

# UHD DATELINE

Student Run Since  
Volume One

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## UHD offers COVID-19 vaccines By Emily Saldivar

On April 1, UHD announced that the COVID-19 vaccine would be made available for members of the Gator community who signed up through the university's partnership with UTHealth.

UTHealth is currently administering the Pfizer vaccine every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the UTHealth Cooley University Life Center at 7440 Cambridge St. Vaccines are available only through appointment which can be made through their website at [www.utphysicians.com/covid19vaccine](http://www.utphysicians.com/covid19vaccine).

Fellow Gator, Indira Zaldivar, signed up for her first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on April 1 thanks to UHD's partnership

with UT Health. She was happy to be able to make such a sudden appointment because she had been on the Harris County Public Health waiting list since March 29 when Texans 16 and older became eligible. However, due to her lack of priority group status, she has not been able to secure a vaccine appointment.

"I'm thankful to UHD for taking this initiative of protecting the health of the UHD community," Zaldivar said. "Getting the vaccine after such a challenging time through UHD's initiative is extra special and a firm step toward the new normal."

She was able to receive the Pfizer vaccine on

April 10 and looks forward to her second dose which is already scheduled for later this month. Zaldivar was impressed with how efficient the whole process was. "It was so fast," she commented. "[I was] in and out in 20 minutes, including the 15 minutes of reaction wait time!"

While the partnership with UTHealth is certainly still up and running, there was also another way to get registered and vaccinated. UHD's sister school, the University of Houston, partnered up with Memorial Hermann to host a vaccine distribution event Monday, April 12 where they distributed about 3,000 Pfizer vaccines. On April 9, UHD President

Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D., announced that UHD students, faculty, and staff were welcome to sign up online for vaccine appointments. The appointments were available between 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at the UH Football Indoor Practice Facility. All those who signed up were required to adhere to UH's COVID-19 protocols for face coverings as well as COVID-19 diagnosis/symptoms while on campus.

Questions about the vaccine can be answered by visiting the Memorial Hermann website at [www.MemorialHermann.org/covid19vaccine](http://www.MemorialHermann.org/covid19vaccine).

## UHD welcomes new president By Indira Zaldivar

On March 31, UHD hosted a virtual welcoming ceremony on Facebook for its seventh president, Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D.

Members from UHS and UHD faculty, staff and students officially welcomed Blanchard following an introductory performance by UHD Mariachi "Los Caimanes."

Blanchard was selected following a nationwide search and a committee of students, faculty and staff and supporters. This committee was led by President Robert K. Glenn from UHV. Blanchard comes to UHD with ex-

tensive prior experience in academic achievement and student success.

According to Tilman Fertitta, chairman of University of Houston System Board of Regents, Blanchard is a "gentleman with incredible credentials" who will lead UHD to new strategies, ideas, and a new look. On the same note, Renu Khator, Ph.D., chancellor of University of Houston System and president of UH, said that Blanchard's many references are a rare sight. He is the "right fitting leader" for UHD and truly represents the spirit of UHS and the spirit of Houston.

She added that Blanchard has met with many members of the 87th Texas legislature, and that he has "all the plans to meet the constituents and do the

right thing."

Following UHS members' remarks, Blanchard laid down the foundation for his new vision for UHD.

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UHD's seventh president, Loren J. Blanchard Ph.D., answers audience's questions during the virtual welcoming ceremony on March 31. Screenshot courtesy of UHD website.



# THE DATELINE

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The Dateline is the official student newspaper of the University of Houston-Downtown. Since its first issue in 1982, The Dateline is proud to be “Student Run since Volume One.” We strive to meet the needs of a growing university as well as the growing metropolitan city that surrounds us.

## Submission Policy

The Dateline staff consists of students from the University of Houston-Downtown who complete all tasks required to produce the newspaper, which serves all UHD campuses. The opinions and commentaries expressed within reflect the views of the contributing writers. No opinions expressed in The Dateline reflect the viewpoints of the University of Houston-Downtown, its administration, or students.

The Dateline reserves the right to edit or modify submissions for the sake of clarity, content, grammar, or space limitations. All submissions become property of The Dateline and may not be returned.

All paid writers must be currently enrolled students at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Press releases, story ideas, news tips and suggestions are always welcomed. We encourage all students to contribute.

Any student interested in joining The Dateline staff may request more detailed information sending an email to the editors at editordatelinedowntown@gmail.com.

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# SGA president discusses OER

By Sheryl Sellers

The Dateline caught up with Student Government Association President Alan Modrow to discuss among other items, what he has heard regarding the Open Education Resource and Senate Bill 180.

Alvaro De la Cruz, University of Houston System student regent, reached out to Modrow asking him to review and sign a petition that was being circulated regarding a Texas House Bill that discusses textbook affordability. Without getting into specifics, Modrow explained that he signed the petition because textbook affordability is a huge issue at UHD.

“A good number of students at the university are Pell Grant eligible so it’s super important to be able, even if it’s open source or anything like that, or even just lowering the prices of textbooks, I think would go a long way,” Modrow said.

An area where a problem could occur

for a student is in course selection. A student could require a particular course, but they need a course that is defined as no-cost. “Ideally you’d have all classes be open source,” he continued.

Another issue that could come into play is the inability to share a text that has a copyright. This problem was brought up in the Faculty Senate meeting.

Students pay a lot of money for technology, cloud storage, etc., but students are also paying for the databases that the university provides. Using those databases in the curriculum would be helpful to students.

Modrow also brought up SGA elections. Emails were sent out recently from the office of Student Activities, outlining the open positions and the process to place a name on the ballot.

A visit to the SGA’s homepage provided an announcement that SGA

applications were due at 5 p.m. on April 13.

Tremaine Kwasi-pui, director of Student Activities, oversees the election administration.

Modrow also stated that his administration is working on several advocacy projects. However, he declined to name them as they are still brewing.

Modrow explained that it has been a busy year for SGA. They proposed the S/U grading option, and the Faculty Senate endorsed their proposal for a “non-instructional day” so students would have one day open to vote in civic, state, and federal elections every two years.

He did allude to advocating for better internal communication. He has seen some improvement, but there is still a long way to go. On a final note, Modrow will graduate this spring, and The Dateline wishes him well in his pursuit of his MBA.

# UHD’s Women’s Health Webinar informs on STIs, birth control

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

University of Houston-Downtown hosted a Women’s Health Webinar on March 30. The webinar was hosted by UHD’s Health Services and featured guest speaker Daisy G. Mullassery, DNP, assistant professor at the Cizik School of Nursing.

The Webinar focused on the topic of STI protection and awareness and birth control methods. Important statistics and symptoms about STI’s were discussed in detail, along with informative graphics. For example, 1 million new

STI cases occur every day. Worldwide, STI cases have increased.

Methods of birth control and the pros and cons of each were also discussed, as well as any side effects and costs. Some of the methods discussed were condoms, female condoms, oral contraception, vaginal ring, and dozens more.

The hormonal effects of different types of birth control were discussed, such as weight gain, mood swings, depression, and more. The chat was open to guests who had

questions and comments, and it was a very informative and necessary conversation for college-aged students.

At the end of the webinar, there was an open Q&A. Some questions were pertaining to cost, if insurance could cover birth control, and what forms of birth control would be most suitable to the individual in question. The people in the chat also shared their experience with STIs or the mentioned birth control methods and how those performed for them.

# Task force dominates Faculty Senate meeting

By Sheryl Sellers

Topping discussion at the April 6 Faculty Senate meeting was an update from the Open Education Resource task force. Speaking for the OER task force, Dr. Edmund Cueva, professor of Humanities, announced that UHD is now in compliance with Texas Senate Bill 810.

Section 51.451, Education Code, of the bill states that an open educational resource is a teaching, learning or research resource that is in the public domain or “one that has been released under an intellectual property license that permits the free use, adaptation, and redistribution of the resource by any person.” OERs can be any course materials (e.g., textbooks, modules and other software that supports access to knowledge).

This means that UHD will have a searchable function for students to view a list of courses noted as either No-Cost or “Low-Cost.”

While UHD complies with the bill, Dr. Cueva asserted that all students, faculty and staff are not aware of it yet, and so have not applied the resource to their curriculum.

The task force has recommended to the provost and to the senior vice president of Student Affairs that an OER Committee be established to address needs and implementation of the OER policy. On the list of recommendations is a request for an additional librarian and choosing committee members from each college, and inclusion of students.

The goal of the bill is to make textbooks more

affordable and available on day one of an academic semester, and to make sure that OER is institutionalized.

Dr. Cueva pointed out that this is “a matter of social justice for our students.”

He added that the average cost of a textbook is currently \$262. With these high-costs students are not always able to purchase the materials that they need, and some decide to drop the course.

“We need to level the playing field,” Cueva said.

Initially these resources will be available at UHD as No-Cost to the student. In the future Low-Cost resources will be added. Those Low-Cost resources will bear a ceiling price of \$50. For instance, such resources as MyLab should

have a \$50 or less cost when Low-Cost is implemented.

It is unknown whether the decision of materials to make available at No-Cost will be decided by course, or by faculty.

Once determined, either the department coordinator or department chair will input the information to PeopleSoft and designate as a No-Cost resource.

Also discussed was the Houston Guided Pathway to Success initiative, or GPS. Led by the University of Houston, currently 13 four-year and two-year institutions take part in GPS. The objective is to drive changes in policy that have a sustained impact on student success and a quality education.

