

Waco Tribune-Herald

Baylor women ready for payback as Frogs come to Foster, **PAGE B1**



Times have changed, but '9 to 5' fun continues with WCT musical, **PAGE B10**

Thursday, February 12, 2026

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WACO HILTON

DOWNTOWN FIXTURE GETTING FULL REFRESH



ROD AYDELOTTE, TRIBUNE-HERALD

A floor-by-floor renovation underway in the Waco Hilton at the corner of University Parks Drive and Franklin Avenue is expected to wrap up by July. Crews are tackling event space now, and will work in about 40 rooms at a time as the project progresses.

Renovation underway follows similar process at Courtyard by Marriott

BY MIKE COPELAND
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The Waco Hilton arrived in 1981 as a public-private venture that many viewed as a stimulus to downtown development. It was Waco's first convention hotel, a complement to the convention complex arriving in 1972.

The past 45 years brought highs and lows to near its doorstep. Management hopes a multimillion-dollar comprehensive remodel, the first since 2016, represents another bright spot. With 600 new competing hotel rooms crowding into downtown in recent years, the Waco Hilton is rising to the challenge.

"We hope to be wrapped up by July 1," general manager Justin Edwards said during a tour Monday revealing old carpeting scraped away to bare concrete, workers with measuring devices, and building material

stacked on the Franklin Avenue side of the 11-story, 195-room property. "In 2016, we did what was called a half-renovation. This time we're doing everything."

Working from top to bottom, crews will tackle the task in phases, about 40 rooms at a time, though some ground-floor work is already underway. Teams with varied skill sets will oversee texturing, carpeting, sheetrocking, painting, interior decorating and fixture replacing. Public areas and meeting rooms will get facelifts. The exterior will get fresh paint and new windows.

The gift shop will double in size. Tile will replace carpeting in targeted public areas, and ballrooms will get new carpeting, said Edwards, who arrived in Waco in 2016, the same year the Hilton received its last upgrade.

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HOUSE DISTRICT 56

Hopefuls see wide fundraising disparity

BY CHRISTOPHER DE LOS SANTOS
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One-term incumbent Rep. Pat Curry out-raised Ralph Patterson, his challenger in the March 3 Republican primary for House District 56, by almost \$300,000 in the latest reporting period for campaign finance disclosures.

In the Democratic primary for the Texas House seat representing three-quarters of McLennan County residents, Ashley Bean Thornton brought in \$17,801, compared to Janessa Givens' \$2,995, according to disclosures covering Sept. 5 through Jan. 22.

Curry reported \$352,345 in contributions during the period, compared to \$56,050 reported by Patterson.

Curry

Curry's highest spending total was \$62,754 split between nine payments for legal services from the Guest and Gray Law Firm in Forney.

"Guest and Gray are one of the law firms I have an active case with, so I can't say much, but they are the firm I hired for a lawsuit I have against Christopher Ekstrom over releasing my business and personal phone numbers and other information," Curry said by phone. "Him releasing that information hurt me personally and it hurt my campaign so I'm paying for the suit out campaign funds and partially from personal funds."



Curry

Ekstrom, who works in real estate in Dallas and ran for a U.S. House seat last year, is also the top contributor to Patterson's campaign. Ekstrom gave Patterson's campaign \$50,000 in December.

Curry's top donor was Texans for Law-suit Reform Political Action Committee, with \$50,000 in cash plus polling valued at \$11,000.

Curry also said \$787,479 in unpaid principal on outstanding loans for his campaign is all money he has lent the campaign himself.

Individual contributions of \$5,000 or more to Curry include \$20,205 from David Jessup, of McGregor; \$15,000 from C.M. Garver, of Houston; \$10,000 from Ron Lenamon, of Crawford; \$10,000 from Karen Keith, of Waco; \$10,000 from Adam and Suzanne Stiles, of Houston; \$5,205 from Michael Toomey, of Austin; and \$5,000 each from Ronald Kroll, of Waco; Asher Linzer, of Waco; Christopher DeCluitt, of Waco; Leigh Marcus, of Waco; Steven and Sharon Cutbirth, of Waco; Steven Caperton, of Valley Mills; and John Embry, of Waco.

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GT proposals raise parental concerns

Waco ISD says no immediate changes planned at Atlas

BY CARL HOOVER
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Families of students in Waco ISD's Atlas Academy at Tennyson Middle School received assurance Tuesday that the program will remain unchanged next school year, after several who attended an

informational meeting Monday questioned district proposals to level gifted and talented and advanced academic offerings across its middle schools.

Some of the about 60 parents who attended the meeting for families of GT students Monday at Waco High School expressed anger and irritation that they were asked to weigh in on proposals developed by the district rather than being involved earlier in program discussions. Others asked about where Lake Air Montessori

Magnet School fits in the middle school plan.

A letter sent Tuesday to families of GT students informs them Atlas Academy will continue its current operation next school year, with applications for new students and intent-to-return forms for current students accepted Feb. 16-March 6.

"Thank you to those who attended our informational meeting at Waco High School last night and to everyone who participated in the Thought Exchange in December. ... Parent

feedback made it clear that families of students currently enrolled in the ATLAS Gifted and Talented program at Tennyson Middle School (TMS) are seeking clear assurances and continuity for their children," the letter says. "Additionally, families who have chosen other middle school campuses have shared a desire for meaningful improvements and more equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities."

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Immigration policies big challenge for Texas eateries, **PAGE A3**

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