

Center near Liberty, between Houston and Beaumont. But she'll be the first to tell you that she's only one of many who are making Phillips' recovery possible.

"Somehow we all got the memo independently of one another," Lange says. "And then somehow we all found each other. What are the odds?"

There was no actual memo, of course. But indeed, several people in the same corner of Texas had a similar idea around the same time.

At the outset, none of them knew each other—or even about each other. They were simply focused on the same goal: to support veterans by providing them with tiny homes. Their collaboration has no name. There's no one in charge. But it has yielded something much greater than the sum of its parts.

**Humble Beginnings**

Allen Segura, who recently retired as assistant principal and director of career and technology education for Summer Creek High School, says the idea to integrate building tiny homes into the Humble school district's curriculum came from a bout of insomnia in 2018.

"Late one night I was scrolling through Facebook and saw some people in St. Louis who were building tiny homes for homeless veterans," Segura remembers. "And the simple thought came: 'I wonder if our students could do that?'"

He bounced the idea off James Gaylord and Missi Taylor, who teach CTE classes in construction, architecture and design at high schools in Humble, a Houston suburb whose name is pronounced "Umble." They were in.

"We had been teaching these classes for years, but it was mostly theoretical," Segura says. "Actually building houses would not only let them put what they're learning into practice, it would also help them understand the importance of serving others."

Under the supervision of the three educators, the students developed a presentation and pitched it to Superintendent Elizabeth Fagen, who took it to the school board for approval. Thus, in 2018, Humble ISD's Big Heroes, Tiny Homes program was born.

**Safe Haven**

Meanwhile, about 40 minutes east of Humble, Lange, a retired social worker, was teaching leadership and environmental sustainability at the retreat center she and her husband built in 2004.

Their doors have always been open to people in crisis. They housed numerous people after Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005. They took in referrals from Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare, a community-based nonprofit serving those living with mental illness and intellectual disabilities. More recently, Lange had begun working with several Veterans of Foreign Wars chapters in an effort to address the crisis of homelessness among veterans.

"I had already started converting a shipping container into a tiny home for one of the veterans I was assisting when I came across a newspaper article about Missi," Lange remembers. "A VFW volunteer named Mark Bowen said, 'Barbara, why don't you go to Kingwood Park and tell those people that they can give us the houses?'"

Never one to leave a stone unturned, Lange went to visit the teachers in Humble. Once they saw her vast experience and her devotion to veterans, the district agreed to donate their tiny homes to Lange's effort.

**Power Source**

Since 2005, Operation Finally Home has been improving and constructing mortgage-free homes for wounded veterans, first responders and their families. But it wasn't until spring 2020 that Lee Kirgan, vice president of project management for OFH, learned about Humble ISD's big idea and suggested to President Rusty Carroll that they consider



**Swearing In!** Gina Williams (center), Interim County Tax Assessor/Collector, performed the swearing-in ceremonies for her deputies, Paul Pineda (left), and Brandi Sawyer, on Monday, December 18, 2023, in the District Courtroom of the Coke County Courthouse in Robert Lee.



**Story Time!** On Wednesday, December 13, 2023, the '64 Study Club hosted the monthly Library Story Time at Robert Lee Care Center with the residents and children from the community. Those in attendance learned what snowpeople eat and what they do at night while they are sleeping from the book "Snowmen at Night" by Caralyn Buehner

getting involved.

Six months later, Carroll surprised Segura with the news that OFH, based in New Braunfels, had secured a grant from big-box retailer Lowe's,

which would provide all the building materials for Big Heroes, Tiny Homes for the foreseeable future.

"Humble ISD had a vision to build tiny homes for homeless

veterans, but they didn't have a sustainable way to source the materials," Carroll says. "By partnering them with Lowe's, we were able to lengthen their runway." (Continued on page 7)

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