

Naked City

► **TYC JUSTICE** Two years after their arrests, and with mounting public pressure to get them to court, there has been movement in the abuse cases against former **Texas Youth Commission** employees Assistant Superintendent **Ray Brookins** and principal **John Hernandez**. A change of venue was announced on June 25, after the **Texas Civil Rights Project** released a letter to the press requesting that Attorney General Greg Abbott push the case harder (see "TCRP Blasts Abbott Over Delay in TYC Prosecutions," June 26). "It looks like it's been moved to Odessa," said TCRP Prisoners' Rights Program Director Scott Medlock. The case had previously languished with state District Court Judge Bob Parks in Ward Co. but has been transferred to Ector Co.'s Judge Jay Gibson. After the long wait, Medlock said, "I would hope this means that the case will be brought to trial and we'll get some convictions."
— Richard Whittaker

► **A FIGHTING CHANCE FOR DEMS?** Are national Democrats finally ready to take Texas seriously for more than just fundraising? According to a June 5 *National Journal* article, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Executive Director Jon Vogel describes the Congressional District 10 seat of Austin Republican **Michael McCaul** as one of the party's most promising targets in the 2010 election. The DCCC is excited because **Jack McDonald**, the chairman and CEO of Perficient, an Austin-based IT consulting firm, has already raised more than \$300,000 for a challenge to McCaul. The current District 10 was one of the creations of Tom DeLay's infamous re-districting fiasco of 2003, in an attempt to neutralize Austin liberals. Its boundaries run from West Lake Hills to the suburbs of Houston. In 2004, McCaul was elected against only token Democratic opposition, and in 2006 he beat a minimally funded political novice. In 2008, attorney Larry Joe Doherty took the best crack yet with a professionally run but moderately funded campaign; still, he garnered only 43% of the vote vs. McCaul's 54%.
— Lee Nichols

► **LAMAR SMITH'S CHALLENGER** In other congressional election news: At press time, West Lake Hills Democratic activist and small-business owner **Lainey Melnick** (right) was scheduled to announce a challenge to Republican **Lamar Smith** in District 21, which runs from West Austin to San Antonio and west past Kerrville. She'll have an uphill fight: Smith has held office since 1987 and, since 1992, has done no worse than 60% of the vote and has averaged 75%. Austin Mayor **Lee Leffingwell** was quoted as being a supporter of Melnick's on the press release declaring her candidacy, but according to Burnt Orange Report, his name has since been removed from the "public list of supporters" section of her website.
— L.N.



► **SPARKY PARK HITS HIGH MARK** A work of art lovingly known as the **Grotto Wall at Sparky Park**, by artist **Berthold Haas**, has been recognized as one of the nation's Top 40 public art projects of 2008. Americans for the Arts' Public Art Network selected the work from a pool of hundreds of public artworks submitted for review. Sparky Park, a pocket park inspired by the North University Neighborhood Association, is the former site of an electric substation. The neighborhood group and Austin's Art in Public Places commissioned Haas to transform an old cinder-block wall into what is now the grotto wall.
— Amy Smith



JANA BIRCHUM

his big takeout of the city budget (see the complete package, starting with "The Chips Are Down," June 26). He made a good argument for removing the item in question, so out it went – but its elimination required rejiggering the layout. Creative Director Jason Stout had already left for the evening, headed out with his family on vacation, so we handed the pages off to graphic designer Chris Linnen for a quick fix. Chris, by the way, is filling in for Jason this week and designed most of this issue's editorial pages.

The Fun Just Never Stops

All this is leading up to the fact that no matter how hard you try to plan for the unexpected, the unexpected can still catch you flat-footed sometimes. For example, I didn't expect to be filling this column space during Michael's absence, but here I am. Plus, did anyone really expect it to rain nearly two inches this week?

Back to the news. There's lots of it this week. Stateside, the Legislature is back in town for a special session that started Wednesday. It's supposed to be a quick-and-dirty session slated to end before the July 4 holiday, but we'll see what happens come Friday (see Richard Whittaker's "Special Session Could End in Fireworks," p.20).

Moving on, school's out, but new Austin ISD Superintendent Meria Carstarphen is in; she started her first day in office Wednesday, July 1, with a media meet-and-greet at Pickle Elementary School. The AISD board of trustees has already adopted her plan to restructure the chain of command (see Richard's "AISD Staff Shake-Up," p.16).

The economy is in the pits, but construction cranes are still very much a part of the Downtown skyline. There's no shortage of city-planning issues coming to the fore, and Katherine Gregor is bird-dogging the process as it develops (see her "Developing Stories," p.18).

Meanwhile, a new City Council took office in June, then recessed until July 23. Just look at some of the delicate balancing acts council members will face when they come back:

• **A \$30 million budget shortfall.** City Manager Marc Ott will present the proposed 2010 budget to council July 23. Council members are scheduled to deliberate the package Aug. 5, 19, and 26, and the new budget takes effect Oct. 1. An interesting component of the financial plan centers around the possibility of Austin Police officers and EMS workers giving up pay increases

in 2010 as part of separate agreements the city brokered with both groups. The two labor associations are expected to vote on the deferrals by the end of July. (In a related salary story, Lee Nichols is covering a simmering controversy at Capital Metro; see "Transit Union Resists Giving Up Pay Raise," p.16.)

