

vccahouston.org
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May 2016

CIVIC ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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Vermont Commons Civic Association
PO Box 130891, Houston, TX 77219
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May VCCA Monthly Meeting

The Monthly VCCA meeting will be on **Monday, May 9th at 7:00 PM** at Café Ginger, located at 1952 West Gray Street in the shopping center near the intersection with Driscoll.



May VCCA Meeting - Property Tax

For the May VCCA meeting, we are inviting a speaker from the Community Relations team in the Office of the Chief Appraiser of the Harris County Appraisal District to talk property taxes, assessments, and protests. With so many new neighbors in Vermont Commons, we want to make sure you have information about how property taxes are calculated, the types of property tax exemptions, how to protest



your property taxes, and what payment plans are available for delinquent taxes. Join us and learn more or refresh your knowledge of Harris County property taxes. Remember: the deadline to protest the assessed value of your home is May 31st, so take advantage of this meeting topic and come meet your neighbors.

TAX PROTESTS

The great majority of Harris County homeowners (homes valued at \$1 million or less) are eligible to use the online iSettle program to resolve their value protest without having to appear in person at HCAD offices.

Texas law requires protests to be in writing, to identify the property and property owner, and to indicate the issue over which the owner disputes HCAD's notice of value. Protests may be filed online by using iFile that is readily accessible on the district's website: <http://www.hcad.org/ifile>. Property owners will need the iFile number printed on their appraisal notice to use the iFile process.

Protests may also be mailed to the district's office at P.O. Box 922004; Houston, Texas; 77292-2004. Protests may also be delivered personally to the district's office at 13013 Northwest Freeway in Houston. The appropriate protest form is also available on the district's website: <http://www.hcad.org/pdf/forms/41-44.pdf>.

VCCA Picnic Thanks

Thanks to the volunteers who planned and carried out the May picnic: Marilyn Fehrenkamp, Jane Inversen, Carole Dodson, Ann Terrell and Jeanette Hix. A special thanks to Jim and Sheila Armsworth for hosting us in their side garden.

Volunteers Needed

The VCCA needs a **Treasurer** for next year beginning July 1. No experience necessary. A few hours of volunteer work a month and a willingness to help is all that is needed.

Web page assistant: The VCCA Web Committee is in need of your assistance. If you know about or care to learn about WordPress sites and can give 1 hour a week at most, please email Carol for more information.
carol.bjornstad@gmail.com

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Yard of the Month
Two townhouses:
2112 & 2114 Driscoll



Java Time

Take a coffee break with friends and neighbors.

When: Thursday, May 12th at 10 am

Where: 2120 McDuffie, hosted by Carolyn Kelvin.

The VCCA monthly coffee welcomes residents from Vermont Commons and Park Civic. Come meet your neighbors, and we guarantee you'll make new friends.



Citizen Patrol Update

David Hoyer, Coordinator

The volunteer members of the **Citizens Patrol** logged an outstanding 251.25 walking hours and 50.8 driving hours through our neighborhood in March 2016. Note that is an average of ~10 hrs/day all voluntary. Thank you for looking out for your neighbors. Keep up the good work Citizen Patrol!

Jim & Lillian Skogsberg, Brenda Rojas, Marilyn Grant, Bob Costantini, Barry Brandt, James Austin, Andy Tallin, Kristina Ireland, BR Simon, Cathryn Gabor, Jeanette Hix, Rob Fuller and Elizabeth McKen- David Hoyer

VCCA Treasurer's Report 2/7/16 thru 4/11/16

Beginning Balance 2/7/16		\$2,690.43
Expenses		
Committee Mtg Exp (Feb)	\$200.00	
Committee Mtg Exp (Mar)	\$200.00	
Web Hosting Cost Reimb	\$35.11	
Newsletter Reimb - Mar & Apr	\$1,132.00	
Committee Mtg Exp (Apr)	\$200.00	
	\$1,767.11	-\$1,767.11
Income		
Advertising Fees	\$1,800.00	
Dues Dep	\$120.00	
Dues PayPal	\$38.54	
	\$1,958.54	\$1,958.54
Ending Balance 4/11/16		\$2,881.86

May 30th is Memorial Day. Be sure to fly your flag.



Recycling Change

Unfortunately, glass is no longer allowed in our green recycling curbside bins. The 96-gallon green bins will be limited to paper, cardboard, plastics and metal cans. Glass containers still can be dropped off at the city's neighborhood depositories. Please check www.houstontx.gov for more info about neighborhood depositories and recycling centers. Recycling

is a great way to show your support for our neighborhood and the environment. Thanks to everyone for doing their part!



RECYCLE
 * NO GLASS *

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Letter to the Editor

Spring has sprung and all of us in Vermont Commons are outside working in our gardens trying to beautify the neighborhood. But I believe that residents (both those who tend their own gardens and those who hire folks to do it for them) should show respect and courtesy for our fellow neighbors by bagging their garden debris and not blowing it on neighbor's yards, into the gutters in front of another neighbor's house or (worst) down the sewer system.

