MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Harris County Quarter 2 Newsletter April - June 2025





HARRIS COUNTY





Extension Education in Harris County

Howdy and Welcome to Harris County!

OUR WORK MAKES A DIFFERENCE. IN THE LIVES OF TEXANS AND ON THE ECONOMY.

MISSION STATEMENT:

"Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service works daily to make Texas better by providing innovative solutions at the intersection of agriculture, natural resources, youth, and health, thereby improving the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, and communities through education and service."

VISION STATEMENT:

"Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will be the leader in providing science-based information and solutions in agriculture and health to every Texan."

SHARED VALUES:

"We value People, Programs, and Partnerships."

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HARRIS COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

WELCOME TO HARRIS COUNTY



ISABELLA FOWLER 4-H PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Howdy! My name is Isabella Fowler. I'm originally from Del Valle, Texas, which is located east of Austin, Texas. I've lived in the Houston Heights for two years with my husband John Garrett and our two dogs, Wylie and Ramona. I attended Texas A&M University obtaining my degree in Agriculture Leadership, Education, and Development, minoring in Youth Development. I was a 4-H member for ten years. I participated in Family & Community Health, STEM, and Agriculture & Livestock projects. I raised swine for all ten years of my 4-H time, that was my favorite project area. In my free-time I like to garden, fish, craft, and do anything outdoors. For the past two years I worked for Ready to Grow Gardens as a Garden Educator, in this role I learned how to be a successful educator and an organic gardener. I have wanted to work in Extension for as long as I can remember, so I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to serve as a 4-H Program Assistant.

HARRIS COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS



Kema Williams

College | Houston City College / Sam Houston State Univeristy Hometown | Missouri City, Texas Major | Animal Science / Wildlife Management

Can you name a new skill you'd like to acquire? "I would love to learn how to catch/rope cattle."

Laura Reaves
College | West Texas A&M University
Hometown | Spring, Texas
Major | Agricultural Media and Communications

Can you name a new skill you'd like to acquire? "Teamwork skills."





Connor Woods

College | Texas A&M University Hometown | Houston, Texas Major | Agricultural Economics

Can you name a new skill you'd like to acquire? "Drone operation and GIS mapping for agricultural use."

Martha Laguna

College | Houston City College / Sam Houston State Univeristy Hometown | Houston, Texas Major | Animal Science

Can you name a new skill you'd like to acquire? "Hands-on livestock experience."



Grayson Schneider

College | Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Hometown | Katy, Texas Major | Animal Science





by Zachary Giblin, Harris County Extension Agent, Urban Youth Development

Harris County 4-H Recordbooks

4-H members across Harris County dedicated their time and talents to completing and submitting their 4-H Recordbooks—a hallmark of personal growth, project learning, and leadership development. We are proud to recognize 11 youth from the local Katy Live Oak 4-H Club who have advanced from the county level to the District 9 Recordbook competition, demonstrating exceptional commitment and attention to detail.

Recordbooks are more than just paperwork—they are a reflection of months (and often years) of project work, goal setting, and youth-driven initiative. These 4-H'ers showcased a variety of project areas including Rabbits, Shooting Sports, STEM, Gardening & Horticulture, and Food & Nutrition. Advancing to the district level highlights their ability to not only complete their projects but also effectively communicate their experiences, learning outcomes, and future goals.

Participation in Recordbooks builds valuable skills such as organization, written communication, and personal reflection, all of which align with the Texas 4-H mission to develop capable, confident, and responsible young leaders.

Congratulations to the outstanding youth and the volunteers, parents, and club leaders who supported them throughout the process. We look forward to seeing their continued success at the district level and beyond!



by Savannah Payne, Harris County Extension Agent, 4-H & Youth Development







During the second quarter of 2025, Extension Agent Savannah Payne and 4-H Program Assistant Sydney Sharp-Taylor successfully delivered the Egg to Chick program to five schools across Harris County. Thanks to the enthusiastic support and collaboration of these schools, the team was able to reach and engage over 700 students.

