



Mueller Neighbors Honor the Spirit of Mueller with the 2020 Community Builder Awards

By: Alison Raffalovich



Black Lives Matter Mueller March by Damaris Nicholson

In your rambles around the neighborhood, you may have seen a few yards with the lovely banner that reads "Community Builder." These are folks nominated by their neighbors as members of our community who exemplify the spirit of Mueller and go the extra mile to help build community and bring us closer together.

For the 2020 Community Builder Awards, the Mueller Neighborhood Association is pleased to recognize four outstanding neighbors who will soon receive banners of their own to display proudly in their yards. Our first two winners, Jenn Adair and Naiara (Nai) Leite, live next door to each other. The neighbor who nominated them said, "Jenn and Nai coordinated the Black Lives Matter march in the neighborhood this summer. They are both advocates for a more equitable Austin and neighborhood. They also are both very generous with their neighbors, always willing to help or share what they have for someone in need. They are wonderful role models, and I'm so glad to call them my neighbors!"

I was one of the many neighbors who participated in the march this past summer and the subsequent remembrance ceremony at Lake Park. Nai and Jenn did a fantastic job organizing a moving and meaningful event that was COVID-safe and gave everyone the chance to participate.

Jenn envisioned the march as an instrument to instigate debate about race relations among our youngest residents in the wake of the Floyd killing, and someone posted a video on Facebook of deaf children and adults doing just that.

As Nai says, "Our community was eager to show its social justice convictions, so it was humbling to channel all that energy." Jenn notes, "I was so amazed by how many people came to honor the Black and bi-racial families living in Mueller and to show solidarity. I hope this helped everyone - especially those of us who are white - to take much more responsibility for racism and white supremacy." Thanks to these wonderful neighbors for their leadership and for giving us the opportunity to meaningfully show up in support of our Black community members in Mueller and beyond.

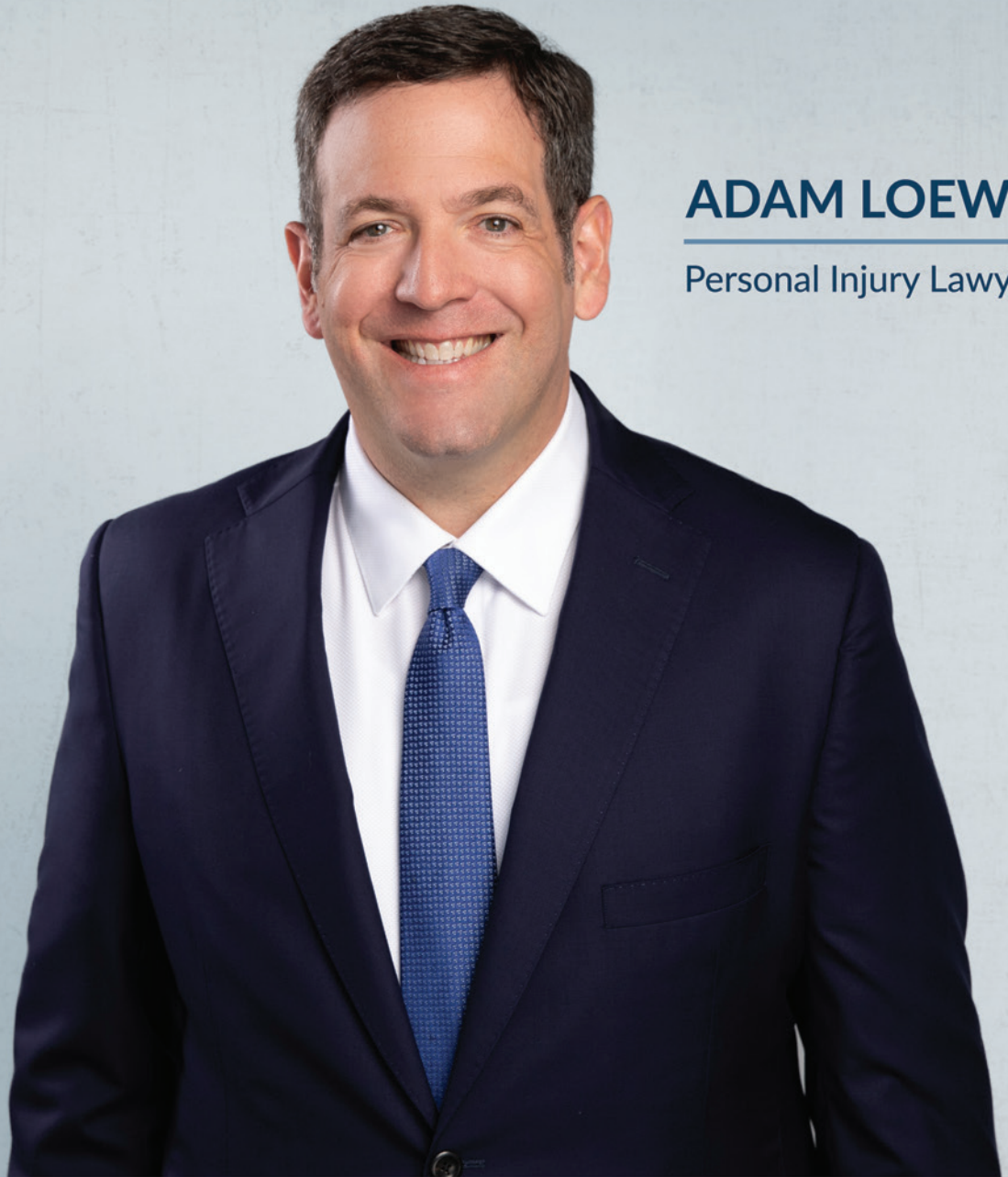
Another winner we're excited to announce is Carmen de la Morena-Chu. As her nominating neighbor explains, "Carmen is by definition what one might define as a community builder. She works hard to connect people as neighbors. She promotes goodwill and optimism through her personal involvement. I've been a recipient myself of Carmen's goodwill. Because I'm in the senior age group that was advised especially to avoid unnecessary shopping at the beginning of the COVID shutdown, she personally checked on me to see if she could pick up grocery items. She was also very involved in getting out the vote, putting up signs and encouraging others in their civic duty. She encourages others through her display of actions to beautify and take care of our surroundings. Positive and uplifting, she's an excellent neighbor for recognition."



