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JUNE 2022, Vol 2 | Iss. 5



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SEGUIN TODAY

JUNE 2022, Volume 2 | Issue 5

Seguin throws one of the best celebrations of America's freedoms. Each year, the Independence Day weekend includes a multi-day celebration. The activities include the Biggest-Small Town Fourth of July Parade in Texas, a fireworks show in Max Starcke Park, a patriotic concert in Central Park, and a special flag raising ceremony. It's an amazing lineup each year, but the celebration always begins with Freedom Fiesta. The party, which got started back in 1967, was hosted by the Seguin Area Chamber of Commerce for decades.

The chamber passed the Freedom Fiesta baton on to KWED Radio a little more than a decade ago, and the community celebration has never missed a beat. This year, we are excited that Freedom Fiesta is going to have an amazing band perform, we'll have a bigger and better assortment of food trucks, and a whole assortment of tasty beverages to wash it all down.

The Kiddie Parade is making its return to Freedom Fiesta this year, and we think this year's celebration of America will be one of our best yet. Freedom Fiesta runs from 6 to 11 p.m. Saturday, July 2 in Central Park. It's a family-friendly free event and it's something that you won't want to miss.

- Darren Dunn, General Manager -

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COVERSHOT

Freedom Fiesta is an annual event hosted by KWED and is held in downtown Seguin. Pictured, a guest at last year's event shows her American pride by waving the flag.

Photo by Lizz Daniels

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SEGUINTODAY

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BEAT the
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SEGUIN
Treats



From Snow Cones to Paletas, Seguin has ALL the BEST SUMMER SNACKS

Story and photos by Lizz Daniels

Frozen treats are a summer staple when temperatures get hot. From ice cream shops to popsicle places and snow cone stands, every Seguin local has a favorite treat and place to make it perfect.

But what is the difference between shaved ice and snow, and why do people put pickles in it? Nellie Sanchez has seen just about every weird combination people can create, and she serves many of them at her shop, Snow Mountain.

“In our case, it’s shaved ice,” Sanchez said. “It’s totally different from a snow cone because a snow cone back in the day was a thicker ice. Shaved is a little bit smoother, melts in your mouth, so along with the sugar [syrup], and now people are adding so much from back in the day. I know when we used to go to the snow cone place, it was a treat to get ice cream in the middle. Now there’s pickles, Chamoy, Tajin; there’s cool whip, skittles, and anything you can possibly think about — if we have it, we are going to put it in a snow cone.”

While some flavors may not seem like they’d go together, they can create surprising results for adventurous palettes. Snow Mountain still carries all the usual sweet and sugary staples you’d expect from a modern snow cone shop for those that like to keep things a little more simplistic.