The Egg to Chick program introduces students—many from urban backgrounds—to the fundamentals of raising poultry. Participants learn not only the reasons behind raising chickens but also the practical skills involved. Lessons cover topics such as poultry anatomy, egg development, and basic animal care. Perhaps most exciting for the students is the opportunity to interact directly with live chicks—an experience that brings the curriculum to life.

This program continues to serve as a powerful tool for both educational enrichment and emotional development, making a meaningful difference in the lives of children throughout the county. Our team is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with such inspiring students and dedicated educators.



by Sydney Sharp-Taylor, 4-H Program Assistant



Wildlife Conservation with The Houston Zoo

Through a new partnership with the Houston Zoo, I was able to coordinate a conservation-focused collaboration with the Houston Zoo, that empowered seven Harris County 4-H clubs to take part in an impactful electronics recycling initiative.

Many people don't realize that recycling old electronics—like phones, tablets, earbuds, and smartwatches—can directly help save wildlife. By reusing valuable metals from these devices, we reduce the need for destructive mining in delicate habitats, protecting species such as gorillas, jaguars, okapis, flamingos, and even our local monarch butterflies. This effort also keeps harmful waste out of landfills, preserving both groundwater and native ecosystems.

Thanks to the free program hosted by the Houston Zoo, 4-H members across Harris County collected used electronics in support of both local and global conservation. Recycled devices are repurposed instead of mined, and proceeds help fund critical efforts to protect wildlife across Africa's forests and beyond.





by Sydney Sharp-Taylor, 4-H Program Assistant

Science, Sustainability, and STEM: Youth Programs Making an Impact in Harris County

Over the past month, I've successfully implemented the Space Terrarium STEM program at three different locations, each time receiving enthusiastic participation and positive feedback from youth and staff. This hands-on activity invites participants to explore how plants might grow in space by designing their own miniature ecosystems using soil, moss, and live plants. The project not only introduces plant science and sustainability but also encourages creativity and curiosity about life beyond Earth.

Each session is designed to mirror the challenges astronauts face in growing food during space missions, helping youth understand the importance of environmental control and balance in closed ecosystems. Participants leave with a deeper appreciation for the role of plants in our world and a personalized terrarium to observe and care for at home. This program has proven to be a fun and effective way to integrate science, environmental education, and artistic expression.

In addition to expanding science learning opportunities, I also launched a conservation-focused initiative through a new partnership with the Houston Zoo. By working with our Harris County 4-H clubs, I was able to support and empower seven clubs to participate in an impactful electronics recycling project. Many people don't realize that recycling items like old phones, earbuds, and smartwatches can help reduce destructive mining in sensitive habitats—protecting species such as gorillas, jaguars, okapis, flamingos, and even our local monarch butterflies.



by Angela Caramillo, UBEAM Grant Project Coordinator

"BLOCK PARTY" Community Event at The Opportunity Center

On Wednesday, May 28th, Angela Camarillo hosted a community event, "Block Party," inviting the community to come together and help beautify The Opportunity Center, a Harris County JPD facility that provides educational services for high school students who are currently or previously justice involved with educational services.

During the event, volunteers and staff planted over 83 plants, refreshed multiple planters, and mulched various areas throughout the center, transforming the space into a more welcoming and vibrant environment. Over 12 volunteers and staff members participated throughout the day, contributing their time and energy to make the project a success.

One of the most meaningful moments was seeing some of the youth from our programs stop by to lend a hand and connect with volunteers, including Mr. Hill. These interactions build stronger relationships within the community while demonstrating the importance of caring for our environment and public spaces.

Through events like this, UBEAM is working to integrate urban agriculture into the lives of youth at the Harris County Juvenile Centers, promoting environmental stewardship, responsibility, and skill-building for their futures.





Summer Livestock Validations

In the month of June, we turned the page to the next chapter in the validation program within Harris County. Since the month of April, we have been collecting validation tag orders and started the preparation process to validate an estimated 750 livestock for the State Fair of Texas and Heart O' Texas Fair and Rodeo coming up in late October. We would like to thank the Harris County Extension Staff, Student Interns, Validation Committees, and other volunteers for helping assist with this youth program in Harris County. We would also like to thank the Harris County Mounted Sheriff Patrol Unit for coming and lending a hand to help serve the youth and community. Also, Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent - Steven Frederick - had the opportunity to be interviewed by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo to show the importance of Texas Youth Livestock & Agriculture Validation Program by a student from Channelview FFA that caught in the HLSR Calf Scramble. We would like to wish the best of luck to all 4-H and FFA youth in the upcoming Fall Major Stock Shows.





















