

2025 in review

\$10

The Kerr County

Lead.

**Our duty
is simple:**

Remember

**Five months after July 4, as Kerr County strives to
recover, preserving memories is vital.**



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Together we are building a healthier future for our community.





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When Everything Changed, Community United for Recovery

On July 4 at 9:48 a.m., while floodwaters were still rising, the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country created the Kerr County Flood Relief Fund to support immediate needs and long-term recovery. Donations arrived within hours from across the country—foundations, small businesses and residents stepping up however they could. It quickly became one of the largest and fastest philanthropic responses in Texas history.

The Fund is now helping Kerr County rebuild and heal.



rebuildkerr.org



"Every day, more good is happening and people who felt hopeless are feeling hope again." — **Brittany, Rebuild Kerr case manager**

Who We Are and How We Serve

The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country is a 501(c)(3) public charitable foundation based in Kerrville. Since 1982, it has funded local nonprofits, supported civic projects, and met community needs across the region. The Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees and managed by a professional staff.

How the Flood Relief Fund Works

The Kerr County Flood Relief Fund makes grants to vetted nonprofits that meet demonstrated needs. These partners provide direct financial assistance, housing support, counseling, small business relief, and other critical services to those affected by the July 4th floods. Working through nonprofits ensures the charitable intent of donors and increases the speed of community recovery.

Impact so far

- 75+ organizations funded
- 700+ families supported
- 200+ small businesses assisted
- 17 volunteer fire departments equipped
- 4 school districts receiving aid

Recovery is possible because of coordinated support, strong partnerships and thousands of people who chose to help.

Rebuilding Stronger for the Long-Term

The Flood Relief Fund is built to support recovery for years, not months. Long-term needs require the long-term commitment of neighbors standing with neighbors.

Housing Recovery

Housing is the foundation upon which all other forms of recovery – economic, social, and psychological – are built. With several hundred homes damaged or destroyed, the Fund supports options that offer survivor families choice: temporary housing for families who lost everything and need safe places to stay, home repair and full reconstructions, down payment assistance, and replacement of mobile homes and recreational vehicles that served as primary residences. Each household works with a local case manager to identify the best path home.



Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Fund is committed to helping individuals, families, and the broader community manage the emotional toll of the flood. It supports care for children, school staff, first responders, families coping with loss, and community members experiencing trauma.

Through multi-year grants to local and statewide mental health providers, the Fund expands access to free counseling, peer-support groups, grief and loss training, art therapy, and additional community-based services, including cost reimbursement for treatment.

"We are grateful to the Community Foundation for recognizing the importance of investing in mental health. The grief in our state runs deep, but so does our resolve to keep showing up for one another through every stage of recovery."

- Kristina Hernandez, CEO of the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

Economic Recovery

Small businesses are a hallmark of the Hill Country's economy. Grants to local chambers of commerce and nonprofit partners have in turn helped business owners meet emergency needs, keep their doors open and build back.

Bolstering Civic Assets and Action

Redesigning sports fields, funding volunteer fire departments, rebuilding public spaces, and supporting nonprofits that stepped up to meet extraordinary needs are a core part of the recovery.

Restoring Community and Culture

"The river will eventually heal itself, but philanthropy and committed volunteers will give it the boost it needs."

- **Becky Etzler, Executive Director of the Riverside Nature Center**

By investing in environmental restoration, welcoming public spaces, artistic expression and events that encourage collective healing, the Fund strengthens the cultural fabric of our community.

Stay Connected

Follow the Kerr County Flood Relief Fund's progress at RebuildKerr.org and sign up for the newsletter to get updates.



**REBUILD
KERR**
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OF HILL COUNTRY



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COUNTRY

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

OUR DUTY IS SIMPLE: REMEMBER

If you ever want a beautiful experience in Kerrville, I always think there's no better place to enjoy music than at the magnificent sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church. It's particularly wonderful to listen to classical music selections from Camerata San Antonio or to hear the pipe organ played by the church's organist Dr. Sabrina Adrian.

Theresa Britt, an accomplished violist who also solos as a mean fiddler, is building the Fredericksburg Community Orchestra and organizing a tribute concert to remember those lost in the flood. She scheduled the performance for 3 p.m. on Nov. 2, All Saints Day — an appropriate date for what was going to be a moving performance.

Before this, we'd heard a lot of discussion about the number and types of monuments and memorials planned to honor the 119 who lost their lives in Kerr County on July 4. There were plenty of opinions about these monuments, the most notable being the one planned for the Hill Country Arts Foundation. I might have stood in opposition to monumental abundance. As it stands, we have monuments planned or underway at the Empty Cross and the Museum of Western Art. The city of Kerrville is still wrestling with

how to preserve the temporary memorial at Guadalupe Park along the river.

The movement of the temporary monument from Water Street to HCAF was encouraging. Others will take root, including one at Camp Mystic, which rightfully deserves a way to honor the catastrophic loss of life there.

However, before that moment of peace in that sanctuary, I may have said maybe one or two monuments are enough. Under Britt's direction, the somber beauty of Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings is a powerful catalyst for reflection. Whether or not Barber intended that, I

don't know, but it works.

Later in the performance, Britt skillfully directed the orchestra through Ashokan Farewell, composed in 1982 by American folk singer and writer Jay Ungar, which Ken Burns used so eloquently in his Civil War documentary in 1990. During the string performance, Seth Lafler read the names of each of the dead.

It was at this moment that I took a picture of a program, with the names listed, the orchestra in the background and texted it to one of the parents of a Mystic family member. Many of these parents who lost children have expressed reservations, at least to me, about how Kerr County thinks of them. On that day, I assured that parent that Kerr County would never forget his child, or anyone else lost that terrible morning.

I walked out of that performance, knowing I had witnessed something special and headed home. I was home for about 15 minutes when I got a call from Rev. Bert Baetz at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, who asked me to attend his congregation's remembrance in their garden, slated for 5 p.m.

So, I dutifully headed back downtown for another service. For those who have never attended an Episcopal service, it's reverently ritualized, but it's always impressive to witness. Camp Mystic is part of St. Peter's story, and members of the Eastland family attended. Small candles flickered to remember all 119. We can make arguments and recriminations about that day, but I was struck by the dutiful efforts of the church that day not to cast judgment but to comfort and care for those who are troubled by the loss of so many.

As I returned home, I came away from those experiences with the purpose that we must stand to remember those who perished that day. So, no amount of monuments or services is too little; we can build them, so we do not forget. That is our mission.



LOUIS AMESTOY
THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.



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Kerrville, Texas

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25 YEARS: A TIME TO CELEBRATE

A Time To Remember



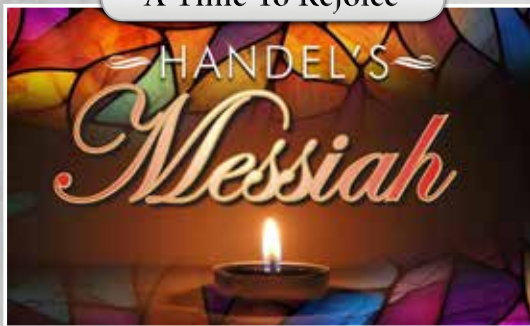
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A Time To Rejoice



DECEMBER 4, 2025

A Time To Dazzle



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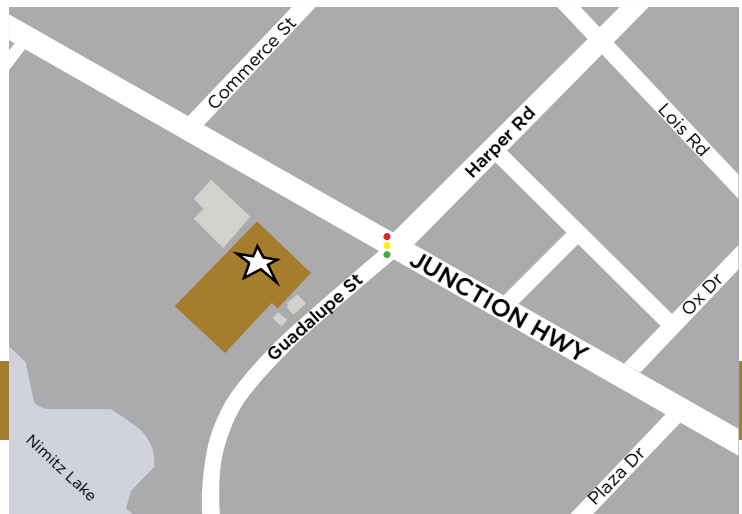
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JULY 4, 2025 FLOOD

For many, the July 4 Flood was unprecedented; others argue the tragedy was preventable. The truth is complex, with no simple answer for those seeking to understand a disaster that left 119 dead in Kerr County.

REPORTED AND WRITTEN BY

JENNIFER DEAN
LOUIS AMESTOY

THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

For generations of Texans, the allure of the Guadalupe River makes it one of the most inviting places to rest and reset. It was practically irresistible on a long and lazy Fourth of July weekend in Kerr County. A perfect weekend may be sitting in a chair with feet dangling in the cool, and frequently calm, waters of the river. If you get to a spot on the river early enough, you may be able to claim one of the many shady stretches under the canopy of ancient cypress trees that line the river from Comfort in Kendall County to west of Hunt.

For many of the 119 who died on July 4, 2025, the Guadalupe wasn't just a getaway. It was woven into the fabric of their lives.

Mollie Schaffer spent her final waking moments sitting on the dock at the River Inn with her husband Randy and their friends, showing videos of a gourmet meal their 12-year-old grandson had cooked. Off in the distance, lightning illuminated the horizon and thunder slowly rolled. The group had reunited at this Hunt lodge every summer since 1980. That weekend marked their 46th gathering—and their last.

"It is ironic that Mollie drew her last breath in a place that had brought her so much joy for almost 50 years," her obituary noted.

Just downriver, Camp Mystic was filled with girls who





had returned to what many called their “happy place.” For nearly a century, the all-girls Christian camp on the banks of the Guadalupe had been shaping young women through summers of swimming, singing, and sisterhood.

Alyson Crouch Hardin had fallen in love with Camp Mystic as a child in Houston, eventually becoming a counselor herself. Her daughter Josephine carried on the tradition, attending for nine summers as a camper and serving as a counselor for four more. Both mother and daughter embodied the camp’s philosophy: “Love in your heart is not put there to stay. Love is not love until you give it away.”

Katherine Ferruzzo considered being elected Kiowa Tribe Captain in summer 2024 her biggest accomplishment—until she was accepted to The University of Texas. Having been the first to submit her application, she was thrilled to return to Mystic this summer as a first-time counselor. She was eager to give back to the place that had given her so much. Katherine was assigned to counsel at the Bubble Inn cabin alongside Chloe Childress, another UT-bound counselor.

Chloe was a fourth-generation Camp Mystic camper who had attend-



ed from third grade through 12th. “She was overjoyed to return as a counselor this summer,” her obituary read. “Her passion for guiding younger generations stemmed from her deep faith and genuine love for others.”

In the Bubble Inn cabin, their young campers were living their best lives—singing songs, forming special friendships, and dancing with cabin mates. Among them was Lainey Landry, who “could not wait to go to Camp Mystic with her cousins and friends.” An Ever Loyal Kiowa, she was a natural leader

during the camp’s spirited scavenger hunt, where her smile radiated as brightly as her costume.

Greta Toranzo was thrilled to return for her third summer, overjoyed to be reunited with her camp friends and counselors, eager for weeks filled with the deep bonds of sisterhood she treasured. Blue, the color of the Kiowas, was also Greta’s favorite color.

The Guadalupe River had been a sanctuary for generations. On July 4, 2025, it became something else entirely.



CHAPTER 1

A TYPICAL SITUATION THAT BECAME SOMETHING ELSE

As the wall of water tore through Hunt, Ingram, Kerrville, Center Point, Comfort and beyond, ravaging everything in its path, there was little time to do more than react. Emergency responders arrived in droves as word went out but in the very beginning, average citizens also ran door to door, warning neighbors and rescuing people trapped by floodwaters. As the long hours of July 4 passed, the response to the emergency in progress became more organized as locations for family reunification and evacuees were identified and communicated and volunteers mobilized.

It was becoming increasingly clear — this was going to be a catastrophic event with far-reaching consequences. When word of missing campers and counselors began to spread, so did questions. Initially, little was known about the devastation wreaked on the camps or the HTR TX Hill Country Campground, other than many people were missing. For the parents looking for children and others looking for friends and family, the lack of information was agonizing. For the parents of Cile Steward and family of Jeffrey Ramsey, that agony of the unknown continues.

Questions about the flood, the warnings, the response and so much

more would plague those impacted from that day forward. Little was known at the time and even now, nearly six months later, questions remain. Even so, a clearer understanding is slowly coming into focus.

In Kerr County, people spend a lot of time outdoors, hunting, fishing, hiking and swimming. Many take full advantage of the region's unique ecology that includes desert vegetation, woody marshes, prairie lands and canyonlands. The miles of river trail in Kerrville draws locals and visitors alike, and usually has a steady stream of people walking, running and biking throughout the day, rain or shine. On a Fourth of July weekend, even with rain in the forecast, many were looking forward to fireworks and the annual Fourth on the River Concert and fireworks at Louise Hays Park. The concert featured the return of hometown favorite Robert Earl Keen.

They also know how temperamental Texas weather can be. After all, less than four months earlier, parts of Kerrville got softball-sized hail that caused significant damage to vehicles and homes. In late July of last year, heavy rainfall pushed the Guadalupe well beyond its banks, submerging large portions of Louise Hays Park for a period and flooding multiple low water crossings in the region.

Many Kerr County residents have been here for multiple generations, and they can tell you all about past floods and other weather events. They know the region's weather and are usually prepared for most emergencies with generators, bottled water and other emergency supplies. They respect the power of the river and know its beauty and warmth can change in the blink of an eye.

Despite a wealth of generational knowledge about and experience with the unpredictability of the region's weather and flash flood tendencies, the July 4 flood took just about everyone by surprise. Was it complacency or hubris? Perhaps, this knowledge created a sense of invulnerability.

In months that followed, many tried to identify the root causes of the tragedy. Within hours of the flood's rampage, those first aspersions of accountability were cast. Beyond the accusations of officials asleep at the wheel and lack of flood warning and preparations, some began looking at the culpability of the camps, at locations where buildings and recreational vehicles were located in known floodways and at the region's long history of land management practices.

In reality, the disaster was likely shaped by many factors, some that began more than a century ago and some

that will be identified in the courts.

The first lawsuits related to the flood were filed by several families of flood victims against HTR TX Hill Country Campground, where more than 30 people died. In November, four lawsuits were filed against Camp Mystic, where 25 campers, two counselors, and the camp director, Dick Eastland, died. The lawsuits represent 20 of Heaven's 27 families, who also came together to advocate for the passage of Senate Bill 1, the "Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act."

Matthew Childress, whose 18-year-old daughter and counselor Chloe Childress died trying to save campers in Bubble Inn, described the event as "100% preventable" — a result of systemic failures, complacency and inadequate preparation rather than an unprecedented act of nature.

The accountability battle is now making its way through the courts. The lawsuits were filed in Travis County, a strategic move reflecting their concerns about the fairness of a trial in Kerr County.

"Those that stayed in place are the ones who perished," Childress testified Aug. 20 before the Senate Select Committee on Disaster Preparedness & Flooding. His daughter died following the camp's training instruction, which he said amounted to essentially one sentence: "to stay in place."

The parents group, known as Heavens 27, led a remarkably fast effort to reform rules surrounding the summer camp industry. Still, unintended consequences for the camps — especially Mystic and Heart of the Hills — could mean closure. Heart of the Hills announced it would reopen at a new location along the north fork of the river, well above the floodplain.

Childress argued that the event was not unprecedented, that the Eastlands were well aware of the dangers of positioning the camp so close to the river. The lawsuits also suggest that the Eastlands had successfully removed large portions of the camp out of the flood plain maps, even though Federal Emergency Management Agency maps showed most of the camp's structures were in the regulatory floodway — the most dangerous part of the floodplain.

Initial defense claims have centered around the flood as an "unprecedented event" and blamed inadequate warning systems.

"First, no cabins were located within FEMA's 100-year floodplain," wrote attorney Mikal Watts, who represents Camp Mystic. "Though some Camp Mystic buildings had been included in the 2011 flood-plain map, those maps

were corrected and amended in 2013 through a process known as a Letter of Map Amendment to recognize that finished floor elevations of those buildings are above the 100-year base flood elevation.

"The cabins where the campers and counselors perished were more than 8.5 feet above the elevation of FEMA's 100-year flood plain, yet the surge left a water mark eight feet above the floor of their cabins.

"Second, the water level was unprecedented. We know the water levels reached during the 1932 flood, the 1978 flood and the 1987 flood. Those levels were nowhere close to the water levels experienced on July 4, 2025. Several local officials have called it "a thousand-year flood event."

Whether the flood was a thousand-year event or something else will be debated by scientists for years to come. Kerrville-based meteorologist Richard McAlister described the July 4 flood as not unprecedented in its volume, but unprecedented in its location at the headwaters of the south fork of the Guadalupe River. Some scientists argue that climate change has supercharged the environment with more moisture, leading to an increase in precipitation numbers.

For comparison, the USGS survey on the 1932 flood showed rainfall "amounted to over 35 inches in about 36 hours at the State Fish Hatchery above Ingram." At 4:20 a.m. on July 4, the NWS in Austin-San Antonio posted an urgent flash flood emergency statement to social media noting that "5-10 inches of rainfall had been estimated in the last 3-6 hours across south-central Kerr County. 6.5 inches has been measured at Hunt. 7.85 inches has been measured just upstream of Hunt."

A table in the USGS 1932 flood report notes that at the north fork near Hunt, 982 cubic feet of water per second discharged during peak flow and at the south fork, 1,290 cubic feet of water per second was discharged. On July 4, a USGS gauge recorded 810 cubic feet per second. During the July 4 flood, the Hunt flood gauge showed a crest of 37.53 feet, compared to the 1932 crest of 36.6 feet.

Early on, a former Kerr County IT manager made headlines by angrily suggesting the county had failed to issue a Code Red text message alert to residents of the peril, and the national media grabbed onto the sensational story of the small county's failure. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick continued to garble the message of local response by suggesting that county and city officials were alerted by phone about the

storm's power, a claim unsupported by any evidence. The Texas Department of Emergency Management said it had resources deployed in anticipation of the storm. Most reports say they were staged in the San Antonio area.

The facts of the morning are this: there were no Department of Public Safety state troopers in West Kerr County to alert residents. There was no indication that TDEM had any assets staged in West Kerr. Hunt was quickly cut off by the floods and the only emergency services personnel in the area were Hunt volunteer firefighters, a pair of off-duty Kerrville Police Department officers and an emergency room doctor vacationing in Hunt.

While TDEM held briefings ahead of the flood and the National Weather Service office that covers Central Texas issued watches and warnings ahead of the flood, these actions were not unusual and typically, would not have elicited an "all-hands-on-deck response" that some media and politicians decried as failure from officials and the community at large.

Two things can simultaneously be true: the NWS did its due diligence tracking the storm and issuing watches and warnings across appropriate channels and the community's lack of response to those messages isn't unusual. The messages didn't convey the sense of urgency matching the magnitude of the conditions — at least not until it was already too late for some flood victims — but that's not unusual either.

A meteorologist would look at the text, recognize the conditions, and perceive the level of urgency. The average layman would not. And, in an area prone to temperamental weather conditions, most have grown accustomed to or even weary of these alerts and often dismiss all but the most urgent.

Consider this: from 2020-2025, the broader region experienced 607 weather events including 261 warnings and 137 flood-related alerts. Despite this high regional activity, 2025 was the most active year on record, with 132 weather-related events. Yet Kerr County usually seemed to miss the worst of these warnings, as if in a weather bubble that received the watch and warning notifications but rarely saw the severe consequences that affected surrounding areas.

As the horror of July 4 unfolded and the world watched, the Texas Legislature announced a bipartisan select committee would investigate the flood to find answers. Initially, the focus was on the Code Red alert system but with the select committee gathered, the focus soon shifted the blame to

the Upper Guadalupe River Authority and Kerr County officials as committee members cited a Houston Chronicle article that published the morning of the first hearing that claimed UGRA failed in their duty to enact a flood warning system.

A quick scan of the UGRA history, published on their website, would have clarified that UGRA's role shifted from that of flood warning to water safety and conservation 25 years ago. UGRA had built a flood warning system but after the agency divested much of its infrastructure assets after settling a lawsuit with the city of Kerrville over a dam collapse during a 1984 flood. The warning system, constructed after the deadly 1987 flood, fell into obsolescence.

Along with UGRA, the county's efforts were in the spotlight. In the first hearing, held in Austin on July 24, State Sen. Jose Mendez, a Democrat from San Antonio, leveled the first charge: "Who was behind the wheel in the middle of the night in Kerr County that should have been the person that was up being prepared to sound the alarm?"

UGRA General Manager Tara Bushnoe was the only Kerr County official to testify that day. She wasn't even

included in the initial flood response until emergency managers realized the river could be a toxic disaster due to debris that included oil, gas and other chemicals from automobiles, homes and businesses.

Doing her best to respond, Bushnoe faced a withering barrage from legislators, whose only context was the thinly reported Houston Chronicle article that focused on the UGRA's previous role as water infrastructure provider. State legislators didn't seem to understand how the river authority worked, or that Gov. Greg Abbott appointed the board of directors.

On the first long day of testimony, the legislators heard from a variety of water board officials and state first responders. No testimony from meteorological experts was heard until the July 31 hearing and that was after nearly 20 hours of testimony.

Legislators questioned Bushnoe and later UGRA Board President William Rector, Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly, Kerrville Mayor Joe Herring, Kerr County Sheriff Larry Leitha, and Emergency Management Coordinator Dub Thomas, sometimes stating judgments rather than asking questions, and yet, no one questioned the Texas Department of Transportation about

the viability of Highway 39 to safely handle a mass evacuation at night, with large stretches of the roadway in the regulatory roadway, again, the most dangerous part of any flash flood.

In the first 27 days of the disaster, legislators blamed Kerr County and Kerrville officials for being asleep. Kerrville and Kerr County officials gave conflicting timelines and ultimately failed to offer a comprehensive timeline of emergency response. While residents who witnessed the flood were given time to talk, little time or attention was devoted to weather, terrain, and hydrogeology experts who could offer important insights into the weather conditions that led to the event, their prevalence in the region, the hydrogeological elements of the landscape, how they interact in a flash flood event, and the condition of the upper Guadalupe River watershed.

TDEM Chief Nim Kidd, who President Donald Trump wants to take over the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), was asked what TDEM knew ahead of time. His response was: "We didn't know anything that nobody else knew," stating that the science of forecasting the event was "just not there yet."



CHAPTER 2

THE METEOROLOGY BEHIND A DEADLY FLASH FLOOD

As it turns out, meteorologists had a pretty good idea that conditions for flash floods were ripe in the Hill Country, especially in South Central Texas. Heavy moisture from Tropical Storm Barry and a low-pressure storm system was a combination they knew to watch closely. While they couldn't pinpoint the exact location heavy

rain might fall far ahead of time, they could send watches to areas of concern and closely watch radar for updates.

Questions remain about the impact of Elon Musk's DOGE cuts and whether they hampered the NWS' ability to make the most urgent flash flood warnings in time. The known facts are that the first indication of weather was a storm brewing off the coast of Belize and the Yucatan Peninsula which would gather strength and earn the name Tropical



Storm Barry.

Longtime San Antonio meteorologist Alex Garcia described it as “barely a tropical storm” but noted another weather system in the area was also on their radar.

“In the forecasts, we noticed early signs indicating that a significant rain event was on the way,” said Garcia, the chief meteorologist at San Antonio’s KABB Ch. 29, who has witnessed his share of extreme weather. “While we couldn’t pinpoint the timing exactly, as we were still a bit far out using long-range models, the signals were clear. Tropical moisture was moving in, and we observed an upper-level system approaching. When both of these factors align correctly in the same area, it typically results in a lot of rainfall. We have seen this pattern before, particularly over the Hill Country. In the days leading up to the event, we monitored these conditions closely and communicated the message, urging people to pay attention because it appeared likely that substantial rain would occur over the Hill Country.”

While Tropical Storm Barry lost its intensity as it made landfall in north-

east Mexico, the storm still carried billions of gallons of moisture that pummeled Mexico, causing millions in damage and killing several people.

Flash flood prediction remains one of meteorology’s most complex challenges because it requires both meteorological and hydrological factors to align perfectly.

“You have to have the right rainfall, and then it has to fall in the right place,” explained Alan Gerard, a retired meteorologist from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Gerard noted that flash flooding represents a combined hazard, requiring specific rainfall amounts to fall in vulnerable locations to trigger dangerous water flows.

The region’s limited weather balloon network may have complicated forecasting efforts. With launch sites only in Del Rio, Corpus Christi and Lake Charles, Louisiana, it’s possible meteorologists lacked granular data for Central Texas.

Texas State Climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon said the weather balloon launched the morning of July 3 provided the “key tip off” about

heavy rain potential before the flood. But he noted Del Rio operates the only upper-air station along more than 700 miles of the Texas border between El Paso and Brownsville.

“The air causing extreme rainfall often enters Texas from over the Gulf or northern Mexico, where observations are scarce or of lower quality,” Nielsen-Gammon testified.

Weather balloon data is one of several meteorological data types collected by the National Weather Service and NOAA, along with satellite, radar and surface observations.

Weather balloons offer detailed atmospheric snapshots from ground level to approximately 100,000 feet, satellites provide broad atmospheric views, tracking cloud formations, temperature patterns, water vapor and the movement of weather systems and radar reveals precipitation location, intensity and wind movements within storms.

Computer models from NOAA, private companies and foreign weather services use this data, which teams like those at the Texas Division of Emergency Management analyze to inform operational decisions.

THE WARNING: A LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY A CENTURY OF HUMAN CHOICES

With the Guadalupe River headwaters located just west of Hunt, Kerr County lies within the Edwards Plateau, a karst terrain characterized by limestone, numerous springs, hills terrain and sharp bluffs, a terrain that also contributes to the region's moniker of "flash flood alley."

"Karst terrains typically have thin soils and steep slopes, both of which amplify flooding," said Robert Mace, executive director of The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University. "With thin soils, it doesn't take as much rain to saturate those soils. Once saturated, water runs off the landscape and into drainages, streams and rivers. The steep slopes add speed to the runoff, hence the flash flooding we see."

These natural vulnerabilities have been compounded by more than a century of land use practices that further degraded the landscape's ability to absorb rainfall — a pattern of environmental degradation that experts identified and warned about as early as the 1920s.

