-find resources.

Sometimes, the money is only the beginning, though.

"You don't need huge budgets to do this kind of stuff," he told me. "What you need is the management environment and the encouragement to look at new things, be different and be creative."

The Michael Unit was lucky enough to have one of these innovators: Michael "Mac" McLeon. A former corrections officer, Mac turned in his uniform to transition into his current role as the urban farming instructor through the Windham School District, which offers educational programs exclusively for incarcerated people in prisons across Texas. He developed the course, drafted teaching materials and coordinated lessons that are now being shared with other prisons that want to replicate his model.

"This is by far the best job I've had in my life," he says.

The coronavirus pandemic has spread through the Michael Unit and access to visitors has been curtailed. The aquaponics program briefly halted growing but restarted in the summer with social distancing and has increased production.

The voluntary course is different from other training program. Maria Hinajosa, a correctional officer who ran Herbs Behind Bars, told CBS 19 in Tyler, "I have a lot of offenders who walk up to me and they want to come work for me." The students are not paid for the work, and the vegetables are not sold by the prison. As a vocational training program, they receive certifications and job skills.

Each morning the students gather in the classroom to discuss the scientific principles that underpin their observations on the farm before heading out into the fresh air to tend to the system. The students check leaves for insects and disease, balance the nutrient levels in the water and sprinkle fish food into the tanks.

"It's not digging a hole and dropping a seedling in. This is a little bit more like freshman chemistry class," Norris said. These guys that would never give a minute's thought to sitting in a classroom and learning about the pH composition of soil and water are now sitting around taking notes on it."

Behind the lush greenery of the garden, chain-link fences stretch as far as the eye can see in photographs and reports from before the pandemic. But

I never expected to find an innovative, sustainable food system growing within prison walls. ...

inside the aquaponics farm is an oasis; a small green sanctuary for anyone who pours energy and care into the living system. Each piece that went into the first iteration of the system was either donated by the corrections officers themselves, or salvaged, including the first fish tank — an old bathtub found in a junkyard.

In addition to the therapeutic and health benefits for the residents, the program also serves the community that the residents will eventually reenter. When Hurricane Harvey hit, the vegetables from the farm fed survivors. Now, during the pandemic, their produce goes to homeless shelters and food banks.

For the many "lifers" at the Michael Unit who will live out their remaining days behind bars, this farm creates purpose and a way to contribute to society. For those who one day will rejoin the free world, this visionary sustainable food system may do even more: it can provide skills, build self-esteem and foster entrepreneurship for a group of people who would otherwise lack opportunity.

Brian Bedilion was involved with an aquaponics gardening program much like the one in Texas when he was incarcerated in Washington state. Dealing with a lifetime of undiagnosed vision impairment that left him with only peripheral vision,



Photo courtesy of TDCJ Communications. The aquaponics farm at the Michael Unit is a living classroom where students acquire skills and certifications that will help them land better jobs on the outside. This photo was taken before the pandemic.

Bedilion never received the support he needed to succeed in school. Self-medicating with drugs from a young age, he eventually ended up in prison with a nine-year sentence.

"I had nothing. I failed at everything I tried to do while I was locked up. I couldn't see, I couldn't read, I couldn't write," he told me on the phone.

Without the ability to read books as an escape, Bedilion stared at the prison wall and languished. His experience changed when he found the aquaponics program that focused on environmental restoration; "it was what saved me." For Bedilion, the program instilled a brand-new sense of confidence and provided an outlet for the difficult emotions he was dealing with.

"You really channel all that crap you're going through on the inside into a purpose," he said.

Once released, he was able to get full-time work and support himself for the first time in his life.

"When I came home I was very overwhelmed. I was destined to go back to drugs," he says. "The life skills that I learned in the program absolutely saved me."

I never expected to find an innovative, sustainable food system growing within prison walls, but the story of the Michael Unit farm is a hopeful one. Successful urban farming initiatives do not require exorbitant amounts of funding, and the tangible benefits these programs can provide for incarcerated people and the wider community are indisputable. To work toward a safer and more sustainable world, prisons across the country should embrace these programs as therapeutic and environmental agents of institutional change. ★

Simke is a Forbes science contributor and freelance writer. This article was updated Friday, Nov. 27, 2020, with additional information.

► BUZZ continued from pg. 1

This increase is evident on the Scott Unit, which experienced an increase in harvested yellow squash for cannery production from 2,000 pounds per acre to approximately 5,800 pounds per acre the year after using bee colonies. ALM's use of the bee colonies has made a distinct improvement in their crop production despite a worldwide dwindling bee population and that effect on global yields.

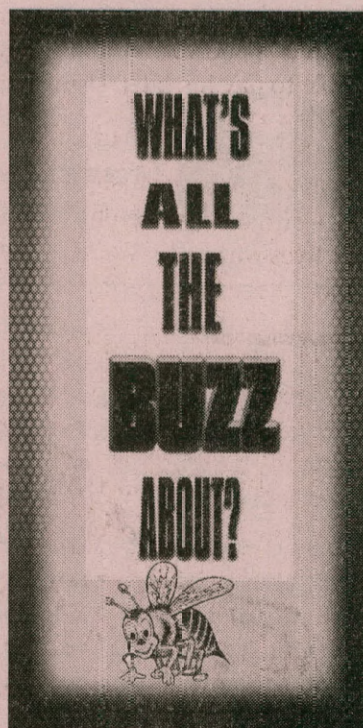
The number of hives per farm depends on the size of the operation. A colony consists of a queen bee plus 10,000 to 15,000 worker bees that gather pollen and nectar while pollinating plants. The apiaries (colonies or hives) program has grown to retain 121 active colonies out of 144 total bee boxes across the 13 units. Every year some colonies leave as other queen bees claim the territory, removing the defeated queens and respective hives. ALM staff continue to collect wild hives and re-populate the vacated boxes.

Pollination of the crops is the main reason for keeping bees, but honey is another benefit. The honey is harvested and provided to the TDCJ's food service department where it is used in meals served in TDCJ units throughout Texas. Since 2015, a total of 3,909 pounds of honey has been produced, with the highest yield in 2019 at 1,188 pounds. There are expectations of continued growth in the coming years. TDCJ's honeybees are found at the Briscoe, Coffield, Daniel, Darrington, Eastham and Ellis units. They are also located at the Ferguson, Hilltop, Hobby, Pack, Ramsey, Scott and Wynne units.

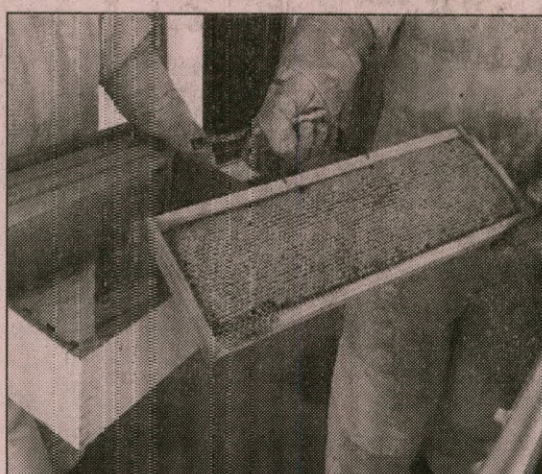
Another added benefit to ALM's beekeeping project is that staff members who oversee the bee program at the farms are able to teach offenders the skill of beekeeping. This is one more way that the TDCJ strives to reduce recidivism by offering programs to help residents learn skills that can be used when re-entering society.

Bees are important for the overall health of the environment and the ecosystem. They improve ALM fields due to added pollination, with the added benefit of giving residents the chance to learn valuable skills that will last a lifetime. ★

Thank you to TDCJ's Department of Agribusiness, Land and Minerals, part of the Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics (MAL) Division.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TDCJ



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TDCJ



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TDCJ

THE ECHO HAS BEEN GETTING A BIT OF mail on this working in prison topic—who would have thought? Clearly it's a large part of life here, and we all have an opinion, one way or another. We've had some folks express they thought we might be fabricating stories (in an earlier issue) of guys sitting up late at night, trying to figure out solutions to problems they encounter during the day. Not so; we have seen it many times. Now we're not suggesting your entire life be consumed with work and thoughts of work. That's why we call it work-life balance.

Now there are some among us who are fortunate enough to turn their hobbies into a full time job, in here as well as out there. One of our neighbors works in a wood shop here at one of the Texas Correctional Industries (TCI) plants. He said that he has a wood

WORKING IN PRISON

Resident readers on this page respond to The ECHO's "Working in Prison" feature (October, 2020), which examined the benefits of jobs for residents in TDCJ. The article suggested that workers may fall into one of two camps: those who feel they are "working for the man" and those who feel they are ultimately working for themselves, building job skills and experience. Readers were then invited to describe their own jobs, work experiences and work-related opinions. We have published some of the letters and responses. Contributions may have been edited for clarity or brevity.

shop in his garage out in the freeworld. You can't beat that. It certainly helps pass the time and keep skills sharp.

We have noticed a lot of welders have written in, and so far, all have said they like their jobs. We are kind of curious. No one mentioned whether they learned the trade here in TDCJ or if it was something learned in the world. Anyway, we appreciate everyone's comments. As you might expect, the view ranges from one end of the spectrum to the other; it's about the same as in the world. As long as we keep hearing from you on the subject, guess we'll keep the conversation going. We read all the letters—sometimes more than once. We don't have room to print entire letters—yet. Some are definitely worth printing in entirety; there are some pretty good writers out there. So: you want a job?



TIANA RYDER
CRAIN UNIT

Hey, ECHO!—you men aren't the only ones that enjoy their work life schedule! I'm a cook, and I love what I do—maybe not necessarily getting up at 2 a.m. for work that starts at 3 a.m., but still. I know getting out into the world (job wise) will be tough, so I take it in stride. As you said, it's "staying in shape" for what's to come. Every day is a new challenge ... but people have to be fed. I am fortunate to work with some great co-workers that take pride in what we make for others. It gives me a sense of purpose. ... I'll take these teamwork and communication skills to the construction industry, whether it's pipe-fitting (what I once did) or electrical, a trade I learned while here. Either way, every day is training day, and I'll see you in the chow hall!



LAVOY WOODS
WYNNE UNIT

I read your article and was delighted to see that someone shares the same idealistic values I was taught early in life: "Not all value is measured in dollars." My job here at the Wynne Unit is the "brass man"—I clean and shine. My dad used to say, "Find a job you like doing, and you'll never work a day in your life." I realized early on I liked shining things. I've buffed floors to a shine so slick you could skate in your socks and think the floor wet. I like my job as the brass man; I make things look like gold!

Since the pandemic I have not been out much due to limited movement, but the values of work are still in me. They were also instilled in me years ago by an old man shining shoes named Mr. Whistler. In 2004 Mr. Whistler died at the age of 88. At his funeral I went up to his casket and pulled out my handkerchief and wiped off his shoes.