EXTENSION Hydroponics and Aquaponics **Development**

Written by Brukendra Fillmore, **PVAMU Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources**

On April 25, 2025, Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent, Brukendra Fillmore hosted a successful Hydroponics and Aquaponics Development event at the El Franco Lee Community Center with 36 participants. The featured speaker, Horticulture Specialist Jeremy Peaches, delivered an engaging and informative presentation. Attendees left equipped with a wealth of knowledge about hydroponic and aquaponic systems and their benefits for sustainable growing. The event was both educational and inspiring, sparking interest and dialogue around innovative agricultural practices.











Harvest Demonstration

Written by Brukendra Fillmore,
PVAMU Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources

On June 20, 2025, Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent provided education on how to grow vegetables and maintain a healthy diet. Research has shown that residents in Houston's 5th Ward are living in a cancer cluster due to contaminated soil. In response, I collaborated with BUFTX to install raised garden beds as a results demonstration of how to safely grow fresh fruits and vegetables above ground. The Harvest Demonstration Event was promoted through my agency's outreach efforts, including social media, newsletters, and community events. Following the hands-on gardening and harvesting demonstrations, we provided healthy recipes and preparation tips. Te'Anna contributed a delicious okra dish and made smoothies using the smoothie bike, adding a fun, nutritional component to the event. Community members engaged with us, enjoyed freshly harvested produce, and left with vegetables to take home and prepare for their families.



Busy Bee



AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Written by Steven Frederick, Harris County Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent







In this last quarter, ANR Agent- Steven Frederick has been traveling the State attending professional development conferences, connecting with community partners, and beginning a bee result demonstration project.

In April, it was time for the annual Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Convention in the heart of Cowtown also known as Fort Worth, Texas. Farmers and Ranchers from across the State attend this conference to sharpen their knowledge on cattle markets, raising cattle, and the best practices to raise a successful cow herd and maximum their production.

In May, I was invited to the Houston Beekeepers Association meeting to speak to the audience about a program that would benefit some landowners with their bee hives to collect pollen once a month to see the variety of vegetation the bees are collecting, and create a map to then provide to landowners on the different vegetation options to bees in both Urban and Rural counties in Texas.

In June, I attended the 2nd Annual Urban Gather & Grow event at the Trees for Houston building. This was an opportunity to speak to individuals about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, and to connect with stakeholders, landowners, and others about the importance of agriculture in an urban setting.















Prepping the Garden for Success

by Sarah Ellis, Harris County Better Living for Texans Agent

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Better Living for Texans (BLT) Program partnered with St. Joesph's Clubhouse, a site that supports the recovery of individuals living with mental health diagnoses by offering a stable environment, meaningful work, and transitional employment opportunities, to bring a series of educational programs to their community. The 6-week series began on May 22nd and ended on July 10th. Each session has a focused, 60-minute gardening lesson. During Session 2 on May 29th, we discussed the components of Soil and how to Compost. After a 20-minute lesson, Sarah & her group spent 2 1/2 hours revamping some of the raised beds that had not been utilized since 2021. After weeding, tilling the soil, and adding cattle manure, the beds are prepped for Session 3 where we will add extra raised bed soil to top off the beds and then plant a variety of vegetable transplants for the summer!

Sarah would like to thank the Houston ToolBank for the equipment to revamp the beds & the Homeless Empowerment Program for donating 18 bags of Raised Bed Soil & 4 bags of cattle manure to help with our project!









Community Engagement

by Karrie Calloway, Harris County Community Engagement Coordinator

Empowering Youth, Strengthening Communities

















This quarter, we engaged over 100 youth through an enriching program at Woodchase Park, where students participated in hands-on gardening, nutrition education, and outdoor wellness activities. We also planned the 4-H Military Summer Camp and facilitated professional development training at the 4-H Conference Center in Brownwood, including Real Colors team-building workshops, which I led as a certified facilitator.

