



Volume 40, Number 47

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Dear Client:

*First an important announcement. In four weeks, this newsletter will reach its 40th anniversary. For four decades, we have chronicled events about the remarkable Austin area. Forty years, with a deadline every week. This represents approximately 3 million words in 2,000 newsletter editions. And now, the time has come for us to change our career emphasis.*

*The March 29, 2019 issue will be the final edition of The Neal Spelce Austin Letter, that we first published April 1, 1979.*

*We're not going away. We are just stepping aside from this time-consuming enterprise, as we step forward in different directions.*

*Our efforts are now being turned toward an exciting new venture. After years of encouragement from numerous associates, friends and family, yours truly has undertaken the humbling task of a memoir book project. To modify a line from a Farmers Insurance TV commercial, "It's about a thing or two, because we've seen a thing or two."*

*The book project includes an in-depth look at Austin – how the metro has evolved to a globally-important city. Humbly, we have come to recognize no else has during the past 40 years written each week (or, importantly, been involved in) how Austin has emerged in ways that many could never imagine. The book also includes some entertaining (we hope) accounts of a long and varied career.*

*We still plan to contribute our insights, perspectives and analyses to LinkedIn – similar to what we've done in this newsletter, only it will be free to those who follow us on LinkedIn. So, if you are interested, simply join our LinkedIn family. Also, we are continuing ongoing consulting work, putting our decades of wide-ranging experience and knowledge to good use.*

*We'll share more about all this with you over the next few weeks, before we reach the 40-year milestone at the end of the month. We'll be working with our computer gurus to wind down. Subscriptions will receive prorated refunds as appropriate. And, we will be glad to answer any questions you may have. Just shoot us an email.*

*We want you to know how very much we have appreciated our loyal subscribers. Now, let's get on to this week's edition.*

**For those Austinites who look to California as a trend-setter, here's a trend to ponder: the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco has risen to a new peak of \$3,690. Believe it. For perspective, this is nearly 30% higher than New York City and more than double the prices in Miami. One final figure for your friends in California: last year, a family of four earning up to \$118,400 qualified as "low income" in San Francisco.**

**One more note from a nearby state that should trigger a reaction in Texas. The *Colorado Sun* reports Colorado Democrats have introduced legislation to block oil and gas production in that state. If enacted it could jeopardize more than 100,000 energy jobs in Colorado. (Hmmm, reckon those workers would soon make a beeline for the Texas oil patches?) It's part of what is called a "Keep it in the Ground" movement that has essentially scaled down oil and gas production in California.**

**Remember last week we told you Texas GOP USSenator John Cornyn could "rest a bit easier" because it looked like former Texas Dem Congressman Beto O'Rourke would run for president rather than challenge Cornyn. This is still true as of this writing. But.**

Another darling of the Texas Democrats, **San Antonio Congressman Joaquin Castro, is considering a run against Cornyn.** Joaquin Castro is currently chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and is a top campaign jefe for his twin brother, Julian Castro's, run for president.

At this stage – emphasizing "at this stage" – **Joaquin Castro does not present as formidable opponent for Cornyn as O'Rourke.** O'Rourke ran such a strong race against Texas USSenator Ted Cruz last year, raising massive amounts of money, that it propelled him into presidential speculation. Nevertheless, Cornyn is planning a well-funded race for re-election.

**Quick update on the status of the Texas Legislature's move to strike down Austin's efforts at enacting a mandatory paid sick leave for workers of private employers: the first such bill has advanced out of a Senate committee. It's still early in the session. Stay tuned.**

**It's getting to be almost "ho-hum – again." But it is so significant, it bears mention. Another new high for passengers at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) was set in January. After a monumental record-setting passenger total in 2018, the 2019 total is a whopping 8.3% increase. The ABIA expansion is coming at the right time.**

**Now that the dust has settled on the widely-publicized quest for Amazon's second headquarters, dubbed Amazon HQ2, the company has revealed some interesting information about the search. The Austin area made the cut to the final 20 cities from the 238 submitted proposals. But, Austin ultimately missed the economic development prize. And it did so even though one of the Austin area's greatest assets was Amazon's #1 priority.**

You'll recall Amazon decided to split the 50,000 job prize (25,000 to each location) between Northern Virginia and New York City, with another 5,000-job operation center in Nashville. **After public and private opposition to Amazon surfaced in NYC, the tech colossus abruptly abandoned NYC.** The company is moving ahead with Northern Virginia and Nashville, but said it will not pick another location to replace NYC.

