



Designed to Think Differently

West Houston Institute puts HCC at forefront of higher ed innovation



Creation Station: Located at the corner of Westheimer and Hayes, HCC’s West Houston Institute will offer faculty, students and community members a collaborative space in which to design and create.

This fall, Houston Community College will open the West Houston Institute at 2811 Hayes Road, a 112,000 square-foot facility featuring state-of-the-art science labs, an industrial makerspace, conference space for 600 and a high-tech collaborative design center. The institute’s unique combination of these components in a single location positions HCC as a thought leader around design and innovation in higher education both locally and nationally.

“The role of community colleges in the next 20 to 30 years will change dramatically and we want to be at the forefront,” said Dr. Kurt Ewen, HCC’s vice chancellor for planning and institutional effectiveness. “Having a makerspace, interactive classrooms, an auditorium and a collaboratorium all next to one another will create a

synergy that currently doesn’t exist anywhere else. I think the local community really will be proud once they see the space.”

Chic and unique

Dr. Butch Herod, director of the West Houston Institute, said the building was designed with a museum-like experience in mind. “It’s laid out to grab your attention and engage you in active learning wherever you walk,” he said. Extensive use of glass creates a bright, open space outfitted with ubiquitous computing stations and whiteboards. Informal meet-up spaces and nooks abound, created to foster conversations. A 10,000 square-foot makerspace is equipped with programma-

ble machines such as lathes, mills, routers and grinders as well as three-dimensional printers, laser cutters and vinyl plotters. Electrical connections for portable power tools hang over butcher block assembly tables, ready for woodwork, glasswork or soldering electronics. It seems like a shop class on steroids, a playground for hobbyists, professionals and inventors alike.

Elsewhere in the Institute is a spacious auditorium with full audio/visual capabilities, a computer networking lab and a digital media center with a “one-button studio” to allow faculty to record lectures and demonstrations. Another highlight is a high-tech collaborative design center called the collaboratorium, where trained facilitators will conduct workshops and retreats using a touch projection screen that resembles something from

(Continued on Page 8)



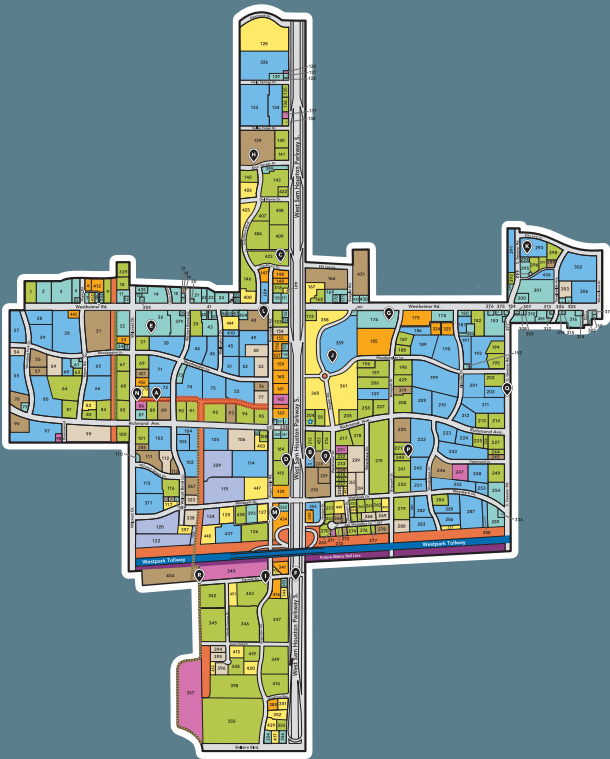
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WESTCHASE TODAY is published quarterly by Westchase District, a municipal management district funded by local property owners in a 4.2 square-mile area centered on the Sam Houston Tollway between I-10 and US-59 on the west side of Houston, Texas. We promote economic growth by enhancing mobility, beautification, public safety, planning and development of the District.



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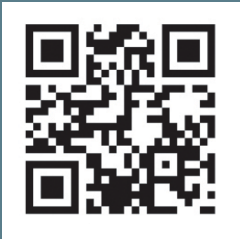
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Completion as a Process

Being a complete community is a fluid definition that evolves. It varies over time and audiences but it is clear that today’s achievement of completion is tomorrow’s starting point to move to the next level or meet the newest expectation of a constituent group. Indeed, time does not stand still and neither do we.

First and foremost, when development of this community began in the 1960s with Woodlake followed by Westchase, it was seen as a desirable area for working and living due to deed restrictions, landscaped common areas and good mobility. While those area strengths have not changed, the bar has been raised repeatedly. This competition among markets and options has benefitted the business and residents alike. Previous features and amenities become standard, new features are added and the cycle continues.

