

FRIddays

FERGUSON ROAD INITIATIVE
SERVING FAR EAST DALLAS

FALL 2022



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*The mission of FRI
 is to engage and empower a
 community of advocates to
 advance a safe,
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 and proud community
 in Far East Dallas.*

Come Together to Give



by Mari L. Madison, Editor *FRI*days

Keeping a volunteer-based, community improvement, nonprofit running for over 20 years takes your commitment. It requires significant funding to operate the Ferguson Road Initiative (FRI). FRI keeps membership fees minimal to involve and empower volunteers. FRI has a success record of over two decades of completed community development projects. The major funding that staffs the FRI office, and pays the light bill, is North Texas Giving Day. FRI shares the Communities Foundation of Texas's (CFT) charge to put giving to work; take generosity and amplify it; take passion and focus it; seed impact and harvest it year after year. We invest in each other. GIVE NOW to FRI.

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The cover celebrates how the
 diverse Far East Dallas Community
 comes together to give.

Community Updates From the Executive Director



by Vikki J. Martin, Executive Director

CreekSide-Ash Creek Urban Reserve in White Rock Hills – With the recent opening of White Rock Hills Park and completion of Highland Road, the neighborhoods surrounding the CreekSide development eagerly await the finalization of the Trinity Forest Spine

Trail. Connecting to Highland Road, this trail will link residents to the 50-miles of trails surrounding the city and will eventually run southward 17-miles to the Trinity Audubon Center. Stay tuned, the ribbon cutting for the trail is scheduled for fall. Negotiations are currently underway to bring mountain bike trails and a senior activity center to this area. Efforts continue to place the multi-million-dollar White Rock Hills Recreation Center on the 2024 Bond Program. With more recreation opportunities, FRI is building strong and healthy neighborhoods.

El Rio Grande Latin Market in White Rock East – The White Rock Hills and White Rock East zones of the Ferguson Road Initiative are in certified food deserts. A food desert is defined by the USDA as a neighborhood where 100 homes or more are without a car more than half a mile from the nearest grocery store. Over the years, these communities have slowly seen supermarkets like Minyards, Tom Thumb, and others close, leaving families who depend on public transportation without access to fresh meat and produce.

Once tethered by a Krogers grocery store, it eventually became a flea market, in desperate need of a face lift. We are happy to see this

Pictured below, Thank you to Comerica Bank for helping FRI partner with Carter BloodCare in sponsoring FRI's annual Blood Drive in July



project nearing completion. With store front improvements, the installation of landscaped islands and new lighting, the owner will be hiring locally, and be providing a sit-down restaurant.

This supermarket is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

Starbucks Community Store in Casa View – With much anticipation, the Starbucks Community Store opened on July 11 at the newly renovated Casa View Shopping Center. Starbucks Community Stores serve under-resourced communities and partner with local nonprofit organizations. They provide economic opportunity, hire and train locally, and create dedicated meeting space for communities.

FRI has been working with Starbucks since April to help them connect with the Far East Dallas community, plan their grand opening, and introduce them to area nonprofit partners addressing food insecurity and expertise in jobs skills training.

Saying Goodbye – After more than two decades of community building, first as founder, and now as Executive Director, I will retire in 2023 from FRI. I will continue to serve on the FRI Economic Development Committee to ensure CreekSide amenities are completed. This will include the White Rock Hills Recreation Center. The Center will be the flagship that completes the CreekSide development.

It has been a privilege to work with my friends and neighbors to help turn our once declining community into one that is thriving and serving all who live, work, play and go to school in Far East Dallas. Thank you.

Pictured below, neighborhood children around the White Rock Hills Park sign



Pictured below, the ten year anniversary graphic for the White Rock Hills Library



Heading Into The Future Looking Ahead



by Dan Ortman, FRI President

As Ferguson Road Initiative (FRI) completes its 25th year of service to the community of Far East Dallas (FED), we anticipate more growth and change. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and to share our future plans.

In 2021 the FRI Board completed a strategic plan to guide our course of action over the next three years. This plan includes building organizational capacity, including increasing staff who can expand FRI's reach and ability to improve the quality of life in FED. This year we added two full-time positions: a Membership Administrator and a Director of Communications and Marketing.

With these changes, Vikki Martin, FRI founder and Executive Director, will be retiring in 2023. Under Vikki's leadership, FRI initiated the current renaissance underway in FED. With community support, FRI has reduced crime, improved safety, unified 37 neighborhoods, increased social services, provided support to schools and nonprofits, secured funding for capital improvements, and helped facilitate more than \$300MM in quality economic development. We thank Vikki for her vision, dedication, and many years of selfless service.