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Senate Updates

The average cost of a textbook is currently \$262, but Open Education Resources will make textbooks more affordable and attainable for UHD students.

OERs are Low- or No-cost academic resources widely accessible to the public.

UHD course listings will have a searchable OER function so students can view all available options for classes with No-Cost and Low-Cost textbooks/resources.

UHD’s OER task force wants to make textbooks more affordable and more readily available on the first day of the academic semester.

# UHD welcomes new president (continued)

“My commitment to this University of Houston-Downtown community is to ensure that I will be in a regular position to listen and to learn,” he said. “Part of that work is already underway as it relates to some of the work being done by faculty, staff, students and alumni.”

Blanchard shared he has been conducting a listening tour since he assumed office on March 15, involving various UHD members to identify UHD’s “points of praise and

areas of development.”

So far from the listening tour, Blanchard has identified that the university needs to do more on student success and access, faculty and staff excellence, professional development opportunities, research, and programmatic design. These will lead the UHD community to “never taking feet of pedal” in quality and excellence.

Professional development, according to Blanchard, must focus on ensuring

that faculty and staff must always be ready to direct students to the kinds of support mechanisms that UHD has in place for them.

“Student success is a campus-wide responsibility” Blanchard said. “We have a collective responsibility to ensure student success.”

The next opportunity to participate in the listening tour is scheduled for April 20 at 10 a.m. Several other listening tours are listed in the email Blanchard sent April 12.

Towards the latter half of the ceremony, Blanchard answered the live questions from UHD faculty, staff, and students in the audience. Some asked about his personal self-care routine, to which he responded that he enjoys a routine of walking.

He also shared with Gators three tips on how to balance work life with personal life: planning, communication and follow through. He encouraged Gators to participate in core and extracurricular

activities such as honor societies and service clubs because they “morph into something bigger.” He recounted how an external work study program at Xavier University led him to implement a speech and debate club that grew into 10 elementary schools. American Rapper, Master P. is a proud alumnus of the speech and debate club.

Houston has been a familiar destination spot for Blanchard and his family who are from

Lake Charles, Louisiana. He plans to meet a lot more Houstonians through his love for performance arts.

“I am just as thrilled as possible to be here in this city of Houston, not only because of its diversity, but what all that diversity actually brings in terms of the cultural experiences that will be afforded us here as citizens of this great city.”

Watch the full streaming of the virtual welcoming ceremony on UHD’s official Facebook.

## Task force updates (continued)

Houston GPS was instituted to create strategies to assist students in attaining their desired degrees and/or to transition from two-year programs into four-year programs, and ultimately saving time and money for students.

The Houston metro area ranks 19 out of the top 20 largest U.S. metro areas in the area of completing a post-second-

ary education.

Meetings with the Houston-area institutions participating in GPS will be ongoing for the next six months.

Next, Dr. Nell Sullivan, professor of English, shared a draft of the letter written to the administration regarding the response made by former interim president Dr. Antonio D. Tillis to the Student Government Association.

tion.

SGA proposed a resolution last year for a “no instruction day” so students would have the opportunity to vote in civic, state, and federal elections. The no-instruction day resolution was presented to, supported by, and passed in the Faculty Senate. The subject letter is in response to the Oct. 23, 2020 letter from Dr. Tillis to SGA.

The letter will be reworked and submitted. A lengthy discussion and constructive volley of questions and ideas regarding a 3/3 workload for faculty wrapped up the meeting.

Dr. Aaron Gillette, associate professor of History, proposed using a system that is currently in play at Texas A & M Commerce. Twenty percent of faculty

of each college would be eligible for a reduction in hours annually. Determination of faculty would be based on those who receive the highest scores on the previous years’ evaluations.

Discussion surrounded the “building of elite” and that department chairs and deans would be the “gatekeepers” of course release. Another dilemma conjectured that there would be some faculty that would never get a

course release due to lack of time for service projects, etc.

The subject of course release was broached because faculty stated that they are already working hard. It was not a consideration to have the course releases based on merit. It was determined that more discussion would be needed.

The Faculty Awards Ceremony will take place via Zoom April 20. Next Senate meeting will be May 4.

## Enrollment Management leaves graduation questions unanswered

By Sheryl Sellers

Spring 2021 UHD graduates have several questions leading up to the big event, and some questions on what to expect following graduation.

The Dateline reached out several times to the office of vice president of Enrollment Management, Daniel Villanueva, for an interview to answer questions that have not been previously addressed. However, no response was received. Considering UHD’s large first-generation student population, this demographic does not

have family members to assist in answering questions that administration may deem common knowledge.

With a sector of students unaware of where to find commencement information, listed below are items that may be helpful. This information is available on the UHD website under Student Activities -> Registrar -> Commencement.

A virtual commencement orientation will take place on Thursday, April 15 from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Registration for this event can be found on the Registrar’s Com-

mencement page.

There will be “Fun Student Photos” on campus sometime in April. Dates and times have not been placed on the Registrar’s Commencement page.

Graduates may submit photos for the Student Recognition Slide which will be presented during the virtual graduation. The photos do not have to be taken by a professional photographer, even selfies are appropriate. The deadline to submit photos is April 23. However, the Registrar Commencement page does not indicate where to

send the photos.

Regalia including cap, gown, tassel, Stole of Gratitude, First Generation Stole, mini key ring tassel or mega jumbo tassel and a diploma frame can be purchased at the UHD Bookstore, or through Herff Jones. The bookstore entrance is currently located on the second floor of One Main Building adjacent to the vending machines. Hours are 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. from Monday through Thursday.

A drive through event to receive Latin Honor cords will be held on Saturday, April 17

from 9 a.m. to noon. Registration for the event nor its location is not yet noted on the Registrar Commencement page. To inquire about receiving Latin Honors, upcoming graduates should contact their advisor. If one is unfamiliar with their advisor, consider reaching out to the college dean’s office.

The virtual graduation ceremony will be held at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 15 via UHD’s YouTube channel and its Facebook page. However, please note that this information is not printed on the announcements purchased from Herff Jones.

Students can pick up their diploma six to eight weeks

following graduation. After that time, they will be mailed to the student. At this time, information on where to pick up the diplomas has not been posted.

After graduation, several benefits remain available. A student’s GatorMail address will continue and can be accessed any time. Documents on OneDrive, Word, Excel, etc. will only be available for one month following graduation. One might consider a flash drive to store these documents if needed. Further information can be found on the UHD website under Information Technology, Alumni & Visitors.

## Now hiring!

Student Run Since Volume One

The Dateline is now hiring! Student run since volume one, The Dateline is an opportunity for students with an opportunity to get involved on campus, gain valuable experience, and build professional skills. Students can also earn course credit with TCOM/ENG 4360 and can even make a little extra cash. Students are encouraged to submit as many pieces as desired for each issue, however no commitment or experience is necessary. We welcome students of all majors, and we are excited to see what you can bring to the team. We are currently hiring for positions including journalists, photographers, illustrators, cartoonists, and graphic designers.

To submit pieces or for inquiries about joining The Dateline, contact the editor: [dollj@gator.uhd.edu](mailto:dollj@gator.uhd.edu)

The University of Houston-Downtown

# Developing vaccine shows promising results

By Emily Saldivar

The Molnupiravir antiviral pill has become a new contender for combating COVID-19, and it may be able to treat more than just the novel coronavirus.

Currently, there is a struggle to effectively treat patients with COVID-19

which has led the FDA to approve the emergency use of three different anti-body treatments for high-risk patients to work alongside steroid, Dexamethasone and Gilead's antiviral drug, Veklury (Remdesivir).

The issue is



that these treatments are infusions, requiring professional administration, which is not easy to get after considering patient count. However, with this new oral antiviral, the fight against the coronavirus may get easier.

While it is still in phase 2 of clinical trials—too early to deem the drug officially effective or not—the results have been promising, so far. The preliminary study shows that infections in COVID-19 patients disappear within the five days of taking the drug. Results from phase 3 are expected to solidify

and prove the pill's clinical merit.

The antiviral was actually in the works before COVID-19 was considered a threat to the world. George Painter, president of the Emory Institute for Drug Development, met with Wendy Holman, chief executive officer of Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, during a conference, discussing the potential of a compound Painter was developing. The original plan Painter had for the antiviral involved flu studies while Holman was then-interested in its effectiveness for Ebola.

The reason for the difference in interest is due to the versatility of possible treatment options the antiviral could produce. A week later, Ridgeback agreed to buy the antiviral and begin the study on safety and efficacy in people. However, by the time the deal was finalized, COVID-19 caused everything to shut down.

This spurred the drug into clinical trials within the next month. The following month, Merck & Co., one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, bought the rights to the drug, getting the

large-scale testing needed for conclusive results.

Michael Teng, Ph.D., a professor from the University of South Florida stated, "This may be one of those things that could be extremely useful on a broad level against a number of different viruses."

While it will definitely be a while before anything is FDA approved for public consumption, this is the beginning of not only effectively treating the novel coronavirus but the beginning of more antivirals being produced in the future.

# Large cargo ship blocks Egypt's Suez Canal

By Emily Saldivar

On March 23, Egypt's Suez Canal gained global attention after a massive container ship became stuck and blocked all other ships from traveling through it.

