

CITY MANAGER'S UPDATE

May 31, 2023

Message from the Manager:

We observe Memorial Day on the last Monday in May. The purpose of the day is simple, but profound - to remember those who gave their lives in defense of our freedoms. Memorial Day is especially felt in Harker Heights where 48% of our population are active duty or military affiliated. Our citizens deeply understand the great sacrifices that have been given for the freedoms we all enjoy. I encountered a story recently that touched my heart and, for me, set the tone for Memorial Day.

My wife and I recently attended the annual Frontier Days festival in Santa Anna, Texas, a town with a population of 1,022 located in Coleman County (about 2 hours west of Harker Heights). You heard that right, Santa Anna put the “fun” in “frontier”! The festival proudly boasts to host the World Championship Bison Cookoff. The festival is held in the City of Santa Anna’s Gary James Memorial Park. The park has RV slots and a playground with modern playground equipment and equipment that brought back fond memories of my childhood which dates the equipment... and me! Also located in the park is an old armory building, now used as a community center, that was used on the day of the festival to house various vendors. While the festival was a quaint, small town, Texas event, what I will always remember is what I encountered inside the entry doors to the old armory.

The story of the namesake of the Memorial Park, Gary James, was shared through a small, humble exhibit mounted on the wall as you enter the building. I was struck by the youthful picture of Gary James, and the other items in the exhibit such as his Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medals. In the exhibit was a newspaper article from the Santa Anna News titled “Military Rites Set for Gary James.” I was so moved by the exhibit to a small town’s grief and pride that I used my phone to take some photos of the small exhibit to share with my good friend and Purple Heart recipient John Footman. Later, as I had time to really look at the pictures, and read the article, it inspired me to share the story of Gary Lynn James of Santa Anna, Texas, with you all.



Per the Santa Anna News, “Pfc Gary Lynn James was born August 5, 1943, in Santa Anna, Texas. He died May 28, 1967, in Vietnam from mortar fragment injuries suffered May 21, 1967, while serving as the “point man” for a “search and destroy” mission. Gary entered the Army in June 1966, after unsuccessfully attempting to enlist over a two year period. He was a slight-built boy

and just did not weigh enough. The night before he went for his successful physical examination, he ate all night and gained three pounds, which was enough to get him in the service. He was sent to El Paso for basic training, and then, because of his small size, was chosen to be trained as a “tunnel rat.” This is the dangerous job of going into tunnels and clearing them of mines and enemy soldiers. Gary was a tunnel rat during the clearing of the “Iron Triangle.” In April he was appointed point man with “search and destroy missions.” Shortly thereafter he received the Purple Heart following a shrapnel wound in the leg. He had been back in combat less than three weeks when he received fatal mortar wounds during the biggest battle of the Vietnam conflict.”

Gary may have been “slight” of build, but he was a giant of courage and conviction! The Santa Anna News recorded this about him, “Gary was proud to serve his country. He often wrote home that he wished the people here could come over and see conditions there. He wrote, “if they did, they would fight their hearts out to keep it from coming to the USA.”” On June 9, 1967, Pfc. Gary James was laid to rest in the Santa Anna Cemetery. He was just 23 years old when he was killed in action. At only 23, he spoke words well beyond his years. He got to see just how bad it is in some parts of the world and clearly reflected on how blessed we are in the USA. Gary gave his life in defense of our freedoms. May we all reflect on Pfc. Gary Lynn James sacrifice, and from it may the scales that so often cover our eyes to our many blessings fall away to reveal what he saw – we live in a mighty and great nation! From this renewed hope may we all seek to serve each other more! We remember, and thank, Pfc. Gary Lynn James for his example, service, and sacrifice for our Nation.

David

“And I’m proud to be an American, where at least I know I’m free. And I won’t forget the men who died, who gave that right to me.” – Lee Greenwood

“And if words cannot repay the debt we owe these men, surely with our actions we must strive to keep faith with them and with the vision that led them to battle and to final sacrifice.”—Ronald Reagan

General Updates:

New Hires:

Welcome to all our new hires:

Alexandra Beaver hired for the position of Recreation Manager on May 1st

Alexander Lujan hired for the position of Water Service Worker on May 1st

Madison Bratton hired for the position of Cashier on May 9th

Diana Lopez hired for the position of Police Officer Trainee on May 15th

Paige Land hired for the position of Telecommunicator on May 22nd

Olivia Kershner hired for the position of Aquatics Supervisor on May 26th

Jamorion Stanford hired for the position of Wastewater Maintenance Technician on May 30th

Nichole Ratliff hired for the position of Utility Billing Clerk on May 30th

Isaak Llorente hired for the position of Water Service Worker on May 30th

FD's James (Jimmy) Carson Retires: Battalion Chief Jimmy Carson retired on May 30th with 34 years of service to the City. We thank Jimmy for his dedication and service to the City and wish him all the best in his retirement!

May Kudos Award Winners: Congratulations to our May Kudos Award Winners: Admin's Ursula Paddie, Public Works' Nate Nesbitt and the entire Library team and Library Director Lisa Youngblood! We are so proud of them and how they represent the organization. They are role models for us all. Many more Kudos Awards to come throughout the organization!

