

Holly Creek Chronicle

Holly Creek Property Owners Association -- Copyright 2012

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Rains Quench Drought in Holly Creek Estates

After the worst drought in memory for many Holly Creek Estates residents, winter brought welcome rains that by March restored the neighborhood's familiar rich green ground cover and refilled ponds and area lakes.

"According to my rain gauge, we had 15 inches of rain during the first 10 weeks of 2012," said resident James Bartlett. "Spring Creek overflowed three times after being totally dry for six months last year. At one point it was more than a hundred feet wide below my house on Penridge Lane, compared to the normal 15-20 feet."

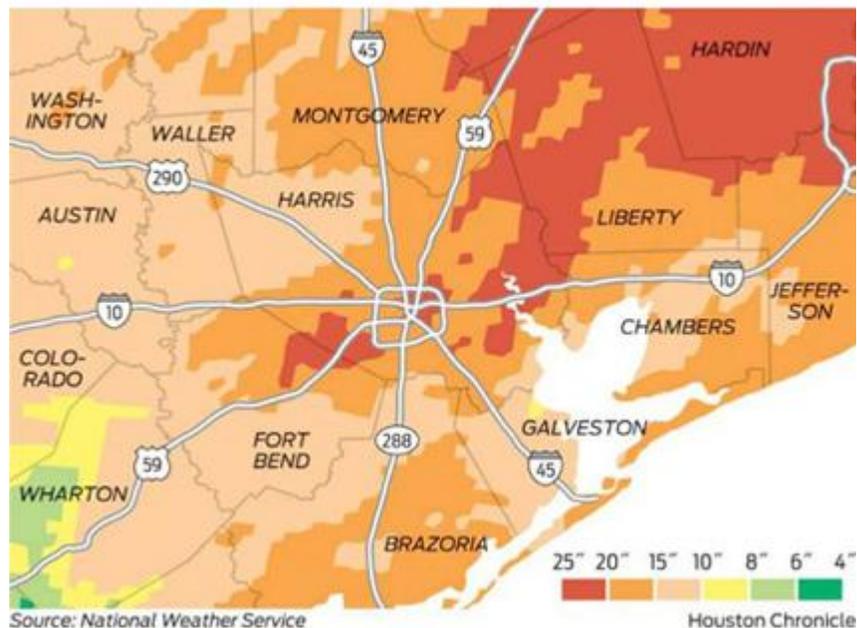
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Area Rainfall to Date



Weather experts attribute the historic 2011 drought to a strong La Niña, a periodic upwelling of cold water in the Pacific Ocean that affects global weather and causes warm, dry summers in the U.S. Southwest. The current event began in 2010 but is now dissipating. Continued on page 2 ...

Rain Quenches Drought in Holly Creek Estates



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Bartlett, a weather enthusiast, took several meteorology and climate courses at the University of Texas in the early 1970s. "We studied La Niña, but meteorologists were just beginning to grasp its full implications," he said. "I never thought I'd be worrying about it as a homeowner."

Rainfall records for Tomball extend back to only 1941. The official monitoring station is at Hooks Airport, 10 miles east of the neighborhood. Its records show the drought began in 2010, when 35.6 inches of rain fell, compared to the normal 46 inches. Then 2011 brought only 23.6 inches. Even worse, one-third of that fell in January and December, meaning the 10 months in between were exceptionally dry.

"I'm convinced Holly Creek Estates was drier than Hooks," said Bartlett. "It was rare to find enough water in the rain gauge to even bother emptying it. I remember a number of times when weather radar showed rain a few miles away, but not a drop fell here. Droughts are not unknown here. I remember the 1960s as dry years when many of the subdivisions north of Spring were built. When heavy rains came in 1973, those areas flooded and the residents were surprised and outraged. You still see the impact of that dry decade in tree rings on stumps throughout the neighborhood."