WILL MOSELEY
RAMSEY UNIT

When it comes to working in prison [for me] it never came down to working for the man, I just knew in order to keep myself sane I needed to get a job, and not just any job.

I had heard stories of people making the most of their time working for this entity (I knew nothing of at the time) called Texas Corrections Industries (TCI). I have a degree in video production from The Art Institute of Dallas. The ECHO posted a job bulletin saying the Wynne Unit needed a graphic designer at the Sticker Plant (which is part of TCI). All you had to do was submit an I-60 through the mail. Well, I made a resume and sent my qualifications and work experience to them on an I-60—not thinking I'd ever hear anything back. Two weeks later, I got a truck mail envelope stating I had been selected for the job advertised in The ECHO. I was ecstatic. I knew that I would finally be doing something that I was good at, and most importantly, I would be

around a bunch of like-minded individuals with the same goal of rehabilitation.

Update on me now: I'm at the Ramsey Unit in Rosharon as an accountant at the Ramsey Furniture Factory. As long as I'm a resident in TDCJ, I plan to work for TCI in some form or capacity. So far I've earned a few OJTs since I've been here in: Accounting, General Clerk, and Computer Operator. Everyone in TDCJ does their time differently, and I know this. But if you want to do something productive with your time and get sought-after work experience with no lapse in work history on your resume, you can do it within these walls. It's happening all around you.



JANELLE PETERKIN
HOBBY UNIT

Hello, my name is Janelle Peterkin. I'm interested in adding my two cents to the "Working in Prison" discussion. I have been a dorm janitor/SSI for the majority of the three years I have been incarcerated. I would like to say I fall into the "don't feel like sitting around all day doing nothing camp." I've worked in many different places as an SSI, the infirmary being my favorite. I am now assigned to my dorm, and being that we are in the fight of our lives with COVID-19, I would consider an SSI to be an "essential worker."

I don't think people realize how many germs are floating around on the phones, benches and doors—and the shower area. It's up to us to sanitize these areas after every use—not to mention the trash that gets left in the back of the bench or under the stools. Yep, don't worry—we find it all.

My duties never end and, I'm currently in the habit of telling my son during our calls to wash his hands and wear his mask. A job, no matter how insignificant, is what you make of it. I'm a proud SSI, and I think positive!



JOSHUA GARRISON
POWLEDGE UNIT

I came to prison with zero work skills! Back then I couldn't recognize seven tools in a tool box. I'd never torn apart a lawnmower or lifted the hood on a vehicle. It was so bad, in fact, that I'd once run a car out of oil and thought we could go to the local gas station and get more and we'd be good. So when I had a chance at a job in the boiler room on Ferguson in 2005, I was hesitant, to say the least. Little did I know that taking that job would change the trajectory of my life.

Taking on a new job can always feel a bit intimidating. This is especially true when you are entering a field in which you have very little knowledge—and even less experience. So I took my first steps into that massive boiler room with pipes and conduit going every which direction, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't somewhat intimidated. As months turned into years, and that initial SSI spot converted from cleaning to repairing to running the plant operations, it became clear that I discovered something I didn't know about before: I had a real talent for troubleshooting and repairing equipment and machines.

Of course, as life tends to do, gradually I shifted from being a Boiler Room Operator into my field of choice. I have now been an HVAC tech for the unit maintenance department for over 10 years now—and I have never enjoyed what I do more. My skills now include a broad spectrum of talents, from ice machines to residential split systems, walk-in coolers to commercial grade chiller systems. Working for TDCJ has allowed me to learn endless real world skills I didn't have when I entered the system. The opportunities for learning are endless. TDCJ is also providing many trades and apprenticeship programs which allow us to document real world work hours with the Department of Labor for closing those gaps in our employment history.

In the end, you may find that the only limitations you have are the ones you place on yourself. That was certainly true for me



HAROLD CHRISTENSEN
POWLEDGE UNIT

I came to the Powledge Unit in Palestine to take college welding. While here I went to work in the hydraulics department at TCI Metal Fab. I can't tell you how many times people tell me, "There ain't no way I'm working for the man for free!" My response is, "I'm working for me, not him." The man didn't put me in here; I put me in here. However, the man has presented us with opportunity to help ourselves—and I thank God every day for it!

I enjoy being around like-minded people out at TCI. We take our jobs seriously, and we take great pride in everything we do. At Powledge Unit TCI, we build dump-trucks for TEXDOT. In five years, my co-workers and I have built well more than 500 dump-trucks, and we all think they are the best in Texas—or anywhere for that matter!



JOHN MEYER
WYNNE UNIT

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of working in prison is the opportunity it gives to those that seek to have a valid job when they get out. Many of us that come from the streets have no idea what it is to have a job; therefore, we have no work ethic to begin with. So when we get assigned to these jobs in prison, we become overwhelmed with the responsibility set before us. Yet while some are overwhelmed, others see opportunity: an opportunity to upgrade a work resume or gain knowledge in a foreign field. The ultimate goal for them is to develop these skills into being asset-worthy and earning a respectable job once released. On the other side of the spectrum, there is the notorious dayroom king of the block. You know him: the loud, obnoxious guy with a seat in front of the TV, slandering all who work.

So my question is to all who are willing to even read this far into this article: What are you doing right now to better prepare yourself for that inevitable interview? Will you be the Swiss Army knife at the job interview—or the dayroom king waiting for the phone call that never comes? Working in prison—yeah, I like my chances.★

the Echo Celebrates BLACK HISTORY month

THE CROWD GATHERED IN THE POSH UPTOWN GALLERY stared with expressions that ranged from disdain to keen interest to shock. Who could blame them? The paintings were, after all...different. Humanoid figures were depicted with limbs that were twisted in unnatural positions with simple lines used to depict internal organs. What looked like football helmet grills stood in for mouths ...

Prolific; profound; primitive: these are terms used to describe the art of a man named Jean-Michel Basquiat. He was born in Brooklyn on Dec. 22, 1960, to a Puerto Rican mother and a Haitian-born father. By the age of 10, he had been seduced by the muse to create images of the world around him. Thus began an incredible art career that would see many peaks and valleys of creative highs and emotional lows.

Possessed of a mind that processed reality differently than others, Basquiat had a radically nonconformist perspective on not just art, but life in general. This was illustrated by his throwing a cream pie in his principal's face before dropping out of high school in 1978. But by the next year he was well known in the downtown art scene. Spraying the graffiti tag "SAMO" everywhere on the streets of New York was how Basquiat made the world aware of his presence.

He quickly gravitated to a type of painting called neo-expressionism, a style that depicts portrayals of mythology, the human form and everyday objects. Done in an intentionally primitive (some would say childlike) manner, neo-expressionism does not concern itself with rendering perfect images. Like the graffiti he spent so much time doing early in his career, Basquiat's paintings combined puzzling words and shocking images.

"My three-year old can do that," snickered one patron with a sniff of her wine, the beady eyes of her mink twinkling with the reflected lighting of the gallery.

"I guess artists don't have to have real talent these days," was the dry critique of a man with bone white hair and elbow patches on his coat.

After examining one of the paintings from top to base, a young woman stood up and declared, "Well, I find it brilliant. The violent strokes of color are so moving, so visceral, even more so the closer you get."

"Uh-huh. I wonder if this guy could even actually draw," her boyfriend said with a glance at his watch.

The hip-hop community has embraced Basquiat. Jay-Z, in his book "Decoded", states that Basquiat is his favorite artist, and producer Swizz Beats has a portrait tattoo of Basquiat on his arm. Rappers probably relate to Basquiat for several reasons: he found

Finding Basquiat

Bryan J. Moore — ECHO Staff

Reprinted and updated from The ECHO (2014)

celebrity after a hard life on the streets; he was a drug addict and he was a "playa".

Basquiat became a virtual rock star of the art world, appearing in the music video for Blondie's "Rapture" and was part of his own short-lived band called "Gray" in 1979. He developed close friendships with fellow artists Keith Haring and Andy Warhol, doing many collaborative works with the latter of the two, a famed pop artist.

Basquiat had numerous lovers, attracting many women with his unique personality, odd looks and rebellious nature. Not even the Material Girl herself, Madonna, could resist the eccentric artist. One of Basquiat's former girlfriends, Alexis Adler, is cataloging art he left behind in the apartment the two shared 25 years ago, a collection that consists of paintings, postcards, drawings and notebooks. That makes a lot of sense because these days it's art buyers who find Basquiat most attractive.

Each May, Christie's, a high-end auction house, holds its Contemporary Art Auction. In May of 2002, Basquiat's Profit I, done in 1982, was sold by Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich for \$5.5 million. In May of 2007, Untitled (fallen angel), painted in 1981, sold for \$11.2 million and as of this May, Basquiat's painting "Dust-heads" sold for close to \$49 million.

"Yes, I can draw." The man appeared out of nowhere. Long dreadlocks erupted in a cartoonish manner from all sides of his head. The tail of his button-up shirt draped over a pair of rumpled black slacks. He took confident strides towards the group in his paint splattered boots. His eyes had a piercing, Rasputin-like quality about them. "If you want photo realism, take a picture. My aim is conveying dreams, what words lack the depth to say.

"Here is a human soul crying." The man's chocolate fingers were spread delicately an inch above the canvas of a painting. His tone was gentle, like a kind teacher instructing a very young pupil. "The soul wants to be connected to something far greater than the common existence. It desires transcendence, which comes after a struggle that most are too fearful to undertake." He leaned toward the woman with the fur coat, his brown eyes practically luminous. "I'm depicting a formless thing that many people cannot comprehend. Can you see that?"

The fact that his paintings are now worth millions means that Basquiat has "made it". The poor boy of Haitian descent is now in a league with famed artists like Van Gogh, Picasso and Salvador Dali. He nonetheless was a troubled individual, as many great artists are. His mother was committed to a mental institution when he was 10 or 11 and was in and out of them for the rest of her life, a source of distress for the artist. Also, throughout his adult life, a source of major concern for those

who were close to Basquiat was his heroin addiction, a condition enabled by his quick rise to fame and which worsened after Warhol's death in 1987.

Sadly, Basquiat made it in a far more tragic sense; he died of a heroin overdose in 1988, joining pop culture icons such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Kurt Cobain in that heartbreaking, gone-too-soon collective known as the "27 Club." Basquiat got caught up in the freewheeling, selfish and indulgent vortex that was the 80s, his life becoming one of innumerable, vivid cautionary tales about the perils of drug addiction and the evils of excess. To cement his celebrity, there was a biopic about Basquiat by Julian Schnabel released in 1996. This solid effort to render his life's events on film starred actor Jeffery Wright as Basquiat and the late David Bowie portrayed Andy Warhol.

