



VOL 7: ISSUE 3



MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF HERNANDEZ

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, the Travis County Commissioners Court voted unanimously to start the development process for a diversion center. This is a big step toward addressing the growing number of people who cycle in and out of Travis County's correctional facilities due to mental health and/or substance use disorders, but there's still a long way to go.

Commissioners wisely sought the input of a steering committee, comprised of local stakeholders, on which I was honored to serve. These professionals painstakingly examined the current struggles faced by both the community and your Travis County Sheriff's Office when people with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders cycle repeatedly through our jail, largely on misdemeanor charges they don't even comprehend they've committed.

A diversion center would give officers a better option than an ER or jail for these offenders. But let me be clear, to work effectively, it must function as a place to manage a crisis and then, relatively quickly, place people back in the community with housing, as well as mental and social supports, to keep them from coming right back. I hope you'll take the opportunity to read the [Travis County Forensic Mental Health Project report](#), where you can learn more about the innovative approach as well as some of the hurdles that require collaborative solutions.

Your Travis County correctional facilities are currently one of, if not the, largest mental health providers in the county. Finding a solution for people who are committing low-level, non-violent crimes not only benefits the jail, it benefits the offender, and has the potential to end his/her cycle of incarceration by offering treatment that provides a remedy. It's imperative to me that this endeavor be about the people, not a building. The men and women working in your Travis County correctional facilities know the people dealing with mental health needs by name. I want to be sure we keep our focus on them, and not allow ourselves to be distracted by anything else.



READ ACROSS AMERICA



On March 8<sup>th</sup>, Sheriff Hernandez and staff took a couple of pit stops at Hillcrest and Manor Elementary Schools as they celebrated "celebrity" week during [Read Across America](#). After reading stories such as *Too Loud Lily*, these bright and energetic students were full of questions about working in law enforcement and how to protect themselves and their families from the "bad guys." After chatting with these kiddos, we know the future of Travis County is in good hands.

WESTLAKE DRONE DAY



On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, a pair of TCSO's tech experts presented at the Westlake Chamber of Commerce's Public Safety Day. It marks the second year in a row we've teamed up with the chamber to discuss the role of the sheriff's office in the areas of community, corrections and law enforcement, while also sharing recent crime trends and emerging issues. This year, we brought a handful of drones we use here at TCSO, which we utilize for a variety of things such as traffic accident investigations and missing person searches.

HANDBAGS FOR HOPE



TCSO is excited to continue our partnership with the [Texas Advocacy Project](#) (TAP) for the Handbags for Hope campaign. Now through April 21<sup>st</sup>, we will be collecting new and gently used handbags, diaper bags or gender-neutral tote bags for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Each bag will be fitted with a discreet tag that lists TAP's toll-free legal line (800-374-HOPE), which can provide safety information to a person in need.

If you'd like to donate a bag, you can drop it off at our Central Command at 5555 Airport Blvd., Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. TAP also accepts [monetary donations](#) if you don't have a bag to donate.



Recently, we received reports that a known scam was starting to make its rounds again in Travis County. Posts on social media claim potential victims were contacted by someone posing as a judge or claiming to be with the Travis County Jail, stating that their son or daughter caused a car crash and needed money to be bailed out. TCSO spoke with [FOX 7](#) to note that, unfortunately, scams like these have happened before.

"If your loved one calls you from the Travis County Jail, you're not going to see Travis County Jail on the caller ID," said TCSO Public Information Officer Kristen Dark. "And when you get that call, you're going to hear a recording that's going to say, 'You're accepting a call from an inmate at the Travis County Jail. Do you accept this call?'"

If something feels off, don't hesitate to contact us for confirmation at 512-854-9770.

COBRA GRADUATION #105



The TCSO Training Academy offers a Corrections Officers Basic Recruit Academy (COBRA) for all new-hire Corrections Officers. Corrections Officers attend the COBRA course while on duty within their first year of employment; Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) provides a one-year, temporary Corrections Officer license. COBRA is 360 hours of specialized instruction that consists of the following:

- PHASE 1: Course satisfies TCOLE requirements for the Basic County Corrections course; topics include booking, identification, inmate rights, headcounts, emergency procedures, searches, classifications, health services, etc.
- PHASE 2: Course highlights those areas that are fundamental to normal and emergency operations of the Travis County Correctional system; topics include defensive tactics, firearms training, CPR, smoke-house safety, departmental policies, interpersonal communication, wellness, etc.

Congratulations to the following officers of COBRA Class #105 who graduated on March 17<sup>th</sup>: Kari Abbott, Zandro Bacongo, Rodrigo Hernandez, Ricardo Jaime-Rocha, Jasmine Lilja, Jordan Mullins, Sheritta Nemeth, Leticia Soto and Adrian Young.

WOMENS HISTORY MONTH



March is Women's History Month and, to celebrate, we're honoring two historic occasions at TCSO – our first-ever female Motors Unit and second female K-9 Unit Deputies!

Deputy Katy Howell has joined the K-9 Unit after 5.5 years serving TCSO. A native Austinite, Howell says she has a passion for dogs and even volunteers/fosters at a local shelter. "I also have a passion for law enforcement and helping people. I chose the K-9 Unit because it combines these two passions," said Howell. "I want to walk a road less traveled, and this is a challenging next step in my career."

Meanwhile, Deputy Alina Narro recently joined the Motors Unit after serving TCSO for seven years. "I've always known I was interested in law enforcement since I was a little girl," said Narro. "I actually have an elementary photo of me posing as a female police officer." Narro, who owns a motorcycle herself, grew up in El Paso in what she calls a "Harley Davidson family," so we know she's a great fit in the Motors Unit!

SMBS SCHOLARSHIPS



This month, we announced that we now have four scholarships available to students seeking higher education:

- The Dan T. Richards Scholarship (\$500)
- The Curtis Weeks Scholarship for Journalism (\$500)
- The David M. Balagia Scholarship for Criminal Justice (\$500)
- The Christopher Korzilius Scholarship (\$1,000)

Thanks to generous donors around our community, the scholarships are offered on behalf of the Sheriff's Memorial & Benevolent Society of Travis County, a non-political, non-governmental 501(c)(3) charitable corporation.

This year, one student recipient will be selected for each category. Categories of study include all studies, journalism, criminal justice, and computer science/technology. To learn more about how to apply or donate to future funds, please click on the icon below.



Congratulations to our recent retirees! Thank you for your dedicated service to this agency and the citizens of Travis County. We wish you the best of luck in your new adventures.

- Sammy Salinas – 33 yrs. of service
- Christopher Jetmore – 31 yrs. of service
- Leslie House – 28 yrs. of service
- Karin Janek – 28 yrs. of service
- Colette Girouard – 25 yrs. of service
- Paul Garza – 23 yrs. of service
- David Williams – 28 yrs. of service
- Peter Berkley – 21 yrs. of service
- Mark Walters – 21 yrs. of service
- Robert Byers – 18 yrs. of service
- Jim Self – 18 yrs. of service
- Charlotte Trevino – 18 yrs. of service
- Phil Driggers – 17 yrs. of service
- Enrique "Rick" Patino – 5 yrs. of service

PFLUGERVILLE SPRING CARNIVAL



On March 25<sup>th</sup>, Riojas Elementary School invited TCSO to its Spring Carnival. Our Community Outreach and Public Safety Cadets had a great time with all the kiddos and meeting all the supportive families. The Riojas PTO hosts this annual fundraising event to support their school's programs. It's a fun way to strengthen positive family-school and community partnerships!