



*Out and About...*

## CHERRIE LEDOUX

Welcome, everyone, to Out and About – here to catch you up on what's happening in the Lake Houston area!

The Kingwood Garden Club has enjoyed a very good year despite Harvey flooding many of their members. This year, this local club that started in 1973 is celebrating their 45th anniversary. With membership currently at 136, they are a thriving and active group of men and women that do what they love while also helping the community. This year's luncheon was themed "Spring Blooms – A Mayday Celebration!" I have been lucky enough to have been to several of their annual luncheons and I have to say, they are some of the absolute prettiest ones I have ever attended. This year's tablecloths were a soft coral with celery-green napkins. The 12 floral arrangements were spectacular, with two of their members making gorgeous designs incorporating the construction of a maypole. Another fabulous arrangement was a beautiful floral birthday cake in celebration of the club's anniversary. The Kingwood Garden Club also awards scholarships to graduates of Kingwood, Kingwood Park, New Caney and Porter High schools who will be studying a field related to gardening/horticulture, including botany, agriculture, conservation, entomology, forestry, horticulture, environmental studies, landscape or landscape architecture, and plant research. This year, a \$4,000 scholarship was awarded to **Caitlin Lahey**, who is a junior at Texas A & M majoring in soil conservation and crop management. She is a graduate of Kingwood Park High School. She spoke to the membership and thanked them for her scholarship and gave an explanation of her course of study. Several past presidents of the club attended the luncheon as well as **Ryan Fennell**, branch manager of Kingwood Library, who talked of the library's plans to reopen. The club's main project for this year was a plant sale held at Town Center April 21. All plants were grown by their members and sold at bargain prices to benefit the community as many restore their landscapes after flood recovery. The luncheon also included the installation of the newly elected officers for 2018-19: **Millie Smaardyk**, president; **Gail Wright**, 1st VP; **Margo Rushin**, 2nd VP; **Dean McNeely**, 3rd VP; **Cathy Owen**, secretary; and **John Hernandez**, treasurer.

Don't forget to drop by the Humble Civic Center on May 16, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. for chopped beef sandwiches along with chips and a drink for only \$10 to benefit Deputy **Christopher Gaines**, who was injured in the line of duty while answering a disturbance call in Atascocita. You can either drive through or dine in for your lunch, so get enough for everyone and dinner also, and help Harris County Precinct 4 Constable **Mark Herman**, Capt. **Toby Hecker** and the Precinct 4 deputies help their injured colleague.

If you happen to not have purchased enough sandwiches for dinner as well, consider heading to Los Cuocos for the Congressional District 2 Runoff Candidate debate between **Dan Crenshaw** and **Kevin Roberts**. Hosted by The Tribune and moderated by The Tribune's owner, **Cynthia Calvert**, you get to mingle and meet at 6:30 p.m. before the forum begins at 7.

On Monday, April 23, Evan Lee Lewis, son of Becca and Wess Lewis, was awarded the first annual Major **David S. Williams** Memorial Scholarship at Kingwood High School's Honors Night. Guy and Judy Williams provided a scholarship to a KHS graduate who exemplified the core values of their son Major **David S. Williams**, who passed away after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Evan was awarded the scholarship from a pool of more than 25 applicants. According to the Williams family, Evan's activities, grades, teacher recommendations and essay clearly made him stand out. Congratulations, Evan! The Williams family stands behind you on your future endeavors at Texas A&M!

It was a gorgeous day at the Atascocita Golf Club May 7. Director of golf and all-around great guy **Ken Kirchhoffer** and Head Golf Pro **Brad Dodson** welcomed hundreds of golfers to their sixth annual Memorial Day Classic, benefiting veterans served by Base Camp 40 and the Lone Survivor Foundation. Lupe Tortilla served up lunch and Planet Ford and The Tribune helped sponsor the event, which featured the Scooter Brown Band and the Atascocita High School JROTC program, which handled the impressive presentation of colors. Former Houston Oiler **Dan Pastorini** played, as did **Larry Shiflet**, **Gary Warman**, **Mike Byers**, **Randy Oertelle**, **John Centner**, **Mark Kolan**, **Jerry Bontarger**, **Carl Williamson**, **Jim McNeese**, **Reuben Vela**, **Matt Woodward**, **Rob Dimilia**, **Walter and Sheryl McKellar**, **Troy Hitt** and **Tim Miser**. A whole host of my girls' girls are graduating this week! I'll let you know about them soon. Maybe a graduation edition of "Out and About?" Let me know about your grads – plans for continuing education, internship plans, gap years and grad parties. Drop me the details at [cherrie@yourgrandaffair.com](mailto:cherrie@yourgrandaffair.com) and I hope to see you Out and About!

# KENNY NEAL

## STOPS BY THE BENDER ON HIS WAY TO EUROPE

### BATON ROUGE SWAMP BLUES TO TAKE CENTER STAGE

**K**enny Neal just headlined the New Orleans Jazz Fest. He's about to perform at the Chicago Blues Festival, International Blues Festival in Monterey, Calif., and the Big Beat in Dallas. He will then fly off to Switzerland for the 52nd Montreux Jazz Festival.

But first, Neal will drop by The Bender in Humble to perform some "Baton Rouge swamp blues."

Neal is a New Orleans native and a New Orleans treasure who is steering the venerable blues tradition into fresh, new direction.

He'll perform at The Bender Performing Arts Center near Historic Downtown Humble on Friday, June 8, at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15.

"Expect to have a great time," Neal told The Tribune. "I do a lot of sing-a-long songs that the Humble crowd will know. I want everybody to be a part of the show, so I expect everybody to sing and stomp their feet. Audiences love that."

Music, especially blues, is Neal's life. He really had no choice in the matter.

"My dad, Raful Neal, started a band just before I was born," said Neal. "I probably knew before I was born that I wanted to play. I tried to crawl up to my dad and grab the mike away. I really don't remember learning to play. I always could. I soaked it all up."

Neal didn't get toys when he was growing up. His dad gave him records – Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Porter Wagoner, Glenn Campbell and Roy Clark.

"It was all good. I was OK with that," Neal confessed. "I was as happy as a kid getting a bike when my dad gave me a record of Ray Charles."

Legendary blues guitarist Buddy Guy was a guitar player in Neal's dad's band. Guy formed his own band and eventually influenced such great musicians as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Keith Richards, Stevie Ray Vaughan, John Mayer – and a youngster named Kenny Neal.

"When I was 19, Buddy asked me to join his band," said Neal. "I played bass for him for five years before I decided it was time to become my own performer."

As his own performer, Neal has perfected what he calls the Baton Rouge swamp blues – and that's what he'll be featuring when he performs at The Bender on June 8.

And what is Baton Rouge swamp blues?

"It's a combination of all that great music that surrounds New Orleans," Neal explained. "New Orleans is jazz, ragtime and Dixieland. West of New Orleans, you'll hear that great Cajun-Creole music. North of us, it's the Natchez sound. Growing up in New Orleans, I was stuck in the middle of all that great music and that's why I call it "swamp blues" with a little Cajun swing to it."

This is Neal's first time to play at The Bender, but he's performed in the area before.

"I can't remember the name of the club I used to play years ago," he said. "It probably doesn't exist any longer, but I have a lot of fans in the area and I'm really glad to be coming back."

And he's coming to The Bender because Jennifer Wooden asked him to come. Wooden is director of the Humble Civic Center and The Bender and his biggest Lake Houston fan.

"There's a funny story about me and Jennifer," Neal said. "Jennifer and her mom came to see me in New York when I was on Broadway in the play, 'Mule Bone.' They only knew me as an actor. They sure were surprised to learn I was a blues singer."

After spending his early years as a singer and guitar player, Neal never thought of himself as an actor, but he tried out for the lead part.

"I thought I was awful in the audition," Neal recalled, "but I got the part and underwent some intensive training to learn to play on Broadway. That training has served me well in my music career."

While Neal has earned Grammy nominations, blues awards and induction into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame, he says the strangest award was after he appeared on Broadway.

"I was flying to Paris, France, to appear in the play and a friend called me just as I was leaving to congratulate me," Neal said. "He told me I'd just won the Theatre World Award for Outstanding New Talent on Broadway!"

When he's not performing at Jazz Fest or in Switzerland, Neal is restoring his beloved 1948 Buick.

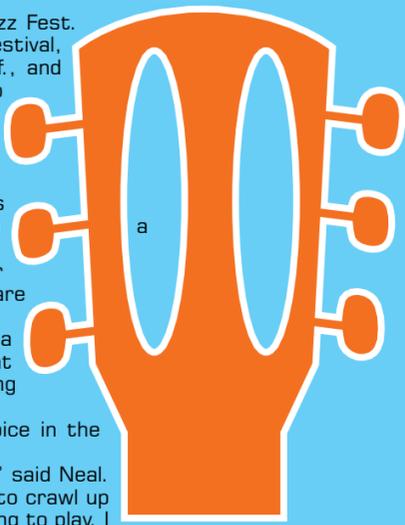
"For my birthday, I decided to put my money into the Buick I've had for 30 years," he said. "I'm custom designing it with all the latest technology and a car expert from Mississippi is building it."

And his passion, besides music, is his enthusiasm for the Kids Rock the Nation Foundation.

"We give guitars to kids who can't afford them," Neal said. "Learning to play helps them build self-esteem, keeps them busy, and keeps them out of trouble."

When he's done performing at blues festivals in Colorado and San Diego, Neal will head to a Kids Rock the Nation fundraiser in Daytona Beach.

To discover why Wooden thinks Kenny Neal is absolutely the best, go to [kennyneal.net](http://kennyneal.net) to hear his music. For tickets and information, call 281-446-4140 or visit [humblepac.com](http://humblepac.com). Information can also be found on Facebook at Charles Bender Performing Arts Center.



BY TOM BROAD



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