

San Marcos OKs a tax break for Buc-ee's

Estimated \$3M gets unanimous approval for Texas company eyeing store along I-35

By Liz Teitz
STAFF WRITER

The San Marcos City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved an estimated \$3 million sales tax break aimed at landing a new Buc-ee's store on Interstate

35. The company — which has created a cult following with its giant stores and beaver mascot — is proposing to build a \$50 million, 74,000-square-foot gas station and store on the southbound I-35 frontage road, just south of

where the interstate meets Yarrington Road in north San Marcos. Buc-ee's plans to have 120 fueling stations and capacity for electric vehicle charging on the 22-acre site.

The council members gave the initial OK for a 50% tax rebate over 15 years. San Marcos projects it would collect \$3.2 million in sales tax over the course of the agreement, while giving back the

same to the company, according to the city's estimates. The agreement requires a second, final approval for the council. That vote is scheduled for March 5.

The agreement does not include any rebates for property taxes. The city expects to collect \$5.9 million in property taxes over the 15 years, and projects the county will receive \$2.8 million, while Hays Consolidated Inde-

pendent School District would receive \$11.4 million.

The agreement comes with the stipulation that if the Hays County Commissioners Court doesn't approve a similar tax break, Buc-ee's can terminate the contract with the city.

Hays County declined to comment on any potential agreement.

The agreement with the city
Buc-ee's continues on A10

Half Price Books and its neighbor to close in May

By Madison Iszler
STAFF WRITER

Half Price Books is closing its location on Broadway next to Antiquarian Book Mart, which also is shutting down, after the buildings that the businesses occupy changed hands.

A sign posted at Half Price states the store will close permanently May 5 and thanks customers for patronizing the business for more than 40 years.

A spokesperson for Half Price did not immediately respond to an inquiry Wednesday morning about why the store is closing and whether there are plans to reopen in a different lo-

cation. The Dallas-based book store chain has four other locations in San Antonio.

Next door at Antiquarian, closing sales are underway and the store is expected to shut its doors in May as well.

Bob Kellel and his family have been selling books at Antiquarian since 1971, and they are ready to move on. The Kellel family sold the buildings occupied by Half Price and Antiquarian, and a vacant lot in December to local real estate developer Glenn Huddleston, deed records show.

"I'm not looking forward to it," Kellel told the Express-News last year. "It's been a wonderful business. I also realize the quality of having a nice bookstore in this area, and it's going to suffer a little bit. But

Bookstores continues on A10



Kellel

New senior housing community proposed

By Madison Iszler
STAFF WRITER

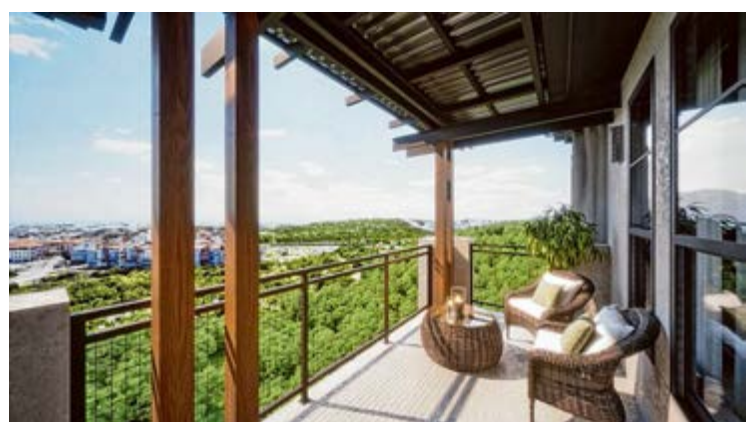
A faith-based nonprofit has unveiled new renderings of a senior housing complex it wants to build across the highway from The Rim shopping center between San Antonio and Boerne.

On 26.5 acres near the Eilan development along Interstate 10, Forefront Living of Dallas plans to build 164 apartments and 40 villas for people 62 and older who live independently.

Units will range from 820 to 2,550 square feet.

The community, named Bella Vida at La Cantera, will also have 16 assisted living units with memory support care and amenities such as a salon and spa, fitness center, pickleball court, indoor pool, restaurant-style dining and wellness programming. Forefront Living declined to disclose the range of costs for various unit sizes and services.

