

Judge's journey toward career in public service began at Victoria College

by Coy Slavik, Communications Specialist, Victoria College

Judge Beatriz Gonzalez has devoted her life to serving the Crossroads region, and she isn't about to quit now.

Gonzalez, 70, has been a practicing attorney for 40 years, including 21 in the Justice of the Peace Office. She also teaches reading skills to kindergarten and elementary school students in her spare time.

"I love Victoria," Gonzalez said. "I am always looking for ways to give back to the community. My first career was actually in teaching, so it is wonderful that I'm able to do a little bit of that now."

Gonzalez's journey toward a career in public service began at Victoria College.

"I was in fifth grade when my sister graduated from high

school," Gonzalez said. "She then went to Victoria College, and that's when I became familiar with VC. I thought to myself, 'I think I can do that, too.'"

Gonzalez accumulated over 50 hours of credits before transferring to the University of Houston's Main Campus, where she obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees in education.

"I always believe God puts you where you're supposed to be, and I had a very close friend who was already going to Victoria College," said Gonzalez, who attended VC in 1966-67. "She said I should go to Victoria College and we could both then go to the University of Houston. That's what we did. Victoria College wound up being the perfect place for me to start. Thanks to Victoria College, I was able to get my bachelor's degree
See COLLEGE, pg. 10



Victoria College Foundation member and former Judge Beatriz Gonzalez. *Contributed photo.*

Victoria Islamic Center set for grand opening



The new Victoria Islamic Center reopens with \$1.8 million in donations. *Contributed photo.*

by Peter Moralez

According to Omar Rachid, communications director for the Victoria Islamic Center (VIC), "The Victoria Islamic Center serves the spiritual, religious and communal needs of area Muslims by means of nurturing their faith, upholding their values, and fostering the well-being of the surrounding community through worship, charity, education, outreach, and

civic engagement."

In 1984 an Islamic community was formed in Victoria. Although it was two families strong, they would gather for prayers and worship together. Over the years that community has continued to grow and flourish in Victoria.

"In May of 2000, the original Victoria Islamic Center, located at 201 E. Airline Road open its doors for worship," said Rachid. The Center, I feel, gave a real sense of

identity in the community, as well as providing a beautiful place of worship."

Like other religious structures, the VIC offered members not only a place of worship, "But also a place to hold weddings and funerals, as well as an educational outreach program through Victoria College. We were very proud of our Center, as well as the open-door policy that has been in effect

See CENTER, pg. 12

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Mas-o-Menos

I am so tired of paying taxes!

by Santiago Raya

All right let's look at this situation. I wake up on a typical day and I'm hit with city and county

property tax, Victoria College tax, road and bridge tax, navigational tax for the Port of Victoria, VISD tax, and I'm sure I'm forgetting someone else. The point is I

haven't even had a cup of coffee and I've got six to eight people in my pocket.

Then I get in my truck and drive off to my low paying job, that I've toiled at for countless years with about a total of a \$2 raise over the past 10 years. And it's not like the old days where I have some benefits as a reward for working for the same company.

Paid insurance...you've got to be kidding! It's all about Obamacare for my family and me, and if it's up to our new president that will be taken away shortly. Sick leave or personal days...you're

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Contributed art.

out of your freaking mind! My incentive to not get sick is I'll lose my job, and personal days are handled when I get off work.

Profit sharing or a 401K...out of the question! My retirement is based on whatever I can squirrel away from my bi-weekly paycheck. I'm sure I'll have to work till the day I die, and maybe even after that since I'm thinking of donating my cadaver to science, to avoid burial costs.

So, I pull into the gas station to fill up my tank. One look at the price of gas and the percentage of that cost that is inflated by federal and state taxes is what drives the price skyward. I know it's a bad habit, but I need a pack of cigarettes and once again the cost is inflated by those same federal and state tax add-ons.

A cup of coffee and something to eat for lunch and its not enough to pay inflated costs due to these new tariffs, imposed by our illus-

trious president, I can barely afford a can of soda! But then I must pay the sales tax.

I haven't even got to work, and I've paid so many different taxes that I've lost track of who's getting what!