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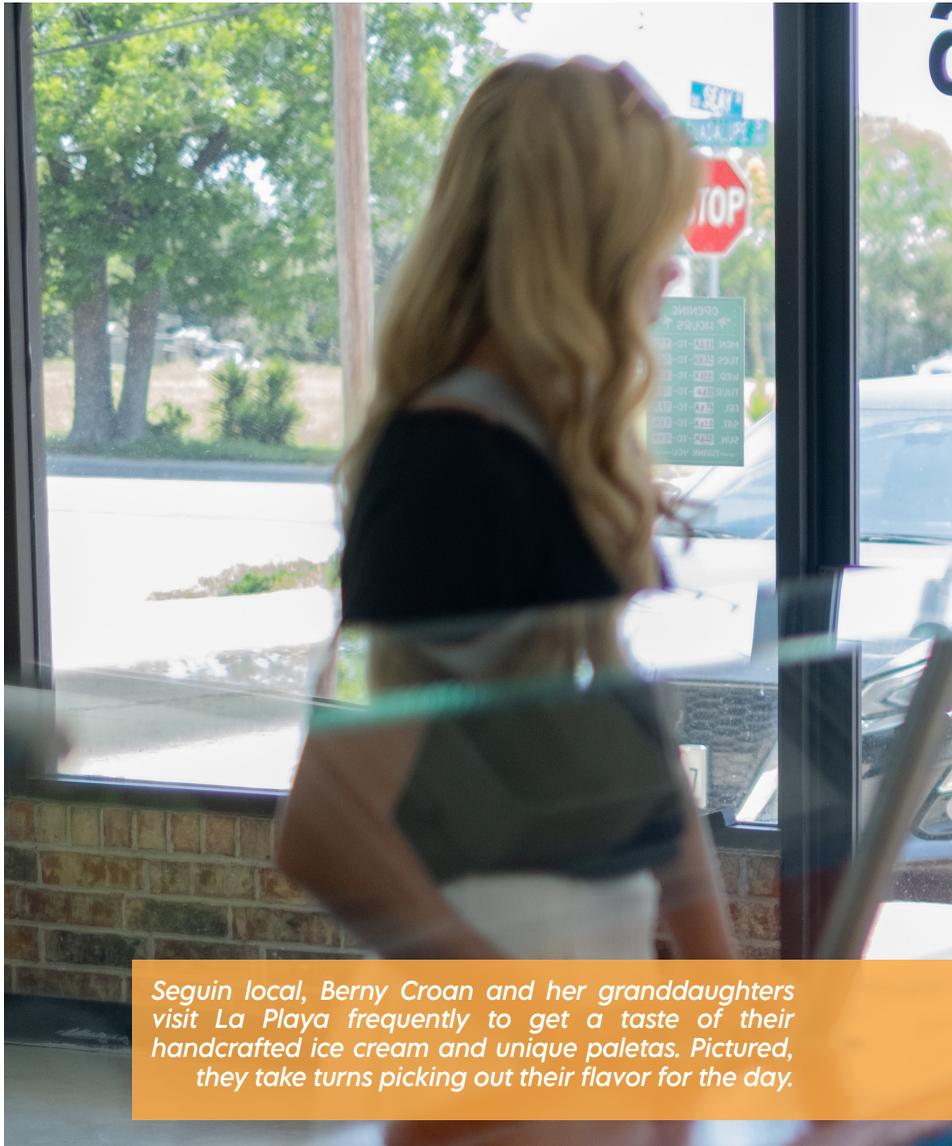
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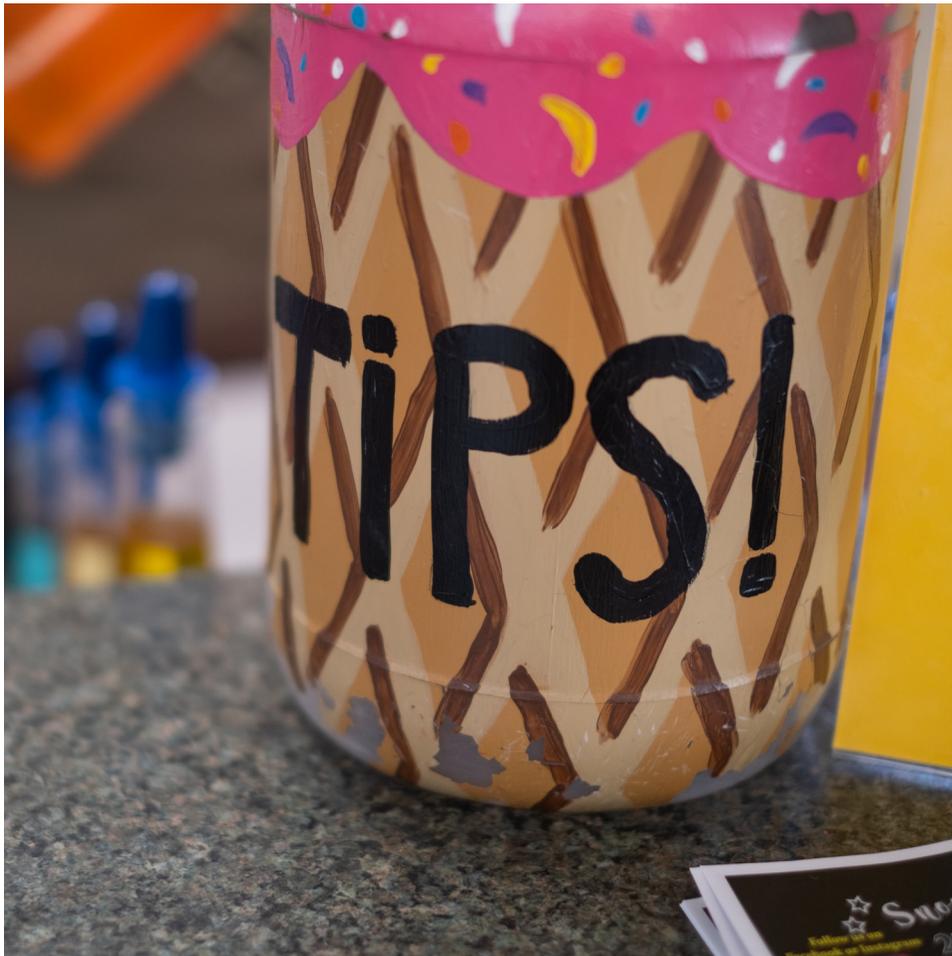
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Seguin local, Berny Croan and her granddaughters visit La Playa frequently to get a taste of their handcrafted ice cream and unique paletas. Pictured, they take turns picking out their flavor for the day.





“We sell a lot of Margarita with salt,” Sanchez said. “Anything like your traditional — your grape, pineapple, strawberry, cherry with ice cream in the middle. That seems to be like one of the main things. I know with the orange, I like to put ice cream in the middle of the orange, and then we put crema on top, which is the condensed milk. It makes it taste more like a Dreamside. Usually, when people ask for orange, I tell them what about some ice cream and stuff, you know, and before you know it, they’re coming back and ordering the same thing over and over.”

Sanchez grew up in Seguin, across town near Park West, and finds that many natives are drawn to snow cones for the nostalgia of simpler times.

“I have one gentleman who comes and says, ‘I love coming to this place, it brings me back to my childhood,’” she said.

Seguin is growing, and new shops seem to be opening every day. The community is welcoming, and new businesses have an opportunity to bond with their customers, which is a part of why La Playa Pop Shop owner Alejandro Guerrero decided to open his shop here.

“I saw the town, and I really liked it,” Guerrero said. “I saw the building and felt it was a really good spot for it. I like to use a lot of fruit in my products, so its usually fruit, sugar and water. Sometimes I like to put just straight fruit, but I do it all by hand.”

“
 You walk in and you see
 these boxes of fresh fruit
 and you know that’s going
 into this. And when you
 get the ice cream you
 taste bits of the fresh fruit.
 I’m just loving it.