The massive cargo ship, known as Ever Given, is one of the biggest container ships currently in commission. It measures to be about 1,300 feet, (400 meters), which is almost the length of the Empire State Building. This Panama-flagged ship was in the middle of its northbound convoy from Rotterdam and en route to China when disaster struck.

The ship suffered from a sudden mechanical blackout. Without power, the captain of the vessel lost control and the ship's bow became

stuck onshore. This incident, which was first thought to be an easy fix, eventually produced a significant traffic jam.

The massive ship blocked both the Northern entrance from the Mediterranean and the South into the Red Sea. The build-up of ships from both sides accounted for about 10 % of the world's trade. The reason for the Suez Canal is because it is an efficient shortcut between Asia and Europe.

If ships do not use this passage, the only other way around would be to go around Africa's southern tip, adding a week to the voyage alongside security risks. By rerouting to go around the southern tip of Africa, ships will need to pass

the Horn of Africa, located in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, regions where piracy and bad seas conditions are known problems.

The Horn of Africa is also known for being a graveyard for ships due to its freezing water temperatures, massive waves, and abrupt rise in the ocean floor from 13,200 feet to about 330 feet. Genevieve Giuliano, a professor from the University of Southern California's Sol Price School of Public Policy stated, "There is a risk there, and it's probably another reason why the ocean carriers will think twice before they actually go around the Horn."

Several attempts were made to remove the large

containership. The first attempt involved heavy machinery that tried to push the ship out, though it did not work. The second attempt made was less focused on moving the ship and more focused on scooping sand away from the ships' edges, so that high tide or a tugboat might be able to move it back into place.

The Ever Given was finally free

after nearly a week of being stuck. Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the Ever Given, stated, "I am excited to announce that our team of experts, working in close collaboration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated the Ever Given on 29 March... thereby making free passage through the Suez Ca-

nal possible again."

Navigation through the canal resumed at 6 p.m. local time though clearing the backlog that was caused by the blockage was estimated to take around 10 days. Despite analysts' initial estimates, ship traffic is still not completely back to normal but is slowly working its way there.



Suez canal blocked by Ever Given. Photo courtesy of CNBC.

# China commits genocide against Uighurs

By Ann Lummus and Safa Abdallah

As of Jan. 19, the U.S. State Department announced China is committing genocide against the Uighur and Muslim population.

“I believe this genocide is ongoing, and that we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uighurs by the Chinese party-state,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said. The systematic attempts Pompeo mentions are of various reports conducted over the span of five years in which China has been repressing Muslim Uighurs’ religion and livelihoods, including enforced internment camps, labor, and female sterilization. Experts estimate as many as 3 million people have disappeared into these camps, with about 1 million currently being held.

However, China denies any allegations against them, instead says that measures taken against the Uighur minorities is because of terrorist threat and noncompliance with the Chinese laws. To further deconstruct these few

groups deemed as rogue Uighurs, China establishes “de-extremification” camps. Militant Uighurs have joined terrorist organizations called ‘Jihads’ in response to the limited resources and abuse from the Chinese government. According to lawyers representing arrested Uighurs, for most cases, there are no links to the refugees and other terrorist groups.

In 2017, the first major set of eyewitnesses came forward to share the institution of the camps after President Xi Jinping called to eradicate other religions against Chinese orientation. Reports in research state that “de-extremification” through “re-education” camps are not a new methodology to China. They’ve existed for several purposes since the 1950’s for labor, Chinese education, and drug addiction rehabilitation.

As of recent in 2019, media has gained access to photos and video footage. There is drone footage posted anonymously on YouTube

that shows hundreds of male prisoners tied and blindfolded in Xinjiang.

In March 2021, western allies gathered to discuss China’s violation of human rights towards the region’s 12 million Uighurs, more so Turkic/Central Asian people who are mostly of Muslim descent. Countries Turkey and Syria are the first to aid Uighur families. According to the Associated Press, Uighurs have fled China before, creating underground railroads and crossing Asia’s Southeast countries to get to Turkey.

Turkey acquired 30 million vaccines for the Uighurs in China. However, only one-third of those vaccines have been used. The AP also reported that Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in December that the vaccine delay was not related to the issue of the Uighurs. “We do not use the Uighurs for political purposes, we defend their human rights.” Cavusoglu said.

In response to

the Uighurs attempting to escape China, the local police conduct random raids, grid management, and send captured families to detention centers. Research along Australia found testimonies where Chinese police would torture and attempt to brainwash Uighurs through the “re-education” policy.

Kayrat Samarkand, a Chinese-born Kazakh, interviews after detained in the camps for three months. He shares, in his childhood he was kidnapped, and his kidnappers broke his legs in order to make him a crippled beggar. The police took Samarkand and paid for many surgeries to help heal his legs. Because the police were there to assist Samarkand, when they asked him to come to the station 20 years later, he went straight away. A regrettable mistake.

Samarkand’s experience details how police mentally abuse the detainees. If coercion did not work the police would revert to physical abuse.

Although Samarkand tried to fight back, he felt the police killed his fighting spirit, as a result Samarkand abided by whatever they told him to do.

Muslim Uighurs whose phones have not yet been confiscated by police informed their families abroad of the internment camps, of being tortured, and drugged. As well as forced to do things that are against their religion, like eating pork, drinking alcohol, and not dressing modestly. These are the efforts of the policies China claims is for “de-extremification.”

Documents have found evidence of eugenics as the women are forced to be sterilized. China is attempting to slowly eradicate the Uighurs by sterilizing the women, separating the children from their families, forcing them to disrespect their religion and destroying their religious buildings as well as their cemeteries. China is effectively getting rid of the very essence of the Uighur people. After separating children from their parents, the children are sent to “schools” where they are manipulated into thinking that it is wrong to be a Uighur not of Chinese orientation.

Research by Zenz and the Associated Press from June 2020 showed that the state subjected minority women to pregnancy checks and

“forces intrauterine devices, sterilization and even abortion on hundreds of thousands.” Population control measures are both a threat and punishment to the Muslim minority women if they do not comply. For example, if minority families have more than two children, the state will take the third, and others, away from the parents and will often lock the parents in internment camps. However, there are those who can keep their third if they are able to pay a severance fee. But no matter the bribe, the policy states for the women to be sterilized.

China has claims as of 2020 detainees graduated, were released and rejoining society because their indoctrination program worked. China’s foreign minister continues to deny the allegations and insists that the government treats all ethnicities “equally and protects the legal rights of minorities.”

But although detainees have been released, they do not have freedom to rejoin society outside of China. Uighurs can be placed back into the camps by the policy of “de-extremification” and “re-education” after being released. Reports from the inside state Uighurs are not able to go back to their previous homes or abroad, nor are they able to contact their family members.



Demonstrators protest outside the Chinese embassy in Berlin on Dec. 27, 2019 to denounce China’s mistreatment of members of the Uighur community in western China. Photo courtesy of John MacDougall/ AFP via Getty Images.

# Early cherry blossoms blooms concern scientists

By Indira Zaldivar

Cherry blossoms in the Central City of Kyoto in Japan reached the earliest “peak bloom” in 1200 years on March 26. Peak bloom occurs when 70% of the blossoms of the “sakura” or cherry blossom trees are open. While this may catch by surprise the tourists and nature lovers anticipating later blooms, the early bloom underlies the larger climate crisis.

According to research in the Journal of Biometeorology, cherry blossoms in Kyoto are blooming around 10 days earlier than they did 100 years ago.

Yasuyuki Aono, a researcher at Osaka Prefecture University, stated to CNN that the flowering and full bloom of sakura trees are very sensitive to temperature changes. Low temperatures delay blooming while warmer temperatures speed it up. While the

temperature was low in the 1820s, Aono pointed out that temperatures have risen by about 6.5 F to this day.

Aono compiled data that shows the sakura trees in Kyoto reaching peak bloom earlier overtime. For centuries before the 1800s, the peak date remained consistently in mid-April. However, after the 1800s, peak date jumped to early April. Only a few times in history has the peak date emerged in late March.

Other cities are also recording early blooms of the cherry blossoms. The Japan Meteorological Agency announced that the cherry blossoms in Japan’s capital of Tokyo, “reached full bloom” on March 22, the city’s second-earliest date on record.

In Washington D.C., flowering of cherry blossoms

peaked on March 28 after temperatures well-above average (1.6 C, 2.88 F), according to the National Park Service. Washington’s cherry trees now reach peak bloom about six days sooner than they did 100 years ago.

“The four days from peduncle elongation to peak is the fastest the trees have moved through the last two stages in the last 30 years (matched in 2015),” the NPS wrote on Instagram.

Record temperatures across the globe put a stress on ecosystems. Amos Tai, associate professor of Earth System Science at the Chinese University told CNN that climate change destabilizes the relationship between plants and insects. Both plants and insects use environmental cues which “regulate the timing of different stages of their life cycles.”

Flowers may bloom before insects are ready. If insects are not ready, then flowers will not get adequate pollination and stall reproduction. Without pollinators and plants, less food gets to the table and is more expensive.

