SAYING GOOD-BYE TO A COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND
MR. BENNIE F. CASS - GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

We are deeply saddened at the loss of our colleague and dear friend Bennie Cass. Bennie Franklin Cass passed away peacefully on July 6, 2020. Bennie was well known in the community of Balcones Heights for almost twenty years. He was born December 2, 1935. Most of his years were spent in Texas, serving as a Bexar County Sheriff Deputy for almost thirty years and continuing on in the U.S. Marshals Service for another five years. He served the City of Balcones Heights for many years as Councilman and also as a member of the Board of Adjustment and Appeals. He was a military veteran (U.S. Army) serving during the late Korean War and a few years afterward as a vehicle mechanic. This led on to yet another simultaneous career with his time as a Peace Officer when he owned and operated BC Garage which he sold in the late 1990’s. Many asked if they could add a few words about their time with Bennie. Fond memories of Bennie are shared below and on page 3.

Mayor Suzanne de Leon: My sincere condolences on behalf of the City Council and staff of Balcones Heights to Bennie’s family and his dear friends. Bennie was my friend and one of my political mentors. He loved Balcones Heights and I can still hear him during council meetings when he would say, “well, let me ask you this.” His questions and strategies were on point and he always saw the big picture. He wanted what was best for everyone in our city, his colleagues, his neighbors and friends and those he didn’t even know. He cared deeply about the well-being of city staff, police and fire departments.

Bennie was loyal to his friends and neighbors but he was also quick to tell you if he thought what you – or me – was doing was wrong. But he would also keep the conversation going, would listen and soon came around and we would either agree . . . or just get over it! Bennie was a hard worker. He also had time for his city and we served together on city council for many years. I loved his laugh. He loved gardening and grew some of the best tomatoes in town (sorry Lamar – your tomatoes are great too!)

I recently found out that he once owned a ranch in Colorado and stayed in contact with the person he sold it to and he would help him during the summer months to bring the cattle down off the mountain to prepare for the harsh winter that was coming. I knew this gave him much happiness and satisfaction and he looked forward to these trips. I would like to think now that Bennie is out riding the range on his favorite horse, herding the cattle and he is happy and at peace. Rest in eternal peace Bennie. Your life made a difference to so many.

Former Councilmember Jack Burton: What can I say about Bennie? He was known for throwing some of the best National Night Out parties; my parents and myself were always attendees. He loved NHRA drag racing and was quite the mechanic working on cars, he loved to fish but I think one of the things he enjoyed most was gardening and it showed. His home was always well-kept and his tomatoes were delicious. It’s hard in this age that we all live that not too many people can say that you know and interact with everyone on your street through good times and not so good times but Vivian Lane feels the loss of Bennie.

Don’t Delay Medical Care

Delaying medical care can have dire consequences. But unfortunately, that’s what has been happening during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data suggests that hospitals across the country have seen a decrease in patients coming to the emergency room for time-sensitive conditions such as heart attack, stroke and appendicitis.

Time matters:

- Stroke: When it comes to stroke, time is brain. Delaying care even minutes can increase brain damage, disability and even death. During a stroke, several million brain cells die every minute. And for ischemic strokes, the clot busting drug tPA can only be administered within the first few hours after the start of symptoms.
Don’t delay medical care - time matters...

- **Heart attack:** The longer a heart attack goes untreated, the more heart muscle can be damaged. Depending on the extent of damage, this can lead to heart failure, arrhythmia or even death. The quicker a person can recognize symptoms, get to the ER and be taken to the cath lab, the better their chance of survival and minimized damage.

- **Appendicitis:** If a person has appendicitis for 24-48 hours, the appendix can rupture. This causes the infection to spill into the abdomen and can make a person very sick and can even be life-threatening. That is why it is so important to call your doctor or head to the emergency room if you are suspicious of appendicitis.

