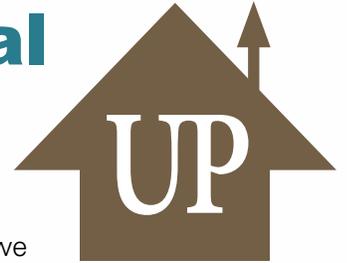




# City CURRENTS

SPRING 2014

## Home Appraisal Value Going



**By Ed Heathcott**

There is good news and bad news about Harris County.

The good news is that Harris County is truly one of the bright spots in the U.S. economy. The bad news? Property values are going to increase by 20 percent.

We have strong economic growth and business expansion, which has increased the demand for residential property. That's what has been driving the increased sales prices we've experienced in the past few years.

The main economic drivers of our economy are manufacturing, the oil and gas industry, the Port of Houston and the Texas Medical Center. These are the primary economic drivers that are bringing so many new people and jobs into the area.

In the last three years, 1,200 people have been moving each day into Texas, with about 600 people coming to Harris County each day. In just the last three years, about 650,000 new people have moved into the Houston area.

And most of those people have found jobs, due to the economic expansion. The city of West University Place is benefitting from the overall enthusiastic business expansion in Harris County. People want to live in West U because of our proximity to the Medical Center and all the downtown office buildings.

Why do people want to live in West U? Because this is where you get the best value for your tax dollars. We have a very desirable place to live

because we have strong codes and ordinances, and zoning, which Houston does not. In addition, West U has reinvested its tax dollars back into our infrastructure; our streets as well maintained, we even have a street sweeper to keep debris out of the storm sewers, and we have a quick response time from police and fire departments. Our parks are maintained at a very high level, and there is so much maintenance that goes unnoticed. Most people probably don't realize that every sign in West U is washed – so you can read them – at least twice each year.

That level of services is what people are getting from their tax dollars here in West U. That said, the residential property owners in West U will soon be receiving a new statement of their property valuations from the Harris County Appraisal District.

Residential property owners across Harris County are going to see the appraised value of their property increase by about 20 percent. Let me be clear: that's the appraised value. The taxable value of residential property is limited, by state law, to an increase of only 10 percent per year. The value you are paying property taxes on cannot be raised by more than 10 percent in any given year.

Many factors contributed to the increase in property values, not the least of which is demand. The sales volume of single-family homes increased 17.4 percent in 2013, and the total dollar volume of housing

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## From the Mayor's Desk



West U is overwhelmingly a community of homes. And yet while our commercial districts are small they are very important. The property and sales tax revenues we receive from businesses are significantly important in keeping the tax burden on homeowners less burdensome. Additionally, our local businesses provide welcome amenities and a sense of community we would not have were they not part

of our community. To be sure, each and every one of them is very definitely "one of us."

West U business land use is governed by our commercial zoning regulations. It is the set of rules and regulations that govern what a business can do with its property. Our commercial zoning regulations have not been substantially revised since they were passed in 1987. Presently they can be difficult to decipher. They need to be updated and clarified so business owners have a clear understanding of what they can and cannot do. Our city staff and Zoning and Planning

Commission (ZPC) have the responsibility for reviewing and updating all of our land use regulations and presenting any recommended changes for Council action. This year your City Council has tasked them with updating our non residential regulations. This is a huge task and the city has employed a consultant to begin the work. The firm of Kendig Keast Cooperative is in the process of reviewing what we have now and how it can be improved. It will confer with a wide range of citizens and business owners and present its findings to the ZPC. Led by Chairman Richard Wilson the ZPC will make recommendations to Council for possible ordinance changes. It takes two readings of any ordinance change at two separate Council meetings before any changes go into effect. You can be assured that both the ZPC and the City Council will hold public meetings to ensure that every citizen interested can learn what and why any change is being proposed. All citizen concerns will be considered and addressed before any changes are made. While it is too early in the process to determine when hearings and town hall meetings will be scheduled, the city will keep you informed as we move through the process.

This exercise is necessary and long overdue. Our city's commercial component is small but vital. We owe it to our business owners just as we owe it to homeowners to ensure the ordinances that govern them are up to date, comprehensive and understandable. Please stay tuned and make your concerns known.

*Bob Ivy*

## 2014 TRASH & RECYCLING HOLIDAY COLLECTION SCHEDULE

For up to date information on the schedule, please check the Holiday Information link on our website at [www.westutx.gov/trash](http://www.westutx.gov/trash).

**MEMORIAL DAY** **MAY 26, 2014** **MONDAY**  
**NO CURBSIDE COLLECTION.** City offices will be closed. Please note the changes for Monday and Tuesday routes:  
 • **Monday (5/26)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Tuesday (5/27)  
 • **Tuesday (5/27)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Wednesday (5/28)

**FOURTH OF JULY** **JULY 4, 2014** **FRIDAY**  
**NO CURBSIDE COLLECTION.** City offices will be closed. Please note the changes for Thursday and Friday routes:  
 • **Thursday (7/3)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Wednesday (7/2)  
 • **Friday (7/4)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Thursday (7/3)

**LABOR DAY** **SEPTEMBER 1, 2014** **MONDAY**  
**NO CURBSIDE COLLECTION.** City offices will be closed. Please note the changes for Monday and Tuesday routes:  
 • **Monday (9/1)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Tuesday (9/2)  
 • **Tuesday (9/2)** trash & recycling routes will be picked up on Wednesday (9/3)

### CITY HOLIDAY CLOSURES AND LIMITED SERVICE HOURS

Administration offices are closed the following days during these holidays:

Memorial Day	May 26
Independence Day	July 4
Labor Day	September 1
Thanksgiving Day	November 27
Day after Thanksgiving	November 28
Christmas Day	December 25
Additional Christmas Holiday	December 26

## Home Appraisal Value Going Up Continued from page 1

sales increased 30.2 percent. At the end of last year, the median price of \$188,000 was the highest ever in the city of Houston, and there was an inventory of less than 2.6 months, also the lowest ever.

Foreclosures, an unwelcome result of the economic crisis, fell nearly 50 percent last year. Meanwhile, builders and developers in the Houston area are struggling to keep up with the demand for new homes. Houston led the nation last year in single-family home starts, with 28,339 new homes started, which is an increase of 20 percent over 2012.

In the last quarter of 2013, builders started construction on 6,141 new homes – the largest 4th quarter in more than six years. Because of the 2008 downturn in the U.S. economy, which was met with a slowdown in Harris County, property values have been stagnant for a while. Now, with economic expansion and the resulting demand for residential and commercial property, homeowners are seeing the appraised value of their investments go up.

The Harris County Appraisal District has nothing to do with what the homeowner actually pays in property taxes. The district – like other appraisal districts statewide

– is responsible for evaluating the value of properties. If property values go up, the taxing entities always have the right to lower their tax rates.

And, there are many, many taxing entities in Harris County, ranging from cities and school districts and the county to the Port of Houston, municipal utility districts, etc.

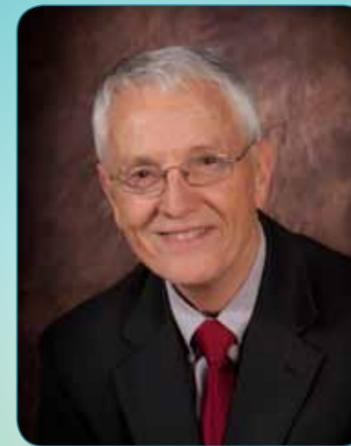
The residential property valuations of HCAD will include these increases:

- Homes valued at \$150,000 to \$249,999: 15.9 %
- Homes valued at \$250,000 to \$499,999: 19.7 %
- Homes valued at \$500,000 to \$999,999: 20.4 %
- Homes valued at \$1 million and up: 20.5%

There are approximately 950,000 total single family homes in Harris County, with increasing appraisals of about 16.6 percent. Commercial property values also are increasing by about 20 percent, with significant fluctuation in office buildings, apartments and warehouses.

Although the Harris County Appraisal District has about 640 employees, it would be nearly impossible to evaluate

**Continued on page 3**



*Ed Heathcott, a member of the West University Place City Council, is chairman of the board of the Harris County Appraisal District. He has served seven years on the six-member board, as a representative of the 33 cities in Harris County except for Houston. Heathcott, the former mayor of Jersey Village for six years, moved back to West U in 2008 after growing up here.*

## Home Appraisal Value Going Up

**Continued from page 2**

every single property in Harris County every two years, because there are 1.7 million parcels of land in the county. The appraisal district is very sophisticated in the use of technology to determine the correct value of properties. Using aerial photos of all structures in Harris County, and a computer program to detect any differences, the district can send an appraiser to those properties with major changes.