No film could ever really capture Basquiat's take on life. He viewed the everyday through a lens that penetrated the veil of the commonplace and he used his unique insight to create images that expressed the subjective, the fantastic and the bizarre. That is Basquiat's artistic legacy.

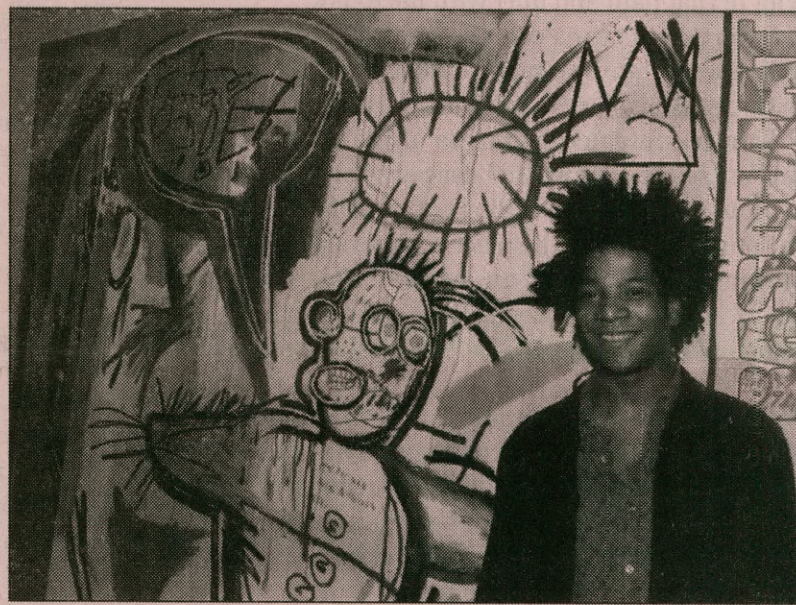
"Yes, yes I do see it... I thought those were just random splashes, but they're tears; his soul is crying," she gasped. "That's incredible."

Basquiat smiled a crooked smile. "Now you're getting it." He stepped towards one of his paintings ...and then stepped into it, disappearing amidst the skewed lines and patches of color.

The woman looked at her glass of wine and back at the painting. The man with the elbow patches ran a hand through his white hair distractedly. The young couple looked at each other with bewildered expressions. The group parted moments later without a word to each other, none of them believing what they had just witnessed, but knowing it was real just the same. ★

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SOUL SEARCHING WITH MARY J. BLIGE

John Walter Flagg — ECHO Staff

Reprinted and updated from The ECHO (2015)

MUSIC IS OFTEN CALLED THE "LANGUAGE OF THE SOUL." Melodies can spring from painful memories, and lyrics can be drawn from unfortunate experiences. R & B diva Mary J. Blige speaks this language fluently, and through her soulful sound, she has connected with audiences from around the world.

Mary Jane Blige — singer, songwriter, model, record producer and actress — is the recipient of nine Grammy awards, in addition to receiving a record 31 Grammy nominations. She has sold more than 90 million albums in the United States and 45 million singles worldwide. Her debut album, "My Life" (1992), is considered among the greatest albums ever recorded, according to Rolling Stone, Time and Vibe magazines. She has also earned high marks for her work in film. She starred in the 2009 Tyler Perry box-office hit "I Can Do Bad All by Myself" and played a role in the Tom Cruise movie "Rock of Ages" (2012), adding more roles and appearances in recent years. She received a Golden Globe Award for her musical contribution for the soundtrack to the film "The Help."



Mary J. Blige
 Posing for photographer
 Marcus Klinke
 Oct. 6 2007

Called the "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul", Blige is credited with influencing the musical marriage between hip-hop and R&B. However, Blige's personal story is no fairy tale. She has led a challenging and complicated life. The anguish heard in her voice is powerfully felt because it is terribly real. Growing up among the harsh struggles of poverty and misfortune, Blige immersed

herself in the joyful distraction which music provided. She found inspiration from Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Chaka Khan and Patti LaBelle. Each of these musical artists had a profound impact on her musical development and her future gritty, urban style.

Blige was taught to sing by her father, who was an accomplished musician in his own right. Sadly, her father abandoned Blige and her family when she was just five years old.

Adding to the tragedy, Blige was abused by a family friend when she was very young. The fear, pain and shame brought on by this early trauma instilled anti-social behavior in Blige, who later dropped out of high school. Destructive relationships dominated her life, leading Blige to find solace in the wrong type of crowd. She struggled with her turmoil for many years and turned to drugs and alcohol to ease the chaos raging inside of her.

If opportunity isn't knocking, then its time to build a door to the future with one's own hands.

Yet amid all of this heartbreaking tragedy and self-destruction, Blige found the courage to open her eyes to new possibilities. She was tired of wasting her life — tired of being stepped on, looking to drugs and alcohol as the answer to her problems and pain, and tired of making bad decisions.

At last, Blige reached a turning point. She finally found the voice to say: Enough! From that day forward Blige's life took on new meaning. She learned how to heal, and she brought what healed her out into the open to share with the entire world: which was her music. This music and her undeniable talent also gave her a spotlight to encourage others overcoming personal struggles.

"Mary J. Blige is not only the 'Queen of Hip-Hop Soul,' but also a guiding light," said Marilyn Bergman, president of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). "Through all of her struggles, she was determined to find and maintain her own musical voice."

Blige received a Legends Award at the World Music

Awards in 2006, and the Voice of Music Award from ASCAP in 2007.

Many residents of TDCJ have also faced daunting circumstances, such as social or economic disadvantages and physical or emotional abuse. It may be hard for individuals to stop incarceration from locking them in place and halting the pursuit of their dreams, yet incarceration is not the end. TDCJ residents have unlimited possibilities to change themselves and improve their situations at any given moment. In many cases, residents become their own opposition, their own worst enemy: self-doubt, procrastination, and negativity snatch away forward momentum.

Success stories like that of Blige prove success can be obtained despite life obstacles. To make the best of one's circumstances, residents urgently need to embrace a richer concept of their personal abilities. When people are doing things they love and are naturally good at, they are much more likely to be centered in their true sense of self. When Mary J. Blige takes the stage, it is obvious that she is in her element, because a sense of freedom and authenticity resounds in her voice. Finding one's niche or calling provides the sense that one is doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing and being exactly who they are supposed to be. By taking into account one's existing abilities, residents can discover that they, too, have transferable skills that will follow them when they walk outside of the prison walls, ultimately building a positive life.

There has to be a reason to get up in the morning. There has to be a reason to keep on moving forward. For Mary J. Blige, it was her music. Residents must ask themselves: what will be my turning point? What will awaken my hidden potential? What will force me to know that I have made enough negative choices and had enough negative results? If residents find that opportunity isn't knocking, then it is time to build a door to the future with one's own hands, like Blige did. She reveals that today's possibilities erase yesterday's failures, and she continues to inspire and lead fans to marvel at the wonders of human potential.

"There's so many things that life is, and no matter how many breakthroughs, trials will exist and we're going to get through it," Blige said in a popular quote. "Just be strong." ★

► **LEE COLLEGE PRESIDENT** continued from pg. 1

In January 2020, Villanueva took the helm of Lee College and made her first visits to classrooms within the prison system. She indicates she is surprised to find herself in this role, but she also knows she has a lot to offer to secondary students—especially those in TDCJ.

"I didn't grow up thinking that I was going to be a college president; no one even said that I was going to be a very serious professional," she says. "But there were those along the way who believed in me and kept pushing me to fight for the dreams that I had for myself. I am very grateful for those mentors."

Although she holds a doctor of philosophy degree in industrial/organizational psychology, a master of arts in psychology, and a bachelor of science in psychology, Villanueva did not have an unobstructed path to success. With great sincerity and wit, Villanueva shares her personal story, which may resonate with those who also struggle with personal wounds. Her message to residents in the TDCJ offers hope for all who have had a difficult past and want to heal.

Afraid of the dark

"I don't know what it's like to be in prison, but I do know what it's like to hurt," Villanueva says. "I know what it's like to struggle and overcome hardships and disadvantages."

As a victim of abuse and trauma during childhood, Villanueva says she relates to others who have had similar experiences, and she encourages other victims not to be ashamed of their pasts. Her parents' divorce and the marriage of her mother to an alcoholic and abusive man created an environment in which she became a victim—and also an overcomer.

"I didn't talk about my own painful experiences for a long, long time," Villanueva says. "Then I finally realized that I should never be ashamed—and this is to all of the women and men who have been abused: it is not our fault. We have no reason to be ashamed. It was a lot to have to overcome, and in many ways I still carry a lot of that pain and hurt with me today."

Poverty was also a central concern for the young Villanueva's family, and economic hardships came with devastating results. But even at a young age Villanueva revealed glimmers of the strength and self-possession she would later carry into adulthood.

"At 10 years old I was filling out job applications for my mother, trying to help her secure very low wage-earning jobs. We didn't always have enough food to eat at night, and we would go to sleep hungry," she remembers.

Early on, Villanueva recognized how choices and consequences play a large role in future lives, and she began aligning her thinking and behavior with values of perseverance and inner fortitude. She was also looking out for her younger brother.

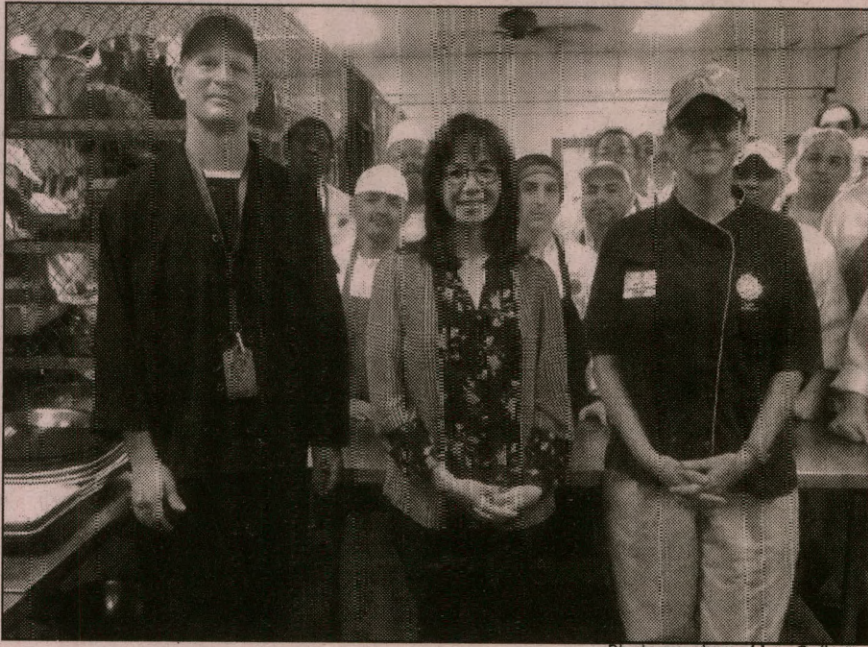
"Part of my journey was also taking care of my little brother, who is three years younger than I am. He, too, is a victim of my step-father's abuse. My brother wound up getting in a lot of trouble and joined a gang. At one point I took on the guardianship of him while I was in college and he was still in high school," she says, "but there were so many times when all we had was each other. Today, however, I am happy to report that my brother is an officer in the United States Navy and married to a wonderful woman—with a beautiful son."