Comm. builder Taylor Youngblood by John Wooding

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Jenn Adair, Merlin and Naiara Leite

that meander throughout our neighborhood... We are all very fortunate."

Our final winner in 2020 is Taylor Youngblood. Taylor is engaged on multiple levels in the community, as newly elected 2021 Chair of the MNA Steering Committee, as the Mueller Zero Waste Block Captain, and as Chair of the neighborhood-wide Block Captain Network. She brings great positive energy to all those roles and more. Her nominator says, "Taylor has generously given her time and abilities to form the block captain network and consistently attempts to keep our neighborhood connected. She is leaning into learning more about systemic racism and providing support to that cause. She is a neighbor committed to changing this neighborhood."

Taylor notes that the birth of her son and thinking about his future "inspired me to really step out of anonymity and into the community. My passion for recycling and reuse led me to become a City of Austin Zero Waste Block Leader. Speaking up on that topic, especially for the curbside compost cart roll-out, led me to speaking at the MNA meetings. That in turn led to my interest in supporting the MNA and its efforts to educate, connect, share, and inspire our Mueller neighbors."

In the spirit of "if you want something done, give it to the busy person!" Taylor received more requests for her time and support as she grew more visible. She welcomes the engagement, saying, "It's always been important for me to see and hear people, and as I grow more confident and outgoing, I want to make sure I know my neighbors, and that they know me, Mueller, and the MNA. I want us all to come together to feel like we all are connected, we hear each other, and we work to make this an amazing neighborhood experience where everyone feels welcome, can say hi to people by name, and can be proud of where they live and what they and Mueller have accomplished."

In a year that has posed so many new and daunting challenges (I for one am happy to have seen the last of 2020), Jenn, Nai, Carmen, and Taylor have helped us all focus on what matters most: the value of neighborhood and community, commitment to full respect and inclusion for all our diverse neighbors, and the joy of living in a community where we truly value and care for one another. Look for the banners for these and other past winners of the Community Builder award, and if you see these neighbors, give them a big (socially distanced) shout-out for how they help to make Mueller such a special place.

Letter from the Chair

Dear Neighbors,

I'm so excited to get to work with all of you this year as 2021 Chair of the MNA. We have a great group of Steering Committee members and an amazing network of committee chairs, volunteers, and neighbors. I'm grateful to previous Steering Committee members and volunteers who continue to work so hard to build up Mueller and are readily available to mentor our next wave of volunteers and neighbors.