Hopefully you have seen the District’s video advertising (if not, visit YouTube.com and search “Westchase District”). You will recall that people are asked what they are “chasing” in Westchase District. It’s a great way to introduce our audience to some of our features beyond the ones we started with when color TVs were new. As we reviewed the articles in this edition, it occurred that, even in the year since the ad was produced, we had gone quite a bit further here in meeting the desires of people who want to do more than simply work or live here – namely those who want to learn and play as well.

HCC’s new West Houston Institute is 112,000 square feet of high tech, high touch, high impact higher education. Both in terms of design and programs, it positions HCC and its busy Westchase Campus (6,000 students in the existing 400,000+ square-foot campus) for growth. It brings more go-getters here and provides



Westchase District Board Chair Philip Schneidau (left) and General Manager Jim Murphy.

our stakeholders increased access to education, the ultimate personal economic development program. They are not alone, as our fifth degree-granting institute, the Interactive College of Technology (see Page 6), has also moved into the District. Developing our human capital is critical to our success as a community at every level.

After you have worked and/or learned, stick around. This issue profiles Toro Japanese Steak House and Sushi Bar. Newly opened and already getting strong reviews, this dining option expands the cultural range of our choices here. Dining as an experience is now part of our entertainment package. Zest in the West (see Page 5) takes this concept of entertainment up several notches. It is a one-night affair but has grown from wine tasting to include so much more. Westchase District is one of the sponsors of this Houston West Chamber event held here each year.

It is safe to say that none of these amenities were part of expectations nearly 50 years ago. After all, times and desires change. But the expectation was that this would be a great place. And we’ll keep working to fulfill that desire.

Retirement? What Retirement?

It’s back to work for new public safety director Don McKinney

After mere seven months after retiring from a 34-year career with the Houston Police Department, Don McKinney joined Westchase District in August as its new public safety director. He oversees more than 40 HPD officers who patrol the District and manages a variety of public safety initiatives which have contributed to a 29 percent drop in overall crime in the District since 2011. It’s a role for which he’s uniquely qualified and one that plays to his strengths as both an administrator and a people person.

Career lessons

Born in Wharton, Texas and reared in Texas City, McKinney’s father was a fire marshal and a certified peace officer. “His being a public servant definitely influenced my choice of careers,” he said. “Besides, I like being around

and talking with people, which is a huge component of law enforcement.” Thirteen days after he graduated from Sam Houston State University with a degree in law enforcement and police science, McKinney started the police academy. For the next three decades, McKinney rose through the ranks at HPD, graduating from the FBI National Academy and eventually overseeing the Crime Analysis division, Special Investigations command, South Central Patrol Command and Criminal Investigations. By the time he retired as an assistant police chief, McKinney had served under five different mayors and six different police chiefs. “I’ve learned over the course of my career, whether when dealing with my superiors or my fellow officers, not to take anything personally and to remember that often what seems like an

Meat Our Protein Vendors

Beef, pork, chicken and even bison sold at the market each week

Ever considerate of our carnivorous customers, Westchase District Farmers Market purposely provides purchasers a plethora of preferred protein products (how many markets can say that?).

The two Pats

Since the market first opened in October 2013, Shiner Pork & Beef (shinerporkandbeef.com) has been a consistent and popular presence each week. Specializing in English Large Black hogs and Beefmaster cattle, Patricia Tieken and her family offer grass-fed pork and beef selections that are treated kindly and humanely. “There’s not a day that goes by that we, as a family, don’t consume something that was raised on the farm,” Tieken said. “We think you’ll be delighted with our food, knowing where it came from and how it was raised.”

Joining the market in 2014, Katterra Exotics, based in Katy (katterraexotics.com), sells pasture-raised bison as well as beef, pork, chicken and other grass-fed meats such as venison, lamb and goat. “We like to keep animal stress levels low and work them as little as possible by allowing them to graze freely in the fields,” said owner Patrick Bierschwale. “Keeping the animal calm produces a far superior cut of meat. We care about the health of our animals and our customers.”

Dig those chicks

The newest protein vendor to join the market is Jolly Farms (jollyfarms.org). Jill Cox and her son Kevin raise about 900 Cornish Cross Broiler chickens on their two-acre family farm in Alvin, Texas. What started as a hobby in 2014 with 12 birds raised for eggs only has hatched into a burgeoning business that supplies chicken to such clients as Hotel ZaZa, Healthy Way Dairy and Erma’s Nutrition Center and Natural Market. “Word of mouth has really spread that we raise healthy and delicious chickens,” Jill said. “People want alternatives to what’s offered in the grocery stores.”