With the increased demand for residential property, the city of West U is once again enjoying a construction boom. According to Assistant City Manager Chris Peifer, the city recently issued 5 new home construction permit in just a two-week period. New home construction permits have already been issued for 20 new homes this year, compared to 13 new permits issued at this time last year.

HCAD, like all appraisal districts in Texas, is commissioned by the state to appraise all properties at fair market value. If you feel your property value is in error, you have several options. To file a protest online, go to [www.hcad.org](http://www.hcad.org) and watch a short video that details how to file a protest.

# Parks & Recreation Events

## Party on the Patio Concert Series

Every Friday in June

7 – 9 pm

### Colonial Park Pool Deck, 4130 Byron

Bring your lawn chairs and blankets, sit back and enjoy a fantastic lineup of some of Houston's best-known bands! The concert admission is complimentary, but if you wish to swim, regular pool admission is required. The Party on the Patio Concert Series is sponsored by Direct Energy and benefits the Friends of West University Place Parks Fund, Inc.

**June 6:** Grady Gaines and the Texas Upsetters (Soul)

**June 13:** Tommy Dardar and Big Daddy Gumbo (Louisiana Blues/R&B)

**June 20:** The Fab Five (Beatles/60's)

**June 27:** Ezra Charles Band (Boogie Woogie)



## Colonial Park Pool Opening

It's time to celebrate the sun once again! Colonial Park Pool Members are welcome to join us for a special members only 2014 Summer Season kickoff party on Saturday, April 26 from 10 am-7pm and Sunday, April 27 from 12 pm-7 pm. Games, food, and a DJ always make a day at the pool even better. Don't have a membership yet? Just purchase one at the door to get into the party!

Colonial Park Pool opens to the general public on Saturday, May 3. Don't forget your swim suit!

## Swim Team Tryouts

If your son or daughter is 10 years or younger and would like to try out for the Pirahna swim team, visit the West U Rec Center on May 3 from 10 am - 12 pm and May 9 from 6 - 7 pm. Below are additional dates to help with your summer scheduling.

### May practice schedule

May 12-29 M-Th, 4:00-7:00 pm Recreation Center Pool

### June practice schedule

June 2-26 M-F, 7:00-9:00 am Recreation Center Pool

### Swim Meets

June 2, 16, 23 4:00-11:00 pm Recreation Center Pool

## Mom's Spa Day

All West U resident mothers are invited to come get a little R & R before their special day out at Colonial Park Pool on Saturday, May 10 from 9 – 11 am! Come out to enjoy a kid-

free day, by the pool, complete with massages, breakfast, and mimosas. Each mother will get the opportunity to win raffle prizes and all will leave with their own Mother's Day gift courtesy of the West U Parks and Recreation Department. The event is limited to the first 60 registrants. Priority registration for Colonial Park Pool Members begins April 1. Open registration begins April 15. Event is \$10 for non-members. For information about registering for this event, please call 713.662.7420 or go to [www.westutx.gov/events](http://www.westutx.gov/events).

Note: Colonial Park Pool will open to the public at 12:00 pm after the event!

## Ice Cream Social

Colonial Park Pool members are invited to enjoy the end of the 2013-2014 school year at Colonial Park Pool on May 30th from 5:00-7:00 pm. Celebrate with music and complimentary sundaes after your last day of school. This event is exclusive to Colonial Park Pool members, no exceptions.

## Sunday Fundays

The first Sunday of each month starting June 1 from 10:00am-12:00 pm is Sunday Funday & is open exclusively for Colonial Park Pool members. Get the best table and enjoy the pool before the rush hits. Entry is complimentary and exclusive to Colonial Park Pool members.



## Monet & Mimosas

West U will be hosting its very own wine and painting event on Sunday, June 8 at Colonial Park Pool from 9:00 am-11:00 am. Registration for the event is \$35 for Colonial Park Pool members, \$45 for non-member residents, and \$50 for non-residents. A minimum of 15 people must be registered for this event by May 23 in order for the event to run. Please contact the West U Recreation Center at 713.662.7420 or visit [www.westutx.gov/events](http://www.westutx.gov/events) for more information about registering.

