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Workforce Solutions launches strategic plan

STEPHANIE GATES
STAFF REPORTER

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) introduced its Strategic Workforce Plan including specific goals and strategy for Hays County.

WSRCA is a nonprofit

partnership that provides no-cost recruitment and employment services in the nine-county Rural Capital Area of Central Texas.

WSRCA's strategic plan is focused on enhancing community collaboration around workforce development to amplify the impact

of workforce initiatives and programs across the region.

Each of the nine counties within the Rural Capital Area has a distinct economy and workforce that reflects their unique histories and environmental features, as well as natural resources and amenities.

"We believe it's important to document the employer needs in each of our nine counties along with the skill sets of the labor force, to address the gaps between skills needed and skills available," WSRCA CEO Paul Fletcher said. "Then by area, our Community Matters Co-

alitions can work to address those gaps, through various means such as education/training and removal of barriers, such as transportation, access to high-quality child care, workforce housing, and access to broadband internet."

The goals of the plan in-

cludes strengthening community collaborations at the regional and county level through the formation of Community Matters Coalitions, identifying solutions for workforce barriers, enhancing the area's employ-

SEE WSRCA PAGE 6A

'JUSTICE FOR JENNIFER'

Woman seeks answers months after fatal car accident



Above, a car collision that took place on June 10, 2020 in Lockhart resulted in the death of Jennifer Miller. Following the accident, her life partner Pamela Watts is seeking justice. Photo courtesy of Big Boyz Towing - Lockhart, Texas

STEPHANIE GATES
STAFF REPORTER

You may have seen a banner displayed around San Marcos proclaiming "no justice for Jennifer Miller," who was killed in a car accident last June in a collision with Sgt. Ryan Hartman, an officer with the San Marcos Police Department.

The banner is posted as often as possible by Miller's life partner, Pamela Watts, who has been distraught since a grand jury decided that Hartman's only charge for the fatal crash was a citation for failing to stop at a stop sign.

She hopes that the banner might share the story of how the criminal justice system handled the death of her beloved partner.

"I've gotten no justice at any turn," Watts said. "Haven't gotten a fair voice. I had a pretty idealistic view



Jennifer Miller

of law enforcement because my brother has been in it for 35 years and he is one of the good guys. Now I get it, our system allows a District Attorney to be God and it's wrong."

The collision happened on the afternoon of June 10, 2020 in Lockhart when Hartman, who was off-duty, was traveling eastbound at the 2200 block of Maple

Street and Watts and Miller were traveling southbound in the 1300 block of South Cesar Chavez Parkway.

Miller died on scene and Watts was transported by helicopter to Ascension Seton Hays Hospital in Kyle to be treated for severe bodily and brain injuries.

Lockhart Police Department's investigation recommended a charge of criminal negligent homicide. However, after a grand jury reviewed the charge and returned a no bill, Watts' only recourse was a civil suit where she could file for damages for her sustained injuries, although that is not the justice Watts wants.

"This thing has really destroyed her life," Watts' lawyer Justin McMinn said. "Nobody wants to go through this. She doesn't feel like she is getting any justice for what happened."

Watts wants systemic

change in the criminal legal system to empower victims to speak at grand juries and to rein in the authority of District Attorneys to present evidence without the oversight of an audience. She says she can't be sure that all evidence was presented to the grand jury because no one representing her or her late partner could be in the room.

Some relevant evidence, like phone records, had not been made available by the time the grand jury was held.

According to Hartman's deposition, police reports and forensic evidence, Hartman was driving 16 mph over the 30 mph speed limit on a partially gravel road with an open container of alcohol that was ¾ empty, talking on the phone, and he failed to stop at two stop signs before colliding with

SEE JUSTICE PAGE 5A



Texas State will host a mass COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the University Events Center (pictured above) on Thursday from 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Daily Record photo by Lance Winter

Mass COVID-19 vaccination clinic to take place Thursday at Texas State

NICK CASTILLO
MANAGING EDITOR

A mass COVID-19 vaccination event will take place at Texas State's University Events Center on

Thursday, April 22, University President Denise Trauth announced Friday.

Trauth made the announcement during a

SEE VACCINATION PAGE 6A

Early voting begins Monday for SMCISD Board of Trustees election

DAILY RECORD STAFF

Two at-large positions on the San Marcos Consolidated ISD Board of Trustees are up for election on May 1 with early voting beginning Monday.

