



SWA Group photos

Ten years ago, Flewellen Creek was a straight-line agricultural drainage ditch. Today, it's the natural-looking, tree-lined center of the Cross Creek Ranch subdivision.

Naturally designed

A creek was landscaper's focus when Cross Creek Ranch was developed

Driving through Houston's western suburbs, I always remind myself sternly that all the new construction is a sign of prosperity. People are happy living in Katy and areas farther west, I tell myself. The schools and mall shopping are good. Lots of people adore the quiet of the suburbs.

I end up depressed anyway. Mile after mile of upscale master-planned communities, with their

indistinguishable houses and concrete-edged "lakes," make me sad. And I get even bluer when I think about the prairie and farmland they so recently replaced.

LISA GRAY

Commentary



Sure, the area's economy is booming. But environmentally, the place is a bust.

I always think: Those suburbs are inevitable. There has to be a better way to build them.

Restoring the creek

In most ways Cross Creek Ranch, in Fulshear, looks like every other development in the area. There's a visitors' center, a

Gray continues on G3



Trunks of trees felled by Hurricane Ike serve as bird perches.



Dave Rossman

Cheryl McCallum is the education director at the Children's Museum of Houston.

PROFILE

Cheryl McCallum brings museum to life

By Alyson Ward

Cheryl McCallum grew up exploring. An only child, she'd take off on her bike and be gone all day, scouting her Irving neighborhood with friends.

"My rule was: You come in when the street lights come on," she says.

At home, she'd ask permission to "make an experiment," which meant rummaging through kitchen cabinets and pouring dry and wet

ingredients together to see what resulted.

"I'm not sure I ever tasted what I made," she says, laughing. But that early play and experimentation influenced the way she has learned ever since.

McCallum, now 50, is education director at the Children's Museum of Houston, a job to which she's devoted most of her career.

She earned a couple of degrees in outdoor education, then spent five

years running programs at Houston Independent School District's Camp Olympia and at a retreat near Navasota. In 1992, she was invited to present a workshop at the museum.

"My jaw dropped when I saw that huge hallway and all the colors and activities," she says. "I thought, Oh my gosh, wouldn't it just be a dream to work here?" Within a few months, she did.

McCallum continues on G6



Shoo the flu before it gets you.

Protect your child from the flu this season. Flu vaccinations are available at more than 48 convenient neighborhood locations – call 281-351-KIDS [5437] for the one nearest you.

281-351-KIDS | texaschildrenspediatrics.org



**Texas Children's
Pediatrics**

STAR

TELEVISION

Which way will Emmys break?

By Jeanne Jakle

Will Neil Patrick Harris once again deliver a razzle-dazzle Emmy show?

The host of Sunday night's award ceremony says he has plenty of new tricks up his sleeve. On top of being charming, funny and a polished song-and-dance man, Harris is an accomplished magician; he's been interested in sleight-of-hand since childhood. One thing he isn't into, however, is repeating himself, so don't expect him to pull out a catchy musical number at the top of the show as he did for the 2009 Emmys.

He does promise plenty of surprises and, yes, music. A standout should be Elton John's tribute to

Liberace as part of the fanfare surrounding nominated HBO movie "Behind the Candelabra."

You also might want to keep a box of tissues nearby. The traditional in memoriam section will be beefed up this year. Emmy will honor five whom producers believe warrant special recognition. Edie Falco will remember "Sopranos" co-star James Gandolfini; Michael J. Fox will pay tribute to "Family Ties" producer Gary David Goldberg; Jane Lynch will celebrate her "Glee" co-star Cory Monteith; Rob Reiner will honor "All in the Family" cast member Jean Stapleton; and Robin Williams will look back at his dear friend and mentor Jonathan Winters.