The safe place

Learning to dissect her painful experiences was a difficult step, but it helped Villanueva reframe her mental and emotional world—ultimately enabling her to transform grief and shame into opportunities for growth. Education became her sanctuary.

"The one place that I felt safe—the only place that I could dream—was when I was in school," Villanueva says.

At first, the young girl fell behind academically, but educators were there to provide guidance and reassurance that kept her firmly on a positive path. The thrill of learning and reading expansive literature opened up whole worlds of possibilities,



Dr. Villanueva visits Lee College students and instructors at TDCJ in Huntsville. Photo taken before pandemic. Photo courtesy of Lee College.

allowing her to visualize a better, brighter future.

"School allowed me to escape the very negative circumstances I had—if not physically, then at least in my mind," Villanueva says. "I just knew there was a world of education that I wanted to be a part of, and a voice inside of me that I wanted to share with others."

After years of self-discipline and purpose-driven focus, Villanueva overcame her fears. She realized that she could craft exactly the life she wanted—one that adhered to her values and beliefs.

"We can stop the message that only 'some people' are capable of succeeding or have the right to be successful. Anytime we can stop that narrative, we must. Because we can all succeed," she says.

Even the worst circumstances are possible to overcome, because there is hope, there is always hope.

Most recently Villanueva has served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Dean of Instruction at Brazosport College in Lake Jackson, Texas. Aligning her choices and actions with the vision of the life she wanted, Villanueva found the will to succeed.

"If people see themselves in me and that encourages them to keep trying and to work harder and to keep fighting for their dreams, then that is why I share my story," she says.

Leaning in during the pandemic

Just months after Villanueva's appointment as Lee College president, the world was abruptly crippled by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The challenges of disrupted routines, short-circuited classrooms, and delayed academic experiences have posed a tremendous challenge to education professionals, including those at Lee College. Villanueva's poise and steadfastness helped her respond to these unprecedented times.

"I always tell people to never waste a crisis. We should ask, 'What can we learn from it? How can we help?'" Villanueva says. "At Lee College, we basically leaned into this and did our best to ensure that our students will not have to sacrifice their academic or vocational goals."

As a college president, Villanueva has discovered new ways to reach out and be relevant to the students and community in this time of uncertainty.

"We did a survey and asked about basic needs, and what I found was that 30 percent of our students had major unmet needs: they didn't know where their next meal was going to come from, they couldn't pay rent, they were worried about child care, and they didn't know if they were going to have a safe place to live. As their college's president, I made sure they had everything they needed," Villanueva says. "My biggest concern is the health and welfare of our students. It is a great challenge, but our students are worth it."

In a move that was timely and critical, Lee College offered free tuition to the freeworld student population that was mostly at risk. The school also

provided funds to freeworld students during the pandemic, thanks to Federal CARES Act funds and Lee College Foundation funds.

"We were worried that 50 percent of our student population would delay their goals in education, so we innovated around the pandemic," Villanueva says. "If they were hurt, we wanted to help—we don't want students to postpone their educational goals."

The president says an ideal student experience involves everything from students having excellent instructors in class who inspire engaging discussions, to students receiving help to establish careers post-release. These are also goals for Lee College students within TDCJ, so the college plays an intentional role in helping a varied student body prepare for future employment.

"Lee College is currently endeavoring to deepen its relationship with workforce and industry partners while expanding programs in the areas of logistics, transportation, cybersecurity and healthcare," she says.

By modifying lessons and subject matter to meet the needs of students in the freeworld and also in the TDCJ, Lee College weds technology with inventiveness and perseverance, shaping an engaging and inspirational student experience. This effort supported 2020's evolution of distance learning strategies.

"What we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to being resilient, is that we had a lot of opportunities to enhance our distance learning and distance teaching strategies," she says. "We knew we couldn't hold classes for quite some time, so we sought ways to deliver the curriculum that would maintain a level of depth and detail for all students. The pandemic has taught us that education is not something that just happens in a brick and mortar organization—it can happen anywhere we choose."

However, as Villanueva observes, none of this would have been possible without her colleagues at Lee College.

"I work with amazing and resilient colleagues who are on the frontline: faculty and staff. They are the quiet forces behind the innovative instruction. They are the people courageous enough to bring instruction to fruition," she says.

Villanueva's work has never felt more urgent, and her approach and commitment to serve all students regardless of their background is grounded in open-mindedness and compassion. She offers a blueprint to change the status quo.

"My core values start with the belief that students come first. When they are in our classroom and they do not feel safe, then that means we have work to do to correct that. We will not tolerate racism or discrimination; that has no place at Lee College or anywhere in society," Villanueva says. "I am particularly interested in serving those most underserved—and what I mean by that is people of color, people who are disadvantaged, people who ordinarily would not have the opportunity to go to college, and people who are currently incarcerated."

Villanueva is proud of leading the charge in preparing Lee College's diverse student body for successful entry into the workforce and a variety of in-demand careers.

"My greatest reward is that I can influence someone positively, and it is important to make even a small difference in improving the quality of life for other people. Although I am supposed to be inspiring students, every day they are inspiring me. They matter. I get up every day with the hope that I can make the world a better place for students. Even the worst circumstances are possible to overcome because there is hope—there is always hope."★

Accredited by the Commission of the Southern Association of College and Schools, and approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency, Lee College is proud to serve more than 8,000 students and awards dozens of associate degrees and certificate programs, along with non-credit workforce community education courses.

► **WALKER** continued from pg. 1

Then the day came when she discovered Windham's Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses—and everything changed.

"Getting into Windham's electrical class was by far the best decision of my life. It has given me a future and hope for a brighter, more meaningful and purposeful life," Walker says.

She finished the electrical class with high honors, and was assigned to the class afterwards as a teacher's aide. Always seeking to expand her horizons, Walker transitioned to the unit maintenance department where she worked as an electrician. An apprenticeship training component coordinated with WSD began at that stage, and information about future opportunities was made available to her.

"I learned about the apprenticeship program when an FSG representative came to speak at the prison and said they hire former TDCJ residents. I submitted my application to FSG right when I got out," Walker says.

Although Walker was released from the TDCJ before she could receive her apprenticeship credentials, she neither lost hope nor her bearings—she stayed the course, and relied upon Windham to help navigate the work world.

Walker's persistence and hard work paid off, and she was astounded at how quickly a job interview was

granted. She said she was extremely impressed with how understanding her new employer was of her situation.

"It is absolutely amazing how well Windham and FSG work together," she says. "The gentlemen that interviewed me already knew where I was coming from and were familiar with the programs I had taken. FSG gave me as much time as I needed to get my ducks in

You never know what opportunities are available to you unless you take that first step.

a row—such as getting my apartment, driver's license and truck. They told me when I was ready to work, call them—my job would be waiting on me."

Apart from her new career, Walker continues pursuing an apprenticeship with FSG. This challenge requires squeezing in weekly classes and study time between long hours at work. She says she is determined to achieve her credentials.

Career-focused and empowered by a respectable trade craft, Walker is amazed at her good fortune and all of the rewards it brings. However, they are not just of the monetary variety, as she explains:

"I love working with my hands. There is nothing like looking back at the end of the day and seeing what you made, or driving by a house and knowing that you installed the lighting in it—nothing can be more rewarding to me."

Her employers at FSG have taken notice of Walker's determination, skill and integrity recently promoting her to a managerial position.

Walker credits her family support system for keeping her motivated and on track throughout the process of making positive life changes.

"It's extremely important to have a good support system to back you in what you do," she says. "Mine has been there for me throughout this whole thing. When I fell short or got discouraged, family was there to pick me up and help me get on the right track again."

Walker also expresses tremendous gratitude and appreciation for the ongoing apprenticeship program—and the people that stand behind it.

"The apprenticeship program offered by Windham has been a true blessing in my life. It has given me the chance of a lifetime: a career and the promise of a better life," Walker says. "There will always be a better future waiting for you on the outside [of incarceration]. It only takes a simple decision—but only the right one will get you there. For the first time in my life, I have something to be proud of."★

Frank's chili cheese dog nachos

Frank Zavala Jr.
Dominguez State Jail

Ingredients:

1 bag tortilla chips
2 pks. Chicken Vienna sausage
½ bag instant chili beans
1 pk. chili with beans
1 squeeze cheese
1 pickle, drained and diced fine
ketchup to taste
mustard to taste

Directions:

Heat packages of Vienna sausages and chili with beans in hotpot. When packages are hot, cook instant chili beans in a bowl. When beans are ready, add chili with beans. Then dump hot Vienna sausage in a separate bowl and cut sausages in halves or thirds and add to instant chili bean mixture and stir well. Open tortilla chip bag on all seams and spread out tortilla chips. Pour ½ bottle of squeeze cheese on chips and spread over instant chili/Vienna sausage mixture. Pour remaining cheese, sprinkle diced pickle on top, and drizzle with ketchup and mustard if desired. Enjoy!

Dragonfire hot sauce

Matthew Curry
Eastham Unit

Ingredients:

½ bottle squeeze cheese
1 bottle hot sauce
5 jalapenos, finely diced
1 pk. chili soup seasoning
2 pks. orange sports drink

Directions:

Combine all ingredients into squeeze cheese bottle, shake well and enjoy.

Yummy rice pudding

Lily Archulzta
Murray Unit

Ingredients:

1 bag rice
2 pks. Maria's cookies
2 pks. energizer mix
½ pk. milk
1 fireball candy
1 pk. brown sugar-maple oatmeal
4 pks. sweetener

Directions:

In white bowl, mix milk, oatmeal and fireball candy with hot water and set aside. In separate white bowl, make a layer of dry rice and add one sweetener pack and four spoons of milk. Repeat this process until all milk, sweetener and entire bag of rice is in bowl, then set aside. In small bowl, pour energizer mix, removing almonds and peanuts as these will not be used in pudding. Now pour rice mixture back into bag and cook in hot pot for two hours. In white bowl, place one layer of cookies and then

cover with rice mixture. Repeat this alternating pattern until all cookies and rice mixture are in bowl. Let sit for 5-6 hours then dig in!

