



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

Name of Author(s): Chris Cobler

Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.): editor

Newspaper: Victoria Advocate

Address: 311 E. Constitution St.

City: Vitoria

State: TX

ZIP: 77901

Phone: 361-574-1271

Fax: 361-574-1220

E-Mail: ccobler@vicad.com

Submitted by: Dan Easton

Title of Person Submitting: Publisher

Phone Number: 361-574-1297

E-mail Address: deaston@vicad.com

What is the subject/title of the entry? Understanding Harvey

Date(s) of publication? Sept. 3, 13, 29; Oct. 29; Dec. 24; April 15

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

In conservative South Texas, our family-owned newspaper prides itself on its close connections to our community. Our roots run deep in Victoria and the surrounding community, and our family cherishes the independent Texas spirit that flowed through the Victoria Advocate when it was founded in 1846 and still today.

This past year, however, has been unlike any other in my years as publisher. Hurricane Harvey punished our region like no other storm since Carla in 1961.

Into this difficult situation, our editorial board turned to editor Chris Cobler and our newsroom to first help our community rally together and then help it learn important lessons from the storm. This evolved into an ongoing special series of news articles and editorials called "Understanding Harvey." The entire package may be seen in an online package here: <https://victoriaadvocate.atavist.com/understanding-harvey>

Initially, of course, our Viewpoints page approach was to unit the community and

recognize the heroes of the emergency relief efforts. Chris' personal column, "After Harvey, remember to breathe," reminded our readers that their hometown newspaper is their Advocate, that we are their friends and neighbors, and that we suffer and rejoice alongside them.

Reader George Schwarz responded to this column: "This is a beautifully written piece that not only conveys the emotion of kinship with other journalists writing about tragedies and potential tragedies, but it also conveys the emotion of reporting and writing under pressure."

After our reporting revealed serious flaws in the local, state and federal response to Hurricane Harvey, our editorial board opinions shifted. The other five pieces in the entry reflect the campaign the newspaper undertook to help Victoria and the region become better prepared for the next storm that inevitably will strike. Because almost six decades had passed since the previous major hurricane, we clearly had let our guard down.

This series of news articles and editorials are particularly important because many local elected officials tended to want to ignore the issues the storm revealed. Chris' editorials pushed the community and our elected officials to take closer looks at our disaster group's lack of preparedness; our city's need for backup generators to keep our water system running; our insufficient sheltering and evacuation plans; the community's housing crisis; the need to inform and engage the public in the public's emergency preparedness plan; the folly and frustration of FEMA's fields of empty trailers; and other issues.

This is the tough love only a community newspaper and a top-notch editor can give.

Thank you for the opportunity to recognize Chris and the work of the Victoria Advocate.

Sincerely,
Dan Easton
Publisher
Victoria Advocate

EDITORIAL BOARD

Opinions published under "From Us" represent the views of the Victoria Advocate editorial board.

Dan Easton,
Publisher

John M. Roberts,
President, Chairman of the Board

Chris Cobler,
Editor, Vice President of Content

Catherine R. McHaney,
Secretary-Treasurer

Becky Cooper,
Managing Editor

Camille Easton,
Sponsorship Coordinator

Editorial page coordinator: Kathleen Grones, 361-574-1222, kgrones@vicad.com

VIEWPOINTS

FROM US

Unused FEMA trailers symbolize what's wrong

■ Topic: Harvey recovery efforts ■ Our View: State, federal governments bungle recovery efforts

When thousands of trailers and mobile homes sit unused in the heart of a region decimated by Hurricane Harvey, something is terribly wrong with this picture.

Sadly, the 2,600 trailers and mobile homes sitting on a Beeville runway are just the latest example of the federal and state government's bungling of Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. Housing advocates in the Crossroads will tell anyone who will listen that the need for adequate housing had reached crisis proportions before Harvey hit Aug. 25. The hurricane magnified that need by a factor of 10.

Yet, the Federal Emergency Management Agency lets homes sit unused while telling those in need that they don't qualify for housing assistance. If so few qualify, why does FEMA have all these trailers stockpiled?

