



Smithson Valley earns two gold medals, sets state record at 6A swim meet.

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NEW BRAUNFELS Herald-Zeitung

Reporting the life story of New Braunfels since 1852

Solutions emerging for foster care needs

As the need for additional foster parents grows, so do local organizations



By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

Ten years ago, Jenni Lord just wanted to create a small running event to help out her friend, trying

to adopt. What was born was Chosen Care, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting local foster parents and children.

Last Easter, Natalie Motl was

visiting her father for Easter in the Fort Worth area. Natalie's father founded Strawberry Creek Services, and after talking more with her dad and praying on it, Motl

decided to help open a branch of the child placement agency in New Braunfels. That branch just

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City survey open to residents online

Results will assist future city planning

By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

New Braunfelsers who were not randomly selected to participate in the 2019 National Citizen Survey can still have their opinions heard.

The city of New Braunfels has opened up the survey to all residents online, and citizens who were not within the 3,000 households randomly selected by the National Research Center can now participate.

The survey was designed to measure service performance, assess community needs and assist in long-range strategic planning, according to a city press release.

Once an opt-in, citywide survey was offered by the National Research Center, the city eagerly elected to participate, said Sheri Masterson, public information officer for the city.

"The scientific, controlled survey goes out first, as we would like those randomly selected to participate in that control group survey," Masterson said. "The city-

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Nolan Simmons, top and bottom right, gets ready to wake board and is seen jumping from a ramp. Simmons came in fourth place in the men's pro division for Texas Ski Ranch's 15th annual Freeze Ride on Saturday. Conrad McIntosh, bottom left, received first place in the men's pro division for Texas Ski Ranch's 15th annual Freeze Ride. Ten men competed in the competition's pro division, and the top six were recognized with awards. **LINDSEY CARNETT | Herald-Zeitung**



15th annual Freeze Ride makes waves



5K formed when trails don't keep speed with bond

By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

After trail funding didn't make the cut for the city's 2019 bond list, the Comal Trails Alliance decided to give New Braunfels a run for its money — literally.

The CTA will hold its first Sweaty Yeti 5K in Landa Park at 8 a.m. on March 23, said Nancy Pappas, CTA president.

The mission of the CTA is to create trails connecting com-

munities and providing opportunities for education, health, preservation and enjoyment of the natural resources of Comal County, Pappas said.

"The CTA feels that there is overwhelming support in the community for a citywide initiative to make a dent in our lack of community trails, but there must be a concerted, well-thought out and funded effort to make that happen," Pappas said.

This first ever "trail adventure

run" through Panther Canyon is to bring attention to the need for more trails, Pappas said. The funds raised will support CTA efforts to partner with the parks department and Comal County staff to maintain and improve existing trails, Pappas added.

"(We want to) encourage more trails through partnerships, grants and other funding opportunities," Pappas said.

More trails in the area would be beneficial for multiple rea-

sons, including environmental stewardship, encouraging economic development and more, Pappas said.

"Trails (also) protect culturally and historically valuable areas, ... encourage physical fitness and healthy lifestyles, and connect people to nature," Pappas said. "Especially in a community like ours where public transportation is not an option — trails are a relatively inexpensive way to solve a lot of community-wide

concerns."

There are plenty of areas in the community that would be ideal for a trail, Pappas said.

"There are many opportunities for expanding our trail system, including up along Alligator Creek, out Rock St. towards Gruene," Pappas said. "The new Loop 337 Expansion with 10 foot sidewalks on either side create incredible opportunities for a

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FOSTER

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opened in September.

Sondra Ajasin was fostering a two-day-old baby, and after realizing all the shelters in Guadalupe County were too full to help, Ajasin recognized the need for the county's first emergency shelter, which her organization, TruLight127 Foster & Adopt Ministries is almost finished building. The shelter is set to finish on April 1.

In part one of this series, the Herald-Zeitung examined how local population growth also means seeing more local children enter the system. Part two focused on the process foster children go through, the problems they uniquely face and the difficulties caretakers face.

In part three we take a look at what local solutions are emerging and how people living in Comal and Guadalupe counties can get involved in helping children in the region.

Recognizing the need

As the need for more foster parents and families has grown in the New Braunfels area, it hasn't done so quietly.

However, most people don't think about foster children day-to-day unless they're personally connected to them in some way, said Tara Roussett, CEO of St. Jude's Ranch for Children — Texas (SJRC).

SJRC offers services for children or families who have been affected by trauma, abuse or neglect, including housing foster children. Its housing campuses are located in New Braunfels and Bulverde.

"Say you have a grandchild with juvenile diabetes. You're going to really want to find a cure for that because it's personal to you," Roussett said. "For foster care, it's not personal to a lot of people that actually have the means to help, and so it kind of sometimes feels like the agencies are fighting on our own."

Recognizing the need and educating other people about it is the first step toward getting local children going into the system the help they need, Roussett said.

"Getting them to understand that this facility is literally in people's backyards in Comal County, that needs help and needs recognition and it would be so helpful to us," Roussett said.