Witches' brew

Anna Brooks
Hilltop Unit

Ingredients:

1 can Mountain Dew
½ pk. blue drink mix
½ pk. purple drink mix
½ pk. orange sports drink
½ pk. lemon/lime sports drink

Directions:

Place all ingredients in a hot pot insert, mix together well. Serve warm or cold. Enjoy!

Stuffed peppers

Alexandra McMahon
Plant State Jail

Ingredients:

6 jalapenos
1 pk. cream cheese
1 bag chicken
1 spoonful Gouda cheese
1 pk. ranch dressing
handful pork skins
onion powder, to taste
garlic powder, to taste

Directions:

Cut the tops off the jalapenos, and then slice down the length of the pepper without cutting it in half. Remove seeds. Put chicken, cream cheese, and Gouda in a bowl together and add garlic and onion powders to taste. Smash up chicken and mix it all together. Fill empty jalapenos peppers with chicken mixture until all is gone. Drizzle ranch over the top of each stuffed pepper, crush pork skins to a powder and sprinkle over top serve.

Yessi's dippy dip

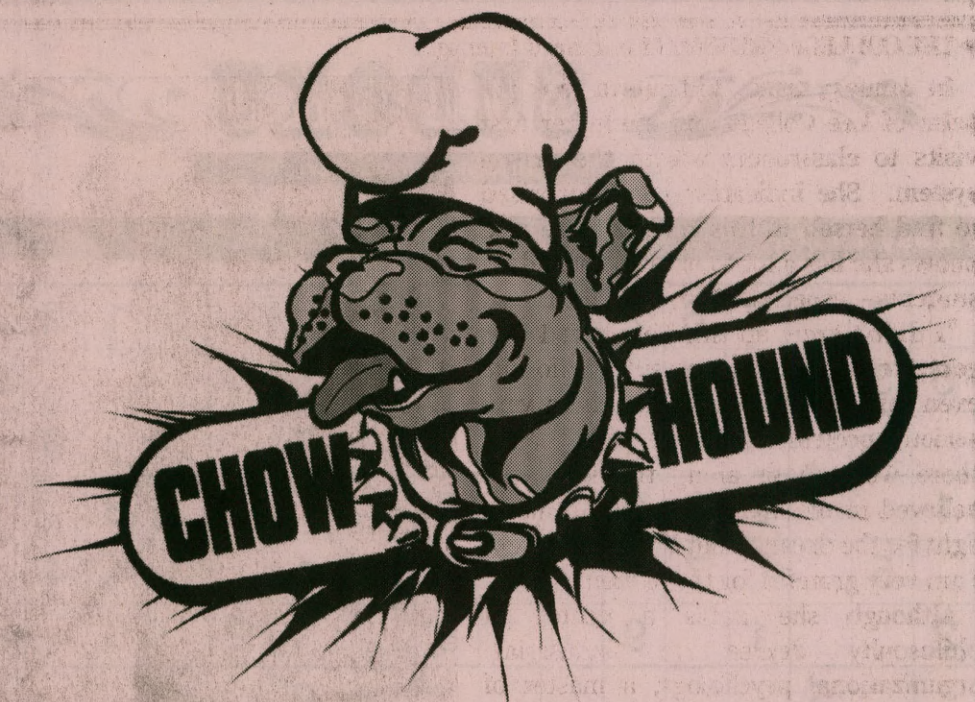
Yessenia Ramos
Hilltop Unit

Ingredients:

1 bag tortilla chips
1 bag refried beans
1 pk. cream cheese
1 hot sauce
1 bag pork skins
1 bottle squeeze cheese
1 pk. chunky chicken
1 commissary bowl

Directions:

Prepare refried beans to medium consistency and put in bowl. In a separate bowl, mix chicken, cream cheese and hot sauce. Make a layer of beans, using half of the beans, in a bowl. Spread chicken mixture on top of beans, and then top with remaining beans. Sprinkle crushed pork skins over top, then add desired amount of squeeze cheese as a topping. Use tortilla chips to scoop the dip and enjoy!



Holiday apple roly-poly

Lily Archulzta
Murray Unit

Ingredients:

1 pk. Maria's cookies
1 pk. apple-flavored oatmeal
2 spoonful creamer
2 pks. sweetener

Directions:

In hot pot insert, mix creamer, sweetener and two spoonful of hot water. Mix well until creamy, then let sit in hot pot for 15 minutes. Crush the pack of cookies until powdery and set aside. Prepare oatmeal with hot water in large bowl, adding in crushed cookies until it forms a doughy consistency. Form six to eight spoon size balls, set inside a dry bowl and drizzle the roly-polys with creamer glaze. Makes an affordable and delicious dessert — no baking necessary!

Big Mike's fried fish and sticky rice

Michael DeLoach
Robertson Unit

Ingredients:

1 jalapeno chips, finely crushed
1 pk. jalapenos, diced
2 pks. jalapeno tuna (or mackerel fillet)
1 pk. orange sports drink
1 pk. peanuts, crushed
1 pk. pork skins, crushed fine
1 pk. rice
1 pk. turkey bites
1 can Mountain Dew
1 bottle barbeque sauce
1 bottle strawberry preserves
1 large white bowl
1 cup or empty jar

Directions:

Crush jalapeno chips; open carefully at top of bag—making sure there are no holes in the bag because the mixing and cooking will be done within this bag. Add the two jalapeno tuna pks. (or mackerel fillets). Add ½ packet of orange sports drink, crush peanuts, and add these into the jalapeno chip bag. Crush pork skins,

and add into the jalapeno chip bag. Next, add two heaping spoonful of barbeque sauce and two heaping spoonful of strawberry preserves. Add ¼ cup of water. Then massage the outside of bag, mixing ingredients thoroughly into a mass or a ball; place the entire bag into a hotpot. Let this cook for one hour.

In a separate bag (the remaining pork skin bag, for example) add the rice, diced jalapenos, chopped turkey bites, the remaining ½ of the orange sports drink, and the entire can of Mountain Dew soda, with ½ cup of water; heat in a separate hotpot for between 30-45 minutes, or wait until the first bag is done. When rice is done pour it into a large white bowl. Take the fried fish and also place it into the bowl. Now, in a separate container or cup, put three heaping spoonfuls of both barbeque sauce and strawberry preserves, whip very well, and pour as desired over the top of the fried fish and sticky rice. Bon appétit!

Chicken 'n' rice

Haitam Nablisi
Beto Unit

Ingredients:

1 pk. chicken chunk
1 pk. chicken chili
¼ bottle squeeze cheese
¼ pk. Gouda cheese
garlic powder, to taste
onion powder, to taste
black pepper, to taste
¼ cup hot water
½ bag rice
½ chicken soup, crushed
1 pk. chicken soup seasoning

Directions:

Pour ¼ cup water in hot pot, plug in pot, and add top seven ingredients to hot water and stir. Let cook for one hour, stirring occasionally. In a spread bowl, prepare rice with crushed noodle soup and chicken seasoning pack, and be sure not to use too much water. Top rice with chicken mixture; enjoy while hot. Costs \$6; makes one serving.

Barrio Picasso

Raymond Trinidad — Released
2019 writing contest finalist

ERIC MORALES WAS once a famous artist. His art gallery had been the entire city of Houston; his canvases were the walls of stores, schools or any structure he deemed worthy of his art. Eric was once caught spraying out a galactic mural — replete with lowrider spacecraft and superhero-themed astronauts on the side of a tanker ship as it moved through the Houston Ship Channel in broad daylight. This had prompted Texas Monthly magazine to publish an article about him entitled “Barrio Picasso,” and for a while, he was the most famous graffiti artist around.

But all of that was a long time ago, back when he was a kid growing up in the barrio and before he became a born again Christian while doing time in reform school. Eric Morales was now 60 years old, a deacon in his church and on the verge of retiring from the U.S. Postal Service. He had long since forgotten all about graffiti art. It was just something from his past — or so he thought — until one day it all came back to him.

It was a hot Monday after-

noon, and Eric was close to the end of his mail route when he encountered a city work crew in the process of razing an abandoned house. He stopped for a moment as a dump truck filled with debris pulled out of the driveway. Eric remembered news reports of the new mayor's campaign to rid the city of these eyesores as drug dealers, addicts and other unsavory characters used them. He was about to walk off when he saw something glimmering in a pile of trash by the sidewalk.

At a glance it appeared to be an abstract image of some sort, but when Eric knelt down to get a closer look, he was astonished by what he saw. It was an image of Moses with his staff held up high in the air and the Red Sea parted before him.

The epiphany was so vivid that he looked at one of the city workers standing nearby and pointed at the pile of trash.

“That's Moses parting the red sea!” he exclaimed, as if he were an archaeologist making a grand discovery.

The city worker, wanting to give the old mailman the benefit of the doubt, looked to where he was pointing, but all

he saw was a pile of trash.

“Sir, all I see is trash,” he said as politely as he could, thinking that maybe the mailman had been out in the sun for too long.

When Eric looked the image was gone — but only from the pile of trash. Now it was in his mind, indelible and crystal clear. Then it became alive in his spirit, radiating there like a star. He smiled joyfully as he walked down the sidewalk.

Later that night an old haggard wino watched as a man approached the side of an abandoned church carrying a duffel bag and a ladder. A full moon and a few streetlights gave the curious wino enough light to see what was happening. He thought he was about to witness a burglary, but then he remembered that the church had been boarded up for years. When he saw the man taking out spray cans of paint from the duffel bag, he realized that this was something else entirely.

The dilapidated church was located in the midst of an impoverished neighborhood. At that late hour, traffic was sparse, mostly street people drifting about here and there. But the man seemed obliv-



ious to everything except the church wall in front of him. Through the haze of his drunken stupor, the wino watched in awe as the man methodically spray-painted an array of color schemes onto the wall. He sat there on the sidewalk smoking cigarettes, transfixed by the beauty of the artwork materializing before his eyes. After a few hours, the mural was finished and the wino crossed the street to get a better look. What he saw was amazing, like something out of a wonderful dream.

“That's Moses parting the Red Sea,” the wino said more to himself than to the man

with the spray cans. After he said this, an unbidden memory of his mother reading him the story of Moses leading the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt came to him like a long lost friend. He heard her blissful voice and smelled the scent of her favorite perfume.

