

# The Newsletter

OF THE KING WILLIAM ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 8, #4

KINGWILLIAMASSOCIATION.ORG

MAY 2012



## The Meerscheidt Homestead: *Gone and Almost Forgotten*

I bought the Stieren House at 503 East Guenther Street four years ago. Upon moving in, I read Mary V. Burkholder's book, *Down the Acequia Madre*, and I learned many historical facts about the house. It was built in 1891 by Carl Stieren, who lived here with his wife Hedwig. Carl was a lumberman and entered into business with the Meerscheidt brothers, Axel and Paul, who owned a large area spanning 33 acres, south and east of South Alamo Street. Together they sold lots and built houses in the area, developing the Meerscheidt River Subdivision where my house stands today.

As a newcomer to the King

William Historic District, I became enthralled by the history of our neighborhood and was floored when I received an intriguing letter in the mail. The letter began, "I am a relative of Axel (Alexander) Meerscheidt."

The letter was from Neale Rabensburg of La Grange, Texas, and it contained an old photograph (above, left) of what he thought might be my house. The picture was taken in the 1890's and was published in *The Story of My Life*, an autobiography by Erna Meerscheidt, Axel's daughter.

While visiting San Antonio and researching his family history, Mr. Rabensburg saw my house and thought he might have found

his ancestor's homestead – the house Axel Meerscheidt built for his family. In her book, Erna notes that their home backed up to the river and that she was born in the master bedroom of the house on July 24, 1893.

I immediately responded to Neale's letter and told him what I knew about the Stieren family living here, and I referred him to Burkholder's book. He was one step ahead of me as he had just finished reading the book's description of my house. He was surprised to read that Hedwig Stieren had lived here. He told me that Erna Meerscheidt's mother, Olga Meerscheidt, was Hedwig Stieren's older sister! The story took

*continued on page 4*

# PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Michael Shearin Guarino

By the time this column appears the Fair and all of Fiesta will be history, I'll hope that we will have made an offer to the top candidate for our new Executive Director position, and we will have passed the halfway point for this year's presidency. From my perspective, the rest of the time I have serving King William will be focused on strengthening our ability to manage change.

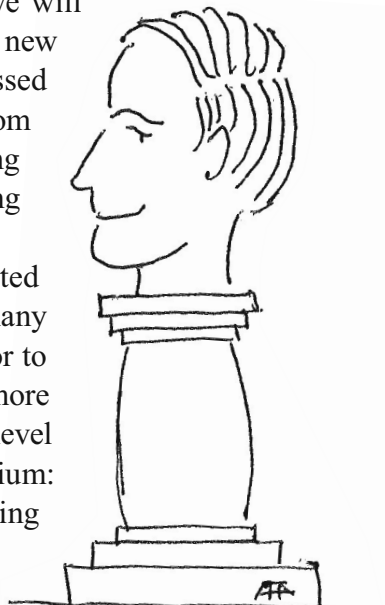
I toured the Cevallos lofts at a preview hosted by the Downtown Alliance in mid-April. Like many of us I was curious to see what our new neighbor to the south looked like. The lofts are larger and more numerous than I expected, and they exhibit a level of amenity more like an urban hotel-condominium: concierge services (you can have your dry cleaning picked up and delivered), a business center, more than one gym, and a very respectably-sized lap pool and shallow "beach" pool in the courtyard (this is a relatively new design feature, meant for basking and dangling ones toes in the cooling water).

The views are startling and so are the accompanying statistics. Since it opened in January its 250+ units are 90% leased; 85% of the units are already occupied and the tenants representing the balance are in the process of moving in. While you can part with more than \$2500 a month in rent, there are also 65 of what some of us former East-Coasters would recognize as "rent control" units, made available at substantially below market rates to qualifying low-income tenants. No wonder the place is filling up.

From its top floor one can see the smaller loft project across the street and the Steelhouse lofts a couple of blocks away. Clearly there is a demand for center city dwellings and there is a demonstrably strong market all around us. Anecdotally, many of the residents I talked to were reverse commuters, young people with jobs in the suburbs but with a yen for urban living.

This can mean good, and perhaps challenging, things for King William. More neighbors to keep beating the drum for a grocery store, but more traffic on South Alamo, and a home grown younger demographic attracted to First Friday. I'd argue that's a good thing, since being in some sense a part of the neighborhood would tend to make one less anonymous and, let's hope, less inconsiderate as part of a crowd.

It seems all but certain that we will find ourselves ringed with denser urbanized development. Land is still much more affordable south, east and west of us than in the very heart of downtown. Others may dream of towers on the HemisFair site, but the reality will be more low-rise on formerly industrial sites. This is not a distant vision of the future, this is our present day -- it's all happening now.



**CONTRIBUTORS** Susan Athené, Lupita Barrientos, Alan Cash, Bill Cogburn, Dina Toland

**LAYOUT** Angela Martinez

*Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion(s) of the Board of Directors of the KWA.*

Editorial guidelines are available online at [kingwilliamassociation.org](http://kingwilliamassociation.org).

## **KING WILLIAM ASSOCIATION**

1032 S. Alamo  
San Antonio, TX 78210  
210-227-8786

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## King William Cultural Arts District is Downtown's Best



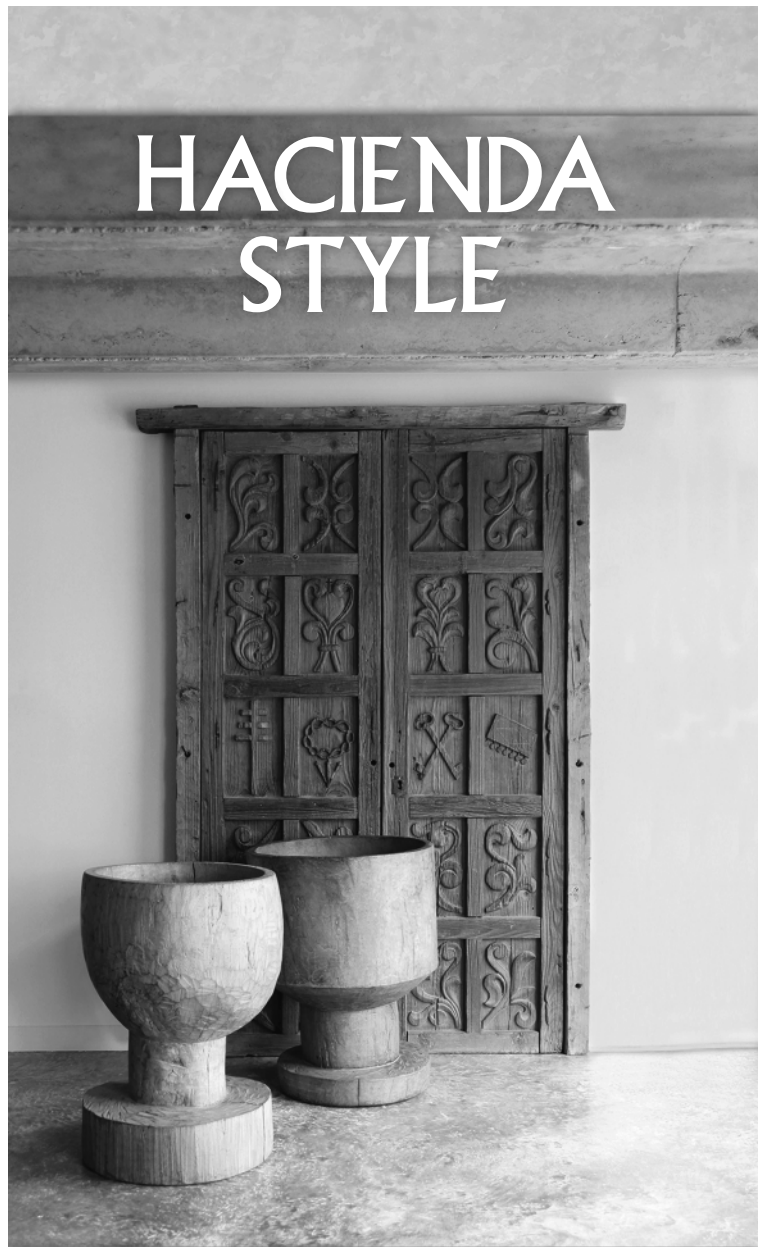
KWA Public Art Committee member Sherry Hess (from left), KWA President Michael Guarino, PAC Chair Molly Shafer, Councilman Diego Bernal, PAC members Susan Athene' and Jim Gillette, and SAY Si's Jon Hinojosa were present to receive the Downtown's Best Award for the Cultural Arts District, now on display at the KWA office.

The Downtown Alliance held its 12th annual Downtown's Best Awards on March 30 with a luncheon at the Grand Hyatt attended by about 400 people. The Downtown's Best Awards were handed out to recognize a diverse array of people, companies, developments and events that contributed to making central San Antonio a better place to work and live. We are proud to say that the King William Cultural Arts District received the Arts and Culture Award, recognizing its achievement as San Antonio's first official cultural arts district.

KW neighbors also recognized for their achievements were: Liberty Bar, for Neighborhood Restaurant; The Bike Waiter for New Business; Mission Restaurant Supply for Downtown Neighbor; and Cevallos Lofts for Development/Construction. Congratulations to all!



Artists living within the boundaries of the King William Historic District ([tinyurl.com/kwdistrict](http://tinyurl.com/kwdistrict)) are invited to apply to exhibit their work at the KWA office. Exhibits run for two months. Email [king.william@sbcglobal.net](mailto:king.william@sbcglobal.net) or drop by the office for an application.



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# The Meerscheidt Homestead

*continued from page 1*

a new twist. Carl Stieren and Axel Meerscheidt were brothers-in-law! Could they have all lived in the same house?

The fact that my address was different was bothersome but Mr. Rabensburg and I thought that the similarity between the houses merited further research. In the 1894 City Directory of San Antonio, Mr. Rabensburg had found that Axel Meerscheidt lived at 515 East Guenther. I quickly realized that 515 East Guenther no longer exists! I took Neale's photograph across the street to my neighbor, the savvy architect Charles Schubert who knew at first glance that the house in the photograph was not my house.

My curiosity led me to the San Antonio Conservation Society Library. Conservation Society volunteer Frederica Kushner was very helpful and soon found the 1952 Sanborn Fire Insurance map that cracked the case.

The Axel Meerscheidt house was next door to mine where the condominiums are today. The estate was huge and labeled with two addresses; 515 East Guenther and 101 Crofton. Unlike the houses surrounding it on the map, the Meerscheidt house was barely visible because of an attempt by a 1950's cartographer to cover it with glue and paper. The attempt was proof that the house was there in 1952 when the map was printed but gone by 1957 when the map was amended. Further research in the city directories confirmed that the house met its demise in 1957. We also came across a 1942 newspaper article reporting a small fire at 101 Crofton which had apparently become the Convent of the Sisters of Guadalupe! More research will have to be done to find out exactly what happened to the house.

I told Mr. Rabensburg, "At least

we have a photo of the house and we know exactly where it stood. It makes perfect sense that Axel Meerscheidt would have had the largest estate and the grandest house in the area! He certainly must have been a leader in the community!"

Mr. Rabensburg sent me a newspaper article printed in 1936 that confirmed my beliefs. The San Antonio Express article meticulously recounts a visit by President Benjamin Harrison in 1891. It was the first time a President of the United States had ever visited San Antonio. The city was in a tizzy. The very first Battle of Flowers Parade was planned to honor the President. Rain forced a cancellation of the parade and moved the reception indoors to the Grand Opera House (site of today's Ripley's Believe it or Not). Every seat in the Opera House was filled to the rafters.

The article detailed the seating arrangement at the event: "the President occupied the center seat of the front row. On his right sat in order, Postmaster General John Wannamaker and Secretary of Agriculture Jeremiah McLain Rusk and on the President's left sat Mayor Bryan Callaghan and Axel Meerscheidt, the latter representing the commercial bodies of the city."

The Meerscheidt Homestead is a piece of the San Antonio puzzle that we did not know was missing. Thanks to Neale Rabensburg, our history is now a bit more complete.