The biggest reason to tune in, of course, is to see who wins. My picks and predictions for who'll take home this year's statuettes:

Outstanding drama series

Nominees: "Breaking Bad," "Downton Abbey," "Game of Thrones," "Homeland," "House



Frank Ockenfels / Associated Press

Bryan Cranston, left, is nominated for best actor in a drama series and Aaron Paul is nominated for best supporting actor for their roles in "Breaking Bad," which is nominated for best drama.

of Cards," "Mad Men."

Will win: "Homeland" (Showtime). Though its second season was a bit uneven compared to the terrorism drama's wondrous freshman year, it still delivered lots of astonishing twists and turns.

I'm rooting for: "Breaking Bad" (AMC). This is its swan song year, when the darkly funny, amazingly written and intriguingly photographed meth drama should at long last be awarded the Emmy. OK, so the second half of its final season will most assuredly get a nod next year, too. Still, fans really want to see it win now while "Bad" still is playing ... and blazing hot.

Outstanding lead actor (drama)

Nominees: Damian Lewis ("Homeland"); Bryan Cranston ("Breaking Bad"); Kevin Spacey ("House of Cards"); Hugh

65th Primetime Emmy Awards

When: 7 p.m. Sunday
Network: CBS

Bonneville ("Downton Abbey"); Jon Hamm ("Mad Men"); and Jeff Daniels ("The Newsroom").

Will win: Cranston, who's highly deserving as always, or Lewis, who made us suffer along with his character as he was torn between the two forces pulling his strings, the CIA and al-Qaida baddie Abu Nazir.

I'm rooting for: Hamm, who has never won and who turned in a multifaceted portrayal as Don Draper — at once likable and repellent.

Outstanding lead actress (drama)

Nominees: Claire Danes ("Homeland"); Michelle

Dockery ("Downton Abbey"); Vera Farmiga ("Bates Motel"); Elisabeth Moss ("Mad Men"); Connie Britton ("Nashville"); and Kerry Washington ("Scandal").

Will win: Danes as Carrie, who finally, after enduring so much humiliation, got her "gotcha" moment with Brody — and played it perfectly.

I'm rooting for: Farmiga, who brought captivating dimension to what could have been just a villainess turn as Norman Bates' mom in the "Psycho"-inspired A&E drama.

Outstanding comedy series

Nominees: "The Big Bang Theory," "Girls," "Louie," "Modern Family," "Veep," "30 Rock."

Will win: "Modern Family" (ABC) ... because it always does.

I'm rooting for: "Veep" (HBO). The second season of this White House comedy was

even more irreverently funny than the first. Second choice: "The Big Bang Theory," which never fails to make me giggle.

Outstanding lead actor (comedy)

Nominees: Jim Parsons ("The Big Bang Theory"); Louis C.K. ("Louie"); Alec Baldwin ("30 Rock"); Matt LeBlanc ("Episodes"); Don Cheadle ("House of Lies"); and Jason Bateman ("Arrested Development").

Will win: Parsons, because he continues to be both insufferable and lovable as the geeky, overbearing Sheldon.

I'm rooting for: Louis C.K., who has never won and pulls off one of the toughest tricks of comedy — he brings us hearty laughs while getting us to seriously empathize with his trials as a divorced dad.

Outstanding lead actress (comedy)

Nominees: Tina Fey ("30 Rock"); Lena Dunham ("Girls"); Amy Poehler ("Parks and Recreation"); Laura Dern ("Enlightened"); Edie Falco

("Nurse Jackie"); and Julia Dreyfus ("Veep").

Will win: Last year's Emmy recipient Louis-Dreyfus, who shone even more brightly in her second term as

stumbling and scheming VP Selina Meyer.

I'm rooting for: Poehler. Is Emmy ever going to honor this comedy treasure, who's been up year after year? I even think Louis-Dreyfus would applaud a win by Poehler, who delivered yet another strong season as forever taunted, but unfailingly optimistic, public servant Leslie Knope.

jjakle@express-news.net

Gray: Creek provides water treatment and drainage

Gray from page G1

fitness center and a water slide. There are manicured lawns, cul-de-sacs and swimming pools. The big brick houses are distinguishable chiefly by their state of completion (many still are under construction) and their size (large, XL and super-size).