At the end of the day I get my paycheck...finally, and wouldn't you know it, I can see what I made but it's a far cry from what I'm taking home because the first thing taken out are payroll taxes!

Now I do everything within my power to be a good citizen and cash in on the American dream. I own my own property, so I've got somewhere to park my trailer. I send my kids to public school, so they don't have to work as hard as I do. I pay my taxes every year so I'm square with the government. I vote for candidates that echo my views while they're campaigning, making promises to do this and fix that. However, it appears once

See MAS O MENOS, pg. 10

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Opportunities available for Hurricane Harvey relief



Left to right: Jim Evans, office assistant; Theresa Martinez, disaster case manager; Ashley Razo, disaster case manager and supervisor; Lisa Steen disaster case manager; Bruce Salzman, disaster case manager. Not pictured: Rick Villa, development coordinator. *Contributed photo.*

by Peter Moralez

Almost a year has passed since Hurricane Harvey (Harvey) wreaked havoc and devastation to the Gulf Coast Region generally, and to Victoria specifically. For many returning their lives to pre-hurricane status has been an uphill battle.

The purpose of this article is to inform readers about three local entities that are working tirelessly to help residents repair their lives, employment, dwellings, and furnishings.

Golden Crescent Workforce Solutions (GCWS) is the most comprehensive job resource in the state of Texas. Directly after Harvey the Victoria office became eligible for a federal grant referred to as the National Displaced Worker Grant. Funds were immediately made available through this grant to assist workers displaced by the hurricane.

“The purpose of this grant is really two-fold,” said Henry Guajardo, Executive Director of GCWS. For individuals who have either lost their job or are experiencing a downturn in their work hours due to their employer’s losses due to Harvey, or for individuals seeking gainful employment to assist their community in hurricane repair.”

According to Guajardo it is essential that individuals seeking employment report to GCWS, located at 120 S. Main Street. “Once here, that individual will be interviewed so we can determine what skills they possess so we can

out, “We are anxious to serve both the youth in our area, seeking career guidance, as well as those individuals underemployed.” Direct any questions to 361.578.0341.

Secondly, Project Comeback Texas (PCT) is a federally funded program to assist individuals who experienced home and furnishing losses due to Harvey. Kathy Garcia, district case manager for PCT indicated, “Individuals affected by Hurricane Harvey can either call 211 or, if in Victoria, can direct calls to First United Methodist Church of Victoria at 361.578.2701 to contact us.”

What that individual can expect from that point is a call back from a disaster case manager to discuss their losses, as well as their unmet needs.

Whether it’s housing, furnishings, or rental assistance PCT will set an appointment to come into the local office that serves them,

legitimize the individual’s losses, and what can be done to assist them to return them to pre-hurricane status,” said Garcia.

PCT serves a five-county area that includes Aransas, Jackson, Nueces, Victoria and Wharton.

“Each case is different, and we will look at each case individually,” she said. “This is an 18 to 24-month program, so individuals can be assured that we will be here to offer assistance to any individual.

See HARVEY, pg. 12

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Noticias del Mundo

MÉXICO - Hallan 10 cadáveres más en Tlajomulco, Jalisco, el mismo lugar donde el lunes aparecieron 10 cuerpos. Con estos, suman 45 los cuerpos hallados en fosas clandestinas y predios de Guadalajara durante los últimos dos meses.



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El presidente de Turquía, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. *Contributed photo.*

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La violencia se agudizo desde marzo de 2017 debido a una fractura en el cartel local Jalisco Nueva Generación, uno de los más poderosos de México.

VATICANO - El Papa Francisco bendijo a los 70,000 jóvenes presentes en la Plaza de San Pedro con motivo de la iniciativa “por mil caminos hacia Roma”, organizada por el episcopado del país.

USA - El orgullo militar de Trump, el mandatario estadounidense firma en Fort Drum el pre-

supuesto de defensa para 2019 que alcanza una cifra sin parangón alguno en el resto del mundo.

CHINA - El presidente Trump pide aumentar del 10 por ciento al 25 por ciento el gravamen a importaciones chinas por valor \$200,000 millones de dólares.


INGLATERRA - A sido detenido en Inglaterra bajo sospecha de terrorismo un conductor tras chocar con las barreras del parlamento causando que tres personas resultaran heridas tras ser arrolladas por

el vehículo en la capital británica.

