



At its December meeting, the Board of Commissioners announced that Lana Wagner was to succeed Albert Sierra as the next Executive Director of the Housing Authority. She has been serving as the Housing Authority's Accountant and Program Manager for several years. As you might imagine, a change of leadership entails a lot of time-consuming details. We will introduce Ms. Wagner to you more fully in a future issue.



### BE A VOICE FOR YOUR FELLOW RESIDENTS!

We still need a resident of public housing, or someone who has a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher, to volunteer to serve on the SMHA Board of Commissioners. The other commissioners are just regular folk who care about the community. They generally meet once a month for about 90 minutes. You would have the opportunity to participate in training on the responsibilities of serving as a commissioner for a public housing authority. There is usually an annual conference in another city, which would require traveling by air and last about 4 days. Lodging, transportation, meals, and incidentals are paid by the SMHA. You would not be

required to attend that conference but it would be a great experience. Other nearby and/or self-directed training is also available. If you are looking for work, serving on the board of a non-profit organization enhances your resume!

There are certain requirements and your appointment must be confirmed by the City Council. If you have any questions, please call the Resident Services office at 512-396-3364 or the City Clerk at 512-393-8090. You can also go to the link below to get more info and an application. Act fast! *The deadline to apply for the next round of appointments is Friday, January 10!*

<http://sanmarcostx.gov/148/Boards-Commissions>

## ALLEN WOODS HOMES — PODER LEARNING CENTER

### BIRTHDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

This year, the annual Allen Woods Christmas party was the biggest it's ever been! With over 40 families attending, it was a night of food, neighborly conversations, and enjoyment. A huge thanks to all those that contributed in our pot luck, especially Helen Rodriguez' daughter Gloria Herrera. It became a double celebration when Ms. Helen's family came to wish her a Happy 96th Birthday! We must have all been good this year because Santa came to visit to take pictures with the residents and families of Allen Woods. Whether it



was a gift from the White Elephant Game, a door prize, or food, everyone got to take home something. Lastly, thank you to the resident volunteers in the kitchen for serving all their neighbors: Mary Ann Vargas, Judy Spurlock, Makayla Spurlock, and Jasper Barrett.

### Kids-mas Party

The PODER After-school program celebrated an end-of-the-year Christmas Party! We are grateful for a generous volunteer, who made hamburgers for the kids meal, and for volunteers Alicia Ward, Norman Contreras, Kaci Reyes, Kelli Reyes, and Baylee Reade. They helped with games and activities including a hot cocoa bar and a cookie decorating station.



### SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER TO YOUNG AND OLD

The last Teen Night of the year was focused on giving back to the community. From the continuation of last Teen Night, the teens got into partners and were in charge of their own stations. There was a gingerbread house making station, a



snowball fight station, and a Christmas Bingo station. The Springtown Villa residents that attended this event appreciated the teens' Christmas spirit and made them feel special. The teens were rewarded with a dinner at Cici's Pizza for all their hard work!





## Springtown Villa

### MULTIGENERATIONAL MINGLING

During December, we had many festive events, including a Christmas party hosted by the teens from the PODER after-school program. Six teens planned, put together, and ran different event tables for the residents of Springtown. These events included gingerbread house building, Christmas Bingo, and Frosty Ball Toss. The residents enjoyed participating in these events, especially Bingo and the gingerbread house building. A few of the residents were able to spend time talking with the teens as they helped them create their gingerbread houses. This event provided an opportunity for different generations to support each other, something that is often absent in the daily lives of many families in the modern era.



Ana Reyna helps Tina Jacinto with her creation.

### Upcoming Events

January 15

Resident Council

January 21

Tips on Reducing  
Debt

January 22

Coloring Class

January 28

Know Your ADA  
Rights



Lino Puentes was happy about getting a gift box of sausage & crackers.

### WHITE ELEPHANT CHRISTMAS

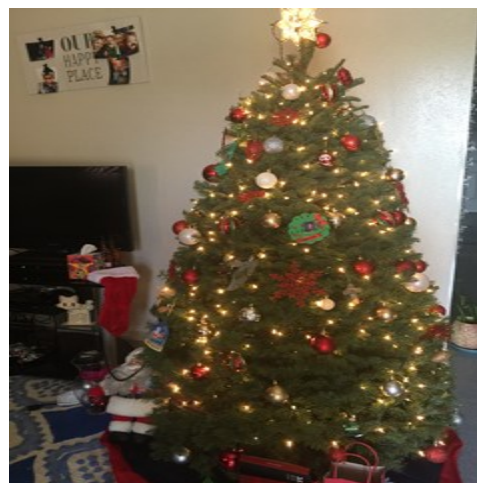
Springtown residents were spreading cheer and partaking in the holiday festivities. One event that they look forward to is our White Elephant Christmas Party. People brought a present to be put under the tree to be

received and possibly involuntarily traded (i.e., stolen) by other participants. A marble vase and a nice blanket were subjects of much interest. Poor Roland ended up with some toiletries obviously intended for another gender. We hope he has better luck next year!