The old wino put down his bottle of wine and started crying. Eric Morales gave the wino a hug and said a prayer for him. Immediately after his prayer, he saw an epiphany of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead as angels hovered about everywhere — and it became alive in his spirit, radiating there like a star. ★

SUDOKU

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Easy 1

	7		3	6	2			4
6	3	1	5	8				9
					6			
1		2		6				5
	5		7				2	
2		1	9					8
	5							
3			9	1	4	5	2	
7			8	4	5		3	

Easy 2

			5	1	2			6
2	5					9	1	
1	7			6		5	8	
			8		1			
5	1		3	4		9	6	
		2	6					
9	2		4				8	7
	4	3					2	1
6		2	7	1				

Intermediate 1

7	1			6	8			
			2					8
	3				1			
			5				2	
1	4				8			3
	8			7				
		6					9	
	2			6				
			1	9			3	5

Intermediate 2

					3	4		7
2			9					5
				8	5	2		
1			8					
		3					8	
						4		6
			5	2	4			
	3				7			8
4		6	1					

Challenging 1

7	6							1
	9		4		5			
	2			9	6			
6			3					7
1			5					8
		9	1					5
		5		7				4
1					2			3

Challenging 2

		7						5
	2			3	9			
					7		6	
		9				2		4
3			9					1
8	2	5				7		
	4		6					
		3	7					5
6							8	

Tough 1

1								
		4		5				9
			8	1		7		
	6	1						5
9		7	4					3
2					4	9		
	4		5	8				
7		2		3				
								1

Tough 2

			5		4			
4				9	8			3
	9		3				5	
				2				9
	8							1
7		3						
	1			8				3
3		6	5					2
		2	6					

Super Tough 1

	7							
			2		4	9		
		6		4	7	3		
					9			8
			6	5	3			
6		1						
1	5	9	3			2		
	6	7		9				
								4

Super Tough 2

		5			2			3
		6			9	2	5	
4		7						
3	1			4				
				3			2	1
							1	4
		6	8	9			7	
7			5					8

Insane 1

				7		8	9	
		1	9					5
	7							
		6		3	9			7
	2						4	
7		4	6		2			
								6
1				4	3			
2	8		5					

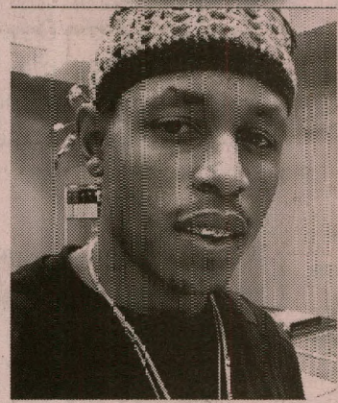
Insane 2

1			3		5	4		
	6	3						8
			7					1
			1		4		7	
5		1					9	2
	3		9		2			
2		8			3			
							2	3
		6	5		9			4

CRIME STOPPERS

Unsolved Homicide

Xavier Mclemore



On Oct. 26, 2020, Xavier Mclemore, age 34, was hanging out with friends around 2 a.m., at 2400 E Riverside Drive. They were in a median homeless camp near Pleasant Valley and Riverside Drive in Austin, Texas. Someone shot into the tent several times and killed Mclemore and wounded several others.

If you have any information regarding this homicide, please contact: Crime Stoppers, P.O. Box 1855, Huntsville, Texas 77342. A family member can also use the P3 Tips Program: online or the Austin Homicide Tip Line: 512-477-3588; P.O. Box 689001, Austin, Texas 78768-9001. Crime Stoppers will pay from \$50 to \$1,000 for any information leading to the arrest, filing charges or indictment of a person or persons that committed a felony crime or is a wanted fugitive. Crime Stoppers guarantees your anonymity. ★

Preparing for inclement weather:

Recognition of cold-related illness, injury

Editor's Note: The following information was provided by TDCJ Risk Management.

Frostbite

Not only can wind chill cause a rapid body heat loss, it also can cause frostbite—the freezing of body tissues. Frostbite can occur in 15 minutes or less at wind chill values of 18 below zero or lower. Offenders can be at an increased risk to frostbite because of factors such as exhaustion, hunger and dehydration, which further lower the body's defenses against cold.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition occurring when the body loses heat faster than the body can produce it. With the onset of this condition, blood vessels in the skin constrict (i.e., tighten) in an attempt to conserve vital internal body heat, thus affecting the hands and feet first. Hypothermia, the severe or prolonged loss of body heat, begins when a person's body temperature falls below 95 degrees. Because the temperature drop may be gradual, and an early symptom of hypothermia is mental confusion, the victim may not know a problem exists. If one's body continues to lose heat, involuntary shivers begin. This reaction is the body's way to produce more heat and is usually the first real warning sign of hypothermia. Further heat loss produces speech difficulty, forgetfulness, loss of manual dexterity, collapse and finally death. Some offenders can be at an increased risk to hypothermia if they have predisposing health conditions or take certain medications. Some of these conditions include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, poor physical condition, poor diet, and/or advanced age.

Watch for the following symptoms of frostbite:

- cold, white and hard skin;
- pain;
- itching;
- loss of feeling in the affected area;
- spots or blotches on skin;
- swelling and blistering;
- skin becomes red and blotchy when warmed; and
- tissue loss, depending on the severity of the frostbite.

Watch for the following symptoms of hypothermia:

- confusion;
- drowsiness;
- slurred speech;
- a drop in blood pressure;
- shallow breathing; and
- a pinkish tint to the skin.

Report all incidents of cold-related illness to a staff member immediately. ★

Fill In Solution

6	2	4	9					5	6	9	0	4			
7	1	3	0		3	3	8	8		9	4	2	7	4	
3	6	2	1		1	7	0	6		0	2	3	8	1	
9	8	4	2			2	4	2	6	7		9	0	2	
				3	4	0	8			4	7	4	7	7	8
4	8	6			4	3			5	0	6	3	6		
7	2	6	4	4	2				5	9		7	4	4	8
0	6	1	7	3	0	2			2	0	7	9	3	1	8
9	4	7	2			5	1	3	4	2	4		2	1	4
7	9	5	9	0	1						6	1	0	8	6
						0	4				2	4	2	7	
4	1			1	3	4	2	1	0			8	6	3	9
2	6	0	3	6			2	9	6	7		5	1	2	7
5	5	1		4			2	8	9	4		5	3	4	6
7	2	7	6	5			5	2	4	3		5	5	2	8

Circle A Word Solution

P	P	R	E	S	S	E	D	N	N	E	V	I	G	A
R	O	V	E	R	V	S	A	A	M	Y	K	W	M	
D	O	W	N	J	J	O	D	O	N	T	O	B	I	E
E	I	N	S	Y	O	S	E	T	D	E	U	E	L	N
T	H	A	T	D	Y	Y	R	R	R	U	J	L	L	
T	U	P	L	P	O	H	U	E	U	U	S	W	B	B
D	M	M	E	N	T	N	S	H	N	S	E	I	E	E
T	O	O	V	T	N	N	A	T	N	A	L	T	H	R
L	P	O	I	U	B	E	E	I	E	E	H	K	O	
L	K	S	C	P	W	M	G	N	M	R	T	N	F	
I	G	C	I	D	N	A	E	O	G	E	U	H	E	M
W	I	L	L	B	E	R	B	J	C	M	S	E	K	O
T	N	A	G	A	U	O	Y	S	A	A	P	A	S	
I	O	B	A	C	K	U	O	Y	O	S	E	Z	H	O
T	C	E	R	U	S	A	E	M	E	B	M	W	S	B

Fill In

					9	4	2	7	4

Fill In clues

2 Digits		4 Digits	
04 41	0524	3242 4443	7130
21 43	1652	3388 4679	7448
31 59	1706	3408 5127	7462
	1982	3621 5243	8639
017 743	2168	3728 5346	8846
214 804	2225	4118 5528	9472
486 862	2427	4257 6135	9768
551 862	2894	4320 6249	9768
642 902	2967	4324 6739	9842
		5 Digits	
		02381 26036 56904 82649	
		0617302 07807 44128 61086 90123	
		2079318 20694 47097 66175 92397	
		4729013 24267 50636 72765 94274 ✓	
		6 Digits	
	032051 134210 474778 590773 726442		
	043645 178555 513424 646902 795901		

Sudoku Solutions

Easy 1

8	7	9	2	6	2	5	1	4
6	3	1	5	8	4	2	7	9
5	2	4	9	1	7	8	8	3
1	8	7	2	3	6	9	4	5
9	5	6	4	7	8	3	2	1
2	4	3	1	5	9	7	6	8
4	1	5	6	2	3	8	9	7
3	6	8	7	9	1	4	5	2
7	9	2	8	4	5	1	3	6

Easy 2

3	9	8	2	1	2	7	6	4
2	5	6	8	4	7	9	1	3
1	7	4	9	3	6	2	5	8
6	3	9	7	8	5	1	4	2
5	7	3	2	4	8	9	6	
4	8	2	1	6	9	3	7	5
9	2	1	4	5	3	6	8	7
7	4	3	6	9	8	5	2	1
8	6	5	2	7	1	4	3	9

Intermediate 1

7	1	5	9	6	8	3	4	2
4	6	9	2	1	3	5	3	7
2	3	8	7	4	5	1	6	9
6	9	3	5	8	1	7	2	4
1	7	4	6	2	9	8	5	3
5	3	2	4	3	7	9	1	6
3	5	6	8	7	4	2	9	1
9	2	1	3	5	6	4	7	8
8	4	7	1	9	2	8	3	5

Intermediate 2

5	9	1	6	2	3	4	5	7
2	4	8	9	7	1	6	5	3
3	6	7	4	8	5	2	9	1
1	7	4	3	5	6	9	3	2
6	5	3	7	9	2	8	1	4
8	2	9	3	1	4	5	7	6
7	1	5	2	4	8	3	6	9
9	3	2	5	6	7	1	4	8
4	8	6	1	3	9	7	2	5

Challenging 1

7	4	6	3	2	5	8	1	9
3	9	1	8	4	8	6	7	2
5	2	8	7	1	9	6	3	4
6	5	2	8	3	1	4	9	7
9	8	3	4	6	7	1	2	5
1	7	4	9	5	2	3	6	8
2	3	9	1	8	4	7	5	6
8	6	5	2	7	3	9	4	1
4	1	7	5	9	6	2	8	3

Challenging 2

9	3	7	8	6	2	4	1	5
1	2	6	4	5	3	9	7	8
4	5	8	9	1	7	3	6	2
5	6	9	1	7	8	2	3	4
3	7	4	2	9	6	5	8	1
8	1	2	5	3	4	7	9	6
7	4	5	6	8	9	1	2	3
2	8	3	7	4	1	6	5	9
6	9	1	3	2	5	8	4	7

Tough 1

1	5	7	3	9	2	8	4	6
8	2	4	6	7	5	1	3	9
6	3	9	8	4	1	5	7	2
4	6	1	9	8	3	7	2	5
9	8	5	7	2	4	6	1	3
2	7	3	1	5	6	4	9	8
3	4	2	5	1	8	9	6	7
7	1	8	2	6	9	3	5	4
5	9	6	4	3	7	2	8	1

Tough 2

6	2	3	7	5	8	4	9	1
4	5	7	1	2	9	8	6	3
1	9	8	4	3	6	2	5	7
5	3	1	8	4	2	6	7	9
2	8	9	6	7	5	3	1	4
7	6	4	3	9	1	5	2	8
9	1	5	2	8	4	7	3	6
3	4	6	5	1	7	9	8	2
8	7	2	9	6	3	1	4	5