The Cox family receives their chicks when they are about a day old and broods them in a temperature-controlled environment for about four weeks until the chicks are big enough to be pastured. Fed only certified organic feed, they spend another four weeks living free range with access to portable floorless coops that are moved daily. The chickens are processed by hand at a nearby state-certified processing facility. “They are rinsed with only fresh running water, not a bleach bath like the industry standard,” she said. “They are never subjected to any brine injections and they’re vacuum packed with their giblets and natural juices which makes for superior taste and texture.”

The birds are sold whole for about \$6.75 per pound and have been a hit with customers. “We have people coming up to us and thanking us for our chickens,” said Kevin. “That never used to happen in my old job. It gives me a good feeling to have people appreciate what I’m offering.”

Custom cuts

Listening to customers and tailoring their products to meet demand is one of the qualities Tieken said local farmers are uniquely qualified to deliver.

“Whether it is steaks or chili meat or soup bones, I can cater to my customers’ wants and even give them recipes for how to prepare certain cuts of meat,” she said. “They can even come out to my farm and pick out their exact pig or cow if they want.”

Market manager John Carey said even if customers don’t select specific animals for their dinner, engaging in a conversation about where and how the meat is raised gives them a connection to their food and increases their confidence in buying and eating local. “Our vendors take great care in raising their animals and crops and they want to tell their customers about the differences that make their products special,” he said. “Hearing their fascinating stories is all part of the charm of shopping at the market.”



From fuzzy to frozen: (Clockwise from top left) Chicks at Jolly Farms are housed in indoor brooders for about three weeks before moving to climate-controlled coops; the portable chicken coops are covered with material from an old Chick-fil-A billboard; each coop holds about 150 hens; Kevin Cox shows off a freezer full of chickens, processed and ready for sale.

Westchase District Farmers Market

Year-round, rain or shine, Thursdays @ 3 p.m.

St. Cyril of Alexandria Catholic Church
10503 Westheimer Road
(at Rogerdale Road, one block west of Beltway 8)

www.westchasedistrictfarmersmarket.com

incredibly catastrophic event today won’t seem so bad over time,” he said. “A good friend of mine was shot and killed on the job, so things like that put day-to-day worries in perspective.”

Addressing perceptions

For 10 years, McKinney also served as Westchase District’s HPD coordinator, working closely with his predecessor, Mark Hubenak. That familiarity with both the District’s programs and patrol officers made him a natural fit when the public safety director position opened. “It’s nice that there’s a niche here for what I know and what I’ve been trained to do,” McKinney said. “I think the Westchase District patrol is a well-oiled machine and the dynamics that come together in this office are pretty remarkable. They played a major role in me coming out of retirement.”

While Westchase District enjoys a reputation as a relatively low-crime area of Houston, McKinney says the perception of crime is something that must continually be addressed. “The District can still have low crime, but if something happens to you or around you, it’s going to seem like it’s through the roof,” he said. “Part of my job is to prioritize our resources so that we can address property owners’ concerns and keep expectations realistic.”

Expect to see McKinney out and about in the District introducing himself to apartment and hotel managers, business owners and other District stakeholders as he listens to concerns and establishes priorities. McKinney said he’s eager to get started and has no regrets about retiring his retirement...well, maybe one small one.

“I was just starting to get my golf handicap down and then I returned to full-

time work,” McKinney said, laughing. “Working for Westchase District is good for me but bad for my golf game.”



Making the Rounds: Don McKinney, Westchase District’s new public safety director, introduces himself to Patsy Slaughter, community manager with The Crosby apartments.

Amenities Added to District Trail System

A roundup of the latest trail developments in pictures



A Classy/Trashy Event: Westchase District’s trail network looks better than ever, thanks to nearly 100 volunteers who came out in late July for our inaugural “Trails without Trash” community cleanup event. Employees from such organizations as: Asakura Robinson; Binkley Barfield; Camp Gladiator; DBR Engineering; Houston Community College; La Quinta; Lockwood, Andrews and Newnam; Olympus Properties; Pampered Lawns; and Walter P. Mooreaved the heat and spent a couple of hours picking up debris along the trails.



Signed, Unsealed, Delivered: Workers installed new trail portal signs this summer along the District’s trail system, like this one near Westpark Drive which includes decorative artwork and an area map.



Tile Style: Joshua Bennett adds grout to mosaic tiles at the new entrance to Harwin Park, which now links to the District’s Brays Bayou Connector Trail.



H2O at HCC: Hot and thirsty trail users, rejoice! A new water fountain - with spouts at two heights plus a pup cup - was installed at the north entrance of the HCC Campus Trail, near Westheimer and Hayes.



Pour Me Another: In August, workers began pouring concrete for the latest addition to the Westchase District trail system, the Westpark Trail. This 10-foot-wide trail is located just north of the Westpark Tollway, runs .6 miles east-west between South Gessner Road and Briarpark Drive, and connects to METRO’s Gessner Park & Ride lot.



Who Spiked the Trail?: The next time you take a walk on Westchase District’s trail system, be sure to look for our newly-installed “trail spikes.” These 21 metal signs, usually found in groups of two or three, are placed along the trails at key decision points as well as at areas of interest. Both sides of each sign includes information about the history and ecology of the area, as well as the role of transportation as a key theme to Westchase District.

A Decade of Decadence in the District

Zest in the West celebrates 10 years as West Houston’s premier food and wine event

Billed as West Houston’s premier culinary and wine tasting experience, Zest in the West has become an annual highlight in Westchase District’s cultural calendar. Featuring more than 200 wine selections and delectable gourmet chef-inspired offerings, organizers will celebrate the 10th annual Zest in the West



Wednesday, October 18 from 7 to 10 p.m. at Chateau Crystale Ballroom, 2517 South Gessner Road.

Something for everyone

The event was conceived by the Houston West Chamber of Commerce and Food & Vine Time Productions, the company that produces the nationally-renowned Wine & Food Week in The Woodlands, Texas. Food & Vine Time owner Constance McDerby is a longtime resident of West Houston who said she wanted to bring a classy culinary showcase to her backyard. “Everything doesn’t have to be in the Galleria or Downtown,” she said. “Zest in the West shows that West Houston has fine dining options and it lets people sample those options at a reasonable price while having a stylish night out.”

Starting at \$65 per person, attendees enjoy sampling food from more than 20 different local restaurants all competing for the “Best of Zest” culinary awards. “Often the head chefs of the restaurants are serving our guests and are eager to answer questions,” McDerby said. “It’s a great way to get exposed to a lot of fine dining without spending a fortune.”

A Bubbles & Brews pre-event outdoor reception features premium bubbly, fine vintage French champagnes, and specialty rare and craft beers, with live jazz music and Ferrari race cars on display. The Ferrari VIP lounge serves premium wine selections with swanky seating areas, casino tables and other fine touches. “Last year, we had a cooking demonstration from The Royal Chef, Darren McGrady, who was chef to Queen Elizabeth II, Diana, Princess of Wales and princes William and Harry for 15 years,” McDerby said.

The event also features DJ entertainment, a big board auction and silent auctions. One well-dressed attendee is awarded a “Fashion Forward” prize packet from the Claudia G collection. “There’s something for everyone,” McDerby said. “Nobody gets bored.”

Remaining approachable

It’s a premise that has proven wildly popular. As the event has moved over the years from the Houston Marriott Westchase to the Hilton Houston Westchase to Chateau Crystale, attendance has grown from a modest 300 guests in 2008 to a sold out crowd of more than 900 last year. Westchase District sponsors free valet parking for attendees. “We’re excited to have such a high-end event make its home in Westchase District for 10 years,” said Sherry Fox, Westchase District’s vice president of communications. “We want people to associate the District with some of the city’s best food and drink.”

A sampling of this year’s Zest in the West participating restaurants are: Cantina Laredo, Carmelo’s Ristorante Italiano, Capital Grille, Churrascos, Kroger, Le Mistral, Nirvana, Café on the Lake at Omni Westside, Rudi Lechner’s, Seasons 52 and Bundt-Cake-A-Holic.

Kroger has been the presenting sponsor for the event since its creation and most of the wines and craft beers featured at the event can be found at Kroger locations. “Every year, I hear people say, ‘Wow! I had no idea that Kroger had this kind of wine available!’” McDerby said. “It’s a big reason why Kroger continues to participate because the event shows its customers what surprisingly good wines they carry.”

Jeannie Bollinger, president of the Houston West Chamber of Commerce, said she thinks that while the event has plenty of glamour, organizers have kept it approachable for everyone. “We’ve always wanted the event to showcase the best of West Houston, but without it feeling pretentious,” she said. “It’s just a fun Wednesday night out on the town where you can get dressed up and enjoy some decadent food and wine all while raising money for a good cause.”