Amazon's person in charge of the lengthy site selection process, its global head of economic development, **Holly Sullivan**, recently granted an exclusive interview to Bisnow.com. It was wide-ranging and concentrated heavily on Amazon's plans for the big Northern Virginia site. **While not specifically referencing the Austin area, her comments revealed some interesting facts suggesting that one of the Austin area's greatest assets was at the top of her list.**

Check this quote from Sullivan: "If you look at the RFP, it was fairly concise, but direct, on what we were looking for. **And that was a location where we could have the talent on day one, but also an opportunity to build that talent pipeline. We specifically referenced a tech talent pipeline.**"

She went on later in the interview to say "As conversations got more granular, the **biggest thing I can say is being able to hire people this year was very important to us.** That was a priority as we continued the process."

One thing for which Austin has long been noted is its **abundance of tech talent and its high ranking as a magnet to attract such talent.** The big investments that are continuing to this day, by Google, Apple, Facebook, Oracle, etc. attest to this reality. Tech jobs are being created and they are being filled. Enough said.

**Another area she stressed was another Austin asset – collaboration. The Austin area wrote the book on collaboration,** going all the way back to 1983 when MCC boosted the Texas tech surge by selecting Austin over and above 58 US cities.

**By the way, the interview did not mention incentives.** It simply focused on the qualities of a location that seemed to be the best fit for Amazon. No particulars on incentives offered by the Austin area were ever made public.

As to the jobs taken away from NYC, Sullivan said only "**we're going to be strategic on how we can locate that additional headcount.**" You can bet the Austin area will be in that mix.

**Okay, let's do the math. Wildlife officials estimate there could be more than four million feral hogs roaming wild in the US. Got it? Now, how many do they think are in Texas? Would you believe at least half that – about two million. And, yes, feral hogs have frequently been spotted inside the Austin city limits, even though most think they are found only in rural areas. What is it about these big, ugly, smelly creatures?**

Well, you gotta realize there is no way to effectively get rid of them. **Feral hogs average about three feet high at the shoulder and weigh anywhere from 100-to-400 pounds.** They first start breeding around 8-to-10 months of age, could have two litters a year with an average litter size of four to six, but **the litter could be as large as ten-to-twelve piglets.**

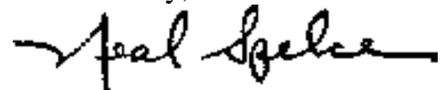
The life span is about four to five years, but they can **live up to eight years.** They don't worry about rare predators, usually mountain lions, coyotes and bobcats. As we said, do the math. **The feral hog population is growing exponentially,** and expanding their range that, in Texas, is generally whitetail deer territory.

**Feral hogs occasionally feast on fawns, but since they are omnivorous, they mostly root up landscape, gardens, and grassy areas looking for food.** And this is where Austin comes in. According to a number of reports, as chronicled by KUT's **Mose Buchele,** the wild pigs have **torn up property in East and West Austin, hitting areas such as Barton Creek, Tarrytown, and Springdale Road just north of Highway 290** – you get the picture.

These creatures are unprotected, non-exotic game animals. **They can be taken (or killed!) by any means or methods,** according to Texas Parks & Wildlife (TP&W). However, Austin has a no-kill policy for wildlife, just as it does for pets. So, are they dangerous to humans? "All wild animals have the potential of being dangerous, especially when wounded or cornered," warns TP&W, **"but feral hogs are not considered dangerous."** It's just the damage they do.

**Dr. Louis Overholster** says when it gets cold in Austin, as it did earlier this week, he *pigs-out* (excuse the lame reference to the previous story) on Tex-Mex food – just for the heartburn!

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher