

alamo heights

AUGUST 2011

vol.3, no.8

advocate

THE NEWSLETTER of the **ALAMO HEIGHTS** NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

www.myahna.com



The **KING** *of the*

PORCELAIN THRONE



One man's plan to take the lid off of Alamo Heights and put it on the national map.

page 5



Sprinkling Success

AH resident's Hover Sprinkler invention attacks drought. **page 4**

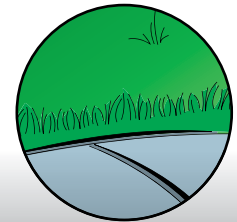
Delicious Desserts

Iconic 1950s dessert recipes from Mrs. Craig, legendary AH baker extraordinaire. **page 7**



Public Information

John Joseph asks if unlimited public info really should be free. **page 3**



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classifieds

Home for Sale: 191 E. Edgewood Pl. Rock exterior, metal roof, circular drive on beautiful corner lot. 4 bedroom/3 bath/2 car detached garage with alley access. Rare finished walkout basement, also with spiral staircase, included in 2885 sq. ft. Mature trees, prof. landscaping, sprinkler system, security alarm, custom roman shades, large laundry room, sunny Florida room, archways and many large windows. Hardwood and tile flooring throughout. \$479,000. Call for showing: J. Wood 210-316-3904.

teen services directory

Alamo Heights Neighborhood Association

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To encourage and secure the preservation of the distinctive and unique beauty of the Alamo Heights community by being an active force in the planning processes and problem-solving efforts of the city while promoting community education and safety in a cooperative, progressive manner.

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LORETTA ANDERSON	15	822-9034	x				
JAI BOATMAN	18	241-6910			x	x	
JULIA GEHLHAAR	19	478-1812	x		x	x	
KELLY UPTON	16	587-5869	x				CPR Certified
DAVIS WILDER	17	860-5903			x	x	Run errands & photography

The Alamo Heights Teen Services Directory is a free service for teenage residents of Alamo Heights ages 13-19. Ages are updated automatically and names are removed at age 20. To add, remove, or update your information in the directory, please send an email to Jodie@NeighborhoodNews.com and include the following information: Subject: Alamo Heights Teen Services, First and Last Names, Age with Birthday MM/YY (birthday is for maintenance only and will not be published), Services (babysitting/lawn care/pet walking & sitting/house & plant care), Phone #, Other Services or Information (optional). Directory updates cannot be taken over the phone.



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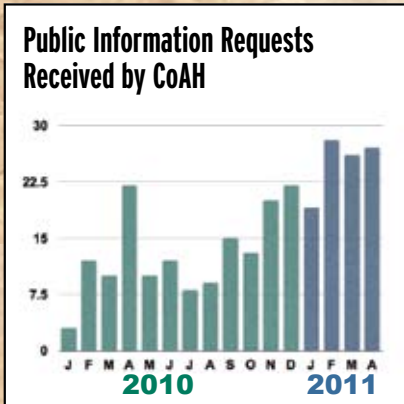
Recently I filed a request with the City Secretary to see a complete list of all the requests that City of Alamo Heights (CoAH) had received for "public information", which is sometimes also called "open records requests" or "Freedom of Information (FoIA) requests". The period reviewed was Jan. 1, 2010 to April 30, 2011.

For the past year or so there has been increasing "chatter" about all these requests and I wanted to understand what is going on. The results were fascinating and, in some ways, very sad.

Although some of the names on the list might surprise you, most would not. Many of the requests, especially those of a political nature, were fishing expeditions that were casting a wide net hoping to prove one conspiracy or another. Other requests were very specific.

State law imposes a lot of regulatory requirements on this entire process.

After waiting just under two weeks I received a 35-page report from the City listing 252 such requests or an overall average of just under 16 per month. Then I carefully reviewed the comprehensive list.



The average number of public information requests in 2010 was 13 per month, but by 2011 (Jan. 1 to April 30) the average of such requests per month had almost doubled to 25.

In the interest of fairness I must disclose that three of the requests were mine. One was related to this

story, requesting all such requests. I had also asked for a copy of the audio of a City Council meeting. There were 24 such requests for copies of the audio of City Council meetings by **Robert Ruggiero** for his web site.

The requests range from mundane to bizarre, and include everything from personal and political to purely commercial and the media.

THE BOGEYMAN COMETH? In many cases it is easy to spot political intrigue at play.

Jill Souter had four requests, as did **Susan Harwell's** husband. Harwell's sister had one election information request.

Before their election (and afterwards, for that matter) **Fred Prassel, John A. Savage** and **Elliot Weser, MD** filed no public information requests whatsoever.

Council member Bobby Hasslocher and his wife, **Jill**, this spring filed three requests, while **Mad-die Highsmith** had five, including three of a political nature.

Some unsuccessful political candidates go away and that's it. Others, however, can't get over their defeat.

Three candidates who unsuccessfully ran for City Council in either 2010 or 2011 filed the most requests. It also doesn't take much imagination to see political conspiracy theories being formulated (almost always unsuccessfully).

Sarah Reveley, who ran for Mayor in May, filed 32 requests—far more than anyone. Her filings, which ranged from Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to what projects CoAH has that include federal funding, represented over 12.5% of the total requests for the period reviewed.

Suzu Bettac, who unsuccessfully ran for City Council in 2010, had 20 public information requests but a number of them bore the note "large request" from the City indicating that they were especially time-consuming to fulfill. She accounted for 7.9% of all the requests made during the period studied. Several of her requests concerned why Alamo Heights Police provided security when **Congressman Lamar Smith** spoke at AHNA's Feb. 1 meeting at Central Market. That was three weeks after **Rep. Gabby Giffords** was shot—at a supermarket. Rep. Smith stated his visit to AHNA was the first such appearance anywhere by any Congressman since the Arizona shooting. Can anyone really keep a straight face and question why, under those circumstances, Alamo Heights provided security? Bettac also had multiple requests objecting to the Police Blotter appearing in **The ADVOCATE**.

Bill Kiel had a total of 19 requests for public information or 7.5% of all requests for the period analyzed.

San Antonio Express-News reporter **Jennifer Lloyd** had two, while three television reporters (**Mireya Villarreal** of WOAI and **Joe Conger** and **Brian New** both of KENS-5) filed one each. **Tony Cantu**, who used to write in the **North Central News**, submitted six requests.

Some requests involved legal issues, both civil and criminal, while others were of the what-gives-CoAH-the-right type of inquiry.

Residents seem evenly divided in their interest in real estate, construction and remodeling. Half the time they are interested in their own properties while the rest of the time they take a real interest in their neighbors' construction projects, right down to wanting to see a neighbor's plumbing inspection. These requests typically are one-of-a-kind (perhaps, with one follow up). Most of these residents apparently only had a single question and when it was answered they're happy and are never heard from again.

Other residents are curious about traffic violations (not necessarily their own), and parking issues.

Commercial interests range from environmental issues to lists of new businesses, plus lists of general contractors and vendors who do business with the City. There are even requests from various businesses wanting to see contracts CoAH has with their competitors, including the new water tower and outside collection agency.

WHEN IS ENOUGH ENOUGH? There are the "regulars", but none are more consistent than **Lucy Perez**, who, every month requests "a listing of each permit issued for new residential and commercial facilities as well as additions and renovations with base-line of (amount varies, either \$25,000 or \$50,000). Also request the listing include permits issued for in ground swimming pools...". Of the 16 months I looked at, she didn't miss one. Although she certainly qualifies as the most regular, there were others who were interested in construction, especially swimming pool permits. Among the others periodically prospecting for construction business were **Michael Pierce, Mary Faanunu, Yael Vinciguerra, Kyle Romen, Joe Trinidad, Tom Israel** and **Megan Jett**. **Eric Jtupka** went so far as to ask for "copies of all permits filed for construction done in last 10 years." Judging from the amount of interest in swimming pool permits, one must conclude that it is very profitable. Too bad the City cannot charge businesses for their prospect lists. Most of these requests come from folks who don't live here, but want a piece of the Alamo Heights pie.