Flood prevention in karst systems like that of the Hill Country differ from other regions, as both surface water and groundwater features matter. Karst features like caves and sinkholes play important roles in stormwater management, as do woody and other vegetation management practices in and throughout watershed areas and riparian locations along rivers, tributaries and streams.

There are concerns with the degraded condition of the watershed directly upstream from Camp Mystic, where deforestation and vegetation removal have reduced the landscape's water absorption capacity. While these are issues karst system experts would like to see addressed, they likely wouldn't have impacted the July 4 flash flood conditions enough.

"The kind of rainfall received recently can be likened to other natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, extreme drought, or extreme freezes/ice storms," said Steve Nelle, natural



Angora goats helped Kerr County become one of the nation's leading producers of wool and mohair. Photo from the collection of Joe Herring Jr.

resource specialist, wildlife biologist and Project Bedrock advisor. "There is nothing man can do to prevent or lessen these natural events."

Nelle and other experts agreed that there are some longtime land mismanagement practices that could mitigate lesser flood events in the future and that they are events that will continue to happen. Their work is rooted in the historic research and observation of a pioneering forester who came to Texas in the 1920s, and whose work would lead to the naming of one of the Hill Country's iconic trees—the Ashe juniper.

THE 1921 WARNING

More than a century before the July 4, 2025 flood devastated Kerr County,

federal forester W.W. Ashe warned that the Guadalupe River watershed was vulnerable to catastrophic flooding due to human alterations of the landscape—warnings that went largely unheeded.

In late August 1921, Ashe traveled to Texas to spend two weeks evaluating the rivers that rise out of the Edwards Plateau, cut through the Balcones Escarpment, and sweep past cities and towns along what geographer James F. Petersen has called the "Texas Spring Line."

While there, Ashe would witness the big floods of 1921, leading him to advocate strongly for reforestation of the heavily logged areas of the Edwards Plateau and rigorous regulation of the Hill Country's over-grazed rangelands.



Ashe had been studying the relationship between high country watersheds and their dependent valley communities since the 1890s for the North Carolina Geological Survey. He published his findings, which detailed the ways deforestation and overgrazing contributed to increased frequency and intensity of floods in the Appalachian Mountains in a volume co-authored with Gifford Pinchot, the U.S. Forest Service's first chief, who would later bring Ashe on as a scientist and researcher for the federal agency.

Working with the National Forest Reservation Commission, a Weeks Act program that enabled the government to purchase denuded land from willing sellers to repair, Ashe arrived in Texas at the request of the Texas State Board of Water Engineers to speak with the agency about the potential of flood control and hydroelectric power on the Colorado and Guadalupe Rivers, and whether federal management of these rivers' headwaters might be possible.

Upon arrival, Ashe found similarities between Texas waterway behaviors and those he studied along the Appalachian Mountains.

"The streams of Texas are erratic and exhibit the same character of flow as those at the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama due to the enormous heavy rainfall at irregular intervals and rapid run-off on account of steep slopes," Ashe told the San Antonio Express in a September 16, 1921 interview.

The human impact worsened the region's natural geographical tendencies for rapid rainfall runoff, with Ashe noting "greed for land" had pushed levees and other flood-control infrastructure so close to streambeds that it robbed the floodplains' ability to act as a sponge, thereby intensifying downstream damage.

Upstream, the problem was even worse as excessive grazing had compacted the ground and stripped it of vegetation so that even modest storms could generate major floods. The problem had intensified dramatically during World War

I when government incentives and skyrocketing prices for wool and mohair led to massive increases in livestock populations across the Hill Country.

Kerr County, known as the mohair capital of the United States, was particularly affected. Wool prices nearly doubled during the war years, rising from pre-war prices of \$0.25-\$0.30 per pound to \$0.40-\$0.50 per pound for common wool and \$0.50-\$0.80 per pound for merino wool. Mohair, prized for its elasticity and crease resistance in military and luxury textile applications, commanded even higher prices as a luxury fiber. The economic incentive to maximize livestock was overwhelming.

The earliest example of the Hill Country's degraded landscape may have come in 1900 when a dam failed in Austin. In the 1890s, a University of Texas engineering professor had already calculated the reservoir had lost more than 40% of water capacity due to silting.

The immediate response to the floods of 1921 was calls for more infrastructure, and that flood would lead to the construction of the Olmos Dam. However, Ashe was blunt in his prediction that the dam alone would not solve San Antonio's flood problem, or other flooding of the Hill Country.

He condemned the developments that "now infringe too closely upon stream channels" and advocated for strong policies to address the underlying cause of the flood — soil erosion.

This required management at a landscape scale as had been demonstrated through the Forest Service's watershed management through protection of the forest cover. To achieve this, he advised reforestation of heavily logged areas and vigorous regulation of overworked rangelands.

Despite the front-page coverage of Ashe's warnings in the San Antonio Express, his recommendations had little immediate impact on public policy in Central Texas. The focus remained on dam construction for the security of cities rather than watershed management. The creation of

THOSE LOST ON JULY 4, 2025

CAROL ANDREWS, 65, ATHENS, TEXAS ❖ JOYCE BADON, 21, BEAUMONT, TEXAS ❖ MARY BAKER, 8, BEAUMONT, TEXAS ❖ LINDA BASON, 78, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ ANNA BELLOWS, 8, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ LILA BONNER, 9, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ ROBERT BRAKE, 67, ABILENE, TEXAS ❖ JONI BRAKE, 66, ABILENE, TEXAS ❖ ELIZABETH BRYAN, 61, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ JAMES BRYAN, 62, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ JOHN BURGESS, 39, LIBERTY, TEXAS ❖ JULIA BURGESS, 39, LIBERTY, TEXAS ❖ JAMES BURGESS, 1, LIBERTY, TEXAS ❖ JOHN BURGESS V, 5, LIBERTY, TEXAS ❖ ELLA CAHILL, 21, BEAUMONT, TEXAS ❖ BRIAN CARPENTER, 36, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ BLAKE CARPENTER, 3, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ CHLOE CHILDRESS, 18, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ MARTHA CRAWFORD, 61, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ MICHELLE CROSSLAND, 50, MIDLAND, TEXAS ❖ CODY CROSSLAND, 45, MIDLAND, TEXAS ❖ MOLLY DEWITT, 9, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ LUCY DILLON, 8, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ RONALD DUKE, 80, HUNT, TEXAS ❖ RICHARD DUNLAP, 73, ANDREWS, TEXAS ❖ JOSEPHINE DUNLAP, 68, ANDREWS, TEXAS ❖ KATHERYN EADS, 52, CIBOLO, TEXAS ❖ RICHARD EASTLAND, 70, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ STEVE EDWARDS, 72, SAN ANGELO, TEXAS ❖ PENNY FERGUSON, 76, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ WILLIAM FERGUSON III, 82, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ KATHERINE FERRUZZO, 19, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ JAYDA FLOYD, 22, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ MIRIAM FRIZZELL, 72, ABILENE, TEXAS ❖ ELLEN GETTEN, 9, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ SALLY GRAVES, 91, INGRAM, TEXAS ❖ HADLEY HANNA, 8, UNIVERSITY PARK, TEXAS ❖ BLAIR HARBER, 13, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ WILLIAM HARBER, 76, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ CHARLENE HARBER, 74, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ BROOKE HARBER, 11, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ JOSEPHINE HARDIN, 28, WESTON, FLORIDA ❖ ALYSON HARDIN, 64, WESTON, FLORIDA ❖ AIDAN HEARTFIELD, 22, BEAUMONT, TEXAS ❖ DEANA HILLOCK, 57, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ VIRGINIA HOLLIS, 8, BELLVILLE, TEXAS ❖ CHARLOTTE HUFF, 55, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ JANIE HUNT, 9, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ WILLIAM HUSTON, 61, SHERMAN, TEXAS ❖ AL IORIO, 66, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ MARY KATE JACOBE, 8, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ MADELYN JEFFREY, 11, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ PENELOPE JEFFREY, 70, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ EMLYN JEFFREY, 70, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ ROBERT KAMIN, 50, HUMBLE, TEXAS ❖ MELISSA KAMIN, 45, HUMBLE, TEXAS ❖ DEE ANN KNETSCH, 66, CANYON LAKE, TEXAS ❖ GARY KNETSCH, 60, CANYON LAKE, TEXAS ❖ LAINEY LANDRY, 9, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ REBECCA LAWRENCE, 8, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ HANNA LAWRENCE, 8, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ KELLYANNE LYTAL, 8, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ TIANNA MABEY, 66, OVILLA, TEXAS ❖ CLAIRE MANCHACA, 21, CONROE, TEXAS ❖ SARAH MARSH, 8, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA ❖ BAILEY MARTIN, 23, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ AMANDA MARTIN, 44, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ ROBERT MARTIN, 46, ODESSA, TEXAS ❖ LINNIE MCCOWN, 8, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ BLAKELY MCCRORY, 8, BELLAIRE, TEXAS ❖ CLAYTON MEADOWS, 29, HAMILTON, TEXAS ❖ HARLEY MOELLER, 6, NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS ❖ MEGAN MOELLER, 33, NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS ❖ JAKE MOELLER, 38, NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS ❖ VIRGINIA NAYLOR, 8, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ JOSE OLVERA, 70, HUNT, TEXAS ❖ ALICIA OLVERA, 67, HUNT, TEXAS ❖ RICHARD PAGARD, 71, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ CLAY PARISHER, 1, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ ELOISE PECK, 8, DALLAS, TEXAS ❖ BRADLEY PERRY, 49, LEAGUE CITY, TEXAS ❖ ABBY POHL, 8, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ JANE RAGSDALE, 68, HUNT, TEXAS ❖ JOEL RAMOS, 43, MIDLAND, TEXAS ❖ TASHA RAMOS, 48, MIDLAND, TEXAS ❖ KYNDALL RAMOS, 17, MIDLAND, TEXAS ❖ TANYA RAMSEY, 46, LEWISVILLE, TEXAS ❖ CARLOS ROMERO, 1, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ LEONARDO ROMERO, 42, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ JAMES RUSHING, 64, SULPHUR SPRINGS, TEXAS ❖ CYNTHIA RUSHING, 53, SULPHUR SPRINGS, TEXAS ❖ JULIAN RYAN, 27, INGRAM, TEXAS ❖ ILEANA SANTANA, 66, MOBILE, ALABAMA ❖ MILA SANTANA, 5, WICHITA FALLS, TEXAS ❖ CAMILLE SANTANA, 38, WICHITA FALLS, TEXAS ❖ EDDIE SANTANA NEGRON SR., 69, MOBILE, ALABAMA ❖ MOLLIE SCHAFFER, 76, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ SHON SCOTT, 53, ANDREWS, TEXAS ❖ MARGARET SHEEDY, 8, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ ALVARO SIGALA MIRANDA, 69, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS ❖ RENEE SMAJSTRLA, 8, INGRAM, TEXAS ❖ MICHAEL SMITH, 67, DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS ❖ PAMELA SMITH, 64, DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS ❖ MARY STEVENS, 8, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖ GRETA TORANZO, 10, HOUSTON, TEXAS ❖ NATALIA VENZOR, 24, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ ROY WALKER, 63, HUNT, TEXAS ❖ MARK WALKER, 51, KENTFIELD, CALIFORNIA ❖ JOHN WALKER, 14, KENTFIELD, CALIFORNIA ❖ SARA WALKER, 50, KENTFIELD, CALIFORNIA ❖ JEFFREY WILSON, 55, COLDSRING, TEXAS ❖ AMBER WILSON, 45, COLDSRING, TEXAS ❖ SHILOH WILSON, 12, COLDSRING, TEXAS ❖ REECE ZUNKER, 36, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ HOLLAND ZUNKER, 3, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ LYLE ZUNKER, 7, KERRVILLE, TEXAS ❖ PAULA ZUNKER, 35, KERRVILLE, TEXAS



THOSE WHO REMAIN MISSING

❖ JEFFREY RAMSEY, 63, LEWISVILLE, TEXAS ❖
❖ CECILIA STEWARD, 8, AUSTIN, TEXAS ❖



new national forests on the Edwards Plateau, which Ashe advocated, never materialized as the Texas legislature did not authorize it.

Perhaps the most lasting contribution from Ashe's work was not his policy recommendations but his identification of the region's most distinctive trees—the evergreen whose unique characteristics he was credited with first identifying. Known locally as “cedar,” it is actually Ashe juniper, which bears the botanical name *Juniperus ashei* in his honor.

A WARNING IGNORED

Five years after Ashe's front-page interview in the San Antonio Express, University of Texas coach “Doc” Stewart established Camp Mystic in 1926. The site he chose sat in a location that embodied Ashe's warnings: nestled at the confluence of the Guadalupe River, Cypress Creek, and Edmundson Creek—exactly the kind of gorge and floodplain location where Ashe had urged protection of forest cover rather than development.

There were no flood discussions. The site was chosen for its natural beauty and river access, assets that

made it ideal for a summer camp. The economic pressure to use the land was building—this was still the era when the Hill Country seemed capable of supporting unlimited growth, when ranchers were running thousands of head of livestock and the environmental consequences were only beginning to show.

From 1926 until 1942, Camp Mystic ran one eight-week session each summer. In 1932, heavy rainfall from June 30 to July 2 triggered flash floods in Hunt and downriver. According to the book, *Flash Floods in Texas*, by Jonathan Burnett, the flooding washed cabins away at Camp Mystic, Camp Rio Vista and Camp Stewart, and damaged the dining halls at Camp Waldemar.

A U.S. Department of the Interior geological survey report of major Texas floods of 1936 includes a description of the 1932 floods as well, described as 35 inches of rain that fell during 36 hours over the upper Guadalupe River Basin, west of Kerrville. Concern for the boys and girls camps is also described: “There was much apprehension for the safety of the people in these camps, especially for the younger boys and girls, but fortunately

all were safe. The fact that the flood occurred in the day rather than at night no doubt accounts for no loss of life in the camps.”

After World War II, Camp Mystic expanded to two sessions, and in 1983 added a third two-week session. Another flood struck in 1978, four years after Richard and Willetta Eastland began working at the camp. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Floods in Central Texas, August 1978, the remnants of tropical storm Amelia produced intense rainfall, leading to flash flooding in Central Texas that led to 33 deaths. On August 2, a storm cell just west of Kerrville produced flash flooding on the Guadalupe River and its tributaries. The most severe flooding occurred in Comfort but flooding began in Hunt where floodwaters rose nearly to the top of the dining hall stairs, causing more than 100 campers to relocate to higher ground. No campers were injured.

Again in 1987, flash flooding resulted from heavy rainfall in the upper headwaters of the Guadalupe River basin, with as much as 11.50 inches of rain occurring 9 miles west of Hunt, according to the National Weather

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Service. Flash flooding traveled down the river in the morning hours of July 17, eventually rising 29 feet and cresting at 31.50 feet in Comfort. Upstream in Kerrville and Hunt, the river crested at its second highest on record at the time. At Camp Mystic, campers were evacuated from the Bubble Inn cabin, along with hundreds of other evacuations along the river.

Ten children died in Comfort while evacuating from the Pot O' Gold Ranch. The church bus and van carrying campers became stranded at a low-water crossing when the wave of water hit, sweeping the vehicles and campers into raging floodwaters. In the end, 10 teenagers died and 33 others were injured. This is an example of the perils of evacuating during a flash flood event.

Despite some flooding that caused some damage and a few evacuations to higher ground, Camp Mystic managed nearly 100 years of operation relatively unscathed, despite its flood prone location.

Generations of girls grew up swimming in the Guadalupe, hiking along Cypress Creek, and sleeping in cabins along the riverbank.

The location that Ashe might have identified as vulnerable in 1921 may have seemed an exception as decades passed, or at least, flooding that did occur was manageable as long as operations stayed vigilant. The camp's longevity appeared to validate the choice. By 2025, Camp Mystic had become a cherished institution, its riverfront location not a warning sign but a selling point.

Until July 4, 2025, when more than 745,000 gallons of water per second converged on the site from three directions—the Guadalupe River carrying 624,000 gallons per second, Cypress Creek contributing 109,700 gallons per second, and Edmundson Creek adding 11,438 gallons per second. In 30 minutes, the Guadalupe River alone moved 1.12 billion gallons past the camp—enough water to fill 56,160 swimming pools.

The century of safety had made Ashe's warning seem quaint. Until it didn't.

THE COLLAPSE AT THE HEADWATERS

While Camp Mystic flourished, the land upstream was failing. The degrad-

ed conditions Ashe had observed in 1921 continued to worsen throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and by the 1940s, the consequences became undeniable.

On September 25, 2025, three months after the flood, wildlife biologist Ryan Reitz stood before the Kerr County Historical Commission with a presentation about the land where the flood began. Reitz, the project leader of the state-owned Kerr Wildlife Management Area (WMA), had come to discuss 75 years of ecosystem management at the 6,493-acre property located at the headwaters of the North Fork of the Guadalupe River. His presentation traced a century-long arc of environmental degradation and painstaking restoration — a story that illuminated how dramatically the watershed had changed since settlement.

He didn't mention the July 4 flood. He didn't need to.

Prior to 1840, Reitz explained, the region was an oak savanna, primarily grassland with scattered trees, and was home to buffalo, antelope, and prairie chickens. Early settlers described a landscape of abundance. In 1897, Sam Tomlin reported the area "was an open grassland" with "cattle get[ting] fat"

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in grasses that stood 4 to 6 feet tall. Cedar growth was so limited that in 1882, Thomas Moore expressed urgency about constructing a cedar log home because “in six months we’re going to run out of that cedar.”

By the late 1800s, the region was described as a livestock “paradise” for stocking and growing animals. The sensitive ecosystem of the Edwards Plateau seemed capable of supporting unlimited growth.

It wasn’t.

The massive increase in livestock began to overwhelm the land. By 1924, owner Robert Real was running around 5,000 head of cattle, sheep, and goats in the area that would become the WMA—right at the peak of the wartime economic boom that Ashe had witnessed. The economic incentives were powerful, and the consequences were building.

But as early as the 1920s, Reitz said, things started to “change pretty dramatically” as high numbers of livestock consumed the forage. Quotes from the era described people who “failed to succeed in the ranching business” and observed that “tall bunch grasses were becoming greatly reduced.”

When the state of Texas purchased

the property in 1950 to establish the wildlife management area, the livestock industry was no longer profitable. Bill Armstrong, associated with the WMA, would later describe it as “a well-used piece of land”—a Texas understatement for devastated.

The land that had been an oak savanna with four to six foot tall grasses was now compacted, eroded, and overrun with cedar. The natural sponge that had absorbed rainfall for millennia had been compressed into hardpan that shed water like concrete. This was the condition of the land at the headwaters of the Guadalupe River—the land onto which estimates of 10-12 inches of rain would fall in just a few hours.

THE LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

The WMA’s founding philosophy, Reitz emphasized, was understanding that ecosystems are “not only more complex than we think, they’re more complex than we can think.”

The history of heavy livestock grazing and simultaneous suppression of natural wildfires had left land managers in the 1950s and 1960s “dealing with the product of their management

system.” The most notable impact was widespread encroachment of Ashe juniper—the native cedar that had been so scarce in 1882. Because “nothing really likes to eat it” and fires had been suppressed, it flourished across the degraded landscape.

The woody plant encroachment has altered many rangelands, creating a cycle of juniper encroachment and then dieback.

The WMA began implementing strategies to reverse the deterioration, but recovery was measured in decades, including introducing fire, simulating a grazing system similar to how the bison used the area and keeping the deer out.

These changes led to significant improvements in land health over subsequent decades, evidenced by increases in browse, grass, and for plant species, which in turn improved the health and quality of the whitetail deer population.

But the WMA represents just 6,493 acres of careful, science-based restoration. The Guadalupe River watershed encompasses more than 3,000 square miles. If it took 75 years of intensive management to restore a small fraction of the watershed, the condition of



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the rest remains an open question.

MODERN SOLUTIONS TO HISTORIC PROBLEMS

Fast forward to today, and a century after Ashe's warnings, Project Bedrock—an Austin-based nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching landowners nature-based solutions to managing healthy vegetation within Texas karst country—is working in partnership with The Watershed Association and with advisors from Texas A&M, Texas State University and a variety of government and nonprofit organizations to promote these solutions and educate the public.

Project Bedrock's mission focuses on two basic nature-based solutions: The first is to use dense vegetation and/or constructed hillside terraces built on contour, and the second is to open up sinkholes and caves. The nonprofit's collective of experts are working to share karst country best management practices with landowners and government agencies. There is pushback against some of these suggestions, including from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which argues that opening sinkholes could compromise groundwater quality.

"Well-vegetated hillsides can serve as the first line of defense to help slow rains," said Elizabeth McGreevy, the nonprofit's founder and program director. Specializing in vegetation management, she stressed that vegetation should form a dense, continuous blanket. Yet many watershed areas, including the one above Camp Mystic, show degraded conditions.

"Many landowners continue to clearcut and overgraze these lands because they have not received proper guidance on karst country best management practices," McGreevy said. "They have been taught by agencies, the media, real estate agents, and their neighbors, that woody vegetation, especially mountain cedars, are bad. So they clear hillsides with shallow soils, exposing them to our hot sun and flooding rains."

The irony is striking: The very tree that bears Ashe's name—*Juniperus ashei*—has become the scapegoat, blamed for problems that actually stem from the broader loss of diverse vegetation cover and healthy soil structure that Ashe warned about. The cedar is native and, in a balanced ecosystem, plays an important role. But in degraded landscapes where competi-

tive grasses and other vegetation have been eliminated, it becomes dominant, not because it's invasive, but because it's one of the few species that can survive on compacted, eroded soil.

Karst soils are very shallow, but when left exposed, they erode and develop a hard crust that reduces infiltration. Despite this, many watersheds, including those around the Guadalupe River, were cleared of their dense, woody vegetation between 1995 and 2005, McGreevy said, adding that for decades, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) paid landowners to clear their cedars.

The Wilcox Ecohydrology Lab at Texas A&M proved that significantly more rain infiltrates beneath woody vegetation than under the sparse grass now commonly found on watershed hillsides, she added. "Their research also proved 20 times more subsurface waters move under the trees than under the grass."

Because the woody plant encroachment of cedar has altered rangelands, creating a cycle of juniper encroachment and then dieback, the Wilcox Ecohydrology Lab also studied the impact of dead trees on soils. Published in November, the study found



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even 10 years after death, juniper trees' positive influence on soil properties continues.

THE HIDDEN INFRASTRUCTURE: SINKHOLES AND CAVES

Nico Hauwert, a former city of Austin geohydrologist, emphasized two ways ranching and historic land management practices have increased flooding potential is by plugging sinkholes and widespread clearing to make grassland for livestock.

"Every ranch I've assessed on the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone (and some further west on other limestones) had stock ponds created from plugging the bottom of sinkholes (sky-light entrances into caves)," Hauwert said. "These stockponds in sinkholes are like plugging a bathtub, but some of the stockponds I've unplugged drain 200 acres or more. No agency that I know seems to be active in unplugging the thousands of plugged sinkholes that no longer support livestock."

The practice was widespread. Every sinkhole plugged was one less natural drainage point for the watershed, one more place where water that should infiltrate underground instead runs off the surface and into streams and rivers. The cumulative effect across thousands of plugged features fundamentally altered the hydrology of the Hill Country.

Caves were also filled to dispose of trash, to eliminate fall hazards, and for urbanization. Many were later converted to water quality ponds for urban areas, and San Antonio's River Walk is a well-known example of an urban flood control solution built as a concrete floodway.

The Texas Speleological Survey (TSS), serving as the official National Speleological Society study group since 1961, maintains a comprehensive karst inventory for Texas. Their 2020

database documents 227 karst features in Kerr County, including 108 caves, 15 sinkholes/cavities, 103 springs, and 1 other/undefined feature.

No public data could be found on plugged karst features in the area, but the practice is common throughout the Hill Country.

Hauwert shared the example of a landowner who plugged a large cave in the Blanco River at the mouth of Halifax Creek in the 1890s. This action was taken to better power a mill located in Kyle by increasing the river's flow.

"While the historic management practice was to keep water at the surface in cavernous areas, now that is not ideal practice," he said. "Instead, having water infiltrate into the soil reservoir and aquifer is best for many reasons."

Additionally, Hauwert reiterated the fallout that resulted from widespread tree clearing of the 1800s and beyond, pointing out that studies have repeatedly shown that trees greatly reduce runoff and flooding as their roots channel water underground, they help keep soil in place and during wet periods, they create their own reservoirs and they help delay rain from reaching the ground, slowing runoff and erosion.

THE COMPOUND EFFECT

What emerges from this history is a picture of compounded vulnerabilities. In an area characterized by extreme weather, including sudden and heavy rainfall, with a karst terrain of thin soils, steep slopes and porous limestone, more than a century of human activity has additionally degraded the natural mechanisms that help mitigate flash flooding.

Decades of overgrazing removed many of the tall grasses that once absorbed rainfall, cutting and clearing eliminated deep root systems that helped channel waters underground, along with sinkholes and other karst

features that were plugged over the years. The practices surely seem beneficial at the time — maximize livestock to capitalize on wartime prices, clear cedar to improve grazing, suppress fires to protect property — but over time, the damage may have outweighed the benefits if the cumulative effect transforms the landscape from a sponge to a chute.

Ashe saw it happening in 1921 and warned about it. The ranching collapse of the 1940s proved him right. The Wildlife Management Area 75-year restoration effort shows that recovery is possible, but requires generations of intensive, science-based management.

And on July 4, 2025, 104 years after Ashe's warning and 99 years after Camp Mystic was established in the location he might have urged be protected, the accumulated consequences of a century of choices converged in less than an hour.

The experts are clear: Better land management wouldn't have stopped the July 4 flood. The rainfall was too extreme, too concentrated, too overwhelming. However, the idea that the storm and flash flooding that followed was unprecedented is a dangerous one. The storm itself wasn't uncommon to the area. It simply fell in a terrible location. But even the location has seen similar storm systems.

Ultimately, the land, vegetation, hydrogeology, and meteorology experts agree on one thing: Planning and preparation are ultimately what saves the most lives. By acknowledging that the landscape's capacity to absorb water had been fundamentally compromised by decades of decisions that prioritized short-term economic use over long-term ecological health, landowners and lawmakers can focus on changing the patterns of the past.

The question now is whether another century will pass before those lessons are fully learned.



CHAPTER 4

THE 911 LOGS SHOW THAT KERR COUNTY RESPONDED

During legislative hearings examining the July 4 flood, state lawmakers focused their criticism on three elected officials who were absent during the disaster's critical first hours.