*- Belinda Valera Molina*

*Please stay tuned. Next month's newsletter will continue the Meerscheidt saga with excerpts from Erna Meerscheidt's autobiography in which she recalls growing up in the mansion on the San Antonio River – the house built by her father, Axel Meerscheidt.*

## More Trees in the 'Hood

King William/Lavaca Tree Project chairs Mary Ann Ohlenbusch and Alan Cash planted trees in the parking lot of Beethoven Hall at 412 Pereida. Many thanks to neighbors Oscar and Robert Alvarado who provided the equipment and know-how to cut the holes in the concrete lot. Two cedar elm trees were planted and someday will be 40 to 50 feet tall.



# OUT IN THE GARDEN

with Alan Cash

Fiesta and the King William Fair have come and gone. Because of more than normal winter rainfall, spring was beautiful. Now things can get back to normal. Hopefully the rains continue.

Here are a few tips. Lawns damaged by last year's drought are beginning to recover. To help things along, feed with a granular organic fertilizer about every two months. Water deeply about every two weeks so that roots grow deeply into the soil. Also cut with the mower at its highest setting. This shades the soil and slows moisture evaporation.

Let birds control insects in the garden naturally. To attract them put out feeders and birdbaths. Clean out birdbaths regularly to prevent mosquitoes. Different seeds attract different birds, but small black sunflower seeds seem to attract a good variety including bluejays, cardinals, and doves. "Cook" about a quart of seeds at a time for about one minute in the microwave before putting them in feeders. This will keep seeds that fall to the ground from sprouting.

Most weeks I have put some garden related comments on the neighborhood eblast that I feel can not wait until the next newsletter edition. These include giving the location of blooming plants in the neighborhood which you may want to add to your garden. If you are not on the eblast list, call the King William office at 227-8786, or email to [king.william@sbcglobal.net](mailto:king.william@sbcglobal.net) to be included. The eblast also includes many items of interest that warrant timely distribution.

Every garden looks better with plantings of evergreens and perennials so that at any time of the year it does not have a barren appearance when there are no flowers blooming. One such plant is the Sago Palm. These are slow growers that do well in sun or bright shade. They can get 5 to 6 feet tall and wide. A good example of Sago Palms is along the front of the home at 315 Adams.

Answers to questions you may have regarding the characteristics and care of plants can be found on the internet at [plantanswers.com](http://plantanswers.com). Enter the name of a plant, click, and there it is.

*Garden Note: The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies.*



# BIKES FOR THE REST OF US

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# Slow Food Moving Fast at Bonham this Spring



Slow Food chapter leader Susan Rigg (center) discusses the importance of recycling and using biodegradable materials with Bonham Academy students, assisted by pre-K teacher Mrs. Garcia (with poster).

Bonham Academy has begun an exciting new initiative this spring in partnership with the Slow Food Movement of South Texas. Bonham parent Veronica Ramirez has been instrumental in bringing the organization, which teaches about nutrition as well as environmental principles, to our school. The Slow Food movement aims to spread awareness of local/regional, sustainable, non-GMO, unprocessed food and how to identify it in supermarkets as well as grow it yourself. Children are growing food in the school gardens, and we hope to establish relationships with South Texas farmers and ranchers who are committed to sustainability.

Veronica recruited Slow Food after doing some research in the current food industry through authors such as Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*, et. al.) and Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*). She was motivated by talking to other parents who were interested in the food being prepared at school and the role of nutrition in developing healthy children. She has worked with Slow Food of South Texas chapter leader, Susan Rigg, to develop a weekly curriculum introducing children as young as kindergarten-age to these concepts, and to plan year-round gardens and then implement these plans with the

help of Susan, volunteers from Agrilife Extension, and of course, parent volunteers.

“Our goal is to keep kids thinking about what defines slow food as healthy and whole,” Veronica says. “To continue to reconnect them to the idea that the decisions they make in their diet not only have a significant impact on their health, but also have the same impact on the health of the planet. It’s all connected.”

Students have embraced the series with open arms, as have parents.