Tomball's record dry year was 1988, at 21.3 inches, while other recent dry years included 2003, 1999, 1990 and 1977. Houston's low came in 1917, at only 17.6 inches. What lies ahead? The National Weather Service predicts below-normal rain for coastal Texas through June (ironic considering the mid-March downpour), followed by normal rain during the second half of 2012.

POA Annual Meeting Set for March 22

The 2012 annual meeting of the Holly Creek Estate Property Owners Association will be held on Thursday, March 22, at the Rosehill Fire Department's Station One at 19000 FM 2920, on the right side of the road west of Cypress Rosehill Road. The meeting is open to all HCE residents and will begin at 7 p.m. and last from one to two hours.

"We urge all residents to attend," said Association President Jerry Hamaker. "It's a great way to meet your neighbors and find out what's going on with the neighborhood and the association - and to raise any points that you'd like to discuss."

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Among items on this year's agenda are approval of the minutes from the 2011 meeting; committee reports and 2012 plans for road maintenance, landscaping, architectural review, deed restrictions, the newsletter and website; and reports on the HCE maintenance fund and the Rosehill Volunteer Fire Department's capabilities and insurance ratings.

HCEPOA Annual Meeting

Elections will also be held to fill three expiring two-year-term board member seats, including position 1 held by Jerry Hamaker, position 2 held by Pete DeLeeuw, and position 4 held by Doug Beckman. All three are standing for reelection, but additional nominations are welcome from attending members or their proxies.

Attendees will also be able to bring up any other business.

"If you'd like to propose other items for the agenda, please email hcepoa@earthlink.net in advance of the meeting. We'll see you there," said Hamaker.

Board Exercises Vigilance to Avert Issues

Through 2011, the board of directors of the Holly Creek Estates Property Owners Association was actively monitoring a number of occurrences in the neighborhood to prevent any inadvertent violations of deed restrictions and architectural standards. The board met twice during the year, and was in ongoing email and phone communications on momentary issues throughout the year.

The Architectural Review Committee, chaired by Steve Yon, reviewed and ultimately approved construction plans on several properties. "A key part of the process was ensuring that homeowners and contractors were adequately informed of what the requirements were. Everyone complied with our standards and the home improvements and in several cases complete remodels will be credits to the neighborhood when they are finished." Yon said.

The Deed Restrictions Committee, chaired by Gene Mattox, addressed several lawn and building maintenance issues associated with vacant homes and undeveloped lots, as well as damage to fences. "Our rate of compliance tends to be very high, once homeowners understand what we are asking," he said. "We've had isolated cases where we've had to take further action through governmental authorities. There are measures available in such cases."

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Board Exercises Vigilance to
Avert Issues

Drought and its resulting impacts in terms of tree loss and fire hazard was an ongoing concern that required continual monitoring and response to inquiries from property owners. Among other issues addressed during the year was operation of off-road unlicensed vehicles driving illegally and recklessly on neighborhood roads and private properties, improper parking of vehicles, prompt removal of dead trees and disposal of debris, whether efforts to control feral hogs were needed (and even possible), and a variety of inquiries regarding activities that are allowed under the deed restrictions.

"We try to be as tolerant and unobtrusive as possible, while still preserving the character and quality of this very special place to live," said Jerry Hamaker, HCEPOA president.

Check Fire Regulations Before Burning

You see them all around rural areas - piles of brush and tree limbs, blazing away as property owners burn to clear debris. So it must be OK, right? The answer, surprisingly, is "Outdoor burning in general is against the law in the entire state of Texas, and there are additional prohibitions in the Houston-Galveston area, which includes Harris County," said Bob Beeley, president of Emergency Service District 21, the agency that contracts with the Rosehill Volunteer Fire Department for fire suppression and prevention. He is also a Holly Creek Estates resident, treasurer of the Property Owners Association and a member of its Architectural Review and Deed Restrictions committees.

"However, there are exceptions that allow you to burn, but you must follow certain procedures," Beeley added.