Sudoku Challenge Winners: The Sudoku Challenge during May had four winners. Employee winners were Ursula Paddie and Ben Becerril. We even had citizens participate in the challenge! Dejah and Steven Hess were the challenge winners of the citizens who participated!

Recess Challenge: The relay like Recess Challenge is set to begin! Seven teams of five have been assigned for this event which promises to get us up and moving!

Library Summer Reading Club: This Summer you can join the Library's Summer Reading Club titled Find Your Voice. Contact the Library for more information.

Carl Levin Pool: The Carl Levin Pool will open for Open Swim beginning Friday, June 9 and will operate on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays until staffing allows for additional days of the week. Fridays the hours are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays will be from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Farmers Market: The Harker Heights Farmers Market is back! The season began Saturday, May 6 and runs through October. The Market is held in the City Hall parking lot. Come out and get fresh vegetables and other interesting and unique crafts!

Back to School Drive: PD's Healthy Homes is currently accepting donations for their Back-to-School supplies drive.

Food Drive: The Activities Center is partnering with the PD Healthy Homes Division for a Food Drive. Please help us collect non-perishable foods that will be served to families in need within our community. Drop off boxes are located at the Activities Center and at the Rec Center. Items needed are rice, beans, pasta, pasta sauce, and cereal. The drive will continue to accept donations through July 17.

Spotlight on Service:

Lisa Youngblood and Library Honored: The Girl Scouts of Central Texas Heat of Texas Service Unit honored Library Director Lisa Youngblood and the Library for partnering with them on several projects in Harker Heights. The Library worked with Girl Scouts on planting a pollinator garden at the Library, having a seed pod craft at the Harker Heights Art in the Park and more!

IT's Jim Miller is Helpful: Public Works' John Fox wrote to thank IT's Jim Miller for his assistance with a computer. He stated that Jim was helpful, and he wanted us to be aware.

HR's Wilson Riley Appreciated: Planning Director Kristina Ramirez wrote to thank Wilson Riley for her help pulling some personnel policies together so quickly. She stated that the work was greatly appreciated!

Kristina Ramirez is Awesome: HR Director Leona Clay wrote that Planning Director Kristina Ramirez was awesome in working together on a recent project.

Jeff Achee and Parks get Kudos: A citizen wrote to give kudos to Parks Director Jeff Achee and Parks saying, "Just wanted to tell you how impressed I am with all the different programs that you/your team are providing the community. From young to old, there are multiple programs that people may participate in. I'd also be remiss if I didn't mention how nice the parks are looking. No doubt you and your team have been hard at work, and I just wanted you to know that I appreciate all you are doing."

Wilson Riley, Genelle Rodriguez-Otero and Officer Matthew Enos Acknowledged: Timber Ridge Elementary School recently acknowledged their thanks for HR's Wilson Riley, Court's Genelle Rodriguez-Otero, and PD's Officer Enos for participating in the school's career day.

Henry Nash Recognized: Park's Henry Nash was recently recognized by the PD for his assistance with their Building a Better Youth program. Sergeant Peter Quichocho wrote, "I am writing on behalf of Community Services to recognize and give special thanks to Harker Heights Parks and Recreation Employee Henry Nash. Mr. Nash has assisted our Building an Better Youth (B.A.B.Y.) program for the past three sessions by coming in with his team from "Integrity Does Matter" and speaking with the students about the importance of integrity and how it plays into their lives. Mr. Nash and his team sit in and observe while the students give a PowerPoint presentation to the class about what kind of profession they would like to pursue, why they chose it, and why it is important to them. Mr. Nash and his team then utilize each student's presentation and make it a point to reach out to each student touching on their career selection and goals so that each student knows that they were heard and that they matter. Mr. Nash and his team's presentations are extremely motivating and sends a very positive message to the students. We just wanted to reach out and send a special recognition, acknowledgment, and thanks to Mr. Nash and his team for being an integral part of our program."

Officer Crystal Thomas Shows Teamwork: HR Director Leona Clay and City Manager David Mitchell recently shared their thanks to Officer Crystal Thomas for her assistance at City Hall. Officer Thomas showed great teamwork across departmental lines and showed why she is such an excellent officer!

Lieutenant Jay Leach Cares for Others: PD's Lieutenant Jay Leach recently cooked and provided breakfast for Admin and IT staff at City Hall as a gesture to show he cares. It also shows the great teamwork that exists between departments.

Casey Brazzil and Crew Valued: Public Works' Director Mark Hyde wrote to show his appreciation for Park's Casey Brazzil and his crew's work cleaning and trimming the roundabout on Commercial/Heights Drive. Mark stated, "our employees have always worked well together and helped one another. We greatly appreciate the help!"

Finance's Kelsey Coffman Helps: HR Director Leona Clay wrote to thank Finance's Kelsey Coffman for her assistance with some budget reports.

Lt. Jay Leach Empowers: Park's Nichole Broemer wrote to thank PD's Lt. Jay Leach for his assistance with the Senior Recreation program. The members and Nichole wanted to thank him for presenting an Active Attacker class. The seniors found the class informative and felt empowered to do something if a situation occurred.

Finance Impresses: A citizen gave praise to Finance staff. She praised Finance for how nice and helpful they were and was very thankful for it.