Each Thursday morning a new curriculum topic is introduced to a group of happy, excited students. Kids already talk about Thursdays as “Slow Food Day” and are engaged in the conversations during discussions.

A recent lesson had students learning all about seeds—their composition, seed dispersal, and how they grow into plants. Students helped plant seeds, talking all the while (in both English and Spanish) about the concepts and using vocabulary presented in the lesson.

Gardens are maintained by teachers and parent volunteers on various Saturday workdays throughout the year. A dedicated corps of volunteers keeps the seedlings watered, both in the gardens and in the greenhouse that parent Angela Martinez won a grant for last year. “We still need more people this year and next to be willing to help during the weekly series,” Veronica says. “The work includes discussing the current topic and a hands-on gardening activity. Since Susan and I have committed to being there every week, volunteers always have the support of a Slow Food member.”

Plans for growth of the program include bringing it into higher grade levels (currently they serve Pre-K through 2nd), increasing harvesting from the school gardens, and possibly becoming a presence at a local farmer’s market. The group would also like to do a fieldtrip to a local, sustainable farm. This is in the works thanks to several dedicated parent volunteers!

Join us! Visit <http://www.slowfood-southtexas.org> to learn more about the mission of Slow Foods or to volunteer to help lead a session at Bonham, or contact Veronica Ramirez at 210-461-3598 to volunteer for a Thursday morning. The initiative is also in need of funds for garden and craft supplies and funds for busses for field trips. Bonham would love to have you, in any way you’d like to help!

- Dina Toland



## Upcoming Events

### Bonham Book Fair

Saturday, May 5, 10-2

Barnes & Noble

321 NW Loop 410 @ San Pedro

### Parents Night Out: Prom

Saturday, May 12. 7:30-10:30

Triangle Bldg., 1501 S. Flores

*Music, food, silent auction and fun.*

*Prom attire optional.*

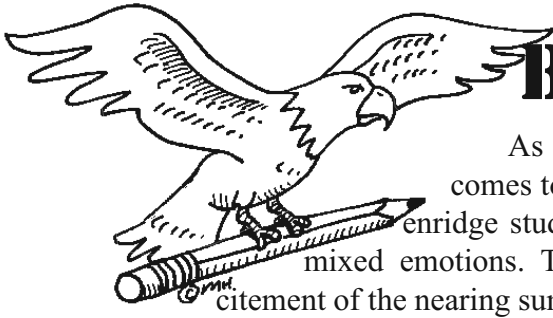
### A Night of Cocktails

Saturday, June 2

1037 S. Alamo St

*Learn to make cocktails, followed by a cocktail party at King William Manor*

more info at [friendsofbonham.org](http://friendsofbonham.org)



## BACK AT BRACK BY LUPITA BARRIENTOS

As the school year comes to a close, Brackenridge students are feeling mixed emotions. The joy and excitement of the nearing summer vacation is slightly overshadowed by the dread of finals and the seemingly endless onslaught of testing during the last couple of months of school. Freshman are facing the new rigorous STAAR exam that replaced TAKS. This new timed test is proving to be quite a challenge, but nothing the mighty Eagles can't handle. Nevertheless, Brack students are powering through and looking forward to some upcoming events.

Prom, for example, is right around the corner and Brazilian Carnival fever is quickly spreading through the campus. This year prom is at the St. Anthony hotel. Final preparations are being made as of this writing as the junior and senior class officers collaborate to make this annual event as fun as possible for the students.

FAWNA, Brack's animal rights club, is holding a drive for San Antonio's shelter animals. Donations of blankets, towels, rags and old clothing, even scraps, are being requested throughout the next few weeks. The students are being offered a free dress day pass in return for a dona-

tion. FAWNA hopes this drive will be as successful as their winter toy drive. All donations are welcome, at any time. Please help us make a difference in the lives of the city's shelter animals.

Spring Fling is making a return to Brack this year, hosted by the Environmental Club. On May 4 organizations will come together to run various food and game booths for a family-friendly evening. A dunking booth will also be on site with a mystery teacher inside. Spring Fling will begin at 6:00 p.m. in the Brackenridge parking lot and is open to the public. Please join us!