Those procedures are spelled out in a brochure entitled "Outdoor Burning - Can I Burn?" published by the Houston-Galveston Area Council of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Copies are available at the fire department, and further information is available online at www.tceq.state.tx.us/rules.

"Anyone who wants to burn should call the TCEQ at 713-767-3500," said a spokesperson there. "We'll advise them of any burn bans in effect due to drought, high winds or low humidity. We'll also determine whether they qualify for an exception that will allow them to burn without violating the law."

Allowable exceptions include ceremonial and recreational fires (like camp fires and cooking fires), or waste disposal fires in areas not served by garbage pickup.

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Of prime interest to Holly Creek Estates residents is that such exceptions allow "On-site burning of trees, brush, grass, leaves, branch trimmings and other plant growth by the property owner or authorized agent ... if there is no practical alternative," as the brochure states. "Only TCEQ may determine if a practical alternative exists."

Check Fire Regulations Before Burning

"The fire department does not have the authority to grant you permission to burn," confirmed Beeley. "We can say 'no' if conditions warrant, and can come out and extinguish illegal fires. But the authority to allow you to burn is held by the TCEQ alone."

The TCEQ has specific requirements that must be met in order to burn legally:

- The person responsible for the fire must be present and remains liable for any damages caused.
- Burning may only occur when wind and weather will not cause smoke and pollutants to pose a hazard or adversely affect "sensitive receptors" (people, animals or plant life).
- Fires must be downwind or 300 feet away from structures containing "sensitive receptors," but this can be waived with written approval of adjacent property owners.
- Burning is not allowed for electrical insulation, tires, treated lumber, heavy oils or asphalts, or explosive materials or chemicals.



"The rules may sound complicated and restrictive, but there are reasons for caution," said Beeley. "Texas lost billions of trees in the drought. What if everyone tried to burn them at once? And Harris County suffers from air pollution, another reason to restrict burning. Also, it's not uncommon to get calls at the fire department about out-of-control debris fires that have burned across neighbors' property."

Within Holly Creek Estates, property owners must also comply with deed restrictions that prohibit creating a nuisance or health hazard - certainly possibilities with ill-timed fires.

"We were particularly concerned during the drought, since in a heavily forested neighborhood with the ground covered by pine needles, a fire could easily have gotten out of control," said Beeley. "We suggest that residents haul off debris if possible, but if they must burn, keep everyone safe by following all the regulations and precautions, keep fires small, and have a water hose available just in case. Trees and limbs that fall of their own accord can be burned by the property owner if necessary. But those cut by professional tree services must be mulched or hauled off."

Said the TCEQ spokesperson, "If we confirm that someone is burning without qualifying for an exception, or creates a nuisance, we can and do issue violations, and we also respond to complaints from neighbors."

Key 2012 POA Plans Announced

The Holly Creek Estates Property Owners Association (HCEPOA) has proposed a variety of plans intended to maintain the neighborhood's services and amenities during 2012. The proposals and the associated 2012 budget will be presented and voted upon at the Annual Meeting on March 22.

Key 2012 POA Plans Announced

Among those plans, Peter DeLeeuw, chairman of the Road Maintenance Committee, will conduct his annual survey of the private roads that are maintained by the association (Holly Creek Trail is maintained by Harris County). Any new cracks found will be sealed to prevent deterioration, and the roadsides will be checked for erosion with low spots filled. No significant repavings are currently contemplated, though several are foreseen in future years.

The Landscaping Committee chair, Doug Beckman, reports that the landscaping at the neighborhood's entrance will be fertilized periodically with green areas mowed, and he will explore options to reduce watering costs. Some additional decorative bushes will also be planted.

Communications Committee chair James Bartlett has proposed publication of at least one annual issue of the Chronicle, or two if sufficient volunteer help can be solicited from residents. He will also undertake the updating and maintenance of the www.hcepoa.org website. The Chronicle was scheduled to publish before the annual meeting, and the website work will be under way as well.