## C. M. ALLEN HOMES — KAD KORNER STORE



Pictured to the right is one of several, beautifully decorated Christmas trees that were donated by Bonner Carrington Property Management to help spread holiday cheer throughout our community.



Pictured below are Texas State nutrition students Sara and Taylor. They taught the kids how to make healthy, peanut butter power snacks.



Upper left and lower right images show Jude and Kathy Prather and friends. They sponsor families in our community and brought gifts to the children. They have been donating gifts for many years, we appreciate their generosity very much.



Department of Health & Human Performance students and Eta Sigma Gamma members took donations to make holiday food bags for our residents.





## CHAPULTEPEC HOMES & ADULT LEARNING CENTER



Gene Martin II, Lucy and her son, Ezra, Stewart Dale Spencer, & Kathryn LaPlant-Israel.

### *Life's Journey*

*"Lady Lucille" Kalunde is our most recent graduate of the FSS program. Lucy was born in Kenya. She migrated to the U.S.A. and became a citizen. She left a bad situation and moved to Austin. She ended up living in a Christian transitional home. She started her schooling at Austin Community College. When it was time to transfer to Texas State to finish her degree, she moved to Chapultepec. Her journey was not without a few bumps in the road. She was unable to get into the degree program she had chosen. Instead of giving up she changed paths and continued her education in another field. She graduated with a degree in Recreational Administration with a minor in Business Administration. She did her internship at the CM Allen Homes. After graduation, she immediately entered the*

*graduate program, earning a master's degree in the same field in 2018. She began working part-time as a prevention specialist for Cenikor, later moving into a full-time position. That role included the opportunity to serve public housing residents in numerous presentations and workshops.*

*Through all of this, Lucy raised two beautiful children and set an outstanding example of what hard work and dedication can accomplish. When the time came to move on to the next phase of her life, she told us, "The FSS program and my residency at Chapultepec homes have provided me with the opportunity to accomplish my academic goals of obtaining a college degree, going to grad school, obtaining financial and credit knowledge, and getting back in the workforce full-time. I am additionally thankful for the opportunity you gave me to serve as an intern at CM Allen in 2016, and the continued chance to work with the same community in my current line of work."*

*After completing the FSS program, Lucy moved to Maryland to be closer to family. We are confident that her work ethic and professional approach will lead her to even greater success in the Washington, D.C. area.*



We are grateful to Toys for Tots Austin for all of their hard work and dedication. They donated toys to all of the families here at Chapultepec for the Christmas holiday. Without the generosity of their donors, some of our families would have gone without this holiday.

## Up Above the Trees

*By Maria Calcaben*

It was a beautiful Saturday morning when a van full of kids from Allen Woods and Chapultepec made their way to Texas State University Camp in Wimberley to experience outdoor teambuilding activities and the Repetitive Obstacle Performance Evaluation System (ROPES) course. In a clearing in the woods, the group met up with Dr. Christine Norton, Associate Professor of the School of Social Work at Texas State University, and her class to start off with icebreaker games. The games allowed the Texas State students and our kids to get to know each other. The kids' ages ranged from nine to sixteen years. The course started with low exercises before lunch. The students and the kids worked together to balance on a swinging log, to figure out how to stand as a group on a tilting platform without it tipping over, and to get through a maze while blindfolded. Believe it or not, each of these exercises demonstrated important life skills lessons. For example, the maze helped kids

realize how often we get ourselves stuck in a loop when there's always a solution or a way out if we think outside of the box . . . or the circle, in this case. During the lunch break, some of the kids got to see the beautiful Blanco River, which runs through the camp. After lunch, it was time for the much more challenging high course. Each participant was strapped into a top-rope *belay*, or a harness which is attached by a rope to a higher point for safety. One of the University Camp staff was an anchor on the ground for the participants that made the

ascent. Two courses were provided: a straight climbing wall and a continuous course. The kids who tried the continuous course claimed it was more vigorous, but very fun.

Those that tried the straight climbing wall enjoyed figuring out the best route to climb. To get down, almost all the participants chose the option to zip line instead of just climb down. It was a fun and fast way to get down! At the end of the day, kids had overcome personal challenges and fears, strengthened together as a team, and enjoyed a day in nature.

Thank you Dr. Norton and the staff at University Camp for this special opportunity!



Kendra and Zayda obviously had a great time.