"The three guys in Kerr County who were responsible for sounding the alarm were effectively unavailable," Rep. Ann Johnson said, aiming her criticism at County Judge Rob Kelly, Sheriff Larry Leitha and Emergency Management Coordinator William "Dub" Thomas.

The narrative that emerged from two days of testimony painted Kerr County officials as asleep while residents drowned.

Kelly was at his Lake Travis lake house. Thomas was home sick. Leitha wasn't notified until 4:20 a.m., long after the disaster began. Yet, these details and those of the Kerrville Police Department's 911 call logs, through which all Kerr County emergency calls are routed, weren't discussed.

But the 911 call logs, legal filings, witness accounts and flood modeling data obtained by The Lead now reveal a more complex story — one that shows Kerr County's professional emergency apparatus responding from the disaster's first moments, even as the scale of the catastrophe outpaced any possible response.

Between 1:14 a.m., when the National Weather Service issued its first flash flood warning, and 5:01 a.m., when Kerr County finally issued its Code Red alert — a gap of 3 hours and 47 minutes — 119 people died in a disaster that unfolded faster than warnings could be issued, faster than rescuers could respond, faster than anyone could fully comprehend.

The National Weather Service issued its first flood watch for Kerr County at 1:18 p.m. on July 3, predicting 1 to 3 inches of rain with isolated amounts reaching 5 to 7 inches through Friday morning.

At Camp Mystic in Hunt, counselors and campers settled in for the night, and at River Inn resort nearby, Karen Blackburn and her two daughters prepared for bed.

"I went to bed and the river sounded normal," Blackburn later recalled. "It was just the gentle sound it always makes."

By 11:05 p.m., weather radar showed heavy precipitation developing over the watershed above Camp Mystic. Red and orange colors on Doppler images indicated intense rainfall rates building upstream. The storm had parked itself over the Divide, west of River Inn, and pummeled the region with rain, where there was no way to measure the amount of rainfall or the river's flow.

FIRST WARNINGS

KABB meteorologist Alex Garcia and his colleagues across San Antonio television stations began raising red flags 2.5 days before the flood.

"The urgency was already up there," Garcia later recalled. "We had designated this as an important alert day for us, an

alert day for the Hill Country, and that was two days out, 2.5 days out. We had kind of raised the red flag on air and online saying that you know, you gotta pay attention. This one's looking like a really big rain event."

The meteorological community saw it coming. What they couldn't see was exactly where it would hit hardest.

JAM Radio owner Justin McClure's organization began broadcasting Emergency Alert System warnings at midnight on July 3. Between JAM Radio and the Ranch Radio group, stations sent out 24 or 25 alerts that evening and into the early morning hours.

At 1:14 a.m. on July 4, the NWS for Austin/San Antonio issued a flash flood warning for Northwestern Bander County and Central Kerr County. Here's an excerpt:

"At 1:14 AM CDT, Doppler radar indicated thunderstorms producing heavy rain across the warned area. Between 1 and 2 inches of rain have fallen. The expected rainfall rate is 2 to 3 inches in 1 hour. Additional rainfall amounts of 1 to 3 inches are possible in the warned area. Flash flooding is ongoing or expected to begin shortly. HAZARD...Life threatening flash flooding. Thunder-

storms producing flash flooding.

SOURCE...Radar. IMPACT...Life threatening flash flooding of creeks and streams, urban areas, highways, streets and underpasses.* Some locations that will experience flash flooding include... Kerrville, Ingram, Hunt, Waltonia, Kerr Wildlife Management Area and Lost Maples State Natural Area.

FLASH FLOOD...RADAR INDICATED

FLASH FLOOD DAMAGE THREAT... CONSIDERABLE

EXPECTED RAINFALL RATE...2-3 INCHES IN 1 HOUR"

The "considerable" tag means NWS considers the warning a high-damage threat and it automatically triggers Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) on mobile devices in the area

It is the 1:14 a.m. alert where forecasters used the phrase "life-threatening flash flooding" for the first time. However, in an area with limited cell phone coverage and in the middle of the night, it's unclear how many actually heeded those warnings.

The failure of the emergency alert system during the flood, particularly for residents downriver from Hunt, remains a key unknown. The system

designed to reach people via phone is operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In the flood's aftermath, confusion arose between alerts from the National Weather Service (NWS) and FEMA, and those from the county's CODE RED, which is an optional text-message system, not a broadcast tool.

The NWS uses WarnGen software to manually draw polygon boundaries for flood warnings. The 1:14 a.m. warning included Kerrville, Ingram, Hunt, Waltonia, the Kerr Wildlife Management Area and Lost Maples State Natural Area. The "flash flood damage threat... considerable" tag automatically triggers broader alert distribution.

When the NWS tags a flash flood warning as "considerable" or "catastrophic," FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) immediately processes and distributes it through multiple channels. IPAWS automatically pushes the warning to the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system, which uses the polygon coordinates to determine which cell towers broadcast alerts. Towers with coverage overlapping the polygon send alerts to all connected phones, often resulting in over-warning.

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Emergency Management Coordinator Dub Thomas confirmed the NWS automatically issued more than a dozen IPAWS-triggered alerts during the July 4 incident. He believed this provided sufficient coverage and led him not to manually issue additional alerts.

However, the automatic system failed to reach many residents, particularly in Hunt, likely due to severe infrastructure limitations. Hunt has only one cell tower in roughly 79 square miles of limited cellular coverage, and the Hill Country's terrain creates dead zones.

The WEA system requires phones to be actively connected to a participating carrier's cell tower. In Hunt and surrounding rural areas, service was minimal. Even phones that appeared to have service may have been too weakly connected to receive the broadcast signals, especially as heavy storms degraded already-marginal coverage. The infrastructure gap meant that despite the NWS issuing technically correct warnings that triggered IPAWS, the alerts could not reach phones where cell towers were absent, signals were blocked by terrain, or service was disrupted by weather.

In his July 31 testimony, Thomas said he did not manually alert residents through IPAWS because the NWS had already triggered over a dozen automatic alerts. Both Kerr County and Kerrville have access to IPAWS. These NWS alerts provided a similar forecast, warning people to "be aware of the potential for isolated flash flooding" and to "anticipate rain in the range of between 1 and 3 in, possibly as much as 7 in." Thomas emphasized that anyone whose phone was on and had not disabled government alerts would have received them.

Hundreds of residents shared messages with The Lead,



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Frequently lost in the narrative of July 4 is what happened at the HTR TX Campground in Ingram, where more than 30 died.





Helicopters were a persistent presence in Kerr County in the hours and days after the flood. On the opposing page, the instructions to Camp Mystic counselors about handling a flood.

showing that some received all of the IPAWS alerts, while others received none. Camp La Junta's owners testified they received no alerts at their camp in Hunt.

One challenge of flash flood emergencies is their deceptive nature. The real danger lies unseen upstream.

Meteorologist Alan Gerard referenced the actions of Richard and Edward Eastland at Camp Mystic, as described by Edward Eastland in a New York Times interview.

"He was saying they were looking at their apps, trying to see when the rain was going to quit and they were looking at their rain gauge," Gerard said. "That's not really helpful. They were trying to be meteorologists and hydrologists and predict what was going to happen rather than reacting to what was happening."

This fundamental misunderstanding of flash flood dynamics proves particularly dangerous in the Hill Country terrain where water accumulates rapidly from upstream sources. Local rainfall provides little indication of approaching danger when the real threat originates miles away.

"That's part of the complicating factor with flash flooding: It's not what's happening at your spot; it's what is happening upriver," Gerard stressed.

At Camp Mystic, the timeline of what happened next is documented in legal filings and New York Times reporting, though some details remain in dispute.

Around 1:45 a.m., Dick Eastland radioed his son Edward: "We've gotten about two inches of rain in the last

hour and we need to move the water-front equipment," according to Edward's account to The New York Times. Grounds crew began pulling smaller canoes to higher ground near cabins.

Between 2:10 and 2:20 a.m., counselors from Bug House, the cabin closest to the river, ran to the office and reported water coming into their cabin. Legal filings say they were told to return to the cabin and shelter in place. Edward Eastland told The New York Times he and his father drove the counselors back and "tried to reassure them" ... "at that point, it was a normal flood."

At 2:21 a.m., Edward texted his wife: "Bubble Gum Creek is bad. Look at the radar."

She responded: "Looks short tho" — believing the heavy rain would pass soon.

Less than two hours later, at 4:09 a.m., Edward Eastland's Apple Watch would register as submerged in water.

Around 2:25 a.m., according to legal filings, Edward received a frantic radio call from gatekeeper Francis Blackwell saying the gatehouse was filling with water. The call cut off as she was washed away. She survived by clinging to a tree.

At 2:57 a.m., Glenn Juenke, the night watchman at Camp Mystic, called Hunt Volunteer Fire Department Chief Lee Pool directly, bypassing the 911 system. Juenke asked if Pool was up. Pool got up and started to respond. The call was ultimately cut off.

This direct call — 37 minutes before the first flood call would hit Kerrville's 911 center — suggests locals knew the

formal system might be too slow or already understood the magnitude of what was developing.

THE SYSTEM ACTIVATES

At 3:30 a.m., Kerrville Police Sgt. Ben Ledesma was checking low-water crossings in the city, though officials didn't yet understand the scope of the situation in West Kerr County, especially in areas west of River Inn. About 30 minutes earlier, Kerrville City Manager Dalton Rice was running along the Kerrville River Trail in Louise Hays Park and observed a relatively calm river.

At 3:33 a.m., Kerrville Police Department dispatcher Riley Gordon logged the first emergency call for water rescue teams to position in the Ingram and Hunt areas.

One minute later, at 3:34 a.m., the first desperate flood calls began hitting Kerrville's 911 center.

At 3:34 a.m., a caller reported: "4 PEOPLE ALL ON THE ROOF."

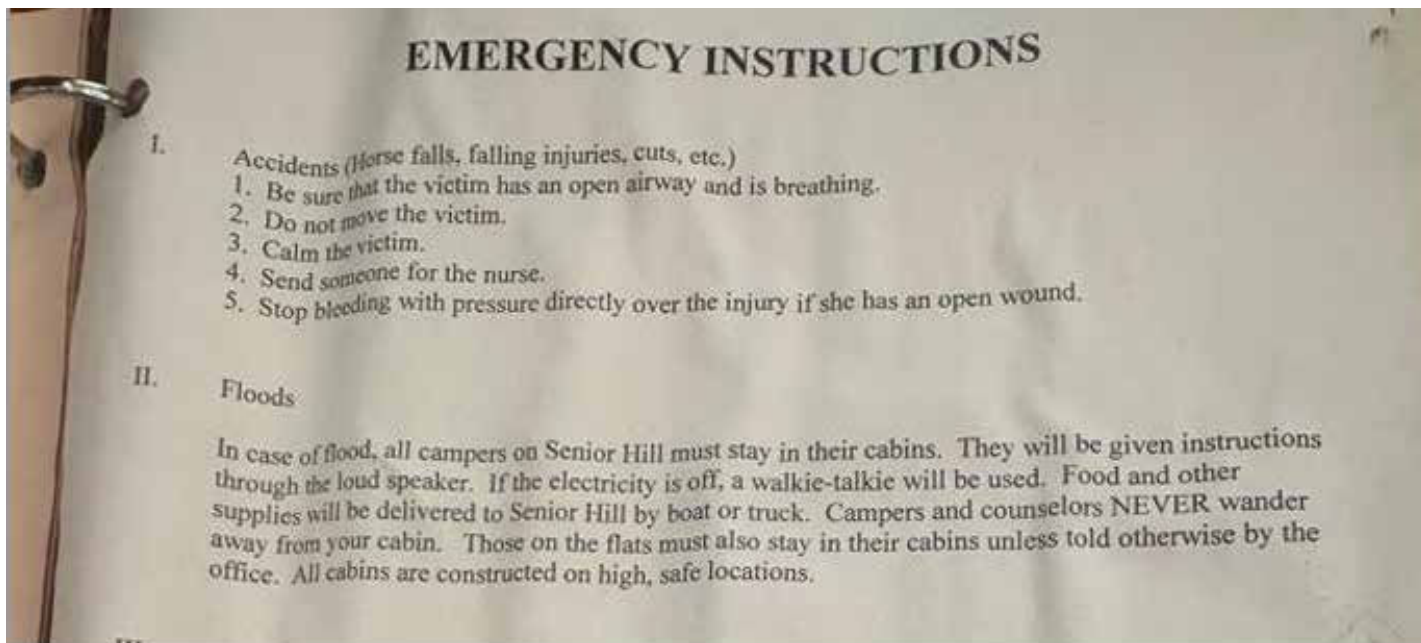
Three seconds later: "CARS ARE GONE AND HOUSE IS FLOODED."

Another call: "5 PEOPLE."

The entries come in fragments, the typos and abbreviations revealing dispatchers typing as fast as they could while phones rang continuously.

At River Inn Resort, flooding had reached crisis levels. Guests attempted desperate evacuations, but the deafening thunderstorm that had raged through the night continued to drown out the sound of catastrophic rainfall, preventing people from fully grasping the severity of their situation.

At 3:35 a.m., Mollie Schaffer became



the first confirmed victim of the flood. She and her husband were attempting to reach higher ground near River Inn in their BMW SUV when the vehicle was swept away by rising waters. Her husband, who was the passenger, escaped. Schaffer had been following behind Karen Blackburn, who turned around when she encountered rapid floodwaters blocking both Highway 39 and the entrance to Marymeade Drive, which would have been access to higher ground. The only other exit to the east was also blocked by flooding from Buffalo Creek. There was no escape route left.

Between Camp Mystic and River Inn, Valerie Tucker and her husband made a successful dash across Highway 39 to reach higher ground in the Panther Creek area. Their escape represented one of the final opportunities to cross the highway before flood waters made the route completely impassable.

Tucker's home sat 36 feet above the normal Guadalupe River level and was built on piers, elevated above the floodway. It had never flooded in previous Hill Country storms. The water moved the home.

At 3:40 a.m., Riley Gordon, a city of Kerrville dispatcher working for Police Chief Chris McCall, made a critical decision that would save lives. Gordon contacted the South Texas Regional Advisory Council, activating mass casualty protocols that would alert trauma centers across 22 counties to prepare for an influx of patients. This action would have alerted Peterson Regional Medical Center to activate its response. No one from Peterson Health was questioned by the legislative inquiries, and the hospital wasn't

included in the initial Emergency Operations Center briefings.

At 3:40 a.m., the log reads: "STRAC CONTACTED."

Seconds later: "TASK FORCE TEAM IN AREA."

This single decision by a dispatcher — made without direction from any elected official, made based on professional training and the evidence of their own eyes as desperate calls flooded the system — meant that hospitals from San Antonio to the coast were mobilizing before the sun rose over Kerr County.

At Camp Mystic, evacuation was underway but complicated. Legal filings indicate counselors were told "by the camp" not to leave cabins, though Edward Eastland disputes this, telling *The New York Times* he never directed anyone to stay. The camp's emergency procedure for floods, as pictured in the lawsuit filings says:

"In case of flood, all campers on Senior Hill must stay in their cabins. They will be given instructions through the loud speaker. If the electricity is off, a walkie-talkie will be used. Food and other supplies will be delivered to Senior Hill by boat or truck. Campers and counselors NEVER wander away from your cabin. Those on the flats must also stay in their cabins unless told otherwise by the office. All cabins are constructed on high, safe locations. In case of flood, all campers on. The Eastlands were using vehicles, two pickups and an SUV, to evacuate girls to the Rec Hall on higher ground. Five cabins were evacuated. Six remained, including Twins I and II and Bubble Inn.

At 3:51 a.m., Dick Eastland's Apple Watch registered as submerged. He

had driven a Chevrolet Tahoe to Bubble Inn to evacuate the girls there.

At 3:53 a.m., Camp Mystic made what appears to be its first call to the county's 911 system, though this call does not appear in the Kerrville Police Department logs obtained by *The Lead*. The Kerr County Sheriff's Office has not provided its 911 logs despite public information requests.

PEAK SURGE

At 4:00 a.m., three primary water sources reached peak convergence at Camp Mystic, according to flood modeling completed by Kerr County Engineer Charlie Hastings.

The Guadalupe River, flowing past the camp's eastern boundary, carried 624,000 gallons per second. Cypress Creek, flanking the camp to the west, contributed 109,700 gallons per second. Edmundson Creek, flowing behind the camp, added 11,438 gallons per second.

Combined, more than 745,000 gallons of water per second surrounded Camp Mystic from three directions. Every small tributary along Highway 39 contributed 5 to 10 feet of rushing water to the main river channels.

In 30 minutes, the Guadalupe River alone moved 1.12 billion gallons past the camp — enough water to fill 56,160 swimming pools.

Dr. David Maidment, a hydrologist who analyzed the flood, identified a critical phenomenon that could have provided warning — if anyone had been measuring it.

At Comfort, more than 20 miles downstream to the east from Camp Mystic, a specialized radar stream gauge recorded something remarkable. The gauge measured both water

surface elevation and velocity — a rare capability that most stream gauges don't have.

At 9 a.m., the velocity at Comfort was 1.64 feet per second.

At 9:05 a.m., it was 1.56 feet per second.

At 9:10 a.m., the velocity spiked to 14.76 feet per second.

Maidment described this as the velocity going “right back straight up” — a “shock wave” or “velocity wave” that preceded the peak water elevation by 1 hour and 35 minutes.

“The nature of wave phenomena is that they do not travel at the same speed as the water they are in,” Maidment explained. A velocity wave can travel faster than the water itself, sending a measurable signal ahead of the rising flood.

THE PHYSICS OF DESTRUCTION

The numbers flowing past Camp Mystic and through the Guadalupe River valley weren't just statistics that ripped massive trees out by the roots, carried massive boulders and debris downriver and overwhelmed even well-built structures.

Water is extremely heavy. A single cubic foot is about the size of a basketball and weighs 62 pounds. During the flood's peak, 745,000 gallons of water per second surrounded Camp Mystic from three directions, totaling over 11 million pounds of water moving past every second.

The water's force grows quickly as its speed increases. When water speed doubles, its force quadruples. At 5 mph, moving water pushes against a vehicle or structure with about 20 pounds per square foot. At 10 mph, that force increases to 80 pounds per square foot—enough to move most vehicles.

The amount of water needed for danger and destruction is surprisingly small:

- Six inches of fast-moving water can knock an adult over. At this depth, the current combines with the water's lift to suddenly sweep a person off their feet.
- Twelve to 24 inches of moving water can sweep away most passenger cars, which can start floating in as little as 12 inches of water. Even large SUVs and trucks can be carried away by 24 to 36 inches of water.
- Three feet of water moving at 6.7 mph (3 meters per second) is strong enough to likely cause a typical residential wall to collapse, according to flood damage guidelines.

The Guadalupe River at Hunt wasn't

moving at 3 meters per second during the peak of the flood. It was moving faster. Much faster. Hastings described it as an inland tsunami.

At Comfort, 20 miles downstream, Maidment's analysis showed velocity spiking from 1.64 feet per second to 14.76 feet per second in just five minutes — a ninefold increase. That's 4.5 meters per second, or about 10 mph.

Upstream at Camp Mystic and River Inn, where the terrain was steeper and the flood wave more concentrated, velocities were almost certainly higher.

“The buoyancy happens — it's like a yes, no situation,” explained Upmanu Lall, Director of the Columbia Water Center and professor of engineering at Columbia University, describing how people lose their footing in floods. “If the water reaches a certain depth and it has some velocity, you're going to get knocked off your feet and floating simultaneously.”

The upward force of buoyancy isn't felt gradually — it overwhelms suddenly. A person standing in rising water may not realize they've lost the ability to maintain footing until they're already being swept away.

Valerie Tucker's home sat 36 feet above the normal river level, built on piers and elevated above the floodway. The water moved it anyway.

At Camp Mystic, counselors and campers faced water moving fast enough to pull them through cabin doors. At HTR RV Resort, campers were swept away in their trailers. At Casa Bonita, the Smith family was overtaken within minutes of calling 911.

The physics were unforgiving: 745,000 gallons per second from three directions, moving at velocities that exceeded the structural capacity of homes, vehicles, and human bodies to resist.

Between 1:14 a.m. and 5:01 a.m., thousands of people along the Guadalupe River encountered those forces.

At Casa Bonita, a cluster of cabins east of Camp Mystic, Madeline Smith called 911 at 4:00 a.m.

“CASA BONITIA - MADILINE SMITH - 832.858.5485 - 7 PEOPLE - 5 ADULTS 2 KIDS 3 DOGS,” the dispatcher typed.

Smith survived. Her parents, Mike and Pam Smith, and her brother-in-law Brian Carpenter and daughter Blake did not. The flood wave swept through Casa Bonita within minutes of her call.

At 4:03 a.m., the National Weather Service declared a flash flood emergency for South Central Kerr County, including Hunt. The alert stated: “PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS SITUA-

TION. SEEK HIGHER GROUND NOW!”

Forecasters reported that numerous low water crossings and the Guadalupe River at Hunt were flooding, with 4 to 10 inches of rain fallen. The flood damage threat was upgraded to “catastrophic.”

The declaration came 10 minutes after one lawsuit says Camp Mystic made an emergency call to the county. The National Weather Service's emergency call came after fatalities had occurred and many were being swept away, including children.

At 4:05 a.m., River Inn reported “35 people” trapped. Multiple entries in the logs reference the resort, where Blackburn and other survivors waited for daylight.

At Camp Mystic, the final tragedy was unfolding. At 3:35 a.m., Edward Eastland had walked to the Twins cabins, where girls begged to evacuate. According to legal filings, Edward told them to stay, saying water would “go back down.”

At 4:09 a.m., Edward Eastland's Apple Watch registered as submerged in water. Around this time, Edward and most campers were pulled through the Twins cabin door by the force of water. Edward and several girls clung to a tree and survived. Other campers were washed away.

Eleven campers from Twins I and Twins II died. One died inside the cabin. The others were swept away.

Dick Eastland and an unspecified number of campers were later found inside the Tahoe. According to a counselor's account, the vehicle was swept away after he loaded all Bubble Inn cabin occupants. All 13 campers and two counselors from Bubble Inn died.

Edward later told The New York Times that when his father parked at Bubble Inn, water was already at the top of the wheels. It rapidly rose to waist then neck-deep as he tried to load girls.

At the same time, Dick Eastland and his son Edward faced the full fury of the river, and another longtime and beloved camp director was experiencing the same catastrophe downstream. At Heart of the Hills Camp for Girls, Jane Ragsdale's home was crushed by a wave of water 40 feet tall, washing away most of the camp that sat in the flood plain. Ragsdale died in her home. Fortunately, the camp was not in session, and the counselors preparing for another summer session were able to scramble to higher ground.

At 4:19 a.m., someone from near Camp Mystic called Kerrville Police Department's 911 center — the first reference to the camp in the logs obtained



by The Lead.

The log notes: “12 girls and rest unk” and “washed away from their cabin.”

At 4:21 a.m., a water rescue team from Junction was already en route to the disaster area.

‘ALL HANDS ON DECK’

By the time the sun rose, Gordon and fellow dispatchers Amber Stark, Garrett Beam and Samantha Dixon were managing an overwhelming surge of calls. Additional staff including Karla Garcia, Haleigh Parks, Abigail Cox and Joshua Walker would join the effort throughout the day.

Between 4 and 5 a.m., Kerrville dispatchers handled 87 calls from the Hunt area — all desperate for help.

At HTR Texas Hill Country RV Resort, the situation was becoming catastrophic. Staff had allegedly learned about nearby evacuations due to flooding between 2:30 and 3:00 a.m., according to legal filings, but no action was taken to warn guests.

Sometime before 4:49 a.m., Jeffrey Ramsey made a final phone call to his children as waters rose around his camper. He told them he loved them “with fear of his imminent death,” according to the Ramsey family lawsuit.

Simultaneously, his wife, Tanya Ramsey, called her mother, who was staying in a cabin approximately 150 yards up the hill from the river. The warning call allowed Tanya’s mother and her brother to reach higher ground and survive.

Floodwaters surrounded and swept away the Ramsey’s camper.

At 4:35 a.m., someone from Camp La Junta called 911: “CAMP LA JUNTA CABINS GOING UNDER WATER MUL-



TILE ALREADY UNDER.”

At 4:42 a.m., another call from the camp: “CAMP LA JUNTA STRUCTURE COLLAPSED.”

At 4:45 a.m., the desperation in the dispatcher’s typing was evident: “CAMP JAJONTA 60 PEOPLE IN CABIN WATER COMING IN STUCK IN THE CABIN.”

The misspelling — “JAJONTA” instead of “La Junta” — reveals the chaos

dispatchers faced.

Despite their calls, Camp LaJunta was cut off. Pool, the Hunt fire chief, recalled the most challenging call he made was to his friend Scott Fineske, the La Junta owner, to tell him no one was coming to help.

At 4:47 a.m., a caller reported: “RIVER IS FILLING UP -- CAN HEAR PEOPLE SCREAMING ACROSS THE RIVER -- HTR CAMPGROUND.”



The 4:47 report was one of the first calls from HTR in the Kerrville logs.

Two minutes later, at 4:49 a.m., another caller reported: "PEOPLE IN A VEHICLE GETTING SWEEP AWAY I CANT TELL// CAN SEE IT ON AN ISLAND -- CAN HEAR SCREAMING I THINKS VEHICLE IS BY HOWDYS II SUV WHITE IN COLOR."

The double slashes, the fragments, the capitals — all evidence of dispatchers trying to capture horror in real time while the next call was already coming in.

At 4:49 a.m., HTR sent a text warning to guests. The lawsuit notes: "By the time the warning was issued, however, the floodwaters had risen to dangerous levels."

It was 3 hours and 35 minutes after the first National Weather Service flash flood warning. More than 30 people would die at HTR.

Tanya Ramsey's body was recovered July 7. Jeffrey Ramsey's body remains missing.

At 5:03:49 a.m., another call from Camp La Junta captured the horror: "CANT GET KIDS OUT OF THE CABINS AND KIDS IN THE RAFTERS -- LA JUNTA."

At 4:56:44 a.m., Michael Huff called about his ex-wife trapped in a camper at Riverside RV Park in Ingram: "WIFE IS IN A CAMPER// FLOODING// 830.370.0156 // MICHAEL HUFF// RIVERSIDE RV PARK IN INGRAM."

She did not survive.

At 5:01 a.m., Kerr County issued its opt-in text message service Code Red alert to residents — 68 minutes after Camp Mystic's alleged first emergen-

cy call to the county and more than an hour after the National Weather Service's flash flood emergency declaration.

Judge Kelly later acknowledged the alert came "too late" due to the speed and magnitude of the event.