- Berny Croan -



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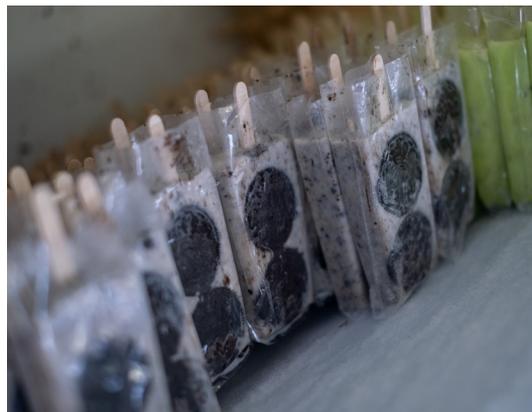


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All that hard work Guerrero puts in pays off when customers' faces light up at the first taste.

Seguin resident Berny Croan and her four granddaughters frequent La Playa Pop Shop every chance they get. The shop freezers are lined with paletas in every combination of ingredients you can imagine, from fresh fruit to Oreos.

But it's the ice cream the girls crave.

"I've got 8 grandkids, so yes, we come a lot," Croan said. "He knows me by name. The fact that everything is fresh. You walk in and you see these boxes of fresh fruit and you know that's going into this. And when you get the ice cream you taste bits of the fresh fruit. I'm just loving it. He makes it. Its not like Bluebell or anything. He makes it right back there. Its incredible."

Snow Mountain and La Playa are just two of the many frozen treats shops around town. A few other local favorites are Savannah's, Juicy Fruits, Andie's, Traveling Gypsy and of course — Dairy Queen. Of course, a quick Google search will reveal a significantly more extended list of places to taste test if you're looking for your personal favorite. But rest assured, no matter if you're an ice cream sommelier or prefer the simplicity of a paleta, there's a shop somewhere in Seguin that serves the perfect treat to keep you cool all summer long. •

A young boy is smiling and holding a large, iridescent bubble. The bubble is highly reflective, showing a rainbow spectrum of colors. Inside the bubble, the words "Freedom FIESTA" are written in a stylized, outlined font. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a festive outdoor setting.

Freedom
FIESTA

Seguin's Homecoming

KWED Radio unveils plans for annual 4th of July party

Story by Cindy Aguirre-Herrera
Photos by Lizz Daniels



Year-round, there are lots of parties and celebrations in Seguin. Yet, there only remains one gathering that breathes nostalgia and the reunion of all friends, family, and neighbors. Freedom Fiesta creates plenty of childhood memories, but even as an adult you can't help wanting to create new memories with your own family and friends.

Freedom Fiesta makes its return to the heart of downtown Seguin on Saturday, July 2. The event is planned from 6 to 11 p.m.

Seguin's Fourth of July week tradition dates back to 1967.

Over the decades, Freedom Fiesta was hosted by the Seguin Area Chamber of Commerce. Only a few years ago, Seguin Radio KWED took the leap of faith and inherited the traditional family-friendly celebration from the organization.

Over the years, Darren Dunn, KWED and Seguin Daily News general manager, says the radio station and its staff have been honored to host the longtime tradition. Unfortunately, in 2020, KWED was forced to cancel the event due to the COVID

ID pandemic but in 2021, hosted a modified yet very successful Freedom Fiesta and Food Truck event.

However, this year, Dunn says the station is looking to welcome back an even more festive event keying in on this year's live entertainment. He says to help keep this year's party going, KWED will be welcoming a high-energy, interactive 11-piece band to the stage.

"Freedom fiesta is coming back in a big way, and we are so excited to have the band, Jumpstart, come be the musical entertainment for that night," Dunn said. "Jumpstart is a variety band based out of Austin, and they come highly recommended. The band has a couple of members from the Seguin area, so they know exactly how important Freedom Fiesta is to this community. It's an 11-piece band. They've got a full horn section, and it is going to be a great night of music food and fun."

Although the variety band is from Austin, there are strong ties to Seguin as two of its members are Seguin natives, Mike Murillo and Randy Zimmermann.



Jumpstart the Band!



Jumpstart is a high energy variety dance band, serving Austin since 1998. They provide a full and varied playlist, plus offer dynamic energetic presentations. They specialize in entertaining at weddings and events of all sizes and types. With two of the band members being from Seguin, they plan to keep the party dancing by including music all locals will enjoy including modern hits and Tejano!

Murillo describes Jumpstart as having a full horn section and a playlist that includes a wide variety of popular music that people will know.

“We play dance music, and all of our songs are kind of geared to that end,” Murillo said. “Growing up in Seguin, I’ll just say it helped a lot because I got a nice blend of different kinds of music especially listening to KWED. My dad would wake up every morning with one of the shows on so between the country and the Hispanic and the German music – of course I would always listen to Top 40 stuff from a nearby San Antonio station, but I always had that concept in mind to be able to build a band that could play all styles of music. There’s a lot of bands that say we’ll play anything, but they are primarily a country western band, or they are primarily a rock band, and they throw in a handful of these other songs that they sound okay at, but you can tell that it’s not really their forte. So, I need to find a bunch of versatile musicians that could do all styles of music like and do it convincingly and that’s what we achieved in Jumpstart.”

Murillo is the founder of the high

energy band — a band that initially started off as a club band and then by 2008 grew into the well-established, versatile, and popular band that currently has ranked as one of the best if not the best wedding band in the Austin region.

In fact, two of the most respected wedding media sites in the country, The Knot and Wedding Wire, both recognized the band in 2017-2018 as this region’s “Best Wedding Band” and “Couple’s Choice Award,” respectively.

Murillo says these accolades come from the band’s ability to customize its performance for the audience at hand and give them exactly what it wants.

“We can play a big variety of music,” Murillo said. “When I say a big variety of music, I’m talking about stuff from the big band era with people like Frank Sinatra on up to the George Straits and all the way up to Lady Gaga. We do it all.”