A big welcome to all new neighbors. We're so glad you are here, and we hope that you find opportunities to connect and get to know the Mueller community, the Mueller Neighborhood Association, and your nearest neighbors. Please reach out if you need to connect, if you want to build relationships, and if you are interested in getting involved. Those of you who have lived here for a bit, maybe this is the year you dip your toe in.

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By now we've all gotten familiar with online meetings. As we go into this new year, still working around COVID, it is my hope that we are able to connect even more neighbors with new opportunities and options.

The MNA will continue to amp up its online presence both on our website and our social media accounts. We look forward to finding new ways to interact and celebrate during our signature events: the Egg Scramble, 4th of July Festival, and Fall Fest. We're working to build up our Community Engagement and Inclusion Committee and our Sponsorship and Block Captain programs. We have lots of ideas and would love to have neighbors share theirs as we come to the table together to get them implemented.

May you have a very safe, healthy, and happy new year!

Taylor Youngblood

Building a Community that is Practicing Anti-Racism

By Koreena Malone

Chair, MNA Engagement and Inclusion Committee



Part I - Background, how did we get here?

As a Community Organizer, in order to develop a strategy for action, you have to identify the critical issues and determine the causes or correlations to that issue. When evaluating Mueller's overt and covert racial discrimination history, I soon realized the work to change

the culture of Mueller to develop an anti-racist neighborhood was going to have to start from the top.

Mueller isn't unlike any other neighborhood void of racial tension or a history of systemic or institutional racism. NPR's article (bit.ly/2015mueller) highlighted the neighborhood's response to a racial incident that took place in 2015. "The incidents convinced some Mueller residents that they needed to open a frank dialogue about race in their community. Two neighborhood meetings have followed. NPR was invited to the latest one, in early December."

After moving to Mueller in August of 2019, I quickly started having one-on-ones. Often, during those conversations, the meetings from 2015 were brought up and reflected as a symbol

of the work that has taken place in our neighborhood. This made it difficult for me to create a space to either offer new opportunities to talk more about racism or even create actions. Talking about racism has not been destigmatized or normalized, so having those conversations were crucial to the ongoing work.

Please understand that conversations lead to relationships, but you can't simply change racism and the many facets it has seeped into with just that action. The dialogue between neighbors is helpful, but if all we do is talk, we have missed the mark and opportunity for growth.

After all the conversations and reviewing Mueller's and Austin's history I wasn't even sure if Mueller residents were ready to check our racist history or current policies. If our call to action to an overt racist social media post in 2015 was two meetings, we had a lot of work to do.

Gradually, I started witnessing a shift in both the MNA's leadership and from my neighbors. I began to see a collective awakening around anti-racism. It wasn't hard to ignore as the world was walking through this same journey.

A series of events took place in America and in Austin. The death of George Floyd was hard to witness and for white people, many seemed to finally understand the fear that black people live everyday.

In Austin, the death of Michael Ramos (another unarmed bi-racial man) and injuries to Brad Levi Ayal and Justin Howell by the Austin Police Department during the Black Lives Matter protest were on full display.

There was no denying the racial inequities that we were seeing from COVID-19 and police brutality in our front yard. There was no place to cry NIMBY in America, or for that matter, Austin, Texas.

So, what did we do as neighbors? On, June 6th, 2020, the Mueller Neighborhood hosted a #BLM march, and on June 8th, 2020, MNA issued a #blacklivesmatter statement (bit.ly/muellerblm).

Did either of these actions really create a systemic change? Well, no they did not.

Neither of these actions provided a space to discuss as neighbors and leaders what it really means to stand in solidarity with all those who are fighting to end systemic and racial injustice or to push (dare I say, shove) us as a neighborhood to a true commitment to unlearn and relearn about systemic racism. We remained a neighborhood with a history of unchecked racism.

What was it going to take for our neighborhood to create that change?

This is the first article of the anti-racism series, please stay tuned to learn what we are doing to organize and change our neighborhood. If you want to be a part of this movement, please contact, Koreena Malone, koreena@cpaksm.com or steering@muellerneighborhood.org.

