

Girl in third grade dies after reportedly suffering a heart attack, **3A**

Security cam captures man putting **stereo components in pants**, **5A** ▶

Indictment alleges multimillion-dollar **disaster contract fraud**, **Below**



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Guisepe Barranco/The Enterprise

Tiffany Huynh, 16, fills in answers on the whiteboard in a Vietnamese language class. Generally at their parents' request, some local Vietnamese teens are taking classes through religious organizations to help maintain Vietnamese culture.

Tearing up traffic tickets

SPEAK UP Should Texas offer amnesty for traffic tickets? BeaumontEnterprise.com/speakup

MORE DPS gives offenders a break, but municipal tickets are a different story: **In the print edition of Monday's Enterprise**

High school basketball



PHOTO GALLERY Action from Ozen at LC-M and Kountze at East Chambers: BeaumontEnterprise.com/sports

MORE Coverage of the games: **1C**

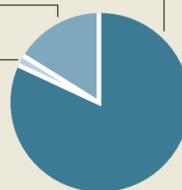
Court appearance

Should a judge be able to stop you from getting tattoos or cosmetic surgery?

82% Yes. If it's somehow related to the crime it's an appropriate sentence.

16% No. It's not a court matter.

2% No judge can touch me. I've got a home tattoo kit and dollar store cold cream.



Vote at BeaumontEnterprise.com/speakup

Culture class

Youths ... sometimes grudgingly ... keep their heritage alive by learning Vietnamese

Size of Vietnamese-speaking population age 5 and up in Jefferson County:

1990: 2,928
2000: 3,688
2005-2009: 2,499

Jefferson County population born in Vietnam:

2000: 2,354
2005-2009: 1,648

Source: 1990 and 2000 census, American Community Survey 2005-09

PORT ARTHUR

By **Kalyn Belsha**
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It's Sunday morning and 11 Vietnamese-American teenagers are seated at long white tables in an open room, facing a whiteboard

in the building behind the ornate Buu Mon Buddhist Temple in Port Arthur.

Sounds of younger students laughing and playing in two adjacent classrooms, separated by free-standing wooden boards, reverber-

VIETNAMESE, page 4A

Three face Ike fraud charges

Indictment alleges \$3.2 million cleanup contract scheme

By **Sonja Garza**
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A former Liberty County judge and commissioner have been indicted, along with a businessman who is the judge's brother-in-law, in a hurricane fraud scheme involving \$3.2 million in federal funds.

Former County Judge John "Phil" Fitzgerald, 51, of Liberty; former Precinct 2 commissioner Herman "Lee"

INDICTED, page 5A

3-D gives surgeons a better view

Technology can help improve precision, safety of operations

A surgery team wearing 3-D glasses performs a 3-D laparoscopic appendectomy recently at Baptist Beaumont Hospital.

Photo provided by Viking Systems



BEAUMONT

By **Heather Nolan**
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Three-dimensional technology has made it past the big screen and into the operating room.

Beaumont surgeon Dr. Garrett Peel last week performed a 3-D, high-definition laparoscopic appendectomy — appendix removal — and cholecystectomy — gallbladder removal — at Baptist Beaumont Hospital. "With 3-D you can see

3-D SURGERY, page 4A

Culture from another land



PHOTO GALLERY Vietnamese heritage visible in Port Arthur: BeaumontEnterprise.com

Out to see the friendly dinosaur



SEEN Did our photographer catch you at the Barney and Friends show Friday at Ford Park? **BeaumontEnterprise.com/seen**

Inside

@Play 1C
BE..... 1B

Classified 5C
Comics..... 5B
Markets..... 4C
Nation/World 6B

Obituaries..... 7A
Opinions..... 6A
Puzzles..... 4B
TV/Movies..... 2B

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Partly cloudy



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Louisiana learned to love Cajun French

State once tried to wipe out aspect of culture it's famous for

BEAUMONT

By **Kalyn Belsha**
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While Vietnamese-Americans in Southeast Texas are at a linguistic crossroads now, speakers of Cajun French faced a similar problem about 50 years ago.

Cajuns are descendants of Acadians, or French colonists who settled in Canada and later moved to southern Louisiana.

Their language is a blend of French spoken by Acadian

and French immigrants, with some West Indian, Spanish, African and English influence. Most French speakers would understand Cajun French, though as you'd find in Spanish or English there are obvious regional differences.