**What Does Success Mean to You?***by Stewart Dale Spencer*

Marleen Johnny enrolled in the FSS program in October 2014. She had just come from the women's shelter with four children. Her primary concern was how to provide for her family. She had a job but she needed something better. She said, "I was in the dark . . . just moving forward." She was not exactly sure what she wanted. She said, "I want to be able to say, 'I don't want to work today.'" I like that. Even if you love your job, it is nice to be able to take a break from it when you need it. Success looks different for everybody. Marleen was working as a custodian at Texas State University. It was her first job in 16 years but she has always had a good work ethic and that's half the battle. Nevertheless, in 2015, she did not have a car or a driver's license. She had to struggle with transportation, getting her bills paid, and making sure that children were able to participate in various activities, which are important to helping kids develop in a positive environment.

One issue that was essential to Marleen was dealing with her credit record. Thankfully, there are new laws to help protect victims from certain financial consequences. Also, because Marleen has always worked, she has been eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which was an important part of helping her to recover financially.

Marleen eventually began working as a housekeeper at Embassy suites. They recognized that she was a good employee and encouraged her to move into a supervisory position but it would have interfered with her ability to be off work early enough to make sure her kids were picked up at school and transported to various locations. The needs of her children were her priorities. I supported her approach as she kept looking for other opportunities, but in the meantime she focused on learning how to manage her money better and worked on improving her credit.

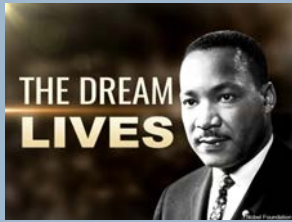
Her persistence paid off. She learned that increasing her income was not the only way to improve her financial situation. Reducing expenses and dealing with debt can have the same effect – more money at the end of the month. Her reliability and good work performance also paid off. In due course, her employer talked her into becoming a supervisor, with the understanding that she would be allowed the time she needed to meet her family's needs. The combination of increasing her income, paying down debts, managing the monthly budget, and improving her credit score greatly improved her financial health. In addition, her adult daughter began working and contributing to the household. It is definitely a family affair.

She said that one of the most significant things she learned while in the FSS program was the importance of monitoring her credit report. She said if she could go back in time to do the program all over again, she would start working on her credit and money management skills right away. I am thankful that she learned this valuable lesson and applied it so diligently. We work to convince people how important these skills are to their future but sometimes people are simply in survival mode, or they feel that since they have so little income it doesn't really apply to them. (It does.) Also, our experience shows us that most people coming into the program think their credit is worse than it actually is. Many people come in with very little on their credit record, except perhaps medical debts, which are not as much of a problem as one might think. Often, people just need to begin adding some positive credit into the record, which can be accomplished by getting a credit builder loan and other means.

Marleen says they plan to stay in the San Marcos area. She said the older kids would like to have a place of their own someday but they realize that in this expensive housing market, it makes sense to stay together as a family. She plans to continue being a renter for now because of the flexibility it provides. She also hopes to be able to take her kids to visit her homeland. She is originally from one of the Micronesian Islands, "Where the sun and the sea meet at sunset. It's so small you can go around it in less than 24 hours . . . if you don't stop to chat or get invited to eat."

It is always heartwarming when people follow our recommendations and we can see the difference it makes in their lives. It's never too late to begin so if you live in one of our public housing sites or have a Housing Choice Voucher, you can apply to be in the FSS program. We cannot increase the number of public housing units beyond our current level. The only way we can serve more people is if our housing assistance serves as a *temporary* support system. We want families to become successful and then move on, so someone else can have that same opportunity. Call 512-396-3364 if you want to be in FSS!





# January



Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

Historical names for January include its original Roman designation of Ianuarius, the Saxon term Wulf-monath (wolf month), and Charlemagne's designation Wintarmanoth (winter/cold month).

**1** SMHA  
OFFICES  
CLOSED

**2****3****4****5****6****7****8****9****10****11****12****13****14****15****16****17****18****19**

**20** SMHA  
OFFICES  
CLOSED

**21****22**

**23** FSS  
CLASS  
CALC @ 6 pm

**24****25****26****27**

**28** Board of  
Commissioners  
5:30 PM

**29**

**30** Food Wise  
Cooking Class  
CALC @ 6 pm

**31**

## LEADERSHIP

### Board of Commissioners

Richard Cruz — Chairperson

Rose Brooks — Vice-Chairperson

vacant — Resident Commissioner

Gloria Salazar — Commissioner

Nina Linda Ramos — Commissioner

### Executive Director

Lana Wagner

## HOUSING OFFICES

### Allen Woods Homes (Main Office)

512-353-5059

### CM Allen Homes

512-353-1116

### Chapultepec Homes

512-396-3364

### Housing Choice Voucher

512-353-5061

### Springtown Villa

512-396-3363

## RESIDENT SERVICES

### Chapultepec Adult Learning Center

#### Family Self-Sufficiency

512-396-3364

### CM Allen KAD Korner Store

512-392-6273

### Allen Woods PODER

#### Learning Center

512-396-3367

### Springtown Villa

512-353-7343