Note: Colonial Park Pool will open to the public at 12:00 pm after the event!

## Beer, Grill and Chill

Calling all West U dads! Head out to Colonial Park Pool on June 14 from 7:30-9:30 pm for your very own Father's Day party. Enjoy a night at the pool with other West U dads complete with games, beer, and food. No registration is required. Event is complimentary to Colonial Park Pool members and \$10 for non-member residents.

## 55 and Up?

We offer a wide variety of fun and stimulating programs ranging from exercise to day trips! Come socialize and make new friends while embracing a healthy, active lifestyle. For more information call 713.662.5895.

# Friends of West U Parks

With record breaking attendance, everybody showed their love for West U parks! **Park Lovers' Ball 2014** was a resounding success and raised over \$262,000 for our parks. Held at the Royal Sonesta Houston on February 8, the scene was one of fun and merriment. Event co-chairs Megan and Drew Morris, Nancy Kate and Mark Prescott, and Kara and Dax Sanders left no detail to chance. They planned and worked tirelessly with their committee and delivered a memorable evening as guests were entertained and treated to scrumptious food and specialty cocktails throughout the night. Highlights included a logo ice bar, the popular wine pull and whiskey toss, a lively game of Heads or Tails, Texas steakhouse dinner, and dancing to the tunes of the David Caceres Band.



Cecilia Binig McCann was recognized as the honorary chair for her many years of service to the West U community. She and her family have been long time parks' supporters. Friends is grateful to all who contributed to the event including auction donors, underwriters, and sponsors, as well as committee members and other volunteers, without whom Park Lovers' Ball would not be possible. We'd especially like to thank Direct Energy (Friends 2012, 2013 and 2014 Corporate Sponsor), Mary Margaret and Russ Schulze; Tudor, Pickering, Holt & Co.; Cecilia Binig McCann and Brian Parsley, Reed Smith LLP, Molly and Phil Scioli, and Andrea and John T. Young, Jr./Conway MacKenzie. Park Lovers' Ball continues to be a highly popular annual event which brings friends and neighbors together to celebrate our wonderful West University Place parks and raise funds so that we can all continue to enjoy our parks for generations to come.

Next on the Friends' radar is the annual summer **Party on the Patio Concert Series** which will take place on Fridays in June (June 6, 13, 20 and 27) from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at the Colonial Park Pool Deck located at 4130 Byron. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets, sit back and enjoy a fantastic lineup of some of Houston's best known bands! Concert admission is complimentary. Please visit the Parks & Recreation Special Events page at [www.westutx.gov/events](http://www.westutx.gov/events) for a complete schedule. The Party on the Patio concert series is sponsored by Direct Energy and benefits the Friends of West University Place Parks Fund, Inc.

Stay tuned for information on the annual **Fathers & Flashlights** campout on Saturday and Sunday, September 27 and 28, 2014, at the fields surrounding West University Elementary School. Event Co-chairs Judy and Comfort Cheng and Dee Dee and Jamie Gilder are busy planning another memorable event for fathers and their children, and the volunteer moms.

To stay current on Friends events and activities, call 713.662.7430, visit [www.westuparks.org](http://www.westuparks.org), or stop by the Friends of West U Parks office located in the West U Rec Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd.



# HELP US Help You!

Emergency Telecommunications Officers, commonly known as dispatchers, are essential to every public safety agency across the world. These men and women answer calls made to 9-1-1 for help and assistance in emergency and non-emergency situations. They quickly assess the situation and dispatch emergency responders to the location of various emergency and non-emergency situations.

West U PD has eight (8) full-time dispatchers. These men and women work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year serving the residents of West U. West U dispatchers answer and dispatch a variety of calls ranging from lost pets to major vehicle accidents with injuries. They are the calm voice you will hear in the middle of the night in an emergency situation.

In an emergency situation you can reach WUPD dispatchers by dialing

9-1-1. If your situation is not life threatening, you can reach them by dialing 713-668-0330. WUPD dispatchers are here to help you, but in order to do that, they need help from you! Here are a few tips to help them help you:

- **Answer all questions.**
- **Don't hang up.**
- **Follow instructions.**

The dispatchers are trained to ask multiple questions in order to make the best decision about your needs. In asking the questions, they are not only assessing your situation, but they are thinking about the emergency responders and the information they will need in order to respond to you. They are also trying to determine if they will be sending the emergency responders into a potentially unsafe situation.