Once again this morning while I was working in my yard, I witnessed a hired gardener cutting the lawn of a neighbor's home on Driscoll Street then blowing the leaves and grass into the gutter and onto the yard of the neighbor across the street - who has just a day earlier mowed, cleaned, mulched, planted new flowers, and swept his gutter!! Every week I witness gardeners tending lawns in Vermont Commons blowing leaves, grass, dirt and household debris directly down the sewer holes in the street (which is totally illegal). And we wonder why we are having such a severe flooding problem in our neighborhood and why Buffalo Bayou is so full of debris!

Surely our neighbors in Vermont Commons can bag their garden debris and urge their hired gardeners to do the same. I'm sure many homeowners are probably unaware that their gardeners are not bagging the debris because they are not home when the gardeners are working. Maybe we can have the constable we recently hired to patrol our neighborhoods at least watch for gardeners who pollute the entire city by blowing garden debris into the sewer system.

Linda Gorski

ByCarolynn Kevlin

Gene and Marilyn Grant moved into a large home on McDuffie about a year and a half ago. Many of us know Marilyn as the friendly, chatty gal who walks her dogs religiously in the neighborhood. We also know she has been renovating her home since they moved into it. Few of us, however, know her husband, Gene, as he's a really busy guy—the Managing Director of Global Markets for BVVA/Compass. Marilyn and Gene live with their son, Gene III, 22, their younger son, Jonathan, 20, who is away at Knox College, and their two dogs, Trix and Snickers. Before moving to Houston, they lived in Canada, where they are both from, New York, Chicago, Florida, London, Singapore and Madrid.

When I decided to interview Marilyn and Gene, I had anticipated meeting two people who were probably a bit frustrated and distracted, as they had been living in their home during the renovation. Imagine my surprise to find a warm, welcoming couple who were pleased to share their experiences. They are also a couple who has gone on with their family life and developed new personal interests during the renovation. A word about the project—you can see detailed pictures on their blog, houstonreno.wordpress.com.

The first thing that strikes you about their home is that it is really large, over 7,000 ft², but when completed, the house will be over 8,000 ft². WOW! They are most proud of their kitchen, which is all done. All white and stainless steel, with a beautiful 12' walnut ceiling, the kitchen is a girl's dream (and did I mention it's huge?). And the wine room is a marvel, with storage for 720 bottles. Because Gene wanted the wine room visible from several rooms, two of the walls are glass, with walnut framing. The glass is 2" thick thermo glass and the frames are at least 4" thick walnut. The thermo glass insures constant temperature and humidity even with Houston's hot, humid conditions.

Another fascinating aspect of the renovation is the movie theater. Yes, theater—no typical media room, but a real Hollywood style screening room, a classic movie theater. To design the theater, Gene hired one of the two top architects in the world specializing in the most up to date techniques and technologies available for acoustics, sound reproduction and projection equipment. Because there was no one available in Houston with the expertise to manage and install the project envisioned, Gene became certified in installation for the state of the art acous-

Spotlight on our Neighbors

tics and equipment. Just to give you an idea of intricacies of the design, the walls have three layers of acoustic materials and an additional layer of vibration buffers.

The leather doors into the theater weigh 400 lbs each. The theater stage, on which the front speakers and the main subwoofer sit (there are 4), has 2,500 lbs of sand beneath to absorb the vibration and insure a true sound from the 11 speakers. So after all this effort and investment, what is the first movie Gene plans to screen after completion—the 1977 "Star Wars."

Marilyn and Gene believe they are about two months away from completing the main part of their renovation, although they have a phase three project on the drawing board. Needless to say, it hasn't been as straightforward as they had hoped, but then what major project ever is. Having taken the house down to the studs, they thought all real problems had been uncovered and repaired. Then the fourth floor deck turned out to be a bit of a nightmare. A huge leak, rotted wood, and the accompanying problems above their master bedroom meant replacing the new hardwoods and ceiling in the master once again.

But through it all, Marilyn and Gene have maintained their cheerfulness and family equilibrium. Gene and his sons have even become master brewers of their own beer. Marilyn, of course, is right in there with them, designing space for the equipment (and it is large) and provid-



ing a place for fermenting. Gene and son Gene took classes at DeFalco's to learn the art of home brewing. I can attest that their first batch is reminiscent of the local brews in the villages of Germany.

Marilyn and Gene are also Harley fans, proud owners of two Harleys, a heritage softail and a fat bob. This is another interest they share with the boys. I asked Gene when he became interested in Harleys. He said he ordered his first one in 1993. In those days, it took about a year to have your order filled. Ten months after placing the order, Marilyn became pregnant with their first son, and Gene decided to focus on starting a family and canceled the order. So 23 years later, Gene has finally realized a dream. Talk about delayed gratification!

Marilyn has offered to host a monthly VCCA coffee when their main renovations are finished this year. We will all look forward to that. But the most rewarding part of having Marilyn and Gene for neighbors is to learn what interesting, entertaining, and delightful people they are. Welcome to the neighborhood, Marilyn and Gene.

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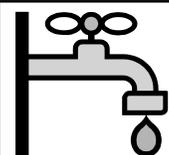
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