As FRI transitions into new leadership, the Board is committed to identifying an individual who understands and will serve this community. We are happy that Vikki will continue to be involved by serving on the FRI Economic Development Committee, the engine charged with overseeing the completion of the CreekSide amenities. Heading into the future, the FRI Board looks forward to commencing our next 25 years of service!

North Texas Giving Day is September 22!

North Texas Giving Day is FRI's most important annual fundraising event. We are thrilled to announce that generous supporters have issued a \$17,000 dollar-for-dollar challenge match to the FRI community. Please help FRI meet this challenge by donating on Thursday, September 22, 6 a.m. to midnight. Your credit or debit card gift will be doubled and will secure FRI's community changing work!

Attention Early Birds

You don't have to wait until September 22 to donate. Go to <https://www.fergusonroad.org/give2022> and give to FRI anytime between September 1-21 where you can also view FRI's annual video. Your donation will still count towards our \$34,000 overall goal.



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Friends of CreekSide

Ensuring The Circuit Trail Conservancy's Future



by Philip Hiatt Haigh, Executive Director, the Circuit Trail Conservancy (The LOOP)

The first phase of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail, part of "The LOOP" connecting White Rock Lake to the Great Trinity Forest, will be open this year. As the newly poured concrete cures, the future of this trail and surrounding park land is in great hands as a dedicated group of local residents, the Friends of CreekSide, have stepped up to support this public space.

When we think about trails in Dallas, it is not about the concrete or bridges – the trail experience is the landscape and programming along the trail, like parks, pollinator gardens, murals, and movie nights. These amenities are provided through an intentional partnership between the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department and private groups called Friends Groups.



The City of Dallas and Park Department own trails and park space and provide critical services like capital improvements and maintenance. Groups like the Friends of CreekSide support the City's work and provide additional amenities, each

determined by the residents that make up each friends group – that is why each trail has its own local character and experience.

Austin Endo, FRI Board Member and founding member of the Friends of CreekSide, recognized this opportunity,

"I've seen first-hand how the trails in Dallas have benefitted their communities. By establishing the Friends of CreekSide, we'll make sure the trail better connects the families in our community and provides a much-needed recreation outlet for years to come."

For Jeff Patton, another founding member, this work is about the future, *"As a father, I am constantly trying to spend more time outside with my family. Establishing this friends group will ensure that these new amenities will be well programmed, well maintained, and welcoming for other fathers and families in our community."*

The Friends of CreekSide will be supporting the first phase of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail, White Rock Hills Park, and the Ash Creek Greenbelt Trail.

If you are interested in helping shape the future of CreekSide, please reach out to info@theloopdallas.org and the most current information on trail construction is at www.theloopdallas.org.



SAVE the DATE!

FRI Town Hall

FRI Community Connection
Town Hall Meeting (In-Person)

Monday, September 19, 2022
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Come meet and greet friends, neighbors, and political officials. Hear crime and public safety reports from Dallas Police, learn about the new Trinity Forest Spine Trail, receive briefings on community concerns and accomplishments.

NEW LOCATION:
Owenwood Farm &
Neighbor Space

1451 John West Road
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Agenda:
6:30 p.m. – Meet & Greet
6:50 p.m. – Welcome, Reports, DPD Updates
7:20 p.m. – FRI Updates
7:50 p.m. – North Texas Giving Day

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Use Your Voice and VOTE



by Daniel Clayton, FRI Board

Mark your calendars for November 8th and make it a point to cast your vote. At stake is the governorship of Texas and our nation's legislative response to mass shootings and gun control, voting rights, the filibuster, Roe v. Wade codification and contraception access, pandemic preparedness, and a host of issues America seeks to reconcile.

Midterm elections will occur in which all U.S. House of Representative seats and a third of U.S. Senate seats are up for grabs. In the ebb and flow of election cycles, midterms occur halfway into the administration of any sitting president, often serving as a referendum on the White House occupant's job performance and a reflection of the general mood of the country.

Voting Americans will determine the balance of power in the United States Congress and determine the ability of the sitting president, in this case President Biden, to secure the support necessary to fulfill agenda priorities.

History proves that the political party of any sitting president often sees a reduction of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives as the public becomes unrestful with current events often outside of the president's control, such as mass shootings and spikes in the price of gas. The 2022 midterm election will also reflect public response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade.

While midterm elections demonstrate public will, they are also deeply impacted by the results of redistricting, which occurred

in Texas during a third called special session of the legislature in late 2021. Furthermore, with the loss of oversight by the Department of Justice, sweeping changes to the way citizens cast their vote have occurred across much of the country in response to claims that President Biden's election was stolen.

Our Supreme Court has recently redefined American fundamentals impacting election outcomes by allowing corporations unlimited spending power in federal elections, dismantling key protections in the Voting Rights Act, and giving the green light to certain gerrymandering techniques that were once blocked.

It is our votes that guide the course and future of our country, state and city. Use your voice with other Americans on November 8th.