Through its ticket sales and live and silent auctions, Zest in the West has raised more than \$238,000 to date for Chamber efforts and the West Houston Leadership Institute, a nonprofit that trains and develops community leaders through a 10-month program. “We’re able to offer qualified participants partial scholarships because of Zest in the West,” said Rusty Graham, WHLI board chair. “It’s our main fundraising event of the year and we couldn’t provide the financial assistance that we do without it.”

Tickets to attend Zest in the West are now available and range from \$65 to \$200. The event is expected to sell out. Volunteer opportunities are also available. Call 713-557-5732 for more information or visit www.zestinthewest.com.



A Grand Zesting: The Chateau Crystale Ballroom in Westchase District will be filled with foodies at the 10th annual Zest in the West October 18.



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www.ict.edu

A Means to Meaningful Employment

Interactive College of Technology serves students from new Westchase address

For those wanting to learn skills that will place them in professional careers, higher education options abound in Westchase District. Already, students have their choices of American InterContinental University, Houston Community College (and its partnership with the University of Texas at Tyler), the Center for Advanced Legal Studies and Fuller Theological Seminary. Add to the list the District’s newest degree-granting institution: the Interactive College of Technology.



The World Awaits: *Gregory Weaver, associate director and Cynthia Bryson, campus director, welcome students to the Interactive College of Technology.*

Degrees and diplomas

Founded in Athens, Georgia in 1982 as Akers Computerized Learning Centers, the institution is accredited by the Council on Occupational Education and has grown to include seven campuses in Georgia, Kentucky and Texas (including two additional Houston locations). While new to the area, ICT has served students in Houston since 1987 from a location on Hillcroft. In January, the college moved into 30,000 square feet at 2950 South Gessner. “We nearly doubled our size and now have more room for our media center and computer labs,” said Cynthia Bryson, campus director. She said the extra room has paved the way for information technology diplomas and degrees to be offered later this year.

“We currently offer two-year Associate of Science degrees in office technology with emphases in accounting, business information systems and administrative support,” Bryson said. “We also offer diplomas in accounting, business information systems, administrative support and medical office administration. Our English as a Second Language programs are among the most comprehensive in the country. Our programs are designed for adult learners who are best served through a hands-on, interactive approach to education.”

Diversity and development

About 600 students are enrolled at the Westchase District location and Cheryl Latham, ICT’s career services coordinator, said about 85 percent of them are non-native English speakers enrolled in ESL classes. “We have students from about 90 different cultures speaking about 50 different dialects,” she said. “Graduates of our ESL program, which takes about a year to complete, may be awarded a scholarship for each semester in which they continue their studies in one of our occupational programs. So there’s motivation to continue studying.”

All occupational programs at ICT include a 135-hour externship, where students are assigned to a partner company to put their new skills to use. “As we establish our presence in Westchase District, we’re looking forward to partnering with more local businesses that could benefit from the professional skilled labor our students can provide,” Latham said. She said that the college’s career development classes prepare students for the workforce, focusing on such skills as resume writing, company research, interviewing and salary negotiations.

With courses costing about \$400 per credit hour, the college is ranked by the U.S. Department of Education as one of the best values for private, for-profit, two-year colleges. “Financial aid and work/study programs are available as well for our occupational students,” Bryson said. “We don’t want to see our students in debt; we want to see them well-equipped to get jobs.”

Interactive College of Technology

2950 South Gessner Road, Suite 100

713-771-5336 • www.ict.edu

Toro Japanese Steak House offers lunch with dramatic flair

Sushi and hibachi meals attract new diners



Owners attention: *Jun Yuan Tan and Zhuo Jun Xu preside over the restaurant and the staff daily. You’ll also find Xu swinging knives at the hibachi grill.*



Quick knives: *Chef Zhuo Jun Xu is an award-winning chef with 20 years’ experience in Chinese cuisine and 30 years cooking over the Japanese hibachi grill.*

The newest Asian-inspired restaurant in Westchase District is collecting five-star reviews from diners just weeks after opening its doors at 10694 Westheimer Road. Toro Japanese Steak House and Sushi Bar offers fresh sushi prepared onsite, plus all the fun of traditional Japanese hibachi cooking.

Owners Jun Yuan Tan “Andy” and Zhuo Jun Xu “Steven” worked through a real estate broker to find their new restaurant location. The pair own another Toro on Highway 290 at Highway 6. They liked the idea of being in Westchase District because of the good mix of apartments and offices, plus the location’s proximity to the West Sam Houston Tollway.

They spent months gutting the interior of the former Pradaria restaurant and installing ten hibachi tables in a specially-equipped dining room. The entire restaurant has been rebuilt, from the kitchen to the bar space to the spacious dining room seating. A private dining room accommodates up to 18 diners around two hibachi tables.

