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'Best in the Nation' Ranking Goes to Seven TMC Hospitals

The numbers have been crunched, the lists have been compiled, and the verdict is in. The list of "America's Best Hospitals," featured in the July 28 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, spotlights seven Texas Medical Center hospitals.

In alphabetical order, with rankings in respective specialties, the hospitals are:

- **Memorial Hermann Hospital**, 42nd in kidney disease (This year marks the sixth time Memorial Hermann has placed in U.S. News rankings since 1997.)

- **The Menninger Clinic**, fifth in psychiatry (Menninger has been listed as one of the top five psychiatric hospitals in the country since the survey was initiated in 1990.)

- **The Methodist Hospital**,

ninth in urology; 11th in neurology and neurosurgery; 13th in ophthalmology; 15th in heart and heart surgery; 18th in gynecology; 21st in psychiatry; 22nd in ear, nose and throat; 33rd in orthopedics; 35th in geriatrics; and 38th in kidney disease. (Methodist is ranked in 10 specialties – more than any other hospital in the city. The hospital has ranked consistently in a variety of clinical areas since the rankings began, and improved its previous rankings in five specialties this year.)

- **Texas Children's Hospital**, fifth in pediatrics (This is the fourth consecutive year Texas Children's has been ranked among the top 10 pediatric hospitals in the U.S. News survey. This year, Texas Children's jumped up three places from last year's eighth place ranking, and also is ranked as the

best pediatric hospital in the South and Southwest by U.S. News & World Report.)

- **Texas Heart Institute at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital**, eighth in heart and heart surgery (The institute has consistently ranked among the nation's top 10 heart centers since the survey began.)

- **The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research**, second in rehabilitation (This is the third con-



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Project Brays: Bringing Flood Damage Reduction to the Texas Medical Center

By KATHLEEN CHARTER
Texas Medical Center News

The 31 miles of water in Brays Bayou – which flows from just south of the Barker Reservoir, through the Texas Medical Center, to the Houston Ship Channel – is about to flow down a "new" path. The bayou is about to undergo a "facelift" that will bring flood damage reduction to residents and businesses along its banks, while enhancing the community with natural surroundings.

Alisa Max, Harris County Flood Control District communications division assistant manager, said the Army Corps of Engineers first paved the channel in the 1950s and '60s.



BUILDING BETTER BRIDGES—The Fannin Street bridge that spans Brays Bayou near the intersection of Fannin Street and Braeswood Boulevard, was the first bridge to be completed as part of the Brays Bayou Flood Damage Reduction Project. The project aims to reduce flooding along the bayou's 31 miles by widening the bayou's channel and renovating or replacing existing bridges.

Although the project significantly reduced flood losses, flood risks remained a problem. To address the flooding issue, the Brays Bayou Flood Damage Reduction Project, known as Project Brays, was developed.

"This is a very large project for the Harris County area. Therefore we look for federal partnerships to bring in federal money – in this case, the Corps of Engineers," Max, who is a professional engineer, said. "Typically in the past, the

Corps would set timelines, procedures and requirements for projects. The Corps would take the lead and sponsors would pay their share as projects progressed. In 1996, the Water Resources Development Act's section 211F allowed non-federal sponsors, in this case the Harris County Flood Control District, to take the lead. We can now follow the Corps' processes locally, and be reimbursed by the Corps for the federal share of work."

"That change was initiated by our executive director, who went to Washington to have it changed by Congress to enable the local sponsor to take the lead," said David Goldberg, Harris County Flood Control District engineering division manager. "Knowing what we were up against, we figured we could do the job in half the time and at half the

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Bringing News to the Texas Medical Center Community for 25 Years

Project Brays

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cost of the original contract."

"We've been able to save time and money on the project, because we're focused on one geographical area, where the Corps has districts across the entire United States," continued Goldberg, who is a professional engineer and a registered professional land surveyor. "The local Corps doesn't cover just Harris County. They cover the whole Texas coastline."

Max explained other benefits of the new relationship.

"The Harris County Flood Control District cannot start building project components at a much earlier point during the Corps' project timeline, knowing future reimbursement is likely," she said. "This will provide flood risk-reduction to the community much earlier."

Project Brays has two parts: upstream and downstream.

There are a total of 17 sub-projects in the upstream portion, including three detention basins and a small amount of channel improvements. Construction first began about five years ago, and to date, six have been completed. All are expected to be complete by 2008.

"Detention basins don't reduce the volume of the flow, they alter the timing of the flow," Goldberg said.

When excess water is added to a stream during a storm, it causes the stream's water level to rise. To reduce flood damage, a detention basin is built adjacent to the stream and excess storm water is directed into the basin and stored, keeping the stream water from rising. The water remains in storage until conditions stabilize. Then the stored water is gradually drained back into the stream.