» CONTINUED on pg. 11



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AH Resident Invents Hover Sprinkler

MARCIA GOREN WESER

Necessity is the mother of invention. Everyone struggling with water restrictions during this Texas drought, trying to keep lawns, plants and trees alive, will be happy to learn that an Alamo Heights resident has invented a solution called the Hover Sprinkler.

Grant Pitzer, a former Navy pilot turned inventor, and his wife, **Rosanne** (a former nurse), became entrepreneurs producing a light-weight, well-balanced, hand-held sprinkler. It was recently featured on WOAI's Saturday morning "Garden Show".

The family has lived in Alamo Heights for six years. Grant met Rosanne in a Naval base Officers' Club, joking that it was "...just like the movie 'Top Gun'!" Originally from Kansas, Grant flew F-14s for the Navy, including combat missions over Iraq during the first Gulf War. He is now a Delta Air Lines pilot, although back surgery has kept him grounded recently.

"I remembered an Environmental Science course I took in college," he recalled, "and studying a process called 'evapotranspiration' which is about how water moves from the air to plants to clouds in an endless cycle. I thought: *Thrust like jets. Soakers turned upside down. Light in weight.* So I started experimenting with how to do this, and applied for a patent in 2009." The Pitzers incorporated their company this May.

What started on their dining room table will soon move to space in an industrial park next month. Rosanne is responsible for sales and marketing. Their children, 8th grader **Raquel** and 6th grader **Zane**, help with packaging and shipping.

The system hooks up to any garden hose, although Grant says 3/4" diameter is best. The plastic wand curves toward the ground and then straight out about four feet; the straight part has 16 water holes. Water pressure forces water out as the wand "hovers" over the ground, allowing more water to soak directly into the ground more

quickly. There is no loss of water through evaporation. Water placement is more precise even on windy days. It can easily be held between low-growing shrubs to water those hard-to-reach places in a garden. And it is so light and easy to use that anyone can use it. "This

is similar to a soaker hose but more controlled, and with pressure to really saturate the ground. It is actually better to soak once or twice a week than to lightly water more often."

Grant continues to innovate. When a customer in Live Oak complained of low water pressure, Grant recalled Newton's Second Law: $Force=Mass \times Acceleration$ ($F=ma$). Then "Eureka!" A new device was created--a small "High Pressure Attachment" that can be screwed onto the original device, able to shoot water 59 feet into the

air or more powerfully into the ground!

And a high-pressure soaking with the Hover Sprinkler could be almost as good as long summer thunderstorm.



Inventor Grant Pitzer demonstrates the Hover Sprinkler.



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The KING of the PORCELAIN THRONE

by SUZANNE HARLIEN

You'll never look at a toilet seat in quite the same way after spending time with Barney Smith.

Smith, an Alamo Heights resident since the early 1970s, has spent the past 46 years transforming toilet seat lids into unconventional works of art — creations so unique they have drawn the attention of Barbara Walters, Montel Williams, Harry Smith and other TV celebrities. Even comedian Tom Green paid a visit to Smith years ago in a search for

the country's most unusual persons. Smith didn't win the honor. But a tour of his Toilet Seat Art Museum in Alamo Heights' Cottage District may convince you he should have.

The museum, tucked away in a wood-frame garage behind Smith's house, is home to more than 1,000 toilet seat works of art. The one-of-a-kind creations represent the strange and wonderful musings of this 90-year-old retired master plumber. "I figured I'd stick with my trade," he says,

explaining his medium of choice.

Everything Under the Sun

Smith dreamed up the idea of mounting things on toilet seats when he used to hunt with his dad. While his father would carve plaques out of wood to display deer antlers, Smith figured he'd just use the spare toilet seat lids he had left over from plumbing jobs. And so it began.

