

Chevron to Vacate Bellaire Location at Fournace/610

By Michelle Leigh Smith

Chevron, Bellaire's top employer and taxpayer, plans to move their 900 employees at the 4800 Fournace location to downtown Houston.

The 10-story building, constructed in 1977 by S.I. Morris Architects, is home to 900 pipeline employees who will transfer downtown in phases. The award-winning design was quite modern for its time, just as the new Geophysical Laboratory that opened in 1941 offered advances like air-conditioning when The Texas Company outgrew its warehouse at Quitman and Stevens.

Chevron plans to begin marketing the 28.14 acre campus in October this year.

"This is part of a project we are undertaking to consolidate our presence in Houston to ensure we con-

tinue to maximize our office space usage," says Van Ast, Media Advisor, Chevron North America Exploration and Production. "This will involve moving employees from our Bellaire facility to our downtown Houston facilities by the end of 2017 and selling the Bellaire facility. Houston, and the State of Texas, remains the global center for our upstream business and other functions and we expect to continue to be a long-term partner to the city and state."

Several of the older buildings have already been demolished, including one last year that faced Fournace. "They were the old research facilities built in the 1940s and 50s and they were sitting empty," says Scott Clymer, who was area manager for Business and Real Estate in

Bellaire and often participated in community outreach. "I got there in 2006 and those buildings were empty. They were costing us more to maintain."

The 28-acre Chevron/Texaco property has a rich history, impacting even the names of streets. The name was changed to Fournace in 1973. According to Marks Hinton in "Historic Houston Streets: the Stories Behind the Names," J.J. Fournace was a long-time resident of Bellaire. When Texaco established a large research center on Gulfton in Bellaire, management did not like the fact that their address contained the name of a major competitor, Gulf Oil. They went to city council and had the name of this stretch of Gulfton changed to honor Fournace.

"When Texaco moved in and they started doing their billing and mailing, Bellaire was given a First Class Post Office," recalls former Bellaire Mayor Betty Janicek. "Gary Summers,

City Manager of Bellaire at that time, was very pleased and proud that we had Texaco. They were the #1 tax account in Bellaire. I remember that Sakowitz would host a monthly bridge

luncheon for the Texaco wives and we learned to avoid shopping there on those days because we didn't want to fight our way through 1,000 women."

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Chevron has announced plans to move its 900 employees at the Bellaire office to their downtown Houston location. They plan to put the nearly 30-acre campus on the market in late 2016.

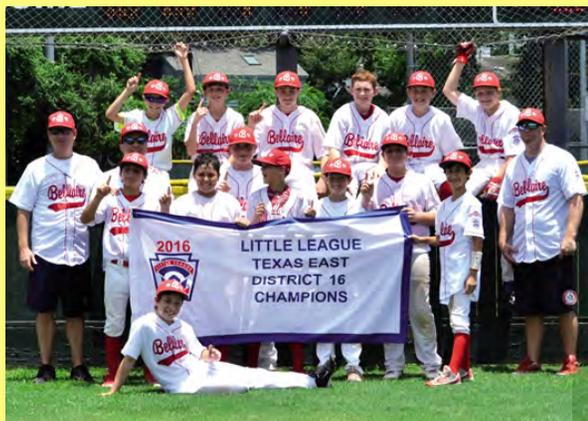
News & Notes

July 12, 2016

Bellaire Beautification Workshop

In June, the City Council of the City of Bellaire approved a \$70,000 contract with Terrain Studio to assist the City of Bellaire with the development of a program plan for Bellaire's beautification efforts. Terrain Studio is a professional landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm with offices in Houston and San Francisco, California.

The first public meeting, a City-Wide Beautification Workshop, is scheduled to be held on Thursday, July 14, at 7 p.m. in the CenterPoint Energy Community Center, 7001 Fifth Street, Bellaire. Bellaire citizens are encouraged to attend.



Bellaire Little League 12U District Champs!

On July 4th, the 12U Bellaire tournament team won the District 16 Championship game against West U. American 8-7. Team members include (l-r): top row-Carter Dixon, Matt Chotiner, Jacob Stavinhoa, Conner Denham, Noah Beinart, Charlie Mullen; second row-Manager Corey Ayers, Coach Luke Mandola, Matt Whitting, Luke Mandola, Caden Biedermann, Aidan Reichel, Cody Ayers, Josh Blum, Max Melamed and Coach Rich Chotiner; ground-Reece Tiras.

Brays Bayou Association

The Brays Bayou Association meets on the third Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at The Gathering Place, 5310 South Willow Drive (77035).

On Monday, July 18, Gary Zika, Program Manager, Project Brays, will discuss the updated schedule and what to expect - a little bit of Project Manager 101.

For more information contact Bob Schwartz at bobx206@gmail.com.

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Life in the Fast Lane Screeches to Halt

By Michelle Leigh Smith

Eric Toure Pratt's fast ride in his girlfriend's maroon 2016 Jaguar J12 ended unexpectedly on the morning of June 21.

Pratt now faces charges of felony possession of a weapon and a second felony charge for manufacture/delivery of between 200-400 grams of a controlled substance in the Hon. Mike McSpadden's 209th district court. Pratt is being held with no bond and his next court appearance is July 23.

The arrest was an example of fine police work. Bellaire Police Sgt. Darrell Hollie first noticed Pratt in his rearview mirror as he was patrolling West Loop 610 for disabled cars, shortly after midnight.

"He blew by me and didn't even brake," says Hollie. "I paced him, and pulled him over in the 6400 block of 610.

Pratt, 42, was traveling

80 mph in a zone marked for 60 on the northbound side of the Loop.

"He handed me an ID card, claiming he didn't have his license. Usually that's an indicator that there could be other issues. He said he didn't have the insurance card because he was driving his girlfriend's car. I ran his name for warrants and found that his license was suspended and the car's registration had expired."

