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Dickens comes back for a second, drier weekend

Stuart Villanueva/
The Daily News
Queen Victoria, played by Anne Boyd, greets her "subjects" at Dickens on The Strand in downtown Galveston.



By **JOHN WAYNE FERGUSON**
The Daily News
» **GALVESTON**

Halfway through a Scotch egg, Missy DeFilippis decided that the holiday season was finally here, a week later than normal. "It doesn't really feel like Christmas unless we've done Dickens," DeFilippis, of Friendswood, said.

Inside

More photos from Dickens on The Strand » **A9-10**

She and her husband, Nick, have been coming to the annual Galveston street festival for 10 years. But last week, facing torrential rains and the possibility of flooding, they de-

cidated not to come.

They were thankful, then, that the festival returned for a second weekend on Saturday.

Dickens on The Strand was originally scheduled for Dec. 2 through Dec. 4. However, record rainfall last weekend caused flooding across the island, and headaches for organizers

See **DICKENS** on page A8

Workforce in Galveston

An estimated 400,000 workers in Texas are paid at or below the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Living on little



Photos by Stuart Villanueva/The Daily News

Blanca Sandoval works behind the counter at the McDonald's location on Palmer Highway in Texas City on Friday.

For low-wage workers, there's no making ends meet

By **MARISSA BARNETT**
The Daily News

Bill time for Jessica Brown is a juggling act. Every month, the 31-year-old mother of two must make \$800 spread enough to cover her utilities, phone, gas, food and expenses for her kids.

It's nearly impossible as it is, she said. Were it not for the help of her parents, who chip in on her rent, she doesn't know how she could get by. "It just doesn't cut it," Brown said.

Editor's Note

This is the fifth article in an occasional series on the evolving workforce in Galveston County.

Brown has for the last few years worked at a fast-food chain in Galveston as a "team leader." She's responsible for opening the restaurant, prepping the food, doing inventory,

See **MINIMUM WAGE** on page A6



Lucelva Herrera mops the floor in the kitchen at the McDonald's location on Palmer Highway in Texas City on Friday.

Government

League City could settle soon with church over disputed land

By **VALERIE WELLS**
The Daily News

Council members Tuesday could settle an eminent domain dispute between the city and a Methodist church.

After months of executive sessions, the council will vote on an agreement with Butler Road Development LLC and League City United Methodist Church to pay \$370,000 for property at 1411 W. Main St. The city took in 2015 for easements and rights of ways needed for a public improvement project.

See **DISPUTED LAND** on page A8



John Carstens/for The Daily News

Dancers participate in Holy Family Parish's annual Our Lady of Guadalupe Procession on Saturday in Galveston.

Parade celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe Day

By **JOHN WAYNE FERGUSON**
The Daily News

» **GALVESTON**

More than 600 people marched down Broadway on Saturday morning as part of the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe Day, a religious holiday that has roots in

See **OUR LADY** on page A8

Vol. 174, No. 243



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Today's weather

73 Mostly cloudy, 20% chance rain
67 » **B10**

Index

Bulletin Board..... B5 Obituaries.....D4
Dear Abby B9 OpinionA4
Lotto.....A2 Sports..... B1
Movies.....C4 TV Listings..... B9

Inside



Lamar Jackson becomes youngest Heisman Trophy winner and first from Louisville » **B1**

WONDER ISLAND

Cooler Holiday Destination

festival of lights
Opens 6PM

EIGHT HOLIDAY ATTRACTIONS ONE VENUE
Nov. 12 - Jan. 8

Cirque Joyeux Noel Dec. 16 - 25

ICE LAND
Ice Skating
Caribbean Christmas
Opens 11AM

MOODY GARDENS

Ice Land • Festival of Lights • Cirque Joyeux Noel
3D Films • Rudolph 4D • Ice Skating • Arctic Slide • Train Rides

Workforce in Galveston



Brandon Pinkney works in the kitchen at the McDonald's location on Palmer Highway in Texas City on Friday. *Stuart Villanueva/The Daily News*

MINIMUM WAGE

Continued from page A1

counting the money and assigning tasks to her co-workers who have been there for less time. When she leaves work after a seven- or eight-hour shift, she sometimes rushes to her side job cleaning houses. When she started at the restaurant in 2013, she made \$7.25 an hour. She's received two raises since then and now earns \$8.25 an hour. It's still not enough, she said. "My bills are never on time," she said, adding that her parents pay her bills in full and she pays them back to avoid having utilities shut off. "I can't save. Even a single person couldn't survive on it."