Elvis, Marilyn Monroe and Michael Jackson have porcelain tributes here,

as do President Obama, Sen. John McCain, and even Saddam Hussein. Dental tools, Legos, communion cups, CDs, dog tags, license plates, flatware, deer antlers — you name it and Smith probably has a toilet seat for it. The oddities hang from the ceiling, line the walls, at times two rows deep, and cover the inside of two huge doors that swing wide to welcome visitors.

» CONTINUED on pages 10 & 11


SNAPSHOT:

Name: Barney Smith, former preacher, plumber and volunteer Alamo Heights firefighter.

What: Toilet Seat Art Museum

Where: 239 Abiso Ave. (the museum is in the garage on Arbutus between Argo and Abiso)

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City Installs 1st Dog Waste Stations

**PICKING UP AFTER YOUR DOG
JUST GOT EASIER!**

The City's Public Works staff recently completed the installation of six dog waste stations in six areas popular for walking dogs, along La Jara Blvd. and the ball fields.

This action originated with City Council's Neighborhood Character and Commercial Revitalization (NCCR) Committee, at the suggestion of Council member Elliot Weser, MD.

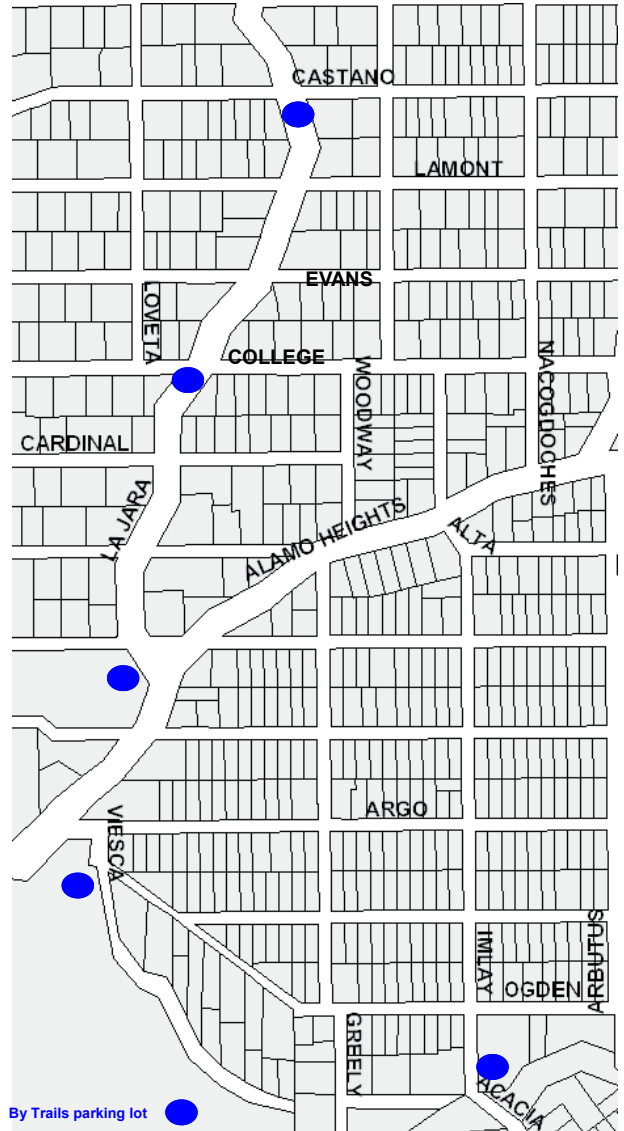
"Whenever our crews remove waste from these sites, the bins are pretty full, so people are using them," said Pat Sullivan, Director of Public Works.

Each dog waste station costs approximately \$230 including the post, bag dispenser, sign and waste bin, according to Brian Chandler, the City's Planning and Development Services Director.

