



## Letter from the President

Dear Neighbor,

2011 is off to a good start in Old Braeswood. Property values are solid, the park is well used and maintained, the POA social events are well attended, the neighborhood is safe and we are protecting our special character. The OBPOA committees are functioning well, as are our sister organizations (Parks, Trees and Garden Club). Thanks to all who serve and contribute.

We have our challenges. A minor crime spree earlier this year, apparently the work of a burglary network that hit many homes all over Houston and which was especially active in West U, and the Boulevard Oaks and Southampton neighborhoods north of Rice University. RACS (Rice Area Constable Service) participation is down and RACS service sometimes leaves something to be desired. We have lost some older, historic homes - especially those that were not maintained. The Medical Center and other developer encroachment still pose threats, although the governor signed a bill into law earlier this month which limits the unbridled condemnation authority previously held by the Texas Medical Center. Our streets need replacing, although most have successfully petitioned for reconstruction and have been placed on the city's wait list, which is now a 10 to 15 year wait.

Overall, however, there seems to be a solid sense of community and progress. Membership in the POA is up modestly, we are financially sound, many are investing in their homes, we have a good mix of older and younger families and we remain a beautiful, quiet oasis right next to the Medical Center, Reliant Stadium and Rice University.

Please join in and participate, and if you haven't done so already, please send in your annual dues. We welcome your suggestions and opinions!

Sincerely,

*John Eldridge*

President, Old Braeswood POA

## Crime Prevention Meeting set for June 7th

In response to the rash of burglaries and criminal activity in our area, Old Braeswood POA will host a **Crime Prevention Town Hall Meeting** at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 7 at Roberts Elementary School cafeteria.



The meeting will feature HPD's Crime Prevention Team and demonstrations by home security experts about cost effective ways to prevent break-ins and kick-in burglaries. Come learn ways to protect yourself, your property and our neighborhood. You can also sign up for free in-home security assessments with an HPD officer. Bring your friends!

**Date:** Tues., June 7, 2011

**Time:** 6:30 p.m.

**Location:** Roberts Elementary  
6000 Greenbriar

*(Refreshments generously provided by Dawn Gervais with Keller Williams Realty.)*

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The first owner of 2330 Bluebonnet led a life of money and glamor. First came the money. He was W. Howard Lee, distantly related to General Robert E. Lee, and the son of William Ellsworth Lee, a partner of the Yount-Lee Oil Company that started the second Spindletop boom with its flank well drilled to 5,400 feet in 1925. That well demonstrated that the Spindletop field was not tapped out. In 1935, the Yount-Lee Company was sold for \$46.2 million.

Howard built his Bluebonnet house in 1936 and lived there with his first wife, Helen Torrance, the daughter of Edgar Lee Torrance. Her father was a pioneer in the motel business, building one of the very early motel chains, with innovations like putting a telephone in each room. His first Alamo Plaza motel opened in 1929.



*Sally Russ at her home at 2330 Bluebonnet Blvd.*

Howard and Helen had plenty of family to keep them company in Braeswood. Howard's brother Donald built a house the same year at 2329 Underwood. His sister, Faustine, lived in the neighborhood with her husband, the famed Glen McCarthy. McCarthy's parents lived directly across the street from Howard and Helen.

During his years on Bluebonnet, Howard is listed in the City Directories as president of Lee Brothers Oil Company. Howard and Helen eventually divorced, and in 1951 Howard sold the house and moved into the Shamrock Hotel. Then followed the glamor in Howard's life. His second and third wives were Hollywood megastars.

Howard married Hedy Lamarr in 1953, becoming the fifth of her six husbands. They moved into 3239 DelMonte Dr. in River Oaks. Hedy, in addition to being an international movie goddess with thirty or more films to her career, was a brilliant inventor. She held a 1942 U.S. patent, together with her musician friend George Antheil, for a frequency hopping system that made radio-guided torpedoes harder to detect or jam. Today, it is the basis of spread-spectrum communication technology used in Wi-Fi and in CDMA telephones.

Glamor doesn't come cheap. Hedy lived lavishly and Howard spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars on her film projects. They divorced in 1960. That same year, he married Oscar nominated actress Gene Tierney, who was divorced from fashion designer Oleg Cassini. They lived at 5000 Longmont Dr. The marriage to Gene lasted. Whenever interviewed, she said that she much preferred life in Houston to her former life in Hollywood. They are buried together in Glenwood Cemetery, he having died in 1981 and she in 1991.