"Think of water drops that land in

the bayou as cars traveling on a highway," Max said. "They all need to go the same direction, and once in awhile there is a pile up. This project should make for a smoother 'traffic flow'."

Goldberg said the detention basins are good news for the Texas Medical Center. One of the detention basins upstream from the TMC, the Sam Houston Parkway Detention Basin, is about 80 percent complete, and when done, will hold approximately 600 million gallons.

Land acquisition for the upstream portion is 98 percent complete. Approximately 600 total surface acres are required to see the job through. Most of the land was vacant.

"We tried to purchase vacant property, because it was less of an inconvenience to property owners," Goldberg said.

In the downstream portion of Project Brays, there are 55 sub-projects, including widening about 17 miles of the Brays Bayou channel from the Houston Ship Channel upstream, through the Texas Medical Center, all the way to where the bayou crosses Fondren Road, which is outside of the 610 Loop. Only one sub-project has been completed, and the target for total completion is 2014.

"We can't just widen the channel, because there are 45 bridges that span this section," Max said. "The plan estimates replacement or extension of 31 of these bridges. Depending on bridge height, some may also have to be raised."

Each bridge will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

"Depending on need, the channel will be widened on either side or both," said Goldberg. "We will cut out a dirt 'shelf' from the current edge of the concrete to where the bridge currently meets the dirt. When

the dirt 'shelf' is dug, the bridge supports will need to be moved to support the load. So we will have to either extend them, or if they're too low, replace them. In some cases we won't have to do either, because when they built the bridges, they didn't foresee this project. Therefore the supports may not be deep enough, and we'll go in and add to them to make sure they can continue to support the bridge."

Since bridges must be widened prior to the channel widening, Max said when bridge construction begins there most likely will be traffic congestion issues. However, those issues will be minimized by spacing out the bridge construction.

"We will do our best not to do two bridges that are next to each other at the same time," she said.

"Think of water drops that land in the bayou as cars traveling on a highway. They all need to go the same direction, and once in awhile there is a pile up. This project should make for a smoother 'traffic flow'." — Alisa Max, Harris County Flood Control District engineer

The bridges that may affect TMC traffic include Alameda, Ardmore, Force Main, Greenbriar, Holcombe, Kirby, North Braeswood, South Braeswood, South MacGregor, South Main, and State Highway 288. The bridge that spans Fannin Street has already been completed.

Because of work that needed to be done to the Fannin Street bridge for the MetroRail installation, bridge renovations began there. The district made it a joint project with the Metropolitan Transit Authority to share renovation costs.

When the remainder of the downstream portion of the project begins this fall, it will start at the ship channel and gradually move its way

upstream. This is being done to minimize flooding issues. If it were to begin upstream, as the channel is widened, water would move too quickly, flooding the people below it. Therefore construction will start downstream, beginning at the end.

"Due to some exceptions, like the Fannin Street bridge, it is a 'hopscotch' process. We want to start channel widening as soon as possible after each bridge renovation is complete. We want to bring flood damage relief to everyone as quickly as we can."

Another of the downstream sub-projects is the Willow Waterhole detention basin, which sits close to the Texas Medical Center (near Post Oak and Chimney Rock).

Max said the basin will provide a great deal of flood damage reduction benefit to areas throughout the TMC.

"It's going in along a major, natural tributary of the same name that flows into Brays Bayou," she said.

Goldberg said construction should begin early next year.

When the upstream section of Project Brays is complete, approximately 13,000 structures will no longer lie within the 100-year flood plain. When the downstream section is complete, it will remove approximately another 17,300 structures.

"By dropping the 100-year numbers, by virtue of what you're doing, you will also significantly drop the 500-year numbers," Max said.

The Texas Medical Center area can expect, at most, flood-reduction depths of 4 to 4.5 feet.

"Part of the reason the Texas Medical Center area flooded so badly during Tropical Storm Allison, was that the water couldn't get to the bayou via the Harris Gully system," Max said, explaining that the Harris Gully is a square storm sewer that carries rain and runoff water from areas north of Highway 59. "When water elevations are lower in Brays, Harris Gully functions more efficiently."

In addition to the flood impact reduction renovations, hiking and biking trails, trees and shaded areas will be restored and added to, providing a fresh, aesthetically pleasing "community" environment.

"We located thousands of trees along the bayou, and rather than dispose of them, they will be transplanted, on the condition that they are healthy," Goldberg said. "We don't just dig ditches anymore. We look at projects that will enhance the community."

The total cost of the Brays Bayou Flood Damage Reduction Project is estimated at \$408 million. The federal government will contribute \$209 million and the balance will be paid for at the local level. The upstream portion is estimated at \$151 million (\$71 million local dollars) and the downstream portion at \$257 million (\$128 million local dollars). ■



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