Holly Creek Estates Appeals to Homebuyers

Neighborhoods are never stagnant. Some residents move on, and new ones come in. So it is with Holly Creek Estates. To gain insight into local home sales trends, the Chronicle interviewed area realtor Elizabeth Mandola, who has facilitated more than a dozen HCE purchases and sales in recent years.

"Your neighborhood has great appeal," she said. "The gracious atmosphere, towering trees, winding roads and rolling hills are beautiful and hard to find, as are estate homes with all the amenities typical here."

During 2011 five HCE homes sold, with four on the market for 100 days or less. Six homes sold in 2010 in an average of 98 days. Prices over this span ranged from the low \$400,000 range to \$900,000. Four more homes are now on the market. One vacant lot sold recently, another is on the market, and one more will reportedly be offered for sale soon.

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"Realtors consider 7 percent turnover in a mature neighborhood to be ideal, which is what HCE had last year," said Mandola. "With custom homes and acreage, a wide range of elements affects value," said Mandola. "These include a home's age and size, lot size, features like swimming pools, guest houses and barns, and overall condition. Buyers are highly attuned to these factors, and well-maintained properties tend to bring premium prices when they sell."

Holly Creek Estates Appeals to Homebuyers

Mandola added that periodic remodeling updates are important every 10-15 years, as styles and preferences change. Beyond clean, fresh paint and good condition, buyers currently like granite countertops; stone; efficiency features like Low-E windows, attic radiant barriers and advanced heating and cooling systems; solid floors (as opposed to carpet, but fresh carpet if present); and attractive landscaping.

Conversely, considered out-of-date today are processed marble, wall paper, small tile, old appliances, and brass hardware and fixtures (many of which can instead be painted bronze).

"I hear 'needs updating' more than I care to," said Mandola. "In preparing a home for the market, I only recommend improvements that can recoup their costs or decrease time on market," said Mandola. "Sometimes it's amazing what you can do with simple efforts, like applying bleach and elbow grease, adding mulch and de-cluttering."

Reflecting today's economic uncertainty, potential buyers are concerned with such carrying costs as taxes and utility bills. They often ask to see a year's utility bills when considering a home.

"Having individual water wells is newly appealing to buyers since the drought," said Mandola. "Also, be sure to keep your home's assessed tax value in line by protesting when needed."

Today's all-time-low mortgage rates, typically 3.5 to 4 percent, are helping keep HCE home sales strong.

"Buyers are willing and able to borrow more, which is essential for higher-end homes. In fact I'm closing a purchase in late March with a 2.9 percent 15-year mortgage. It doesn't get better than that," Mandola said.

As for HCE, she concluded that, "You live in an atmosphere rich in beauty and character. Enjoy it now and know that it will capture the attention of buyers when it's time to sell."



Newsbriefs

Azalea spring

The brief, beautiful blooming of the azaleas in HCE confirms the onset of spring. If you've not seen all the scenery our neighborhood offers, take a hiking or driving tour before the blooms are gone.



Drought kills trees

The 2011 drought in combination with pine bark beetles killed countless trees in Holly Creek Estates. Though total neighborhood losses are unknown, just four adjacent properties along Oak Hollow lost 200 trees altogether, perhaps 25 percent of their total.

Please obey speed limit

Please observe the speed limit on Holly Creek Trail. Driving fast on this winding, dark road with its hikers, cars pulling out of driveways and frequent wildlife crossings (especially deer) makes speeding dangerous, as well as discourteous to your neighbors.



Water wells impacted

A water well service company reported that eight HCE homeowners had to deepen their water wells last year, presumably because of the drought and heavy water use.

Display your address

The Rosehill Volunteer Fire Department requests that you display a visible address marker in front of your property, in case such emergency vehicles as ambulances and fire engines are needed. A copy of the residents' directory has been supplied to the fire department to facilitate emergency response.

Dangerous feral hogs

During 2011 a group of feral hogs that roams the HCE area attacked and killed an adult deer on one resident's property and damaged numerous yards. In recent months it has caused yard damage near Salem Lutheran Church.