Plastic bags and disposal bins make it convenient and easy for dog owners to be considerate of

their neighbors' lawns. Removing animal waste from these areas not only benefits the public health and safety, but ultimately, the San Antonio River.

Council member Weser credits several Alamo Heights residents, including Lynda Christal, Nancy Lovell, Hans G. Rohl and Mac Sykes, MD among others, for the original suggestion regarding the need for pet waste receptacles.



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WHAT'S COOKING in

Mrs. Craig's Legendary Desserts





For more than a quarter century the people of Alamo Heights loved the amazing desserts of Pat Craig who operated a home bakery from her house on Joliet, just off Broadway. During the 1950s and 60s Mrs. Craig sold her distinctive, homemade desserts in her living and dining rooms. No one who ever walked through that front door will forget her coming out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron and greeting you with a big smile. The aromas were heavenly. And no one can forget her many feline friends.

Those really were the good old days! There are so many of us who will always remember her home-baked goodies. Mrs. Craig always said her aim in life was "just to make people happy." We agree she certainly did that.

Her daughter, Sandee Craig Middleton, said that her mom never used a recipe. During the last few years before her mother's death, Sandee recorded some of her recipes and methods. It was often an arduous task because her mom never measured anything and baked in large quantities. Mrs. Craig's favorite expression was "till the batter feels right."












Enormous thanks to Joann Fielden, Susan Hasslocher, plus Jill and Bobby Hasslocher for unearthing these treasured recipes. Hopefully some of the favorites that you remember are included below or in future editions of *The ADVOCATE*. Start baking!

MRS. CRAIG'S PIE CRUST

-  1½ cups flour
-  1 tsp salt
-  ½ cup shortening
-  ¼ cup water

1. Cut shortening into flour and salt mixture just until evenly blended.
2. Add water and mix briefly until dough begins to cling together.
3. Roll out on heavily floured surface.
4. Makes two shells or a single two-crust pie.

CHOCOLATE FUDGE PIE

-  1 cup brown sugar
-  1 cup sugar
-  ¾ cup flour
-  1 cup water
-  ½ tsp salt
-  ½ cup butter
-  4 egg yolks
-  1 cup canned milk
-  1 tbsp vanilla
-  1 square (or 2 for extra richness) unsweetened chocolate
-  1 cup nuts (optional)

Combine sugars, flour, salt, water, butter in large saucepan and boil until thickened, stirring continually.

Turn heat low and continue stirring mixture until it begins to clear.

Beat egg yolks and add a small amount of the hot mixture to them until blended. Then add eggs to hot mixture.

Add milk and continue stirring over low heat until thick.

Melt chocolate.

Add chocolate, vanilla and nuts, if desired.








Pour into baked pie shell.

Top with meringue (see below) and bake at 450° for 10 minutes and then reduce heat to 300° until meringue peaks begin to brown (30-40 minutes).

Alamo Heights



BANANA CREAM PIE

-  2 cups whole milk
-  ½ cup sugar
-  ½ tsp salt
-  1 tbsp corn starch
-  ¼ cup butter
-  4 egg yolks
-  1 tbsp vanilla

Dissolve sugar, corn starch and salt into milk and cook in a large sauce pan until it begins to thicken.

Beat egg yolks and add a small amount of hot mixture, blending thoroughly, then add egg mixture to pudding along with butter.

Cook, stirring constantly, until thick.




Remove from heat and add vanilla.

Pour into baked pie shell.

Cover with sliced bananas and top with meringue.

Bake at 450° for 10 minutes and then lower temperature to 300° until meringue peaks begin to brown (30-40 minutes).

MRS. CRAIG'S MERINGUE

-  4 egg whites
-  ½ cup sugar
-  pinch of either baking powder or cream of tartar

1. Beat egg whites until foamy, then add sugar a little at a time. Add pinch of baking powder or cream of tartar.
2. Continue to beat until it forms stiff peaks.
3. Cover pie, sealing edges to crust.
4. Bake at 450° till edges begin to brown.