"This is very much a lifestyle
Senior continues on A10



Three and Forefront Living

Renderings show Bella Vida at La Cantera, a senior housing community, slated to be built across the highway from The Rim shopping center between San Antonio and Boerne.



Photos by David Zalubowski/Associated Press

Reata Engineering and Machine Works CEO Grady Cope watches a worker prepare a machine to confirm that parts meet customers' standards.

Productivity surge gives economy a lift

Chronic worker shortages have led many companies to invest in machines

By Paul Wiseman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Trying to keep up with customer demand, Batesville Tool & Die began seeking 70 people to hire last year. It wasn't easy. Attracting factory workers to a community of 7,300 in the Indiana countryside was a tough sell, especially having to compete with big-name manufacturers nearby like Honda and Cummins Engine.

Job seekers were scarce. "You could count on one hand how many people in the town were unemployed," said Jody Fledderman, the CEO. "It was just crazy."



At Reata, which makes parts for aircraft and medical device manufacturers, "efficiency was ... forced on us," Cope says.

Batesville Tool & Die managed to fill just 40 of its vacancies.

Enter the robots. The company invested in machines that could mimic human workers and in vision systems.
Economy continues on A9

Express-News, MYSA employees form union amid industry turmoil



Kin Man Hui/Staff file photo

Employees of the San Antonio Express-News moved into new offices in downtown's Light Building in early June 2022. E-N and MYSA employees have petitioned for union recognition.

By Patrick Danner
STAFF WRITER

Newsroom employees of the San Antonio Express-News and MYSA on Wednesday petitioned the company for recognition as a unit of the Media Guild of the West.

In a letter to Express-News owner Hearst Newspapers, the employees requested their union be voluntarily recognized as a collective bargaining unit and to start negotiations toward a contract.

In a statement, the San Antonio NewsGuild said it had collected signed authorization cards from 46 of an estimated 68 eligible employees — 68%. The company

questioned that math, saying the pool of eligible employees was larger and the percentage in support lower.

Union organizers said in a mission statement their aim is to "safeguard our future as a news provider." It said employees are seeking fair and competitive compensation, stable benefits and career development opportunities and a workplace that celebrates differences in race, gender, age, sexual orientation and background.

An employer can voluntarily recognize a union based on a showing of majority support from workers. Hearst declined to do that, and the union said it would petition the National La-

bor Relations Board for a representation election.

Prior to such an election, union representatives and Hearst would have an opportunity to present their sides during a campaign period. The union would be certified if it won a majority of the votes cast by secret ballot.

Jeff Johnson, president of Hearst Newspapers, said in a statement, "We look forward to making the case to our employees, on the merits, that it's not in their best interest to unionize the Express-News newsroom."

"Hearst deeply values a direct relationship with its employees, and our track record of additional benefits, annual bonuses for all
Union continues on A9

BOOKSTORES

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I'm old — I'm 71 — and my children live in Boston, and my wife wants to go see the grandson more. It's hard for me to get away and go with her while I'm busy with this. And property taxes have gotten prohibitive."

Huddleston owns other buildings in the area, including a colorful building in the 2600 block of Broadway previously occupied by the Fiesta San Antonio Commission, the former Magnolia/Mobil Gas station topped with a Pegasus at 5424 Broadway, the Inter-Continental Motors building at 3303 Broadway and the Uptown Alamo Heights strip center at 5930 Broadway.

Huddleston did not immediately respond to an inquiry Wednesday afternoon.

The buildings are next to the recently renovated Ranch Motel and Leisure Club and sit along a corridor that's seen an explosion of residential and office construction in recent years, largely driven by the success of Pearl.

Just outside Pearl, three office towers have been built in the past five years. They house the headquarters for Credit Human and Jefferson Bank, and space for tenants such as Bank of America and CBRE.



Deborah Martin/Staff

Bob Kellel and his family, who run Antiquarian Book Mart, have sold the Broadway buildings that house it and Half Price Books.

San Antonio real estate development company Embrey recently completed Tin Top Flats at the Creamery, a 338-unit apartment complex at 847 E. Ashby Place, and local developer David Adelman's Area Real Estate turned the former Borden Creamery warehouse next door into space for office and restaurant tenants.