WASHINGTON - El presidente de Turquía, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dijo que su país sancionado por Washington boicoteara los productos electrónicos estadounidenses.

CALIFORNIA - California ya ha gastado la mitad del presupuesto de 2018 para combatir los incendios.

El estado ha invertido cerca de \$500 millones de dólares para so- focar al menos 20 incendios en los últimos 40 días.



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UHV receives 65 acres for athletics expansion



Image shows land donated to UHV is located. *Contributed art.*

The University of Houston-Victoria recently received a gift of 65 acres of land, valued at \$820,000, the largest donation ever made in support of UHV Athletics and the second-largest in university history.

The 65 acres of land are conveniently located off Business Highway 59 on Big Bend Road near the Victoria Regional Airport, about four miles from the university's main campus. The gift will allow the university to further establish and expand its athletics program and will provide a place to build its own athletics complex including competition and practice fields for existing sports, a training center, some offices and facilities for potential additional sports. Funds will need to be raised to build fa-

ilities. The facilities will help alleviate the overuse or scheduling conflicts the Jaguars have faced. Now, UHV will be able to have its own sports fields.

Higher education is important to the Bennett-Wood family, and this gift will help carry on the family's legacy, Christopher Bush, family member and a spokesman for the donors, wrote in a statement.

"Education is vital and important for community stewardship, and Victoria and the University of Houston-Victoria are a perfect match," Bush said. "This project will allow Victoria to keep the present momentum of planned and sustained growth moving forward for years to come."

"UHV is making great strides every day, and contributions to

athletics will help us continue that growth," new UHV President Bob Glenn said. "The Crossroads community has shown UHV overwhelming support since its founding, and I look forward to seeing its continued and increased support."

The university has made progress becoming a destination university, and adding new facilities, curriculum and sports programs will help attract new students, said Wayne Beran, UHV vice president for administration and finance. Beran has been with the university for

more than 20 years and has seen the university in all its development stages. Athletics, especially,

can contribute to increased enrollment, he said.



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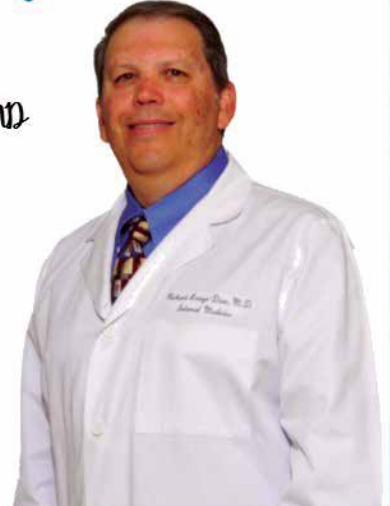
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por Benita Garcia



Verónica Castro. Contributed photo.

obliga a internarse en un centro de rehabilitación.

Verónica Castro regresa a la pantalla chica con “La casa de las flores”, luego de permanecer casi 10 años fuera de la televisión, marca su retorno interpretando a una mujer madura que fuma marihuana y lidia con los oscuros secretos de su familia.

Rafael Amaya contrajo una enfermedad durante las grabaciones de El señor de los cielos que le impidió seguir desarrollando su trabajo. Histoplasmosis es la enfermedad infecciosa respiratoria que contrajo Amaya.

“La reina del Flow”, novela protagonizada por Carolina Ramírez

Demi Lovato la cantante estadounidense, conocida por éxitos

como Échame la culpa con Luis Fonsi, sufrió una sobredosis que la



Demi Lovato. Contributed photo.

y Carlos Torres, se mantiene en el primer lugar al lograr un rating de 15.91 por ciento. “La Piloto” protagonizada por Livia Brito se

mantiene en un tercer lugar con un 10.66 por ciento.

Después de meses de aparente See CHARLANDO, pg. 7



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Marjorie de Sousa y Julián Gil. *Contributed photo.*

CHARLANDO, from pg. 6
calma entre Marjorie de Sousa y Julián Gil, un nuevo capítulo de su

escandalosa relación se está desatando, luego de que la bella actriz acusara a su expareja de ser un mantenido. Antes tales declaracio-

nes, Julián Gil no se quedó callado y contesto que ella no lo mantiene, que él se rompe la cara trabajando los siete días de la semana.

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To be or not to be, concerned

by Officer John Turner

Recently, I was made aware of an incident that has evidently become a cause for concern in many. I'm speaking of drug laced business cards. There has been a claim (on the internet, of course) that a woman was approached in a parking lot by a man claiming to be a contractor looking for work. She declined his services but accepted his business card (because, it would be rude to not accept something from a stranger whose services you don't need). Anyway, as she's driving away she starts to feel dizzy and pulls over, only to discover that the man who handed her the card had been following her. The claim reported that the business card was laced with a date rape drug.

Evidently, according to several different news outlets this was a hoax. Then again there are a few other sites that claim it's true. Who knows?

There was another incident, in Houston, in which deputies were allegedly exposed to Fentanyl through flyers, laced with the drug, placed under their windshield wipers. The deputies reported feeling ill after having removed the flyers. Once again, depending on which site you visit, some say they were exposed to Fentanyl and others say they weren't. Again, who knows?



Contributed art.

Just because there is little or no truth to the incidents, it doesn't mean they can't happen. To be safe, simply refer to the age-old advice given to us when children and don't take things from strangers. Also, if you happen to notice a flyer under your windshield wiper and you may be concerned that it's laced with drugs, don't touch it. Either remove it with something (other than your bare hand) or use the windshield wipers to dislodge it.

Other concerns brought to our attention are things to be truly aware of and have occurred on several occasions in Victoria. Those are credit card skimmers and bank jugging.

Crooks are still using the skimming devices at gas stations. Some are installed inside the pumps,

making the old advice of pulling on the card reader less effective. Even though it takes a little more effort, the best bet is to go inside and pay. If you choose to pay at the pump, always opt for the pump most visible to the clerk and use a credit card. Pumps that the clerk can see are less likely to be tampered with and, they say it's much easier to get an issue with a credit card straightened out that it is with a debit card.

Bank jugging involves criminals targeting bank customers who have just made a withdrawal. They look for people walking out of the bank with a moneybag or envelope then follow them to their next stop where they either rob them of the cash or burglarize the victim's vehicle looking for the money. Occasionally, they follow the victim to their homes.

The best advice, after having made a withdrawal, is to conceal the money as best you can so you don't draw attention to yourself. Also, if you feel you're being followed leaving the bank, don't go straight home, call the police, explain the situation and go to a populated location. Give dispatch your location, direction of travel and your destination. Hopefully, an officer will arrive at the location just before you do or intercept you on the way.

In any case, always be aware of what's going on around you and take the appropriate measures to protect yourselves.

John Turner is a Crime Prevention Officer with the Victoria Police Department. For more information on home security or other crime prevention information, he may be contacted at (361) 485-3808.

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Summer vegetables abound at the farmers' market



Fresh vegetables at farmers' market. Photo by Spendlove Vegetable Ranch.

by Meredith Byrd

In previous years, the farmers' market has taken the summer off and reopened in the fall. Not this year! Despite the heat, our farmers are bringing a beautiful assortment of fresh vegetables, meats and homemade goods. You can get a big chunk of your weekly grocery shopping done at the market, so come out and see us on Saturdays!

Fresh seasonal vegetables

It is no secret that vegetables are the backbone of our market. If you think that the heat of summer means that fresh vegetables are hard to come by, think again! Our farmers are growing calabaza squash, butternut squash, spaghetti squash, scalloped squash, yellow summer squash, green and yellow zucchini, bell peppers, jalapeño peppers, banana peppers,

Anaheim chilies, serrano peppers, cayenne peppers, okra, eggplant, carrots, onions, radishes, and potatoes. As we move into fall and the temperatures begin to cool down, we'll have an even bigger variety of vegetables each week.

Meats and eggs from pastured animals

No factory farms here! We are proud to offer fresh meats from animals that are humanely and sustainably raised, including beef (steaks, roast, ground beef, cubed stew meat, ribs, fajitas, organ meats, bones), pork (sausage, belly/sides, chops, ribs, steaks, roast, ground pork, bones, fat), and lamb (chops, ribs, soup bone). The eggs sold at the market are all from chickens who spend their days roaming pastures eating a variety of grasses, seeds and bugs,

rather than spending their days in cramped cages.

