

Ex-HPD officer facing up to 25 years

He pleaded guilty to running drug money that was pumped through Houston to Mexico

By **Dane Schiller**

A former Houston police officer pleaded guilty Tuesday to running drug money as a courier for an organization that laundered as much as \$27 million collected from around the United States, then pumped through Houston and on to Mexico.

Anthony Foster, 47, faces up to 25 years in federal prison without parole for his role in the conspiracy but could serve less time if he cooperates with authorities still looking for members of the organization, including the boss, who are believed to be in Mexico. U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal warned Foster

and co-defendant Sarah Combs, 48, a former office manager who also pleaded guilty Tuesday, that she is not obligated to show leniency when they are sentenced in May. "If the sentence you get is heavier than you expect, you understand that you are stuck with it," Rosenthal cautioned before the pleas were final. "You

cannot get out of it." Combs faces up to five years.

The case exposed an enterprise that operated out of a simple office tucked away behind an auto collision shop on Westheimer in far-west Houston.

Money was brought to Houston in bulk, then transferred between financial institutions to make the jump from the United States to Mexico, *Courier continues on B5*



Houston Chronicle
Anthony Foster resigned from HPD in 2009 while under investigation of taking a bribe.

BAYOU BEND



Mayra Beltrán photos / Houston Chronicle

Henri Gadbois, artist and Houston native, is a master at making tantalizingly real-looking — but inedible — dishes for display. His work can be seen, but not tasted, at the Bayou Bend Collections and Gardens.

A feast, but for eyes only

You can't have this chef's cake — and you can't eat it, either

By **Allan Turner**

HC Hedgehog cake and boiled beef's tongue; roasted boar's head and plum pudding; raisins on a stem and oven-browned chickens still wearing their heads and feet. Henri Gadbois' kitchen wizardry is a feast for the eyes.

One glance at the Houstonian's culinary art, a gourmet's dream on gleaming 18th-century china in Bayou Bend's elegant dining room,



Gadbois crafts his faux food, like these collard greens, from the real thing.

is enough to start tongues wagging. "It all looks so good," says Sally Luna, a docent at the Houston decorative arts museum, "that you want to dive right into it."

Best of all, the spread is completely calorie-free. There's just one drawback: It's fake, nothing more than clay and silicone and tasteful applications of paint and varnish.

When it comes to haute cuisine, the 82-year-old *Artist continues on B3*

EDUCATION

HISD's cash bonus for early resignation notice is up for vote

By **Ericka Mellon**

HISD teachers and principals who give the district early notice of their plans to resign or retire next school year could end up with a thank-you check.

The school board plans to vote Thursday on whether to continue a cash incentive program to pay school personnel who give notice within a few weeks in an effort to help the district better plan for looming vacancies.

The Houston Independent School District is setting aside up to \$2.5 million from savings to pay for the incentives, which would range from

\$1,000 to \$5,000 depending on the employee's years of experience.

HISD officials said most teachers give notice in late May or early June that they don't intend to return the next school year, making recruiting and hiring more difficult.

Gayle Fallon, president of the Houston Federation of Teachers union, said teachers who like their principals typically give notice as soon as they can.

"I have no problem with the (incentive) program," Fallon said. "The district gets adequate notice, and the teacher leaves with some additional cash."

HISD continues on B5

SCHOOL LAWSUIT

Expert: Mandates hurt school districts

By **Lindsay Kastner**

HC AUSTIN — Government mandates hobble public school districts, hampering their efforts to solve problems and implement new ideas, a school efficiency expert testified Tuesday at a lawsuit trial over the state's education funding.

But attorneys for both Texas and the various groups of school districts that are suing the state questioned whether the

mandates specified by expert Paul Hill apply to Texas schools.

More than 600 school districts have taken the state to court, arguing that funding for education is inadequate for them to meet increasingly rigorous academic requirements. Some of the districts also contend that Texas funds districts inequitably.

Hill was one of three witnesses presented *Expert continues on B5*

TRANSPORTATION

Texas' road safety laws among nation's worst, group says

By **Erin Mulvaney**

Texas ranks among the worst states for passing highway safety laws, according to an annual report released Tuesday.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety released

the "Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws" grading all 50 states and the District of Columbia on their performance based on 15 basic traffic safety laws. Texas — the first state to pass an 85-mile-per-hour speed

limit last year — joined about a dozen states in the bottom tier.