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White Rock Montessori School Instilling the Joy of Learning



by Susan Hopper, Communication and Marketing Director

Tucked away on 4.5 wooded acres in Far East Dallas, White Rock Montessori (WRM) offers an array of outdoor learning opportunities for their 18-month-old to eighth grade students. In the Discovery Garden students care for plants, chickens, ducks, and goats. A natural playground offers trees to climb, nature paths,

and a pond fed from large rain barrels. Fondly referred to as a “sweet small school,” this urban oasis adheres to the Montessori method that emphasizes independence, freedom, and respect for a child’s natural, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development.

WRM has been educating students since 1975 and at their current location at 1601 Oates Drive since 1994. In 2020 they realized a 25-year vision to add a two-thousand square foot learning space for Middle School students. This separate building includes a kitchen, collab spaces, quiet spaces, and outdoor spaces for 7th and 8th grade learners.

WRM expanded their program for their youngest learners by adding a year-round and all day 18 month – 3-year-old program. Together with the Toddler Program, one of the two 4 – 6-year-old classes will provide a year-round and all-day schedule. Both programs are designed to better serve the needs of working families and offer before and after school care. The Toddler and Primary Programs are at capacity this school year; however, openings are available in the 2023-2024 school year. Connie Laufersky, Director of WRM, is committed to increasing diversity and accessibility at the school through scholarship programs for children in the 75228-zip code.

Carmen Parra whose children have attended WRM for six years comments on their experience at WRM, “My children have thrived at White Rock Montessori, where we have found a welcoming and caring community to call home. They began in the primary program and are about to start in the 6th and 7th grade. With a gorgeous campus, the emphasis on nature, and taking care of the environment, students learn valuable lessons that are so important for our future leaders.”

Pictured below, WRM primary school students circle around their teacher for an outdoor class in the woods.



Quench Your Thirst for Knowledge

Aspire Offers Literacy, ESL, GED, and Citizenship Classes



by Paul E. Maynard

Literacy changes lives and the economy. Studies show that the GDP of Dallas would grow by ten percent if all adults living in the city read at least at a sixth-grade level. Two of the largest literacy focused nonprofits in the Dallas area combined forces with programs designed to reach that goal.

Aspire is the leading organization in the metro area focused on combating illiteracy. The merger of the Aberg Center for Literacy and Literacy Instruction for Texas (LIFT) formed Aspire in 2020. Aspire provides literacy services and classes to those seeking a better life. A board-led organization, they have the reputation for going further than people expect when it comes to fighting illiteracy. Aspire is conveniently located at the Owenwood Farm and Neighbor Space in Far East Dallas.

Aspire has a track record of making a positive impact in the community. From learning English or earning a GED, to balancing a family bank account or preparing for careers; Aspire students learn to face challenges with confidence. When you are ready to learn, Aspire can help you reach your personal goals.

A student in Aspire's Sequential English Education (SEE) classes, Joseph, feels more confident and is becoming an avid reader. As a retiree and child of sharecroppers, he wanted to make his mother's wish for him to go back to school come true. *"The more I read, the more I thirst*

for knowledge," he said. *"Everything that happened in my youth was like planting a garden. I'm yielding that crop now and I feel good."* Perla wanted to learn English, to help her young children in their education. She enrolled in Aspire's English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to become more fluent and conversant in English. Additionally, Perla attended and completed citizenship classes. She became a U.S. citizen in 2019.

"These stories are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what Aspire is capable of and has accomplished," said Paul DiBiase Director of Development for Aspire. *"Aspire is very proud of their success and it shows in their growth in the Dallas community."* he added.

If you would like to be a part of Aspire's community, you can become a donor or a volunteer at their website at www.aspiretolearn.org or call at 214-824-2000.



Pictured above, ESL class in session



Pictured above, GED class in session

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White Rock Lake Artists' Studio Tour Celebrates 29 Years



by Megan Dennen

In 1992, artists Marty Ray, Richard Ray, Michael Obranovich and David Hickman set out to share a glimpse into the East Dallas art scene surrounding White Rock Lake. Growing up, most kids take field trips to museums, galleries, art schools and sometimes have the rare opportunity to meet the artists themselves. As adults we most often see art where it is displayed for view and sale. These are excellent places to view art, but its even more inspiring to see art right in the space where it is created, in the artist's studio. The *"at home" studio space is the focus of the White Rock Lake Artists' Studio Tour*", says Marty Ray the current studio tour coordinator. *"And yes, of course the artist and the art is there too. I'm proud we were the first studio tour that emphasized at home studios, showing young artists the possibility of creating their own studio right at home."*

Twenty nine years later the tour is now called the White Rock Lake Artists' Studio Tour with 40 plus studios in close proximity to White Rock Lake. Tour artist and sponsor, David Farrell says, *"it is a great way to learn about art while exploring the various neighborhoods of East Dallas."* People visiting the studios come from all over the country and all parts of Dallas. Many have recently relocated to Dallas from the East or West Coast and are curious about local art and culture.