Murillo says bringing the party to the stage is effortless thanks to this elite group of musicians — musicians that have pulled in consecutive 5-star ratings from clients and those on hand for the celebration for the last several years.



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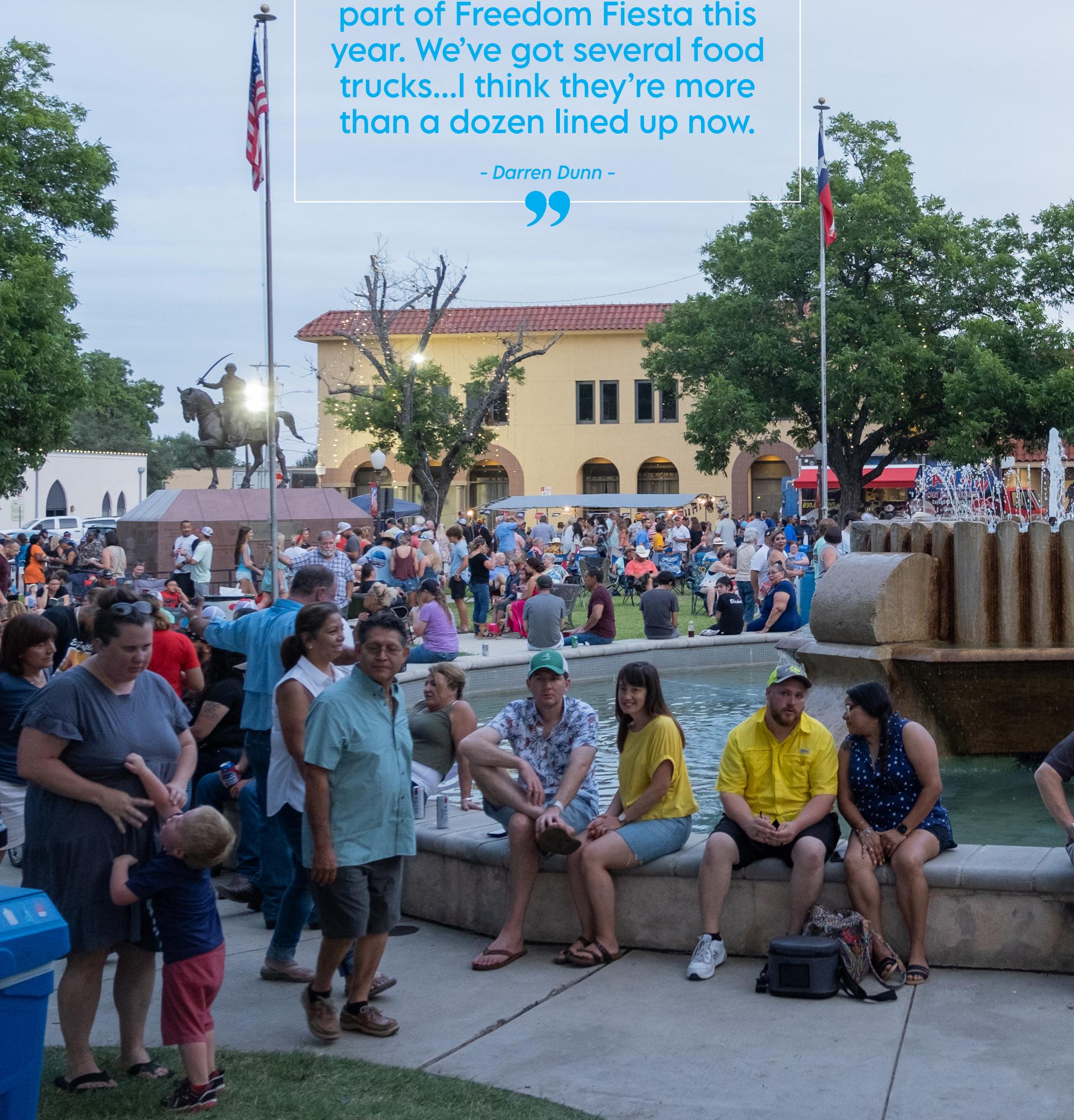
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“

The food is going to be a huge part of Freedom Fiesta this year. We've got several food trucks...I think they're more than a dozen lined up now.

- Darren Dunn -

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“It’ll be the full band with the horn section,” Murillo said. “I’ve got two female lead singers that are just great and then my male lead singer and we’ll mix up a bunch of dance music, party music, and we will keep it going. It should be fun for people of all ages because we are going to go ahead and mix in some stuff for people that I think will get into some of the big band stuff. We won’t do a whole lot of it. I don’t want to play the whole night of that kind of stuff. We will throw in some country. We’ll probably throw in some Tejano music – you know just to spice it up kind of showcase what we do very well and hopefully, everybody will enjoy it.”

Murillo says he’s been pretty excited ever since the band was booked for Freedom Fiesta and can’t wait to showcase the band in front of his hometown. Although an attempt several years ago to play at Freedom Fiesta failed, he is glad that the right moment has now finally arrived.

“It didn’t work out then, so I was real excited because I wanted to play in my hometown and go back to my roots sort of speak so I’m very excited about this,” Murillo said.

In addition to returning with a live band, the celebration, like last year, will again offer a plethora of food trucks. A small handful of non-profit organizations have also been invited to participate in this year’s event and will be serving up some of the best Fourth of July treats in town.

