MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF HERNANDEZ

Throughout my career, and especially in my role as Chief Investigator with the Travis County District Attorney's Office, I saw first-hand, the struggles people with mental illness face as they and their cases move through the judicial process. I can't count the number of mothers of adult children with mental illness who shared their heartbreaking stories with me. Many of them carried luggage full of documents; piles of paper that did nothing to bring relief to their child's suffering. These moms pleaded their children's misery, and I could see the toll that years of fighting for their children had taken on them. These experiences were one of the driving forces that convinced me to run for Sheriff.

As your Sheriff, I serve on the front lines of one of our state's biggest mental health issues. I've written about this matter several times. Approximately 40% of the inmate population in our jails have a mental health designation of some kind. Today, 155 of them have been deemed mentally incompetent to stand trial. Most of them will wait two years for admission to a state hospital for competency restoration. Jail is not only one of the worst places for someone in a mental health crisis, it's also very costly.

As we continue to push for solutions on both the state and local level, we have to do everything we possibly can to humanely care for those in our custody. As we know better, we must do better. To that end, we're extending our resources toward developing a Trauma-Informed approach because we understand the vast majority of people living with mental illness have experienced trauma as well.

Trauma Informed Care is a basic realization of trauma and its effects, recognizing the signs of trauma, proper response, and efforts to avoid further traumatization. It is not a "soft" option, making excuses for people, an alternative to justice or a compromise of safety and security.

I'm so excited that Karen Ranus has

joined TCSO as our Trauma Informed Program Administrator. She's a force to be reckoned with and an expert in her field. You can read more about her distinguished career in this issue. In her new role with TCSO, we anticipate benefits to our inmate population, our employees, and the community.

I find myself once again, thinking about those moms. They and their loved ones need our help. As we seek lasting solutions that will end the misuse of jail facilities as mental health institutions, TCSO will continue to maximize our resources to improve the quality of life for them and for our employees who serve them.





On January 16th, TCSO joined the community to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Austin Area Heritage Councils Community March and Festival. The event began with a walk from the MLK statue on the UT campus to the Capitol, and then onward to the Huston-Tillotson campus. The festival was held in the afternoon with lots of music, food, vendors and camaraderie - it was a perfect way to celebrate community!



January is a busy month for our Community Outreach Unit participating in various Career Days across Travis County elementary schools. It's so fun engaging with all the kiddos and addressing their endless questions of what it's like being an officer. We like to say we recruit early at TCSO!

VSU VOLUNTEER AWARDS



annual Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony. VSU Volunteers assist on the front lines of crisis intervention, providing immediate response to victims of various criminal and crisis circumstances. These individuals are an essential part of the TCSO family and we're so grateful for their dedication to serve our community.

Volunteers were recognized for Years of Service, Gold and

On January 20th, our Victim Services Unit (VSU) held their

Silver Star Shifts and Most Shifts Taken. A special congratulations to Officer of the Year Detective Tim Parrish and Volunteer of the Year Rebecca Pruitt! If you're interested in volunteering for VSU, you can learn more by clicking on the icon below.





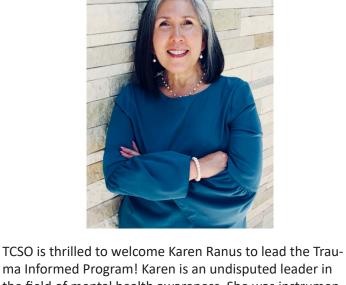
HERDING DOGS UPDATE



Last year, we introduced you to TCSO's herding dogs Sam

and Zeke. In their first year on the job, they've proven to be man's best friends, greatly reducing the amount of time deputies need to be on the scene of loose livestock. The dogs are able to get themselves into tight spaces with dense trees and brush - and they get there quickly! Sam and Zeke flush the livestock toward deputies. They've earned a great reputation, and not just here in Travis County. Word of mouth has spread within the state and beyond. Unbeknownst to TCSO, we've been forging new territory and setting the standard for the use of herding dogs by a law enforcement agency. We've recently been contacted by agencies in California and South Carolina that heard about the unit and want to know more about how it operates. Estray Unit Deputies brought Sam and Zeke to Montgomery County Sheriff's Office's regional livestock quarterly meeting where they were invited to demonstrate the effectiveness of their unique abilities.

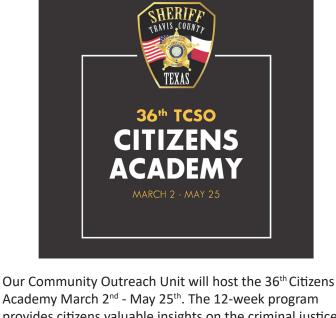
TRAUMA INFORMED PROGRAM



the field of mental health awareness. She was instrumental in expanding the impact of the Central Texas affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in her role as Executive Director. Most recently, she served as the Vice President of Impact for <u>Lucero Speaks</u>, helping launch a health tech brand

stream before crisis. **READ MORE**

start-up focused on addressing youth mental health up-



provides citizens valuable insights on the criminal justice process and the how's and why's of TCSO operations and services. Citizens receive approximately 18 hours of classroom instruction by corrections officers, law enforcement deputies, civilians, and supervisors who work in each division within the department. For more information and to register for the upcoming session, please click the icon button below.





On January 20th, our <u>Building Bridges</u> program hosted <u>Ref-</u> ugee Services of Texas (RST) in support of Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Director of Survivor Services Kaylen Runyan presented a very informative session on the elements and misconceptions of human trafficking. She also

SUDANESE CELEBRATION



were honored to attend the Sudanese Community of Austin's celebration of Sudanese Independence Day. It was a wonderful opportunity to gather and enjoy the Sudanese culture with guest speakers, artistic displays and a youth choir. We are grateful for the Sudanese Community of

EMPLOYEE MASTHEAD (L TO R): Corrections Officer Johnfer Mendoza, Social Service Program Coordinator Jean Girou & Corrections Officer Erica Pena