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CRIME BLOTTER

The *ADVOCATE* thanks Chief of Police Rick Pruitt and the entire AHPD for the outstanding job they do 24/7. We also greatly appreciate their sharing the CRIME BLOTTER with our readers as a public service to alert the entire community to what is going on around Alamo Heights, especially in our neighborhoods. AHNA is happy to provide this space at our expense, not the City's. The CRIME BLOTTER is printed verbatim and unedited from public information provided by AHPD.

Theft 7/17/11 100 blk. Cloverleaf
A lawnmower was stolen from an open, unattached garage while owner was away from home on an errand.

Theft 7/17/11 200 blk. Townsend
Two sections of an apartment complex mail center were stolen from a wall where they were mounted. The two sections contain mailboxes for twelve apartments.

Theft 7/16/11 4800 blk. Broadway
Officers were summoned to a retail store for a shoplifter and they apprehended the subject who had unsuccessfully attempted to elude them. Subject had two previous convictions for theft thereby enhancing the offense to a higher charge.

Vehicle Burglary 7/14/11 300 blk. Rosemary
Resident reported someone attempted to steal his vehicle by prying open the door lock and forcing the ignition. When offender was unsuccessful in the theft of the vehicle, a GPS device was stolen from the dashboard.

Theft 7/12/11 200 blk. Arcadia
Three children's bicycles were stolen from the side of a residence where they are stored while not in use. The bicycles were not secured with a chain or lock.

Theft 7/12/11 200 blk. Grandview
Resident reported the theft of a double stroller from a detached garage. The garage was not locked and the door may possibly have been left open.

Theft 7/11/11 5100 blk. Broadway
A business manager reported cash was stolen from an unlocked desk while office was unoccupied.

Theft 7/10/11 4800 blk. Broadway
Officers were summoned to a retail store for a shoplifter. The officers located subject who then attempted to elude them. Subject was apprehended after a short foot chase. The subject had two previous convictions for theft thereby enhancing the offense to a higher charge.

» CONTINUED on page 9

Mosquitoes?



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CRIME BLOTTER *cont'd*

Theft 7/8/11 200 blk. Viesca
A bicycle was stolen from the bicycle rack near the community swimming pool. Bicycle was not secured with a locking device.

Theft 7/8/11 200 E. Oakview
Resident reported a UPS package was stolen from their front porch. The resident saw a suspect and vehicle, describing them the same as in the nearby theft of another package the same day.

Theft 7/8/11 200 E. Oakview
Neighbor reported seeing a female subject walk up to a neighbor's house and take a Fed-Ex box off the front porch. Female subject got into a waiting vehicle and left the area.

Graffiti 7/3/11 5300 blk. Broadway
While on patrol an officer discovered graffiti on the side of a commercial building. The markings will be compared to multi-agency databases to develop suspect(s).

Theft 7/1/11 100 blk. Katherine Ct.
Resident investigating noise in the carport observed a male subject riding one of their bicycles while pulling another behind. Subject placed both bicycles in the trunk of a gray, 4-door vehicle parked nearby, then quickly departed the area.

Theft 6/29/11 700 blk. Alta
Resident reported the theft of decorative light fixtures bordering a circular driveway.

Theft 6/27/11 500 Austin Hwy.
Police officer on late night patrol observed male subject run from a business carrying two cases of beer. Subject was apprehended by the officer.

Vehicle Burglary 6/27/11 4800 blk. Broadway
A vehicle parked in a parking lot was entered while the owner was at work. Miscellaneous property left in open view was stolen. There was no sign of forced entry to the vehicle.

Graffiti 6/25/11 300 blk. Cardinal
Vehicles at two different residences were spray painted overnight. Additionally, there were three other overnight incidents of graffiti being painted on cars on different streets.

Burglary 6/24/11 200 bk. Retama
Resident reported an unknown person entered her residence and stole numerous items of jewelry while resident was away. Alamo Heights detectives are following up on a suspect and suspect vehicle seen in the area.

