

CITY MANAGER'S UPDATE

March 28, 2024

Message from the Manager:

This past month, I saw some images online of President Biden and Former President Trump together. The photos showed the two presidents as best of pals out enjoying nature. The only issue, as could be guessed from the individuals depicted in the photo, was the photos were not real. The article that ran with it was how far artificial intelligence (AI) has come in being able to modify things such as pictures and videos. The article went on to say soon you won't be able to tell real from fake – pictures, videos, voices, etc. This should be a warning to all of us about some of the dangers and pitfalls of emerging technologies. So how do we protect ourselves? Our IT Director Gary Bates' infamous advice is don't open any emails! Speaking of Mr. Bates, I asked him to coauthor this manager message with me sharing emerging threats and how we can protect ourselves from them. Gary came back to me and asked if we had room for a book full of material! There really is a massive effort to obtain all our data, information, and money. Gary put together what he feels are the most immediate threats and ways to prevent being a victim to them:

The biggest security threat of 2024 that individuals need to be aware of is still the **phishing threat**. Phishing is when a person receives an email, phone call (vishing), or text message; in which the hostile actor is trying to elicit personal information from the target. This information could be a credit card, social security number, birthdate, or login information to email accounts or banking information. The hostile actor then can use this information to compromise the individual's credit or bank account. Current phishing campaigns include election fraud campaigns, tax rebate campaigns, and Medicare open enrollment campaigns.

It is important that individuals be aware of this kind of threat and how to protect themselves from it. Some basic safety tips include:

- Evaluate each message you receive.
 - Remember there aren't any free lunches. If the offer sounds too good; it probably is.
 - Follow-up unusual message utilizing a different source. For example, if your bank says there is a problem with your account; then instead of replying to the message, call your bank using a public acquired phone number, not the number in the email message. Or check your banking app on your smart device.
- Utilize two-factor authentication if your service provides it. The most common form of this is when you login to an account you receive a text message with an additional passcode that needs to be entered. This helps stop 98% of the attacks out there according to the National Cyber Security Alliance.

- Share information with caution. This includes posting to social media. Information can be gathered to launch a more directed attack against an individual or sound more convincing during the initial contact.

Additional information on how to protect and report this type of cybercrime can be found at <https://staysafeonline.org>

The second biggest threat affecting individuals currently is disinformation or malinformation. This type of threat attempts to mislead, harm, or manipulate an individual. These types of threats utilize a variety of tactics. These include:

- Cultivate Fake or Misleading Personas or Websites. This tactic is where the hostile actor creates fake websites or personalities to make their message more believable. For example, creating a fake expert using inauthentic credentials to influence their content.
- Creating Deepfakes and Synthetic Media. Deepfakes and synthetic media is when the hostile actors utilize Artificial Intelligent (AI) tools to fabricate and digitally manipulate videos, photos, and/or audio. This type of attack can create content nearly indistinguishable from real life.
- Flooding the Information Environment. This tactic is designed to overwhelm targets with too much information, making it near impossible to distinguish good content from hostile content. This is often done by sending the same or similar messages from inauthentic accounts. In a practice known as astroturfing, it is designed to show grassroots support for a specific message while concealing the origin of the message.

You can protect yourself from these and many more disinformation tactics by:

- Recognizing the risk. Understand that there are disinformation actors pushing certain agendas. Be wary of manipulative content that tries to divide.
- Question all sources. Critically evaluate content and its origin to determine where it is trustworthy.
- Investigate the issue. Conduct an unbiased search into contentious issues. Look at both sides of the issue from known trusted sources.
- Think before you link. Slow down and don't immediately click share to content you receive on various social media platforms. Check all the facts first before you share.

More information on how hostile actors and foreign intelligence agencies are attempting to influence individuals can be found at the following link:

<https://www.cisa.gov/topics/election-security/foreign-influence-operations-and-disinformation>

I really appreciate these words of wisdom from Gary on how we all can stay safe in the digital world. I always say that if something agrees with your way of thinking so much, you should

approach it with caution. As Gary noted, seek out other trusted sources, get your news from more than one or two sources. Make sure you share this information and tools for staying safe with those in your sphere of influence. Through these tools we can protect ourselves and our families and further continue to be peacemakers in our community. And whatever you do, don't open any emails!!!