By the numbers

More than 2.4 million Texas workers earn less than \$10.10 per hour, according to a 2015 study by the Austin-based Center for Public Policy Priorities. An estimated 400,000 workers in Texas are paid at or below the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Labor studies suggest a person would struggle to get by on anything less than \$14 an hour in the Houston-Galveston area, where property and rental prices are higher, a 2016 analysis by the center found. That figure budgets for a monthly rent of about \$750, about \$240 for food, \$480 for health insurance, \$380 for transportation and \$335 for federal taxes. "That's just to make ends meet," said Garrett Groves, Economic Opportunity Program Director at the center. "That doesn't leave any wiggle room for anything." Living on less than that is nearly impossible without some form of assistance, advocates said. But most people are not eligible for federal assistance if they earn above the federal poverty line, which is about \$12,000 annually for an individual, which breaks down to just less than \$6 an hour.

Movement to raise the wages

At least 29 states, including Arkansas, Ohio and Arizona, have raised their minimum wage to above the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour. Some cities, such as Seattle, have raised theirs as high as \$15 an hour. Locally and across the country, low-wage earners and advocates are calling for an increase to the federal minimum wage or a change in state policies to allow cities to set their own wage standards. Raising wages could help boost the local economy because workers would likely spend the added pay in the area, said Steve McIntyre of Gulf Coast Interfaith who helps organize an annual conference on wages.

Some local employers, however, said doubling the minimum wage — as a national movement called Fight for \$15 is advocating for — would increase the cost of living across the board.

"If someone told me I had to pay \$15 per hour tomorrow, we would sit down and look at the whole picture," said Robert Flores, who owns 14 McDonald's restaurants around the county and employs more than 700 people. "Of course it's possible," he said. "Minimum wage was at one time \$1.75, but cheeseburgers were 19 cents. That's exactly what would happen. Ultimately, you're going to be in the same socio-economic status, the same situation. It's going to impact the cost of everything around you." Flores said he pays above minimum wage starting out, in part because it's what the market requires. Many of his employees move into higher-paying managerial or other positions after learning some skills, he said.

Who's earning low wages?

Of workers earning less than \$10.10 an hour, 60 percent were between ages 25 and 54 years old, while just 3 percent were teenagers between ages 16 and 18, a 2015 analysis by the Center for Public Policy Priorities found. Nearly 45 percent had some formal or college education and half of the workers had children, the center said. Many of those wage earners were working in retail, hotel and motel services and the food industry — a big portion of Galveston's tourism-based economy. "We see people at the churches every day who work 40 hours per week but are unable to pay for food, shelter and their basic needs," the Rev. Freda Marie Brown of St. Vincent's House said. Some of those low-wage earners reached by The Daily News declined to be cited in the newspaper because of fear of retribution from their employers.

"We see people at the churches every day who work 40 hours per week but are unable to pay for food, shelter and their basic needs."

The Rev. Freda Marie Brown, St. Vincent's House

Brown, who had worked in a medical office in Houston, moved to Galveston to be closer to her parents after the office closed. She's applied to medical offices on the island, but hasn't found a position. "I've tried and tried," Brown said. "I'm not looking now — I guess you could say I'm discouraged." Switching jobs is also nerve-racking because Brown doesn't know how she could manage an in-between period without a paycheck, she said. Other jobs would pay more, Brown said. But she's not ready to make a big switch while trying to raise a family, she said. Brown had her first son when she was 18 after graduating high school. Becoming a mother delayed her plans to go to school. Now, it's financial concerns about how to pay for school and continue paying bills that stops her, she said.

Growing cost of living

Lower wages are driving some families out of Galveston, Cindy Roberts-Gray, director of Third Coast Research and Development, told advocates gathered at a living wage conference earlier this year. Labor calculators have put a living wage for Galveston Island at about \$17 per hour.

Low-income families with children find it most difficult to get by because of the expenses that come with raising kids, she said. As a result, Galveston's population has gradually declined, particularly for people in their child-rearing years, she said. For Brown, her parents' help is the only thing that allows her to stay in the area. Her parents own a house and she pays \$300 a month to live there, she said. "Anywhere else on the island would be out of the question," she said.

A cycle of poverty

Another problem is the cycle of poverty that earning low wages creates, Groves said. Most jobs paying near minimum wage don't provide any health or other benefits. Living paycheck-to-paycheck can make it nearly impossible to save for retirement, a home or build an emergency fund, Groves said. "These are all compounding factors," he said. "Anything can stress your economic situation to the point of breaking and make it harder to climb out of poverty."

What's being done?