Burglary 6/22/11 4700 blk. Broadway
An assisted living resident reported someone entered her room while she was at lunch and stole three credit cards from her wallet. Attempts to use the credit cards in Balcones Heights were denied due to a fraud alert program.

Theft 6/22/11 100 blk. Arcadia
A bicycle was reported stolen from the front porch of an apartment; it was not secured with a locking device.

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► *The King of the Porcelain Throne continued from pg. 5*

"Come on in," he says with a big smile. He'll invite you to watch three videos (you can hardly say no) of his interviews on "The View," "The Early Show" and "The Montel Williams Show," and then you're free to wander around. But don't be surprised if he shares a story or two as you meander.

"This is part of the insulation from the space shuttle Challenger (1986)," he says, pointing toward a piece of scorched material mounted to a toilet seat lid. "A fellow who lived in Alamo Heights gave it to me. He told me, 'We were at Cape Canaveral and saw Challenger take-off and blow up and that piece floated up onto the beach right there at our feet.' He said, 'Do you want it?' I said, 'Sure.'" Smith laments he has no hard proof the piece came from Challenger, despite his phone calls to NASA officials offering to show it to them. But he does have documentation for the piece of Saddam Hussein's toilet that is on display. A retired Navy commander who visited Baghdad's Green Zone gave him the souvenir with a signed letter of authenticity.

Smith's Michael Jackson toilet seat tribute, complete with sunglasses, surgical mask and gloved hand, doesn't include signed memorabilia, but it does have a bit of an eery detail. "I was a-mounting these [Michael Jackson] pins on a toilet seat when on the TV they said Michael Jackson was dead," Smith says, shaking his head. "What a coincidence. I went out and bought me a black hat, cut the brim off and put it on there. Then I pulled the hair down over his sunglasses and mask and finished the plaque."

Even a collage of dead bugs bears special significance to Smith. "Those are little ground hornets," he says, calling attention to a collage featuring a honeycomb-like nest and dead insects. "One of 'em stung me on top of my head and I said, 'I'll put you on a toilet seat!'"

Sharing Stories: from San Antonio to Sicily

Smith's sense of humor and quirky personality is part of the attraction. Every Fiesta, during the Alamo Heights Pooch Parade he opens his museum and hands out water to parade participants and their human companions.

"He just loves people," says Brenda Sellers, the oldest of Smith's three daughters and a retired elementary school teacher. "He can stand out in the street if nobody's come to see him during the day and say, 'Come here! Come see my museum!'"

Even on sweltering, 100° days he gladly opens the un-airconditioned garage, cooled by fans, to anyone who is interested in seeing what is inside. Over the years, he's logged guests from the USA and almost 70 countries, including a visitor from Sicily just last month.

Samuel Stem, a psychologist from New Braunfels, and Stephanie Gail, who recently moved to Texas from Oregon, visited for the first time last month. Stem and Gail are Geocachers and had heard about the museum on the organization's website. Gail says it's listed as a Texas favorite, probably because Smith has four toilet seats dedicated to these scavenger-hunt enthusiasts.

"Pick a toilet seat at random, and he will tell you a historical, interesting fact of how he got it and what he did," remarks Stem, after spending more than an hour at the museum. "It's really not about the toilet seat; it's about the story."

No Signs of Slowing Down

Between caring for his ailing 90-year-old wife – their 72nd anniversary is

» *CONTINUED on page 17*



Samuel Stem, Barney Smith and Stephanie Gail.

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▶ continued from pg. 10

Aug. 27 – and working on creative projects, Smith says he cannot spare a few minutes to put his feet up as the doctor suggests.

“I don’t have time for that,” he says, dismissing the thought with a wave of his hand. “I was up till 2 in the morning last night.”