- **Breathing problems**

**When to go to the emergency room:**

If you would normally go to an emergency room for your condition, you should still go during a pandemic. Some sure signs you require emergency attention are:

- Head injury, loss of consciousness or other major trauma
- Severe abdominal pain
- Signs of a stroke such as one-sided weakness or numbness
- Signs of a heart attack such as chest pain
- High fever
- Open fracture
- Uncontrollable pain or bleeding

**Hospitals remain safe places for care**

There is a perception that hospitals might expose an individual to infection or COVID-19, but that is simply not true. Hospitals have extensive safety measures in place to prevent infectious disease from spreading. Not seeking care for a medical emergency is much more dangerous than going to a hospital at this time.

At Methodist Hospital | Texsan, the health and safety of our patients, caregivers and communities is our top priority. We maintain strict precautions and infection prevention measures throughout all our medical facilities.

**Some of the steps we’re taking to keep you and our clinical team safe are:**

- All patients and clinicians are screened before entering our hospital
- Each hospital has a separate location for COVID-19 positive patients and those who are under investigation. These patients are masked and escorted to designated locations
- Everyone is required to wear a mask throughout our facilities
- Heightened infection prevention policies, including hourly cleaning and the removal of high-touch items such as magazines and vending machines
- Food and drinks are prohibited in clinical units to prevent the spread of illness
- Non-COVID-19 patients, as well as those receiving outpatient care, or patients with scheduled procedures, are treated in separate areas and assigned caregivers who are not concurrently caring for COVID-19 positive patients
- Updated visitor policies, including limitations, which have been in place for the duration of the pandemic

**Expert emergency care close to home**

“We have a brand-new Emergency Department with new equipment, furniture, and more space.” said Michael Brewbaker, Director of Emergency Services, Methodist Hospital | Texsan. “We are here for you, and we are well-equipped to handle any health concern you may have.”

If you or a loved one are experiencing emergency symptoms, don’t delay care. Time matters and can greatly impact outcomes. View our average ER wait times at MethodistTexsanHospital.com.

Pictured right:

*Heather VanDewark, Supervisor of Emergency Services*

*David Stafford, Emergency Services Critical Care Tech*
Continued memories of Mr. Bennie Cass

Councilmember Lamar Gillian: When Bennie planted his tomato plants, he would be fretting over them in 4-6 weeks if they didn’t look good. But, his tomatoes were the best. I still have a few on my windowsill. Bennie always took good care of his home. He always bought the best for the house. In fact, just a month before he passed he had his house painted. Sometimes Bennie and I got sideways. I would call him up and ask him what the problem was. We were always able to reconcile whatever issue we had.

Bennie and I sat next to each other in City Council chambers, he in place 5 and I in place 4. During heated discussions, we said more to each other with our eyes than our mouths. He was a wonderful Councilman. I always respected the contribution he made to the City. Bennie was a strong man of faith. He read his bible regularly and attended church often. Many times Inkie, my wife, and I would go to the communion rail and Bennie would be on either one side or the other. I am so happy my brother-in-Christ knew Jesus as his Lord and Savior. That gives me great comfort now.

Bennie, Charlie Matthies, and I were the City’s “Skunk Busters.” In the last 5 years, between the three of us, we have probably captured and removed eighty skunks from our city. Check with Charlie sometime, and he will gladly share the exploits with Bennie. I will really miss him. I will remember him every time I plant or eat a tomato, sit down at Place 4 in council chambers, walk in the neighborhood, or pick up a tool that he sold me in one of his many garage sales. He will never be forgotten.

Councilmember Gloria Cantu: Bennie Cass was a kind and thoughtful friend of mine. He was a strong supporter of mine and often encouraged me to become more involved in City government. While sitting next to Bennie at City Council meetings, he would say to me, “I can’t hear a damn thing!” He was such a character! As I made phone calls to my friends and neighbors during the beginning of COVID-19 asking did they need anything, Bennie asked me for some hand sanitizer. I told him I would have it to him within a couple of hours. When I delivered the bottles of sanitizer to him, he told me how much he appreciated me and what a good friend I was. He was always full of compliments. Bennie will be missed dearly. Rest now in peace my friend.