Texas has 80,000 miles of state-run roadways, and the last day there wasn't a fatality on Texas roads was Nov. 7, 2000, according to the Texas

Department of Transportation. State lawmakers, however, have been slow to adopt some of the measures the national safety group sees as steps to improve road safety and reduce deaths.

"We know what works

to reduce and eventually eliminate drunk driving from our roads," said Jan Withers, president of the national Mothers Against Drunk Driving. "We now call on state legislatures across the country to do their part."

The U.S. has recently seen the largest jump in traffic fatalities since 1975, a 7 percent increase in crash deaths during the first nine months of 2012 compared to the same period in 2011, according to *State continues on B3*



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CITY & STATE

SOUTH TEXAS PROJECT

Hearing on nuclear plant spurs debate

By Nolan Hicks

BAY CITY — The South Texas Project is an essential part of the Bay City area economy, said local leaders who support plans to extend licenses for the nuclear power plant.

But opponents are questioning the extension's impact on the environment, including how the country will deal with nuclear waste.

Both sides attended public hearings on Tuesday required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the federal agency that regulates the nation's

nuclear power plants. Agency officials heard input for an environmental report — an important part of its examination of the South Texas Project's bid to extend its licenses.

The agency's draft report found that allowing the plant to continue generating power would have little or no impact on the environment.

20-year extensions

Currently, STP's two licenses to operate the two reactors at the Matagorda County facility are set to expire in 2027 and 2028. Extending the licenses would add another 20

years to each.

Public hearings are one of the last requirements of the environmental review process. But turnout for the afternoon session was light — about a dozen people.

The federal agency expects to issue the final report in July.

The commission also is required to ensure that the aging reactors, about 90 miles southwest of Houston, would be able to continue operating safely.

Local officials said the facility poses no real danger to the environment and the plant is key to the area's economy.

"STP's license renewal will provide jobs for our children and build a strong economic base for our community," said Carolyn Thames, a member of Bay City's City Council, who was one of three civic leaders who spoke in favor of the project.

Area's 'lifeline'

Bay City ISD board member Terry Farrar described STP as "the lifeline of our community."

If STP weren't in Bay City, a town of about 17,000 people, "we would probably die," Thames said. "They have 1,200

employees."

However, an environmental activist argued the federal agency should allow STP's licenses to expire as currently scheduled.

Over the next 15 years, she added, the community could transition away from its dependence on the nuclear plant.

"This is the time to plan for a transition, to plan for worker training, to plan for cleaner, safer energy for the future," said Karen Hadden, executive director of the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development Coalition, which is based

in Austin.

Susan Dancer, a local anti-nuclear activist who was sitting with Hadden, said she opposed the license extension for multiple reasons, including uncertainty about how the country will deal with nuclear waste.

"STP is kind of Matagorda County's sacred cow that you're not supposed to speak against or question," Dancer said. "I think it's really important ... for citizens to question, to look into what's going on."

nhicks@express-news.net
twitter.com/ndhapple

HOUSTON SCENE



Johnny Hanson / Houston Chronicle

Artist makes fakes from real thing, which he eats

Artist from page B1

Gadbois is a master of deception.

Known for his landscapes and the nearly three decades he taught art at Lee High School, Gadbois ventured into the world of faux foods in 1989, when, at the request of Bayou Bend docents, he crafted a 14-inch stew-filled pastry for the museum's Christmas table.

Since then, he has supplied Bayou Bend's pantry with fake edibles — 80 boxes of them, he estimates — and filled similar grocery orders for about 150 museums nationwide.

"I like to cook," says Gadbois, who typically begins each exercise in faux cookery by making the dish with genuine foods. That approach, he says, lets him assess a dish's real-life color, texture and overall appearance.

Modern dishes, too

Susan Schoelwer, curator of George Washington's Mount Vernon, is a customer and a fan.

"He has done projects for us spanning the gamut, from pieces for a display in our mansion representing what George and Martha ate and served to their guests, to pieces for our refurbished slave quarters. ... His faux foods stand out because of their variations, the level of care and attention Henri gives them."

Gadbois, Houston-born and educated, typically relies on museum docents for research that keeps his historic food reproductions authentic.

Still, his menu offers items as contemporary as fried chicken and pecan pie.