Six candidates are vying for the two three-year terms: Incumbent Anne Halsey, Andrew Fay, Mari Salmi, Nicholas "Nico" Costilla, Sylvia DeLeon Muzzy and Roger E. Davis.

Voters in Hays and Caldwell counties will be able to vote early at the following locations in San Marcos: Live Oak Health, 401

Broadway Street Suite #A; Hays County Government Center, 712 S. Stagecoach Trail #1012; and the Texas State Performing Arts Center, 430 Moon Street.

Early voting hours on Monday are from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. From Tuesday through Friday, early voting takes place 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday early voting continues from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. On Monday, April 26, polling locations are open from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Early voting wraps up on Tuesday, April 27 from 8

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SOCIAL



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Sunday Record



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VACCINATION FROM PG. 1A

Facebook live where Hays County and University officials discussed the upcoming vaccination effort.

"I'm extremely proud of this joint venture," Trauth said. "It reflects the strength of the relationship that Texas State has had with Hays County and our surrounding communities, working together we're always trying to improve the life and health of our fellow Texans."

The mass vaccine event will take place at the UEC between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. on Thursday. Texas State Student Health Services Director Dr. Emilio Carranco said the event will be able to vaccinate 6,000 people.

"We're certainly going to encourage all members of our university community to attend that event," Carranco said. "We're going to try and spread the word to others. This is a really important effort on the part of Hays County and Texas State."

To register to receive a Pfizer vaccine at the UEC visit: <https://www.haysinformed.com/vaccine-registration>

"We're going to do everything to make our vis-

itors feel welcomed to this beautiful facility," Trauth said. "We're going to have a lot of faculty and staff volunteering because they are the ones that want to support their friends and neighbors. I encourage everyone to register and bring their family and friends to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to end COVID-19."

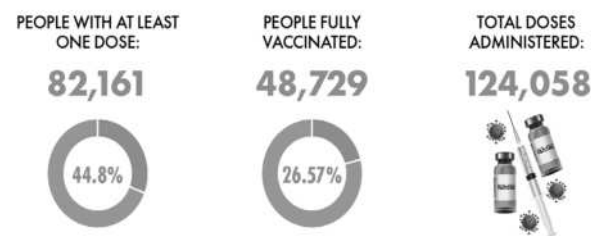
Trauth said Texas State has administered 6,000 vaccine doses to the university community throughout the spring semester and will continue to provide vaccines throughout the summer.

In Hays County, 82,161 residents have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, 44.8% of eligible adults, while 48,729 have been fully vaccinated — 26.57% — according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

The DSHS states that 79.96% of Hays County residents 65 and older have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, while 62.21% of those in the same age group are fully vaccinated as of Friday.

As of April 12, 20,836

HAYS COUNTY VACCINATION NUMBERS



Data from Texas Department of State Health Services. The DSHS estimates that Hays County has a population of 183,380 who are 16 years or older. Updated 4/16/21

Daily Record infographic by Colton Ashabanner

San Marcos residents in the zip codes 78666 and 78667 have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, while 11,894 are fully vaccinated, according to the DSHS.

All Texas adults are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Under the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's emergency use authorizations, those 16 and older can receive a Pfizer vaccine, while only those 18 and older can receive a Moderna shot.

Hays County Judge Ruben Becerra said the county has held 50 vaccination clinics since COVID-19 vaccines became available. He added that the county

will keep vaccinating, including walk-up clinics at Live Oak Health Partners Community Clinic in San Marcos, 401 Broadway St. Suite A, on April 19 and 20, and on May 3 and 4.

"We will not let up our efforts until everyone who wants a vaccine is vaccinated," Becerra said, adding that vaccines are not mandated. "But if you want a vaccine, we want to make sure that you get one with no hindrances."

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Grand jury to consider charges in death of Texas protester

ACACIA CORONADO
 REPORT FOR AMERICA/
 ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN (AP) — A grand jury will consider whether to bring charges against a man who drove into a crowd demonstrating in Austin against police violence last July and shot and killed an armed protester, prosecutors said Friday.

Travis County District Attorney José Garza an-

nounced the move in a statement without identifying the man who shot Garrett Foster, 28. The man's attorneys have identified him as Army Sgt. Daniel Perry, a Fort Hood soldier, whom they say was working for a ride-share company and acted in self-defense after Foster pointed a gun at him.