At 5:04 a.m., the Starflight helicopter launched from Austin, already racing toward Kerr County. It's one of many helicopters that began streaming into Kerr County.

At 5:12 a.m., a water rescue team arrived on site at HTR, with notes showing staging at City West Church, Texas Game Warden boat on scene, and a "6-8 foot rise in river."

A RESPONSE FASTER THAN THE DISASTER

The call logs noted here only represent the Ingram and Hunt segment of the log. They show a coordinated effort among local, state and federal agencies that began before most elected officials knew the disaster was unfolding.

Water rescue teams were staged in Ingram at 3:33 a.m., a Junction team was en route by 4:21 a.m., Starflight out of Austin launched at 5:04 a.m., and Texas Game Wardens arrived on scene at 5:13 a.m.

The logs show particular attention to vulnerable populations, children at camps, elderly residents, and people with medical needs requiring oxygen or medications.

The logs show the adaptability of responders facing rapidly changing conditions. Multiple staging areas were established. When voice calls couldn't get through, dispatchers used text-

to-911. When roads became impassable, boats and helicopters took over.

BODIES IN THE RIVER

As the flood made its way downstream into Kerrville, KPD and Kerrville Fire Department were not only dealing with rescues and routine calls but also began recovering bodies.

By mid-morning, the grim scope of the disaster became visible in Kerrville, more than 10 miles downstream from Hunt. At 9:08 a.m., Officer Harris responded to Louise Hays Park on Thompson Drive for an unattended death — a body found at the fish statue by the splash pad where children play on summer days. Minutes later, at 9:10 a.m., another call came in for a body recovered at Rolling Green on Bandera Road, stuck on a tree, submerged power lines nearby made recovery difficult. The victim was an unclothed female.

The Guadalupe River had carried victims from the camps and RV parks through the heart of the city, transforming public parks and residential neighborhoods into recovery scenes. First responders who had spent the night racing to save lives now faced the grim task of documenting and recovering the dead.



CHAPTER 5

A COMMUNITY FOCUSED ON RECOVERY AFTER TRAGEDY

Kerr County could not stand on its own without the army of volunteers and first responders who showed up for search and rescue. The community also needed money, with hundreds of homes, businesses and infrastructure wrecked. In the center of Kerrville, Louise Hays Park was shattered, harboring many of the dead. Initial damage estimates reached hundreds of millions of dollars.

Up and down the river, first responders faced the grim task of not only recovering the bodies of adults, but of children — some unrecognizable due to the blunt force trauma. Grimes Funeral Home handled many of those early recoveries, serving as a morgue, but the event proved taxing on all, including Kerr County Justices of the Peace. Precinct 4 Justice of the Peace Bill Ragsdale wanted autopsies on the victims, which would require transport to Austin or San Antonio. The delay angered families and led to proposed changes in the legislature. The legislation would have led to the creation of a mandatory training program for JPs in counties without medical examiners on how to handle large numbers of bodies during a disaster. However, the legislature failed to pass

the changes.

Across the county, groups marshaled to raise funds and by 10 a.m. July 4, the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country had stood up its fundraising efforts.

“One of our primary roles at the Foundation is to steward that generosity and let them know that the money is going to be spent well,” said Austin Dickson, the CEO of the Community Foundation. “Thank them and thank their customers and all the people that have kept our community in their hearts so many months down the line.”

The Foundation raised more than \$100 million, distributing millions of dollars to get people back into homes and provide mental health care. Since the July 4 floods, more than 12,000 people have sought mental health care from MHDD, a regional mental health authority based in Kerrville.

The flood’s impact stretched nearly every nonprofit and organization in Kerr County. In the first hours, Kerrville’s Walmart served as the reunification point for flood victims, though many were at Peterson Regional Medical Center. Shelters were set up at churches, including Calvary Temple and City West Church. By day’s end,

Schreiner University’s Event Center became the reunification center for Camp Mystic families, leaving Schreiner staff to deal with frantic families seeking their children. Arcadia Live served as a reunification center for Camp Waldemar.

Kerrville, Ingram, Hunt and Ingram independent school districts all provided facilities as reunification centers, shelters, first-responder housing or, in the case of Ingram Tom Moore High School, a food distribution center.

Hunt School was incredibly active during the flood, quickly transforming to an emergency shelter for search and rescue teams. Superintendent Luci Harmon and Principal Sarah Nichols saw that first responders from out of town needed a place to stay, since many were making daily trips to accommodations in locations as far as San Antonio each day or sleeping in their vehicles.

“We decided we would open up and let people stay because we have showers and we have a laundry facility,” Harmon said. They created flyers and put them under windshield wipers along the highway since most responders weren’t monitoring social media. Soon they had many teams



staying onsite, including K-9s.

The Red Cross provided the cots, and school staff worked daily shifts, doing laundry and organizing food delivery for the first responders. They stayed open until August 1, when work began to clean and repair school grounds to prepare for back to school.

Kerrville Pets Alive was active from the start as well, rescuing more than 350 pets during the flood and confirming the deaths of many others. KPA quickly formed a partnership with Austin Pets Alive, who helped with search and rescue, transport and communications with people searching for lost pets.

The Salvation Army faced an avalanche of clothing from across the country, leading nonprofit Sisters In Service to help with logistics.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In the days after the flood, a steady stream of politicians and government officials made their way to Kerr County, including President Trump on July 11. Trump promised to move the process forward, but the realities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's complex rules and procedures have slowed some efforts. Moreover, FEMA only reimburses up to 75% of damage, and the more aid one receives — including volunteer support — the more it counts against reimbursement.

The Texas Department of Emergen-



cy Management and Gov. Greg Abbott, a frequent visitor, pushed to have 2 million cubic yards of debris removed. But even that ran into questions over the removal process, especially woody debris, which environmental groups argued should have been left to enhance riparian restoration.

"I do want to say that dead wood is crucial to the restoration of our river," said Clint Carter of the Bandera County River Authority.

Carter, a watershed ecologist, presented an analysis that showed an estimated 52% loss of riparian vegetation across a 30-mile reach of the upper Guadalupe River, totaling approxi-

mately 820 acres.

RIPARIAN REPAIR

Speaking at the Texas Water Symposium on October 23, Clint Carter delivered a sobering assessment of the Guadalupe River's ecological damage—and urged landowners to resist the impulse to remove all remaining woody debris.

The flood stripped approximately 820 acres of vegetation across a 30-mile river reach, representing a 52% loss of canopy cover. Some areas, particularly downstream of large structures, lost upwards of 90% of their trees. Hunt saw 95% canopy cover loss in certain sections.

The immediate cleanup response compounded the damage. Carter noted that an estimated 2 million cubic yards of wood debris have already been removed from the 30-mile stretch, eliminating what he called the river's "building blocks" for self-repair.

Now, as the Texas Department of Emergency Management offers free debris removal to landowners, Carter is urging a more selective approach—a message echoed by the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife, Hill Country Alliance, and Riverside Nature Center.

Carter reiterated the dead wood pitch at the Schreiner University event, which was held in partnership with the Hill Country Alliance and Texas Public Radio.

Carter presented a new landowner guide emphasizing that woody debris provides essential ecological benefits: protective cover and nurseries for native species like bald cypress, sycamore, pecan, walnut and black willow; improved groundwater infiltration leading to sustained base flows; and bank stabilization when debris is anchored.

The guide includes a decision matrix for property-specific evaluation. Carter stressed it's not prescriptive—"whether to remove woody debris depends. It's site specific."

His advice for landowners considering TDEM removal: "Just take the trash and we leave the sticks."

Carter's five guiding principles: Take it slow. Be selective. Leave what lives. Keep what covers. Remove what harms.

FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick committed state funding to implement flood warning sirens along the Guadalupe River before next summer, acknowledging sirens could have saved lives. Those efforts are now ongoing.

Senate Bill 3 establishes a grant program to help local governments install outdoor warning sirens in flash flood-prone areas. The Texas Water Development Board will identify high-risk areas and require municipalities or counties to install and maintain the warning systems.

Last month, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Board of Directors approved agreements with regional partners to pursue state funding for telecommunication infrastructure needed to support a flood warning system in the wake of the deadly July 4 flood.

The board unanimously approved two resolutions necessary for the Texas Middle Mile grant application. The grant seeks funding to expand the Lower Colorado River Authority's private LTE network to provide secure communication for rain gauges, water sensors and warning infrastructure throughout Kerr County.

Kerrville Public Utility Board is serving as lead applicant for the grant because the utility already has a grant writer on staff. Even before the flood, UGRA officials were working on improving data collection to aid a flood warning system.

Kerr Economic Development Corp. Executive Director Todd Bock is leading many of the economic recovery efforts, and has repeatedly praised the efforts to make the river safer.

"This will come out as literally the



platinum standard for flood warning systems across the state of Texas," Bock said.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Bock outlined the sweeping scope of the county's long-term recovery efforts, revealing that approximately 260-265 businesses were affected by the July 4 flood and that commercial rebuild costs are estimated at \$58.6 million.

"We are keeping up with the community. The community is leading this. We're not leading this. We're keeping up with the community demand," Bock said, emphasizing the grassroots nature of the recovery.

Of the affected businesses, 74 self-identified as directly impacted, with more than 90% contacted by business case management teams. Three businesses have closed and one has been sold as of early October.

The hardest-hit sectors include camps (\$43.9 million in rebuild estimates), vacation rentals (\$6.6 million) and retail (\$6.7 million). Camps alone account for \$17.6 million in materials costs.

Bock stressed that available funding functions as a support program rather than full reimbursement. "There's not enough readily available money currently to go through and just make everybody whole," he said, urging businesses to contact the Small Business Administration. "Get in their queue."

LiftFund Hill Country Disaster Relief has awarded 285 grants totaling \$2.02 million and disbursed eight loans totaling \$371,000, helping retain 787 full-time and 460 part-time jobs. The program has approximately \$3.15 million remaining across all categories.

The Kerr Together Long Term Recovery Group operates under the umbrella of KerrEDC and includes working groups focused on business

recovery, housing, tourism, emotional and spiritual care, and unmet needs.

"Emotional and spiritual needs, and your unmet needs table, those two on the end are probably the two of the most important working groups in long-term recovery," Bock said. "If we don't heal ourselves, our spirits, our minds and our bodies, then we can't move forward."

The recovery effort partners with Global Empowerment Mission for construction management, the American Red Cross for mass care and Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid for survivor legal assistance.

BUILT TO LAST

Unlike temporary disaster response, the Long Term Recovery Group is designed to remain operational indefinitely.

"Once you create a long-term recovery group in a disaster area, the intent is for it to never go away," Bock explained. "It stays intact forever, long beyond the recovery from the disaster itself, so that your community is poised if there ever is another one, whether it be tornado, another flood, any sort of tragedy or any sort of disaster."

Bock, who previously served as mayor, said he believes his current role is part of a larger plan. "I think God puts people in place where he deems fit for them," he said. "And it's not our timing, it's his timing."

The recovery effort also aims to combat misconceptions about the county's condition. "Kerr County is destroyed and we are — we've taken a hit but we're not out," Bock said.

But will the river and community ever recover? That's still the work that needs to be done, and Bock, like others, says this is a long race, with Kerr County still in the early stages.

EVEN AFTER THE DEVASTATION OF JULY 4, FISH AND WILDLIFE ARE RETURNING TO THE RIVER NATURALLY RESILIENT

REPORTED AND WRITTEN BY JENNIFER DEAN THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

Despite losses, Bird City Kerrville sees regrowth and rebounding populations in the future

As the floodwaters receded after the crest of the July 4 flash flooding, many people tentatively approached the river to assess the damage. One of the common observations made by people who often walk the river trails was the eerie silence that followed the flood. For a time, the usual cacophony of birdsong was gone.

Kevin Pillow, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Kerrville, witnessed the immediate aftermath of the flood. Like others, he was struck by the unusual silence.

"The birds were totally disoriented, completely quiet," he said, describing the behavior as "a period of mourning."

Usually, birds have a sort of internal warning system that alerts them to incoming storms. In this case, the convergence of the two storms — a low-pressure system and the remnants of Tropical Storm Barry — likely confused the usual sensitivity to pressure changes birds have that alerts them to incoming weather danger.

"We lost late fledges like cardinals, a whole lot of our woodpecker and our

See **BIRDS** on Page 44 >>



With the Guadalupe River closed for much of the summer, birds and aquatic wildlife returned to the river in the after of the July 4 flood.

Despite vegetation, aquatic species reductions, post-flood rebound expected

The Guadalupe River is home to a diverse number of aquatic species. As floodwaters receded July 4, the damage revealed included extensive habitat damages.

In the days following the flood, many people reported finding fish, turtles and other aquatic species among the debris and wreckage, even in homes and businesses. Swept up in floodwaters, they were left behind when waters receded.

Damage to the river corridors was also clear as heavily wooded areas were stripped bare and debris spread far and wide. Five months later, most of the debris has been cleared, although the destruction is still

visible.

Initial survey information from Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) on the flood's impact on aquatic wildlife and river habitats show population losses in certain species but based on previous flood experiences, the experts are confident their numbers will rebound.

In presentations to Kerrville City Council and the UGRA board, Bandera River Authority and Groundwater District Watershed Ecologist Clint Carter said there was 820 acres or 52% vegetation loss from the

See **AQUATIC** on Page 45 >>



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insectivores,” Pillow said. “They all nest in those century-old cypress down at the river.”

Like Pillow, many other people were saddened by the sight of birds and other animals killed in the flood. Ashe juniper, Spanish oaks and bald cypress are nest areas during breeding season, and in July, several species still had nesting and fledging birds. Cardinals, various swallows, flycatchers, warblers, sparrows, ducks, geese, and various wading birds are also common to these habitats.

Following the flood, questions of how the destruction to the river ecosystem would impact the ability of these species to rebound and whether migrating birds would return to the area.

The good news is experts say nature usually rebounds naturally as seen in previous similar floods like those in the 2015 Blanco River flood and 2015 Llano River flood.

“Food systems will go through the roof as every insect, everything that we’ve seen that came down becomes a food source,” Pillow said, also expressing optimism that migrating birds will play a crucial role in regrowth. “They’re going to help us replant and reseed every single one of those trees. That’s their job. They’ll come here and they’ll

See **BIRDS** on Page 134 >>





AQUATIC from Page 43 >>

floodway on the south fork of the Guadalupe River in Hunt to the Kendall County line. Carter extended his expertise to the recovery effort and developed a process using geospatial analysis to prioritize areas for restoration based on vegetation loss.

The analysis uses pre-and post-flood imagery, said Mitch Nisbet, district supervisor of the San Antonio District of the Inland Fisheries Division, citing an estimated “53% loss of tree canopy along the Guadalupe River in Kerr County.”

Tree canopy provides protection from the sun, preventing wide fluctuations in water temperature. Species like the Guadalupe bass rely heavily on well vegetated shorelines and shade trees to regulate temperatures during the summer.

The habitats of many species also consist of inputs of tree limbs, logs and other structures, much of which was destroyed by flooding. Fish and other river dwellers rely on these river corridors for movement between food, cover and breeding locations.

While flooding strips away vital tree canopy and water vegetation, it can spread invasive plant species that cause further damage.

“Invasive plant species often thrive in disturbed soil, so there are concerns about proliferation of invasive species like giant cane and chinaberry,” said Tara Bushnoe, general manager of the Upper Guadalupe River Authority.

Nisbet explained that the *Arundo* (also known as the giant cane or reed) thrives in recently disturbed habitats, which happens during a flood. It spreads via fragmentation



and new stands have been identified post flood.

Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) biologists are currently mapping instream habitat and will be doing so throughout the year.

Nisbet said the tributaries flowing in the Guadalupe have been surveyed and there are little changes to the amount and health of aquatic species after the flood.

“In the main stem Guadalupe in Kerrville and Ingram we have seen little changes in species composition and biodiversity,” Nisbet said, but noted a decline of about 30% in

AQUATIC from Page 135 >>

A YEAR IN REVIEW

2025

KNOCKED US DOWN, BUT WE'RE NOT OUT



The year 2025 began with familiar challenges—new commissioners taking office, debates over development and water conservation, and mounting fiscal pressures on schools and infrastructure. Kerrville rejected a massive D.R. Horton annexation over water concerns, while approving financing for KPUB's \$181 million power plant.

Spring brought dangerous fire weather and a devastating March hail storm that caused millions in damage. May's sweltering heat wave and mounting budget deficits signaled growing strains. In June, the city advanced the \$1.13 billion Whiskey Springs development and celebrated KPUB's historic \$105 million Texas Energy Fund loan.

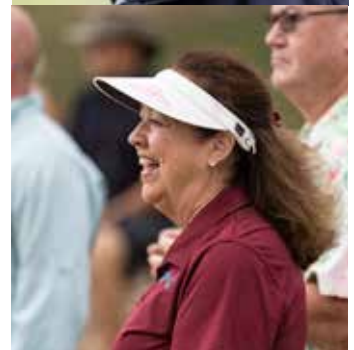
Then came July 4.

In pre-dawn hours, catastrophic flooding killed at least 119 people, including 27 at Camp Mystic. The Guadalupe River surged 22 feet in 45 minutes. The disaster destroyed infrastructure, displaced hundreds, and forever changed the community.

The response was immediate and overwhelming. President Trump visited. The Community Foundation raised over \$100 million in 30 days—a national record. H-E-B donated \$5 million. Corporations, celebrities, and neighbors rallied together.

The second half of 2025 became about recovery: adopting disaster tax rates, pursuing state funding, filing wrongful death lawsuits, and passing the Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act. Officials developed flood warning systems while the community honored victims and rebuilt parks.

By November, Kerrville had shown remarkable resilience—reopening facilities, supporting survivors with housing grants, and planning for a safer future. The year that began with routine challenges became one of tragedy, unity, and determination to emerge stronger.





The new year began with political transitions and community challenges as Kerr County swore in new leadership while grappling with ongoing controversies.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

On Jan. 1, newly elected commissioners Tom Jones (Precinct 1) and Jeff Holt (Precinct 3) were sworn in, creating an anticipated 4-1 majority on the Kerr County Commissioners Court. Sheriff Larry Leitha, re-elected to his second term, pledged accountability as his top priority while swearing in his deputies.

The Kerrville City Council moved quickly to address key policy issues. On Jan. 15, the council approved the first reading of a tree preservation ordinance with a 4-1 vote, establishing protection requirements ranging from 40% to 80% based on tree size and location for undeveloped properties larger than one acre. The ordinance, which received final approval Jan. 29, originated from the Kerrville 2050 Plan.

Battery energy storage systems emerged as a contentious issue. Commissioner Holt urged creation of a regional planning commission with Kendall County to block lithium-ion battery storage facilities. By Jan. 28, commissioners were still struggling to craft bylaws for the 391 commission, facing warnings that regulating BESS facilities through fire codes could trigger resident “rebellion.”

COMMUNITY CONTROVERSY

Zion Lutheran Church faced turmoil after Pastor Caleb Williams resigned Dec. 30 following allegations of financial and sexual misconduct. An audio recording detailed accusations made by Church Secretary Brittney Compton during a Dec. 29 meeting. The church hired a Grapevine law firm to conduct an external investigation, while Kerrville Police confirmed receiving complaints. On Jan. 8, interim pastor John Onstott also resigned due to family reasons, and questions arose regarding \$25,000 in legal expenses.

DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The Kerrville Planning and Zoning Commission approved annexation of over 280 acres between Kerrville-Schreiner Park and Comanche Trace on Jan. 6, potentially allowing homebuilder D.R. Horton to construct as many as 1,000 homes. City Manager Dalton Rice indicated the city would likely receive a request for infrastructure assistance, possibly through a Public Improvement District that would place costs on new homeowners.

Frost Bank confirmed Jan. 8 it would build a new location at 501 Main St., occupying about one acre where Entertain Mart currently operates.

RECOGNITIONS AND MILESTONES

The Kerrville Public Utility Board was honored Jan. 17 for deploying eight linemen to Georgia and Florida for three weeks in September 2024 to

aid power restoration after Hurricanes Helene and Milton. KPUB's 2024 annual report showed an average outage time of just 11 minutes, significantly below industry averages, attributed to preventative maintenance and systematic pole replacements.

Kerrville achieved certification as Bird City Kerrville on Jan. 9, a program recognizing conservation efforts by a coalition of 25 local organizations. A celebration was held Jan. 17 at Kerrville Hills Winery.

WEATHER AND SAFETY

A slight winter storm brought snow that quickly turned to ice Jan. 22, closing schools and businesses, though City Manager Rice reported limited problems.

The Kerrville Police Department's Holiday Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (Dec. 16-Jan. 1) resulted in 60 traffic stops, with 42 issued for speeding. During the period Dec. 23-Jan. 1, law enforcement made 29 arrests, with approximately 75% for public intoxication, drug possession or drunk driving.

NATIONAL AND STATE POLITICS

Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th president on Jan. 21, immediately signing executive orders declaring the migrant situation an “invasion,” suspending asylum claims and reviving border wall construction. He also pardoned or commuted sentences of hundreds of protesters convicted in the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection,

including a Kerrville resident.

HOUSING AND ECONOMY

Closed home sales in Kerrville jumped 52.9% in December 2024 compared to the previous year, with a median home price of \$390,000 and housing supply reaching 7.7 months, suggesting a shift toward a more balanced market.

The Economic Improvement Corporation received an end-of-year recap showing the Olympic Pool renovation, initially budgeted at \$7 million, would be scaled back to cut costs by eliminating stadium seating and a locker room. The pool was not expected to reopen until 2026.

STOCK SHOW AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

The 81st Kerr County Stock Show concluded Jan. 11, continuing its mission to empower young 4-H and FFA members through life skills and scholarships. The show was dedicated to Jim and Julie Behrens for their two decades of involvement.

KerrKonnnect, which provides door-to-door transportation, launched its "Share The Love" fundraiser, announcing it completed 5,499 trips totaling over 60,000 miles in 2024 and reached a milestone of 250,000 total miles driven since October 2018.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Provisional CDC data (2018-2024) indicated heart disease was the leading cause of death in Kerr County with 1,186 deaths, followed by cancer with 1,092 deaths. COVID-19 ranked seventh overall with 223 deaths. Data suggested 2024 may be the first year without any COVID-19 related fatalities.

Schreiner University's 2024 Vocational Nursing program graduates achieved a 100% first-time pass rate on the NCLEX licensure exam, with 100% job placement.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

Parks and Recreation Director Ashlea Boyle announced she was leaving Kerrville for a similar position in Leander. City Manager Rice reported sifting through around 50 applications for the position.

Katie Milton Jordan resigned as interim executive director of the Kerr Economic Development Corporation, effective Jan. 24, citing an opportunity for an ownership stake in an AI consulting company in San Antonio.

ICE IN KERR COUNTY

Rumors circulated Jan. 30 that federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials were removing students from Kerr County schools, but local law enforcement and Ingram ISD Superintendent Robert Templeton debunked the claims. The panic stemmed from a regional law enforcement and school safety planning meeting held at Ingram Tom Moore High School.



The Kerr County Stock Show helped kick off the year.



Precinct 3 Commissioner Jeff Holt and Precinct 1 Commissioner Tom Jones were sworn in on Jan. 1.



The Kerr County Renaissance Faire is one of the biggest early events of the year.



February brought significant political developments, community protests and major decisions affecting development and athletics as Kerrville continued to navigate growth and change.

TARIFFS AND NATIONAL POLICY

President Donald Trump announced sweeping new tariffs Feb. 1, implementing 25% on imports from Canada and Mexico and 10% on Chinese goods, though he delayed implementation by one month on Feb. 4 after reaching preliminary border security agreements. The tariffs, which ultimately took effect March 5, aimed to boost U.S. manufacturing and address immigration and drug trafficking concerns.

Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) introduced legislation Feb. 4 seeking to

eliminate the Department of Education, while state legislators filed bills seeking to end countywide voting on Election Day in Texas despite local officials arguing it saves money and increases accessibility.

DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

In a significant vote Feb. 11, the Kerrville City Council unanimously rejected an annexation plan for a D.R. Horton development that could have brought over 1,000 homes, citing concerns over water availability and density. The decision marked a turning point in the city's approach to growth management.

Earlier, on Feb. 6, the Kerrville Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously approved a zoning change to allow a major mixed-use development, including senior living and multifam-

ily housing, at Loop 534 and Cypress Creek Road.

The council officially voted Feb. 25 to cancel the May general election — the first cancellation since 1955 — due to unopposed candidates, allowing incumbents Delayne Sigerman and Jeff Harris to retain their seats.

REGIONAL COOPERATION AND BATTERY STORAGE

The Kerr County Commissioners Court voted unanimously Feb. 10 to form a joint planning commission (391 Commission) with Kendall County to increase local oversight and stop battery energy storage systems.

On Feb. 14, Kerr County officially broke ground on the new Animal Services shelter, 26 months after voters approved the bond.



Lyle Lovett made his debut at Kerrville's Arcadia Live.



IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

A rally supporting undocumented workers drew approximately 200 people Feb. 8 to the intersection of Sidney Baker and Main streets in Kerrville, reflecting ongoing community engagement with national immigration policy debates.

ATHLETICS AND COACHING CHANGES

Tivy High School Athletic Director and Head Football Coach David Jones stepped down Feb. 8 after 13 years and 91 victories, marking the end of an era for the program.

Schreiner University parted ways with football Coach Kenny Treschitta on Feb. 8 and moved quickly to name Keith Allen as the new head football coach on Feb. 11.

The Schreiner University women's wrestling team successfully defended their SLIAC Championship on Feb. 14.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX CONTROVERSY

A controversy erupted Feb. 14 over a proposed 7% hotel occupancy tax for unincorporated Kerr County areas, aimed at funding the Hill Country Youth Event Center, after Sen. Pete Flores indicated he would not support the measure. By Feb. 24, State Rep. Wesley Virdell introduced legislation (HB 4) to authorize the Kerr County Hotel Occupancy Tax, with Flores introducing companion legislation.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Kerrville Economic Improvement Corp. decided Feb. 18 not to claw back incentive agreements from James Avery Craftsman despite the company missing its job creation targets. James Avery COO Paul Zipp told the EIC that housing affordability is a critical challenge for attracting and retaining workers, criticizing the City Council's recent annexation rejection.

The EIC Board tabled a proposal to fund a new economic development manager position.

On Feb. 14, the Kerrville Triathlon, celebrated as the "most scenic triathlon in Texas," was acquired by global sports organization Supertri.

WATER CONSERVATION

The City Council discussed implementing permanent, more stringent water conservation measures Feb. 25, indicating that conservation is the "new normal" for the community.