FEMA describes Beeville as a regional staging area for some unspecified future need, but that answer fails to satisfy anyone on the left or right of the political spectrum. At a cost of about \$40,000 each, 2,600 trailers represent a total of \$104 million. For those who argue the trailers need to be in the hands of those in need, this is a huge waste. For those who argue the government shouldn't provide housing, this is an even bigger waste.

Compounding the waste is the knowledge the federal government auctioned off disaster-response trailers at fire-sale prices just before Harvey hit, according to an Associated Press investigation. More than 100 2017-model FEMA trailers were sold during the two days before the Category 4 hurricane landed in the Gulf Coast for less than \$5,000 apiece.

Experts in the mobile home business say such trailers should have a lifespan of 15-20 years and could be used for multiple disasters during that time.



ANGELA PIAZZA/APIAZZA@VICAD.COM

Almost 2,600 FEMA RVs and mobile homes are stored at the former Chase Field in Beeville. The staging area serves the southern region of the United States.

Almost eight months after the hurricane, it's painfully clear federal and state governments are not up to the challenge. That's mind-boggling given how many disasters have hit the United States in the past few decades, but Crossroads people on the frontline agree: The government didn't start planning for the hurricane until after it happened.

About a month after Harvey, Gov. Greg Abbott announced a new approach to recovery efforts that would let local officials lead the way. That never materialized in the Crossroads, as the Texas General Land Office's local conduit, the Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission, reported frustration with receiving any information or money.

Last week, the GLO announced its plan

to distribute \$5 billion in federal block grants for disaster relief. Houston has fought for more local control of the money and apparently will get a considerable amount in the form of grant money to the city and Harris County.

The Victoria region is in line to get \$110 million, but the only local control is some of that money will be routed through the overwhelmed regional planning commission.

Although state and federal officials haven't asked, the Victoria Advocate's Editorial Board did, talking with those involved locally in helping those in need. On the front line in Victoria is the Long-Term Recovery Group. Although the group also was unprepared for Harvey, its members have worked tirelessly and compassion-

HOW TO GET, GIVE HELP NEED HELP?

Dial 211 or call First United Methodist Church at 361-578-2701 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

TO JOIN

Contact Mark Longoria at mlongoria@myffcc.com to learn how to become a member of the Victoria County Long Term Recovery Group.

TO DONATE

Contact the United Way's Dolly Stokes at 361-578-3561 or send donations to P.O. Box 35402, Victoria TX 77902.

CRISIS COUNSELING

Call Texans Recovering Together by the Education Service Center, Region 3, at 361-573-0731.

ately to help since and to stretch the little money they have received as far as it can go.

The group recently received a grant to allow it to form a 501©3 and to employ a full-time director and part-time bookkeeper. With this structure and based on the work it already has done, the recovery group is the best option for handling GLO and other recovery money. Its members are committed to the effort and not distracted with running other programs, as is the case with Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission.

For a community located in the heart of hurricane country, a strong and active long-term recovery group is a must. It's too late to undo the damage inflicted on Harvey victims for the past eight months, but there still is time to do better.

Gov. Abbott proclaimed Harvey recovery efforts would become a model for the country, and indeed they have: a model of what not to do.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

FROM OTHERS



EVERYDAY HERO

To nominate your Everyday Hero, submit the person's full name, address and phone number, along with photo and reason for nomination as an Advocate Everyday Hero, in 150 words or less. Submit the information by email to letters@vicad.com, mail to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902, or bring it by the Victoria Advocate at 311 E. Constitution St. Include your name, address and phone number so we may contact you to verify your information.

CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

TEXAS GOVERNOR

■ Gov. Greg Abbott: State Capitol Bldg., 1100 Congress, Room 2S.1, Austin, TX 78701, office: 512-463-2000 or 800-843-5789, fax: 512-463-1849

TEXAS U.S. SENATORS

■ U.S. Sen. John Cornyn: 517 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, office: 202-224-2934, fax: 202-228-2856

■ U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz: B40B Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, office: 202-224-5922

TEXAS U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

■ U.S. Rep. Blake Farenthold: 2110 Rayburn House Office

Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, office: 202-225-7742, fax: 202-226-1134

■ U.S. Rep. Filemon Vela: 437 Cannon House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, office: 202-225-9901

