



FOREST CREEK

F O R U M

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When I was six or seven years old, I witnessed the ocean drowning of a dear aunt. Although too young for the full scope of the tragedy to sink in, the thoughts and the images of that event have remained with me for almost 70 years.

No wonder that, when our young grandson started splashing in our swimming pool a dozen or so years ago, the thought of such an unfathomable occurrence never left our mind. We took every precaution possible, as I am sure the vast majority of parents, grandparents, relatives, caretakers and friends of so many young children do when they let their young ones swim in pools, lakes, rivers, water parks and more.

But the unimaginable does occur -- more often than we think.

Now that another swimming season approaches it may be the time to give "the unimaginable" some thought because if statistics tell the truth, drowning is all too imaginable.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes the following grim statistic: From 1999 through 2010, a total of 46,419 deaths from unintentional drowning (including boating) occurred in the United States, an average of 3,868 deaths per year. That is an average of more than 10 drowning deaths each and every day of the year.

But what is even more disturbing, unintentional drowning has become the leading cause of death from unintentional injury among children aged 1-4 years. It replaces deaths resulting from motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death from unintentional injury for boys aged

1-4 years. These child-drowning deaths occurred most often in a bathtub for children under one year of age and, in a swimming pool, for children aged 1-4 years. The latter location -- swimming pools -- accounts for more than 50% of all unintentional drowning deaths in that age group, according to the CDC.

At this point, the reader may ask, why the focus on younger children and swimming pools? While, of course, every drowning is an immeasurable tragedy, the loss of a toddler under such horrific circumstances in one's neighborhood pool, is bound to leave an indelible impression. That is what happened on a beautiful June day almost seven years ago at a nearby swimming pool. To be precise, on June 13, 2008, Colin Holst, a proud and happy four-and-a-half-year-old little boy went to "the big" pool -- a swimming pool close to Circle C Ranch -- just one day after graduating from swimming lessons and receiving his medal. Little Colin, age 4, enjoying a family weekend by the water. Colin was having a ball playing in the fountains and sprinklers with his friends, all moving around the pool together in a clump, playing and splashing and ducking in and out of the water.

Suddenly, in an instant, Colin wasn't with them. Time stood still as all eyes swept the pool looking for him, and then, only moments later, Colin was pulled from the shallow water unconscious and not breathing. Efforts to revive him at the pool were unsuccessful. Colin, the baby boy born "with a mop of dark hair that looked just like his

(Continued on Page 7)

The Forum

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Editorforestcreek@peelinc.com

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Peel, Inc. www.PEELinc.com, 512-263-9181

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Junior Cotillion



Austin resident Alexandra Gandara, and a former Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader, has been appointed director of the National League of Junior Cotillions chapters for Travis County, the program's national office announced. Gandara is a graduate of Texas State University and McNeil High School.

The Junior Cotillion program, which features etiquette, social dance, and life skills training for middle school students, holds classes starting in the fall and concludes with a black and white ball. "I believe the program has the ability to guide students into becoming well-mannered, savvy young adults who will positively impact their communities for years to come" she said.

Headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., the National League of Junior Cotillions was established in 1979 and has more than 350 chapters nationwide.

Registration is now open for the 2015-2016 cotillion season. Please visit www.nljc.com or call 512-785-7068 to register.



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MOSQUITOES

Mosquitoes can be very irritating and disrupt outdoor activities. They also are able to transmit various diseases to humans and animals. Mosquitoes are known to transmit heartworm in dogs and cats, and they can spread encephalitis (including West Nile Virus), Chikungunya, dengue, yellow fever, malaria and filariasis among humans.

Most female mosquitoes require a blood meal for egg production whereas males feed on nectar and do not bite. Eggs can be laid on the surface of water or in dry locations that are occasionally flooded by water. Some eggs are able to remain dormant under dry conditions for several months. Eggs hatch into larvae, or wigglers. Mosquito larvae live in water and feed on organic debris or microscopic plants and animals. Larvae molt into pupae which do not feed. Mosquito pupae spend the majority of their time at the surface of the water, only moving when disturbed.

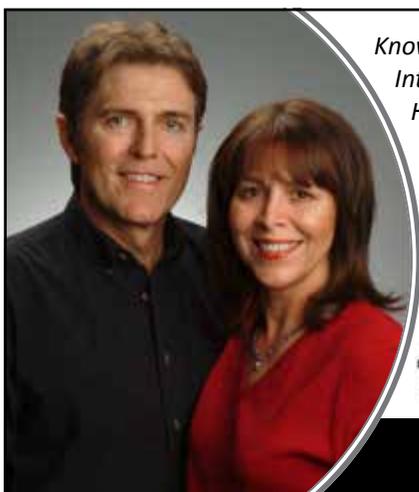
Many things can help to reduce mosquito problems around the home. Eliminate all sources of standing water. Containers such as watering cans, buckets and bottles can turn into mosquito breeding grounds. Water should be drained from birdbaths, gutters, flowerpots and pet dishes at least once a

week. Children's wading pools should be emptied of water at least once a week and stored so they cannot collect water when not in use. Tree holes should be filled in with sand or mortar, or drained after each rain. Leaky faucets and pipes located outside should be repaired.

Areas that cannot be drained, such as ponds or large rain collection systems, can be stocked with mosquito fish that eat mosquito larvae. Dunks can also be used in these areas. Dunks are a small, donut-shaped product that contains *Bacillus thuringiensis var. israeliensis*. The donut disrupts the life cycle of the mosquito and is non-toxic to humans, amphibians and fish.

Avoiding peak hours when mosquitoes are active is probably the best method to avoid being bitten. When outside, wear loose-fitting, light colored clothing with long sleeves & long pants. Repellants containing active ingredients such as DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus can be effective to keep mosquitoes from biting when evening activities cannot be rescheduled. Other products such as citronella candles will also repel mosquitoes, but work best in enclosed areas.

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As Austin and surrounding areas grow and expand, encounters with urban wildlife become increasingly frequent, especially during the spring and summer breeding seasons.

Wild animals often make their homes in or around our homes, and they can be unwelcome and even destructive. Be aware that trapping is not always the answer, and should only be used as a last resort. Unless the source of the problem is eliminated (uncapped chimneys, holes in decks or attics, pet food left outside), another animal will likely move into the same spot. Additionally, during spring and summer, you may trap a mother whose babies will be left orphaned if she is removed.

Trapping is also quite stressful for animals, and they often injure themselves when trying to escape. They can be exposed to the elements and left trapped for an unknown number of hours or days, without food or water. If they are relocated, they may have trouble finding food, water, or shelter, as they will be disoriented in their new environment. They can also be considered intruders by the resident animal population, and be driven away or attacked, with a very uncertain outcome.

To avoid all of these situations, there are humane solutions to prevent common wildlife problems before they occur. These include installing L-shaped mesh barriers under decks, sheds, and around gardens, adding bungee cords to trash can lids or keeping the cans inside the garage until collection day, capping the top of the chimney, installing mesh covered attic vents, taking pet food indoors overnight, and adding squirrel-proof baffles to bird feeders.

If you do run across wildlife babies, remember that they cannot digest cow's milk properly, so they should be brought to Wildlife Rescue as soon as possible. Fawns are often left alone and curled up in the grass for up to 10-12 hours while their mothers forage, so if their mouth is warm, bottom is clean, and they are not being overrun by fire ants, leave them alone. Young feathered birds are frequently found on the ground and belong there, as it is natural for them to fledge the nest and learn to fly, feed, and avoid predators, all under the watchful eyes of their parents, who are likely nearby. Unfeathered baby birds can be safely united with

their parents by creating a makeshift nest, nailing a small plastic bowl as high as you can reach onto a tree, first poking a few small drain holes in the bottom, adding some dry grass or leaves, and placing the nestlings in it. Within a few hours, the parents should return to resume feeding them.

Recently, the National Wildlife Federation ranked America's largest cities based on three criteria for wildlife: percentage of parkland, citizen action to create wildlife habitat, and school adoption of outdoor learning in wildlife gardens. Austin, Texas was named as "the clear-cut (#1) choice as America's best city for wildlife, boasting the most Certified Wildlife Habitats (2,154),

most certified Wildlife Habitats per capita, and most Schoolyard Habitats (67). Famous for its Congress Avenue Bridge that's home to 1.5 million bats, the City of Austin is certified as a Community Wildlife Habitat. Its residents not only want to Keep Austin Weird – they're the best in America at keeping their city wild."

However, as more and more of our landscape is bulldozed and developed, we leave less and less for the native animals that call it home. The least we can do is be

cognizant of these changes, prevent conflicts when possible, and learn to treat our native wildlife as humanely as possible!

HUMANE RESOURCES for wildlife conflicts:

Austin Wildlife Rescue: 512-472-9453 or www.austinwildliferescue.org

Austin Area Wildlife Rehabilitation: 512-709-6335 or www.austinareawildliferehab.org

Tips & Advice: www.humanesociety.org/wildneighbors

State Laws: www.tpwd.texas.gov

Please also note that Austin Wildlife Rescue benefits from the Randall's Good Neighbor Program. Present your Remarkable Card with the Wildlife Rescue Organization Number (#2780) and a percentage of your purchase will be donated back to this wonderful non-profit organization!

Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them. Check out our blog at naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com if you enjoy reading these articles!



Hope4Minds Expands its Mission

to Support More Texas Children With Severe Brain Injuries

Less than four years after it was founded, a Southwest Austin nonprofit organization has decided that it's got more than enough hope to go around.