The Eagles are also enjoying the numerous awards they have won in the past few months. Russian language students competed in the National Russian Essay Contest and brought home medals in every category. One student even made it to Internationals and won the silver in Moscow! Almost a dozen art students made it to State this year at the Visual Art Scholastic Event. DECA students enjoyed wins in their state competition, and three students advanced to Internationals. Lastly, the Purple Jackets cheer squad won first place in a national cheer competition and scored the highest points ever recorded.

The way things are going, this year is sure to end on a high note and make history.

# Page Middle School Program Update

Communities In Schools of San Antonio is now providing case management services to 80 students at Page Middle School in the Partners Program. CIS-SA also offers assistance school-wide with school supplies and uniforms, and provides crisis intervention and referrals to community resources.

CIS-SA-sponsored activities for April included:

- Girls' groups facilitated by the Rape Crisis Center on building healthy relationships
- Boys' groups on building life skills and making positive choices
- Substance abuse prevention and refusal skills group facilitated by the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Pen Pal groups with Poe Middle School Partners Program students to improve reading, writing and social skills
- Martial arts classes to build confidence and self-discipline
- Mentoring by community volunteers

- College awareness activities
- Parent Contact Program – touching base with parents, discussing concerns and successes
- Individual counseling to address academic, attendance and behavior issues

Eighth grade Partners Program students have been eager to earn additional credits to catch up with their peers, and want to earn what they can before the school year ends. The Partners Program teacher has been coming in on Saturdays so that students can work on their credits. It is necessary to provide breakfast and lunch when offering Saturday school, and school funding had come to an end for this. So that our students may continue to come in on Saturdays, CIS-SA has stepped in and, thanks to support from the King William Association, will be providing healthy breakfasts and lunches to these young people.

CIS-SA and Page Middle School appreciate your support!

- Carrie Ragland, MS, LPC-S  
CIS-SA Project Manager – SAISD Partners Program

## Do a Good Turn Daily Local Scouts Clean-up River



Webelos from Pack 765 and their siblings collected several bags of trash during this year's Basura Bash. Pictured (from left to right): Nico Gonima, Joaquin Culbert Mendoza, Freddy Sanchez, Ollin Culbert Mendoza, Wiley Martinez, Felice Martinez, Alec Toland and Mateo Sanchez.

## Sunset Cinema: Train Films at Sunset Station

5/3 The Train

5/10 Murder on the Orient Express

5/17 Silver Streak

5/24 Strangers on a Train

5/31 The Darjeeling Limited

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## Come to an Event Along the River and Help SARA Celebrate Its 75th Anniversary

On May 5, 1937, the 45th Legislature of Texas created the San Antonio River Canal and Conservancy District, which was renamed the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) in 1953. For the past 75 years, SARA has been engaged in protecting and preserving the San Antonio River and its tributaries, including the area of the river as it flows past the King William neighborhood.

SARA is celebrating its 75th anniversary with a number of events, and the residents of the King William neighborhood are invited to attend. The Mission Reach Bloom Boom Wildflower Festival is on May 12. This event features guided wildflower walks and numerous family-friendly activities. Festivities will take place from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at Confluence Park. SARA will be providing a tour guide to join Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and Commissioner Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez for a bike ride of the Mission Reach at 9:00 a.m. before the Bloom Boom event. This bike ride is hosted by the San Antonio Museum of Art and space is limited, so please visit <https://www.samuseum.org/event-detail/?e=1321> to RSVP.

On May 19, SARA is again joining Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and Commissioner Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez to open the next segment of the Mission Reach. This event will begin at 9:30 a.m. where the project currently ends near Mission Road. Following a ribbon cutting ceremony the County Judge and Commissioner will lead a walk down to the Mission San Jose Portal.

Also on May 19, please join SARA and the San Antonio River Foundation for the 3rd Annual Museum Reach Fun 5K and Health & Wellness Expo, which begins at 8:00 a.m. near Pearl. This is an opportunity to enjoy the Museum Reach Urban Segment.

There are many other activities and events taking place to help celebrate SARA's 75th anniversary. To learn more please visit [www.sara-tx.org](http://www.sara-tx.org).