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

The Texas Senate swiftly approved school voucher legislation (Senate Bill 2) on Feb. 6. By Feb. 26, 76 Republicans, including Rep. Wesley Virdell, committed support to House Bill 3, indicating Republicans had gained the majority support needed to pass school vouchers in the Texas House.

HEALTH CARE INNOVATIONS

Peterson Regional Medical Center

announced Feb. 21 it is using AI tools (OrthoGrid) for joint replacement surgery and implementing a "prehab" program to optimize patient outcomes.

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND CULTURE

Lyle Lovett performed a sold-out concert Feb. 8 at The Arcadia Live.

Pookie's Patisserie made its grand debut in downtown Kerrville on Feb. 14.

Pint & Plow earned a bronze medal for its winter seasonal Kill It Good at the 2025 Texas Craft Brewers Cup.

Winners of the second annual Pot O' Hot Festival were announced Feb. 22: Kyle Bond won the juried competition with BBQ Texas Taco Soup, and Graham Gammack and Randall McCabe won the Tasters Choice award with Mulligatawny.

PUBLIC SAFETY

A Kerrville man, Kevin Mark Selch, pleaded guilty Feb. 5 to cruelty to non-livestock animals for shooting and killing his neighbor's dog in December 2023, receiving five years of deferred adjudication.

FERAL CAT INITIATIVE

The Commissioners Court discussed Feb. 24 the growing feral cat population in the county and agreed to hold a public forum on solutions.

EDUCATION

The Ingram Tom Moore High School band hall debuted Feb. 5, marking the first classroom space completed under the 2023 bond election.

SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

Schreiner University men's basketball defeated Texas Lutheran 88-78 on Feb. 10 and later secured the No. 2 seed in the SCAC tournament after losing the regular-season finale to St. Thomas 63-61 on Feb. 23.

SUMMIT

Mayor Joe Herring and City Manager Dalton Rice presented the State of the City Feb. 27 at the Hill Country Economic Summit, confirming the historic cancellation of the May election and detailing growth management plans. An economic forecast delivered at the Summit predicted improvement in the housing market in 2025 despite continued challenges in affordability.

NEW BUSINESS

Glow Row, a new adventure tourism business offering nighttime kayaking with illuminated boats, opened near Louise Hays Park on Feb. 28.

MARCH.

March brought extreme fire weather, infrastructure approvals and political controversy as Kerrville balanced growth with natural resource challenges.

FIRE DANGER AND EMERGENCY DECLARATIONS

The month was dominated by dangerous fire weather conditions. Multiple Red Flag Warnings were issued throughout March, with gusts reaching up to 55 mph on March 4.

On March 17, Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly issued a disaster declaration and burn ban, effective at noon, due to severe drought and fire danger. The Crabapple Fire near Fredericksburg, which began that Saturday, was 55% contained by March 17. Commissioners extended the disaster declaration and burn ban on March 25.

A mobile home on Quail Valley Drive in Kerrville was destroyed by fire March 18, injuring two residents.

POWER PLANT FINANCING

The Kerrville City Council unanimously approved financing March 11 for KPUB's \$181 million natural gas-fired power plant. The funding includes 60% (\$105.3 million) from the Texas Energy Fund. The decision was hailed as critical for the city's energy security and rate stability.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

City Manager Dalton Rice presented plans March 11 to create a new economic development manager position focused on local business growth, reiterating and expanding on the proposal March 13.

The Kerrville Economic Improvement Corporation unanimously approved accelerated funding (\$1.13 million) and policy changes March 18 for Habitat for Humanity's Mariposa development. The changes included allowing Habitat to serve lower-income families (below 80% median income) and ensuring long-term affordability through lien subordination.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX

Kerr County officials hosted a public meeting March 3 to discuss a proposed 7% hotel occupancy tax for unincorporated areas of the county to fund the Hill Country Youth Event Center.





COACHING CHANGES

Tivy High School named Curtis Neill as its new football coach on March 18, following the departure of David Jones in February.

TARIFFS AND STATE POLICIES

President Donald Trump implemented 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada on March 5, adding to economic concerns.

Gov. Greg Abbott ordered Texas state employees to return to in-person work by March 31 on March 5, terminating telework policies. The mandate took effect March 31.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE POLICY

The Kerr County Commissioners Court unanimously adopted a new Artificial Intelligence policy March 10, restricting employees from inputting sensitive information into AI generators.

ZONING DECISIONS

The City Council rejected a zoning change March 25 for a 23.8-acre tract intended for mixed-use development.

DEVASTATING HAIL STORM

A severe thunderstorm brought devastating hail March 23 to Kerrville's north side, causing extensive property damage throughout the region. In the Summit neighborhood, hailstones resembling baseballs pummeled homes and vehicles. District Attorney Lucy Wilke shared video of her pool being hammered by the massive hail.

The storm resulted in significant damage along Interstate 10, where it shattered windows, pummeled vehicles and caused traffic to stall. Many vehicles took shelter under overpasses as numerous reports of broken windshields came in.

Cecil Atkisson Motors suffered catastrophic damage to its inventory, with one dealership manager describing the business as "the ball to the storm's Louisville slugger."

Acapulco Restaurant was forced to close March 24 to clean up damage and flooding from the storm.

City Manager Rice estimated damage would be "in the millions" once adjusters completed their reports, with the full extent of the damage still emerging days later.

EDUCATION

Ingram Independent School District and Ingram Elementary School were named to the 2024 Texas Honor Roll on March 17.

Schreiner Institute student Jackson Fonville was accepted into the United States Military Academy at West Point on March 4.

CULTURAL EVENTS

"Lost in Yonkers" opened at VK Garage Theater on March 21.

Schreiner University hosted "The American Revolution Experience" interactive exhibit beginning March 19 (running through April 4).

Schreiner University hosted the "Metal Magic and Molten Mayhem" cast aluminum relief sculpture workshop on March 21.

Dr. Sabrina Adrian performed an organ concert celebrating J.S. Bach's 340th birthday on March 22.

ATHLETICS

Schreiner basketball standout Kamden Ross participated in the 2025 NABC Division III College All-Star Game in Indiana on March 22.

Schreiner University's Equestrian Team held its spring polo fundraiser at Camp Stewart on March 22.

MILESTONES

A memorial banquet was held March 9 for Center Point educator Charlotte Ritter at the Hill Country Youth Events Center.



APRIL.

In April, Kerrville marked the 75th anniversary of the construction of Louise Hays Park.

April witnessed heightened political tensions, crucial water policy discussions and significant educational funding decisions as Kerrville confronted both local challenges and national controversies.

POLITICAL PROTESTS

Approximately 300 protesters gathered April 5 at the Kerr County Courthouse as part of nationwide “Hands Off” demonstrations against the Trump administration. The event sparked fierce online backlash despite being peaceful.

On April 19, approximately 200 “Hands Off” protesters gathered at the courthouse, while a caravan of 40-50 “Trump Train” supporters circled the block in a counter-protest. The event was peaceful despite being rowdy.

The protests created political controversy when the Republican-led Commissioners Court initially deadlocked on the permit before ultimately approving the right to protest on courthouse grounds on April 14 following consultation with the county attorney regarding First Amendment rights.

WATER CRISIS FOCUS

Water emerged as a critical issue throughout the month. The Kerr County Water Alliance hosted a community town hall meeting April 29 at UGRA headquarters to discuss local water conservation and policy challenges, drawing about 80 residents. The city launched a six-question survey to gather public input on water conservation.

On April 8, the City Council approved amendments to the

Subdivision Code requiring a Certificate of Assured Groundwater Rights.

Commissioners heard a presentation April 29 urging stronger on-site sewage facilities (OSSF) regulations to protect the Edwards and Trinity aquifers, particularly eliminating the 10-acre septic exemption.

At the state level, the Texas House voted overwhelmingly (138-6) April 23 to advance House Joint Resolution 7, a constitutional amendment to allocate \$1 billion annually for state water projects.

EDUCATION FUNDING

The Texas Education Agency released its contentious, long-delayed A-F accountability ratings April 24 (based on 2023 data). Ingram Tom Moore High School led area campuses with an “A” rating of 93.

A KISD committee recommended considering a small voter-approved tax rate election (VATRE) to address funding gaps left by the state legislature.

DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The City Council unanimously approved April 8 negotiations with Academy Sports + Outdoors to open a new store at River Hills Mall.

The council unanimously approved April 22 City Manager Dalton Rice to begin negotiations for incentives for the Whiskey Springs development project, a potentially \$1.13 billion development planned to add nearly 500 homes and apartments, a hotel, golf course and other amenities on nearly 800 acres north of I-10 and east of Highway 16.



The Golden Girls stopped by the Peterson Health Digital Studio at Pint and Plow Brewing Co.

The Economic Improvement Corporation approved amendments April 21 to the grant agreement with Habitat for Humanity-Kerr County for the Mariposa Residential Neighborhood, removing annual payment limits and updating the definition of “Workforce Housing.”

The EIC learned April 21 that bids for the Olympic Pool renovations exceeded the \$6 million construction budget, leading officials to consider reallocating savings from other bond projects like the Cailloux Theater and Scott Schreiner Golf Course improvements.

JUDICIAL ACTIONS

A Kerr County jury convicted Robert Henry “Robby” Hurt on April 3 on two counts of making terroristic threats against Kerrville City Council members via a December 2022 email.

On April 24, a 54-year-old man, Scott Bender, was fatally shot during a confrontation with a neighbor

near Hunt.

AIRPORT EXPANSION

Kerr County Commissioners Court approved April 29 a conditional mediation settlement agreement with Dark Sky Estates, LLC, allowing for the expansion of the Kerrville-Kerr County Airport.

COMMUNITY MILESTONES

Louise Hays Park celebrated its 75th anniversary April 26 with a community celebration featuring activities like a Kids Craft Zone, Heart of the Hills Farmers Market vendors, exhibitor booths and a time capsule ceremony. The park was built by approximately 600 volunteers in a single day on April 26, 1950.

Habitat for Humanity Kerr County dedicated its 129th home April 26 to Keena and her four children.

VANDALISM AND SAFETY

Kerrville City Manager Dalton Rice announced





April 1 the city would install security cameras at Doyle's Carver Park following a second act of racist vandalism on a bathroom there.

WAR MEMORIAL

Kerr County Commissioners Court unanimously approved April 14 adding the names of two Ingram Tom Moore High School graduates killed in Iraq — Charles Victor Komppa and Javier Paredes — to the county's War Memorial.

Commissioners voted to name the facility at 550 Earl Garrett Street the Col. Allie Burton Building.

TEEN COURT

Kerrville's Teen Court program completed its inaugural year April 23, deliberating on three cases at its final meeting.

POWER OUTAGE

A ringtail cat sparked a power outage April 9 affecting more than 3,800 customers in central Kerrville at KPUB's Stadium Substation early Wednesday morning. Power was restored within two hours.

ELECTIONS

The Kerrville Planning and Zoning Commission convened a workshop April 3 to discuss disconnects between commission recommendations and City Council decisions.

The City Council voted April 8 to eliminate the city's regulations on electioneering at polling locations.

U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro and state Representatives Vikki Goodwin and Gene Wu, all Democrats, hosted a "People's Town Hall" in Fredericksburg April 13, a heavily Republican stronghold.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Kerr County deputies arrested Gonzalo Mendoza-Gonzalez, an Austin murder suspect, after his vehicle broke down in Kerrville on April 22.

WEATHER

Kerrville and the Hill Country received much-needed moisture April 24 from overnight thunderstorms, with rainfall amounts ranging from three-quarters of an inch to 1.5 inches.

KINDNESS AWARD

U.S. Postal Service worker Cecil Cloyed received the Kerrville Kindness Award April 8 for finding and helping an elderly woman on his route who had been



MISS USA VISIT

Reigning Miss USA, Alma Cooper, visited Kerrville May 1 and spoke to over 500 elementary school students from Kerrville and Ingram at the Hill Country Youth Event Center.



stranded in her home for three days.

FUNDRAISING

Tivy High School's Golden Girls dance team raised nearly \$11,000 April 21 during a fundraising event at Pint and Plow Brewing Co.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Author and professor Kathleen Hudson led the first "Digging for Gold: Creative Writing" workshop April 26 at the Butt-Holdsworth Memorial Library.



MAY.

Straight line winds from a powerful thunderstorm felled Gravity Check's covered riding arena, which was under construction.

May brought sweltering heat, mounting fiscal pressures and significant milestones as Kerrville confronted budget challenges while celebrating achievements and navigating controversial state legislation.

DANGEROUS HEAT WAVE

A dangerous heat wave began May 12, with the hottest day (103 degrees) forecast for May 14. The National Weather Service issued a Heat Advisory May 13 for Kerr County, with temperatures forecast to reach 103 degrees Tuesday and 106 degrees Wednesday. An Extreme Heat Warning was in effect May 14, with temperatures forecast to hit 105 degrees locally. Kerrville recorded a high of 99.3 degrees May 15, falling short of the 105 predicted but still experiencing sweltering conditions.

CORTEZ FAMILY TRAGEDY

Three members of the Cortez family were killed May 3, and one was injured in a suspected drunk driving crash in Center Point. The deceased were Courtney Cortez (25), Cody Cortez (35) and Daniel Cortez Jr. (57). Jeremy Wasson of San Antonio was jailed, facing three counts of vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated. The funerals for the three members were held May 14.

SCHOOL DISTRICT ELECTIONS

Caleb Boone won the Kerrville Independent School District Board of Trustees District 7 seat May 3 against Mike Wittler, receiving 55.63% of the total vote. Voter turnout was low, with 160 ballots cast out of about 4,000 eligible voters (4%).

AI TOWN HALL

The Kerr County Lead hosted its first-ever AI Town Hall May 6 at Pint and Plow Brewing Co., drawing over 50 attendees and live viewers. The event featured experts from healthcare, local government, higher education and the legal profession discussing AI's current and future impact on Kerrville.

LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

A Texas legislative bill (HB 24) advancing in the legislature would significantly limit Kerrville residents' ability to block zoning changes for



KISD Trustee Caleb Boone was sworn in as the newest member of the school board.



KISD Trustee Dr. David Sprouse.



Kerrville City Councilmember Delayne Sigerman.



Kerrville City Councilmember Jeff Harris.



new developments. The bill increases the protest signature threshold from owners of 20% of nearby properties to 60% of adjacent properties.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed President Donald Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" May 8 in the early morning. The bill included major tax relief but proposed deep cuts to federal safety net programs like SNAP and Medicaid.

The Texas House of Representatives approved legislation May 21 (Senate Bill 3) that would ban all products containing tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), despite public opposition. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick championed the bill.

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS

Kerrville City Councilmembers Delayne Sigerman and Jeff Harris were sworn in May 13 for their new terms.

The City Council took a major step toward development May 13 by unanimously approving a resolution to create the Whiskey Springs Public Improvement District for a massive new development, which could finance

approximately \$200 million in public infrastructure.

The council unanimously approved an economic development agreement May 13 to attract Academy Sports and Outdoors to River Hills Mall. The council unanimously approved rejecting all bids May 13 for the Kerrville Olympic Pool renovation and expansion project because they exceeded the city budget.

HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Kerr County Commissioners voted May 13 to join a regional habitat conservation plan with the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority to protect the endangered "fat mucket" mussel, calling it an "insurance policy" against federal permitting requirements. The estimated annual cost for the county is \$10,000 once the permit is approved.

POWER PLANT LOCATION

The Kerrville Public Utility Board announced May 15 it chose a location 10 miles south of Columbus, Texas, for its new 122-megawatt natural gas power plant project, expected to be

operational by June 2027.

POPULATION MILESTONE

U.S. Census Bureau estimates revealed May 22 that Kerrville's population surpassed 25,000 residents for the first time, reaching 25,324 in 2025.

KERRVILLE FOLK FESTIVAL

The 53rd annual Kerrville Folk Festival began its 18-day run May 22 at Quiet Valley Ranch with a free opening night, though a severe thunderstorm disrupted the headlining performance of Wilder Blue.

GRADUATIONS

Tivy High School graduated 288 students May 23 at Antler Stadium. Valedictorian Hannah Hood and Salutatorian Peyton Bailey delivered speeches. Ingram Tom Moore High School held its graduation ceremony May 16 at Schreiner University.

SUPERINTENDENT RETIREMENTS

Dr. Robert Templeton of Ingram ISD and Cody Newcomb of Center Point



Tivy High School's Golden Girls' spring showcase at Arcadia Live! packed the house.



Tivy High School Principal Rick Sralla celebrated the school's graduation ceremonies with his students. On the right, Ingram Tom Moore High School Principal Brandie Guzman celebrated the 2025 graduation.

ISD announced their retirements, leaving legacies of academic success.

MEMORIAL DAY

The Kerr County Memorial Day Program was held May 26 at the Courthouse. City Manager Dalton Rice delivered the keynote address, focusing on remembering the fallen and veteran mental health. Two Ingram Tom Moore High School graduates, Charles Kompapa and Javier Paredes, had their names added to the war memorial.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING CLOSURE

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation ordered the emergency closure May 28 of eight massage establishments across Texas, including A Pattaya Massage in Kerrville, citing evidence of human trafficking operations.

SCHREINER UNIVERSITY

Schreiner University held its 102nd Spring Commencement May 8, with alumna Caitlin Leal as the keynote speaker.

Schreiner University received five-year accreditation for its Master of Science in Nursing program from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.

CHRISTMAS TREE FUNDRAISING

The Kerrville Christmas Lighting Corporation launched a \$125,000 fundraising campaign May 28 for a new 50-foot LED courthouse Christmas tree, supported by a \$50,000 matching grant.

COMMUNITY WATER SURVEY

Kerrville officials presented findings from a community water survey May 20 at a public forum, highlighting that

conservation is key to water management. The survey showed about 30% of residents are unaware of their water sources.

PAPAL SELECTION

Kerrville area real estate agent Janelle Peralt witnessed the selection of Pope Leo XIV (Cardinal Robert Prevost) in Rome on May 13, 2025. Peralt, who won a trip through a Rotary raffle, was in St. Peter's Square when white smoke appeared.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION CLOSE

The Texas Legislature neared its June 2 adjournment May 29, having passed major bills on higher education, school vouchers and enhanced school safety (Uvalde Strong Act).

BUDGET WORKSHOPS

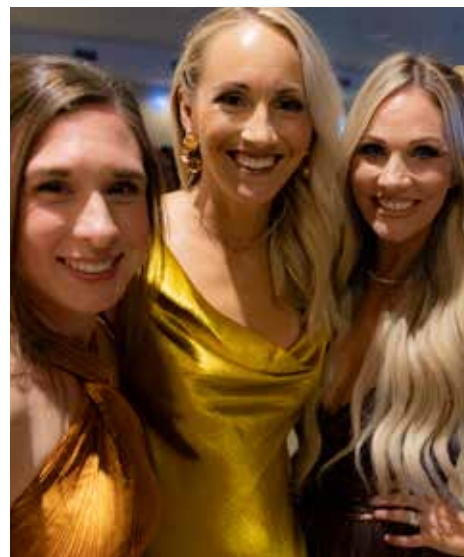
Kerr County Commissioners held a budget workshop May 29 reviewing the results of a countywide salary study. The study by Werling Associates Inc. found that overall, Kerr County is in a "good situation" with average wages about 30% above the market.

WARTIME LETTERS EXHIBIT

The Kerr County Historical Commission's new exhibit, "Wartime Letters Home Sharing Stories of Service," debuted May 15 at the Kerr Arts and Cultural Center.

STORM DAMAGE

Powerful thunderstorms swept through Kerr County early May 11, dumping between 1 and 4 inches of rain across the area; Camp Verde reported losing power for eight hours. A powerful line of thunderstorms destroyed an under-construction covered



The Hill Country Charity Ball made another big donation to a local charity.

arena at Gravity Check Saloon east of Kerrville early May 23.

BULLYING INVESTIGATION

KISD announced May 29 it launched an investigation into an alleged bullying incident at Starkey Elementary School after a social media post circulated over Memorial Day weekend. The post included a video by a national anti-bullying group that has gained over 1.4 million views.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

The Hunt Garden Club received the Texas Garden Club of the Year Award for 2024 on May 20.





June showcased Kerrville’s resilience through significant governmental decision-making, major infrastructure achievements and high-profile community events, while managing ongoing fiscal challenges.

POWER PLANT BREAKTHROUGH

Gov. Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 2268 on June 12, which grants the Kerrville Public Utility Board financing flexibility to secure the Texas Energy Fund loan for its power plant project using system revenues.

On June 25, KPUB secured a \$105 million low-interest loan from the Texas Energy Fund for the 122-megawatt Rock Island Generation Project, marking the first project funded under the program.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The Kerrville City Council unanimously adopted updates to the Kerrville 2050 Comprehensive Plan on June 10 on first reading, incorporating community input and emphasizing resilience planning. The council advanced the Whiskey Springs Public Improvement District proposal for a \$1.13 billion luxury development.

VENUE TAX REFERENDUM

Kerr County Commissioners unanimously approved a resolution June 16 to pursue a countywide venue tax



The Doyle Community Center’s annual BluesFest.

referendum for the November ballot to fund the Hill Country Youth Event Center, after previous efforts to secure hotel tax authority failed in the Texas Legislature.

ANIMAL SHELTER CRISIS

The voter-approved animal services facility faced significant cost overruns approaching \$2 million over the initial \$5.75 million bond. Commissioners discussed finding funds, possibly \$212,000, to make the facility “Initially Operating Capable.”

OLYMPIC POOL RENOVATION

The City Council authorized June 24 a \$6.5 million construction contract with JK Bernhard Construction Co. for the Olympic Pool renovation. The council had approved a \$750,000 budget increase May 27 (total project budget \$7.75 million).

KERRVILLE FOLK FESTIVAL

The 53rd edition of the Kerrville Folk Festival concluded June 8, having experienced satisfaction despite an

early-festival storm that disrupted a performance and flooded campsites.

TRAGIC DEATH

Ethen Michael Brengel (18), a Tivy High School graduate, died June 13 in a two-vehicle collision in San Antonio; he was scheduled to ship out to the Navy that day.

NO KINGS PROTEST

About 500 protesters gathered June 14 on the Kerr County Courthouse lawn for a “No Kings” demonstration, which ended peacefully despite heightened security and the presence of armed counter-protesters.

SENTENCING

Robert Hurt, 71, was sentenced June 25 to 60 days in jail and eight years probation for making terroristic threats against Kerrville City Council members stemming from anger over LGBTQ+ library content. His actions led to nearly \$100,000 in enhanced security measures at City Hall.

HEALTH CARE PARTICIPATION

Kerrville City Council unanimously approved joining the West Texas Health Provider Participation District June 24 with Howard and Brown Counties to help local providers access enhanced Medicaid payments amid potential federal cuts.

ROBOTIC SURGERY

Peterson Health hosted a demonstration June 19 of Da Vinci surgical robots as part of an open house program highlighting its advanced robotic surgery capabilities.

IMMIGRATION FACILITY

The county postponed action on a proposal to lease its shuttered juvenile detention center to federal authorities for housing migrant children, forming a committee for more information.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Hill Country Charity Ball Association presented a \$140,000 donation June 10 to Disabled Outdoorsmen USA.

The 4th annual Pleasure Garden Blues Fest took place June 21 at the Doyle Community Center, drawing approximately 600 attendees.



The performance space at Louise Hays Park marked one of its final acts before being destroyed in the July 4 flood.

The Kerrville Police Department graduated its latest class of “junior cadets” June 7 from its summer program at the Doyle Community Center.

Kerrville First United Methodist Church hosted a Mega Food Pantry event June 30 in partnership with the San Antonio Food Bank at Light on the Hill.

PERSONNEL TRANSITIONS

Dr. Robert Templeton, Ingram ISD Superintendent, announced his retirement June 23 after a 14-year tenure.

Todd Bock’s transition to permanent Executive Director of the Kerr Economic Development Corporation, effective July 1, was confirmed June 23.

D-BAT CONTRACT

The City Council discussed June 24 the expiring D-Bat contract for the baseball and softball complex, noting a significant shortfall in tournament teams due to corporate instability.

PLANNING AND ZONING DENIAL

The Kerrville Planning and Zoning Commission denied June 6 Kerr County’s request for a larger LED highway marquee sign for the Hill Country Youth Event Center, citing size, precedent and city dark sky initiatives.

JUVENILE CHASE

A juvenile driver was apprehended June 18 after a high-speed chase in a stolen pickup truck that seriously injured an innocent motorist.

BECK BURIAL

Jerry and Shirley Beck, a local couple known for their recovery commu-

nity service, were buried together June 20 at Fort Sam Houston Cemetery.

ELECTIONEERING ORDINANCE

Kerrville City Council officially deleted its electioneering ordinance following sustained legal pressure and ongoing federal court litigation.

WATER FUND RECOVERY

The City of Kerrville’s water fund recovered from a projected \$1 million deficit to operate “in the black” for fiscal year 2025.

FBI REPORT

An FBI report released in June indicated that Texas led the nation with four active shooter incidents in 2024, resulting in 11 casualties.

AQUA TEXAS RATES

Aqua Texas Inc. proposed substantial increases in water bills for Kerr County residents, with decisions expected from the Public Utility Commission of Texas in July.

THURSDAY STORMS

Powerful thunderstorms swept through Kerr County early June 11, dumping between 1 and 4 inches of rain across the area; Camp Verde reported losing power for eight hours.

COMMUNITY DAY

Kerrville-Schreiner Park hosted a Community Day June 7, offering free park entry and activities.

JULY.

When everything
changed in Kerr County





July 2025 will forever be remembered as the month that changed Kerr County, when a catastrophic flood on Independence Day killed 119 people and devastated communities.

THE DISASTER

In the pre-dawn hours of July 4, unprecedented rainfall caused the Guadalupe River to rise more than 20 feet in less than two hours. The National Weather Service issued the first flash flood warning at 1:14 a.m. for areas including Ingram and Hunt. The Guadalupe River in Kerrville surged 22 feet in just 45 minutes, peaking at 36.6 feet at 6:45 a.m. At one point, the river was estimated to be moving nearly 4 billion gallons of water per hour.

The flooding initially killed six people, rising to 13 fatalities by a 3 p.m. press conference, and then to at least 24 people dead by the end of the day. The death toll continued to climb: 43 by July 5, 59 by July 6, 68 by July 7, 84 by July 8, 94 by July 9, 95 by July 10, 96 by July 11, 103 by July 13, 106 by July 14, 107 by July 15, and 108 by July 23. The Kerr County Lead's investigation confirmed at least 116 deaths by July 29.

