

Transparency non-negotiable on golf course

Baytown needs to pump the brakes on plans for a new golf course and conduct more research and public hearings before voting to spend ...

Well, they have not said how much it would cost yet. No matter, this is too big of a public investment to make in such a rush.

When it comes to committing public dollars to major projects, transparency is non-negotiable and, so far, there has been far too little of it.

The city was pushing for a Feb. 3 vote on the yet-to-be-released plan with its hand-picked developer, Tennessee-based Miramar Properties.

Ahead of the vote, the developer said he wanted "dirt being turned in April" and an opening in 2023. The mayor has blessed the plan: "I look forward to voting yes on the golf course."

Clearly, not all council members were on board with the rush for approval and the special meeting was canceled. Instead, there will be discussion of the golf course plan at Thursday's regular meeting.

Let's face it, this project was moving too fast without a clear vision or purpose — as far as we know.

Imagine making a substantial family investment in something before determining its value, how other family members felt about it and deciding if it was the best way to meet your family goals?

That's what is happening here.

With the vote delayed, however, city leaders must now use the next few weeks to engage residents in public discussion and explain exactly the kind of deal they want to enter taxpayers into before signing on the dotted line for such a high-stakes venture.

Collecting public opinion can be tedious and unforgiving. But it ensures everyone is working from the same set of facts and people believe their voices have been heard.

Here's what we know so far from the city and proposed developer:

- Baytown is in line for a "first in the world designed" golf course.

- The project will be built by a company who has never developed a golf course. Miramar's boss did say he had assembled a team of experts. In fact, Miramar has already hired a golf course architect who has, they say, well over 20 courses under his belt.

- The course will be a unique concept that goes beyond a regular 18-hole course — and potentially could play 36 holes.

- The golf course could be the first of multiple projects that they want to be involved in on the south side. Nearby, look for mid-rise, multi-family with mixed-use retail on the first level and other retail opportunities.

Here's what we don't know:

- How much is Miramar investing in the project?
- How much is the city committing to the project?

Taxpayers need and deserve more time to get answers to questions like these and many others before the city signs away their millions.

The question before the city is not whether a golf course would be a nice addition to the area. The question is can we afford it at the expense of greater needs elsewhere and the obvious uncertainty of the return on investment.

We raise all this not to discourage the city from moving forward. However, the city must make sure this is a plan that's embraced by the community.

A high-end golf course could be a catalyst for economic growth and improving quality of life. But more answers and project transparency are needed. This is not an easy or simple decision, and it carries a significant potential impact.

We can't imagine anyone not wanting this project to be the win for the city. We do too — and after all the right questions asked and answered satisfactorily, that's just what it can be.

— David Bloom

TODAY IN HISTORY

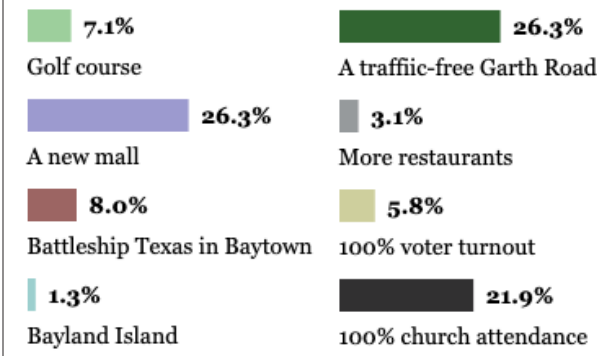
On this date:

In 1778, during the American Revolutionary War, the United States won official recognition and military support from France with the signing of a Treaty of Alliance in Paris.

In 2008, the Bush White House defended the use of the interrogation technique known as waterboarding, saying it was legal — not torture as critics argued — and had saved American lives.

Baytown Sun Weekly Survey

Last week, readers were asked, "If you had one wish for Baytown that would come true tomorrow, what would it be?"



This week's question: "Which team will win the Super Bowl?" Respond at www.baytownsun.com

Just what we needed on Valentine's Day

In the waning era of the Great Depression, many people on Valentine's Day couldn't afford a dozen red roses from a flower shop or a fancy, heart-shaped cake from a bakery or even a few Valentines from a five-and-dime store.

When I was a preschooler, that's the way it was. Nearly everyone operated on tight budgets, having to focus on needs rather than wishes.

So, as the sun was beginning to set on Feb. 14, 1938, my mother and I were looking back on a day without Valentine trimmings. We were coming home from the grocery store (only with necessary items), when we discovered someone had dropped by while we were gone.

More about the Valentine's Day Visit later. First, meet the visitor, my Aunt Pooch.

We were sorry to have missed her — mother's youngest sister, Elva Nelson Cuthbertson, known as Pooch since she was young child trailing like a puppy dog after her brother Will and his pals. Only 10 years older than I, Aunt Pooch was a member of the Maroon Brigadiers at Robert E. Lee High School and a former cheerleader at Baytown Junior High. She was a vivacious jitter-bugger, full of fun. Besides teaching me the latest dance steps, she coached me on how to speak jive. For example, she would ask: "Whatcha know, Joe?" And I would answer: "Just got back from the vaudeville show." Or, "What's



WANDA ORTON

your name?" Answer: "Pudding Tame. Ask me again and I'll tell you the same."