BOA Chair Dave Sellars: May God bless Bennie Cass. It was always a pleasure working with him on Planning & Zoning and Board of Adjustments. My condolences to the family.

BOA member Frank Hebert: I met Bennie at one of my earliest City Council meetings. He was always genuinely friendly and surprisingly humorous. We shared many subjects, mostly related to our age group. He never spoke an unkind word to me about anyone. He was a good listener, which made him a friend, immediately. I will miss him and his stories about Balcones Heights. Every since Bernie Sanders came on the scene I have called Bennie, Bernie. He thought it was hilarious, being such a staunch conservative.

Shana Halpin: Each month of 2020 has added to our stress and tested our resolve. However, without a doubt, the most devastating, soul-wrenching event of this year has been the loss of my dear, sweet friend, Bennie Cass. My dog, Lucy, and I would turn the corner on our walks, and I struggled to hold her back as she tried to race to Bennie, who was always sitting in his white plastic chair in front of his opened garage. Admittedly, I raced toward him, too, as we both loved Bennie wholeheartedly.

For her, he was a kind man who would give her buckets of love. For me, Bennie was a sort of surrogate father, someone who handled my gardening, or pulling me into his garden to tell me how to fight blights and bugs, Bennie filled my family’s hands, hearts, and brains with abundant treasures with every encounter.

While Bennie was actually quite humbled and reserved, never seeking personal gain or glory, he was most outspoken when it came to his deep-seated passion for the city of Balcones Heights and its residents. He wanted nothing but greatness for both, and he fought hard to protect his ideas. He would work his hardest because this was his home, and we were all his family.

I drive past Bennie’s house nearly daily. I suppose I keep hoping to see that opened garage door with him in that white plastic chair, tossing a flippant wave and flashing a quick smile just one more time. Perhaps I am hoping for one more conversation about Alaska or a few more gardening hints or a few more insights about life. His absence stings, as much as almost any other loss I have experienced. But I dreamed of him recently, and of his ridiculous sense of humor. He had me laughing wildly. Perhaps he is reminding me that I should focus on those beautiful, admirable parts of him rather than the emptiness of his absence.

Perhaps Bennie is letting me know that his wonderful soul lives on in all of us who remember and love him. ❥
It’s amazing how time flies; it has been over a year since you elected me to serve in the City Council Place 5. I appreciate the confidence in my leadership expressed in that election, allowing me to represent you and this community. One of the reasons I volunteer to serve my community as a Council member is my long and ongoing concern about maintaining our property values in community that is clean, safe, and quiet. Finding ways to improve, enhance, and expand our business district is another priority I have. Some say “we have no land to expand.” And that is true. The ideal thing is to attract a developer(s) to buy existing land and build to a higher and better use. One way to attract developers is to maintain a clean, quiet and safe neighborhood. I believe we all have to work together to create and maintain a strong, consistent, fair and effective code enforcement program. This is needed to eliminate situations which will deteriorate our properties and our business district. I want to take this opportunity to thank the residents and businesses that have recently made improvements to their property. I have seen new fences, new paint job, new roofs, new driveways, and abatement of some code ordinance violations. Hopefully we will see more in the months ahead.

This past winter the City engaged the Mitchell Planning Group to work with the City to update the City’s 2009 Master Plan. While nothing has happened on that initiative due to the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic, I am hopeful that we will make of progress in the near future. Many elements of the Master Plan were predicated on the original plans for the pilot Bus Rapid Transit system. After more than a six-month delay imposed by the County Judge to explore light rail, the BRT pilot program restarted. However, due to the delay, many aspects of the original plan were abandoned. That included TX DOT funding for major improvements to Fredericksburg Road. All of the related elements within our Master Plan were no longer viable. That is a major reason that we are revisiting the plan with the Mitchell Group. As for residential streets: Hillcrest is being looked at which is another street with deteriorating areas with the weight of buses, trucks and daily traffic. This will be a costly project due to the street, sidewalks, utilities, and such.