TEXAS SENATORS

■ State Sen. Lois Kolkhorst: Victoria Office: 5606 N. Navarro St., Suite 300X, Victoria, TX 77904; Office: 361-573-7300; Austin: 512-463-0118, Austin fax: 512-475-3736

VICTORIA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

■ County Judge Ben Zeller: 101 N. Bridge St. Victoria 77901, 361-575-4558 (general number for the commissioners court)

GUEST COLUMN

Youth Leadership Conference helps us build young leaders

The Victoria Business and Education Coalition continues a 15-year tradition with its 2018 YOUTH LEADERSHIP Conference from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day June 4-7 at the Victoria College Student Center. This fun, action-packed and innovative learning experience teaches incoming seventh-graders leadership skills that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The participants are divided into teams, each with two team leaders who have been through the program before.

Team leaders are there to provide guidance, help and model great leadership skills to their team members. The relationships formed in these teams and the skills learned are the heart and soul of the YOUTH LEADERSHIP Conference.

Conference activities

are centered around four themes for the week. Each theme contributes to imparting leadership skills and experience to the conferees.

Day One: Goals and Dreams

Every leader possesses goals and dreams, and this first day helps the students connect with both by learning how to set goals and pursue dreams. This is done by working together to climb a rock wall with safety harnesses, determination and the help of their team leaders and fellow conferees.

Each team member writes their own dreams and goals, then frames it to sit on their night stand to remind them of their mission. And finally, in one of the funniest ongoing activities of the conference, each team makes up a team cheer to inspire and entertain everyone else, with the goal of winning the

spirit stick.

Day Two: Servant Leadership

Day two activities build on day one by taking the conferees on location to a local nonprofit to perform community service while learning that great leaders always give back to their communities.

This theme is reinforced through a service project performed on site, and the conferees are immediately appreciated for their hard work. The day winds up in enjoying water slides and other games that help the conferees get to know each other better, form bonds of friendship and just have fun.

Day Three: The "I Can" Attitude

Pursuing goals and dreams and practicing servant leadership need a motor to make them successful, which brings us to the "I Can" attitude. If our students leave the



ALLEN T. COFFEY

This is why the entire day focuses on learning how to lose an "I-can't-do" attitude and gain an "I-can-do" attitude.

This theme is tackled by learning to work through obstacles and difficulties by learning from the examples and accomplishments of others. To help the conferees understand better the need for discipline and understanding in becoming an "I can do" person, Hank Hough and his Incredible Dogs will be here to demonstrate discipline, control and obedience in action.

Day Four: Manners Matter

conference knowing all about leadership and soft skills but are convinced they can't ever do those things, we have failed.

On the last day of the conference, students learn the importance of making a great first impression and the role of manners in doing so. Students will learn how to properly introduce themselves with a firm handshake, eye contact and a sincere greeting.

In addition, a special catered lunch will be served and used as the backdrop to teach proper table manners and behavior at the table and how this can influence how employers, clients or customers see them as either professionals who are a pleasure to work with or messy and unprofessional.

There will also be instruction on how to tie neckties and other essentials of proper dress.

This last day also affords the opportunity to celebrate the students' leadership accomplishments and new friendships made.

This is capped off with an

awards ceremony attended by conferees and their parents and followed by a reception with cake for everyone.

For more information about VBEC and the YOUTH LEADERSHIP Conference, head over to our website vbectx.org and select the YOUTH LEADERSHIP Conference tab, call 361-572-8283 or come by our office at 3404 N. Ben Wilson between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

Allen T. Coffey, AmeriCorps VISTA public relations specialist, Victoria Business and Education Coalition, is a native of Victoria and a retired minister. He holds a B.A. from the University of Houston-Victoria and an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He may be contacted at 361-572-8232.

FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

— First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Our Messiness

God works in and through our messiness. "Clean up your room," Mom says. The teenager discovers a Valentine Made in his youth and forgotten. "Here, Mom," he says and kisses her. Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. Acts 8:6-7

"When we look back, the only things we cherish are those which in some way met our original want; the desire which formed in us in early youth, undirected, and of its own accord."

Willa Cather (1873-1947) American writer who achieved recognition for her novels of frontier life on the Great Plains, including O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, and My Ántonia

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number so we may contact you to verify your information.

Our letter lengths are 200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others. We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.