The Bluebonnet house was purchased from W. Howard Lee by Sam and Juanita Suravitz. Sam became president of Beard & Stone Electric Co., and served as Vice-President of the Jewish Home for the Aged.

The Suravitzes sold to Paul and Mary Bennett in about 1975. When Paul retired in 2000 as office manager for an oil field supply company, Vinson Supply Company, they moved to the St. James at 5555 Del Monte Dr., and sold the house to Bill and Sally Russ, the current owners. Sally is a community volunteer retired from Montessori education.

Bill owns an independent oil and gas company, Endeavor Natural Gas.

Although the house has been expanded and remodeled over the years, it retains its original character. It was built to face the prevailing coastal winds, and it is only one room wide, to allow cross ventilation. It stands just as Howard Lee planned it.

*[This is the 17th article in a continuing series on houses and people in Old Braeswood. Suggestions for future columns are welcome.]*

## *Governor signs bill protecting Old Braeswood from Medical Center expansion*

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Our sincere thanks to State Representative Garnett Coleman for his efforts over the past two legislative sessions to pass a law that limits the power of the Texas Medical Center (TMC) and all of its member institutions to condemn residential property. The new law will help ensure that the Texas Medical Center remains east of Main Street and Montclair.

Unexpectedly, the effort this year gained enhanced momentum because "protecting private property rights/addressing eminent domain issues" was included on the Governor's listing of "emergency items for the 82d Legislative session." As reflected on the Governor's website, "including eminent domain issues . . . on the list of emergency items allows lawmakers to begin considering these issues during the initial 30 days of the legislative session."

[\(http://governor.state.tx.us/news/press-release/15557/\)](http://governor.state.tx.us/news/press-release/15557/)

Old Braeswood worked closely with a coalition of homeowner groups from the University Place Super Neighborhood and with Rep. Coleman beginning in 2008 to bring this protection into law. We greatly appreciate Representative Coleman's efforts on our behalf and other nearby neighborhoods including Southgate, Southampton, Boulevard Oaks, Devonshire and Central City.

## *City Council Redistricting leaves Old Braeswood in District C*

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City Council recently approved new district maps which include two new council districts: J and K. The new districts resulted from increased population as revealed by the 2010 census data. While Old Braeswood remains in District C, its new boundaries bear little resemblance to the former district. The new District C includes portions of the Heights, Montrose, Meyerland & Memorial Park. Most of these neighborhoods share common challenges in that they began as suburbs and now find themselves in the heart of the city. New district boundaries take effect Jan. 2012. Elections for City Council will be held Tuesday, Nov. 1, 2011. Current District C councilwoman Anne Clutterbuck is term limited so the seat is up for grabs in 2012. At time of press, both former State Representative Ellen Cohen and a former city council candidate, Brian Cweren, have declared their candidacy. The University Place Super Neighborhood will host a District C candidate forum at Rice University in the fall.

## *CenterPoint Energy notice about installation of transmitters and new meters*

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Centerpoint Energy advises us that they are conducting area wide replacement of residential gas meters in the Old Braeswood area beginning in June. This program will have two parts. Meters will be replaced at homes that still have the old cast iron meters. This is only a small percentage of the meters in the neighborhood. But all meters will then be fitted with a transmitter that will send consumption data to a mobile meter reading vehicle for collection. This will eliminate the "meter reader" from entering private property for the purpose of reading the meter in the future. Centerpoint Energy expects to complete this project by year end.

Centerpoint Energy is responsible for the meter change out. There will be a brief interruption of service only when a meter needs to be replaced. But again, only a small fraction of neighborhood meters fall into this category. When a meter is exchanged at a residence and no one is home, the gas will be left off. Workers will leave a hang tag on the door notifying you to contact Centerpoint. Their technicians will then need to set up an appointment with you to relight natural gas pilots when gas is restored. All Centerpoint Energy personnel are required to wear identification indicating Centerpoint Energy employment. The vehicles are also marked "Centerpoint Energy". Centerpoint Energy will notify you in advance via door hanger if your meter is in need of replacement.