Oxbow Development Group, the development arm of Pearl owner Silver Ventures, is building more than 550 apartments, a 151-room hotel, commercial space and parking across the San Antonio River from Pearl.

San Antonio-based Lynd Living and Opportunity Home San Antonio, formerly known as the

San Antonio Housing Authority, are building more than 250 apartments across from Hawthorne Academy. GrayStreet Partners and Fulcrum Development, both of San Antonio, want to build, in multiple phases, a mixed-use development across Broadway from Pearl called Broadway East with stores, restaurants, housing and a hotel.

Next to the San Antonio Museum of Art, McCombs Enterprises plans to build housing, office space and a hotel.

Houston-based Urban Genesis and Harris Bay, which has offices in San Antonio and California, also plan to build hundreds of apartments and rental townhomes in the area.

BUC-EE'S

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requires Buc-ee's to fill a minimum of 175 full-time jobs with benefits, and to make an effort to hire local employees, contractors and suppliers. The company must also make a \$100,000 donation to the City of San Marcos Community Fund within 100 days of opening.

Under the agreement, the company must install a rainwater reclamation system, and it will use an oil/water separator to handle runoff.

The council's unanimous decision came after some residents spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting and asked the council to reconsider the agreement.

Three residents questioned the city's decision to offer tax breaks to the large corporation, instead of supporting local businesses in the same way. They also raised concerns about traffic. In response, Mayor Jane Hughson asked city staff to list existing small business programs the city offers.

Stan Beard, director of real estate for the company, told the council that 80% of Buc-ee's customers will come from outside of San Marcos and Hays County. In response to a question about affecting local businesses, he said the company's focus is on road

trip stops, not pulling local shoppers away from smaller convenience stores.

Council members and city staff praised the choice of location for the proposed store, noting that it's not in an environmentally sensitive area and can be easily accessed from I-35 and the frontage road without going through intersections or stoplights.

Council Member Saul Gonzales asked Beard whether the company would still consider San Marcos without the tax rebate.

"Whenever we approach a community, the understanding is that we believe we bring a valuable asset to a community," Beard said. Tax breaks "play a huge part" in the company's decisions, he said. "So the short answer is we would not be having this conversation."

The nearest Buc-ee's to the proposed site is 20 miles south in New Braunfels. The company also has stores in Bastop, about 40 miles away, and in Ottine, near Luling, about 30 miles away.

The company also is planning a \$38 million store in Boerne, a plan that has been in the works since 2016. A company official told the Express-News last week that construction there could start this summer.

Founded in 1982 and based in Lake Jackson, Buc-ee's operates more than 40 travel centers, with most of them in Texas.

SENIOR

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choice. This is really designed for seniors who want access to health care, but want an active, independent lifestyle," CEO Tim Mallad said.

Forefront Living was founded in 1962 as Grace Presbyterian Ministries. It operates the Presbyterian Village North retirement community, Faith Presbyterian retirement community, Faith Presbyterian Hospice and T. Boone Pickens Hospice and Palliative Care Center in Dallas, and it is opening the Outlook at Windhaven senior housing community in Plano this summer.

Its leader has long eyed San Antonio. It is an under-served area, and it has been decades since a nonprofit built a senior living community here, Mallad

said. The location off I-10 is attractive to Forefront Living because it's a short drive from shops and restaurants, as well as being atop a hill in a natural setting with trees and greenery.

Bella Vida is designed by Three, a Dallas-based firm that designed Hotel Emma at Pearl.

The response from people interested in learning more about living at Bella Vida has surpassed expectations, Mallad said. More than 450 people signed up for a "priority club program" to receive initial information about the community, and Forefront Living opened a waiting list. The organization plans to begin construction in 2025 and open Bella Vida in late 2026.

"I think it confirmed ... there is definitely a need," Mallad said.



Courtesy of Three and Forefront Living

Forefront Living of Dallas plans to build 164 apartments and 40 villas for people 62 and older along Interstate 10. Units will range from 820 to 2,550 square feet.






THEY SAY...

A PHOTO IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS






WE SAY...

THEY ARE A PART OF OUR DAILY HISTORY

WITH OUR AWARD-WINNING PHOTOS



YOU CAN OWN A PART OF SAN ANTONIO'S HISTORY



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