Now diners sit comfortably around the hibachi tables or individual tables, enjoying the cultural décor, featuring photos of Japanese cherry blossoms under the watchful presence of Mt. Fujiyama.

Raves and Faves

A quick view of Yelp reveals several positive dining reviews in just the few short weeks the restaurant has been open:

“This place is awesome. I came here for lunch and plan on coming back very soon.”

“The star of the night was the Toro Roll with toro inside and out. The toro combined with kanpyo, yuzu sauce and sprouts was such a wonderful blend of flavors unlike any roll I’ve had before.”

“Best new sushi spot in town. Live uni on a regular basis. Great service and fresh fish every time.”

Sushi, hibachi and more

For the sushi lover, restaurant manager Cathy Zhang recommends the live uni and live scallops. She said they have 40 different sushi rolls. After 4 p.m. every day, they offer a 50% off chef’s special.

Toro also offers a lunch bento box, sushi box, sashimi box, sushi/sashimi box or teriyaki box. “It’s good for business people,” said Zhang, “We can serve the food fast and get you back to work in one hour.”

As for the hibachi tables, Zhang said the show is as good as the food. “Right now, we have a lunch combo special. You can enjoy steak, shrimp, chicken, red snapper, salmon and scallops; choose any two for just \$13,” she said. “It’s all high-quality fish from Japanese suppliers.

“Our chefs are well-trained. Most have more than 20 years of experience as a hibachi chef. Bring the whole family; kids will love the show.”

To watch a short video about Toro, visit www.westchasedistrict.com/videos

Toro Japanese Steak House & Sushi Bar

10694 Westheimer

713-677-0156 • torojapanese.com



For the sushi lover: *A variety of sushi is served tableside in an exquisite nautical presentation.*

Padding the District’s Public Safety Efforts

New iPads assist Westchase District Patrol officers with surveillance and productivity

Picture this: surveillance cameras are trained on a Westchase District business. Monitoring software detects a group of individuals congregating in a corner of the parking lot and sends a notification to a patrol officer on duty. With a few finger taps, the officer then pulls up the video feed on an iPad and spreads his fingertips on the touchscreen to zoom in to get a better look at faces and to determine if he should investigate or call for assistance. The scene reads like science fiction but it’s happening today, thanks to new technology acquired by Westchase District to help its patrol officers stay on top of suspicious activity.



Armed with Apps: *Westchase District Patrol officers are using iPads to fight crime.*

Tools for the trade

While on duty for the Houston Police Department, officers have access to mobile data terminals (MDTs), in-vehicle computer workstations that allow officers to check license plates and drivers’ licenses, communicate with HPD dispatchers and perform other information-gathering

tasks. Those MDTs aren’t currently available to officers while they’re working Westchase District patrol, so the District recently purchased four iPads for public safety use in the field. “They’re not full-blown MDTs, but they’re definitely more than high-tech toys,” said Don McKinney, Westchase District’s public safety director. “They give the officers a variety of tools that they can use on the go while on patrol. Kudos to my predecessor, Mark Hubenak, for implementing this technology.”

In a huge clerical leap forward, the devices allow officers to complete their shift reports electronically rather than fill out paper forms. “Previously, we would have to manually enter the information from their work cards into a database,” McKinney said. “It was time-consuming and it meant there was a lag time for us to be able to review the data. Now we can track the officers’ calls for service almost instantly. It helps us identify what types of calls our officers respond to the most and determine whether there’s anything we can do at a higher level to target those concerns.”

Via the iPads, officers also can access contact information and gate codes for all Westchase District apartment communities, refer to a list of HPD call codes and view the patrol schedule. They can capture still images as well as videos for McKinney and other officers to reference. “They also can view Google Maps and search criminal records and documents via the Harris County District Clerk’s website,” McKinney said. “The portability is key, so they don’t have to come in off the streets to a desktop terminal to perform these tasks.”

Smarter and smaller

McKinney said he thinks one of the best features of the new iPads is the ability to connect with video surveillance cameras positioned in select locations throughout Westchase District. “This technology allows our officers to assess a situation before they roll up on it,” he said. “Being prepared when approaching a scene gives them an advantage that’s immensely helpful.”

The apps have proven to be so successful with the officers that McKinney is planning on loading them on work-issued iPhones as well. “The screens are smaller, but the officers can wear them on their belts and have both hands free,” he said. “The important thing is that they have timely access to the information they need in the field to do their jobs effectively.”