Dig Co, a Centerpoint subcontractor, will be responsible for adding the transmitters to the meters. Dig Co at no time will need access inside a private residence. There will be no interruption of service during their installation. All Dig Co personnel must wear identification. They also wear brightly colored safety shirts with "Dig Co" written on them. Dig Co has reported that the installation takes about 15 minutes to complete and that there is no digging necessary.

Our direct contact information for Centerpoint Energy is Mrs. Lynette Sealy at 713-207-4430. Additionally, should there be a question as to the identity of a worker requesting entry onto a homeowner's property - please contact the Patrol and a deputy will be dispatched to

## *Sign up for Old Braeswood eBlasts and Crime Alerts*

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Would you like to receive up to the minute news and crime alerts electronically? Subscribe to eNews and Crime Alerts by sending a message to [info@OldBraeswood.com](mailto:info@OldBraeswood.com).



New

# WELCOME Neighbors

**Christi Bowden**

7309 Grreenbriar

**Elizabeth & David**

**Micheletti**

2423 Gramercy

**Dylan Seff**

2340 Blue Bonnet

**Rolf Schmitz**

2321 Maroneal

## Volunteers Needed

**Newsletter:** Do you like to write or have layout or graphic design skills? Then we need you! Our newsletter is produced using MS Publisher— a program that is very easy to learn. Content is supplied in advance by board members and committee chairpersons. The goal is to make the newsletter attractive and readable. Submissions are always welcome. For more info, contact Susan Teich at 713-839-7234.

### **Tree Committee:**

Volunteers are urgently needed to help with this ongoing project to reforest the rights of way throughout the neighborhood. Jobs available include planning, planting, watering, fundraising and pruning young trees.

## Join our Yahoo Group

Visit this link to get started: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OldBraeswoodNeighbors/>. This is a real time group where you can send messages to other members without delay. The Yahoo group has been very helpful for tracking down lost pets and has even been used to help the RACS Constables Patrol track down thieves.

The Yahoo group is not related to the eNews and crime alert service.

## Garden of the Season Winner!



*The Old Braeswood Garden Club chose 2311 Bluebonnet unanimously as the best garden for winter. The yard has a sophisticated elegance. It is always very well groomed and fits the personality of the house beautifully. A color photo is on the website.*

## Real Estate Report for April 2011

by Dawn Gervais, Realtor ® Consultant

Real Estate is a cyclical business. What goes up must come down and what is down won't stay there. Demand slows down and supply builds up and you are all aware that we are currently experiencing a buyer's market here in Houston. You know the market has bottomed out when it starts back up, and you know the market has peaked when it starts back down. People who buy in a buyers' market are the smart ones. They're not unrealistic and they know they can't predict the end of a bust, but they can see when a market has fallen considerably. If you plan to sell your home soon it's important to remember that homes that are priced well and in good condition are always the first to sell. If you're planning on buying a home and waiting until prices come down even more, you are gambling that interest rates will hold steady or drop. Even a 10 % drop in home prices is immediately nullified by a mere 1 percentage point increase in interest rates on a 30-year mortgage loan. Falling home prices are a great opportunity for a savvy homeowner looking to move up. Even though your home sale price may be lower, the smaller loss of sale can be compensated by greater savings at purchase.



Homes sold since 1/1/2011: 7		Homes Currently for Sale: 14	
Min, Sold Price	\$439,000	Min. Asking Price	\$339,000
Max, Sold Price	\$3,075,000	Max. Asking Price	\$1,399,000
Avg. Price per Sq.Ft.	\$220.30	Avg. Price per Sq.Ft.	\$266.90
Avg. Days on Market	124		

## Remember to submit your plans for review before starting construction



The Old Braeswood deed restrictions require that all alterations to your home's exterior and that all structures including fences which are built on your lot be reviewed and approved prior to construction. To help keep your project running smoothly, please submit your plans for review before sending them to the City of Houston for permitting. If you are contemplating a project, please contact the Old Braeswood office at 713.807.1787/info@oldbraeswood.com. to request a plan review application. Submitting your plans in advance will also prevent problems down the line and may save you thousands of dollars in change orders.

## Your letters

Dear OBPOA:

We wanted to send a heartfelt thanks to Old Braeswood POA for their speedy and thoughtful efforts for helping us find our missing pet cat. The description of our missing cat was communicated quickly, and the outpouring of neighbor support was unbelievable. We received numerous emails, phone calls and physical visits! Our happy-ending ordeal was a good reminder of the great "community" Old Braeswood is!