Homemade pickles, jelly, breads and more

In addition to the homegrown vegetables, meats and eggs, you can find a wide range of delicious homemade foods each Saturday.

Pickles – dill, garlic, spicy, bread and butter

Jams and jellies – peach, apple, plum, apricot, pear, strawberry jalapeno, tomato, pineapple, pineapple habanero, watermelon, fig, grape

Breads and Noodles – egg noodles, white bread, cornbread, zucchini bread, banana bread

Sweets – muffins, cookies, cakes, pies

Grains – freshly ground cornmeal, grits, corn flour, and flaxseed meal

Spices and Seasonings – meat rubs, dried peppers and herbs, soup bases

Meal planning at the market

With such a variety of foods available each Saturday, customers can plan entire meals using ingredients found at the market.

For breakfast, you could have fried or scrambled eggs and toast with homemade jam, or an omelet stuffed with fresh onions and peppers. For lunch you could make a delicious soup with onions, carrots, bell peppers, zucchini and yellow squash, or ground beef sliders with home fries. Dinner ideas include pork chops with an apple jelly glaze, beef kabobs with onions and peppers, spaghetti squash with meat sauce, or a lovely mix of grilled vegetables served over buttered egg noodles.

When you support the farmers' market, you are supporting small businesses in the Crossroads area. Everything sold at our market must be homegrown, homemade or handmade from within 100 miles of Victoria. You can talk directly to the farmers about the way they raise their animals or grow their vegetables, and they are always happy to share their favorite recipes with you. Stop by the Pattie Dodson Public Health Center any Saturday between 9:00 and 1:00. We would love to see you at the farmers' market!

Meredith Byrd manages the Victoria Farmers' Market every Saturday from 9:00-1:00 at the Pattie Dodson Center. Contact her at 361-578-0591 or mbyrd@food-bankgc.org.



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LEGAL LIMIT - TEXAS CONTINENTALS
SIERRA ALEXIS - WILL CISNEROS

SATURDAY - AUGUST 25, 2018
4:00PM - MIDNIGHT * DELEON PLAZA

COLLEGE, from pg. 1
in just three years. Obviously, that saved me a lot of money.”

Gonzalez obtained her law degree from UH and returned to Victoria after receiving a phone call from a friend.

“Lydia Serrata, who is also a graduate of Victoria College, was practicing law here in Victoria. She called me and said she needed

some help,” Gonzalez said. “She was with the DA’s office at the time, and she wanted to start her own practice.”

Gonzales worked with Serrata’s law firm for three years before she accepted a job in Victoria’s Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3 Office. She was elected Justice of the Peace for Precinct 3 in 1985 and served in that capacity until 2006.

“The Justice of the Peace Office is the lowest form of court, so that’s why it has the highest amount of traffic,” Gonzalez said. “You see a lot of people. You are just serving the public in that court. That’s where people really go when they need help.”

Gonzalez, who also served as an assistant district attorney for eight years before becoming semi-

retired, said she learned many of her communication skills required to be Justice of the Peace from her time as a VC student.

Gonzalez now serves on the VC Foundation, which provides financial support for scholarships, faculty and staff development, technology, capital needs, and other VC initiatives.

“The role of Victoria College is huge and has grown by leaps and bounds, especially the last few years,” Gonzalez said. “Victoria College doesn’t just educate students to go to school somewhere else. VC is also educating them to come out in six weeks or six months ready to work, ready to take on a good job and ready to be contributors to our community.”

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MAS O MENOS, from pg. 2
they get elected they lose sight of their campaign promises.

And that’s where the real problem is...the education that my kids are receiving. I wasn’t the sharpest tack in the box when I was a student, but I made it through elementary and high school, and even earned a degree from our local community college.

But check this out; my oldest is starting at that same college in the fall. We got her registered and went to buy her textbooks and I’ve never seen a kid so frightened! She looked through her new books and she says it’s like they’re written in a foreign language.

I was very frustrated. I thought after 12 years of public education she would be better prepared for the next level. What are my tax dollars for VISD going for if not preparation for the next grade? And VISD wants to raise their tax rate to offset costs due to hurricane Harvey!

