



For Immediate Release  
February 9, 2021  
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## **Travis County Earns Two Texas Association of Counties' Best Practices Awards**

**(Travis County, TX)** – Today, the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) presented two awards to the Travis County Commissioners Court. TAC has named Travis County the recipient of two 2020 County Best Practices Awards.

Every two years, TAC recognizes county leaders' efforts to create new, efficient, and effective solutions to challenges facing local governments. Through the Best Practices Awards, TAC highlights innovation and distributes vital information on what's working in county government.

Travis County is being recognized for its neighborhood fire drill and Silver Watch programs.

### **Neighborhood Fire Drill**

"When, not if" is usually heard when the topic of wildfire comes up in Travis County, where tens of thousands of homes are considered to be at high to extreme risk. If wildfire is generally seen as inevitable, then Travis County Commissioner for Precinct 2 Brigid Shea thought homeowners should be prepared by practicing an evacuation for when the long-expected danger arrives.

Shea and a team of fire officials, first responders, county officials, a University of Texas at Austin professor and residents of the 200-home, fire-vulnerable Comanche Trail neighborhood developed a wildfire evacuation drill and put it into practice on a Saturday in March 2019. They documented and analyzed the experiment to create a model that other counties and communities could adapt to their own situations, or to prepare for other disasters such as floods.

**"Many counties struggle with how to protect their citizens from wildfires,"** Shea said. **"Engaging our residents fostered a sense of optimism and confidence that when a fire does come, they will know what to do and will be resilient in the face of danger. They also knew their experiment had the potential to save lives elsewhere. We hope by sharing this project we can accomplish that end."**

For more information, including an application form for other neighborhoods interested in conducting their own fire drill, see [www.traviscountytx.gov/fire-marshal/prevention](http://www.traviscountytx.gov/fire-marshal/prevention).

### **Silver Watch Program**

Recognizing that there are many elderly residents who don't have anyone around who could check on them regularly, Travis County Constable Precinct 5 Carlos B. Lopez devised a solution: the Silver Watch Program.

Lopez reached out to Meals on Wheels of Central Texas to discuss establishing a partnership. He proposed that while they're out in the community, Precinct 5 constable deputies could check up on Meals on Wheels clients who have little or no support beyond their meal deliveries. Meals on Wheels agreed.

With initial training provided by Meals on Wheels, Precinct 5 deputies have logged about 600 visits over the past year. These welfare checks, even with COVID-19 safety restrictions in place, have proved crucial for residents who have little or no support. The program has been expanded to include a Silver Santa Drive that collects blankets, tissues and other everyday items for the program's participants.

**"I am truly honored that TAC has recognized our Silver Watch Program,"** Lopez said. **"Taking care of our most vulnerable population is a community responsibility. The partnership that Constable 5 formed with Meals on Wheels to keep our residents safe, I truly believe was divine intervention."**

**"Dedication to excellence and saving or improving lives are the common threads that run through these two award recipients from Travis County,"** TAC Executive Director Susan M. Redford said. **"We hope these awards inspire counties to continue discovering new solutions to better serve Texans."**

Travis County is one of six Texas counties selected to receive a TAC 2020 County Best Practices Award.

Every other year, TAC's County Best Practices Awards Program recognizes noteworthy innovations and solutions that increase efficiency, improve operations or overcome obstacles facing county governments. These innovations and solutions help Texas counties better serve their residents. The best of them also serve as models that other counties can shape to fit their particular needs.

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