“The food is going to be a huge part of Freedom Fiesta this year. We’ve got several food trucks,” Dunn said. “I think they’re more than a dozen lined up now. There will be all kinds of food available for you. All your favorites will be there, plus some new items for you to enjoy. These folks are bringing their fantastic culinary skills to Freedom Fiesta this year, and we know that people will really enjoy the collective spread that will be out there for you to enjoy. They will have a huge assortment of goodies to tantalize your taste buds. And of course, there will be cold beverages to wash it all down. So, it should be a great night in Central Park.”

To help pump up those taste buds, here’s a sneak peek of some of those who will be offering up this year’s menu. The list includes folks like Grouchy Mamas, Chick-Fil-A, Dive In Donuts, Frankie J’s, Couples Catering and Mister Softee. Again, this is only a small handful of those who will be rolling up and parking at this year’s event.

Helping quench people’s thirst will again be members of the Seguin Knights of Columbus Council. The non-profit group will be returning to host this year’s beer garden.

This year’s celebration is also expected to include a children’s zone complete with bouncy houses, face painting, and balloon artists. One of the featured events that will again help kick off the celebration will be The Guadalupe County Republican Women’s Kiddie Parade. Kids of all ages are invited to decorate their strollers, bikes, skateboards, or battery-powered vehicles for a patriotic trip around Central Park. Leading the patriotic parade at 6 o’clock that evening will again be Seguin’s very own Uncle Sam. Line-up that day will get started as early as 5:30 p.m. Prizes will also be awarded to this year’s top patriotic entries.

That patriotic spirit will continue to be celebrated the remainder of the night as crowds flood Central Park for another fun evening of dancing, food and fun, but Freedom Fiesta is more than just a community party — it’s Seguin’s Homecoming. It’s our signature summer celebration to welcome families back home and provide them with fresh new memories to take with them after the party ends. Freedom Fiesta, the place for you to be this July. •



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JUNE

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4th of July Festivities

July 2nd - Freedom Fiesta
(Downtown)

July 3rd - Patriotic Concert
(Downtown)

Fireworks Fiesta
(Max Starcke Park & surrounding areas)

July 4th - Flag Raising Ceremony
(Downtown)

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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

HOLIDAYS

1st - Pride Month Begins
14th - Flag Day
19th - Juneteenth

Featured Events



Applications for 4th of July Parade

DUE: June 20, 2022

The Seguin Main Street Program is accepting applications for the Biggest Small-Town Fourth of July Parade. For applications, visit www.seguintexas.gov/fourthofjuly.

Jun. 14-28

NJTL Tennis Camp

The San Antonio Tennis Association will have its 2022 NJTL Tennis Summer Camp from Tuesday, June 14 through Thursday, July 28. The fee is \$50-\$60. Racquets upon request. To register or for further information, email Paul Ramos at Programs@satennis.com or call 210-735-3069.

Jun. 30

Ball HS Legacy Scholarship

Applications are available for the Ball High School Legacy Scholarship for relative of alumnus or graduate of Ball High School. The applications are due Thursday, June 30 and are available by visiting www.ballhighschoolseguin.org.

Jun. 30

Help Seguin Shine

The Seguin Area Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce the availability of grants for groups that enhance the quality of life in Seguin. The Seguin Area Chamber of Commerce Help Seguin Shine Applications are due Monday, June 30. For more information, call 830-379-6382.



Freedom Fiesta

July 2, 2022

Freedom Fiesta returns Saturday, July 2 at the downtown square. The event will take place from 6pm - 11pm and will have family friendly fun, food & beer plus live musical performance by Jumpstart.

Bring your launchers and come celebrate July Fourth the Seguin way!

Jul. 13

Workshop

The Guadalupe County Historical Commission will hold a Cemetery Protection and Preservation Workshop at noon on Wednesday, July 13 in the conference room of the First United Bank in Seguin. Information and documents necessary to assist citizens in protection and preservation of the more than 300 historic (50 years or more) small and family cemeteries in Guadalupe County will be discussed.

Aug. 8

Master Naturalist Training Class

The Guadalupe Master Naturalist Chapter, sponsored by Texas Parks & Wildlife and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will sponsor a series of training classes from Monday, Aug. 8 to Saturday, Nov. 19. The cost of the class is \$124. For an application visit <http://txmn.org/guadalupe> and follow the "Certification Training" dropdown. For more information email, pjsagebiel@yahoo.com or call 806-392-4431.

Aug. 28

The Gathering Music Show

The Gathering Music Show will have a dance featuring Justin Trevino from 3 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 2 at the Geronimo VFW Post 8456 in Geronimo. Admission is \$10 and the hall is smoke free and family friendly. The doors open at 1:30 p.m. and the kitchen opens at 2 p.m. For more information or reservations, call 830-305-8829 or 830-379-0506.



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KAY & BUBBA KNOW THAT GREAT BUSINESSES ARE BUILT ON GREAT RELATIONSHIPS. STARTING WITH THEIR OWN.

Welcome to Pecantown

Pecantown
- BOOKS AND BREWS -

Making Mom & Pop MEAN Something

Column by Tess Coody-Anders
Photos by Lizz Daniels

Last year represented a historic reshuffling of the labor market, as nearly 48 million workers quit their jobs in what has been dubbed the Great Resignation. I'm one of them.

The thing is, I loved my job. I loved the people and the institution and our shared mission. But over the course of the pandemic, two things changed for me. My relationship with Time altered, both as a concept and an immutable force. Mostly this was driven by loss: of people, who left us too early, and of priorities, many of which I found were misplaced.