In partnership with HISD, we supported students involved in livestock projects and fundraising efforts, helping them gain valuable real-world skills and meaningful community exposure.

To celebrate Mother's Day, we hosted a heartfelt community engagement event at Texas Southern University—a community baby shower for young college mothers. Partnering with a local nonprofit and Harris County Health Services, the event featured sessions on mental health awareness, a wellness workshop, and a flower arrangement activity. Over 35 mothers participated and received door prizes and gift bags filled with baby essentials. This initiative was made possible thanks to generous support from Receding Black Clothing, Target, Home Depot, Bass Pro Shops, and other local donors.

Additionally, we hosted a Health & Wellness Fair designed to connect the broader community to essential services, including free health clinics, diabetes and cholesterol screenings, nutrition programs, and mindfulness activities. The event was conducted in partnership with Fort Bend Health and Human Services.

I also served as a guest speaker on the topic of mental health and mindfulness curriculum during a community health awareness event. The session reached over 40 attendees, including both youth and adults working in community service roles across the state, promoting tools for wellness, stress reduction, and community healing.



Impacting Families through EFNEP Programs

EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

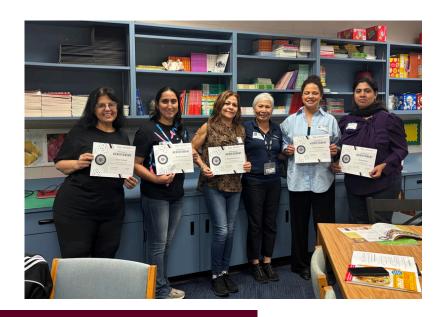
by Harris County EFNEP Agent Khadija Ghaffar

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) connects with its target audience—families with children—through school-based Family Engagement Centers. Alief ISD boasts a strong Family Engagement Program where families and community members gather to build language, computer, and career readiness skills, alongside parenting and personal development workshops.

One standout example is Boone Elementary, where EFNEP has maintained a lasting partnership for over 12 years. EFNEP educators have consistently provided hands-on nutrition and wellness education to families at this site. The Family Center Liaison at Boone, who is retiring this year, has expressed deep appreciation for EFNEP's interactive approach and impactful programming.

This spring, EFNEP offered an 8-week adult education course titled Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves from March to May, focusing on practical strategies for healthier eating and active living.

Eight women participated in the Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves sessions and enjoyed engaging, hands-on learning led by EFNEP educator Ms. Hannah Hungbui. The photo featured here was taken on graduation day—a celebration of their commitment and growth. Each participant brought a unique motivation to the program. One woman shared that she joined to gain health tips to support her personal wellness journey. Another wanted to learn how to offer healthier meals to her family. One participant, currently seeking employment, expressed that the program not only enhanced her practical nutrition knowledge but also helped strengthen her language and communication skills.



EFNEP Expands Reach Through Partnership with Sunrise Centers

ATEXAS A&M GRILIFE EXTENSION

EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

by Harris County EFNEP Agent Khadija Ghaffar

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension- EFNEP has been actively engaging with Houston ISD's Sunrise Center initiative, exploring meaningful ways to offer nutrition education programs at these new community hubs. In early 2025, EFNEP was invited by a Communities In Schools coordinator to collaborate at the Sunrise Center located at the W. Orem YMCA.

EFNEP's whole-family approach—designed to create lasting behavior change in both adults and youth—was a perfect fit for this unique setting. At the W. Orem YMCA, EFNEP youth educator Jennifer Mattes delivered the Healthy Hero Adventures program to children attending the after-school program, while EFNEP educator Ana Rosales led the Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves course for adult participants.

This partnership exemplifies EFNEP's commitment to empowering families through education, promoting healthier lifestyles across generations.

Fifteen students, ranging from Kindergarten to 5th grade, participated in Healthy Hero Adventures, where they learned the importance of healthy eating, food safety, and staying physically active in a fun, engaging way.