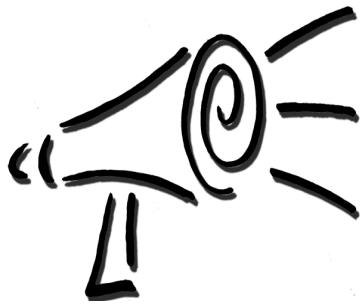


# BOX OF BOOKS: A Book Drive to Benefit SAISD

Box of Books, a local 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been formed by King William neighbors with the mission of providing all new teachers in SAISD with a box of books to start their classroom library. To accomplish this goal, Box of Books is asking for book donations. Books of all levels will be accepted, and a process has been developed to exchange all adult-level books into age-appropriate and subject-matter specific books for student use.

To find out more about Box of Books, please visit [www.cmef.org/boxofbooks](http://www.cmef.org/boxofbooks) or [www.facebook.com/booksforsakids](http://www.facebook.com/booksforsakids). For donations, email [BoxofBooks@hotmail.com](mailto:BoxofBooks@hotmail.com) to schedule a pick-up or drop your books off in our collection box at Madhatters Tea House and Cafe (320 Beauregard). Your donations can help improve literacy in San Antonio!

- Steve Lecholop



**Newsletter Submissions Wanted:** Do you have a story to tell? A neighbor to praise? News to share? A general interest column to launch? Submissions and contributions to the KWA Newsletter are welcome! Please send to [king.william@sbcglobal.net](mailto:king.william@sbcglobal.net).

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**KING WILLIAM**  
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# King William Area Kids



Neighborhood children gathered for the annual egg hunt at Upper Mill Park. For more information about family events in the community, visit the KWAKs group at [facebook.com/groups/kwaks](https://facebook.com/groups/kwaks).

# SAY Si and the 2012 Concrete Decor Show Share the Joy



SAY Si students surrounding the new water feature at SAY Si, one of the fantastic concrete decor makeover projects that took place in February.

February 2012 brought an amazing and exciting experience for SAY Si and our King William neighborhood. Organizers from Professional Trade Publications visited several nonprofit sites in San Antonio for a community service project, ultimately leading to the selection of SAY Si as a partner with the Concrete Decor Show organization.

Each year the Concrete Decor Show partners select a local non-profit organization in the community in which its conference is held. Bent Mikkelsen, CEO of Professional Trade Publications said, "SAY Si provides a place where trainers, contractors and artisans from around the country can come together to complete building improvements that will have a lasting impression on the lives of young people for years to come."

How very true as both students, teachers and concrete specialists all worked together to create an amazing tableau for our entire neighborhood and the San Antonio community to enjoy.

Come visit us at SAY Si to see the water feature as you wander through our xeriscape garden up to the outside entrance where student designs greet visitors. The front entrance inside the building will brighten up your day. There is more to see as the renovations showcase a wide range of use for commercial and residential work.

SAY Si again thanks the Concrete Decor partners for allowing our students to work with a new art form and for enhancing our facility. This was a generous gift.

- Beverly Schwartzman



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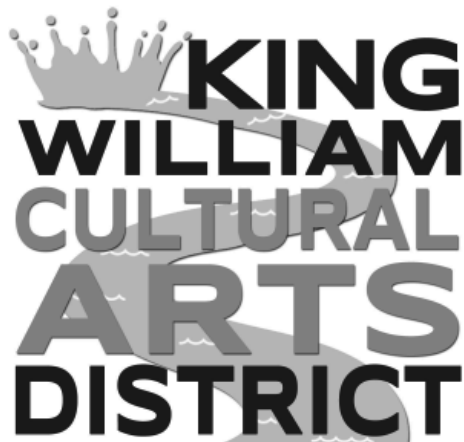
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King William Cultural Arts District and several neighborhood businesses win Downtown's Best. See story on page 3.

## May Calendar

- 2 KWA General Mtg - 7:00 p.m. - Blue Star Brewery
- 16 Deadline for June newsletter submissions
- 16 KWA Board Mtg - 6:30 p.m.
- 28 Newsletter mailing prep - 6:00 p.m. - KWA office