Super Tough 1

5	7	4	9	3	1	6	8	2
8	1	3	7	2	6	4	9	5
2	9	6	5	8	4	7	3	1
7	3	5	4	1	2	9	6	8
9	4	8	6	5	3	1	2	7
6	2	1	8	7	9	3	5	4
1	5	9	3	4	8	2	7	6
4	8	7	2	9	5	8	1	3
3	8	2	1	6	7	5	4	9

Super Tough 2

8	5	9	6	7	2	4	1	3
1	3	6	4	8	9	2	5	7
4	2	7	3	5	1	8	9	6
3	1	5	2	4	8	6	7	9
6	7	2	1	9	5	3	4	8
9	8	4	7	3	6	5	2	1
5	9	3	8	2	7	1	6	4
2	6	8	9	1	4	7	3	5
7	4	1	6	6	3	9	8	2

Insane 1

6	5	2	3	4	7	1	8	9
4	3	1	9	8	2	6	7	5
9	7	8	6	5	1	4	2	3
8	4	6	2	3	9	5	1	7
3	2	5	1	7	8	9	4	6
7	1	9	4	6	5	2	3	8
5	9	4	7	2	3	8	6	1
1	6	7	8	9	4	3	5	2
2	8	3	6	1	6	7	9	4

Insane 2

1	8	2	3	9	5	4	6	7
7	6	3	2	4	5	8	9	1
9	5	4	7	6	8	3	2	1
8	2	9	1	5	4	6	7	3
5	4	1	6	3	7	8	9	2
6	3	7	9	8	2	1	4	5
2	9	8	4	1	3	7	5	6
4	1	5	8	7	6	2	3	9
3	7	6	5	2	9	8	1	4

Circle A Word clues

GIVE AND YOU USE
AND IT RUNNING IT WILL
WILL BE OVER BE
GIVEN WILL BE MEASURED
YOU PUT BACK
GOOD INTO YOUR TO
MEASURE BOSOM YOU AGAIN
PRESSED FOR AMEN
DOWN WITH THE Luke 6:38 NKJV
SHAKEN SAME
TOGETHER MEASURE THAT

Circle A Word

P	P	R	E	S	S	E	D	N	N	E	V	I	G	A
R	O	V	E	R	R	V	S	A	A	M	Y	K	W	M
D	O	W	N	U	U	O	D	O	N	T	O	B	I	E
E	I	N	S	Y	O	S	E	T	D	E	U	E	L	N
T	H	A	T	D	Y	R	R	R	R	U	J	L	L	
T	U	P	L	P	O	H	U	E	U	S	W	B	B	
D	M	M	E	N	T	N	S	H	N	S	E	I	E	E
T	O	O	V	T	N	N	A	T	N	A	L	T	H	R
L	P	O	I	I	I	B	E	E	I	E	E	H	K	O
L	K	S	G	C	P	W	M	G	N	M	R	T	N	F
I	G	T	I	D	N	A	E	O	G	E	U	H	E	M
W	I	L	L	B	E	R	B	T	C	M	S	E	K	O
T	N	I	A	G	A	U	O	Y	S	A	A	P	A	S
I	O	B	A	C	K	U	O	Y	O	S	E	Z	H	O
T	D	E	R	U	S	A	E	M	E	B	M	W	S	B

Happy Valentine's Day!

Missing You
Submitted by James Broussard
Dominguez State Jail

WITH EVERY THOUGHT OF YOUR LOVE
MY GREY SKIES TURN BLUE
WORDS COULD NEVER EXPRESS
THIS PAIN IN MY HEART
THAT COMES FROM ME
MISSING YOU
EVERY MINUTE
AWAY FROM YOU
HAS TRULY DRIVEN ME INSANE
BUT EVERY TIME
I SAY YOUR NAME
IT EASES MY PAIN
WE ARE GREAT TOGETHER,
WE FIT TOGETHER
LIKE A HAND AND GLOVE
THE WAY I FEEL
BEING AWAY FROM YOU
PROVES I AM ADDICTED
TO YOUR LOVE
I MAY NOT KNOW
A LOT OF THINGS
BUT THIS ONE THING
I KNOW IS TRUE
I AM GOING THROUGH
THESE DAYS
IN PAIN
AND IT'S BECAUSE I'M
MISSING YOU

Mirrors of Yesterday
Submitted by Kacie Updike
Henley State Jail

MY HURTS FROM YESTERDAY
THE SORROWS OF MY CHILDHOOD
THE PAIN OF MY HEART
THE MANY VOIDS WITHIN
I ASK MY HEART TO GRACEFULLY
RESUME BEATING JUST ONE MORE TIME
I ASK YOU TO KEEP ITS FLAME
LIKE A BONFIRE
I ASK YOU TO STAND
FOR MY UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
I KNOW YOUR HEART DESIRES TO LIVE
FREELY, HUMBLLY, PEACEFULLY AND
TO GIVE YOUR LOVE GRACEFULLY
LIFE IS A WONDERFUL BLESSING
BUT ALSO A LESSON
IN HOW TO GIVE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Beauty Inside
Submitted by Nevenka Eyzaguine
Plane State Jail

BEAUTY ON THE INSIDE AND OUT
SO WONDERFULLY DRESSED UP AND
BROKEN ALL AROUND
SHE DOESN'T KNOW HER WORTH
SHE DOESN'T WANNA' SEE
THAT SOMEONE OUT THERE
CAN LOVE HER
FOR ALL THAT SHE CAN BE
SHE BELIEVES SHE DESERVES
ALL THESE BAD THINGS
HE SAYS SHE DESERVES
ALL THE GREATNESS
HE SEES SHE CAN BE
ALL THAT BROKENNESS
THAT'S INSIDE
ALL THAT MEANINGLESS SHAME
NONE OF IT COMPARES
TO THAT WONDERFUL
BEAUTIFUL MESS
THAT AMAZES HIM EVEN TODAY
THERE'S BEAUTY
ON THE INSIDE AND OUT
WHEN WILL YOU SEE
YOU'RE WORTH MUCH MORE
THAN WHAT THEIR EYES
CAN SEE?
THE ONE WHO ADORES YOU
IS JUST A THOUGHT AWAY
THE ONE WHO LOVES YOU
IS JUST A PRAYER AWAY
THERE'S BEAUTY
ON THE INSIDE AND OUT
WHEN WILL YOU EVER SEE
THAT THE ONE WHO TRULY LOVES
YOUR INNER BEAUTY
IS HE?

Time
Submitted by Terri Pell
Lockhart Unit

TIME CAN'T ERASE
WHAT I FEEL INSIDE
I CAN'T FORGET YOU
GOD KNOWS I'VE TRIED
EVERY SONG I HEAR
YOU COME TO MIND
THEY MAKE IT EASIER
TO REMEMBER
WHEN YOU WERE MINE
IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN EASY
JUST TO WALK AWAY
FROM YOU AND
ALL THE GAMES YOU PLAY
OUR SOULS ARE CONNECTED
BUT YOU CAN'T SEE
YET I CAN'T GIVE UP
ON WHAT USED TO BE
I'D NEVER KNOWN LOVE
UNTIL YOU GAVE ME
YOUR HEART
AND I NEVER KNEW PAIN
UNTIL YOU TORE
MINE APART

A love that will never be real
Submitted by Maria Gomez
Murray Unit

YOU ARE AN AMAZING PERSON
I LOVE YOUR PERSONALITY
THE WAY YOU EXPRESS YOURSELF
AND HOW
YOU BRING YOURSELF OUT TO
EVERYONE AROUND YOU
EVERY TIME I SEE YOU,
IT'S LIKE YOU BRING
OUT THE BEST IN ME
AND I'M NOT AFRAID TO
SHOW IT TO EVERYONE AROUND ME
I LOVE THE WAY
YOU MAKE EVERYONE SMILE
AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES
IT IS HARD NOT TO FEEL GOOD
ABOUT WHO YOU ARE BECOMING
I KNOW THAT THINGS HAPPEN,
BUT I KNOW
I AM ABLE TO COUNT ON YOU
TO HELP ME THROUGH THEM
I'VE SEEN YOU ALL AROUND
AND YOU MAKE SURE
THAT EVERYTHING IS TAKEN CARE OF
IN TIME, WISELY
YOU HAVE REVEALED
WHAT YOUR FEELINGS AND CONCERNS ARE
I VALUE YOUR HONESTY,
YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH ME
GOD HAS PLACED YOU IN MY LIFE
BECAUSE HE KNEW
THAT I WAS GOING TO NEED YOU
SO I HOPE YOU CAN ALSO REMEMBER I'M ALWAYS
GOING TO BE HERE FOR YOU NO MATTER WHAT
YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE...

Sweet as a Kiss
Submitted by D. Oakley
Hilltop Unit

TO EACH SOUL
THERE ARE PIECES
SHARDS OF PAIN,
SLIVERS OF JOY
WHOLE FRAGMENTS MISSING
STOLEN BY ANOTHER
THESE AREAS WE SEEK TO REPLACE
WITH WHISPRED WORDS OF LOVE
THERE IS NOTHING AS SWEET AS A KISS
AS PURE AS A LAUGH
AS TENDER AS A GENTLE TOUCH
THERE ARE COUNTLESS POEMS
SONGS TO NUMEROUS TO COUNT
YET IN REALITY WE ARE ALL SEEKING
ONE THING TO FULFILL US
TRUE EMOTION

Making A DENT

Jim Dent — Contributing
Writer, Pokunsky Unit

Sportswriter and author Jim Dent's comments represent his own opinions and not those of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or The ECHO.

TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW, what will you tell the young and curious about the maddening year in sports in 2020, when COVID-19 rewrote all the schedules—and championships were won in about half the normal time?

Will you tell them that it was crazy, fun, and sometimes inspirational, and that it filled a void in time that kept us from going insane? That it was often unexplainable usually

disorganized, and it made us wish for ordinary times when you didn't need mathematical equations straight out of Einstein to know who was in first place?

As expected, the year was about as predictable as the race for the title in the NFL East. Back in the spring, I had predicted the 2020 year in sports would go off the rails, and there were long stretches when it did.

Then Adam Silver proved why he is the best commissioner in all of professional sports. The NBA bubble worked because it was well designed and operated with precision. It produced the championship team that couldn't have been better delivered by Fed Ex. LeBron James and the Lakers, with a lot of help from Anthony Davis, became the champs of the people.

So did the Los Angeles Dodgers, in spite of a baseball

season that stumbled out of the gate, and 60 games later, passed War Admiral down the stretch on a horse named Seabiscuit.