During my campaign I promised that I would work with my colleagues, staff, residents and business owners with respect, trust, transparency and courtesy. Some residents made this comment, “I don’t vote because council does whatever they want anyway.” Well, council will continue doing what they want if you don’t voice your concerns. Another comment was “I don’t know who is in council because council members never come around except when they are asking for a vote.” That is another unfortunate comment because every resident has the right to attend any meeting and ask any questions. The city provides a monthly newsletter to keep residents informed and all council members are identified in that newsletter.

I wanted to make sure I made myself available for residents to know who I am. I had planned to be at the Justice Center from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon and from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm in the month of April 2020 but due to COVID-19 my plans fell apart. Be that as it may, I will be happy to meet with any and all residents who have questions and or concerns regarding our City government and decisions City Council is making. Please contact me (my number and email are below) and I will be happy to meet with you at a mutually convenient time and location. That could be your driveway, the Justice Center, Jim’s, Luby’s or Wonderland of the Americas. We can visit in person as long as we meet all the necessary social distancing and mask requirements.

Council and staff will be conducting several workshops and public hearings on the City’s new budget. Everyone is invited to participate in those meetings. As far as I know, these meetings will continue to be held online via Zoom. The information is included on the meeting notices/agendas that are posted at the Justice Center and on the City’s web site, www.bhtx.gov. Attending these meetings also provides the status of the city budget and the challenges Council faces. The more people are informed, the better choices we can all make in moving our City into the future. A public hearing is scheduled for August 24, 2020. I hope that everyone stays safe and healthy. I encourage everyone to continue to follow CDC recommendations. If you have any questions regarding City issues, please do not hesitate to contact me. 210-508-7404 or mvalverde@bhtx.gov.

Respectfully Yours,

Miguel C. Valverde
Council Place 5
St. Gregory the Great Catholic School (StG) serves students in PK3 through 8th grade. StG is excited to announce that beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, a variety of learning experiences tailored to meet the needs of the community will be offered.

Parents now have the option to register in one of the following categories:

1. **A Full-Time Traditional Learner:** This refers to the “traditional” in-school experience.

2. **A Full-Time Distance Learner, Online:** A Full-Time distance learner online is a student who works from home full-time but will login and participate in class via teleconferencing.

3. **A Full-Time Distance Learner, Self Paced:** A full-time distance learner self-paced is one who works from home but due to extenuating circumstances is unable to login regularly during the day to meet (virtually) with their class. These students would receive the curriculum and some direct instruction but be self-paced at home working with their parent/guardians.

4. **Temporary Distance Learner (aka “hybrid” student):** This refers to full-time “traditional” learners who have to stay out of school for an extended period of time due to COVID (or other circumstances) but will remain registered as a full-time traditional learner. This refers to full-time “traditional” learners who have to stay out of school for an extended period of time due to COVID (or other circumstances) but will remain registered as a full-time traditional learner.

St. Gregory the Great is located at 700 Dewhurst Rd which is across from Dave and Busters at Crossroads within Balcones Heights city limits.

Please call or stop by for more details! 210-342-0281 | www.stgregorysa.org | 700 Dewhurst Rd. SA TX 78213

** The first day of school is scheduled for Monday, August 17, 2020 and unless circumstances change, StG will begin with all learning platforms that day!

COVID health and safety plans will be implemented in strict compliance with the CDC and health official guidelines. StG will enforce social distancing, encourage (and possibly require) masks, integrate safety zones at desks/in classrooms and common areas.

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**Rental Property Inspection Program**

Did you know 80% of the residents of Balcones Heights reside in rental properties? Most live in apartment complexes, some in single family residences and duplexes and others in hotels and motels. At the June 22, 2020 City Council meeting, staff introduced the concept of a rental property inspection program. The program will require rental property owners to annually register their property with the city. The program is a proactive approach of establishing minimum housing standards using the currently adopted building, electrical, fire, property maintenance, energy conservation, fuel gas, mechanical, and local codes.