Camp Mystic sustained catastrophic flooding with no power, water or Wi-Fi. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick stated 20 girls were initially unaccounted for. On July 7, Camp Mystic confirmed that all 27 campers and counselors were dead.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Kerrville Mayor Joe Herring Jr. and Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly issued disaster declarations. Gov. Greg Abbott signed a disaster declaration covering nine counties and providing unlimited state resources for the response. U.S. Coast Guard helicopters were deployed for rescue operations, leading to 237 rescues or evacuations.

The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country established the Kerr County Flood Relief Fund at 9:48 a.m., just hours after the disaster struck. By July 11, the foundation had raised more than \$30 million. By July 23, it had raised \$60 million and dispersed \$4.4 million in a second round of grants.

INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE

The flood destroyed infrastructure,

displaced hundreds of residents and caused widespread power outages affecting 2,646 customers. Kerrville's water treatment plant was damaged, forcing the city to rely on wells. The city's "Fourth on the River" holiday celebration was canceled, and the stage was seen downstream in a crumbled mass.

On July 28, the city of Kerrville declared a water supply emergency and implemented Stage 4 severe water conservation measures due to the inoperable water treatment plant. The Kerrville Triathlon Festival was formally canceled.

PRESIDENTIAL AND GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE

President Donald Trump signed a federal disaster declaration July 6, authorizing FEMA assistance. On July 11, Trump visited Kerrville to review rescue and recovery efforts, making remarks at the Hill Country Youth Event Center. He toured Camp Mystic and Louise Hays Park.

Gov. Abbott expanded the state disaster declaration July 5 to include six additional counties. Abbott reported July 14 that 97 people remain missing. By July 21, Kerrville officials confirmed the number of missing persons had dramatically dropped to three remaining individuals, eventually decreasing to two by July 24.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick announced July 8 that the state would fund flood warning sirens along the Guadalupe River before next summer.

FINANCIAL RESPONSE

Corporations and celebrities pledged over \$2 million in relief efforts by July 7. Major donations included \$5 million from H-E-B and \$1 million pledged by the Adam R. Scripps Foundation by July 10.

Country music star Robert Earl Keen announced July 5 he would donate merchandise sales and plan a benefit concert for relief efforts. He announced July 17 a benefit concert,

"Applause for the Cause," scheduled for Aug. 28.

The Chamber Foundation began distributing initial \$2,500 grants to businesses on July 7.

DISASTER TAX RATE

Kerr County Commissioners approved July 14 using 8% disaster authority to calculate property tax rates to manage cash flow for recovery, expecting delays in FEMA reimbursement. The Kerrville City Council unanimously approved the resolution authorizing the 8% disaster tax rate calculation on July 15. The council approved the 8% disaster tax rate calculation July 22, providing flexibility for recovery funding.

Commissioners approved a \$32,269 salary increase for Sheriff Larry Leitha on July 22 but rejected placing a 2% venue tax for the Hill Country Youth Event Center on the ballot.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE

Gov. Abbott confirmed July 11 a special legislative session would begin in 10 days. The Texas special legislative session began July 23. The first joint legislative hearing on the disaster was held in Austin, with testimony revealing coordination failures and communication gaps. Texas lawmakers filed at least 12 bills focused on youth camp safety, emergency communications and business recovery.

The legislative hearing continued July 24 in Austin, lasting 11 hours. A second joint legislative hearing was scheduled for July 31 in Kerrville at the Hill Country Youth Event Center.

RIVER RESTRICTIONS

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority declared the Guadalupe River system off-limits July 7 due to unprecedented contamination (chemicals, sewage and hazardous materials).

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

World Central Kitchen and the Salvation Army began coordinating



efforts to provide meals to first responders on July 4. The Salvation Army announced July 17 a comprehensive recovery operation planned to continue for up to two years.

Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly issued an emergency order July 6 restricting access to Highway 39 and evacuating unsupervised volunteers after flash flood warnings returned to the area.

DRONE INCIDENT

A Black Hawk helicopter carrying Kerrville city officials was grounded July 8 after being struck by an unauthorized drone.

MILITARY HONORS

U.S. Coast Guard aircrew members

received military medals July 13 (Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal) from DHS Secretary Kristi Noem for their heroism during the Camp Mystic rescues.

CITY SECURITY

City officials were dealing with targeted threats July 14 and discussed increasing security at City Hall.

TIMELINE REVELATION

Public records revealed July 29 Kerrville city leaders were not alerted to the catastrophic flooding until 5:36 a.m. City Manager Dalton Rice publicly defended his text message referring to Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem as “homeland Barbie.”

CASUALTIES BY LOCATION

The Kerr County Lead’s investigation confirmed the HTR TX Hill Country Campground and Blue Oak RV Park bore the heaviest toll with 37 confirmed deaths.

SEARCH OPERATIONS

Dive teams worked in the water at Louise Hays Park through July 18.

DISASTER DECLARATION EXTENSION

Gov. Greg Abbott announced July 4 that the deadline for residents to register for federal FEMA and SBA flood relief assistance was extended to Sept. 28.



August was defined by flood recovery efforts, with the community beginning the long process of healing while grappling with financial pressures and political accountability.

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

Texas lawmakers held an unprecedented 13-hour joint hearing July 31 (reported Aug. 1) between House and Senate disaster committees in Kerrville at the Hill Country Youth Event Center over the response to the flood that killed 117 people. During the hearing, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick delivered sharp criticism to Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly for being absent from key meetings on the disaster's first day. Hydrologists testified that the July 4 event was a genuine "thousand-year flood."

TAX RATE DECISIONS

The Kerr County Commissioners Court firmly rejected implementing an 8% disaster tax rate on Aug. 4.

The Kerrville City Council held a special meeting Aug. 19 and unanimously voted to pursue an 8% disaster recovery property tax rate increase for public hearing, citing over \$1 million in immediate flood losses.

FINANCIAL WARNINGS

Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly warned commissioners Aug. 13 that using too much of the county's fund balance to cover the proposed \$66.2 million budget could potentially lead to the county becoming "insolvent, meaning bankruptcy." On Aug. 22, Kelly warned about the "money disaster" the



Texas Gov. Greg Abbott dispersed relief checks to Ingram and Hunt residents. In San Antonio, Spurs legend Manu Ginobili threw out the first pitch at a San Antonio Missions game as part of a fundraiser for flood relief.

county faces due to required matching funds for federal recovery programs.

DONATIONS AND SUPPORT

NBC weatherman Al Roker delivered more than \$1.4 million in corporate donations Aug. 7 to Kerr County flood victims, including \$1 million from Buc-ee's to the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country.

Gov. Greg Abbott distributed 80 checks worth more than \$2 million Aug. 10 from the George Strait Foundation to flood survivors.





Schreiner University opened the renovated Edington Sports Complex, marking a new era in sports at the university.



Above and below, the legendary Crider's Dance Hall opened for one last dance before summer's end.



"Into The Woods" marked the re-opening of the Cailloux Theater after extensive renovations.





A near capacity crowd showed up Antler Stadium for the season opener against Del Rio.

The San Antonio Missions hosted a Flood Relief Fundraiser Game Aug. 9 against the Springfield Cardinals, wearing jerseys of flood-affected high schools, which were then auctioned for relief. Retired NBA legend Manu Ginobili threw out the ceremonial first pitch. The San Diego Padres and Boston Red Sox also wore Hill Country high school jerseys during batting practice.

The Home Depot Foundation awarded a \$70,000 grant Aug. 22 to the Dietert Center to aid recovery from extensive flood damage to its first floor.

The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country announced a \$40 million commitment Aug. 21 for housing recovery.

EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

The Texas Education Agency released 2024-25 accountability ratings Aug. 18: Kerr County schools earned 65 distinction designations, but Starkey Elementary received the county's only F rating (58 points), triggering mandatory state intervention measures. Hunt ISD received an A rating (94 points), the county's top honor.

Hunt ISD, which lost two students in the flood, prepared to welcome students back to school Aug. 20.

CAMP SAFETY LEGISLATION

Grieving parents of Camp Mystic victims delivered emotional testimony Aug. 21 before the Texas Senate Select Committee on Disaster Preparedness and Flooding, strongly supporting proposed camp safety legislation ("Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act").

The Texas House overwhelmingly

passed Youth Camp Safety Legislation (HB 1) on Aug. 21, which could potentially force the closure of historic camps by prohibiting cabins in 100-year floodplains.

Leaders of three historic Kerr County youth camps (Waldemar, Stewart and Vista) sent an urgent plea Aug. 29 to state lawmakers warning that the new flood safety regulations could force their closure.

WATER RESTORATION

Kerrville City Council eased water conservation measures Aug. 20 from Stage 4 to Stage 2 restrictions after successfully restoring the surface water treatment plant damaged in the flood.

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority announced Aug. 12 that Guadalupe River water quality returned to normal levels.

COMMUNITY HEALING

The first concert of the "Rise and Rebuild Concert Series" for community healing, featuring James McMurtry and BettySoo, took place Aug. 25 at Arcadia Live.

Robert Earl Keen's benefit concert "Applause for the Cause" was scheduled for Aug. 28.

Gov. Greg Abbott delivered the keynote remarks Aug. 28 at a Small Business Disaster Recovery Fair. During the fair, business owners emphasized that taking on additional debt was not an option and pressed state and federal officials for grants over loans.

DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

Kerrville City Council approved Aug. 12 a massive development agree-

ment for the \$1.2 billion Whiskey Springs project, featuring 787 acres of mixed-use development.

WRONGFUL DEATH LAWSUIT

The family of flood victim Jayda Floyd filed a wrongful death lawsuit Aug. 12 against the operators of HTR TX Hill Country Resort, alleging gross negligence.

ETJ REMOVAL

The Kerr County Commissioners Court unanimously approved Aug. 11 the motion to remove several county facilities (including the Hill Country Youth Event Center and Riverstar Park) from the City of Kerrville's extra-territorial jurisdiction following a sign dispute.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE STAFFING

Sheriff Leitha requested \$631,000 in additional funding Aug. 5 from commissioners to hire five new employees and purchase three patrol vehicles, citing severe understaffing. He reported that the Kerr County Sheriff's Office is handling nearly half (43.6%) of all police calls in Ingram due to that city's understaffed police force.

FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

Kerr County Commissioners unanimously approved Aug. 25 the formation of a flood warning system project team led by Tom Moser, charging the team with developing a plan and implementing a system within six months.

SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE EVALUATIONS



BettySoo and James McMurtry opened a series of free flood relief concerts at Arcadia Live!

Kerr County began Substantial Damage Evaluations Aug. 14 in unincorporated areas in the 100-year floodplain following the July 4 flooding disaster.

REOPENINGS

The newly renovated Scott Schreiner Golf Course officially reopened Aug. 27 following a \$4 million renovation project, celebrated by city officials as a symbol of resilience.

Playhouse 2000's production of "Into the Woods" marked the reopening Aug. 27 of the renovated Cailloux Theater following \$2 million in upgrades.

HEALTHCARE BENEFITS PROTEST

City employees and their allies packed the Kerrville City Council meeting Aug. 26 to protest recent healthcare benefit cuts, which they claim impose hundreds of dollars in new costs and jeopardize specialized care. Over 1,200 people signed a petition demanding City Manager Dalton Rice's resignation (a demand later removed by organizers) and financial relief for workers.

DATA BREACH

Kerrville Independent School District sent letters Aug. 22 to 4,300 people acknowledging a data breach earlier in the year that compromised extensive personal information, with the Qilin ransomware gang claiming responsibility.



RIPARIAN RESTORATION

The first of three riparian restoration workshops was held Aug. 5 in Center Point, drawing a standing-room-only crowd to discuss how landowners can help the Guadalupe River heal ecologically.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Target and USAA delivered 2,700 backpacks and supplies Aug. 5 for all 4,700 students across the Kerrville Independent School District.

NONPROFIT WEEK

The Lead Live began its fourth annual Nonprofit Week on Aug. 18 and reached its 1,000th episode Aug. 20 during the week.

SPORTS VICTORY

The Tivy High School football team routed Del Rio 41-20 Aug. 29 in their season opener, a memorable night preceded by ceremonies honoring flood first responders.



Amy Grant performed at the Cailloux Theater thanks to the HE Butt Foundation.

SEPTEMBER.

September focused on long-term flood recovery planning, with officials pursuing millions in state funding while communities began rebuilding and honoring victims.

DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDS

On Sept. 1, Kerrville officials announced they are developing plans to pursue up to \$50 million in state disaster recovery funds following the deadly July 4 flood. Acting Texas Comptroller Kelly Hancock confirmed the opportunity to access a portion of a \$200 million state appropriation for disaster-prone areas.

TAX RATE ADOPTION

Kerr County Commissioners proposed the “no new revenue rate” of 40.24 cents per \$100 valuation Sept. 1 for the 2025-26 budget despite warnings the decision could push the county’s fund balance below recommended levels. Flood damage reduced local property appraisals by an estimated \$240 million. The Commissioners Court formally adopted the fiscal year 2025-2026 county budget and the combined tax rate of \$0.4024 per \$100 valuation on Sept. 8. County Judge Rob Kelly abstained from the budget vote, warning the reliance on fund balance could put the county “in peril” next year.

The Kerrville City Council officially adopted a disaster tax rate of \$0.5711 per \$100 valuation (a 7.98% increase) Sept. 9 by a 4-1 vote, generating funds specifically for flood recovery. The council also unanimously adopted the fiscal 2026 budget.

CAMP SAFETY LEGISLATION

Families of Camp Mystic victims appeared Sept. 5 on the NBC Today Show to share their stories and advocate for the passage of the Heaven’s 27 Camp Safety Act (S.B. 1).





Gov. Greg Abbott, center, and Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott visited Center Point.

Gov. Greg Abbott signed three bills Sept. 6 aimed at improving summer camp safety and flood preparedness: Senate Bill 1 (Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act), which prohibits the licensing of youth camps with cabins in FEMA-designated floodplains; House Bill 1 (Youth CAMPER Act), which requires detailed emergency plans; and Senate Bill 3, which establishes a grant program for outdoor warning sirens.

Gov. Abbott signed Senate Bill 5 on Sept. 18, appropriating \$280.6 million for disaster relief and preparedness, including \$50 million for local grants to establish flood warning infrastructure.

Camp Mystic announced Sept. 24 it plans to reopen its Cypress Lake camp in 2026 while building an on-site memorial for the girls and counselors lost in the flood. The decision drew criticism from some victims' families.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country reported Sept. 11 that it had deployed 18 case managers to connect flood survivors with housing and recovery services, housing 12 families within the first week of the program's launch. On Sept. 17, CEO Austin Dickson reported the foundation had raised more than \$100 million for flood relief, setting a national record for funds raised and distributed by a community foundation within 30 days of a disaster.

KerrKonnnect announced Sept. 11 it is offering free rides through the end of 2025 to residents who lost transportation in the July 4 flood.

The Astros Foundation announced Sept. 26 a \$2.5 million donation to build new youth baseball and softball facilities in Ingram, a community hit hard by the flood.

The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country awarded a \$500,000 grant Sept. 30 to the Dietert Center for repairs following severe flood damage.



Butterflies enjoyed the return of the Riverside Nature Center.

SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

Ingram Independent School District Interim Superintendent Mindy Curran reported Sept. 2 that the district, despite significant flood damage that exceeded its insurance cap, was able to start school on time and achieved an A rating from the state.

Starkey Elementary Principal Colleen Dale presented the Kerrville ISD board Sept. 15 with an aggressive turnaround plan after the campus received an F rating on the state accountability report, the only failing school in Kerr County.

FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority board unanimously approved Sept. 17 requesting a federal feasibility study for flood detention dams to help reduce flash flood severity in Kerr

County.

Officials reported advancements Oct. 14 on the Guadalupe River Flood Warning System, aiming for a "platinum standard" system with multiple backup systems and real-time data integration.

FLOOD DEBRIS

Kerr County Commissioners heard appeals Sept. 8 from residents and advocates urging the county to keep woody flood debris mulch within the Guadalupe River watershed for local restoration efforts rather than exporting it to commercial compost facilities outside the county.

MEMORIALS

The funeral for Jane Ragsdale, a victim of the July 4 flood and the heart and soul of Camp Heart of the Hills, was held Sept. 15 at Kerrville's First Presbyterian Church.

Kerrville held its second annual Sept. 11 remembrance ceremony and memorial walk at Schreiner University, where speakers focused on the "hidden wounds" of war and suicide prevention.

The Hill Country Arts Foundation announced Sept. 17 it will permanently display the Wall of Hope flood memorial at its campus.

Symphony of the Hills opened its season Oct. 9, performing Mahler's Adagietto to honor the 119 victims of the July 4 flood.

LAWSUIT FILED

An expanded wrongful death lawsuit was filed Sept. 26 against HTR TX Hill Country Resort by the families of 11 flood victims, alleging the resort ignored numerous flood warnings prior to the disaster.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Former MLB All-Star Mark Teixeira began his campaign Sept. 22 for the



The San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama and Miss Texas Taylor Davis visited.

21st Congressional District seat with a visit to the Ingram Tom Moore High School football game.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Tom Jones announced his candidacy Oct. 9 for Kerr County Judge, opening the Precinct 1 commissioner seat on the ballot for the 2027 term. Flood recovery was stated as his top priority if elected.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The Kerrville Public Utility Board approved its fiscal year 2026 budget Sept. 17, deciding to keep electricity rates unchanged to provide economic relief during flood recovery.

COMMUNITY VISITS

The San Antonio Spurs visited Ingram Tom Moore High School Sept. 10 to support the flood-battered community and connect with students and staff.

Gov. Greg Abbott led an event Sept. 5 at Center Point ISD to distribute laptops to students whose families were affected by the floods, noting the state's total commitment to flood recovery reached \$500 million.

ARTS CANCELLATION

The Hill Country Arts Foundation



canceled the 2025 Texas Arts and Crafts Fair Sept. 23 due to extensive flood damage to its campus and forthcoming major construction.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

A federal government shutdown loomed starting Oct. 1, threatening delays in critical services like long-term FEMA flood recovery projects and veterans' education/job training programs in Kerr County.

MEDIA APPEARANCE

Kerrville ISD staff who evacuated hundreds of children from summer camps during the July 4 flood were featured Sept. 30 on The Kelly Clarkson Show. H-E-B donated \$50,000 each to the Children's Bereavement Center and

KISD staff.

REOPENINGS

The Riverside Nature Center officially reopened Sept. 2 after nearly two months of closure due to flood damage estimated at \$200,000 to \$300,000.

SPORTS MILESTONE

Schreiner University's inaugural developmental football team won its historic first game Sept. 20 with a 59-34 victory over Westgate Christian.

CIRCLE OF SERVICE

The Salvation Army of Kerrville hosted its annual Circle of Service fundraiser featuring Miss Texas USA 2025, Taylor Davis, with proceeds supporting flood recovery efforts.



When Kerr County starts to comeback: OCTOBER.

October saw the community navigating the complexities of flood recovery but saw the beginnings of a return to events that define the community.

FLOOD RECOVERY PLANNING

Kerr County held a flood recovery town hall Oct. 2 (“Floodplain 101”) to inform residents about rebuilding decisions and how to navigate federal floodplain regulations three months after the deadly July 4 flood.

Kerrville city officials unveiled Oct. 9 the preliminary master plan to rebuild the flood-damaged Louise Hays Park, with an estimated cost of \$6.5 million to \$10 million.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and House Speaker Dustin Burrows announced Oct. 13 joint legislative investigative committees to examine the deadly July flooding, specifically inviting Camp Mystic to testify.

Dr. David R. Maidment presented Oct. 23 to the UGRA board on improving flood forecasting, suggesting that detecting a velocity spike in river flow could provide approximately two hours of early warning.

PARK AND TRAIL REOPENINGS

Parts of Louise Hays Park and the Kerrville River Trail reopened Oct. 6 to the public for pedestrian access, marking a significant step in recovery efforts after the trail system was damaged in the July 4 flood.

WHISKEY SPRINGS DEVELOPMENT

Kerrville City Council unanimously approved Oct. 14 the







Led by junior outside hitter Giana Hilliard, Schreiner volleyball had its best season in its NCAA era.

first reading of an ordinance establishing Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Number Three (TIRZ No. 3) for the Whiskey Springs development, amid public criticism regarding financial subsidies. The council approved the second reading Oct. 28, officially creating the zone.

Prominent San Antonio trial lawyer Mikal Watts announced Oct. 14 he is representing Camp Mystic and the Eastland family pro bono in the wake of the flood disaster. On Oct. 31, Watts launched a coordinated public defense of Camp Mystic in the media, waging a public battle with Matthew Childress over the details and accountability surrounding the July 4 flood tragedy.

CAMP MYSTIC CONTROVERSY

Matthew Childress, father of a Camp Mystic victim, published an op-ed Oct. 23 in the Houston Chronicle criticizing Camp Mystic's actions and lack of accountability regarding the July 4 flood.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The Texas Water Symposium, "After the Flood: Recovery & Renewal," brought together grassroots leaders Oct. 23 to discuss long-term recovery and debate the controversy surrounding the cleanup's removal of coarse woody material (logs and debris) from the river, which some argued was crucial for natural healing.

A geospatial analysis presented to the City Council Oct. 28 showed an estimated 52% loss of riparian vegetation

(120 acres) along a 30-mile stretch of the Guadalupe River due to the flood.

RECOGNITION AND HONORS

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recognized 17 game wardens with high honors Oct. 23 (Medal of Valor and Medal of Merit) for their life-saving actions during the July flooding.

Mountain Home volunteer firefighter Dusty Block was honored Oct. 28 by Jon Stewart in Times Square for rescuing dozens of people during the July 4 flood.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

The city of Kerrville's Fright Night event drew hundreds of families Oct. 31 to Louise Hays Park, marking a return to hosting family-friendly fun despite the park still bearing scars from the devastating July 4 flood.

The inaugural Water Street Festival was held Oct. 25 downtown, serving as the first major community event since the July flood, aimed at revitalizing local businesses.

The Cailloux Theater hosted its Gala Grand Opening Oct. 25 with the performance Spirit of Scotland after completing renovations.

Gunny's Warriors hosted the third annual Field of Honor observance Oct. 18, which was postponed from September to aid community healing after the flood.

A large "No Kings" protest against the Trump administration took place Oct. 18 at the Kerr County Courthouse, drawing an estimated 600 people and

focusing on issues like immigration policies and cuts to federal programs.

Tivy High School hosted its annual Athletic Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony Oct. 16 and banquet, honoring the 2005-2006 girls' basketball team and the 2008 and 2009 football teams, with an emotional tribute acknowledging the community's flood resilience.

Schreiner University unveiled the completed public art project, "Cypress Sentinel," Oct. 6 designed by visiting artist Tim Mispagel.

CROSSWALK CONTROVERSY

The Texas Department of Transportation sent a letter Oct. 17 to Kerrville requiring the city to remove artistic crosswalks honoring the Guadalupe River, or risk losing state and federal transportation funding, following an order from Gov. Greg Abbott.

WEATHER

A strong cold front brought the coldest air of the season Oct. 29 and a wind advisory with gusts up to 50 mph to Kerr County, creating critical fire weather conditions.

SPORTS

Tivy High School lost its homecoming shootout Oct. 3 against Victoria West, 59-56.

Schreiner University's fledgling football program won Oct. 6 its Monday night developmental game at Texas Lutheran, 49-28, extending its unbeaten streak to 3-0.



November brought continued flood recovery efforts, major legal developments and community resilience as Kerrville honored victims while planning for the future.

WRONGFUL DEATH LAWSUITS

Four wrongful death lawsuits were filed Nov. 10 in Travis County District Court against Camp Mystic LLC and members of the Eastland family, representing 15 of the 27 people who died at the camp during the July 4 flood. The lawsuits allege negligence, gross negligence and delayed evacuation despite receiving flash flood warnings.

Five additional families joined the wrongful death lawsuit Nov. 15 against Camp Mystic, bringing the total number of victims represented in the civil litigation to 20 of the 27 killed.

The children of Jeffrey Ramsey, a man still missing from the July 4 flood, filed a wrongful death lawsuit Nov. 13 against the operators of HTR TX Hill Country Resort, alleging the resort failed to evacuate guests despite advance warnings.

CAMP SALES AND RELOCATION

Heart O' the Hills Camp for Girls was purchased Nov. 5 by Elisabeth and John Hay. The camp will relocate to a new, safer 70-acre site on the North Fork of the Guadalupe River, planning

to welcome campers in summer 2026, following the July 4 flood that killed the camp's longtime director, Jane Ragsdale, and destroyed the original site.

FLOOD RECOVERY SUPPORT

A program was announced Nov. 13 offering down payment assistance grants of up to \$145,000 for Kerr County residents whose homes were destroyed in the July 4 floods to purchase new houses.

Gov. Greg Abbott made a stop in Kerrville Nov. 15 to laud first responders at a luncheon hosted by the newly renovated Dietert Center.

FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

The Kerrville City Council unanimously approved Nov. 18 an interlocal agreement to develop a comprehensive flood warning system in partnership with multiple local entities, supporting a grant application of approximately \$15 million.

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority Board of Directors unanimously approved Nov. 19 agreements with regional partners (KPUB, Kerr County, City of Kerrville, City of Ingram) to pursue state funding for telecommunication infrastructure necessary for the flood warning system.

PARK RECONSTRUCTION

City Council approved Nov. 18 a memorandum of understanding to accept a total of \$375,000 from the Houston Rockets, San Antonio Spurs and Dallas Mavericks (plus matching community funds) for Guadalupe Park reconstruction.

City Council discussed Nov. 18 the first iteration of reimagining plans for Louise Hays and Lehmann-Monroe parks, emphasizing flood mitigation by moving vertical structures out of flood zones onto higher ground.

COMMUNITY HONORS

The Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce presented its annual awards Nov. 7, recognizing individuals and organizations for grit and resilience following the flood. Former Mayor Judy Eychner received the first-ever "Grit and Grace" award, and Doug Hetzler was named Businessperson of the Year. The Center Point, Hunt, Ingram and Kerrville independent school districts all received awards for their resilience during the July 4 flood relief efforts.

The Kerr County Annex was dedicated Nov. 11 to retired Air Force Col. Allie Burton, a 101-year-old Kerrville native, World War II and Korean War veteran, in a ceremony celebrating Veterans Day.

The Kerr County Sheriff's Office



honored dozens of employees Nov. 14 in a ceremony acknowledging service during the flood recovery, with Sheriff Larry Leitha noting impending retirements.

MENTAL HEALTH COURT

Kerr County Commissioners Court unanimously approved Nov. 24 the establishment of a specialty mental health court, set to begin operations Jan. 1, 2026, aimed at serving individuals in the criminal justice system with mental health and substance use issues.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

New Hope Counseling secured grant funding Nov. 1 to offer free mental health services through 2027, specifically to help the community process trauma from the July 4 flood and other life challenges.

