

## The Woodlands area continues to grow

Since I moved here more than 25 years ago, it's amazing to see the growth in and around The Woodlands area.

When I moved to the Village of Alden Bridge in 1995, Research Forest Drive stopped at Alden Bridge, and we had few neighbors on our street. The carousel at The Woodlands Mall was the major attraction, and we went to dances at the Gorilla Hole.

Now when you drive around The Woodlands, it is fairly built-out, and new communities are coming alive along the Grand Parkway. Shenandoah is also growing, with multifamily complexes slated for early 2020. We cover these and

other current trends in our annual Real Estate Edition (see Page 34) this month.

Education needs to evolve statewide along with this growth. With the signing of House Bill 3 this session, Conroe ISD prepares to handle additional funding and address issues such as mandating full-day pre-K programs.

Another legislative item this year named a section of I-45 after the late George Mitchell, founder of The Woodlands, who would have turned 100 in May. Turn to Page 63 to learn how his name lives on through Mitchell's many passions.

Thank you for being a valued reader.



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George Mitchell's namesakes

## HISTORY

BY VANESSA HOLT

# George Mitchell's namesakes

## Woodlands founder remembered at centenary

Residents of The Woodlands may be familiar with the name of entrepreneur George P. Mitchell, who founded the community in 1974. But some who knew him said they hope the public institutions named after him—including, most recently, a section of I-45—will serve to remind residents of his vision for a sustainable master-planned community.

Mitchell, who died in 2013, would have turned 100 on May 21, and The Woodlands also reaches a milestone this year, marking 45 years as a community in October. Having amassed wealth as the founder of Mitchell Energy and Development Corp. in the mid-20th century, Mitchell was known for pioneering a successful approach—fracking—to extract natural gas from shale. But locally, he is known for bringing his community vision to fruition with the development of The Woodlands.

"He wanted to revitalize living in the greater metropolitan area. ... Cities were rotting, and this was something to refresh the area," said Steve Leakey, a member of George's Coffee Club, a nonprofit group dedicated to bringing about community awareness of Mitchell's contributions.

On June 10, Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law House Bill 2571, a piece of legislation written by state Rep. Steve Toth, R-Woodlands, and Rep. Will Metcalf, R-Conroe, and sponsored by state Sen. Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe. The bill designates the portion of I-45 between Hwy. 242 and the Montgomery-Harris county line as the George P. Mitchell Memorial Highway in recognition of his contribution to the area.

Although The Woodlands started with just a few hundred residents and has grown to about 115,000, according to 2017 U.S. Census Bureau data.

Roger Galatas, former president of The Woodlands Corp., said while Mitchell was involved in the creation of numerous public entities within The Woodlands, including the nonprofit research group Houston Advanced Research Center and social service agency Interfaith of The Woodlands, only a few bear his name.

An intermediate school on Conroe ISD, a county library, a performing arts center and a nature preserve are named for Mitchell and his wife, Cynthia Woods Mitchell. Another milestone, the 40th anniversary of the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, was celebrated by the arts venue in April.

Mitchell also emphasized sustainability and natural preservation in developing the community, and he set aside a large portion for open space with an eye to preserving natural habitat and wildflowers, Galatas said. George Mitchell Nature Preserve opened in South Montgomery in 2007.

"There's 25% in open space [in The Woodlands], and that was very important to him, to live with nature," he said.

With the addition of I-45 as The Woodlands founder's latest namesake, his former associates said his significance to the community can be recognized by more people traveling in and through the area.

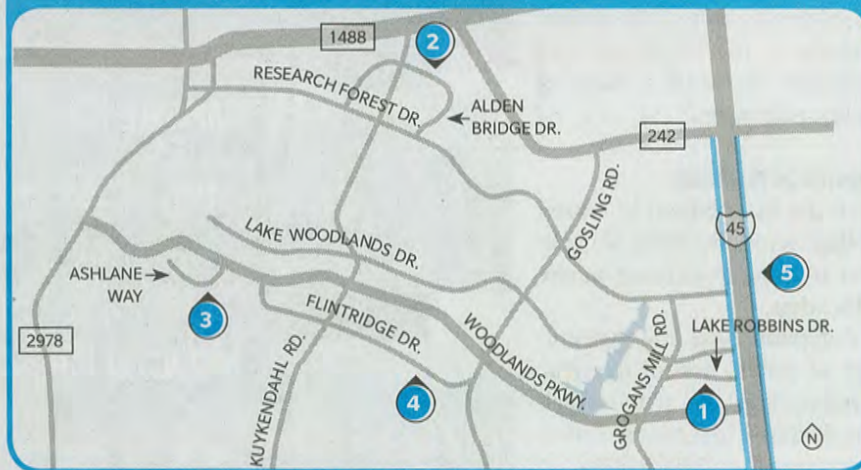
"He was the ultimate visionary, looking ahead and to see ... the future," said Karen West, a friend and former attorney for The Woodlands Corp.

## What's in a name?

### GEORGE MITCHELL



Before settling on The Woodlands as a name for his community development, George Mitchell considered several names, including Cross Timbers, according to former associate Coulson Tough. The Mitchell name can be found on various other local landmarks, now including a portion of I-45.



- 1 Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion**  
The arts center, named after George Mitchell's wife, opened in 1979.
- 2 George P. Mitchell Intermediate School**  
The Conroe ISD school serves grades five and six and opened in 1996.
- 3 George and Cynthia Woods Mitchell Library**  
The local branch of the Montgomery County Memorial Library System on Ashlane Way opened in 2005.
- 4 George Mitchell Nature Preserve**  
The 1,800-acre preserve that opened in 2007 connects to the Spring Creek Greenway and features hiking trails.
- 5 George P. Mitchell Memorial Highway**  
Legislation signed by Gov. Greg Abbott this year names a portion of I-45 in The Woodlands area after the community founder.