Stitching Soothes the Soul

By Julie Berman



Cross stitch by Carole Mick

The Mueller Stitchers (AKA Stitch and B*tch) are keeping busy even if we can't be together these days. There's a lot of stitching going on but a lot less b*tching!

I have checked in with our members a few times to see how they are coping with the isolation during these last months. This is what some have to say.

Judy McMullen stitched an embroidery piece for her granddaughter, Sophia. She hasn't been able to see her very much these last months but it has made her happy to think of her as she was working on it. "It gets harder and harder to stay sane these days. Keeping busy helps."



Embroidery by Judy McMullen

Carole Mick's sisters inspired her to get back into cross stitching. "Whenever I need to just clear my head from worries or boredom I pick it up and lose myself in counting little Xs. It's been productively therapeutic." She has done an 11x15 piece that took her from April to September to finish. Now she is working

on little 5x5 monthly ones. She is up to March.

Holly Berent has always enjoyed a variety of sewing, knitting and other handiwork. "Often I start a project not knowing what the finished work will be. It's more about enjoying the process. It's very relaxing to just concentrate on whatever I'm working on."



Knitting by Barbara Redding

Barbara Redding has been busy making baby hats. She knit one for her first grandson, Barrett, with help from another stitcher, Diane Gierisch. She has also made hats for her nephew's newborn son and his big sister.

Diane Giersch has been making masked bears! She made one for her daughter who is in nursing school. Then her grandkids saw it, now she is

making many more.

Susan Anthony has made an adorable dress for her granddaughter and is finishing up a cotton throw for her sofa. "I sure miss working on our projects and getting to know you better at the monthly meetings."

In the early months of the pandemic I made snakes for my



Knitting by Diane Giersch

grandchildren. It was a great way to use up odd bits of yarn. I was having trouble concentrating and these were easy to make. Later I decided to start embroidering, something I haven't done in years. All the grandchildren are getting embroidered pillowcases for Christmas!

We all miss gathering at our monthly meetings but our projects provide us with creative, productive, relaxing outlets during this uncertain time. We are so looking forward to sharing all our creations when we finally meet again.

This group is full right now with 22 members. If you are interested please consider starting a new group.



Quilting by Holly Berent



Knitting by Susan Anthony



Knitting by Julie Berman



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The Pavillion at Branch Park

by Dennis Mick



Nearing completion in Branch Park across the street from the Kerbey Lane Cafe, the event pavilion under construction will contain nearly 20,000 square feet and will serve a number of purposes including

the home to the weekly Mueller Farmers' Market. In addition, events such as corporate functions, craft shows, weddings, and private gatherings will be held there.

Central features include two sets of unisex restrooms with common wash stations, three walls of floor-to-ceiling windows for weather protection to highlight the park setting, and a convenient loading/unloading area for vendors or participants bringing tents, stages and other items to the facility.

The Branch Park central location was intended to make events more accessible to Mueller residents as well as visitors from other neighborhoods and to provide easy access and adequate parking in nearby parking garages.

According to Brian Dolezal of Catellus, the farmers' market is expected to move to the Branch Park Pavilion in the springtime, with other events to be announced.

Running around Mueller in Minimalist Shoes

By Drew Harris



One of my favorite things about life at Mueller is the greenway trails for running. You will often find me on my near-daily runs around the neighborhood. But I'm running differently these days, more specifically, in a very different kind of shoes.

I have been running for a long time, both in marathons and triathlons as well as casual jogs around the parks. I took pride in running the Austin Half-Marathon every year for about a decade. I even started running the half-marathon in a taco costume to help keep Austin weird.

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But years into my running, I started getting serious pain in my foot. After going to a sports doctor, I found I had the bane of many runners: plantar fasciitis.

Plantar fasciitis is the inflammation of the fascia tissue connecting your heel bone to your toes. It made long-distance running excruciating. I gave running a break, but the condition persisted even a year later. I bought new running shoes with even more cushioning than before, but still my half-marathon days were over.

Then I learned about a new movement to ditch the shoes with extra cushioning, and try running closer to how we evolved to run. Humans can beat most other animals in a long distance endurance race. Our feet evolved for running over millions of years running across Africa's vast savannahs.

But these days we run in engineered shoes with cushioned heels and stability reinforcements. While this makes running more comfortable, it also makes the muscles in our feet work less hard to stabilize ourselves -- and thus they become ultimately weaker. More importantly, it encourages a running stride where you more commonly land heel first, rather than on the ball of your foot. This "heel striking" significantly worsens plantar fasciitis.