At the same time, 21 adults took part in Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves, a program focused on building lasting behavior change in key areas such as diet quality, food resource management, food safety, and physical activity.

The staff at the Sunrise Center were highly impressed with the program's impact and expressed strong interest in bringing it back—and even replicating the model at other Sunrise Center locations across the district.

Pictures of the Youth and Adult programming at W. Orem YMCA Sunrise Center below. The hands-on activities make the learning fun and engaging.



Disaster Preparedeness- Essential Strategies for Safety

In preparation for Hurricane Season, Family and Community Health Extension Agent Te'Anna Donaldson conducted a short series stressing the importance of Disaster Preparedness. On May 6th, the series kicked off at the J.W. Peavy Senior Center, equipping participants with educational resources to assist in the preparation and mitigation of human-caused and natural disasters. Participants gained insight into creating emergency communication plans, assembling and maintaining emergency kits, securing homes and workplaces, and ensuring preparedness in their communities. The series also addressed the unique needs of senior citizens, the importance of financial readiness, and techniques for managing mental and emotional well-being during crises.

Emergencies can strike at any time—whether it is a hurricane, power outage, or public health crisis. Being prepared isn't just a precaution; it's a necessity.



by Te'Anna Donaldson, PVAMU Extension Agent, Family & Community Health







Live Well, Eat Well, be Active with Diabetes

Family and Community Health Agent, Te'Anna Donaldson conducted the Live Well, Eat Well, be Active with Diabetes program at Finnigan Park for adult participants.

Participants learn how to make informed food choices, manage portion sizes, and incorporate culturally appropriate, diabetes-friendly meals into their daily lives. Additionally, the program encourages consistent physical activity tailored to individual abilities and goals, promoting improved blood sugar control and enhanced quality of life. Through interactive sessions, group support, and hands-on activities, the program fosters sustainable habits that help prevent complications and support long-term diabetes management.



Building Healthier Habits — and Stronger Bonds

by Selena Samuel, PVAMU Extension Agent, Family & Community Health

How Eating Smart • Being Active Impacts Our Community

At the Steve Radack Community Center, Eating Smart • Being Active is more than a class — it's a community. Participants come together to learn how to eat well, move more, and make healthy choices on a budget. But what keeps people coming back is the connection they build with one another.

"The bond we built with each other was the best part. We supported and motivated each other every step of the way." — Class Participant Each lesson includes:

- Hands-on cooking with easy, affordable recipes
- Practical tips for meal planning, budgeting, and food safety
- Fun ways to get active in everyday life

By the end of the program, participants report feeling more confident, eating more fruits and vegetables, and being more active all while building friendships that last beyond the class.







Growing Engagement — One Seed at a Time

by Selena Samuel, PVAMU Extension Agent, Family & Community Health

Freed Community Center turned a challenge into a chance to grow literally and figuratively. Facing low program attendance, we reevaluated our approach and deepened our connection with the community, using the on-site garden as a powerful tool.

What We Did:

- Recalibrated Programs: Focused on topics like healthy eating, job readiness, and parenting support
- Tied in the Garden: Used the garden for hands-on lessons on nutrition, cooking, and food budgeting
- Improved Scheduling & Outreach: Adjusted class times and boosted promotion through social media and community partners

Why It Worked:

The garden helped make lessons real participants picked fresh produce and learned how to turn it into simple, healthy meals. It sparked excitement, conversations, and deeper connections.

"Seeing the food grow and then cooking it together helped everything click." – Program Participant

Results:

- 🐇 25% increase in attendance
- 🙎 Hands-on learning through the garden
- P Stronger community bonds and engagement

What's Next:

We'll continue using the garden to teach and connect, growing not just food — but trust, health, and community.







Strong People, Strong Bodies

by Sonja Stueart-Davis, EdD, Harris County Family & Community Health Agent

The twelve-week Strong People, Strong Bodies Program concluded on Wednesday, April 30^{th,} at Julia C. Hester House. Strong People Strong Bodies (SPSB) is an evidence-based progressive strength training program. The objective of the program is to improve the health and well-being of middle-aged and older adults by increasing access to structured, safe, and effective strength training programs.