Chronicle seeks volunteers

Want to be locally famous and help your neighborhood? Volunteer to write an article or just submit an idea or photograph for the Holly Creek Estates Chronicle. Contact James Bartlett at jamesandeileen@comcast.net.

Website updating

We are currently updating our neighborhood's website, www.hcepoa.org, maintained by the Holly Creek Estates Property Owners Association. To suggest changes or submit content, contact James Bartlett at jamesandeileen@comcast.net.

Community events

There are many educational or entertaining events offered at venues near Holly Creek Estates. Since there are so many available, we'll provide highlights and their web addresses.

Arbor Gate Nursery

15365 FM 2920. Provides classes, lectures, live demonstrations on gardening, cooking, welding and landscape lighting. Example: Tough perennials for today's garden, by Texas A&M professor Dr. Welch. To see their extensive activity list and sign up, go to www.arbortgate.com

Community Events

Harris County Public Library-Tomball College

Provides lectures, helpful services (e.g.) income tax and playful experiences for children. Examples: March 20 - How to save and protect our trees this summer by Barry Ward, Executive Director of Trees for Houston. See the website and sign up: www.hcpl.net click on location and select Tomball.

The Showboat Drive-In Movie

5 miles west on FM 2920. Great entertainment for less, 2 movies for adults \$5 & children \$4. For movie listings and times go to www.theshowboatdrivein.com

Tomball Chamber of Commerce

There are many recurring events planned.

Examples: Walk Tomball every Saturday at 8 a.m. - a walking guided tour of downtown. Just show up.

Farmers Market on most Saturday mornings on Main Street. Downtown.

GTACC 34th Annual Golf Classic at High Meadow Country Club on March 22. Sign up by March 20.

Go to www.tomballchamber.org

German Heritage Festival, March 30 to April 1.

Held around Tomball's Historical Train Depot. Live entertainment, food and drink, and a bike rally on Saturday at 8 a.m.

Go to www.tomballsistercity.org

Family Spotlight

Family Spotlight - (The Chronicle hopes to "spotlight" families living in Holly Creek Estates. If you would like to nominate a family or include your own family in the spotlight, please contact Laura Urrutia at alberturru@aol.com.)

The Davidson family is the focus of our first family spotlight. Tracy, Christine and their three boys are new to Holly Creek Estates; they moved into their home on Red Oak Trail in July, 2011.

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Tracy works for ExxonMobil as an Aviation Sales Manager. A former Naval Aviator, he loves fishing, photography, and hiking. **Christine** is a teacher and has taught elementary school as well as dance classes. Her hobbies include dancing, making crosses, and looking for seashells at the beach. She grew up in Florida.

Tracy and Christine have three children. **Christopher** is 15 and attends Pope John XXIII High School in Katy. A 9th grader, he competes in cross-country, track, and field events. **Joshua** is 13, in the 7th grade, and attends St. Anne Catholic School. He stays busy competing in springboard diving events and plays basketball. **Nicholas**, also at St. Anne Catholic School, is 10 and in the 4th grade. He is involved in Cub Scouts and enjoys Legos and art.

When the Davidsons spend family time together, they like to travel, hike, watch movies, barbecue, and hang out by the pool. Their pets are a female Maltipo named Snow and a Cockatiel named Zazu.

Before moving to Tomball, the Davidsons lived in Fairfax, Virginia. What attracted them to HCE? Christine says it was, "the quiet neighborhood with beautiful homes surrounded by acreage."

Welcome!

Family Spotlight

The Uhle Family Jumps for Success

Two members of the Uhle family, HCE residents have achieved athletic success. Kenneth Uhle placed 1st in the pole vault at the Tomball Meet on Feb. 14, 2012. He attends Tomball Junior High School.

Ali Uhle, a student at Tomball High School, placed 3rd in the pole vault at the Seven Lakes Meet on Feb. 25, 2012.