So I have abandoned my cushioned Asics running shoes in favor of minimalist running shoes, which more closely mimic the way we naturally run when barefoot. I started with a pair from Vibram, and I'm now running in Xero running shoes with a 5,000 mile sole warranty.

Unlike normal shoes that have a cushioned, elevated heel, these minimalist running shoes have a "zero-drop" flat sole. They take a while to get used to and to train your foot muscles to work harder to stabilize. Researching this method first or even consulting with a trainer can help you get started. I have been taking it slow, initially only running a mile a day. But now, three weeks in, I am back to running three miles per day, and most importantly, I am experiencing no plantar fasciitis!

So if you see me running around in my blue Xero running shoes, say hi!

Mueller Donates with Heart

By Taylor Youngblood

Mueller has so much heart. The generosity of our neighbors is astounding, and I have been so moved I need to share how our wonderful community came together in December 2020.

Through the church I attend, Gateway Church - Central Austin campus, I became aware of the assistance we provide to refugee and asylum populations. I was informed about a family of refugees from Afghanistan with five boys who had a list of needs the church offered to work on. I had a strong feeling that Mueller would be able to take care of this family, and I was correct.

As Mueller's Zero Waste Block Leader (and through the other roles I hold in Mueller), neighbors regularly ask me where they can donate items to those who might most benefit. With that in mind leading up to the semi-annual bulk collection week, I posted the list of items this family was requesting. We received commitments for almost everything requested in one day. We weren't able to find all the bikes for the boys - we got two for the youngest. - but we got everything else, as well as seven beds. It's been very difficult for the refugee program to obtain beds, and Mueller donated seven (three with frames).



Bed Donations by Taylor Youngblood

This family's father worked as an artist back in his country, and many Mueller residents donated and found him art supplies. The family and the program coordinator, himself a refugee from Burundi, were so grateful and touched. Thank you, Mueller, for your generous support and patience while we coordinated pickups, and thanks to those of you who dropped items off. More information is available at gatewaychurch.com/refugees.

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Donated Bike by Taylor Youngblood

I'd like to thank the following people who donated: Leigh Gavigan, Pam Nicholas, Monica Soloman, Patricia Maveety Carnes, Mandy Gauld, Jeanne Traeger, Scott Townsend, Jenna Bacorn, Christina Martin, Woody Lauland, Leah Jean, Becca Hari, Sydney Spann, Barbara Pfaff, Caroling McGrath, Linda Gilbert, Mary Eng, Judy Fridella Townsend, and their families.

Also, in December, our own children's museum, Thinkery, reached out to me and requested my assistance arranging a drop off site for toilet paper rolls and paper egg cartons for their activity kits. At the time Thinkery was not able to accept material donations like in the past, so they asked me to hold a small drive to safely and effectively collect these two items. We got a ton of material as you can see in the picture. Thinkery staff is very grateful, and as a result of your support and requests, they offered to expand collection to the public for limited times during January.

Thank you for your passion, support of our local organizations, activities for youth, and for holding the physical space to make those options possible.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for the heart you all have for our local community. ❤️



Thinkery Donations by Taylor Youngblood



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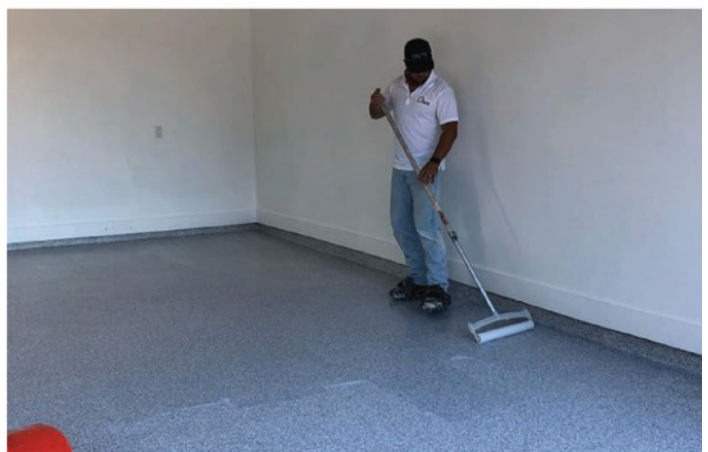
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