It is very important that you do not hang up until the dispatcher advises to do so. Every moment is vitally important. If the dispatcher gives you instructions on something to do, please follow if safe to do so. If it is unsafe or you're unsure, let the dispatcher know.

In the event of a major incident, the dispatchers are answering multiple calls, sending and communicating with emergency responders simultaneously. Answering non-emergency calls for information about the incident delays the dispatcher from answering emergency calls and hinders vital communication with the emergency responders. So, please refrain from making non-emergency/inquiring calls during these times.

## Spring is just around the corner

Spring means different things to different people --- warmer temperatures and beautiful days, gardening, landscaping improvements, pool filling, to name a few. But higher usage of water comes into play with each of those activities, too. As you jump into the spirit of spring, make sure you do some preparation to lessen the impact on your household budget.

- \* Before you turn on your sprinkler valves full blast and walk away to enjoy other activities, check to see that your sprinkler heads have no leaks and that they are spraying correctly. Check out the sprinkler zones to ensure they are working correctly. Make sure your timers are set properly. Leaking irrigation systems can easily increase water bills.
- \* Beautiful warm days lead many of us to our yards and landscaping. Planting new flowers, cleaning out beds and mowing yards can result in dirty clothes and dirty bodies. Cleaning our bodies is another fast way to add dollars to your water bill. Make a conscious effort to take shorter showers, turn off water when shampooing, fill tubs to only six inches and make sure drains and shower heads aren't leaking. The single best thing you can do for saving money while cleaning clothes is replacing old washers with high efficiency ones. If that is not in your budget plans, then use the shortest wash cycle you can for the degree of soiled clothes, select the smallest volume setting for the load you are washing and do full loads only.
- \* Pool filling is an annual rite of passage in West U and will affect your utility bill. Talk to your pool professional and find out how many gallons of water it takes to ready your pool.

Then contact the Utility Billing Department at 713.662.5824, through mail or email, [billinghelp@westutx.gov](mailto:billinghelp@westutx.gov), with the amount and the date of the filling. Your sewer portion of the bill for that time period will be adjusted on a future billing. For example, if you use 10,000 gallons of water monthly and you fill your 20,000 gallon pool, you will see a reflected use of 30,000 gallons of water and the respective sewer costs. By contacting us, your bill will be adjusted to remove the sewer charges on the portion related to filling the pool.

- \* Check your plumbing system, especially if you have an older home with exposed outside pipes. Look specifically at areas where the pipes enter the home. Turn off your main water valve and check your water meter for activity which indicates possible leaks. Check toilets, ice makers, dishwashers, washers and tubs for leaks which can add up quickly on your monthly utility bill.
- \* Pressure wash your house, sidewalks, driveways and prepare to see the \$\$\$ grow. Four hours of pressure washing, using about 4 gallons/minute, will add approximately 1,000 gallons to your monthly usage. Pressure wash only when needed.

Water is a precious resource. Summer drought as we experienced in 2011 through 2013 taught us lessons financially and environmentally. Think conservation and energy savings as you use water around your home.

## CPR/AED Certification Training



The West University Place Fire Department offers several community programs that could potentially save a life. One of the new programs that we are excited to offer residents is the American Heart Association's CPR/AED certification training classes which are taught by West U's firefighters!

**Are You Ready To Save a Life?  
Because an Emergency Can  
Occur ANYTIME.**

The American Heart Association's CPR/AED learning programs help increase survival rates by training people just like you to respond quickly. The sad truth is most people don't survive a cardiac arrest. Four to six minutes is the window of opportunity for someone to act before it's too late, but less than one-third of cardiac arrest victims get CPR from someone near them.

About 92 percent of sudden cardiac arrest victims die before reaching the hospital, but statistics prove that if more people know CPR, more lives could be saved. Immediate CPR can double, or even triple, a victim's chance of survival.