There were days when I thought Major League Baseball would have to shut down operations and hope that 2021 was a better year. That was before MLB constructed playoff bubbles that saved

it was a year when they made up the rules as they went along, and I'm not so sure it was good for the image of sports.

the season. Looking back, the 60-game sprint was exciting. Even the seven-inning double-headers served the game well.

I predicted in this very space that NFL and college

football would struggle to complete their seasons, and they did ask the Pittsburgh Steelers how they felt about playing three games in 12 days in December that were mostly responsible for derailing a perfect regular season. The Steelers also made history by playing in the first Wednesday afternoon game since 1943, which opened the door for two straight losses to Washington and Buffalo.

College football suffered an even greater embarrassment when the Big 10 had to change the rules at the end of the regular season to allow Ohio State into the conference's championship game with five games instead of six under their belt. Yes, it was a year when they made up the rules as they went along, and I'm not so sure it was good for the image of sports.

In March, college basketball will reach a crossroads that will establish a pathway to

the future. If COVID-19 hasn't subsided enough to allow for the NCAA basketball tournament, college sports as we know them will be severely damaged.

March Madness is the engine that funds a great portion of amateur games. Billions were lost in 2020 when the virus shut down the three-tier TV contract that paid the bills.

For the most part, pro sports will be able to weather the financial collapse of 2020. Baseball lost three billion dollars, and the free agency market will suffer for years to come. NFL and NBA owners have the wealth to keep their seasons going. College sports don't possess the same deep pockets. That is why the 68-team tournament will be held in a three-week bubble, most likely in Indianapolis.

The long reach of COVID-19 still has tentacles, and nothing is promised. Next year is not yet here. ★

Sports View

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Will Hill

ECHO Staff

The opinions expressed in this column are those of sportswriter and fan Will Hill and do not represent official viewpoints of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or The ECHO.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, THE year 2020 was a difficult one on many different fronts, including athletics. Sports, the one area we normally can count on to help us heal in trying times, was itself, relegated to the sidelines for a long portion of the year due to the coronavirus pandemic. With the turning of the calendar, it is easy to want to simply dismiss everything that happened during the past year and start with a clean slate in 2021. As tempting as that thought might be, there were some great moments that happened both on and off the field that deserve celebrating. The ECHO-Lades awards are only my honest, and hopefully entertaining, method of doing that.

Best Play of the Year Award goes to Arizona Cardinals' quarterback Kyler Murray for his Hail Mary pass to DeAndre Hopkins to defeat the Buffalo Bills on Nov. 15, 2020. After the Bills had made a drive to go ahead 30-26 with only a handful of seconds left in the game, Murray drove the Cardinals to midfield. Rolling to his left, the right-handed Murray unleashed a perfect pass into the end zone where Hopkins, surrounded by three Bills defenders, leapt up and caught the ball to win the game, 32-30. The best part of the entire play was that Murray's momentum carried him off the playing field and onto the Cardinals sideline and turned him in a 180-degree circle. Instead of turning around to see the

Presenting: The 2020 ECHO-Lades

result of the play, he simply stood with his teammates and calmly watched Hopkins catch on the giant video board at the opposite end of the stadium. Style counts.

Best Hustle Play Award goes to Seattle Seahawks wide receiver DK Metcalf for his prevention of what would have been a sure score by the opposing team. During the Seahawks week-seven matchup against the Arizona Cardinals, Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson, threw a pass in the flat that Cardinals' safety Buda Baker intercepted and took off towards his team's goal line 90+ yards away. The Seahawks' second-year wide receiver, DK Metcalf, who was at the back of the end zone when the play happened, chased Baker down and tackled the safety, preventing a pick six. Baker was overheard on tape asking his sideline, "How did he catch my (bleep)?" Hey Buda, your coaches are probably wondering the same thing. Analytics say that the young wide out reached a speed in excess of 21 miles per hour during the 114-yard chase down. That is impressive in any season.

Best Barrier Breaking Moment of the Year Award goes to Kim Ng. When the MLB's Miami Marlins hired Kim Ng to be the team's general manager (GM), they created history by making her the first female to hold the top spot in a front office in any major American men's sport. Ng, 52 years old, got her opportunity the old-fashioned way: she earned it. She spent more than 30 years in the sport, climbing the ladder from an intern with the Chicago White Sox at the age of 21 to assistant GM for the New York Yankees in 1998. She later worked in the Dodgers organization and in the league office. Ng had interviewed numerous times in the past for vacant GM positions with various organizations but was always passed over in favor of someone else.

Best Barrier Breaking Moment of the Year, Part Two, Award goes to San Antonio Spurs' Assistant Coach Becky Hammon, the first

female to serve as head coach in an NBA regular season game. When referees ejected San Antonio Spurs' head coach Greg Popovich during the teams Dec. 30 game against the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers, Hammon took over the reins and led the team the rest of the game. Hammon has served as a bench coach under Popovich for several seasons since her retirement from playing in the Women's National Basketball Association. Hammon had previously coached the team in Summer League games but never in a regular season game.

Worst Career Advice Award goes to whoever advised Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott to turn down a contract extension reported to be worth \$100 million in

Most Disappointing Team Award goes to the Dallas Cowboys.

guaranteed money. Prescott, who suffered a compound fracture of his right ankle in a game against divisional rivals the New York Giants, signed a one-year franchise tag worth north of \$31 million. That's still good money, and the risk/reward of playing without a long-term contract for a player who had never missed a start in his four-year career seemed to be worth it. Nope. Every prognosis for a full recovery for the quarterback that led the league in yards last season has been positive, but he is still early in the rehabilitation period.

Best You Did It To Yourself Award goes to former Houston Texans' General Manager and Head Coach Bill O'Brien. When you consistently trade your team's best players away for basically nothing in return, eventually it is going to come back and bite you in the-you-know-where. O'Brien got lucky in the past when he traded the team's best players, but this year, not so much. The Texans' struggles combined with the marked improvement in the play of Cardinals' second-year quarterback Murray,

due in part to the addition of Hopkins, sealed O'Brien's fate.

Loudest Noise Award goes to all of the so-called "lifelong Patriots fans." The sound of them jumping off the team's bandwagon en masse was unmistakable. For the past two decades all anyone has heard from the most obnoxious fan base in sports is how great of a coach Bill Belichick is, how Tom Brady is the greatest quarterback ever, and how the Patriots are the best-run franchise in the NFL. All of those statements may have been true at one time; however, the only thing heard from them this season was a deafening silence. Maybe they have all turned into lifelong fans of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers or Kansas City Chiefs.

Most Disappointing Team Award goes to the Dallas Cowboys. Although this is a crowded field that includes the Houston Astros, the Houston Rockets and the Houston Texans, the "winner" of the award is the Dallas Cowboys. It is about the only thing they seemed to be able to win. A team that entered the season with a lot of hype and very little substance was exposed for what it actually is: a collection of overpaid prima donnas.

Most Egg on Face Award goes to the Big 10 conference. After initially saying that it was postponing the fall sports seasons out of an "abundance of caution" for the welfare of student athletes, the conference reversed course and started the season several weeks later than the other Power Five conferences. With a reduced timeframe to complete the season, the conference decreed that any games lost to cancellation would not be made up, and if a team did not play at least six games, it would be ineligible to participate in the conference's championship game. Problem: Ohio State only played five games and by its own conference's rules was ineligible to play Northwestern in the title game. Solution: Simply change the rule so that your conference's highest-ranked team



could play and possibly represent the Big 10 in the college football playoffs, thereby ensuring a big payday for the schools. I would like to think that the commissioner of the Big 10 is at home wiping the egg off his face, but truthfully, he is probably sitting in his office counting the money. Oh, by the way, congrats Ohio State for "winning" your conference championship.

Athlete of the Year Award goes to Kansas City Chiefs offensive lineman Laurent Duvernay-Tardif. In February 2020, Duvernay-Tardif was the starting right guard for the Kansas City Chiefs, helping the team to earn a victory in the Super Bowl. This award has nothing to do with his skills as a football player, but everything to do with his character as a person off the field. Drafted by the Chiefs in 2014, he balanced playing professional football with studying medicine at McGill University in Canada. When NFL players were given the opportunity to opt out of the 2020-2021 season, Duvernay-Tardif didn't hesitate. He exchanged the facemask of his football helmet for a doctor's facemask, choosing to work as an orderly at a long-term care facility near Montreal while also studying public health at Harvard University. Sure, he could have chosen the offensive line over the front line in the fight against COVID-19 but he didn't, and for that, Laurent Duvernay-Tardif deserves the ECHO-Lade for Athlete of the Year. ★

Prison Rape Elimination Act Ombudsman

In 2007, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Ombudsman was established by the 80th Legislature (Texas Government Code §§501.171-178) and was appointed by the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ). The PREA Ombudsman office was created to provide offenders, family and friends of offenders, and the general public with an independent office to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment occurring in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional facilities. The PREA Ombudsman also provides a confidential avenue for offenders to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment and ensures impartial resolution of complaints and inquiries related to allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The PREA Ombudsman reports directly to the TBCJ Chairman and may be contacted at the following address:

PREA Ombudsman
P.O. Box 99
Huntsville, Texas 77342

TDCJ has a "zero tolerance" for all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of offenders. Offenders knowledgeable about offender-on-offender or staff-on-offender sexual abuse or sexual harassment that occurs within a TDCJ correctional facility are encouraged to immediately report the allegation to the facility administration, PREA Ombudsman or the Office of Inspector General. Offenders may remain anonymous upon request.

Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión Ombudsman

En el 2007, el Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión (PREA) Ombudsman fue establecido por la 80a Legislatura (Código de Gobierno de Texas §§501.171-178) y fue nombrado por la Junta de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TBCJ). La oficina PREA Ombudsman fue creada para proporcionar a los ofensores, familia y amigos de ofensores, y al público en general con una oficina independiente para reportar el abuso sexual y el acoso sexual que ocurre en los establecimientos correccionales del Departamento de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TDCJ). El PREA Ombudsman también proporciona una vía confidencial para que los ofensores reporten el abuso sexual y acoso sexual y asegura resolución imparcial de las denuncias y consultas relacionadas con las acusaciones de abuso sexual y acoso sexual. El PREA Ombudsman reporta directamente al presidente de TBCJ y puede ser contactado en la siguiente dirección:

PREA Ombudsman
P.O. Box 99
Huntsville, Texas 77342

El TDCJ tiene una política de "cero tolerancia" para todas las formas de abuso sexual y acoso sexual de ofensores. Ofensores con conocimiento acerca de un abuso sexual o acoso sexual de un ofensor a otro ofensor, o de un empleado a un ofensor que ocurre dentro de un establecimiento correccional de TDCJ se les recomienda hacer inmediatamente la denuncia a la administración de la unidad, PREA Ombudsman o a la Oficina del Inspector General. Los ofensores pueden permanecer anónimos al solicitarlo.