The tour gives participants a glimpse into local artists' work space and creative process. To see how an artist sets up a studio at home, in backyards, garages, and how it becomes the creative space for art to evolve can be eye-opening. The studios are works of art themselves

with many evolving over years while others are newly established. The tour features artists who work in a variety of art media and processes and every studio is unique to the artist's needs.

With live art demonstrations and a chance to socialize with the creators, this event continues to be a well-loved activity for all ages who enjoy seeing the arts thrive in our communities. This year's event will be held **October 15th – 16th from 10am – 5pm**. Check out whiterockartists.com for up-to-date information on the artists and spaces being featured, or scan the QR code.



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Pictured below, Alice Oleary painting



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City Council Redistricting



by Jared Greco, FRI Board

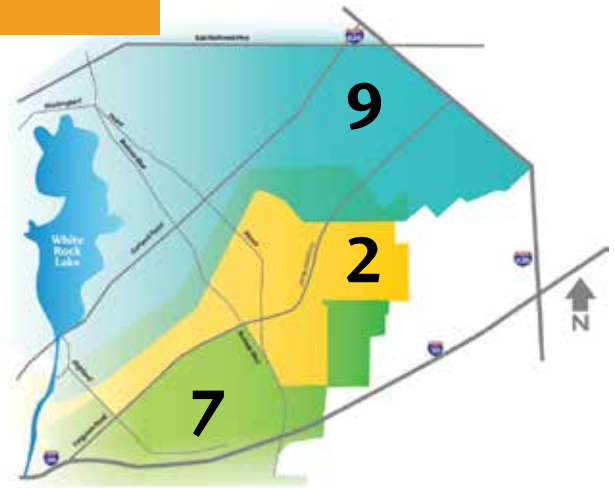
For the third time in two decades the land in the White Rock Hills neighborhood in Far East Dallas (FED), where the future White Rock Hills Recreation Center will be located, will be in its third city council district: First district seven, then nine, and now two. Why is this important?

Every 10 years census redistricting takes place across America for all electoral districts. District lines must be redrawn to account for population shifts and to craft electoral districts that have roughly the same number of people.

Because city council redistricting greatly influences the flow of resources to FED, the Ferguson Road Initiative (FRI) established a Redistricting Task Force over six months before community forums were held by the appointed Redistricting Commission. Once these forums began taking place, Redistricting Commissioners heard from FRI and our constituents on close to a dozen separate occasions. At each of these meetings, FRI prepared a packet for each commissioner showcasing our accomplishments as a “community of interest” and reasons why FED should remain in two city council districts. The FRI Board of Directors knew early on that population shifts, not to mention the tremendous population growth of Dallas, FED, and Texas overall, would likely move some lines around. The FRI Board of Directors knew we had to make reasonable requests to the commissioners. *“Our ask was simple: keep us in two districts and move the lines as needed so long as it was reasonable to do so,”* stated Austin Endo, a member of the FRI Redistricting Task Force.

Why is it important to FRI to remain in two districts? Because adding a third district makes advocacy at the political level more difficult. FRI works not only with our City Councilmembers, but we also work with their staff and appointees, like their Park Board Members and Plan Commissioners. Maps released in late spring 2022 placed Far East Dallas into three city council districts, locating District 2 between Districts 7 and 9. Furthermore, the map broke up several FRI zones: White Rock Hills and Casa View. The rationale by the Commission was to ensure a fourth Hispanic district within the city.

Once it was understood that the Redistricting Commission was committed to maintaining the third district in Far East Dallas, FRI worked with the Commission to help unite White Rock Hills.



The final map (*see above*) was presented to the City Council in May. Councilmembers worked together to make amendments that would help unify communities that had been split apart.

The final map was adopted by the City Council on June 27. The Ferguson Road Initiative will be represented by Districts, 7, 9, and now, 2. Although the new city council districting is not what we expected or originally wanted, we are confident we will work well with Councilperson Jesse Moreno (District 2) in addition to Adam Bazaldua (District 7) and Paula Blackmon (District 9). In fact, FRI is taking the approach that we now have three advocates for Far East Dallas of the 14-member city council. *“FRI does not always win, but we’re always trying to do right by our community in Far East Dallas,”* said Karl Zavitkovsky, FRI Board Member, Economic Development, Chair.



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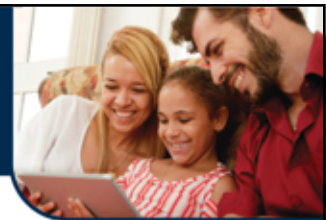


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