Who’s helping me with my loss-

es? I’ve had to tighten my belt and if it’s up to me, VISD should have to tighten their belt too! Last election they wanted a bond to help build a sports complex...are you kidding me?

I couldn’t care less about a new sports complex, how about a new education plan that lifts the overall student performance? That’s what’s needed. I sat in one classroom all day long using only textbooks and that worked for me. Nowadays school is held in campuses that are outfitted with the most contemporary amenities, and for what? Students who aren’t prepared to go to college or trade school.

I feel we need to take a long hard look at what’s going on here. VISD has a budget of over \$110 million and what are we taxpayers getting in return for our investment?

I was at the store the other day and the teenager waiting on me couldn’t even make change for a dollar without looking at the cash register!

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La Cocina de Tia Yole



Poached salmon on citrus salad. *Contributed photo.*

QUICK AND EASY SUMMER MEALS LEMON AND HERB GRILLED TROUT SANDWICHES

1 large lemon
 ½ cup mayonnaise
 ¼ cup snipped fresh basil or 2 tablespoons snipped dill
 1 lb. Ruby or rainbow trout filets
 4 ciabatta buns, split
 Fresh basil (optional)

1. Finely shred peel and squeeze juice from ½ of the lemon; thinly slice the remaining lemon half and set aside. In a small bowl combine mayonnaise, lemon peel, lemon juice, basil, and ¼ teaspoon each salt and black pepper.

2. Rinse fish; pat dry. Remove two tablespoons of the mayonnaise mixture and brush on fish. On a grill rack, place fish, skin side up, directly over medium-high heat; grill 1 minute. Carefully turn skin side down and grill 5 to 7 minutes more or just until fish flakes easily with a fork. Add lemon slice and halved buns, cut side down, to the grill after turning fish.

3. Remove fish, buns, and lemon slices from grill. Remove skin from fish, if desired. Cut fish into bun-size pieces. Top bun bottoms with some of the mayonnaise mixture. Add fish, lemon slices, and additional basil. Pass any remaining mayonnaise mixture. Makes 4 servings.

PIEROGIES WITH MEAT SAUCE

1 (12.8 oz.) pkg. Frozen potato-and-onion-filled pierogies
 8 oz. Uncooked chorizo sausage or bulk Italian sausage
 1 pint red and/or yellow tomatoes halved
 1 (8 oz.) can tomato sauce
 4 oz. Watercress (4 cups)

1. In Dutch oven, cook piero-

gies in 4 cups lightly salted boiling water according to package directions. Drain and cover to keep warm.

2. Meanwhile, in 12-inch skillet brown sausage. Drain fat. Reserve ½ cup tomatoes; add remaining tomatoes and tomato sauce to skillet. Cook, uncovered, 6 to 8 minutes or until tomatoes begin to soften.

3. Divide pierogies among plates; spoon on sauce. Top with reserved tomatoes and watercress. Makes 4 servings.

CAPRESE PASTA AND STEAK

8 oz. dried large rigatoni
 ½ cup purchased basil pesto
 1 lb. Flat iron or tri-tip steak cut into 4 portions
 4 Roma tomatoes sliced
 4 oz. fresh mozzarella cheese sliced
 Fresh Basil Leaves (optional)

1. Cook pasta according to package directions; drain

2. Meanwhile, remove 2 tablespoons of the pesto and use to brush on steaks. Heat a large heavy skillet over medium heat; add steaks. Cook about 10 minutes or to desired doneness, turning once.

3. Divide pasta among 4 plates. Top with steak, tomatoes and

cheese.

4. Place remaining pesto in a small microwave safe bowl. Heat on 100% power (high) for 20 seconds or until hot, stirring once. Drizzle atop steak/pasta mixture. Top with fresh basil. Makes 4 servings.

POACHED SALMON ON CITRUS SALAD

1 lime
 6 oranges (navel, blood, Cara Cara or tangerines)
 4 (4 oz.) skinless salmon filets, about 1-inch thick
 ¼ cup olive oil
 1 teaspoon sugar
 2 tablespoon cooking oil
 6 wonton wrappers cut into ½-inch strips
 7 oz. bunch watercress, trimmed, or 4 cups arugula or baby spinach

1. Finely shred 1 teaspoon on peel from lime; set aside. Juice lime and 2 oranges; reserve ¼ cup for dressing. Pour remaining in large nonstick skillet with lime peel and ½ cup water. Bring to boiling; add salmon. Reduce heat. Simmer, covered, 8 to 12 minutes, until fish easily flakes with fork.