But crucially, Cross Creek Ranch does one thing much better than its neighbors. And that thing is — bear with me here — water treatment and drainage. The back end of its water-treatment system is both effective and parklike. And the suburb has actually improved the creek that runs through it.

"The big idea, early on, was that the creek would be the backbone of the community," Matt Baumgarten told me in the welcome center's parking lot. Baumgarten, a spot-spoken landscape architect, was the project's lead designer for the firm SWA.

In 2004, that was a surprising idea — particularly given the uninspiring state of Flewellen Creek on the tract to be developed. Where it ran through that overgrazed pasture, the waterway had been straightened out and channelized. The trees and brush that must have once lined its banks were long gone. It was less a creek than a drainage ditch.

To the developer, Trendmaker Homes, SWA proposed to make Flewellen look and work more like the natural creek it once had been. To give it curves, to slow its water flow, to plant its banks lushly with native trees and grasses. In a 50-acre wastewater-treatment area, plants would do the final work of "polishing" the water before it was used for irrigation or flowed into

the creek; the treatment area would be so attractive that it eventually would be outfitted with boardwalks, to serve a park. And the creek, outfitted with hike-and-bike trails, would serve as a nature park that ran through the subdivision's heart. The former drainage ditch would be a selling point.

The developers agreed.

Naturally

Almost 10 years later, it's possible to see how well the first phase of that plan turned out. Cross Creek Ranch was bought by Johnson Development last year, but its marketing strategy remains creek-centric. A sales packet shows egrets, herons and ducks gathered at the Polishing Pond, as the lush water-treatment basin is now branded. "Living the way nature intended," says the slogan on a folder that holds sales brochures. "Naturally."

Baumgarten showed me around. Trees and plants lined the creek so thickly that in many places, it was hard to see the water. Ducks flew overhead. Near the subdivision's entrance, native grasses were planted gardenlike in neat beds. Deeper in, less-manicured swaths of knee-high wildflowers and grasses waved at the sides of streams.

Near one of the little "wetland receptor" ponds, frogs chirped and birds rustled in branches overhead. Baumgarten smiled. "In lots of places where a subdivision goes in," he said, "you go out to the undeveloped site, and you hear all these natural sounds. Then the site is graded, and there's silence. Here, we did the massive grading, and there was silence for a while. But then the sounds returned — 10 times what they used to be."

I reminded myself that



SWA Group photos

Before Cross Creek Ranch was developed, the land was an overgrazed pasture. And that stretch of Flewellen Creek, straightened and channelized, was more a drainage ditch than a creek.



Even the dead trees have been planted. Scattered through the development, trunks of trees felled by Hurricane Ike have been mounted upright.

the place was master-planned, dreamed up by landscape architects. I knew the enormous amount of earth-moving equipment that had been involved, and that almost all the thousands of trees lining the creek banks had been planted. It's more a garden than a wilderness: Even the occasional dead trees in the landscape had been inserted there consciously — reused

from Hurricane Ike and mounted according to plan — so that birds could perch on them.

But here's the thing: When Baumgarten and I left the paved paths and walked down to the water, Flewellen Creek felt natural. I felt a hundred times happier there by the creek than I'd ever felt in the west suburbs before.

lisa.gray@chron.com

The Garden Club of Houston
71st Annual

Bulb & Plant MART

Come see our updated look including a new booth "Garden Garage Sale" filled with garden treasures.

Friday, October 4th:
9:30 am to 5 pm
Saturday, October 5th:
9:30 am to 3 pm

Free Admission No Sales Tax

Holly Hall Retirement Community
2000 Holly Hall Street
@ Fannin across from Reliant Stadium
www.gchouston.org