Tenacious Tactics and a Titanium Tooth

Officer Gus Barron patrols Westchase District with new canine partner

Gus Barron isn’t one to sit still for long. Growing up in East Chicago, Indiana, Barron played little league baseball, wrestled in school and earned money with a paper route. “I never sat and played video games much, I was always riding around the neighborhood on bikes and skateboards,” he said. That restless nature has served him well as an officer for the Houston Police Department’s Westside Command and for the Westchase District Patrol, keeping him ever-watchful for suspicious activity. Recently, Barron took on a new challenge and a new partner: Behr, a four-year-old, 86-pound Belgian Malinois.

From welding to working robbery

Barron’s current training with HPD’s K9 Unit is a world away from his previous life. For many years, Barron enjoyed a successful career as a welder for an offshore drilling company. “I loved my work and I was my own boss at the shop, but I wanted to do more to help people,” he said.

In his spare time, Barron studied respiratory therapy, eventually becoming a registered emergency medical technician and a commissioned firefighter with the Northwest Volunteer Fire Department. At age 36, Barron took the leap and applied to the Houston Police Academy. “I get bored easily and I just saw more opportunity to move around within HPD,” he said. “It was tough going in as an older cadet, but my wife was extremely supportive.”

Barron graduated from the Academy in March 2009, landing a nightshift patrol assignment in Westside. He later worked as an investigative first responder and as a member of HPD’s Westside Robbery Division. “There’s a lot of puzzle pieces you have to assemble when making cases against multiple serial robbery suspects,” he said. “You have to be tenacious, but it was rewarding at the same time when I could link cases together to make arrests and bring justice to victims of crimes.”

Bites and buddies

In his latest assignment, Barron and Behr are undergoing 16 weeks of training involving such subjects as obedience, agility, tracking and bite work. “For some of the training, I don a padded suit and work as a decoy while the

other dogs perform takedowns on me,” Barron said. “We recently discovered that Behr had a broken canine tooth and some bone loss in his lower jaw, so he’s getting a new tooth made of titanium, platinum and white gold. Then we’ll be able to work on his bite holds.”

While Behr learns to follow his master’s commands, Barron is learning to read his canine’s cues and reactions to situations. “The goal is for Behr to become proficient in explosives detection, so we’ll work a lot of public gatherings and events,” Barron said.

A member of Westchase District Patrol since 2013, Barron said area workers and residents can expect to see the pair together whenever the officer makes his rounds. “Wherever I go, Behr goes,” he said. “It’s a great life to be able to work in a profession that I love and to have my dedicated buddy right there with me all the time.” With Behr on the other end of the leash, it doesn’t look like Barron will be sitting still for long.



Crime-fighting Companions: *“My responsibility to my partner doesn’t end when my shift is over,” said Officer Gus Barron of his dog, Behr.*

(Continued from Page 1)

the sci-fi movie *Minority Report*. “There’s nothing else like this in town,” Herod said. “It’s a unique process for organizations or departments trying to think themselves beyond a problem they’re currently experiencing.”



Circular Thinking: Dr. Butch Herod, director of HCC’s West Houston Institute, stands in the expansive hallway near the institute’s conference space. The building blends natural light with LED lighting to create a bright atmosphere for creative thought.

said. “Whether you’re an engineering student completing a senior project, an entrepreneur prototyping an idea or a retiree making jewelry, we want to facilitate creativity and interactions.”

Ewen said he’s okay with the idea that it may take the general public awhile to figure out everything that’s offered through the Institute. “What happens here is the starting point for a kind of new conversation,” he said. “It’s a place to come to think differently,” he said.

A different mindset

Under construction for the past two years, the \$49 million West Houston Institute raises the profile of the Hayes Road campus, which has an enrollment of about 6,000. It is already home to the Media Arts & Technology Center of Excellence, the Engineering Center of Excellence and the HCC/UT-Tyler engineering program with 450 students enrolled to date.

Welcome, partners

Herod added that he’s exploring partnerships with local K-12 classes as a way to expose younger students to STEM classes (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). While the institute initially will be used by students, faculty and staff, there are plans to open up the amenities like the makerspace and the design center to the public via paid memberships. “We expect diverse groups of people to be using the space all at once,” Herod

“I think the WHI is a part of the innovative infrastructure that will help define this entire community,” said Dr. Zachary Hodges, HCC Northwest president. “It positions the area as an incubator for innovation, experimentation and redefining education. It’s kind of like a mini research park inside of Westchase District. Anyone who walks through this facility comes away with a different mindset of what Houston Community College is and what we’re doing. It’s expressing our response to 21st century workforce readiness.”