2. Meanwhile, for dressing, in bowl whisk together reserved juice, olive oil, and sugar; season with salt and pepper.

3. In second large skillet heat cooking oil over medium-high. Cook wontons, 1 to 2 minutes, stirring often, until crisp.

4. Peel and section remaining oranges. Drizzle dressing on greens, oranges, and salmon. Pass wontons. Makes 4 servings.

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CENTER, from pg. 1

since its origin," he said.

Rachid, as well as many others will always remember Saturday the 28th of February 2017. "The day before President Donald Trump had signed an executive order banning travel to America from seven predominantly Muslim countries. Early the next morning

I was awoken by a phone call telling me that the mosque was on fire," he said.

The structure was a complete loss. "It was a sad day for our congregation, as well as the community as a whole," Rachid said.

Speaking with Osama Hassan, Imam of VIC, "I was the first one at the mosque when it was on fire, I was overwhelmed, he

said. "Amazingly, I am also overwhelmed by the reaction of the Victoria community. I feel that on many occasions communities get a negative opinion of Muslims as a whole because of the actions of a few. I look forward to the grand opening of the new mosque and the opportunity to continue to serve the Victoria community," Hassan said.

An Imam not only leads his members in prayer, but is also the local spiritual leader of the Muslim community.

Amongst all the turmoil, it was decided by the hierarchy of the VIC that they would rebuild at the same location, and according to Rachid, local Muslims would contribute in any way possible, as well as create a GoFundMe page to solicit donations.

"We set a fundraising goal of one million dollars, but honestly we didn't have a timeframe of how long it would take to raise that kind of money, much less any money at all," he said.

The VIC never imagined what would happen next. "Within 72 hours our GoFundMe page raised in excess of 1 million dollars from 25,000 donors in 91 different countries, and 90 percent of the donors were non-Muslim," Rachid said. "We were filled with a humbleness that words can not describe, our hearts were truly filled

with joy."

In addition to worldwide donations, some from as far away as New Zealand and Japan, and another \$700,000 was raised from local statewide, and national sources bringing the total to 1.8 million.

"We broke ground on our new Center in November of 2017," he said. "Unfortunately, Hurricane Harvey set us back, as well as raised our construction costs. But we forged on, and our now set to re-open at the same locale."

The VIC will be opening its doors to members in late August, with a community-based grand opening for everyone sometime in October. "We want to invite everyone from the community to join us in celebration, as well those throughout the nation and world who helped us to bring our goal to fruition. We are eternally grateful for all those who contributed to our rebuilding fund and look forward to serving our community," Rachid said.

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HARVEY

, from pg. 3

also who seek assistance and we are not bound by creed, color, religion or social status."

Thirdly, Victoria County Long Term Recovery Group (VCLTRG) is an agency that works specifically in Victoria county, although it has no government affiliation.

"We have been organized to serve Victoria residents who have suffered losses specifically due to Hurricane Harvey," said Ashley Razo, disaster case manager. "It doesn't matter if an individual or family are homeowners or renters, whether they have insurance or not, or whether they have been helped by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)."

Like other disaster relief agencies, VCLTRG was created to mitigate the unmet needs of those suffering from Harvey losses. United States citizenship is not a require-

ment of this organization.

"Individuals will submit an application to our office, located at 207 N. Glass Street, in Victoria," Razo said. "We will review their losses on a case by case basis and make a determination as to how we can assist them."

Razo went on to say, "I live in the Victoria area, and have experienced losses due to Harvey so I know on a personal basis about the losses suffered in our community and I look forward to serving individuals and families in an effort to restore them to how life was for them before the tragedy of Hurricane Harvey." VCLTRG can be reached at 361.703.5567.

There are no immediate deadlines with any of these agencies. However, it should be noted, that while assistance funds are available, those funds will be awarded on a first come first serve basis.



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