David and Gary

“Given the choice between dancing pigs and security, users will pick dancing pigs every time.” - author unknown

General Updates:

New Hires:

Welcome to all our new hires:

Joshua Brown hired for the position of Firefighter/Paramedic on March 4th
Jonathan Hicks hired for the position of Wastewater Superintendent on March 11th
Charles Maines hired for the position of Firefighter/EMT on March 18th
Bianca Ceja Cebreros hired for the position of Telecommunicator on March 18th

Promotions:

Congratulations to all those promoted:

James Williams was promoted to Juvenile Case Manager/Teen Court Coordinator on February 3rd
Leslie Stevens was promoted to Chief Plant Operator on February 17th
Patrick Wilson was promoted to Utility Specialist on February 17th
Maurice Henderson was promoted to Mechanic on February 17th
Dale Reeves was promoted to Heavy Equipment Operator Trainee on February 17th
Norris Lockett was promoted to Light Equipment Operator on February 17th

Retirements:

FD's Walter Elvidge retires on March 28th with 18 years of service to the City. We thank Walter for all his service to our City and wish him all the best in his retirement.

Awards: The Library has received the Texas Municipal Library Director's Association 2023 Award for Excellence in Library Services. The Library exhibited excellence in ten service areas. Great job Library!

Solar Eclipse: I hope you are tracking the coming total solar eclipse that will occur on April 8! If you need eclipse glasses, please contact our fantastic Library staff and they will make sure you have the pairs you need. Expect heavy traffic in the area the day before through the evening of the 8th. You are encouraged to fill up your vehicle and get groceries prior to the 7th to beat the rush! On the 8th, City offices will be temporarily closed between 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. It should be a fun event to witness!

March Kudos Award Winners: Congratulations to HR's Melonie Matthewson and PD's Chief Betiale Hawkins for being our March Kudos Award Winners! Many more kudos to come!

February Challenge – Random Acts of Kindness Winners: Congratulations to Henry Nash, Destinee Henderson and Lyndsey Amundson for being drawn as the winners of the Random Acts of Kindness Challenge! I can tell you these three are kindness warriors and this is well deserved!

March Wellness Challenge – Couch to 5K: The Couch to 5K Challenge ends on March 29th. The drawing for winners will be held on April 2nd for the customized Harker Heights wireless charger. Be sure to turn in your challenge tracker by April 1st.

April Wellness Challenge – The Movie Exercise Challenge: The Movie Exercise Challenge begins April 1st! This is a pick a family member or non-work friend to be your teammate. The challenge requires each team to complete 30 minutes of physical activity every day. Complete the challenge to be entered into a drawing for movie tickets for two.

HH-N-GO: The HH-N-GO bingo style challenge began on January 2. A new letter/number is pulled each week and there are specific things to do for that letter/number if you have it on your card. There is a game card for employees and one for citizens. The game helps us to get to know our organization better and for our citizens it helps them get to know the City better. You can still get a card and play so contact HR if you want to play!

Harker Heights Arts Festival: This year's Harker Heights Arts Festival will be held at Carl Levin Park Amphitheatre and will be a two-day event full of colors, textures and inspiration. The event will be on Saturday, April 6 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday, April 7 from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Art Show: The Library and Parks are partnering to host an Art Show from April 1 to April 8. The show will be at the Activities Center ballroom and will feature a temporary 2,600 square foot exhibit!

Spotlight on Service:

IT is Outstanding: PD's Yesmarie Burgos-Figueroa wrote to thank the IT team for what she says is outstanding work. Yesmarie went on to say, "They are constantly helping all of us here at the Police Department. Gary Bates comes to the rescue when I am running out of memory and educates me on using the system to my advantage. Jim Miller connects my printer and fixing my computer. Lorissa Byse helping me navigate the system thru the phone. Always polite. Joshua Delong resetting my password so I can get in the system when I'm on call. And the list could go on but I am so grateful they are such a professional team and help me navigate the never ending updates of the system or me forgetting my password many, many times."

PD's Melanie Ross Impresses: A citizen wrote to thank PD's Melanie Ross for assisting her on call. The citizen stated they were "really impressed with the lady that took the call and listened to my concerns. She was understanding, pleasant to talk to, and yet very professional in the questions she asked. She presented a couple of options for consideration carefully explaining the differences."

PD's Andrew Barnstable Shows Kindness: A citizen wrote to thank PD's Andrew Barnstable. The citizen wrote that "the officer was respectful and kind to the person wanting to know if they were ok and/or needed medical help."

Parks' Casey Brazzil, Donovan Martinez, and Nathan Menjares Appreciated: PD's Roxanne Harrill wrote to show her appreciation for Parks' Casey Brazzil, Donovan Martinez, and Nathan Menjares. Roxanne wrote, "I would like to express my appreciation to Casey Brazzil and two of his employees Donovan Martinez and Nathan Menjares. On morning of March 20, 2024 a motorist had struck a light pole at Hudson and FM 2410 and managed to break the pole causing it to fall into the street on Hudson. When I arrived on scene the pole was interfering with the flow of traffic, and I attempted to move it out of the way but the pole was too heavy for one person to move. I reached out to Casey Brazzil who was actually off that day, but he managed to get two of his guys to come over and move the light pole out of the roadway so traffic could utilize the roadway. I would like to thank them for their help with this matter and their help was greatly appreciated."

Sara Gibbs Thanked: HR Director Leona Clay wrote to thank Admin's Sara Gibbs. Leona wrote, "I wanted to thank you for all your help at the Employee Appreciation breakfast. You went above and beyond to ensure the leadership team was successful with this event. We appreciate all that you do!"

Nicole Loayza Helps Out: Parks' Nicole Loayze was thanked by HR Director Leona Clay. Leona wrote, "I wanted to let you know how much we appreciate all the help you provided with clean up from the Employee Appreciation breakfast. Your assistance was invaluable. We appreciate all that you do for the City!"

Lyndsey Amundson Makes an Impression: A Parks and Recreation applicant was very complimentary of HR's Lyndsey Amundson. The applicant said Lyndsey was extremely helpful and kind. HR Director Leona Clay stated, "Great job of being the positive image for the Human Resources Department. Keep up the good work."

Casey Brazzil and Billy Stevens Bring a Smile: HR's Wilson Riley wrote to thank Parks' Casey Brazzil and Billy Stevens for helping set up the tables for World Oral Health Day. Wilson wrote, "You and Billy are always so kind and helpful and I just wanted to let you know that you both are appreciated!"

HR Brings the Teamwork: Parks' Casey Brazzil thanked HR for all they do. He wrote, "We appreciate what you all do for us. We are a great team."

Josh DeLong Assists: HR Director Leona Clay wrote to thank IT's Josh DeLong for all his help getting the latest award HR received on the website. Leona wrote, "Thanks Josh! We appreciate all that you do!!"

Gary Bates Rocks: HR Director Leona Clay wrote to thank IT Director Gary Bates for his assistance. Leona wrote, "Thank you so much for always taking care of us! You rock!"

City Loves Vets: Dee Stewart with the Texas Veterans Commission wrote to thank the City for our care for our veterans and to acknowledge an award given to the City for hiring vets. Ms. Stewart wrote, "I am very appreciative of the support the City provides to the military community AND

your support to me and the clients I serve providing employment assistance. The award is very much deserved.”

Library Provides Resources: The Library was acknowledge by a citizen on social media for all the resources it provides. The citizen stated, “Go to your local library! So many resources to help your child read and learn.”

Lisa Youngblood Not to Be Eclipsed: A citizen wrote to thank both Library Direct Lisa Youngblood and an instructor at a recent eclipse event. The citizen stated, “ I just wanted to let you know Collin LOVED the instructor today! He learned so much from him & said he was so interesting & so smart! The instructor also complimented you. He said the instructor commented he only comes to this library because of how dedicated you always are to educate the community!! He's right! Thank you so much for always giving us so many opportunities to expand our education, especially for our kids! They need that!!!!”

Jerry Bark Leads: Fire Chief Shannon Stephens wrote to show his appreciation for the leadership of Assistant City Manager Jerry Bark. Chief Stephens wrote, “Jerry and I have had a couple of planned meetings that have had to be rescheduled based on problems and items that have required his immediate attention. Every time this has happened, Jerry has personally contacted me to apologize for any inconvenience and to let me know that our time is important to him. This is an admirable quality, especially in a busy leadership position. This is a very little action but it speaks volumes about his character and quality as a leader. A good leader understands that the little things matter because it is the little things that permit big things to happen. Jerry is that leader and it is a pleasure to work with him.”

HR Brings the Challenges: Parks’ Henry Nash wrote to show his appreciation of recent health challenges issued by HR. Henry stated, “Thank you all so very much for making the City of Harker Heights such a great place to work and a great family to be a part of.”

HR Makes it Fun: Library’s Angela Sabino wrote to thank HR for the fun running challenge!

David Mitchell and Jerry Bark Serve: CM David Mitchell and ACM Jerry Bark were thanked by Park’s Henry Nash for the employee appreciation breakfast. Henry wrote, “Greetings Mr. Mitchell/Mr. Bark. Hope both of you are doing well. Just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate our leaders taking time out of their busy schedules to express your appreciation to your employees. Appreciation is best shown not just when it is spoken, but when it is expressed. On behalf of the Parks and Recreation Team, we thank you guys so very much. Your demonstration of servanthood embodies what our city best represents and stands for. Continue to model the proper example for your leadership and team members of what it means to live a life of voluntary servitude that is a benefit and blessing to others.”

Leadership Team Cook: Code Enforcement’s Calvin Fleming wrote to share his appreciation for the Leadership Team cooking for employees. Calvin stated, “I would like to say thank to the Leadership Team for a wonderful breakfast today and we do appreciate your leadership.”

Kiarrah Carlisle is Creative: HR’s Lyndsey Amundson gave a kudo to Parks’ Kiarrah Carlisle. Lyndsey stated, “Can I give a Kudos to Kiarrah! She does a beautiful job with the newsletter, so creative!”

Annette Jorgenson is Top-Tier: Library's Erica Rossmiller gave a shout out to Library's Annette Jorgenson. Erica stated, "I want to recognize Annette Jorgenson for her top-tier work ethic and her devotion for our community and Library. Annette always takes a proactive approach to her Library duties and shows true enthusiasm as a public servant every day. The Library is a more efficient and welcoming place because of your passion. Thank you, Annette, for being an admirable colleague!"

Angie Sabino is Thoughtful: Library's Erica Rossmiller thanked Library's Angie Sabino. Erica wrote, "for consistently being a helpful and thoughtful colleague! She always goes above and beyond in her Library duties to assist patrons and staff. Today, she helped me ensure that a research presentation for middle school students went smoothly! She took time out of her busy schedule to help me prepare our meeting room and greet the students and their teachers. Undoubtedly, she made this afternoon's presentation have a smooth and professional start! Thank you, Angie, for all that you do!"

John Fox Makes the Cut: Public Work's John Fox recently got some low tree limbs cleared on a street in prompt fashion. Recognizing John as a man of quick action, City Manager Mitchell wrote, "Thank you for getting the tree limbs cut so promptly. Your service is appreciated!"

Calvin Fleming Goes Above and Beyond: Code Enforcement's Calvin Fleming will always roll up his sleeves and help where he can. City Manager Mitchell noted that and wrote, "Thank you for always going above and beyond everything you do!"

Finance Brings Budgeting to Life: City Manager Mitchell was so impressed with the recent budget kickoff meeting he wrote to Finance Director Ayesha Lealiiee, "A big thank you to you and your staff for bringing yet another Budget Kickoff Meeting to life! This event is now looked forward to by all which just shows the good work you all do in preparing for it. Please share my appreciation with your entire staff!"

HR Helps Us Learn: FD's Eunice Myers wrote to thank HR for a recent lunch and learn. Eunice wrote, "Thank you for the Lunch N Learn this morning. It was informative and very helpful. I appreciate all you do to ensure our success professionally and personally. Have a great day!"

Eunice Myers Thanked: HR Director Leona Clay and HR's Lyndsey Amundson wrote to thank FD's Eunice Myers for her involvement in a recent lunch and learn and for her feedback.