Advocates and city leaders have for years been quietly discussing how to raise the wages of the county's lowest paid. Galveston Councilman Craig Brown, who spoke at the conference, said the council soon plans to take up an ordinance that would force vendors to establish a higher wage in order to work with the city. The city could also decide to add wage standards among criteria assessed when the city considers bids, he said. Last summer, the Galveston Park Board of Trustees voted to pay the organization's lowest-paid hourly employees more. The park board adjusted its salary schedule for its two lowest category employees, called N4 and N5 employees in the park board's documents. The categories include beach cleaning operators, maintenance workers, visitor center supervisors, gate attendants at Seawolf Park and call-center operators. Under the new pay ranges, the employees who were in the lowest pay grade now make at least \$10.55 an hour, a 17.55 percent increase from the previous \$9 minimum wage. But local governments' hands are tied in how much

U.S. minimum wage through the years

Year	Federal minimum wage	Minimum wage in 2012 U.S. dollars
1938	\$0.25	\$3.98
1939	\$0.30	\$4.85
1940	\$0.30	\$4.81
1941	\$0.30	\$4.59
1942	\$0.30	\$4.14
1943	\$0.30	\$3.90
1944	\$0.30	\$3.83
1945	\$0.40	\$5.00
1946	\$0.40	\$4.62
1947	\$0.40	\$4.02
1948	\$0.40	\$3.74
1949	\$0.40	\$3.77
1950	\$0.75	\$7.01
1951	\$0.75	\$6.50
1952	\$0.75	\$6.35
1953	\$0.75	\$6.31
1954	\$0.75	\$6.28
1955	\$0.75	\$6.31
1956	\$1.00	\$8.29
1957	\$1.00	\$7.99
1958	\$1.00	\$7.77
1959	\$1.00	\$7.72
1960	\$1.00	\$7.59
1961	\$1.15	\$8.64
1962	\$1.15	\$8.56
1963	\$1.25	\$9.18
1964	\$1.25	\$9.06
1965	\$1.25	\$8.67
1966	\$1.25	\$8.92
1967	\$1.40	\$9.43
1968	\$1.60	\$10.34
1969	\$1.60	\$9.81
1970	\$1.60	\$9.28
1971	\$1.60	\$8.89
1972	\$1.60	\$8.60
1973	\$1.60	\$8.10
1974	\$2.00	\$9.12
1975	\$2.10	\$8.78
1976	\$2.30	\$9.10
1977	\$2.30	\$8.54
1978	\$2.65	\$9.14
1979	\$2.90	\$8.97
1980	\$3.10	\$8.46
1981	\$3.35	\$8.29
1982	\$3.35	\$7.82
1983	\$3.35	\$7.59
1984	\$3.35	\$7.34
1985	\$3.35	\$7.09
1986	\$3.35	\$6.98
1987	\$3.35	\$6.74
1988	\$3.35	\$6.48
1989	\$3.35	\$6.18
1990	\$3.80	\$6.66
1991	\$4.25	\$7.16
1992	\$4.25	\$6.96
1993	\$4.25	\$6.77
1994	\$4.25	\$6.60
1995	\$4.25	\$6.42
1996	\$4.75	\$6.97
1997	\$5.15	\$7.39
1998	\$5.15	\$7.30
1999	\$5.15	\$7.14
2000	\$5.15	\$6.90
2001	\$5.15	\$6.72
2002	\$5.15	\$6.62
2003	\$5.15	\$6.48
2004	\$5.15	\$6.31
2005	\$5.15	\$6.10
2006	\$5.15	\$5.91
2007	\$5.85	\$6.53
2008	\$6.55	\$7.02
2009	\$7.25	\$7.82
2010	\$7.25	\$7.67
2011	\$7.25	\$7.40
2012	\$7.25	\$7.25
2013	\$7.25	\$7.15
2014	\$7.25	\$7.03
2015	\$7.25	\$7.02
2016	\$7.25	\$6.89

Source: U.S. Department of Labor

they can do to raise wages and at the state level there's little appetite to raise the minimum wage, experts said. In 2003, the Texas Legislature passed a law barring cities from setting wage standards. Until then, municipalities had had some authority to set the bottom rate for wages. There were about seven bills filed during the 2015 session addressing minimum wage, including legislation giving cities wage-setting authority or setting a state wage higher than the federal standard, Groves said. But leadership declined to give most of those bills a public hearing, he said. "It's not given serious consideration," he said. For Jessica Brown, raising the minimum wage comes down to fairness, she said. She and her co-workers work demanding full-time positions, but struggle to meet their basic needs, she said. "We put a smile on our face and do the job, even when we're under a lot of stress and pressure," she said. "I'm blessed with help from my parents, but I don't know how some of my co-workers do it. People are just working to take care of their family like everyone else."

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