The second was what I felt was a coarsening of our culture. We seem to be in the grip of a kind of mass depression. Our sense of belonging - what social psychologists refer to as our "ingroups" and "outgroups" - has been scrambled. The net effect is that people are behaving in ways that range from outrageous (punching flight attendants! screaming at baristas!) to dangerous (the deadly crowd surge at the Travis Scott concert at Astroworld.)

Yet each time I despaired over the news or the loss of a loved one, I was met with an important reminder: local matters. Where I saw chaos at a macro level, I found kindness and connections in my neighbors. All of which reminded me that changing the world begins with sweeping my own front porch.

And so I made real resolutions this year, and acted on them. The first was to stop talking about how best to improve the qual-

ity of life in Seguin and start doing it. This month, we opened Pecantown Books & Brews in historic downtown. While we sell new books and farm-to-table fare, our mission is to foster productive collisions, of the intellectual and interpersonal kind. It's a mission we have lived outright as we remodeled an old home while learning the ins-and-outs of two industries.

While the books and brews are new to me, this isn't entirely my first rodeo. I've co-owned a mid-sized agency. I've been CEO of a large and complex enterprise. But this is the first time I've fully experienced the ineffable ripple effect small business ownership has on a community. Small businesses generate 44 percent of U.S. economic activity and employ nearly half of all Americans - but they do so much more than make a payroll.

It's not possible to open a small business like ours without buying products and services from other small businesses: produce grown at area farms and beer from local brewers, bread and desserts from local bakers, and meats and cheeses from cheese shops and butchers. Furniture and fixtures from local shops. Eight months of construction, provided by local contractors and artisans. On-going services like accounting, pest control, appliance maintenance and repair, business insurance - heck, canisters of CO2 from a local welding shop. All bought or contracted locally.



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Tess Coody-Anders is a serial small-towner, having spent most of her adult life in towns where everybody knows your business. A Seguin High School graduate, Tess currently serves as Vice President for Strategy and Strategic Communications at Trinity University. Welcome to Pecan Town is Tess's column which seeks to explore opportunities and challenges from explosive growth in our area.

Opening any small business is a complex affair that requires a significant investment of time and money. But even with plenty of both, it would be nigh impossible without the kindness and support of neighbors. From other downtown business owners to city officials, no call for help or advice has gone unmet. And while the journey from idea to opening has not been easy, it's been a joy precisely because it's delivered that which we all need and want most in a community: a sense of belonging.

So many of our customers are new to town, having relocated from Austin or San Antonio or from out of state, and most say the same thing: Seguin is what's next. As we prepare for this future, the mutual support and camaraderie among small businesses is one of Seguin's greatest strengths, and one we cannot squander. It takes collaboration and a mutual investment of energy and passion to harness success in ways that benefit all. For better or worse, in a small town - and especially a resurgent downtown - no person or business is an island. The rising tide raises all ships.

Late last month, city officials and consultants held an open house to share updates on progress toward citywide and downtown master plans. Discussion was lively, and while sometimes even a little heated, it was respectful. Not everyone agreed about where the public restrooms should go, or how to solve parking challenges, but one thing was clear - people care. For a time, we didn't. There was a time when Seguinites didn't believe things could - or should - ever change. We refused to believe that we deserved more.

Change can happen to us, or it can happen through us. Realizing a future Seguin with a vibrant downtown, high quality of life for all and a diversified economy is possible if we cultivate our twin small-town superpowers: collaboration and kindness. While these intangibles are difficult to measure, they should not be undervalued. Both go a long way to attracting and retaining the small businesses we need to keep Seguin growing - and real. •

Ice cream, but make it...



INGREDIENTS

Vanilla Ice Cream Infused With Rose Geranium Leaves

Makes about 1 quart; serves 6-8

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 24 rose geranium leaves
- 6 large egg yolks

HANDHELD!

Ice cream and hot days are a perfect match. Ice cream can be served in many different ways — from sundaes to cakes and even as...sandwiches!

Ice cream sandwiches are comprised of a favorite ice cream flavor nestled between wafer-type cakes or cookies. They're available pre-made in a grocer's freezer, but they're easily made at home with a few ingredients, such as a favorite cookie and homemade ice cream. "Vanilla Ice Cream Infused With Rose Geranium Leaves" from "Simple Soirées" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang) by Peggy Knickerbocker makes for an ideal treat this summer.

INSTRUCTIONS

To make the custard: In a heavy saucepan combine the cream, milk, 1/2 cup of the sugar, and the geranium leaves. Cook over medium-high heat until the mixture just begins to boil, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat, cover, and let the leaves steep in the milky mixture for about 15 minutes. Then pour the mixture through a fine mesh strainer and discard the leaves or herbs.

In a small bowl, whisk together the egg yolks and remaining 1/4 cup of sugar until thick and pale. Add a few tablespoons of the warm milk mixture to the egg mixture, whisking vigorously. Once combined, add the egg

mixture back into the milk mixture, whisking continuously.

Cook over medium-low heat until the rich custard coats the back of a spoon (run your finger down the bowl of the spoon — if the finger mark remains, it's done). Or use an instant-read thermometer; the custard is done at 175 to 180 F. Do not allow the mixture to boil.

Strain the custard again into a glass bowl using a fine mesh sieve. Cover and refrigerate until you are ready to make the ice cream (the custard needs to chill for 30 to 60 minutes). You may place the bowl into a larger bowl of ice to quicken the chilling time.

To make the ice cream: Pour the chilled custard into an ice-cream maker and freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions. When it is done, serve immediately or transfer to an airtight container and store in the freezer for a day or two. Remove it from the freezer about 10 minutes before serving time.