• **A new music department.** At its last meeting, June 18, the council came within a hair's breadth of approving the creation of a two-person division to streamline and strengthen the ties between the city, neighborhoods, and the music community. But the vote was postponed after the police union privately questioned the wisdom of financing a new department when officers were considering giving up raises. Council punted the matter to Aug. 6.

• **Water Treatment Plant No. 4.** The council is slated to return to this long-running conundrum some time in August. The difference this time is that the council is somewhat greener under new Mayor Lee Leffingwell, with new Council Members Bill Spelman and Chris Riley rounding out the enviro contingent. Environmentalists largely oppose construction of a new plant, favoring instead stricter water conservation measures. While we're on the topic, the city hit a high-water mark June 25, with the Austin Water Utility reporting it pumped nearly 218 million gallons of water that day – a high for the year (though well below historic records). Just wait until August. By then, no telling how many records the city will have set. At last count, Austin Energy was on its third all-time record in six days.

• **Wildflower Commons.** This hot potato – a proposed mixed-use development in the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District – returns to City Council Aug. 20. The developer is seeking a zoning change to a planned unit development, a dramatic shift from its current zoning for single-family residential and office use.

• And if that's not enough, there's this clutch of unresolved bugaboos: the search for a new Solid Waste Services director to bring the department into the environmentally present, the perpetually in-draft Downtown and comprehensive plans, rancor in the ranks of the Fire Department, controversial guidelines for designating what is and isn't a "heritage tree," and the upcoming (or is it?) launch of MetroRail.

Clearly, this summer will be a sweaty test of endurance for anyone who's playing along. Be cool. ■

res publica FOR MORE DETAILS AND EVENTS, SEE COMMUNITY LISTINGS, P.54.

FRIDAY 03

PEOPLE UNITED features **Michael Lux** discussing his book *The Progressive Revolution: How the Best in America Came to Be*. 1pm. KOOP Radio 91.7FM.



SATURDAY 04

BARTON HILLS INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE Join Police Chief **Art Acevedo** for a Fourth of July march with students from Barton Hills Elementary, followed by a patriotic ceremony hosted by musician **Sara Hickman**. Bring nonperishable food items for the **Capital Area Food Bank**. 9am. Barton Hills Elementary School, 2108 Barton Hills Dr.

DRINK PINK – SEE RED, WHITE, & BLUE Live music and art-bra models – why? It's all for a good cause, with proceeds going to **breast cancer research**. 6pm. Opal Divine's Freehouse, 700 W. Sixth, 477-3308. Free. www.bcr.org.

SYMPHONY & FIREWORKS ON LADY BIRD LAKE with music from the Austin Symphony Orchestra and a Howitzer cannon. 8:30pm. Auditorium Shores, South First at Lady Bird Lake, 442-2263.

TAKE BACK AMERICA TEA PARTY Republicans and barbecue. 2-6pm. Texas Capitol, 1100 Congress. Free. www.austinreteaparty.com.

YELLOW BIKE'S FOURTH PROJECT Live music and yellow bikes. 1pm. Wooldridge Square Park, 900 Guadalupe. www.austinyellowbike.org.

MORE FOURTH OF JULY EVENTS on p.60.

SUNDAY 05

GIVE BLOOD FOR SUNDAES Every Sunday in July, you get an Amy's Ice Creams sundae for saving lives – i.e., donating blood. Blood Center of Central Texas, 4300 N. Lamar, 206-1266. www.inyourhands.org.

INSIDE BOOKS PROJECT needs all the help it can get with sending books to Texas prisoners. Stop by *Thursdays & Sundays, 8-11pm. Space 12, 3121 E. 12th, 647-4803. www.insidebooksproject.org.*

MONDAY 06

ENVIRO TEEPEE CAMPOUT The **Polymorphic Plastic Parade** comes through Austin today with teepees made of salvaged and renewable resources – it's social commentary and installation art. Mon.-Tue., July 6-7. Republic Square Park, 422 Guadalupe, 974-6700. Free. www.plasticparade.org.

TUESDAY 07

EAST AUSTIN SPEAKER SERIES: LIVE & UNCENSORED! Today's installment of this Southwest Key-sponsored series focuses on the History of Activism in East Austin and Its Emerging Political Influence. Southwest Key's East Austin Community Center, 6002 Jain, 462-2181. Free. www.swkey.org.

SIERRA CLUB PICNIC Bring a dish, and join in on this annual potluck tradition. (No alcohol allowed; reusable dishes provided.) 6:30-10pm. Zillker Park Rock Garden picnic area. www.texas.sierraclub.org/austin.

WEDNESDAY 08

LIVEABLE CITY PRESENTS COMP PLAN 101 See how you can be a part of the process as the city embarks on a new Comprehensive Plan that will shape Austin's future. 6-8pm, Scholz Garden (inside), 1607 San Jacinto. www.liveablecity.org.

OIL AWARENESS MEET-UP Worried about peak oil? This is the group for you. 7pm. Hyde Park Presbyterian Church, 3913 Ave. B. www.oilawareness.meetup.com/3.

POSTMODERNISM GETS PUNKED

The Food for Thought lecture series presents this talk from physicist **Alan Sokal** (right). 7pm. Old Quarry Branch Library, 7051 Village Center Dr., 345-4435. Free. www.centerforinquiry.net/austin.