See for yourself

Though no date had been set as of press time, HCC said it plans to host an open house for the West Houston Institute later this fall. For more information, contact Alexa Valencia, 713-718-5963.



A Space for Makers: The West Houston Institute will offer students and community members access to high-tech printers, like this one in HCC’s previous makerspace, to create three-dimensional models and prototypes.

A New Look at an Old Address

Redesign of District website updates visuals, enhances ease of use

Whether you’re searching for commercial real estate information, hunting for the perfect apartment or just want to know more about the area, westchasedistrict.com is your source for all that and more. Visited by more than 20,000 users each month, the website received a major overhaul this summer that resulted in not only a fresh new look, but usability boosts that will ensure that visitors can find what they’re looking for more quickly.

Strong pillars

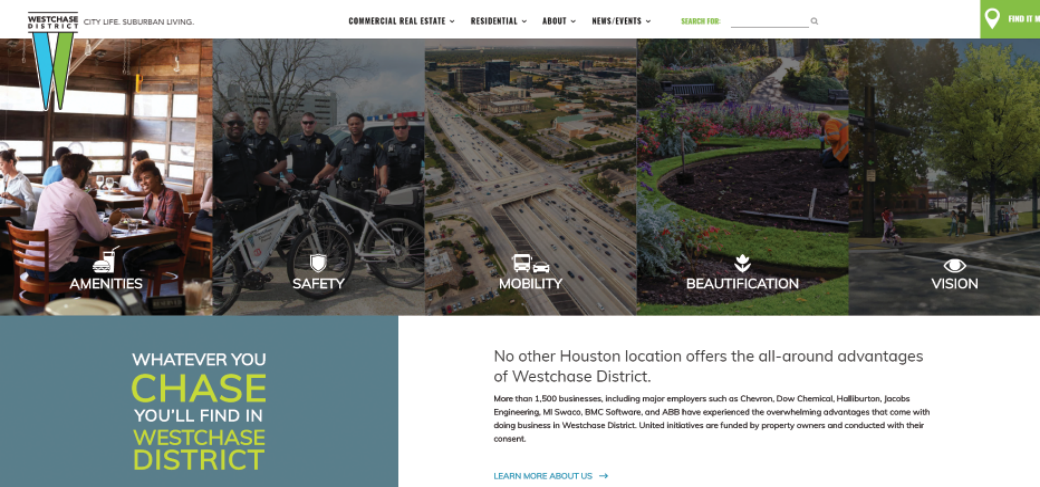
“The old website was working fine, but it had been four years since we last redesigned it,” said Sherry Fox, Westchase District’s vice president of communications. “In that time, there’s been a new pope, a new president and at least two more movies with Minions in them – we thought it was time to take a fresh look at things.” For expertise, Fox turned to BQR Advertising, the Westchase District-based firm behind the District’s digital advertising campaigns. BQR spent a half-day with District staff reexamining what services the District provides, how those services are reflected online and what pages website users visit most.

“The good news was that Westchase District is rock solid in communicating what we call its five pillars: amenities, safety, mobility, beautification and vision,” said Vicki Roy, principal with BQR. “Westchase District has a tremendous wealth of information for visitors to view and download. The challenge was in determining how to group the information in ways that are easy to find.”

Condensed and simplified

One of the goals of the redesign was for users to be able to access any page within two page clicks, so Roy and her team cut the number of drop-down menu choices in half. “We don’t want information to be buried so deeply in the website that users can’t access it easily,” Roy said. “Another goal was to limit the amount of text on each page so that users can scan pages quickly to find what they’re looking for.”

At a glance, users can view commercial real estate stats, residential information,



Online Update: Westchase District’s website, westchasedistrict.com, recently received a design makeover.

area demographics, and news and events. In the top right-hand corner of every page is the icon for the FindIt Map, where users can search for bus routes, parks and trails, restaurants, hotels, banks, schools and churches. At the bottom of every page users can contact staff and visit the District’s social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

Device diversity

Of course, the website is optimized to be viewable on any sized device, from desktop and laptop computers to tablets and smartphones. “Unless you’re looking at a map, you shouldn’t have to do a lot of pinching and zooming with your fingers or your mouse,” Fox said. “All the content you want will be there, presented in a way that’s easy to find and easy to read.”

Fox encouraged people to spend some time exploring the new site and to not hesitate suggesting improvements. “Even though we think it’s the latest and greatest, I’m sure there’s always something that can be made better,” she said. “But we can’t do it if we don’t know about it, so if you have a suggestion please contact us with it.”