Sixteen individuals completed the program and were grateful for the opportunity to participate. As a result of participating, they feel stronger, their bones ache less and they suffer less from arthritis. The group plans to continue meeting and exercising.

Participants celebrated with a light lunch sponsored by WellCare Insurance and were presented with Certificates of Completion and a Survival Kit to keep them motivated.







Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia with the Alzheimer's Association

by Gabrielle Kanu, Harris County Family & Community Health Agent

Harris County Family and Community Health Agent, Gabby Kanu, collaborated with the Alzheimer's Association to host four classes for adults in Crosby, Katy, and Houston. The presentation, Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia, was presented to over 45 people since April. The presentation covered different types of dementia and how participants can get involved with the organization. During one session participants raised over \$1,000 for the Longest Day. "The Longest Day" is an annual event held by the Alzheimer's Association on the summer solstice, the day with the most daylight, to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support, and research. Future lessons from the Alzheimer's Association will be taught throughout Harris County.









Master of Memory Programming

by Gabrielle Kanu, Harris County Family & Community Health Agent

Harris County Family and Community Health Agent, Gabby Kanu, collaborated with seven senior centers and libraries to teach the Master of Memory program throughout Harris County. The Master of Memory series helps older adults improve confidence in their ability to affect memory function, reduce negative attitudes, and increase understanding of controllable risk factors. Over 140 people have graduated from this series since January 2025. Master of Memory programming will continue in the fall at senior centers and libraries throughout Harris County.









ForUsTrees Town Hall Event

Written by Stephanie Gray, Harris County Horticulture Agent

On April 3, 2025, Stephanie Gray, County Extension Agent for Horticulture (Commercial/Green Industry), played a pivotal role in advancing environmental education and community engagement through the successful coordination of the ForUsTrees Town Hall Event at 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX. This event was a key milestone in the ForUsTrees Grant Project, which aims to expand equitable access to green spaces and enhance the urban tree canopy in underresourced neighborhoods across Houston and Harris County. Stephanie worked with partners from Houston Area Research Center, among others from the USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife, Texas Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, and American YouthWorks. The event welcomed 45 attendees and additional volunteers.

The Town Hall featured presentations on:

- The ForUsTrees project overview
- Urban Heat Mapping Campaign findings
- The importance of urban forestry
- Tree planting and maintenance techniques
- Benefits of green spaces
- Climate resilience through urban forestry





The ForUsTrees initiative has already made a significant impact:

- 54,310 trees planted
- 2,040 hazardous trees removed
- 23 Community Engagement Environmental Education interns hired and trained
- Numerous public education events hosted

This project not only fosters environmental stewardship but also promotes economic development through green job creation and increased property values. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's commitment to community-focused horticulture continues to make a lasting difference in the region's environmental resilience.

Agents Led Successful Texas Superstar Field Day

Written by Stephanie Gray, Harris County Horticulture Agent

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service hosted an educational Texas Superstar Result Demonstration Field Day at the Brookwood Community. The event brought together gardening enthusiasts, Master Gardeners, and local residents for a hands-on experience with some of the most promising ornamental plants for Texas landscapes. The day began with engaging presentations on what qualifies a plant as a Texas Superstar. Participants moved outdoors for equipment demonstrations by King Ranch AG and Turf, a sponsor of the event, followed by interactive trial observations where attendees voted on their favorite plant varieties. Survey results from over 35 participants revealed significant gains in knowledge, particularly in plant selection, ornamental design, and equipment use.





Most attendees expressed strong intentions to adopt the practices introduced, with many anticipating economic benefits ranging from \$50 to \$499. The event drew participants from Harris, Fort Bend, Waller, and Galveston counties, underscoring its regional impact.

IN COOPERATION WITH ...

Lina Hidalgo, Rodney Ellis, Adrian Garcia, Tom S. Ramsey, Lesley Briones,

Harris County Judge Commissioner, Precinct 1 Commissioner, Precinct 2 Commissioner, Precinct 3 Commissioner, Precinct 4

Making A Difference Quarterly Newsletter July 2025

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