It’s no wonder. Each toilet seat design takes about 20 hours to complete, but some take longer depending on the complexity of the design. In a masterful creation depicting a detailed scene of Fort Sam Houston; Smith etched the iconic clock tower, quadrangle and other details into the molded wood of a toilet seat lid. “I spent a lot of time on it,” Smith says.

Pop culture, current events, family members, friends, vacations and vocations all serve as fodder for Smith’s imaginative designs. He carves, paints, varnishes and decorates his wooden (not plastic!) canvasses. And he’s never at a loss for ideas.

Being a Packrat Pays Off

Toward the back of the garage Smith stores stacks and stacks of shoeboxes filled with souvenirs, trinkets and other things many less-creative folks might consider junk. Each box is clearly labeled: plastic knives, rubber bands, charms, scrap leather, sponges, ashtrays, uniform patches. The list goes on.

Sellers says the family always collected things, so it was natural when her dad started squirreling away seemingly insignificant treasures in boxes. And when he started putting the items on toilet seats, that, too, seemed natural. “We didn’t really think anything about it,” she says. “Since he’s a retired plumber toilet seats were accessible. He just used them as a background [for his artwork].”

One of his favorite works of the 1,002 completed so far remains a fairly modest one — Exhibit #468. It is an artistic depiction of Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “When Earth’s Last Picture Is Painted.” The piece is a tribute to his favorite teacher, who assigned the poem as a declamation piece when Smith was 12 years old and attending school in Eastland, Texas. He knows it by heart even today.

“A lot of people get old, and give up their hobbies and their passion and they slowly fade away. Not Mr. Smith,” remarked Stem during his Geocaching visit. “As long as he’s alive, I hope he keeps making toilet seats and creating these wonderful memories.”

From the looks of things, Smith won’t let him down.

“I’m getting around pretty slow,” he says, “but I’m going to keep making these as long as the Lord allows me to.”

About the Author Suzanne Harlien has lived in Alamo Heights for 13 years and in San Antonio for over 20 years. She has worked for newspapers in Texas and Europe, serving as both writer and editor. She currently works for USAA as Managing Editor of content on their iPad app. Suzy has won numerous awards for her writing and editing skills.

▶ Continuation of Founder’s Corner from page 3

Too bad the City can’t charge non-residents for the time staff spends researching their unlimited information requests. Unfortunately, public information isn’t free. The 7,000 residents of Alamo Heights have to pay for some people’s unbridled obsessive-compulsive behavior. It has been jokingly suggested that the City should put Prozac in the water.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IS NOT FREE A few residents are deluging the City’s staff with so many public information requests that people are starting to ask why the requestors shouldn’t pay for the staff’s time to deal with it. The rationale goes: if they want the information, it is available, they can pay for it. If they are unwilling to pay a fair, reasonable price for the extra service that they are asking for, maybe they really didn’t need the information as much as when it was “free”. It makes no sense for everyone to pay for what only a few are using, and even fewer are abusing. Why should the taxpayers of Alamo Heights pay to scout prospective clients for business not even located in Alamo Heights?

While the public is entitled to public information, the real question is, should there be limits and should everyone pay for a few people’s obsessions? Apparently State law permits cities to charge for out-of-pocket expenses, like photocopying. The larger issue, however, is should the City of Alamo Heights set a maximum of how much “free” public information people are reasonably entitled to annually before the requestors start being charged their fair share of the cost for the time the staff spends researching their requests. Is 20 or 25 hours, for example, a reasonable amount of time for the staff to spend fulfilling one resident’s public information requests for free? This is an issue whose time has now come. What do YOU think about a few people using up so many of the City’s limited resources for their self-aggrandizement?

If you’d like, perhaps *The ADVOCATE* could start regularly publishing the details of what public information requests are made to the City every month. Let me know what you think.

John Joseph was the Founding President of AHNA and is Editor of The ADVOCATE, which he also started. The personal opinions expressed in this column are his and do not represent the view of AHNA, its Board of Directors or any individual member/s of that Board. He can be emailed at: AHNAadvocate@gmail.com.

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