"He tried to roll the window up on me so I called for back-up," says Hollie. "I heard him on his cell phone saying, 'Babe, come get the car'."

That was his next clue that this was not a run of the mill speeding stop.

"Officer Joe Jenkins arrived right away," says Hollie.

"When he got out of the car to be handcuffed, I patted him down for weapons,

checking for something hard like a knife or a gun and I felt the money," says Hollie. "When he headed for the patrol car, I noticed he was walking knock-kneed, like he needed to pee. A stack of \$25,000 fell out of his pocket, along with a couple of baggies of a white powdery substance. I saw it on the ground and said to myself, wait, that was not here a minute ago."

"I recovered the money

and sat it on the roof of the car," says Hollie. "I searched the car and found a total of 398 grams of cocaine, two 9 mm Springfield pistols with 30 rounds in extended clips and another \$1,700 in cash in the console. There were also two grenade-shaped Ecstasy pills."

"We made the gun safe and I let Jenkins give it to dispatch to see if it was stolen," Hollie says. He contin-

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Bellaire Police To Hold Annual Summer Community Meeting

The Bellaire Police Department will hold their Annual Summer Community Meeting on Thursday, July 14, at 7 p.m. in the Civic Center of Bellaire City Hall, 7008 S. Rice Avenue.



Topics of discussion will include implementation of patrol officer body worn cameras, residential burglaries, police operations, and other topics of interest. Everyone in the community is invited.

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Texaco came before Bellaire's Planning Commission in August of 1963 to request that land at 1002 N. Rice be zoned for a laboratory. "The building would be used for general offices and we are planning erection of a seven-story building that would also house a computer," reads a news article from the Bellaire Texan.

"The new laboratory site had to be accessible for employees but remote enough to use dynamite to test geophysical instruments and both the land and the building had to fit within a budget of \$125,000, according to a chronicle of Texaco Exploration & Production research in celebration of 50 years in Bellaire (1941-1991).

"The Chevron property is zoned as TRP - Technical Research Park, the only such zoning district in the City," says Mayor Andrew Friedberg. "I think the greatest impact on Bellaire of

Chevron's move will be determined by how the property is rezoned. Chevron and/or the buyer will initiate that process. As with all zoning changes, there will be multiple public hearings.

"Chevron has emphasized that this is an office consolidation and not a reduction in force. They're simply relocating their Bellaire employees to their offices in downtown Houston," says Friedberg. "Chevron has been a great corporate citizen of Bellaire for many years and of course we're sad to see them go, but we understand that office consolidation makes sense for them," he says. "We look forward to maintaining our positive relationship with the company going forward."

"Probably the most negative aspect is the timing which is likely to create a lot of uncertainty," says University of Houston economist Barton Smith, who has conducted research in urban eco-

nomics since 1973. "With the Houston economy and real estate markets struggling right now, the transition to another owner is anything but clear. Thus, Bellaire is likely to be left in a world of uncertainty for several years until energy prices recover and the overall metropolitan economy gets back its normal energy.

"We've seen buildings emptied out all over the city and a lot of office space coming back on the market," says UH Economist Bill Gilmer. "Times are tough and this is certainly something that could be anticipated. They've had two rounds of layoffs, spinning off some of their downstream work so they have plenty of space available downtown.

"The other part of it is that it opens up an opportunity. Land is very scarce in Bellaire because it is primarily a residential area. I think it would be prime for upper end residential."

The Texas Company contributed heavily to the World War II effort of the 1940s and 30 percent of the Bellaire lab activities from 1942 to 1944 were devoted to projects that helped in the Allied campaigns in Europe and the Pacific. The Bellaire lab developed radar technology and built airborne magnetometer submarine detection equipment that was used to search for enemy subs off the coast of the United States and Europe. It was also where Texaco developed tools for use in the exploration and production of oil and gas, including logging and seismic tools.

Depending on how long it takes Chevron to sell the building, this decision could cost Bellaire significant tax revenue. "Empty buildings certainly don't pay taxes like fully occupied buildings do," says Tim Connally, who has worked in commercial real estate for more than 30 years. "The office market was down

15.5 percent at the end of the first quarter of 2016, according to CoStar, a database that recaps the office market."

"Despite 44.2 million square feet of office space available for lease - which comes out to 26.6 percent of all existing and under construction space - Houston failed to surpass 1.5 million square feet of total leasing activity for the first time in the last 15 years," says Patrick Jankowski with the Greater Houston Partnership. Leasing is so slow right now and the City (Houston) has a lot of empty space which means developers aren't paying top dollar for land.

The 2016 projected tax bill for just Bellaire is \$180,885. "I do notice Chevron is in the process of protesting the value," says CPA Ralph Rieger. "The 2015 total tax bill was \$1,008,815 of which Bellaire's portion was \$168,845."

In 2001, Texaco acquired seven properties on Mayfair,

each valued at \$297,500, shortly before Texaco and Chevron merged.

In looking at the last five years of history on HCAD, the appraised value has gone up \$10M since 2013. The appraisal for the land and the 10-story building has risen from \$37,243,445 in 2013 to \$47,538,671 this year.

Harry Potter Program for Teens / Tweens

Come to the West U. Library on July 20 at 3 p.m. for a Harry Potter-themed painting party! Paint your Hogwarts house crest or the Deathly Hallows symbol on a canvas you can take home. All supplies provided. Space is limited, so come in to the library or call (713) 668-8273 to sign up. This program is for tweens and teens ages 10 years to 15 years. The Library is located at 6108 Auden.



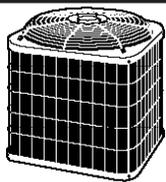
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