Thank you so much! — *Melissa, Daniel, Mickie May & Solomon Levin (and reunited cat brothers "Rim" & "Steal")*



## Invitation to join the Garden Club

The Old Braeswood Garden Club, organized in 1939, welcomes all women in Old Braeswood to join the Garden Club. Our motto is "Friendship." Actual gardening is not required. To join, please call President Christine Infante at 713-667-3675.

## Recycling & Trash Schedule

Household Trash:	Tuesdays
Yard Waste	Tuesdays
Recycling	Alt. Tuesdays
(May 10 & 24, June 7 & 21, July 6 & 19)	



In accordance with Chapter 39 of the City's Code of Ordinances, trash may not be set on the curb for collection before 6 p.m. of the day preceding pick up. Please remind your yard service not to leave bags on the curb during the week. Please also remind crews not to blow leaves or other debris into the storm sewers, as this clogs the system and creates the perfect conditions for mosquitoes—and is against the law. For more trash rules, visit [www.houstontx.gov/solidwaste](http://www.houstontx.gov/solidwaste).

## SAVE THE DATE!

Old Braeswood  
Night Out  
**6 – 9 p.m. Tues.**  
**October 4, 2011**

**Meet with neighbors on your block at 6 p.m. and join us in the Park at 7 p.m. for ice cream.**

## 2011 OBPOA Officers & Chairpersons

President	John Eldridge
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice Pres.	Susan Teich
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice Pres.	Buddy Steves
3 <sup>rd</sup> Vice Pres.	Ryan Maierson
At-Large	Sam Bernstein
At-Large	G.G. Hsieh
Treasurer	Brent Whiteley
Secretary	Dawn Gervais
Past President	Dee Murray
Architectural Review	Marilyn Archer Matthew Kelley
Block Captains	Sally Miller
Historic	Susan Teich
Newsletter	<u>VACANT</u>
Park	Matthew Kelley
Enforcement	Sam Bernstein John Eldridge David Robins
RACS Rep	Ryan Maierson
Rice U Liaison	Bob Birenbaum
Social	G.G. Hsieh
Trees	Carroll Shaddock
University Place	Kathy Lord
Welcome	Dawn Gervais
Manager	Evalyn Krudy



**OLD BRAESWOOD  
PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION**

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[www.oldbraeswood.com](http://www.oldbraeswood.com)

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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## *Stop Solicitors before they get to the door*

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A common thread in many of the recent area burglaries is people posing as solicitors who are in reality casing homes. While it's nearly impossible to keep them from knocking on your door, there are a few things you can do to keep them at bay. First, police recommend that you post a No Solicitors sign next to your doorbell. These signs are available from local hardware and office supply stores. More attractive versions are offered on the web in a variety of finishes to coordinate with your door hardware. While posting a sign won't prevent a solicitor from knocking, having one posted will give the Constable reason to arrest a solicitor that does not leave voluntarily. Beginning June 7th, OBPOA will offer small brushed brass and aluminum plaques that measure 1.75" x 1.75" and will fit on the door molding in older homes. A \$5 donation is requested.

If a solicitor is behaving oddly or becomes insistent or belligerent, immediately call the Patrol at 713-755-7628. Do not open your door to solicitors. The Patrol advises that you simply answer through your locked door, or just make some noise to let them know someone is at home. This holds true even for those who have posted No Solicitors plaques.

## *Thanks to Park Party volunteers!*

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The annual Old Braeswood Park Party was held on May 1 and it was a blast thanks to GG Hsieh and her hard working volunteers. This year the event was geared toward all ages. Neighbor Molly Khalil helped make the day extra special with activities for children. Little ones played on the park equipment and made sidewalk art, crafts and lots of bubbles.

Special thanks to party chairman GG Hsieh and her great team of volunteers who made the event a real success. The team included Liz Alhand, Annette Eldridge, Matthew Kelley, Mark Hausknecht, Molly Khalil, Dee Murray, Ross Van Wassenhove and George Wallace. Thanks also to our Park Party Sponsor, Dawn Gervais with Keller Williams Realty.

Please send us your photos of the Park Party for the website.