Rental property owners and managers will receive additional information regarding the process of registration and inspections over the next few months. Now is the time for property owners and managers to take a walk around their properties, inside their common areas and rental units to identify potential violations. If owners/managers have questions regarding the codes, they are encouraged to contact Community Development staff to schedule a visit from a fire inspector or the code enforcement officer. These visits are complimentary and give both parties the opportunity to develop a relationship with good communication.

It is anticipated that the program will kick-off in January 2021. This fall is an excellent time to identify and correct issues before the program starts. Maintaining and improving properties protects the long-term investment of the property owners and improves the safety and habitability of rental properties in Balcones Heights. Safety of our residents is the paramount focus of the rental property inspection program.

Community Development and Balcones Heights Fire Inspectors will continue to share information on this project over the upcoming months. For any questions or to schedule an appointment to have inspectors visit your property, contact Janet Thelen at Community Development at (210) 957-3545 or email inspections@bhtx.gov.
Infrastructure Update
Janet Thelen, Director
Community Development

The April newsletter covered a variety of proposed infrastructure projects that we were hoping would already be underway. The pandemic slowed the process of securing bids and getting started, but on July 16, 2020 the Balcones Heights City Council held a special meeting and the focus of the agenda was infrastructure. The council unanimously approved the expenditures/contract for the Hillcrest Drive/Babcock Road traffic signal upgrades, awarded contract for the Vivian Lane street reconstruction, and approved preliminary design work for the Hillcrest Drive reconstruction project.

The Hillcrest Drive/Babcock Road traffic signal contract was awarded to SAECO for project construction. GKW Engineering will oversee the project as a subcontractor for 6S Engineering the City Engineer. This project focuses on the replacement of the traffic signal controller and upgrades to the pedestrian crossing equipment. This project should be completed in late September or early October.

The City of Balcones Heights will apply for federal funding in October submitting a grant application to the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) for the total reconstruction of Hillcrest Drive from Fredericksburg Road to Babcock Road. City Engineer, 6S Engineering, will oversee this process. There is a lot of preliminary information that must be gathered in preparation for the grant application. Surveyors will collect information on the right-of-way, easements, the location of utilities and drainage features, the topography of the land, and much more. Engineers will evaluate the soils, topography and survey information to plan for the proper design of the proposed roadway, sidewalks, and utility improvements. This data will supplement the actual grant application. The AAMPO will announce grant recipients in April 2021. Typically, the grant is 80% federal funding and 20% funding from city funds. Hillcrest Drive was constructed approximately 31 years ago and is considered past its normal lifespan of 20-25 years. For a city the size of Balcones Heights, funding a major arterial street reconstruction would be beyond our reach without grant monies.

The contract for the reconstruction of Vivian Lane was awarded to EZ Bel Construction. They are an experienced San Antonio based company who builds roadways all around our area. Construction will start in September. The project will finish up in the spring of 2021. The City Council approved with the Vivian Lane reconstruction the addition of 7 parking spaces at Rogier’s Park. This will allow park visitors a safe place to park off the residential street. The Vivian Lane project will use a $300,000 Community Development Block Grant (federal HUD money). The City will fund the remainder of the project with a $350,000 tax note and sewer fund and street fund monies. SAWS and CPS Energy fund the water and gas line replacements. Total project cost is $1.1 million.

Each of these projects is based on conservative designs and budgets. The City has planned for each of these projects and with fiscally conservative budgets throughout the years has saved funds to assist with the maintenance of our community’s infrastructure. The Infrastructure Committee and the Finance Committee meet regularly for frank and open discussions to prioritize projects, seek out federal funding, and make appropriate recommendations to the full city council. Planning, transparency, and fiscal responsibility are the standards by which infrastructure projects are selected.