In an effort to enforce assimilation and the use of English, Louisiana's state Legislature banned the use of French in schools in the 1920s, eventually all but wiping out the Cajun French language.

"For a long time, it was

something we were told not to do in public," said David Cheramie, the executive director of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. "You were not to let people know you spoke French."

In a reversal of its previous policies, Louisiana's Legislature established the council in 1968 in an attempt to preserve Cajun French culture and language.

Cheramie says close to 1 million people spoke Cajun French in Louisiana about 50

years ago, but estimates now about 150,000 to 200,000 do.

"If it hadn't been for our efforts, it probably would be zero," he said.

Cheramie said while most native speakers of Cajun French are gone, the council has worked to support interest in learning the language, which he said most people do by learning French then "Cajunizing it."

Colleges like Louisiana State University and University of Louisiana at Lafayette have basic Cajun French lan-

guage programs and there are about 3,400 children enrolled in French immersion programs in schools from Lake Charles to New Orleans, Cheramie said.

The program is optional, but parents see it as a good way to preserve their heritage and develop their children's cognitive learning skills.

The flavorful food — from gumbo and crawfish to andouille and boudin — and lively fiddle and accordion-filled music associated with Cajun culture also drives some young people to learn the language, Cheramie said.

"A lot of people learn the

language so they can sing the songs," he said. "Singing Cajun songs in English — it just doesn't work."

The Texas Almanac estimates about 375,000 Cajuns call Texas home. Many of them hail from Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange.

Many Cajuns headed for Southeast Texas at the turn of the 20th century, when Louisiana's economy was faltering, but Spindletop was spewing oil.

Louisiana Cajuns started to work in the oil industry, bringing with them their culture that still flourishes today throughout Southeast Texas.

VIETNAMESE: "There's actually a proverb. ... "If the language exists, the people exist."

Continued from page 1A

ate off the walls.

The teens are here to learn the Vietnamese language — mostly reading and writing, as most have basic speaking abilities — but few are paying attention as their teacher scrawls the words "Viet Nam" on the board. One student idly rubs an iPhone across his face and another is asking his classmates for candy.

The students are studying the geography of their "home country" today, announces Huong Tran, their 34-year-old volunteer teacher, who left Vietnam with her family about 15 years after the end of the Vietnam War and lived temporarily at the temple, which sponsored her family's arrival.

"That is our home country, but I'm from Port Arthur," a defiant 14-year-old Peter Huynh tells Tran. He is sporting a fohawk and has been known to wander the classroom mid-lesson.

"You were born here, you were raised here, but you are..." Tran continues.

"American!" Huynh shouts, throwing his arms in the air.

"You are Vietnamese-American," Tran corrects him, though Huynh is not listening.

He is watching the clock: it's 11 a.m.

Huynh stands abruptly and moves toward a golden gong in the rear of the room. He thumps it with a drumstick, sending the students scattering. Break time.

History's lesson

Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese citizens fled their country after the fall of Saigon in 1975, when the communist-controlled North took over the American-aided South.

The U.S. government accepted many Vietnamese refugees during that time, attempting to relocate them evenly across the nation. Still, many ended up in California and Texas because the Vietnamese people preferred to be near water and in a warm climate.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of Vietnamese



Giuseppe Barranco/The Enterprise

Vietnamese Americans pray at the Buu Mon Buddhist Temple on Sunday.

refugees settled in Port Arthur, Beaumont and Orange, though few had any English language skills. Adults quickly learned they could move up from low-paying jobs if they spoke English and many tried. Learning English was difficult, as the Vietnamese language is made up of one-syllable words, and variations in pitch and tone can change a word's meaning.

Vietnamese parents knew their children needed to learn English to be successful in America, and many placed a strong emphasis on assimilation and education. But in their haste to see their children succeed, English was sometimes stressed at the expense of teaching them their native Vietnamese.

As a result, many first- and second-generation Vietnamese-Americans in Southeast Texas are confronted with the reverse of the problem they once had: Their children and grandchildren speak, read and write perfect English but have limited Vietnamese language skills.

My language, my culture

Educators and community leaders agree it's a problem because connection to one's culture and heritage is largely

tied to knowledge of the language. Certain things, they say, simply don't translate.

"There's actually a proverb in Vietnamese: 'If the language exists, the people exist,'" said Cindy Dinh, 22, who teaches Vietnamese to high schoolers and adults in Houston. "That really captures the need to preserve the language."

That's especially true for many who immigrated from South Vietnam, which has a distinct dialect that is dying with the elders who speak it.

"We don't want our heritage not to be remembered," said Charles Le, 40, the president of the Buu Mon Temple. "It's good to know what America is about, but it's bad when you let go of your culture."

Texas' Vietnamese-speaking population is second in size only to California's, now totaling about 154,000, with about 40 percent of those in nearby Harris County. Statewide the Vietnamese-speaking population has almost tripled since 1990.

But the size of the Vietnamese-speaking population in Jefferson County has fluctuated over the last 20 years, dropping to about 2,500 in recent years from 2,900 in 1990. And fewer Vietnamese who

were actually born in Vietnam are living in the county now than in 2000.

On Ninth Avenue in Port Arthur, a string of Vietnamese markets and restaurants offer the chance to read the labels on ethnic foods or order in restaurants, but only a couple of groups in Southeast Texas offer Vietnamese language classes.

Some schools and churches are dedicated to preserving and celebrating Vietnamese traditions, like music, dragon dancing and carnivals, especially this time of year during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year.

Why learn?

At the Sunday morning Vietnamese class at the Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church in Port Arthur, the highest-level class has six well-mannered students ages 12 to 14. They stand to greet classroom guests and recite the words and sounds their language teacher writes on the board in perfect unison.

Rules about good behavior and respecting the teacher are posted on the wall and cutout paper letters that spell "We follow Jesus" line the front whiteboard. All but one student grew up learning

Vietnamese.

When asked why they are taking the class, a few mumble their parents are making them.

But upon further reflection they say they want to be able to communicate with their grandparents, travel to Vietnam, shop at ethnic grocery stores, list the skill on job applications and avoid being taunted by their peers or reflecting poorly on their parents.

"You need to know Vietnamese because if you're hanging around with other Vietnamese people and they're speaking Vietnamese and you can't, they're going to start talking bad about you saying, 'How come you don't even know your own language?'" said 13-year-old Kevin Vu.

But sometimes those reasons aren't enough to hold the interest of older students, who say they are tired of learning after a long school week.

Linh Nguen, 16, is a student in the Buu Mon class and one of the more advanced speakers. The instructors hope she will start teaching soon, but she said she thinks this will be her last year in the class.

"At first when the idea came up, I was very excited to learn Vietnamese and know the language better," she said. "But right now..." she laughs softly and sighs. "Sometimes I'm like, 'Do I really have to go?'"

Tran, the teens' teacher, says she tries to keep the class interesting, making up creative fill-in-the-blank exercises, because she knows some of the kids don't use the language outside class unless their parents ask them to practice at home.

She's worried: "If they don't use it, they'll forget."

"I try to be funny sometimes, because they think it's boring," Tran said. "You don't want to be on top of them because they can give up easily. So we just try to be gentle and nice, not tough with them."

Potential for resurgence

Experts say it is not uncommon for interest in one's

identity and heritage to be low at the middle- and high-school levels. They say often it's not until college that students start exploring their family history and where they came from. At that age, learning a language is more difficult, though not impossible.

What might turn the linguistic tide, however, is a combination of factors: ease of communication in Vietnamese on the Internet, Houston ethnic radio stations reaching the population here and parental influence, said Tien Doan, who directs the language program at Queen of Vietnam.

Changes abroad also could prompt a resurgence in desire to learn Vietnamese, experts say.

Linda Ho Peche, who taught a course on Vietnamese-American history at UT Austin, says as Vietnam's economy continues to grow, it could one day become a major player in global markets. That would provide an incentive for more people to learn Vietnamese, she said. That has been the case in recent years with the Chinese language, as China grows in prominence.

And until the political climate in Vietnam stabilizes, people will continue to leave the country, said Madeline Hsu, who directs UT Austin's Center for Asian American Studies. Because new immigrants often look to settle where their friends and families live, established Vietnamese communities like those in Southeast Texas could see more native speakers.

But even if the community stays the same size, perhaps what could be most effective in preserving the Vietnamese language is instilling a sense of responsibility in today's youth to pass on their knowledge.

There are glimmers of hope this approach is working.

When asked what she planned to teach her children one day, Buu Mon student Tiffany Huynh, 16, responded without hesitation: "They're going to have to learn Vietnamese."

3-D SURGERY: It's a progression in minimally invasive surgery that supplanted open surgery

Continued from page 1A

tissue planes that cannot be well appreciated in 2-D," Peel, who owns the Preivity Clinic in Beaumont, said. "3-D makes for a potentially safer dissection, especially with complex anatomy."

Surgeons say the new technology, which is becoming more common in teaching hospitals, gives them a better view of the procedure and allows them to be more precise in their techniques.

And yes, they wear 3-D glasses.

Three-dimensional surgery is a progression in minimally invasive surgery, which has replaced open surgery and now is the norm in most hospitals.

Minimally invasive, or laparoscopic, surgery involves making a tiny — approximately one centimeter, or four tenths of an inch — incision in the body and inserting a miniature camera and surgical instruments inside the patient, said Dr. Iumy Torres-Barja, a general surgeon in Beaumont.

The procedure is benefi-

What's next?

Although 3-D technology hasn't quite taken over operating rooms across the country, Dr. Sami Kilic, an obstetrician, gynecologist and surgeon at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, said it might not take long for that to happen.

Nanotechnology might not be too far behind, he said. Nanotechnology allows doctors to reach specific cells.

Today, Kilic said cancer

patients get chemotherapy and many lose their hair in the process. That's because the medication kills cancer cells and normal cells.

Using nanotechnology, doctors will only deliver medication to the cancer cells, he said.

The technology is spreading fast, he said, and Hong Kong currently is the leader in nanotechnology. Houston is working to take over, he said, and a lot of research projects are in the works in the area.

cial for the patient because their recovery time is shorter, they don't have large scars and they usually experience less blood loss, said Dr. Sam Kilic, an obstetrician, gynecologist and surgeon at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston.

Most surgeons prefer the laparoscopic approach because they have better depth perception, Kilic said.

Additionally, surgeons are able to stand in more comfortable positions because

they don't have to bend over a patient's body as much as they would in open surgery.

During laparoscopic procedures such as an appendectomy, a surgeon inflates the patient's stomach with carbon dioxide, which stretches the skin and gives the surgeon more space to work with, Torres-Barja said.

The camera magnifies the organs and the instruments, and that image is displayed on a flat-screen high-definition television monitor in

front of the surgeon.

The technique makes it easier for surgeons to see the organs inside the body, she said, especially in obese patients where fat sometimes can get in the way.

The future

While it's effective, 3-D technology is relatively new, Kilic said, so there still is room for improvement.

That, and its high cost likely has limited 3-D technology to medical classrooms and a select few hospitals across the country.

High cost is why Torres-Barja said she doesn't expect the equipment to replace current technology anytime soon.

But Kilic isn't so sure. At UTMB he uses 3-D robotic technology which allows him to perform an operation without touching the patient.

One part of the robot gets close to the patient, and its arms are connected to the surgical instruments, called trocars, inside the patient's belly.

The console the surgeon uses to operate on the patient usually is in the same operating room, about 10 or 15 feet away from the patient, Kilic said.

The surgeon uses a joystick to control the robot's arms, and looks through what Kilic compared to binoculars. That gives the surgeon a 3-D view of the operation, he said.

The technology came about at the request of the U.S. Army, he said. They wanted the ability to operate on wounded soldiers overseas from the United States.

Kilic offered a similar approach to NASA because in the future they plan to send their astronauts into space longer, he said.

Kilic's working on a study where he measures the time it takes a surgeon to perform a laparoscopic procedure and comparing that to the time it takes the surgeon to perform the same procedure using 3-D technology for the first time.

In most cases, their 3-D time is the same as their normal time, he said, which shows most surgeons are

quickly able to learn 3-D techniques.

Westborough, Mass.-based Viking Systems brought its 3D HD equipment to Baptist Hospital last week for a trial. The Food and Drug Administration cleared the company's system in September, said Rob Tierney, its vice president for U.S. sales.

Baptist is in the process of bringing the technology to the hospital, Peel said.

Although the technology is more expensive than traditional 2-D laparoscopic scopes and monitors, the cost falls on the hospital, not the patient or the insurance company, Peel said.

Other hospitals in the area do not have the technology.

The system Peel used at Baptist was the company's fourth iteration of developing 3-D technology for the operating room, Tierney said.

"We may have reached the pinnacle of our technology by delivering high definition cameras," he said. "We're going to have to create a fourth dimension to improve."