That's the thinking behind a new mission and a name change for the Southwest Austin nonprofit organization known as HOPE4JD, which was founded in 2011 to support families whose children suffered brain injuries due to nonfatal drownings. As of April, the organization will be known as Hope4Minds whose mission is to foster hope and enrich the lives of children with an acquired brain injury by providing support and education.

With a new name and more families to serve, Hope4Minds also will expand its community outreach services to include parent support groups and concussion baseline screenings, in addition to the services it already offers such as CPR/First Aid training and family care packages.

"Our board of directors and supporters see the opportunity to do

more and help more Texas families," says Ronda Johnson, executive director, Hope4Minds. "Our community rose to the challenge over the last few years, helping us make a difference in the lives of families in Austin, San Antonio and Dallas. Our work has showed us the needs of more children who are living with an acquired brain injury and whose families need our support."

According to the Texas Brain Injury Alliance, fewer than 1 in 20 children with acquired brain injury will get the rehabilitation they need for recovery. Injury may occur during events such as non-fatal drownings, choking, car accidents, sports and recreational activities, falls, lightning strikes and even abuse.

Since 2012, the organization has provided more than \$211,248 in services to families, 841 hours of recovery therapy services, nearly 100 family care packages to Texas hospitals and rehab centers, and free CPR training for 216 adults.

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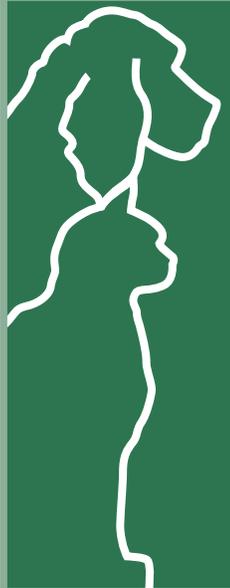
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Fight Back Against Property Taxes in 2015

By John Paul Krueger, Senior Property Tax Consultant

It's no secret that people are moving to Central Texas every single day. Austin is known nationwide as one of the most desirable places to live, and we're all paying for it. Skyrocketing property taxes are arguably one of the largest expenses that moved to town with this influx of new Travis and Williamson County residents.

The name of the game is supply and demand. This is great news if you are looking to sell your home in the near future. However, if you are in the vast majority of people that would like to continue to be able to afford to live here, rising property values pose a very real financial threat.

Property owners in Travis County will soon receive a letter in the mail titled "Notice of Appraised Value". State law requires that the Travis Central Appraisal District provide you with this letter communicating what the district felt your property's market value was as of January 1, 2015. You are likely about to experience some sticker shock based on the "hot" nature of our real estate market.

Whether your property's value has jumped 1% or 50%, every landowner should strongly consider the option of appealing their valuation. Why?

The Travis Central Appraisal District's mass appraisal techniques are anything but perfect. They do not incorporate important information specific to your property.

Texas allows landowners the ability to lower their taxes if they are being taxed unfairly compared to other properties in the area.

Last year, market values in Travis County jumped an average of 12.6%, per the appraisal district. Our real estate market has not slowed since that time. We will likely see significant increases again this year.

In short, there are many potential ways to argue for lower property taxes in 2015.

If you are not the type of person that has real estate expertise or enjoys rigorous negotiation, it is in your best interest to enlist a property tax representation firm to handle every aspect of lowering the property tax on your Central Texas property. This can save you significant money with as little as five minutes of your time, and the good news is most property tax consultants operate on a contingency fee structure—no savings, no fees.

Colin's Hope (Continued from Cover)

mother," died at the hospital the next day, having never opened his eyes again after his swim.

Out of this unimaginable tragedy, sprang a glimmer of hope -- even of good. Grief-stricken by their loss and shocked to learn the cruel toll drowning takes on children of Colin's age, Colin's family founded an organization dedicated to preventing such tragedies from befalling other families: Colin's Hope. Simply, "Colin's Hope envisions a world where children do not drown. Colin's Hope raises water safety awareness to prevent children from drowning."

As our weather warms up, as families once again head for our pools, lakes and beaches, please take time to familiarize yourself with water safety rules -- they might make the difference between a happy summer and the unimaginable. An excellent place to do such is ColinsHope.org. At Colin's Hope, learn about this wonderful organization's many water safety awareness programs, events, campaigns and resources. They all have one vision in mind: "A world where children do not drown. While at Colin's Hope, take a look at their on-line Water Safety Resources Hub," take the "Water Safety Quiz" and please consider volunteering for one of their many activities and programs and making a contribution so that the "glimmer of hope" may become a bright light -- a reality, as much as possible -- for our children and grandchildren.

Acknowledgement: Some of the information and wording in this article comes -- with permission -- from "Colin's Story," at Colin's Hope. Colin's photo and lead image, courtesy Colin's Hope.

Colin's Hope has a mission to raise water safety awareness to prevent children from drowning. They envision a world where children do not drown. To learn more, please visit www.colinshope.org



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