Expect to see crews out and about the city making minor street repairs, repairing damaged curbs and sidewalks, surveying, and making the repairs to the traffic signal at Hillcrest Dr./Babcock Rd. intersection. Have patience for lane closures and other possible delays or detours. Remember to slow down and brake for workers. If you have any concerns or comments, please feel free to contact Janet Thelen, Community Development at jthelen@bhtx.gov or (210) 957-3545. Information will be updated as needed on the City’s website www.bhtx.gov, and Facebook page. https://www.facebook.com/BalconesHeights
Monday, September 21 thru Friday, September 25

Bulky item & brush collections are provided two times per year. For this cycle - bulk and brush material may be put out as early as Friday, September 11, 2020 - but material must be out no later than 7:00 a.m. on Monday, September 21, 2020 as that is when services commence.

Bulky item collection is provided to all City residential solid waste ratepayers. To find out if you are current on your account contact C-6 Disposal at 210.375.0066.

If you are a resident and current on your account, you are eligible to receive this service. Material must be out no later than 7 a.m. on the Monday of the designated week. Once the truck has passed, it will not return.

**BULKY PILE/BRUSH GUIDELINES:**

Bulky/brush items must be set out no later than 7:00 a.m. of the first day of the scheduled collection.

Place bulky/brush item piles within two (2) feet of the curb. Bulky/Brush piles are limited to 8 cubic yards (6' height x 6' width x 6' length). See photo below for a visual of these size limits.

Residents electing to use landscaping or lawn maintenance service to trim trees should have the contractor take the trimmings with them.

- Do not place on curb! Please do not block sidewalks!
- Do not place bulky item piles in front of parked cars, near fences, trees, mailboxes, beneath overhead wires or power lines, low-hanging tree limbs, or on top of water meters.
- Do not place material at the curb after crews have passed by your house. The truck will only pass by once.
- Brush left by commercial tree trimmers or landscapers will not be collected as part of this pick up.

Questions: - Contact C-6 Disposal Systems, Inc. - 210-375-0066

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**VIRTUAL TOWN HALL**

WITH STATE SENATOR
JOSÉ MENÉNDEZ &
MAYOR SUZANNE DE LEÓN

Join Senator José Menéndez, District 26, and Mayor Suzanne de Leon for a discussion on COVID-19, the upcoming 87th legislative session, and other relevant topics, followed by a Q&A with your local leadership.

Time and Date to be announced.

For more information call 210-733-6604 or Email: Sergio.Gonzales@Senate.Texas.Gov
EVERYONE COUNTS!! There is still time to fill out your census. If you misplaced your census form, or for questions about the Census Bureau, surveys, data products, or general information: Call the Census Customer Service Center at 1-800-923-8282 or 301-763-INFO (4636.) or go to the website: 2020census.gov

AUGUST 2020 CALENDAR
August 14  Budget Workshop - 1:30 p.m.
August 18  Planning & Zoning - 6 p.m., if needed
August 24  Public Hearing & Possible Action to Approve Budget and Tax Rate 6 p.m. ZOOM
August 24  Regular City Council Meeting 6 p.m. ZOOM

** All August & September dates subject to change - see www.bhtx.gov for updates.

SEPTEMBER 2020 CALENDAR
September 7  Labor Day Holiday - All City Offices Closed
September 8  Grandparents Day
September 11  Patriot Day
September 22  Planning & Zoning - 6 p.m., if needed
September 28  Regular City Council Meeting 6 p.m.

BALCONES HEIGHTS MAYOR & CITY COUNCILMEMBERS
Left to right: Miguel Valverde, Councilmember Place 5 & Mayor Pro Tem; Stephen Lara, Councilmember Place 1; Mayor Suzanne de Leon; Lamar Gillian, Councilmember Place 4; Gloria Cantu, Councilmember Place 2 and John Halpin, Councilmember Place 3.

Newsletter Editor: Chrissie Kolb, Community Relations Manager
For questions or comments contact chrissie@bhtx.gov