That said, we would turn on the radio and start jitter-bugging again. Mother suspected Aunt Pooch inspired my spontaneous rendition of

"Beer Barrel Polka" — complete with toe-tapping and finger-snapping -- in the beginners department at Goose Creek First Baptist (now Memorial Baptist) Church.

Maybe Aunt Pooch wasn't responsible, at least not directly, for my song and dance number in church, but she strongly influenced my love of movies, taking me often to the Texan and DeLuxe (later named the Palace) theaters in Goose Creek and the Arcadia in old Baytown. With Aunt Pooch, I remember seeing classic films like "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and "The Wizard of Oz."

By the time I entered school and learned to read, movie magazines drew my attention. Although my mother loved movies -- probably as much as her sister and I did -- she had no use for those magazines. "There are better things to read," she kept saying. She was right, but I still liked reading them and cutting out pictures of movie stars to decorate my bedroom wall. When mother wasn't looking, Aunt Pooch would sneak me

a few such magazines. After all, my wall shouldn't go empty. It needed star power like June Allyson, Betty Grable, Gene Kelly, Van Johnson, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, about that Valentine's Day Visit:

One may wonder how Aunt Pooch got into our house without a key. Though my parents had a key, they never locked the house. And there were many other trusting souls just like them. A different world, then.

Aunt Pooch brought us a present, a heart-shaped cake with red icing, and it was not from a bakery. She baked and decorated it in her home economics class at Lee High School. Since no one was at home, she looked for a pen and note pad to leave us a message. She couldn't find anything to write on except ... Aha! When it's Valentine's Day, there's a way. Finding a box of matches on our stove, Aunt Pooch put it in writing — making letters out of matches -- next to the cake on the kitchen table:

"Happy Valentine's Day

Love, Pooch"

To this day, I treasure that match-making message and the memory of a heart-shaped (and heart-felt) cake baked at school by the Valentine Visitor.

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Wondering about the future ... if there is one

(DISCERNING READER ALERT: This column was first published on Feb. 4, 2018.)

WARNING: This is morbid. Every year at this time, I think a lot about getting old(er).

Why now? Why February? Because it's national signing day for future college football players come Wednesday.

"Are you nuts, Jimbo?" some must be asking. "What's that got to do with advancing age?"

Well, it didn't use to matter. But I was young for many years of my life. Not so much anymore.

"Huh?" I t's like this. I like to see who my Razorbacks sign. Then I wonder how many will contribute, how many will make me proud over the next four years.

"Say what?" OK, in my youth, I figured I was going to be around many more years. Thusly, I could watch the players either make it or fail. Didn't give it a second thought.

Now, at my age — slightly past 55 — I wonder if I'll be around to see what happens with the Arkansas signees.

This worrisome feeling doesn't apply only to football, but more on that shortly.

Football-wise, all I can do now is rely on what my great friend Carl Theiss thinks. Carl covers about 514 football games a year for the Chronicle so he has a pretty good idea about the kids he has seen play and how they'll do in college.

"Joe Goose of Conroe is a fine football player," Carl will say. "He'll make it with the Hogs."

Then he adds, "Joe's dad, Giovan-



JIM FINLEY

ni, played at Georgia Tech, his uncle, Methuselah Higginbotham, at Notre Dame, and his mom, Lucinda, was a cheerleader at Rutgers. She could do the best flip in America.

"Joe will be fine."

Carl is the smartest person I've ever known. Not only does he know sports, but he can tell you all you want to know about anthropology, macromolecular enzymes, and the bloodline of our 13th president, Millard Fillmore.

I think Carl's middle name is Albert, as in Einstein.

Moving on, how will new Razorbacks coach Chad Morris do? It might take him three years to turn things around. THREE YEARS?

Part of my less-than-positive attitude I blame on Woody Walker, the great former basketball and golf coach at Ross S. Sterling. ("Winner," I believe, is Woody's middle name.)

He was addressing an intellectual audience at the weekly meeting of the Gathering Of Old Toots (GOOTs), the fashionable men's lunchtime federation, when out of the blue (or maroon since he's an Aggie) he started talking about his current vehicle, a Chevy Tahoe.

"When I bought my SUV in 2011, I figured it would be the last car I'd ever have to buy," Woody pontificated. "Now I'm not so sure."

Woody was 80 when he bought the SUV, was 86 when he shared his depressing thoughts with us, and

will be 88 in May.

"Now I'm beginning to believe it won't be my last car," he told us with a chuckle.

Just something else to think about. But who thinks of buying their last car?

Senior-types, that's who. Forgive me, young people, but this is what happens when you get old(er). You'll see.

I also wonder about a few things less important than football.

Like, will I be around to see if President Donald Trump is re-elected?

Will Oprah Winfrey throw her hat in the ring?

That will be interesting if she does, because Democrats all across the fruited plain complained mightily when Donald Trump became a candidate for 2016. Remember?

"We simply can't have a billionaire entertainer running our country," they yelled.

At the time, it was something to think about.

And now?

Locally, who will be Baytown's next mayor? I like the one we have now, the honorable Stephen DonCarlos. (He lets me call him Steve.)

And the list goes on and on.

You young people can laugh at the Graying Generation all you want, but, trust me, your day is coming.

I think what I'm going to do is make a list of possible future events and then consult with Carl Theiss. He'll have the lowdown, I'm sure.

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