The more people who are made aware of the need locally, the more local children can be helped — which hopefully results in more of children who are in the system being able to stay in their home county, said Mary Walker, spokeswoman with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

"We just want to make sure of the fact that people are aware of the fact that if at all possible, when at all possible, we want to keep the kids where they're comfortable, in a place that they know," Walker said.

Lord said when she decided to start the race that

would lead to the creation of Chosen Care, she already saw more people becoming connected to it.

"There was a growing awareness in our community about this crisis around children in the foster system and in orphanages around the world," Lord said.

Still, there is a lot more work to be done to make sure everyone is aware of the problem locally, which is partially what led to the creation of the Family Coalition, said Motl, Assistant Director at Strawberry Creek Services, New Braunfels' recently-opened child placement agency.

The Family Coalition is a round table group of people in the community interested in helping foster children, Motl explained. Groups such as Chosen Care, SJRC, Strawberry Creek Services and more have a seat on it, Motl said. The Family Coalition is new to the area and was founded about six months ago, Motl said.

"We meet together once a month and our purpose is to right now ... awaken the community to what we're doing and the need ... (right now our goal is) to get the community more involved and to let them know that this is something that's happening here," Motl said.

A lot of people in New Braunfels think there isn't a lot of neglect or abuse in the area, but there is, Motl said.

"People just didn't know about it," Motl said.

How to help

So what can Comal and Guadalupe County residents do to help this growing population of children in need?

Foster. Volunteer. Give. These are the three actions local foster advocates are pushing for; more people willing to foster; more people who can volunteer their time; more people who can donate items or money to groups already helping local children.

"We definitely have our eye in that area, and on the need for more foster parents who will come in and then can take those children to a loving home," said Cheronda Tillman, Region 8 DFPS rural foster and adoption recruitment specialist.

The children who go into the system did not ask to be born into the situation they've been born into, said Ajasin.

"They did not ask for their parents to hurt them, they did not ask for their parents to be addicted to drugs — all they're asking for is for somebody to love them, and if you have that heart, then that's what you should do (is foster)," Ajasin said.

The number one biggest need above all else is people who want to be foster parents, Roussett said.

"We will guide them through the entire process, train them, help them, be their friend by their side as they open up their heart and home to children in need and so we are always looking to grow our foster home base," Roussett said.

Anyone in the New Braunfels area interested in getting licensed to be a foster family can do so by

reaching out to Strawberry Creek Services at www.strawberrycreekservices.com, Motl said.

"A family that wants to become foster parents or foster to adopt would come here and we would get them fully licensed through the state," Motl said.

For people who don't feel they can handle fostering right now, there are a ton of volunteer opportunities locally, Motl said.

"If you can't foster and adopt, but you can babysit, or help with short-term care giving, that gives the people who are doing this hard work a break," Ajasin said.

Eloise Hudson, community relations coordinator for CASA of Central Texas, said CASA is always looking for more volunteers to be CASAs — Court-Appointed Special Advocates.

A CASA volunteer advocates for what he or she feels is best for foster children as they go through the court process, Hudson said.

"We do ask for a year commitment because in the state of Texas there has to be a decision made on the case at a year," Hudson said.

Throughout the year to 18-months they are paired with a child, a CASA volunteer is required to visit with the child at least once a month, Hudson said — something many of the volunteers find very rewarding.

"We want the child to get comfortable with the volunteer and be able to ask questions that they want to ask and just for them to know that they do have an adult in their life that they can trust and that they know is going to give them answers," Hudson said.

Persons interested in becoming a CASA volunteer can reach out to CASA of Central Texas at www.casacentex.org under the volunteer tab.

Locals can also help to support foster families through volunteering with Chosen Care or with New Braunfels Angels.

"We always have a need for volunteers. We definitely have a need for mentors who have fostered or adopted themselves in the past, that could be a potential resource to a family," Lord said.

For people interested in volunteering with Chosen Care, visit www.chosen.care.

New Braunfels Angels are volunteers who support a family through giving a monthly support box, full of toys, groceries and more, Motl said.

"In the box can be anything from paper towels to a child's favorite dinosaur if they said they like dinosaurs, so it's really to support the entire family," Motl said.

To volunteer with the New Braunfels Angels, go to www.facebook.com/NewBraunfelsAngelsTX/.

All local organizations are always open to accepting monetary donations, Hudson said.

"There's lots of different ways that people can help — you can just give individually, you can go

to our website and make a one-time donation there," Hudson said.

Local opportunities for giving to foster children are endless, Roussett said.

"There's so many other opportunities such as donations — current, gently used clothes that kids and teenagers are wearing today ... things used around the household ... shampoo even," Roussett said.

For more information on how to donate to SJRC, visit www.sjrctexas.org.

Fostering may not be for everyone. That's something very understandable; but everyone can give something that helps these children, whether that be time, support, donations or money, Ajasin said.

"That is just as important as fostering and adopting," Ajasin said. "Because no one can do it by themselves. Really our hash tag is 'it takes a village' and we really, really believe that."

For information on how to give to TruLight127 go to www.trulight127.org.

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