To make ice cream sandwiches, let the ice cream thaw until spreadable. Place an ample amount on a cookie and top with another cookie. Wrap sandwiches individually in waxed paper and put into the freezer to allow the ice cream to harden again. Use large cookies, which can be homemade or store-bought.

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In Case You Missed It

This feature was originally published in two parts in the Seguin Daily News and has been printed in its entirety here.

Journalism with INTEGRITY

Unpacking 'The Big Lie' with TWO-TIME Pulitzer winner Lisa Falkenberg

Story by Lizz Daniels

Since 1917, Pulitzer Prizes have been awarded annually to acknowledge significant literature, journalism, and music achievements. On May 9, 2022, Seguin native Lisa Falkenberg and a team of writers won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Falkenberg is the editor of opinion at the Houston Chronicle and was working from home when she received the news.

"I was at home, and I was watching from my laptop, and I wish that I had more confidence that we would win to go into the office, get dressed up, but I didn't," Falkenberg said. "So I was sitting there actually, by myself, watching the Pulitzer announcement on the website — live — and when they announced our category, you know they gave the finalists. I think we were the last finalists that they mentioned, and then you just kind of close your eyes and cross your fingers."

And then she waited.

Their series, "The Big Lie," was announced as the winner. That's when the excitement began to set in. Falkenberg, however, is no first-time winner. She won in the commentary category back in 2015 for a series that led to Texas lawmakers initiating reform to the grand jury system.

"I've been here before, obviously," she said. "I won a few years ago for column writing, but it's



Lisa Falkenberg is the Editor of Opinion at the Houston Chronicle and a Seguin native. Photo by Bill Smith II, Houston Chronicle.

something different when you win as a team. It was such a joint effort. So many hours, so much collaboration, and even people's names who weren't on the entry helped edit and made sure everything was presented properly online and there were graphics. It was such a joint effort."

After calling her deputy editor and the other writers credited on the entry, Falkenberg's next phone call was back home to the individual who's inspired her most over the years — her sister.

"The first family member I called was my sister who still lives in Seguin - Lorie Ruiz," Falkenberg said. "The reason is because my love of

writing was very much inspired by her. And so she's my first teacher, and I love her dearly. She's encouraged me so much through the years, so shoutout to my sister Lorie."

The road to the Pulitzer win was a long one that began with a single headline: "Editorial: Resign Senator Cruz. Your lies cost lives —" An inflammatory statement, to say the least.

Throughout six more editorials, Falkenberg and the rest of the Houston Chronicle's editorial board made the case that widespread voter fraud, as portrayed by state leadership, was false.

"There were allegations made that the 2020 presidential election was somehow stolen or rigged because of voter fraud," Falkenberg said. "These allegations were made despite the fact that the department of homeland security found the election the most secure in American history. Some people chose not to believe that. In Texas, we figured this is a state where our leaders, including our Attorney General Ken Paxton and our governor Greg Abbott, dating back to when he was Attorney General, have tried harder than any other state, just about, to find voter fraud. They've spent millions in taxpayer money trying to find it, so if it exists, if it is common, if it is a serious problem that is eroding and attacking our democracy, well...hell, it should be here in Texas."

Editorials are not news — not exactly. They are opinion pieces written to persuade readers to either think the same way or consider a different viewpoint — a lot of what passes for news in today’s corporate media is, in fact, editorial-style content. Moreover, journalism has a variety of categories in which a piece may fit — this story, for instance, is a feature.

An editorial is not talking-head style commentary based on personal opinion or anecdote — as with all real journalism, it must be thoroughly researched and, more importantly — verified. Falkenberg, however, understands why some would be skeptical.

“My parents, when I called them — some of your listeners may relate to my mother’s response,” Falkenberg said. “She is one of those folks who is somewhat skeptical, shall we say, of the idea that voter fraud isn’t as common as its being portrayed by a former president or by Fox News. So, I understand people’s doubts and skepticism because my own parents hold it.”

The Lone Star State has a reputation for being unshakably red with values that run deep through its history. Texas has proudly produced multiple US presidents throughout the years, but following the 2020 election, the Chronicle’s editorial board noticed a change. Bold and concerning claims about the prevalence of voter fraud in the state were being utilized in an effort to influence policy.

So, they did what journalists do — they asked questions and found answers.

“Leaders in Texas, Republican leaders mostly, who felt that if they could say there was voter fraud going on, then they could limit access to the ballot,” Falkenberg said. “Which does help Republicans in large part. Because if you limit the access to the ballot, often people without cars, people without a ride to the polls, older people, people of color for instance are not going to make it, and those votes won’t count. And if they had tended to vote Democratic, which they do, then those votes won’t be present.”

Social media, Falkenberg says, is to largely blame. Advertising and algorithms have disrupted the flow of information, creating echo chambers where if users don’t like an opinion... they can simply hide it.

“I’m very troubled by the way social media limits our perspectives; I try very much to expose myself to all sorts of viewpoints and my parents, they help me do that when I come home,” she said. “They have certain perspectives that, you know, they learn on Fox News that I may not have been familiar with before, but I try to look at the facts. Sometimes they’ll raise something that I hadn’t considered. I’ll look it and up and I’ll see. Maybe there’s a kernel of truth to it, maybe its full-blown truth and then they’ve taught me something, but a lot of times its distorted information that is tailored to an audience that some people hoping to make money, have manipulated for their own gain. That’s really hard for me to know that’s going on in so many families across America — that people can’t have conversations based on the same facts anymore.”