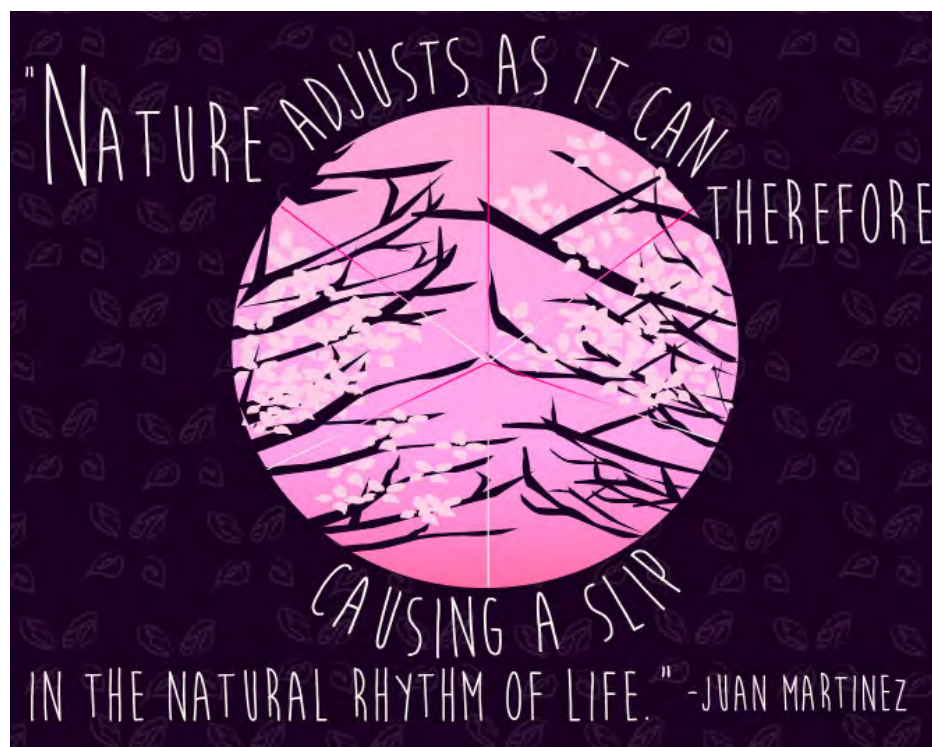
“The relationship between plants and insects and other organisms have developed over many years -- thousands to millions of years,” Tai said. “But in the recent century, climate change is really wrecking everything

and perturbing all of these relationships.” While the climate change crisis requires a significant reduction of global carbon emissions, especially from developed countries, Gators can follow three ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

UHD’s very own coordinator of sustainability, Juan Martinez, asks Gators to reduce plastic use and meat consumption (especially beef), and re-use as many resources as possible. Gators are encour-

aged to elect officials who adopt more renewable energy to power a low-carbon economy and sustainable food production and transportation.

“As climate continues to change, so will growing seasons,” Martinez said, “The issue then is the instability it causes for ecosystems, the economy, and society. As a result, nature adjusts as it can therefore causing a slip in the natural rhythm of life.”



Sarah Ramirez

# Former presidents urge Americans to vaccinate

By Emily Zaldivar

Former presidents ban together for two commercials encouraging Americans to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible. Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Jimmy Carter all appeared in advertisements encouraging everyone to get vaccinated by proclaiming that it is up to the public to do their part.

The first commercial contains personal goals from each president as to why they are getting the vaccine. Former President Clinton states that he cannot wait to get back to work while former President Bush talks about his anticipation for attending opening day at Texas Ranger Stadium with a full stadium.

Obama stated,

“This vaccine means hope. It will protect you and those you love from this dangerous and deadly disease.” He also followed up with his personal goal of finally being able to visit Michelle Obama’s mom and getting to hug her and see her on her birthday.

The 42nd president looked somber as he said,

“We’ve

lost enough people and we’ve suffered enough damage.” Clinton said.

However, the 39th looked hopeful.

“I’m getting vaccinated because we want this pandemic to end as soon as possible,” Carter stated. All of them are shown in pictures donning facemasks and getting their vaccines with their wives.

The only former president who did not join in the campaign was the 45th president, Donald Trump. When asked, a spokesperson for the Ad Council cited that their absence was due to the date the ad was filmed. Inauguration Day made for a perfect time to film the commercials as all the former presidents and their wives would be together. Howev-

er, former President Trump skipped out on the inauguration altogether and thus missed the opportunity to be included in the ad campaign.

There was also a second video that was released the same day. This video was different in that it was only of the former presidents, sans Carter.

Continued on page 8

## Former presidents urge Americans (continued)

Rather than personal narratives, it was a direct address to the public. However, much like the first commercial, getting vaccinated when it becomes available is the message from this brief video taken in the amphitheater at the Arlington National Cemetery. Since then, President Biden's original promise of

having the vaccine available for everyone by May 1 has been changed to April 19. The number of pharmacies participating in vaccine distribution has also increased from 17,000 to 40,000 locations as well as 12 additional federal-run mass vaccination sites.

If you live in Texas, the COVID-19 vaccine

has been available for all adults, regardless of medical status, since March 29. NRG Stadium is the largest vaccination site. However, Houstonians have many options when it comes to vaccination sites, including hospitals like Memorial Hermann and UT Health or local pharmacies like Walgreens.



Former U.S. presidents, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama participate in a commercial encouraging Americans to get the COVID-19 vaccine filmed on President Biden's Inauguration Day. Screenshot courtesy of YouTube.

## UH Men's Basketball advances to Final Four By Jeremy Barrientos

On March 29, the No. 2 seed University of Houston men's basketball team advanced to the NCAA Final Four for the first time since 1984 by defeating the 12 seed Oregon State with a score of 67-61. The Houston Cougars fought back after losing a 17-point lead. They managed to hold off Oregon State in the final minutes and earned their place in the Final Four to await the winner of

the No. 1 seed Baylor and No. 3 Arkansas.

Their road to the 2021 NCAA Tournament championship game was cut short after they were defeated by Baylor with a score of 78-59.

UH head coach Kelvin Sampson stated, "Baylor is clearly the best team we've played. They may be the best team in the seven years I've been here." Baylor continued on to the championship game

and defeated Gonzaga 86-70 to win the title.

This was the Cougars' first Final Four appearance since the glory days of Phi Slama Jama, who were led by Hakeem Olajuwon, but lost in the 1984 championship game to Patrick Ewing and the Georgetown Hoyas. Phi Slama Jama advanced to the Final Four each year from 1982 to 1984 with the number one ranking and an im-

pressive 31-2 record. This year's team finished the season with a record of 28-4 and have established themselves as a reputable contender poised to repeat their success under head coach Kelvin Sampson.

Since the addition of Kelvin Sampson in 2014, the UH men's basketball team won 20 games in 2016 and advanced to the National Invitation Tournament. In 2018, the new Fertitta

Center opened, and the Cougars made their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2010. The 2019 season was even more impressive as they advanced to their first Sweet 16 since 1984. This year they finally reached the Final Four and have no plans of slowing down until they win a championship.

Renu Khator, president of the University of Houston System, has focused

and prioritized a nationally competitive athletics program built on a foundation that breeds long term success.

"Strong athletics is essential to our future," Khator said. "I am prepared to do everything in my power to help us achieve that goal."

This year is proof of that commitment and the standard that UH and its athletics program intends to achieve.

## Lil Nas X's "Montero" hits No. 1 on Global 200 By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

The pandemic encouraged many artists to step out of their comfort zone and focus entirely on their craft. Lil Nas X released a new single "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" that became an overnight hit. It topped the global Spotify chart and with nearly 9 million daily streams will likely stay there for a while. This is his seventh single to achieve 100 million Spotify streams. "Montero" differs from his first hit "Old Town Road"

by debuting at the Hot 100.

Despite the success of the song, there was a lot of controversy surrounding the music video where he recreated scenes with a biblical theme, such as Adam being seduced by Lucifer or Lucifer's transition from angel to demon. He also depicted himself choosing to become a demon rather than be an angel and lap danced on a man who is seemingly dressed as the devil.

The music video led to a subsequent deal between Lil Nas X and creative product company, MSCHF. The company paired with Lil Nas X to custom-design 666 pairs of Nike sneakers, each which contained 60cc of human blood. The limited edition release resulted in fierce outcry. Nike sued MSCHF for adapting and profiting off a Nike product without Nike's approval. MSCHF agreed to recall and

buy back the "Satan Shoes" from its consumers at the original \$1,018 price tag. It is important to note that Nike did not sue MSCHF for the 2019 release of their "Jesus Shoes" which contained 60cc of Holy Water drawn from the Jordan River.

Lil Nas X has regularly responded to people who claim his music is satanic and evil, including replying to a pastor who tweeted that Lil Nas X would "burn in Hell for mocking

God." As much as his cynics condemn him, Lil Nas X refutes them. He used to be scared of coming out by the fear of the possible reaction from close-minded people.

Lil Nas X came out in 2019 by posting a letter to who he was at 14, once full of shame

and promising to die without coming out. Lil Nas X was once a Christian teen who thought he was already beyond redemption and was going to hell. He is being himself, unapologetically, and will continue to do so for the rest of his music career.



Lil Nas X and MSCHF sparked controversy with "Satan Shoes" containing 60cc of human blood. Image courtesy of MSCHF.



# Beloved author, Beverly Cleary passes at 104 By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

Beverly Cleary, celebrated children's author and UC Berkeley alum, passed March 25 at the age of 104. She died in her home in Carmel Valley, California where she lived for almost 60 years. Cleary's most popular fictional character, Ramona Quimby, a zestful little girl, was featured in eight books that were

written from 1955 to 1999. Cleary stopped writing and stated that she had even got rid of her typewriter.

She grew up an only child in Portland and claimed she had extremely vivid memories of childhood. She met her husband, Clarence Cleary, at UC Berkeley and after graduating obtained a degree in library science

from the University of Washington at Seattle. Cleary became a children's librarian in the 1940s and said her reason for writing was for children. After she became a published author, a building at UC Berkeley was named after her.

When Cleary worked at the library, children would approach her and

ask for books about regular children with regular lives that they could relate to. When Cleary realized there were none, she wrote her first book "Henry Huggins" that became an instant hit. The book was about a regular boy who lived in Portland and about the glorious scrapes of childhood. Ramona Quimby, who would become her

most popular character, was only briefly mentioned in her first book but her fans wrote to her begging for more Ramona content.

Cleary always answered fan mail personally and wrote books according to what the children asked for. She paved the way for children books set in a real setting as opposed

to childish fantasy scenes, sci-fi, or historical settings. The books are as timeless and relevant as ever. They have been re-illustrated dozens of times and librarians keep shelves devoted to Beverly Cleary's stories. Cleary will always be remembered through her works and in the hearts of all her readers.

# James Bond villain, Yaphet Kotto passes at 81 By Amber Williams

Known for his role in the film "Alien" and a familiar villain in the James Bond movie "Live and Let Die," Yaphet Kotto passed away in his Philippine home at 81 on March 15. His agent, Ryan Goldhar, confirmed Kotto's passing, but not cause

of death. Though he retired from acting on the big screen, his last appearance was through a long-running television series "Homicide: Life on the Street."

Kotto's wife posted on Facebook about his sudden passing.

"I'm saddened and still in shocked of the passing of my husband Yaphet of 24 years. He died last night around 10:30pm Philippine time," she wrote. "You played a villain on some of your movies, but for me, you're a real hero and to a lot of

people also. A good man, a good father, a good husband and a decent human being, very rare to find. One of the best actors in Hollywood a Legend. Rest in Peace Honey, I'm gonna miss you every day, my best friend, my rock."

Ava DuVer-

nay, known director of "A Wrinkle in Time" also posted her respects on her public Twitter page.

"Yaphet Kotto. My Mom's favorite," she wrote. "He's one of those actors who deserved more than the parts he got. But he took

those parts and made them wonderful all the same. A star. Rest well, sir."

Kotto acted in 42 movies and 42 television series across his career.

## Reviews

# 'Godzilla vs. Kong'

By Amber Williams

From blowing up buildings to fighting monsters, "Godzilla vs. Kong" is an enjoyable, destructive ride for monster lovers and a fun family get-together. Directed by Adam Wingard, who also directed "Blair Witch," the movie is exciting and ruinous from start to finish.

The film is a sequel to both "Kong: Skull Island" and "Godzilla: King of the Monsters."

"Godzilla vs. Kong" takes place five years after "Godzilla: King of the Monsters." Godzilla is rampaging and attacked a facility

named Apex Cybernetics in Florida. Apex CEO Walter Simmons (played by Demián Bichir) recruits Nathan Lind (played by Alexander Skarsgård) to find a power source in Hollow Earth the home world of the Titans, and to stop Godzilla's attacks.

The movie has multiple characters that show different sides of what occurs between King Kong and Godzilla, ten in total, so it is not straightforward to figure out who is important and who are side characters. The focus is Godzilla and King Kong, so the human

characters' purpose is seemingly worthless. Their goal is to see where the Titans will fight or lead them to, so the story is ignored or not crucial to the plot. When something does happen that is important, such as Nathan Lind and his group arriving in Hollow Earth, a plot point happens that seems worthless – that a machine could do what the actors could do without the additional dialogue.

Though the actors are some of the issues of the movie, the monsters are not. The action, visuals, and tragedy of the Titans are amazing to

watch and captivating. The actors are not too involved with the action either, making it more engaging for the viewer.

Overall, the

film was exciting and engaging. It will keep the audience's attention captured within the world and interested in what happens next. It is destructive

and violent, fun for everyone to enjoy, especially young adults and children.

"Godzilla vs. Kong" is playing in theaters now and is streaming on HBO Max until April 30.



Godzilla and King Kong face off in new film. Image courtesy of Legendary Pictures.

# Uighurs in China need global concern

By Aansa Usmani

In present-day China, the current government prohibits criticism or displays of political resistance against the current ruler. If caught promoting anti-government rhetoric, the penalties can be quite harsh, ranging from lengthy prison sentences, hard labor, or even the death penalty.

Regardless, there is a minority sect consistently accused of promoting seditious treason. Known as the Uighurs (also spelled “Uyghurs”), the eastern-based Muslim, Turkic group stems from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and other East Asian countries.

Over many centuries, Uighurs have migrated to Xinjiang, the Northwest corner of China, a region abundant with cotton, oil, and other desirable materials. In recent years, China has implemented the “Belt and Road initiative,” creating new alliances with foreign countries and expanding Chinese trade.

The proj-

ect’s successes and achievements are a mere mask—underneath it lies a massive oppression campaign towards the Uighurs, stemming from bigotry and Islamophobic views from the Chinese government.

The brutal treatment of Uighurs began in the early 2010s, after a series of civilian uprisings within the Xinjiang region. In response, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his communist-majority government began implementing harsh rules and penalties towards the minority-Muslim group.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, “The detainees (Uighurs)... [are] targeted for a variety of reasons, including traveling to or contacting people from any of the twenty-six countries China considers sensitive... [ex: Turkey and Afghanistan]; attending services at mosques; having more than three children... sending texts containing Quranic verses.”

These restric-

tions draw parallels to the anti-Semitism that preceded and persisted throughout Nazi Germany or other occupied territories.

Per the Chinese Communist Party, Uighurs are sent to “re-education facilities” helping them become more patriotic towards China and the CCP. In reality, these facilities practice more than educating and training. Within its walls, Uighurs are to repudiate their Islamic faith and worship the CCP and Jinping.

They are subjected to pro-CCP rhetoric, such as hearing Jinping’s speeches for many hours. Additionally, they are forcibly eating pork and drinking alcohol—the two consumable items prohibited in Islam.

Those who do not comply are given extreme punishment, from bodily harm to psychological trauma. There is no estimate on the death count, but its incoming detainees continue to increase.

Alongside the brainwashing, the de-

tainees are negatively contributing to the Belt and Road Initiative. Their forced labor is present within big-name companies such as Amazon, Samsung, Nike, Apple, and others. Some of the corporations have openly condemned the actions of the Chinese government, while many remain silent to avoid controversy and a massive boycott.

Additionally, mosques within the region are being converted to bars or other secular places, erasing Uyghur and Islamic culture centuries. For those not sent to these “training facilities,” life has become a secretive survival, assimilating into Chinese culture to prevent further suspicion.

Over 75 years ago, when American forces were liberating concentration camps, the world vowed to “never again” allow another ethnic cleansing. Since then, there have been many instances of culture erasure, from the Rwandan genocide

to current religious persecutions in the Middle East.

Within these events, many call to end these practices. For China, hesitancy arises when discussing Uyghur mistreatment. Since becoming a renowned economic powerhouse, western allies hesitate in addressing the massive oppression, hoping not to “rock the boat.”

Some nations have condemned the Chinese government’s actions in recent years, this will not change anything. Threats of sanctions or other measures will not end the suffering. Boycotting forced-la-

bor companies will not solve this issue. The ongoing Uyghur mistreatment has been a decade in the making, punishing an ethnic group for the actions of a few.

The only solution to end their suffering would be if the United Nations or a group of western allies massively condemn and implement crippling sanctions on China. These acts are economically detrimental, punishing its government for the traumatic treatment given to the Uighurs. Although cruel, this is the only way the East Asian country will learn its lesson.



Illustration courtesy of @UyghurCartoons on Twitter

# Still adjusting to new normal, one year later

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

On March 11, the World Health Organization officially declared coronavirus a pandemic. As pro-vaccination campaigns continue across the country, we look back at how it changed our lives.

The coronavirus was discovered in Wuhan, China December 31, 2019. Weeks later, the city was under complete

lockdown. Despite this, the virus has spread worldwide and quarantines similar to Wuhan’s, were replicated thousands of times. For many, the government announced quarantines seemed a pleasant and temporary change of pace until the weeks turned into months and put 41.8% of the workforce into remote working.

The effects of being stuck inside were affecting people mentally, physically, and emotionally. Domestic abuse reports skyrocketed as did drug and alcohol abuse. Social isolation is also determined to be a significant factor in the public health crisis, with depression and anxiety in adults increasing from 11% in 2019 to 42%

in 2020. Many were scared and panicked, leading to the consumer-created shortage on toilet paper and the 50% increase in firearm purchases from 2019 to 2020.

Travel bans and closed school campuses have made Zoom, Facetime, and Skype calls a part of daily life. Many parents report that their child felt negative

effects of prolonged lack of access to in-person schooling and believe that it will have a negative impact on their academic development.

Globally, 118.7 million cases have been reported and the 2.6 million COVID-19 deaths continue to grow, we have hope that the world can return to a different but bet-

ter normal. Over 60 million Americans have been vaccinated and the numbers will continue to rise with medical professionals and WHO encouraging vaccinations. We hope that people who are still staying in their homes are using their saved commute time to simply rest or enrich their lives.

# Mass shootings are normal now, as at least 130 shootings have occurred in 2021

By Shaheryar Khan

Barely 100 days have passed in the year 2021 and there have been at least 130 mass shootings in the United States alone. As the nation prepares to open up midst a global pandemic, I fear that these mass shootings are becoming far too normal in our day to day lives.

Last issue, I wrote a news article over the deadly mass shooting in Atlanta, where a man shot up three spas. Of the eight killed, six were women of Asian descent. Since that fateful day, there have been at least 20 mass shootings.

The most recent mass shooting to occur was not far from home, as a gunman in Bryan, Texas, opened fire at his

workplace, killing one person and wounding five. Before that, a gunman opened fire in a business complex in Orange, California, killing four people, including a child. Shortly before that, ten people were massacred in Boulder, Colorado, at a grocery store.

More Americans have died from the use of guns since 1968, which is more than 1.5 million, than in all the wars in United States history since the Revolutionary War, which is 1.4 million. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people in the U.S. are 25 times more likely to be killed from gun violence than people from other wealthy countries. Men, wom-

en, children, everyone is part of the statistic. According to an FBI analysis of homicides, more than 70% of murder victims were killed by firearms in 2017.

During the Rose Garden speech April 8, President Biden denounced gun violence in the U.S. and urged Congress to pass broader gun-control legislation.

“Gun violence in this country is an epidemic, and it’s an international embarrassment,” he emphasized his statement by reiterating what he said previously, “this is an epidemic, for God’s sake, and it has to stop.”

The guns used in highly publicized mass shootings get the most attention, reflecting the ever-

changing American armory. Most people will defend the possession of a firearm by stating that they use it for hunting. Those kinds of hunting rifles are rarely used in crimes. Still, in recent years the weapons that individuals flaunt are military-style semi-automatic rifles, like AR-15s and AK-47s, and military-style pistols like the Glocks. All these guns are designed to kill people, hence the descriptive term, military-style.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina visited a gun range to “support the Second Amendment.”

“The ability to own a gun responsibly is a constitutional right in America, and here’s what I

would say,” Graham told WYFF News 4. “We need that right today, as much as any other time in American history.”

Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president and CEO of the National Rifle Association, is also in favor of the Second Amendment for apparent reasons.

“Our Second Amendment is freedom’s most valuable, most cherished, most irreplaceable idea. History proves it,” La Pierre said. “When you ignore the right of good people to own firearms to protect their freedom, you become the enablers of future tyrants whose regimes will destroy millions and millions of defenseless lives.”

With gun

violence continuing to increase at an alarming rate and having high-profile individuals pretty much telling the people to fight guns with more guns, we are all inevitably going to see little to no change.

When I was in school, we had lockdown drills implemented, but I will be honest, no one paid attention. But when my little siblings go to school and have lockdown and school shooter drills, they are much more aware of the situation around them since it happens far too often. When my friend informed me about the shooting in Bryan, Texas, my initial reaction was, “another one?”

Officials that the people elected need to start writing up policies rather than “thoughts and prayers.”

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# States should consider Virginia's move to abolish death penalty

By Rachel Ann Preston

On March 24, Governor Ralph Northam signed a bill into law that abolished the death penalty in Virginia, making Virginia the first southern state to abolish capital punishment. Historical implications of the death penalty such as the disproportionate incarceration of Black men, raise questions on the impact that enforcing the death penalty has on deterring crime and causing emotional wounds on families that are involved.

This recent development follows the impact that coun-

try-wide Black Lives Matter movements have made, as well as the outcry and public sentiment regarding the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor – to name two in a long list of too many.

The death penalty is a tough subject in many southern states. While there remains a strong opposition against it, many argue that “an eye for an eye” is the right thing to do when it comes to brutal murders. Texas, while not being considered traditionally southern in regard to what was once the Confederacy,

still enforces capital punishment.

This is not purely an issue of racial injustice, even though statistically, Black defendants are more likely to face death sentences. The action of sentencing someone to death has many facets. I ask the question – if killing someone was inherently wrong, how does lethally injecting a murderer with three different substances (a sedative, and two chemicals) until they die right that wrong?

While watching an episode of ID's television show “Evil Lives Here,”

one woman was interviewed about her ex-boyfriend, Anthony Fiebiger, who received two separate death convictions in 1999 for separate murders. In the interview with his ex-girlfriend Sharon Morris, she read an article published about Fiebiger in which he stated that he wished they would execute him already – it had been 20 years, and prison was “like torture.” She smirked a little bit and then replied, “If it's that torturous for him, they should continue to keep him alive... because there's no

amount of torture that can match what he inflicted in his life on innocent people.”

I think that captures an important component of the death penalty. We don't seem to care if the person who commits a heinous crime necessarily dies. We just want to know that they're suffering. Is that the right form of comfort in the face of violence, and does it help a victim's family process grief?

Capital punishment has a long history dating even further back than the seventh century, B.C.'s Draconian Code of Athens, in which the only punishment for crimes was death. Given the long history of the death penalty, from hangings in Britain to

burnings at the stake to beheading at the guillotine, it seems that today's lethal injection is the most humane way we have ever handled killing prisoners. Even with the humane methods that replaced the electric chair, it may be time to follow in Virginia's steps and find another way to handle violent crimes. Justice can be served without the act of taking another's life, which only adds to the count of deaths related to traumatic events. It may reopen old wounds for victims' families when 20 years later they are reminded because they have an appointment at “The Walls,” the prison unit which facilitates the executions.

# Texas tech billionaire claims dementia in \$2 billion Ponzi scheme

By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

Texas tech mogul billionaire, Robert Brockman, the 79-year-old CEO of software company Reynolds & Reynolds, was indicted on Oct. 1, 2020, on tax evasion, wire fraud, money laundering as well as other illicit criminal activity as described in the blistering 44-page indictment.

As noted by the prosecution, “It was further the objective of the conspiracy for Brockman, using nominee... to create a false paper trail regarding his offshore structure,” among other illegal activities.

Equally im-

portant, an IRS Criminal Investigation Chief, Jim Lee, stated Oct. 17, “Dollar amounts aside, I have not seen this pattern of greed and concealment and coverup in my 25-plus years as a special agent.”

Furthermore, according to evidence from the United States Department of Justice, Brockman sustained a 20-year crime spree with the intent to conceal an estimated \$2 billion in income from the IRS. His indictment last fall raises many questions about the billionaires involved in the biggest U.S. tax fraud case ever filed against an

American.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Robert F. Smith, age 58, from Austin, Texas was named by the prosecution as a co-conspirator. Smith is founder, chairman and CEO of Vista Equity Partners, an American investment firm focused on financing and forwarding software and technology to enable startup businesses. Though named co-conspirator, Smith was not indicted, unlike Brockman.

Forbes tax and litigation writer, Robert W. Woods, questions why Brockman was indicted,

while Smith was not.

“Smith's cooperating witness deal may be expensive, but the \$139 million price tag and his cooperation mean no indictment or jail,” Woods said.

How is this possible? A short seven-page, non-prosecution agreement endorsed by the U.S. Department of Justice was carefully prepared and signed by Smith, five of his attorneys, and the Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Richard E. Zuckerman. Who can afford five attorneys to represent them when millions are struggling to survive

during a pandemic?

As a Cornell graduate and former Goldman Sachs executive, much of Smith's wealth comes from private equity. Smith's firm is one of the most successful private equity firms in the nation, with more than \$46 billion in assets, making him the richest Black man in America. Why did greed come into play for a man with an (steadily growing) net worth of \$6 billion.

According to the IRS, “From 2000 through May 2015, Smith engaged in an illegal scheme to conceal income and evade taxes he owed

by using an offshore trust structure with related foreign corporations and offshore bank accounts, and by willfully filing a series of false documents with the IRS and the Treasury Department.”

As immoral as many of Smith's actions were, his reputation with business and philanthropic endeavors helped the Black community and will be forever remembered. In Atlanta in May 2019, Smith vowed to wipe out the student debt of the entire 2019 graduating class of Morehouse College.

*Continued on page 15*

# Overlooked female astronomer who shattered glass ceilings

By Raksha Singh

Science textbooks in school taught us that the most abundant atom in the universe is hydrogen. Did you know British-born American astronomer, Cecilia Payne Gaposchkin, made this revolutionary ground-breaking discovery? Her thesis entitled “Stellar Atmospheres” concluded that hydrogen was the overwhelming constituent of stars, making it the most abundant element in the universe, and she established that stars could be classified by temperatures.

Her influential discovery was met with skepticism by astronomer Henry Norris Russell,

who thought that stars would have the same composition as Earth, but in 1929 conceded with Payne. Superiors also tried to dissuade her from her conclusion in her thesis which noted astronomer Strauve deemed as “the most brilliant Ph.D. thesis ever written in astronomy.”

At an early age, Payne-Gaposchkin dealt with personal hardships. Her father passed away when she was four. At 12, her mother moved to London for the sake of her brother Humfry’s education. Hardships did not stop her bright future ahead. In 1919, she won a scholarship to study at Newham

College, University of Cambridge, where her interest in astronomy was sparked after attending a lecture.

“The result was a complete transformation of my world picture,” Payne said. “My world had been so shaken that I experienced something very like a nervous breakdown.”

Even though she completed her studies at University of Cambridge she was not awarded a degree because of her sex. At that time Cambridge did not grant degrees to women. When she realized that her only career option in the U.K. was to become a teacher, she made her move to U.S. in search of career op-

portunities in astronomy.

In 1923, she became the second woman to earn a fellowship to study at the Harvard College Observatory. In 1925, she became the first person to earn a Ph.D. in astronomy from Radcliffe College since Harvard denied doctoral degrees to women. Payne-Gaposchkin was also the first person to get a doctoral degree through the Harvard College Observatory. Her thesis was the first published monograph by Harvard College Observatory. After her doctorate, Payne studied stars of high luminosity to understand the structure of the Milky way.

She surveyed and studied all stars, stars brighter than the tenth magnitude as well as variable stars and collected all the data amounting to over 1,250,000 observations with her assistants. This work later was extended to the Magellanic Clouds, adding a further 2,000,000 observations of variable stars. These data were used to determine the paths of stellar evolution. Her conclusions from these observations was published in her second book, “The Stars of High Luminosity.”

In 1931, Payne-Gaposchkin became an American citizen. On a tour through Europe in 1933, she met Russian-born astrophysicist, Sergei I. Gaposchkin, in Germany. They married in March 1934 and

settled in Massachusetts, close to Harvard. Her observations and analysis of variable stars carried out with her husband laid the basis for all subsequent work on such objects.

When Payne-Gaposchkin began research at Harvard, women were not professors, so she spent many years doing low-paid research jobs. However, she was appointed to become professor in 1954 and in 1956, she became chair of the Department of Astronomy. She also became the first woman to be appointed to head of a department at Harvard. She spent her entire academic career at Harvard and remained scientifically active throughout her life. She has indeed shattered many glass ceilings in the academic world.

# Federal Reserve stimulates financial tsunami

By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

Ever wonder where most of the money in the economy comes from? The Federal Reserve, better known as the Fed, is America’s central bank and has been printing an estimated \$1 million a second, according to Liam Frost, a freelance journalist, editor, and business writer.

Over one year ago, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System announced March 23, 2020, “The Fed will continue to purchase Treasury securities and agency mortgage-backed securities in the amounts needed to support smooth market functioning and

effective transmission of monetary policy to broader financial conditions.”

There was an increase of \$586 billion—to \$5.25 trillion—in the week of March 18–25.

Within days, the Fed announced that it would purchase \$500 billion in U.S. Treasuries and \$200 billion in mortgage-backed securities over several months. How? By quantitative easing, a massive expansion of open market operations kicked into gear in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is the first time the Fed’s balance sheet topped \$5 trillion. Why?

Investors panic over the global spread of COVID-19, prompting the central bank to launch several liquidity initiatives such as bond-buying programs, amongst other systems, to stimulate the U.S. economy.

Nothing of this caliber had occurred since 2007 when Moody’s, an economist rating agency, flooded Wall Street investors with its negative and false AAA ratings. As a result, subprime mortgages in 2008 tanked, creating a financial crisis.

Millions of homeowners fell into foreclosure, mortgages’ integrity plummet-

ed into delinquency, leaving American families homeless and Wall Street investors richer.

Moody’s paid \$864 million in penalties, but no one went to jail. Do you think history repeats itself? Do you think big banks are too big to fail?

Standard and Poor’s entered into a similar accord in 2015, paying out \$1.3 billion. S&P is the world’s largest rating firm, followed by Moody’s.

In March 2021, the same organization, Moody’s, claimed Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 bill, dubbed the “American Rescue

Plan,” will create 7 million new jobs.

The president’s complete statement at the White House was, “And it will generate economic growth for the entire nation. That’s why major economists — left, right, and center support this plan. Even Wall Street has agreed. According to Moody’s, by the end of this year, this law will spur our economy to create 7 million new jobs.”

In the end, the Fed will print more greenbacks to fulfill their massive goal of stimulating an economy already struggling to survive. At the same time, e-commerce grows

and generates billions in revenue.

Initially, printing more money will create hyperinflation, higher prices for consumers, and inevitably higher taxation on people in the employee quadrant, not the investor quadrant.

Nevertheless, I remain optimistic about the U.S. economy, our trade policies, and foreign relations. So, if the Fed wants to print more money (and it will), the U.S. will go more into debt because debt fluctuates, creates innovations, and stimulates our economy—so be it.

As the saying goes, if you cannot beat them, join them.

# Keep organic waste out of landfills, harvest black gold by composting

By Indira Zaldivar

It's time you learned that trash and household waste have a purpose in the compost pile. Composting is an environment-friendly activity that makes use of two categories of waste labeled as greens and browns. The greens and browns transform into a nutrient-rich soil additive, commonly referred as "black gold."

Greens are rich in nitrogen e.g., fruit and veggie scraps, peels, spent coffee and tea grounds, grass clippings, eggshells etc. Browns are carbon-rich waste products such as cardboard, cardboard toilet paper rolls, coffee filters, newspaper, and yard waste (dead leaves, plants).

Recently discovering that I live within a five-mile radius of a municipal waste disposal site

has made me eager to raise awareness on composting. Composting is relearning how to dispose of organic waste where it belongs, back to the environment. It is easy, inexpensive or free, and a great way to give back to our environment.

More than a third of waste in landfills are compostable, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Compostable waste in landfills fails to turn into rich soil due to anaerobic conditions. Instead, trash in landfills contaminates groundwater and releases harmful gases into the atmosphere such as methane which contribute to climate change.

Municipal solid waste in landfills is the third-largest source of methane emissions caused by people in the United

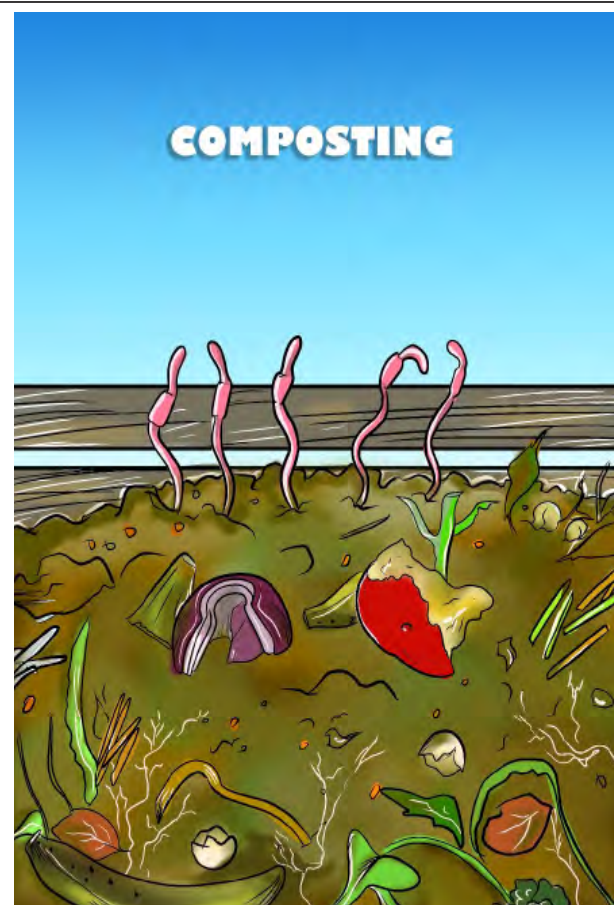
States, according to the EPA. Methane traps heats in the atmosphere 28 to 36 times more than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 100-year period, says the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's assessment report.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that the combined land and ocean temperature has increased at an average rate of .13 F per decade since 1880, however, the average rate of increase since 1981 (.32°F) is more than twice as great. Climate change threatens our own existence and the quality of life of future generations. Composting and other green initiatives are our way to counteract climate change by reducing municipal waste and harmful gases.

EPA says composting also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers, multiplies beneficial bacteria and fungi which break down organic matter, enriches soil to help retain moisture, and beat downs plant diseases and pests.

You can compost outdoors or indoors. My favorite method of composting involves the composting worms known as red wigglers. Composting with worms is called vermicomposting. Over 200 red wigglers work tirelessly in my backyard in the compost bins accelerating the decomposition process. My little industrious pets eat microorganisms in the compost pile which they later poop. If you want to be fancy, refer to their poop as worm castings. The worm castings, or black gold, rich hummus, beautiful exchange as I like to call it, is even richer in nutrients than traditional compost.

Continued on page 15



Whitney Barrett



"Composting and seeing my trash literally turn into something beneficial to the environment has been such a beautiful, rewarding experience for me." - Sustainability advocate, Indira Zaldivar.

# Cockrell Butterfly Center at HMNS flutters my fears away

By Aansa Usmani

During spring break, I revisited the Cockrell Butterfly Center, located in the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Over a decade ago, my fear of butterflies emerged when a few landed on me during my visit. Since then, I have avoided revisiting the Butterfly Cen-

ter, fearing further trauma.

In adherence to CDC guidelines, HMNS enforces mask-wearing and asks visitors to maintain social distancing measures. Ongoing exhibits have set capacities for visitors, allowing visitors to safely tour arti-

facts.

When entering the exhibit, indoor-based attractions detail the life cycle of butterflies, beginning with caterpillars and overall transformation into beautiful, winged-pollinators. Some touch-based exhibitions became

view-only were disconnected or labeled "out of service" to prevent transmitting COVID-19.