His studio shelves are loaded with molds for oranges, apricots, pomegranates, figs, onions, leeks, collard greens, turnips, zucchini, cucumbers, eggplants, green bell peppers, and avocados, whole and sliced.

When new fruits and vegetables are needed — those not already in Gadbois' inventory — museums must wait until the items come into season. Gadbois' molds always are made from the genuine articles.

In the apple category alone, Gadbois has about 30 molds, representing everything from crab apples to Granny Smiths. Some are specimens of perfection, others pitted and blemished. Rarely are two pieces of fake fruit identical.

So realistic are the reproductions that Dana Evans, executive director at Virginia's Museum of the Shendandoah Valley, routinely hands fake confections to visiting children to emphasize that the tantalizing treats are not for eating.

"People," Evans says, "very often reach for

items they think are real food."

Gadbois currently is preparing a fake feast for a Shenandoah museum exhibit this spring.

The ham, sweet potatoes and collard greens all are ready to be served.

The eggs Benedict, however, have proved problematic. The hollandaise sauce, he says, is insufficiently yellow, and the English muffins keep turning out disconcertingly pink.

Word of mouth

Gadbois never faced such challenges until late middle age when Bayou Bend docents begged for help with their Christmas dinner.

Until that time, the artist had produced only one

item of fake food, a clay grapefruit to top a high-school trophy.

Soon, Gadbois not only became a master chef of fake edibles, but led a gang of aproned docents — his Mud Pie Group — that, meeting weekly, molded hundreds of tiny clay roses and other items for the Bayou Bend table.

Through word of mouth, his fame spread and his national business grew.

Then as now, Gadbois generally eats the real-food versions of his successes, and his failures. Many may find boiled beef tongue unappetizing, but Gadbois counts it as a treat, both for the studio and the table.

While attempting to cast French fries in

silicone, a task that has proved surprisingly difficult, Gadbois has developed a fondness for salty, greasy spuds. "I've discovered that frozen French fries really are delicious," he says.

Gadbois' faux dishes appear as scrumptious today as they did yesterday; as tempting, actually, as they did 10 years ago. And with his reputation as a plaster and plastic chef growing, one could envision a prissy epicure with a ballooning ego.

He can dish it out, too

Gadbois, though, takes fame in stride. He remains down to earth, even kind.

Spying a studio visitor unthinkingly reaching for French chocolates in a crystal dish, he deadpans: "I wouldn't do that if I were you. ... They're bad for your teeth."

allan.turner@chron.com

She's turning over a raw leaf

Kristina Carrillo-Bucaram, founder of the Rawfully Organic cooperative, boxes lettuce Tuesday at the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center for the group's weekly pickup. The co-op has about 7,500 members and attracts 500 people weekly for its mostly locally grown produce.

State highway laws receive poor grades

State from page B1

to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data.

The report focuses on a new federal incentive program that encourages states to enact teen driver licensing laws, ignition interlock laws, distracted driving laws and occupant protection laws. Among the 15 highway safety laws evaluated by the group are seat belt, booster seat and motorcycle helmet measures, in addition to restrictions and requirements for teen drivers, texting bans and tougher impaired driving laws. Texas did not have eight of the 15 recommended laws.

The report found that an additional 316 new laws need to be adopted in all states to meet the recommendations, including 15 states still needing a law banning all drivers from texting.

Last year, Alabama, Idaho and West Virginia passed an all-driver texting bans, joining the majority of states that have passed such laws. (Some states have laws prohibiting drivers from using cell phones in certain areas like school zones.)

State Rep. Tom Crad-

dick, R-Midland, re-filed a texting ban bill for the 2013 legislative session. In 2011, Gov. Rick Perry made an unprecedented move of vetoing a texting ban passed during the legislative session, drawing criticism at the time from national highway safety groups.

Bob Kaufman, a Texas Department of Transportation spokesman, responded to the report, saying that TXDOT uses awareness campaigns to prioritize safety, such as the "Click It or Ticket" campaign. He said the campaign has led to seat belt use increasing from 75 percent to 94 percent in the past 11 years.

He also said awareness campaigns have improved behavior in the areas of drunken driving, motorcycle safety and proper child passenger.

"Important to remember, drivers hold the key to driving safely," Kaufman said. "We encourage drivers to adhere to some basic safe driving tips: pay attention, buckle seat belts, put the phone away, never drink and drive, obey all traffic laws and drive to conditions."

erin.mulvaney@chron.com
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