SCHREINER UNIVERSITY EXPANSION

Schreiner University announced Nov. 14 it will add three new women's sports programs — flag football, beach volleyball and swimming — beginning competition in fall 2026, positioning the university to grow athletics equitably.

MEGAACRETE DEAL COLLAPSE

The \$25 million Megaacrete manufacturing deal, which included plans for a 75,000-square-foot facility and 45 jobs, collapsed Nov. 17. The termination was due to the 2024 closure of Austin White Lime Company, the critical supplier needed for the project.

REPUBLICAN PRIMARY HAND COUNT

The Kerr County Republican Party executive committee voted 10-6 on Nov. 17 to hand count a portion of the ballots (Election Day ballots) in the upcoming March 3 Republican Primary election despite concerns from county election

officials.

ELECTION DEFENSE

County Judge Rob Kelly publicly defended Nov. 24 Commissioner Tom Jones, who faced calls for replacement due to the “resign-to-run” law after filing to run for county judge.

KISD FINANCIAL RATING

The Kerrville Independent School District Board of Trustees learned Nov. 17 the district received a “Superior” rating (100/100 points) on its Texas Education Agency Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST) report.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Kerrville hosted its 24th annual Holiday Lighted Parade Nov. 22 in downtown, honoring first responders as grand marshals. The parade was followed by the Merry on the Square festival and the courthouse Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

The Salvation Army hosted its annual Thanksgiving dinner Nov. 27 at the Kerrville Kroc Center, with the meal prepared by the Odessa Chuck Wagon Gang due to complications from the July 4 flood.

Clint Orms began a three-day grand opening celebration Nov. 13 for his new 11,000-square-foot flagship showroom in downtown Kerrville.

The Texas Furniture Makers Show opened Nov. 1 at the Kerr Arts and Cultural Center with 54 pieces on display, representing more entries than the exhibition had seen in several years.

TRIBUTE CONCERT

The Fredericksburg Community Orchestra presented a community memorial and tribute concert Nov. 2 at the First Presbyterian Church for those lost throughout the year,



particularly victims of the July 4 flood. The names of all flood victims were spoken during the performance of "Ashokan Farewell."

Rev. Bert Baetz presided over an All-Saints Service at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, which honored those lost in the flood.

SPORTS ACHIEVEMENTS

Ingram Tom Moore secured its first bi-district football playoff win Nov. 13 since 2014, defeating Hondo 24-17. They defeated Orange Grove 37-21 on Nov. 21 in the UIL Class 3A Division I second-round playoff game, advancing to the third round for the first time since 2014.

Schreiner University volleyball swept two matches Nov. 15 in the conference tournament to advance to its first Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference championship match. The historic volleyball season ended Nov. 16 with a loss in the SCAC championship final against Colorado College.

Tivy High School senior Ava Reyes was scheduled to perform Nov. 27 in the 99th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City as part of the Spirit of America dance contingent.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Commissioners opened bids Nov. 24 for the Cade Loop Bridge disaster recovery rehabilitation project, a key flood recovery infrastructure item.



Ingram Tom Moore running back Will Symm shined.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Kerrville Pets Alive broke ground Nov. 25 on its new S.A.F.E. Campus facility, which is planned to be a comprehensive pet resource center to support animal welfare and assist Kerr County Animal Services. KPA also announced Karen Guerriero's new role as executive director.

RIVER CLEANUP

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority's annual River Clean Up event drew more than 180 volunteers Nov. 15 and successfully removed debris from four

sites along the Guadalupe River.

CYBERSECURITY

The Kerr County Commissioners Court approved measures Nov. 10 to incorporate IT security staff into disaster response protocols following revelations that cyberattacks have significantly accelerated.

DIETERT CENTER REOPENING

The Dietert Center celebrated Nov. 11 the gradual reopening of its Friendship Cafe and other areas after being heavily damaged during the July 4 flood.

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The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

is a program that assists former and current foster youth ages 16 to 25 who need assistance with completing their high school education or employment. Youth in the program are partnered with a Workforce Advocate to help them with career assessments, job search assistance, job referrals, job training, mentoring and job placement.

Youth Averted from Delinquency (YAD)

is an intensive case management service provided to youth who have been through the juvenile justice court or juvenile probation. A case manager provides intensive case management on a weekly basis and more.

YAD Mentoring

is a service for youth in the YAD program that provides specialized mentorship as a form of detention diversion. The program uses evidence-based practices to help youth build family-based resilience, mitigate trauma-related behavior and connects youth with a network of safe adults.

Learn more about BCFS Health and Human Services' work in Kerrville by visiting to BCFSCSD.org/Kerrville or by scanning the QR code.



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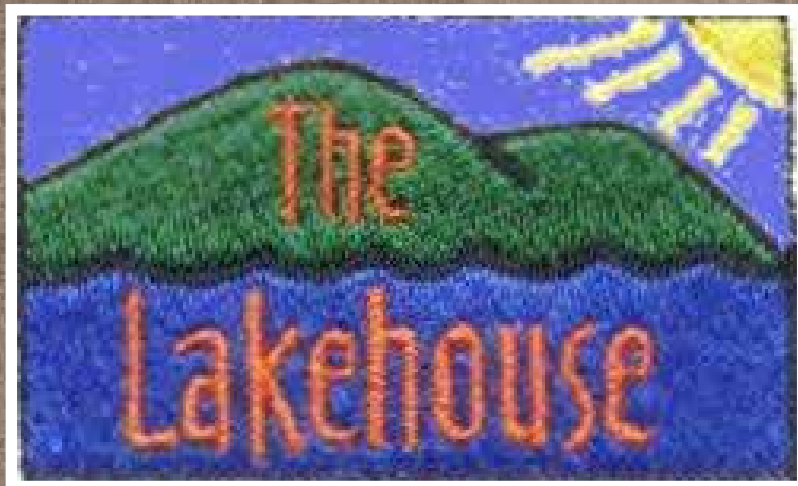
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Piggy stands guard at Flora on Earl Garrett Street.

SHOP



CATS

REPORTED AND WRITTEN BY JENNIFER DEAN THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

SHOPPING IN KERR COUNTY IS BETTER WITH CATS

Shop cats are a time-honored tradition. Serving as pest control, greeters (when they feel like it) and loyal companions. Historically, cats have been in stores, barns and warehouses since they became domesticated thousands of years ago.



Pumpkin at Mo-Ranch



Jazz at Balsler's Automotive.

Quite a few Kerrville businesses have cats living on site. The businesses range from service shops to retailers, but no matter the product or service, the cats tend to draw their own loyal customer base.

In the weeks following the flood, Smudge, the calico shop cat at Herring Printing Company, became quite the celebrity and for many, a bright spot during a difficult time. Located next to the memorial wall that popped up on Water Street, visitors often stopped to see Smudge after their time at the memorial.

She had so many visitors, there were times she'd need to find a quiet spot to nap, said Joe Herring, Jr., owner of Herring Printing Company. But she loves the attention.

Usually, Smudge can be found lying in front of the store window, watching people, cars and even the odd dog walker as



Chassis at NAPA Auto Parts in Kerrville. Pancake patrols the aisle at Double L Ranch & Wildlife Feed Store.

they pass.

Need an auto part? Look for Chassis, a friendly black-and-white cat, at NAPA Auto Parts on Jefferson Street in Kerrville. Chassis is usually wandering, snoozing on a shelf, or sitting sphinx-like on the counter or a stool. Auto, an 18-year-old black cat, NAPA Auto Parts owner Dalton Dover has had since childhood, naps away much of the day in the back office but will occasionally wander out to see what the ruckus is about.

How about feed? Maybe a cargo trailer rental? Visit Double L Ranch & Wildlife Feed Store in Kerrville and you'll likely spot Pancake, the shop's orange feline resident and star employee.

Word is she's a store favorite and people often ask for her when they stop in for supplies. Like most shop cats, Pancake roams the establishment freely, often staying indoors during hot or



Smudge at Herring Printing Co.



Archer, the Highlander, in search of treats or attention at Flora, in downtown Kerrville.



Callalilly lounging at Plant Haus in Kerrville. "If it fits, I sits," she said when asked if the box was hers.



Orion, the Maincoon at Flora in Kerrville, enjoying some countertop blepping after treats and pets.



Sausage, the boss of Kerrville Auto Repair silently judges customers who don't service their vehicles properly.



Agapanthus at Plant Haus often works in the office, signing off on invoices and such.



Shadow at Kerrville Auto Repair enjoys naps and treats by day and mousing and other adventures by night.





Auto at NAPA Auto Parts

cold weather but is usually happy to accompany her humans when they go outside for chores.

The most unique shop cats may be the crew at Flora in downtown Kerrville. This retail establishment is home to two Persian shop cats, a large Maine Coon mix and a Highlander with extra toes.

Piggy and Putin, the two Persians, can often be found sleeping in their window-view beds or standing guard at the door. Don't be off-put if Piggy looks at you disapprovingly. That's just the natural resting "disapproval" face (RDF) of the Persian breed. She's a lover who enjoys pets, especially if the treats are brought out.

Similarly, Orion, the Main Coon, will gladly accept some soft pets as well as treats. He likes to sleep by the register where he's sure to get attention. Don't be alarmed by his tongue poking out most of the time.

"Blepping" or "the blep" is a sign of contentment for cats and dogs.

A fairly new breed, Highlanders are a cross between Desert Lynx and Jungle Curl, and it's not uncommon for them to have polydactyl paws (extra or odd number of toes) like Archer, the Highlander at Flora. The breed tends to be very friendly, and Archer is no exception. He'll swing by for a pet or two and then wander off for other adventures. Highlanders tend to be smart and high-energy, so interactions and activity are usually welcome.

Less active but just as affectionate, Jazz is the shop cat at Balsers' Northside Automotive. If you stop by, you'll likely find the compact tabby mix dozing on the couch. She doesn't mind if you join her and will enjoy the attention. She likes people and the visitors like her. You'll even find mention of her in online reviews of

the shop.

Take a stroll through Plant Haus on Jefferson Street where, if you're lucky, you'll meet a little tabby named Agapanthus and a calico mix named Callalili. Clever, right? They often wander, helping with bug and critter control but can sometimes be found snoozing on a shelf or countertop.

Why is it that auto repairs always come at the worst possible time? One way to soften the blow is to visit Kerrville Auto Repair Center on G Street in Kerrville, where they'll help you get back on the road in no time, and while you wait, you can meet shop cats Sausage and Shadow. Sausage, an orange shorthair, was rescued from the engine of a vehicle brought in for repair a while back and Shadow, a black shorthair, was brought in to make sure Sausage doesn't get lonely at the shop.

They're great nappers,

unbothered by visitors and commission but word is, they are also excellent mousers and scorpion killers. Like the others, their reputation alone attracts new and returning business.

The secret to small business success? Shop cats. They keep away the critters, entertain your customers, and drive return business better than an expensive advertising campaign.

We began the shop cat tour last spring and the last kitty we met before the flood was Pumpkin at Mo-Ranch on Monday, June 30. A sweet, sassy orange cat loved by staff and visitors alike, Pumpkin greeted us in the lobby.

Some time has passed since the shop cat tour began, so if we missed any special kitties, let us know. There's always room for more shop cats, and my guess is the dog crowd will be hollering for a workin' dogs follow-up as well.



KERR COUNTY'S MASTERS OF LIGHT

WRITTEN BY

LOUIS AMESTOY

THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

Troy Errington and Darin Smith have turned Christmas decorating into an art form, a competition and a labor of love that requires U-Hauls, storage units and a healthy appreciation for “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.”

The two men — a recently retired Ingram ISD volleyball coach and Peterson Health’s director of clinical programs — are the reigning champion and runner-up in The Kerr County Lead’s annual Christmas Lights Tour, sponsored by the Kerrville Public Utility Board. Now in its fifth year, the tour showcases the county’s most spectacular holiday displays, and Errington’s Crockett Street home and Smith’s Riverhill residence have become must-see destinations.

“The movie was the specific inspiration for my house lighting,” Errington said during a recent interview at Pint and Plow Brewing Company. Smith includes a “Cousin Eddie” cutout in his display as a nod to the same film.

But their passion runs deeper than Clark Griswold’s electrical mishaps. Both men trace their decorating obsession to their fathers. Errington’s father crafted wooden cutouts — many of which still grace his son’s yard today. Smith’s father preferred lights and large inflatables, a tradition his son has continued and expanded into a side business installing





TROY ERRINGTON 147 CROCKETT ST. KERRVILLE

Troy Errington recently retired from coaching and teaching at Ingram ISD after leading the volleyball team to a district title and earning his 700th career win. His Christmas display on Crockett Street earned him Grand Champion status in The Kerr County Lead's Christmas Lights Tour. The display features wooden cutouts his late father crafted and his mother painted, making this year's setup particularly meaningful following her death in February. Errington views decorating as "decompression" after the intensity of coaching season and refuses to start his display until his team's season officially ends. His setup requires a full U-Haul to transport and a storage unit to house between seasons.







DARIN SMITH
502 RIVERHILL
KERRVILLE

Darin Smith balances a nearly 15-year career at Peterson Health with a thriving Christmas lights business. As director of clinical programs, he oversees certifications for trauma, stroke and chest pain. After graduating from Schreiner University's first Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in 2010, Smith turned his decorating passion into a professional venture, now hiring crews to install displays for residential and commercial clients across Kerrville. His River Hill home earned runner-up status in The Kerr County Lead's Christmas Lights Tour. This year's display includes a tribute to the July 4 flood featuring 27 bows and a "119" cutout honoring first responders and victims.





displays for others.

For Errington, decorating serves as “decompression” after the intensity of coaching. He maintains a strict rule: no decorating until his volleyball season officially ends. This year marked a bittersweet transition — Errington recently announced his retirement from coaching and teaching after leading Ingram to a district title and earning his 700th career win during the season.

The scale of their efforts is staggering. Errington needs a full-size U-Haul to transport his display between seasons and stores everything in a rented unit. His father-in-law handles the electrical work, installing the panels and outlets necessary to power the elaborate setup. He even uses Wi-Fi plugs to remotely manage his inflatables during the Hill Country’s notorious wind events.

Smith has taken his hobby professional, running a company that handles bounce houses and Christmas lighting installation for residential and commercial clients. He’s moved away from inflatables that can’t withstand the wind, focusing instead on precise lines created with custom-cut commercial lighting.

What started as a passion has grown into a thriving side business. Smith, who has worked at Peterson Health for nearly 15 years since graduating from Schreiner University’s first Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in 2010, now oversees certifications for trauma, stroke and chest pain as director of clinical programs. His decorating venture has expanded to the point where he hires crews to handle installations across Kerrville.

Behind the spectacle lies genuine community spirit. Errington’s family maintains a “Blue Santa” collection box that raised more than \$500 last year. Smith continues his father’s “Teddy Bear Exchange,” where a box at the street allows neighbors to take or leave bears.

This year’s displays carry added weight. Smith, who typically features a river element, replaced it with a tribute to the July 4 flood that devastated the community. His display includes 27 bows and a “119” cutout honoring first responders and the victims. Both men expressed hope that their lights might offer a moment of joy to a county still recovering from tragedy.

For Errington, this Christmas season holds particular significance. His mother died in February, and his recent retirement from coaching makes this a year of transitions. Displaying the wooden cutouts she painted alongside his father’s handiwork has become a way to honor both parents while stepping into a new chapter.

Smith, whose children are 5 and 2, finds motivation in seeing the holidays through their eyes and capturing that “wow” factor.

As of Thanksgiving, both men were racing to complete their displays, working against the clock to finish by their traditional deadline of Thanksgiving night.

This year, The Lead will feature video coverage of both homes rather than still photos, a change necessitated by the sheer detail and scope of their work.

The Kerr County Lead’s Christmas Lights Tour, sponsored by the Kerrville Public Utility Board, will feature multiple homes throughout the county. Details on the full tour and how to visit these displays will be announced in upcoming coverage.

For now, Errington and Smith are doing what they do best: bringing light to the Hill Country, one strand at a time.







In face of tragedy, heroes emerged

In a region prone to flash floods, people have answered the call to help those in need



WRITTEN BY
JOE HERRING JR.
FOR THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

The tragedy of July 4, 2025, is by far the worst flood to hit Kerr and Kendall counties in recorded history. 119 people were killed in that flood. In Kerr County, two remain missing: Cile Steward (8) and Jeffrey Ramsey (63).

Previously, the major floods of 1900, 1932, 1935, 1978, and 1987 were also deadly, but none nearly as devastating as the flood of this past July.

From July 13-18, 1900, torrential rains of up to 13.28 inches flooded the Guadalupe River, reportedly cresting around 37 feet in Kerrville. I've found several references to this flood, including from the L. A. Mosty family.

Four people died in the July 1, 1932, flood in Kerr and Kendall counties. Two were killed near Comfort, when their car was swept from the road 'by a wall of water,' as they drove toward Kerr-

The Sun flows an emblem, its new property, for sale.

KERRVILLE FLOOD TOWN GUN

Harvester of Happenings in the Heart of the Hills

WEEKLY 40

\$2.00 Per Year

KERRVILLE, KERR COUNTY, TEXAS, THURSDAY, JULY 7, 1932

5 Cents Per Copy

NUMBER 31

Four Persons Perish in Guadalupe River Flood

Request Made For Red Cross To Take Charge

Enormous Property Loss Expected to Exceed \$500,000.

Kerrville is slowly encircled from the north, northeast, east and south by the upper Guadalupe valley.

Mike Odeh, 26, Houston, an employee of Camp Ziegler in Ross County.

Charles H. Greenleaf, 50, Olevia, Mich.

Nims Alva Stiebel, 29, assistant postmaster at Comstock.

William Brunson, 30, Austin.

Shed's lady was recovered early Monday in a flat bottom along the river bank and near the entrance of the Ross County.

The body of Charles H. Greenleaf of Chicago was recovered Sunday afternoon four miles upstream.

Mike Odeh, 26, Houston, an employee of Camp Ziegler in Ross County.

Health Conditions Are Satisfactory, Says State Official

State Health Department officials were in Kerrville Tuesday and Wednesday, investigating the health conditions in the camp.

Upon departing from Kerrville, the health officer here in Ross County.

Before leaving Kerrville, Dr. Anderson told City Manager R. B. Ellis that the health conditions in the camp were satisfactory.

Health of a crew about 40 feet from where the men were housed.

It remained for Cooper Fletcher, Sr., to reach the flood victims.

He was accompanied by his wife and three children.

He was accompanied by his wife and three children.

He was accompanied by his wife and three children.

VIEW OF GUADALUPE IN KERRVILLE AT HEIGHT OF FLOOD



This picture of the flood in Kerrville was taken by Carl Nave from the roof of the Blue Bonnet Hotel in the heart of the business district, while the Guadalupe was at its highest Friday afternoon.

Three Youngsters In Car Stricken by Carbon Monoxide Gas

The three youngest children of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ziegler had a narrow escape from death by carbon monoxide gas.

(Continued on Last Page)

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN"

"Greater love had no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

(Continued on Last Page)

Methodist Young People to Gather At Camp Thursday

Young people of the annual Young People's Conference, senior division, at the Methodist church.

(Continued on Last Page)

KERRVILLE BOYS' LOVE FOR HIS DOGS LEADS HIM TO BRINK OF WATERY GRAVE

Howell Priore's love for his two dogs almost cost him his life and nearly trapped him in a fatal position.

The 11-year-old youth, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Priore, who lives along the river opposite the main business section of Kerrville.

He never saw his dogs anywhere. Confused beyond all measure of canine perception, the young pup and the six-year-old cross-breed were muddled downstream.

Dislodged in a small tree near the river, he was swept out by the rising water.

He never saw his dogs anywhere. Confused beyond all measure of canine perception, the young pup and the six-year-old cross-breed were muddled downstream.

Dislodged in a small tree near the river, he was swept out by the rising water.

He never saw his dogs anywhere. Confused beyond all measure of canine perception, the young pup and the six-year-old cross-breed were muddled downstream.

Dislodged in a small tree near the river, he was swept out by the rising water.

20 Homes Swept Away at Legion

Twenty homes at Legion were swept away Friday by the tremendous wall of water which came down the Guadalupe River.

Mr. Neal was taken to the surgery at the Veterans' Hospital, where first aid was administered.

While apprehension was high among those whose personal safety was threatened, the flood victims were unafraid.

Flood Claims Half Million Young Fish

The toll of the Guadalupe flood Friday included a half million fish.

Committee Pays Tribute to Youth Who Died in Flood

A special committee named by Dr. Orville D. Weems, director general of the League and United Red Cross, Tuesday reported a resolution on the death of Louis M. Odeh.

The resolution follows: "Whereas the young man, Louis M. Odeh, died in the flood which has afflicted Kerrville, Texas, on July 6, 1932.

Two Are Hurt in Automobile Crash

Two Kerrville residents suffered injuries in an auto crash Saturday afternoon.

Absentee Voters May Cast Ballots

Absentee ballots may be cast at the office of County Clerk J. H. Farnell at the court house.

Atkins Announces For County Judge

The Sun this week is authorized to announce that John S. Atkins is a candidate for County Judge.

FRIVOLOUS THOUGHTS OF VICTIMS MINGLE WITH GRIM REALITIES DURING FLOOD HOURS

While apprehension was high among those whose personal safety was threatened, the flood victims were unafraid.

First Half Hour Was Worst, Says Marooned Youth

"I was marooned the first 30 minutes after I climbed up the log, but after that, I was not so bad off."

Howell Priore Deplores Fact Lives Lost in the Flood

"I was marooned the first 30 minutes after I climbed up the log, but after that, I was not so bad off."

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Heroes of Guadalupe River Flood at Kerrville!



But for the heroism of B. P. Roberts, left, and Cooper Fletcher, right, (in the left photo) How Prior, center, might not be living today. Marooned in a tree, surrounded by the swirling waters of the Guadalupe river when it went on a rampage last week near Kerrville, Texas, Prior spent a night and a day in the tree and saw two men drown trying to rescue him, before Fletcher jumped from a boat rowed by Roberts and brought Prior to safety. Another hero of the flood was Gene Butt, an amateur wireless operator, right, who, when all communication was cut off, stayed at the controls of his radio and kept Kerrville in communication with the outside world. He sent 111 messages and received 25.

ville. There were four in the automobile when the water hit – Lizzie Ingenhuett, Ida Stieler, William Bronson, and J. L. Perkins. Of these, Stieler (age 29) and Bronson (30) drowned. The other two, Ingenhuett and Perkins managed to hang on to tree limbs and climb out of the water.

The other two deaths occurred in Kerrville itself, when men attempted to rescue Hal Priour, a teenager who was trapped in a cypress tree in the floodway near the end of Earl Garrett Street. Charles Greenleaf (50), of Olivet, Michigan, and Mike Odell (26), of Houston, died trying to save the boy.

The river flooded again in mid-June, 1935, just about three years after the devastating flood of 1932.

In early August 1978, remnants of Tropical Storm Amelia stalled over the headwaters of the Guadalupe and Medina Rivers, unleashing historic floods. The disaster drowned 33 people and inflicted widespread damage, sweeping away bridges, destroying roads, and scouring thousands of acres of rangeland.

Less than ten years later, on July 16–17, 1987, an intense summer storm dropped approximately 11.5 inches of rain in mid-July near the river's headwaters. The flood wave roared

through Ingram, Kerrville, and Comfort. At a church camp outside Comfort, evacuation vehicles carrying campers stalled in surging water. Ten teenagers drowned and dozens more were injured in the tragedy.

There are some similarities among these floods. The dates suggest early July flooding is the most dangerous time for our area. While some of the earlier floods lack descriptions of the source of the rain, several mention remnants of tropical storms. The flood of 2025 was caused by the remnants of Tropical Storm Barry.

The stories I read also talk about those who helped and those who survived. Every one of these tragedies had folks who stepped forward, into danger, to help others.

The flood of July 4, 2025, is no exception. People from all over the country, and from several foreign countries, including Mexico, showed up to help. They came to rescue those in peril, find those who were lost, feed those who were hungry, and give shelter to those who were homeless.

The Guadalupe River will flood again. Hopefully, warning systems will be in place to help save lives.



Schumacher Crossing in 1978.



The 1932 flood moving through Kerrville.

HOW **SPORTS** BROUGHT THE **SMILES** HOME

TWO TEAMS — INGRAM FOOTBALL, SCHREINER VOLLEYBALL — SHINED IN 2025 TO BRING A BOOST TO A DIFFICULT YEAR ACROSS KERR COUNTY

ESSAY BY

LOUIS AMESTOY

THE KERR COUNTY LEAD.

The beauty of sports is the unexpected. It can slide both ways — agony and ecstasy. It can bring a smile and a tear. After 30-some years of covering sports — sometimes on, sometimes off — I can say I've seen my fair share of wow moments.

In a dream world, I'd rather cover a high school track meet than spend another second jotting down

the play-by-play of a public meeting, but that's the task I've assigned myself by publishing *The Lead*. In most years, I'm thrilled to go out and cover high school football season. Not this year. It showed up before we could catch our breath from the relentless July 4 flood coverage.

If you told me that covering Ingram Tom Moore High School football and Schreiner University volleyball would have been one of the highlights of the year, I would have walked away from the conversa-







tion, but that's the beauty of sports. We can all be cynical.

Now, in terms of transparency, over the last two years, I worked part-time for the Ingram Independent School District as their communications person. Heading into the summer, I moved on because I couldn't do the work full-time. And covering high school sports at *The Lead* hasn't been a priority, but we do cover Schreiner extensively.

I knew that coming into the summer, Schreiner University volleyball coach Jeremiah Tiffin had a promising roster and a newly configured conference that saw longtime powers Trinity and Southwestern leave. So, I was cautiously optimistic.

However, you have to remember that success is a limiting factor for these two programs. Ingram's claim to fame was a 40-game losing streak from

2005 to 2009 — at the time the longest in the nation. Established in 1980, the Warriors have had 10 above .500 seasons — meaning winning more than five games in a season. The Warriors' best season came in 2014 when they finished a school-best 10-3, losing in the regional semifinals to Edna.

Ingram coach Tate DeMasco was lured home to Kerr County in 2021 by former Superintendent Bobby Templeton, and things began to change slowly. DeMasco, a Tivy grad, with assistant coaching positions at larger San Antonio schools, brought in a can-do attitude and some stubborn determination to right things. Last season, the Warriors started poorly at 0-6, but the losses were tight. Things turned around in the district schedule, with a 3-2 finish, just enough to sneak into the UIL 3A playoffs.