**For a list of available classes and registration information, visit <http://westutx.enrollware.com>.**

*Adapted from [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) CPR & ECC information.*



## Tree City USA: Using trees as nature's air purifiers

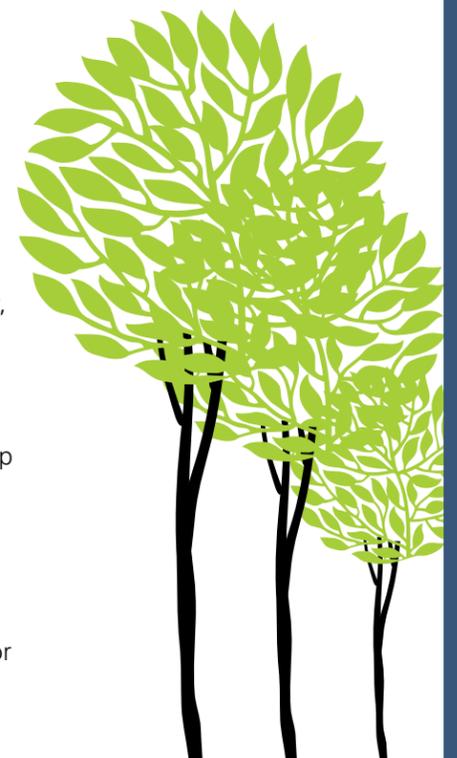
Trees have been called 'the lungs of the earth' and surely we depend on the oxygen they produce. Dr. David Nowak, a scientist with the U.S. Forest Service, pointed out four other important ways that trees serve as nature's air purifiers:

1. Reducing air temperatures and thereby helping to lower ozone levels.
2. Removing pollution particles that adhere to leaves.
3. Reducing energy demands, thus power plant emissions.
4. Removing gaseous pollutants via uptake in leaf stomata.

This science is being quantified in Tree City USA communities across the country. For example, 384 tons of air pollutants are

removed by Minneapolis' 979,000 urban trees every year; planting one million trees in Sacramento can save \$10 million in annual energy costs; and in Idaho's Treasure Valley, community trees reduce airborne particulates by 270 tons per year at a value of \$7 million. Cleaner air, especially in our cities and towns, is certainly an important reason to keep planting trees.

The City of West University has received the Tree City USA designation for 22 years and just received word that we attained that status again for 2013. Stay tuned for more information.



**City of West University Place**  
3800 University Boulevard  
West University Place, Texas 77005

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## City of West U Officials

### City Council Members

Mayor Bob Fry  
Mayor Pro-Tem Susan Sample  
Ed Heathcott  
Joan Johnson  
Dick Yehle

### City Manager

Michael Ross

General Information ..... (713) 668-4441

City Website ..... [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov)

*City Currents is a quarterly publication  
and is printed on ♻ recycled paper.*

## Prepare NOW for Hurricane Season

There's no better time to prepare for an emergency or weather event than before it happens. The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 through November 30. Since the City of West University Place is located just 40 to 50 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, any storm that hits the Gulf coast could potentially affect our community.

Residents can stay informed during hurricane and other emergencies through several communication tools. The City of West University Place's emergency notification system is the fastest mode of communicating to residents via residential, business or cell phone, e-mail, or text message. Register for emergency notifications at [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov) on the "e-Notify Me" tab. Visit [www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/stear/public.htm](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/stear/public.htm) to register for special needs assistance.

Whenever a tropical storm enters the Gulf of Mexico, it makes good sense to be prepared whether or not the

storm comes our way. Double check emergency plans and consider these tips:

- ▶ Monitor TV and radio broadcasts for instructions and storm information.
- ▶ Check emergency supply kits for family members with special needs and pets. Plan to have enough food and water to last three to seven days without electricity. Replenish emergency supplies after every storm.
- ▶ Pick a meeting place and select an out of-state friend as a family contact, so all family members have a single point of contact in case anyone gets separated.
- ▶ Always keep gas tanks full and make sure vehicles are ready for the road.
- ▶ Keep copies of insurance coverage information and an inventory of personal property for insurance settlements, along with other important documents.

## SAVE THE DAY WITH FREE SHREDDING!

Protect yourself from Identity Theft with **FREE** Document Shredding provided by SHRED IT and the **CITY OF WEST U**. To learn more, visit [www.westutx.gov/recycle](http://www.westutx.gov/recycle) or email [recycle@westutx.gov](mailto:recycle@westutx.gov).

**When:** Saturday, May 3

**Time:** 9:00 am - Noon

**Where:** 3826 Milton (West U Public Works Maintenance Facility)

**Limit:** 5 Banker Boxes

Available to West U Residents  
Only and no business shredding  
will be accepted.