Outside of the entrance lies the main attraction: the butterfly garden. The outdoor exhibit encompasses a large area, including fountains, tropical plants



Butterfly specimens and live butterflies are available at the Cockrell Butterfly Center at HMNS. Photo credit: Aansa Usmani

and fruits. From my stomach to the top of my head, butterflies were swarming ev-

erywhere, landing on people, flowers, and other brightly-colored objects.

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# Keep organic waste out of landfills (continued)

Composting and seeing my trash literally turn into something beneficial to the environment has been such a beautiful, rewarding experience for me. I was in awe when an avocado pit sprouted in my compost pile.

I thank the initiatives by the UHD's Center for Urban Agriculture and Sustainability for introducing me to composting and other sustainable

initiatives.

You and I have the power to re-learn how to tend to our environment. Whatever we do in our backyard, homes, and schools, affects people around the world. You and I, who live in a developed country, have a greater responsibility as world citizens to participate and demand that our government and economy adopt sustainable initiatives

because developed countries have contributed the most to CO<sub>2</sub>, methane emissions, and climate change.

Next time, you finish enjoying a banana, apple, cup of coffee, you'll know that banana peels, apple cores, coffee grounds and filter, all have a place in your compost bin.

**Composting 101**  
Comparing the types of composting materials

**Greens ♡ are Nitrogen-rich composting materials**

- Spent Coffee & tea grounds
- Veggie & fruit scraps
- Egg shell powder
- \*Undyed hair & pet fur
- \*Unpolished nail clippings

\*takes longer to decompose

**Browns ♡ are Carbon-rich composting materials**  
\*you need 2x more of the Brown

- Fallen Twigs
- Dead/dried up leaves
- Grass clippings
- Cardboard
- Toilet paper rolls
- Natural paper scraps
- Coffee filters
- Brown paper bags

Whitney Barrett

# Cockrell Butterfly Center at HMNS (continued)



Other animals such as lizards, snakes, and others were present, creating a neo-tropical, coastal environment within the exhibit's greenhouse. Various signs denoted the types of butterflies, as well as which ones were currently being studied.

Upon re-entering the indoors, visitors are encouraged

to check whether any "fly-aways" (stray butterflies) followed them. Although the exhibits in this hall were smaller, it allowed caterpillars to develop cocoons in a quieter space. Additionally, this hall gave more insight into butterflies' dietary needs and breeds specific to certain locations. Overall, HMNS'

Butterfly Center gives more insight and first-hand experience into the life of a butterfly. Although the rules are more stringent, it shows that the museum upholds the public's safety during the ongoing pandemic. Personally, this visit helped me to overcome my outdated fear of butterflies, as well as admire the

efforts of its workers in creating a beautiful exhibit.

The HMNS is open every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are available for purchase on its website. Purchase them a day-or two before visiting. For additional information, visit their website.

# Tech billionaire (continued)

According to a Business Insider press release, "Smith will make a \$36 million-dollar donation to Morehouse's new Student Success Program, which will in turn completely pay off all federal student loans borrowed by the 400 Morehouse students who graduated in May, nearly all of whom are Black men, as well as loans owed by

their parents and legal guardians."

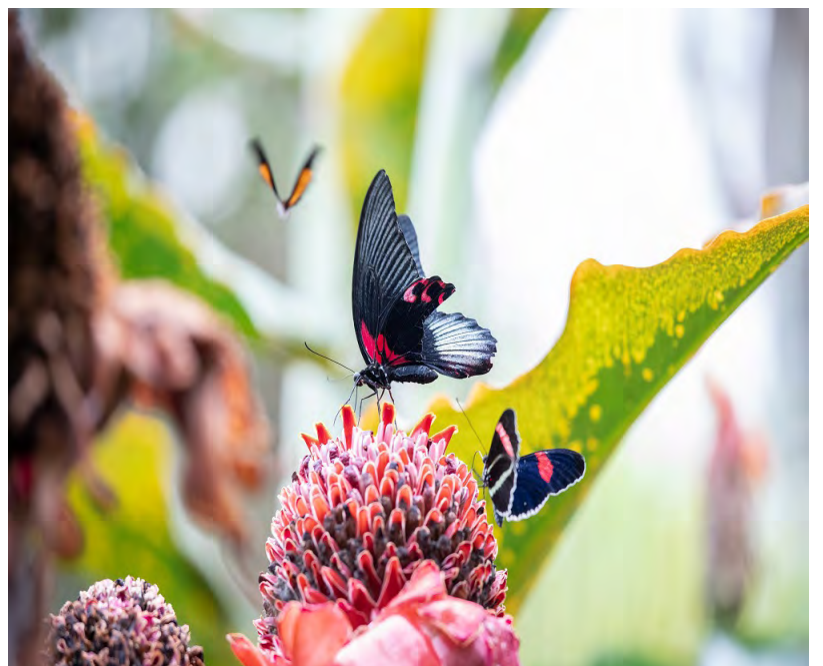
Smith called the gift "a little fuel" for the students.

"On behalf of the eight generations of my family that have been in this country, we're gonna put a little fuel in your bus," the philanthropist said during the commencement speech, which left alumni, students, and all who attended—flab-

bergasted.

I wonder if a billionaire, president, legislation, program, governor, senator, or one country can really make an impact and change the life of a student body, family, and generation simply by upholding true character, a firm and strong rhetoric, and overall—integrity.

The Cockrell Butterfly Center at Houston Museum of Natural Science allows visitors to personally and safely interact with wildlife. Above photo courtesy of @CockrellButterflyCenter on Instagram. Below photo courtesy of HMNS website.



## UHD **DATELINE** Now hiring!

Student Run Since Volume One

### Hiring until position is filled

The Dateline is seeking applicants for the position of business manager. This paid position begins fall 2021 and applicants must commit to the position for the full 2021-22 academic year. The job involves both advertising sales and managing the busi-

ness and financial operations of the newspaper.

The successful candidate will have a strong orientation toward personal selling and developing advertising revenue as well as effective budgeting and management skills. Duties include managing

business and financial matters for the paper, in cooperation with the student editor and faculty adviser, and expanding the sales of advertising space in the paper, including to businesses in the campus neighborhoods of NoDo and Washington St. Typical commitment is 20

hours per week; salary is \$800 per month, plus 15% commission on ad sales.

Minimum qualifications include at least sophomore standing or higher, the completion of at least one semester at UHD, successful completion of basic business courses, and

a 2.5 GPA.

To apply, please send a letter of application indicating your reasons and qualifications for applying for the position. Include as well your resume as well as an unofficial copy of your UHD transcript. Send these documents to

The Dateline faculty advisor, Joe Sample, Associate Professor, at [samplej@uhd.edu](mailto:samplej@uhd.edu). Applications are sought immediately and will be accepted until position is filled.

# Peace Corps celebrates 60th Anniversary in March

By Milton Rivera

On March 1, the Peace Corps celebrated 60 years since President John F. Kennedy established the agency in 1961. The anniversary of the Peace Corps commemorates international peace and friendship, volunteerism and service. In that time, UHD has supported projects around the world through its alumni who have chosen to serve. At last count, 18 alumni have volunteered with the Peace Corps, serving within a wide variety of specialties that most recently supported more than 60 host country partners.

“As the Peace Corps celebrates our 60th anniversary, I am reminded of how far we have come and what an unprecedented time we are in now. The past 60 years have truly prepared us for this historic moment. During a pandemic that has touched every corner of the globe, it’s clear that we are all in this together,”

says Acting Peace Corps Director Carol Spahn. “As we look to the next 60 years, I know the Peace Corps will continue to be a community of people—all over the world—willing to do the hard work of promoting peace and friendship.”

The theme for the 60th anniversary was “Peace Corps through the Decades: Sixty Years, Countless Stories” and was commemorated during “Peace Corps Week,” which runs Feb. 28 to March 6. A number of virtual events took place during that week. Search the hashtag, #PeaceCorps60 to find pictures from and posts from the attendees.

The agency’s website, [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov), also features returned Peace Corps volunteer (RPCV) photos from the past six decades. RPCVs were encouraged to share their stories and images on social media using #repyourdecade.

Visitors to the website can also read about the Peace Corps’ history and stories from service.

This year doesn’t just mark an anniversary for the Peace Corps, it marks a new beginning.

When the agency evacuated its global posts in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it paused operations and brought home more than 6,000 Americans who were serving in more than 60 countries.

The agency is now recruiting and planning for a return to service,

bringing an extraordinary opportunity for future Volunteers to be the start of a new chapter for all of Peace Corps. These new Volunteers will be vital to the agency’s post-pandemic success as members of a new inaugural cohort. For more information on current openings and to learn more about how COVID-19 may impact service departure, please visit the volunteer openings page.

These new volunteers will be vital to the agency’s post-pandemic success as members

of a new inaugural cohort. For more information on current openings and to learn more about how COVID-19 may impact service departure, please visit the Volunteer openings page.

The Peace Corps sends Americans with a passion for service abroad on behalf of the United States to work with communities and create lasting change. Volunteers develop sustainable solutions to address challenges in education, health, community economic development, agriculture, environment and

youth development. Through their Peace Corps experience, volunteers gain a unique cultural understanding and a life-long commitment to service that positions them to succeed in today’s global economy. Since President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps in 1961, more than 240,000 Americans of all ages have served in 142 countries worldwide. For more information, visit [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov) and add us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



# Peace Corps