"Coming to a decision in these kinds of cases can

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WSRCA FROM PG. 1A

er-led and demand-driven workforce system and creating pathways to self-sufficient employment and career advancement for Central Texans.

The overall strategy will guide WSRCA's work over the next three years.

The WSRCA project team conducted a survey of stakeholders and held workshops and forums in each county from 2019 through 2020, to identify workforce issues and challenges within the communities. Through this process, common challenges and issues emerged, informing the goals and strategies of the plan.

The study found that high poverty, broadband access and a shortage of childcare capacity were significant workforce issues in the county.

The goal of the Workforce Matters Coalition is to work with local resources to identify potential issues with broadband and work with the local community resources to resolve those gaps.

"During the pandemic, we saw how critical it was for all to have good broadband access and just how many people did not have that access," Fletcher said. "Many excellent solutions came out of the pandemic, such as the hotspot school buses positioned through many ISD's to provide wireless access. The WSRCA Centers and many others boosted their public Wi-Fi signal to provide access from the parking lot. Broadband access is a complex topic that the public workforce system cannot solve alone, but we look forward to having these discussions with stakeholders in our counties to design community-led solutions."

On childcare issues, once the Child Care Workforce Matters Coalition is established, the group will develop priorities to address the issues identified in the county plans.

Fletcher said they will consider finding resources to provide back-office support for smaller childcare centers and in-home providers to help create more operational efficiency; working with small business development organizations and subject matter experts to strengthen existing centers to support expanding child care

availability in the county; looking at ways to improve teacher pay in early childhood settings by creating efficiencies; and determining ways to raise awareness of the importance of early care and education availability as an economic and labor market driver.

WSRCA also found that a young educated workforce and the presence of Texas State University are a strength for Hays County.

Strong community partnerships have helped strengthen public transportation, improve career and technical education opportunities and establish a more robust manufacturing pipeline.

Many strengths of the region included its location between two metropolitan areas, career and technical education program out of San Marcos Consolidated ISD, a manufacturing jobs connection program, its young population and relatively high labor force participation.

They also identified weaknesses and threats including housing affordability relative to wage, unemployment slower to recover during the COVID-19 pandemic, a median hourly wage lower than the Austin metropolitan area, the second highest poverty rate in the region and dependence on tourism and events in the northwestern side of the county.

Fletcher says access to affordable housing has been a long-term issue for the workforce and that the highest areas of employment also have the highest housing costs.

"This barrier causes Texans to have to live further away from where they work, increasing their commuting costs and taking additional time away from their families," Fletcher said. "We will work on this issue as a community to determine the best potential options to address the costs associated with workforce housing. So that some of our region's critical roles, such as teachers, healthcare workers, and first responders, can afford to live where they work and be better engaged in their community."

The Workforce Matters Coalitions will help create a forum for business leaders, elected officials, and other

community leaders to discuss how to prioritize resources to help in these situations. WSRCA will also rely on local economic development agencies, chambers and other small business resources to support companies in their growth and help them improve access to career opportunities with higher wages.

The plan recognizes retaining college graduates and college-educated residents while attracting or developing more high-wage and high skill jobs as a key opportunity.

One key priority is to increase the awareness of high-demand careers and the opportunities to connect with Hays County employers while ensuring educational programs in the region are training for the right skills.

A key element to the mission of the plan is strengthening the region's employer-driven workforce system. Employers play an active role by providing input on the skills and competencies they need and give feedback on the quality of workforce training programs and services.

"Major industries within our region will benefit from the plan, by having a steady talent supply chain that will not only meet the needs of current employers but will be ready to expand to meet the

needs of future enterprises that will relocate to our area because of our highly skilled workforce," WSRCA COO Diane Tackett said.

Another key element of the mission of the plan is self-sufficient employment. Achieving this goal starts with building greater career awareness and connections between job seekers and employers in the region. WSRCA will continue its work to ensure that training programs for high-demand careers are accessible to job seekers and will meet the needs of employers.

"We're excited that the plan will help establish and strengthen well-defined pathways to help guide job seekers into high-demand career opportunities that provide family-supporting wages and opportunities for advancement," Fletcher said.

"As we have seen during the coronavirus pandemic, it is critical that high-quality child care is available to allow parents to go to work," Tackett added. "Quality child care not only ensures safe places for kids to be but creates excellent learning environments that ensure our kids are preparing for successful entry into school and beyond."

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