But the facts that Falkenberg and the team found were that, historically, when politicians in Texas have claimed voter fraud — it’s been in an attempt to limit the vote of those that would vote against them.

So, does legitimate voter fraud occasionally happen? Yes, but the cases the Houston Chronicle’s research uncovered indicated most instances occurred for reasons far less sinister than what Texans had been led to believe. In fact, the actual numbers varied greatly from the descriptions provided by politicians, major news outlets, and social media.

“We looked at whatever prosecutions had taken place and found just negligible numbers, negligible percentage,” she said. “To the point where you’re more likely to be struck, probably twice, by lightning than you are to commit voter fraud.”

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With conversations increasing in the state regarding gerrymandering, voter restrictions, and more, it's critical, Falkenberg says, for voters to know the truth.

She just hopes that the actual truth, based on verifiable facts, can get to those who need to read it the most.

"One thing I said the day the Pulitzer was announced is that my greatest hope is that the award and the attention that often surrounds it would increase the probability that the Texas leaders who truly needed to read our series about voter suppression would actually read it," Falkenberg said. "If I were a betting woman, I would not place a bet that Ted Cruz is suddenly going to pick up the Houston Chronicle or the Pulitzer website and read the entry in full. But I do hope that honest, skeptical, curious, patriotic Americans who want to know the truth about whether voter fraud exists and whether it's a problem will go to the Pulitzer site and look at the Editorial Writing entry and read some of our series. We've tried to write it in such a way that lays out all the facts."

In a world where social media and extremism have often made factual statements a subjective thing, people on both sides of the great American political divide may be wondering if there is any hope left and, if so, where they can find some of it.

"Do I believe there is hope for this democracy



Falkenberg is pictured with her sister Lorie Ruiz who resides in Seguin. Photo courtesy Lorie Ruiz.

and this country? Yes, I do," Falkenberg said. "That hope, rests in the leaders who can be honest and principled and just simply have integrity despite all of the pressures they may have from their own groups to manipulate a narrative or join forces with somebody who will help them get re-elected. And my hope, because I'm a journalist, largely rests in journalism. The Washington Post has this slogan that all of us know and I love, 'democracy dies in darkness,' and it is true. Without fair and accurate journalism — that is actually fair and accurate — there will be no democracy because democracy is based on the will of the people, and how can the people make the informed decisions they need to make if they're not informed?"

Journalism originated in this country to be a watchdog for the people — to make sure citizens knew what the government was doing and journal-

ists were expected to be critical of power structures when needed. It's how the American Revolution happened. Before social media, there's no way the publisher of our country's first newspaper could have imagined the world of constant media onslaught Americans would find themselves living in nearly 250 years later.

Today's journalists seeking to do the same truth-telling are often cast as instigators and, worse, liars with an agenda.

"I hope that my people in Seguin, my neighbors, my former teachers, my family members, and a town I love dearly will understand that the project was done with no other intention but to support our democracy," Falkenberg said. "To tell the truth — to let people know that their votes are safeguarded, that there are processes in Texas to make sure that voter fraud doesn't happen, and by God if it does, our Attorney General is ready and willing to prosecute those. But it's just not happening in the way that some leaders want people to believe."

With a governor's race looming in the distance, and local elections entering runoffs, Falkenberg hopes that voters will stay critical of all elected leaders and keep seeking out accurate information. The truth is still out there, and so are real journalists.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning series by Falkenberg, Lindenberg, Holley, and Carrasco is available to read in full, for free, at www.pulitzer.org. •

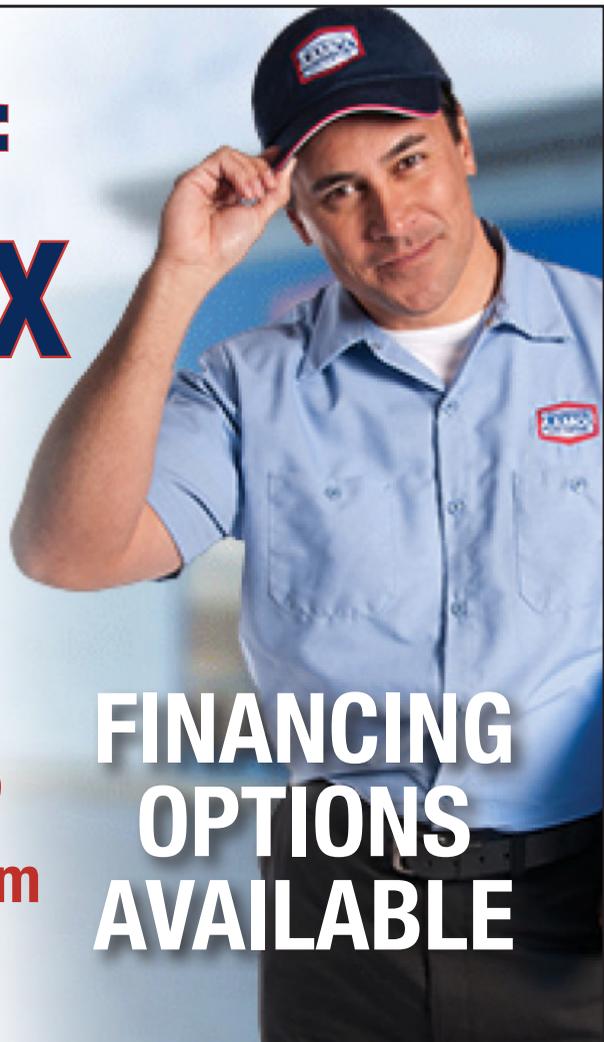


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