I covered 10 of those 11 games and saw steady improvement. You can accept a 3-8 finish if there are upsides and plenty were coming into the season. But once the flood happened, football seemed like a long way away. Usually, I'm itching for that first game.

I didn't make every game this season, but I made many of the big ones, including the impressive 37-33 win over Brady, where Gov. Greg Abbott played catch with DeMasco's son on the sidelines and performed the coin toss. Abbott would later boast that the Warriors didn't lose a game after that — he was partially correct. Ingram rolled off five consecutive victories before falling in the district title game against nemesis Llano, a program the Warriors haven't beaten on the gridiron.

The fun parts of Ingram's season was seeing the

development of junior quarterback Logan Spalding, who seemed to get the ball out quicker and quicker every time. He also had receivers that he didn't have last season, as he assumed the mantle of starter midway through the season. Spalding found J.J. Stewart, Caden Reed, Kendall Boles, Josh Woodruff and Hunter Cobb. Stewart was the guy with the big catches. The Warriors rotated running backs, with Caleb Ward and Will Symm doing much of the heavy lifting.

Still, I had my doubts going into the playoffs. So, I went down to San Antonio for the bi-district game against Hondo and figured that the Warriors might get run over. Funny thing. They rolled over Hondo.

In the six years I've been here, I've been waiting to see a signature win from Ingram. And on that



Gov. Greg Abbott delighted the hometown crowd with an appearance in September.





After Abbott's visit, the Warriors won five consecutive games and seven of their last nine.





Schreiner's Giana Hilliard, below, dominated for the Mountaineers.

night, the Warriors' defense came to play, which was the biggest surprise of all. For someone who doesn't smile much at sports, it was joyful watching the Warriors fly around to the ball on defense. Chris Alva, a rock in the middle of the defensive line, proved a handful for every offensive line, helping free up others to make critical plays. A 24-17 win for the Warriors, and an I'll be damned from me.

So, the next weekend down in Schertz, the Ingram faithful outnumbered by an Orange Grove fanbase armed with obnoxious plastic vuvuzela horns that blasted all night, but fell silent when Will Symm rushed for four touchdowns. The night ended with another smile and a big hug from a drenched DeMasco.

What were we watching? The Warriors were suddenly 7-5, their best record since 2018, when they went 8-3 under Duane Kroaker. DeMasco knew what he was seeing — Thanksgiving weekend football, a massive goal of any high school football program (no matter the state).

For those of us who made it to New Braunfels on Nov. 28 to see the Warriors face Edna, a team that seems built around consistent 10-win seasons and deep playoff runs, the tension of that game was almost too much to handle. Frankly, it was the best high school game I've seen in a long time, and it was a heart-





Schreiner's Jenna Palomarez, above, was the smallest player on the court, but that didn't stop her from earning all-tournament honors.



breaker. Ingram lost by a field goal in overtime. They had Edna beaten, but couldn't close them out. The season ended 7-6, but we all saw something satisfying. Ingram put everything out there and made us smile during this frequently bleak year.

We could certainly say the same thing about the Schreiner University women's volleyball team. The Mountaineers boasted a school-best 24-7 record on the season, finishing second in the conference tournament against Colorado College — a perennially difficult opponent for Schreiner.

The list of accomplishments was long for the Mountaineers, but this is a team ready for the future. While they will be moving into a more difficult conference in 2026, the foundations are there for another great run. Tiffin is a coach who wants to stick around Schreiner for a while, and that's a benefit. He's built a solid recruiting base from around Texas, which has the nation's best volleyball talent. The only sad part about this is that we won't get to watch 4-foot-10 libero Jenna Palomarez throw herself at every ball that might hit the floor. After watching Palomarez for the last four years, it's a reminder of why sports are so great — because we get to watch something remarkable.

Another reason to smile.



A COMMUNITY GATHERING THE LEAD LIVE!

In 2025, we reached a milestone in our signature offering, with a 1,000th show

The Peterson Health Digital Studio at Pint & Plow Brewing Co. had always been a gathering place for Kerrville's voices. But on the morning of July 5, 2025, those voices

carried a different weight.

The July 4 flood had transformed the Guadalupe River into a killing force just hours earlier. At 3 a.m., a wall of water had crashed through the Hill Country, devastating Camp Mystic, the HTR TX RV park, and the Casa Bonita neighborhood. By the time The Lead Live went on air that morning, the community was still in shock, the death toll unknown, and hundreds remained missing.

What followed over the next months would redefine the show's purpose. The Lead Live, which had spent four years as a daily platform for local news and conversation, became some-







thing different in the flood's aftermath: a central gathering place where a traumatized community could speak, listen, and begin to heal.

The transformation was immediate. The show that had been covering Christmas tree fundraisers and Fourth on the River concerts became a platform for emergency coordination, grief counseling, and the slow work of rebuilding. And the community responded by showing up, day after day, to share what they knew and what they needed.

The statistics tell part of the story. On Aug. 20, *The Lead Live* broadcast its 1,000th episode—a milestone that arrived in the middle of crisis. By year's end, the show will have completed its fifth season with 248 episodes in 2025 alone, bringing the total to 1,087 broadcasts since its launch. For the second consecutive year, the show hosted 1,000 guests, an average of more than four per episode.

But the numbers don't capture what happened in August 2025, when *The Lead Live* became something rare in modern media: a daily forum where the community could organize its own recovery.

Over the course of that brutal month, more than 40 nonprofit groups took the microphone. Ashley Phillips of the Salvation Army didn't just describe the overwhelming influx of donations at the Kroc Center—she helped coordinate where those resources needed to go. Doug Quinn and TJ Ware from United Survivors Disaster Relief spoke directly to neighbors grappling with guilt over surviving when others hadn't, naming the vicarious trauma that was affecting everyone, not just those who lost homes.

Kelsi Wilmot from Hill Country MHDD helped create a space for first responders struggling to turn off their crisis response. The Sisters in Service walked listeners through the chaotic work of managing a distribution center receiving supplies from across the country, helping volunteers understand where their efforts were most needed.

When Austin Dickson and Jane Zirkel from the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country appeared, they didn't just announce they'd raised more than \$60 million—they explained exactly how residents could access emergency funds. Small Business Administration representatives Tana Moorehead and Gabriel Perales returned repeatedly, each time urging business owners not to miss critical loan deadlines.

City Manager Dalton Rice used the platform to explain budget constraints without bureaucratic jargon. Police Chief Chris McCall honored the 18-month dispatcher who

organized the county into sectors during the crisis. Jake Williamson described how the Hill Country Youth Event Center became an emergency operations hub, and how his dog Clancy ended up serving as therapy for exhausted responders.

Each guest brought not just information, but validation. When Michael Anglin discussed his "Rising Up" video project to capture unfiltered survivor stories, he acknowledged what everyone felt—that this disaster needed to be remembered, not buried.

The live, conversational format gave guests what written updates couldn't: the ability to respond to community needs in real time. When listeners called in with questions about FEMA applications, SBA representatives could answer immediately. When confusion arose about debris removal, Commissioner Tom Jones could explain state contract constraints on the spot. The back-and-forth meant information flowed both ways—guests learned what the community needed even as they provided resources.

Through September, October, and November, the show continued its recovery coverage even as it resumed normal programming. Financial advisors Andrew Gay and Gilbert Paiz still gave market updates. Real estate agent Janelle Peralt still discussed property listings. Doug Hetzler still showcased products at Gibson's Discount Center. But the context had changed. Everything now happened in the shadow of July 4.

The regular segments became a form of normalcy, a signal that life would continue. When the show covered the inaugural Water Street Festival in October, it felt like more than just a downtown event—it was a community announcing it refused to be broken. When Katherine Boyette and Wanda Montemayor came on air to introduce the Kerr County Love Project, they offered something beyond traditional therapy: healing-centered engagement through clay tiles that helped residents, especially children, process trauma through art.

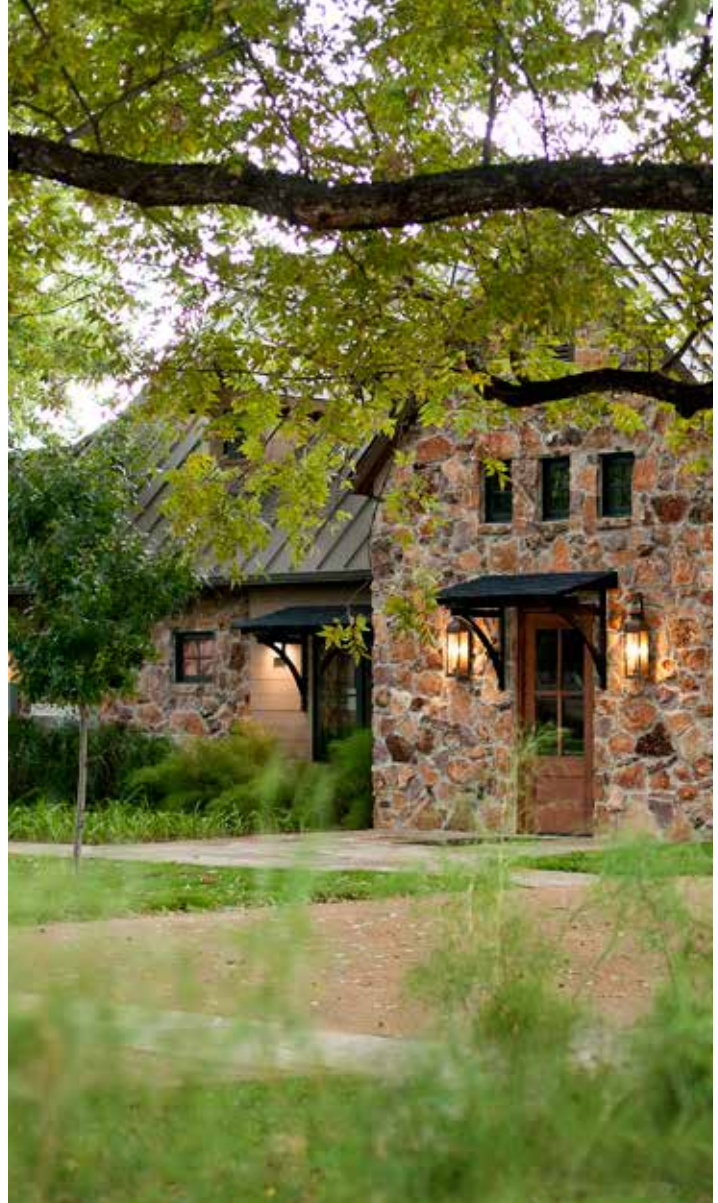
By the time Thanksgiving arrived, *The Lead Live* had documented both the immediate horror and the slow, grinding work of recovery. Victims and volunteers, officials and ordinary citizens, nonprofit workers and business owners had all taken their turn at the microphone, creating a collective narrative of survival and rebuilding. They had honored the 119 dead while celebrating the resilience of survivors, not as separate acts but as inseparable parts of moving forward.

As the fifth season draws to a close on Dec. 19 with episode 1,087, *The Lead Live* stands as more than a local news show. It has become a historical record of community resilience, told by the people who lived it. In an era when local journalism continues to shrink nationwide, this daily broadcast from a brewing company in Kerrville demonstrated something essential: when disaster strikes, people need more than information. They need a place to gather, to grieve, to organize, and to begin again.

The 1,000 guests who appeared in 2025 weren't just interview subjects. They were neighbors helping neighbors find their way forward, one conversation at a time.



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Thank you, Kerrville.

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The Kerr County **Lead.**

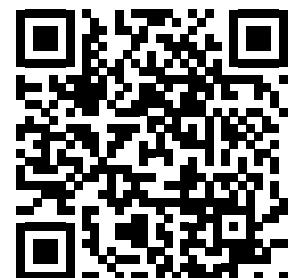
Our mission is simple: BE PRESENT.

In four years, The Kerr County Lead has produced more than 30,000 images documenting life in Kerr County across 212 photo galleries. Our weekday webcast hit 1,000 episodes on Aug. 20, 2025. Every weekday morning, we deliver an exclusive newsletter to subscribers' inboxes by 5 a.m.—packed with content you won't find on our website. Subscribe for \$10/month or \$100/year. Not ready to commit? Our photo galleries, videos and website remain free for everyone.

Join us in our mission. In the meantime, enjoy these next few pages of some of our finest photography from 2025.



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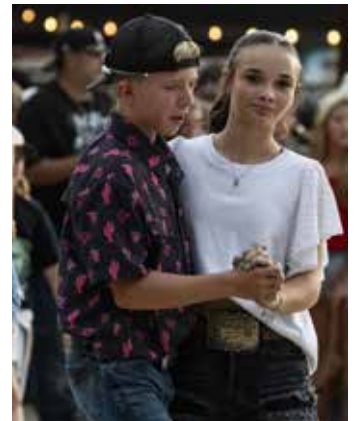


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SCAN FOR DETAILS



BIRDS from Page 44 >>

move pecans. They'll move cypress seeds. They'll move all of these things that we can't pay attention to right now while we're looking for people — they'll take care of that for us."

The birds are getting some help from the Upper Guadalupe River Authority and the City of Kerrville which initiated reseeded efforts in conjunction with a cleanup event on November 15.

The seed mixes include "switchgrass, green sprangletop, sand dropseed, sideoats grama, barnyard grass, Maximilian sunflower," said UGRA General Manager Tara Bushnoe. "It was purchased through a grant from the Community Foundation in partnership with Hill Country Alliance."

The seed mix will also

be handed out to landowners and used on reseeded projects over the next few months. Several tree planting activities through Bird City Kerrville and other groups are in the planning stages.

Birding groups and individuals have reported the return of many species during the past months. Year-round residents include several species of swallows and flycatchers, northern mockingbirds and northern cardinals have been seen .

The fall migration period began in mid-August and typically lasts through late November. Some of the fall migrants and winter residents spotted in the past few months include the lesser goldfinch, chipping sparrows, yellow rumped warbler, cedar waxwings, American robin and American Kestrel.

Neotropical cormorants usually winter in the area and in early November, they returned to Louise Hays Park.

Many wading birds make their home along the Guadalupe River and egrets, green herons and great blue herons can be found in areas with shallow water or small pools. Waterfowl like the northern pintail, mallard duck and Canadian and Egyptian geese are on the river. Various flycatchers and swallows have been out in force and hawks and other raptors can be found in high perches along the river.

Kerrville was designated a Bird City by Audubon Texas and Texas Parks & Wildlife earlier this year, and before the flood, plans were already in the works to begin building a series of bird blinds in locations around the city. The first

blind, which can be found in Kerrville-Schreiner Park at Trailhead 3, will soon be complete. While that blind is on the non-riverside location of the park, there are plans for others along the Kerrville River Trail in the future.

The blinds could be valuable tools for citizen science bird sighting report projects through platforms like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird, Audubon's D-Bird and iNaturalist provide valuable information for post-flood research. Data can help inform habitat and conservation efforts where they're most needed.

"Wildlife have dealt with natural disasters since the beginning of time and this is no different," said Steve Nelle, wildlife biologist and range conservationist. "They will bounce back in normal ebb and flow of population."



AQUATIC from Page 45 >>

Largemouth Bass and some sunfish species, and changes in size structure.

"The larger size Largemouth Bass were not as abundant but there were increases in abundance of smaller Largemouth Bass (less than 10-inches) relative to pre-flood numbers," Nisbet said. "We expect to see a highly successful spawning event in future years."

Preston Bean, a fisheries research scientist with TPWD at the fisheries center in Mountain Home, agrees and explained that fish are generally very resilient, particularly those in the spring-fed limestone systems of the Hill Country.

He explained that many of the fish lost in floods are usually younger, smaller fish. Guadalupe bass, for example, are adapted to these systems. The official Texas state fish, Guadalupe bass are also a recreationally important species in the region. Despite some popula-

tion losses, those remaining will spawn next year, as was seen following the 2018 flood in the Llano River.

"We saw catch rates of age-0 Guadalupe Bass (i.e., fingerlings) in 2019 about eight times higher than in other years, indicating that they had a very successful spawn in the year after the flood," Bean said. "We'll likely see a similar situation in the Guadalupe River. It will take a few years for those fish to reach a catchable size for anglers, but there are still large Guadalupe Bass in the river right now."

TPWD referenced relevant studies that have been completed during floods with tagged fish that showed about 75% of Guadalupe bass stayed within the same river reach by finding refuge downstream of boulders or other structures or by to the edges of the river and into the flood plain where water movement was slower. The other 25% moved upstream, some traveling as far as four miles, a distance

that included travel over multiple low-head dams and crossings.

To repopulate river reaches, this behavior is common for fish in flood-prone systems. At a population level, fish are expected to be fine, provided river corridors can recover.

"We will have the ability to restock with Guadalupe Bass this upcoming spring if it's warranted," Nisbet said. "Additional surveys will be conducted in January and March/April to make this determination."

No post-flood information about the Guadalupe fatmucket and Guadalupe Orb, both endangered freshwater mussels found in Kerr County, is yet available but according to Bushnoe, UGRA staff has seen live paper pondshell and Texas lilliput during their water quality monitoring events.

"They are native freshwater mussels but not endangered," she said.

River restoration efforts have been organized

through the Kerr Together River Working Group.

"As part of this effort, Hill Country Alliance organized three landowner workshops which were sponsored by UGRA, Bushnoe said. "Streamside landowners with property impacted by the flood gained hands-on experience to help them manage their properties through revegetation."

They were also given free seeds and plants for their properties.

To address invasive species spread, TPWD partners with government entities, nonprofit organizations, volunteers, and private landowners to manage and control *Arundo* populations at no-cost to the landowner. The Healthy Creeks team can be reached at healthy-creeks@tpwd.texas.gov or 512-289-2740.

More Hill Country Alliance workshops are being planned for the spring, Nisbet said.

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Exterior rendering of the renovated A.C. and Myrta Schreiner House at 529 Water Street

About the Heritage Center

The Heart of the Hills Heritage Center is a new cultural and educational space connecting our community with the unique stories of the Texas Hill Country. Located at 529 Water Street, the Center welcomes residents, visitors, and newcomers to explore Kerr County's rich history and see themselves reflected in its stories.

What You'll Experience

Visitors will discover interactive and immersive exhibits that showcase our natural landscape, highlight the region's entrepreneurial spirit, and reflect who we are and who came before us. Through first-person accounts, historical imagery, artifacts, and multimedia storytelling, exhibits like "Healing Landscape" and "Settlers in Kerr County" bring our various histories to life for visitors of all ages..



Healing Landscape exhibit

Why It Matters

As we look ahead to our opening year, your support is needed now more than ever to grow and sustain the Heritage Center as a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. We're developing collaborative exhibits and engaging programs that will demonstrate how learning from the past informs our future. Making an investment today guarantees that the Heritage Center will be able to accurately, respectfully, and carefully preserve the history of our cherished Hill Country. Thank you for standing with us as we continue building a space that honors our past, engages the present, and inspires future generations. I look forward to welcoming you to our community's newest gathering space!

Angela Kennedy, Executive Director

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Settlers in Kerr County exhibit

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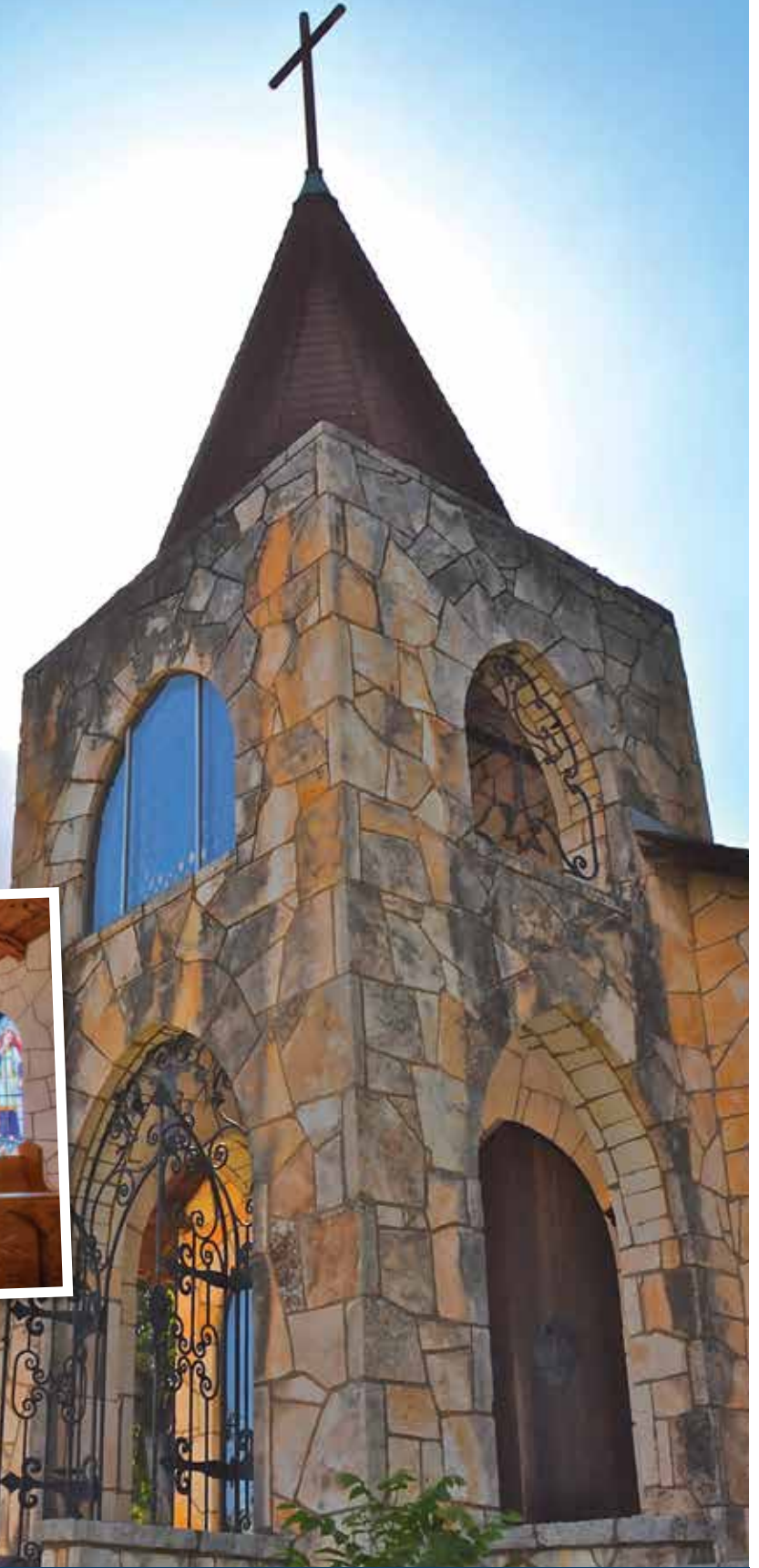
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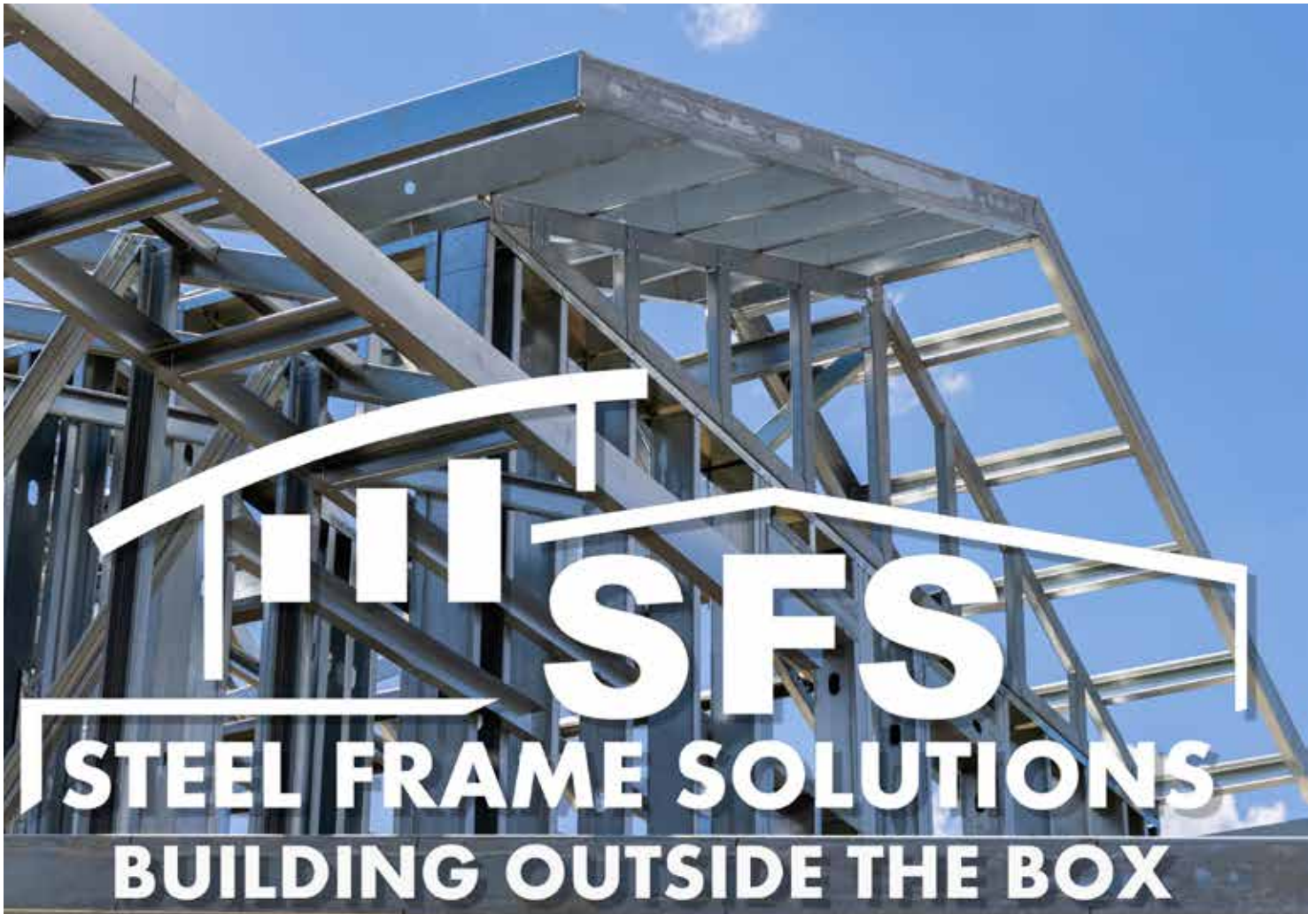
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