

TASTE

THE BEST 25 S.A. RESTAURANT DISHES OF 2020



EXPRESS-NEWS ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

AUDIO: Remembering Chuck Yeager through excerpts from a 2011 interview with reporter Sig Christenson. ExpressNews.com/Yeager



S.A. LIFE

Even the pandemic failed to erase the city's arts scene. **E1**

San Antonio Express-News

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Sunny: High 74, Low 53

Teachers feel stuck in no-win scenario

Pandemic's challenges leave them overwhelmed

By **Andres Picon**
STAFF WRITER

Adrian Reyna's role in the San Antonio Independent School District hasn't changed in 10 years, but since the start of the pandemic nearly 10 months ago, the nature of his job has become nearly unrecognizable.

A history teacher at Longfellow Middle School, Reyna, 33, wears a plastic pod that fits around his head and torso to work to shield him from airborne

particles carrying the coronavirus.

He never imagined his job would put him at risk of becoming infected to the point that he would feel the need to wear a bubble every day. But given the pandemic and his proximity to students, it's the only way he feels somewhat safe.

Reyna's difficult new reality is one shared by thousands of schoolteachers in Bexar County.

Throughout the fall semester, they reported grave frustrations with the way

school reopenings were being handled, as well as anguish about the draining high-risk, low-reward situation in which they and their students found themselves.

The severity of these concerns has varied from district to district and even campus to campus.

As a group, though, teachers have had to contend with shifting safety protocols, battles with administrators, overwhelming workloads and the expectation that their stu-

Teachers continues on A26



Luke Amphlett, an SAISD teacher, was placed on administrative leave earlier in the semester after speaking up at a faculty meeting about staff concerns.

Kin Man Hui / Staff photographer

Much smoke, little fire on voter fraud

By **Taylor Goldenstein**
AUSTIN BUREAU

AUSTIN – The Texas attorney general's office spent nearly twice as much time working on voter fraud cases this year as it did in 2018, logging more than 22,000 staff hours, yet resolved just 16 prosecutions – half as many as two years ago, records show.

All 16 cases involved Harris County residents who gave false addresses on their voter registration forms. None of them received any jail time.

Attorney General Ken Paxton, who has made the hunt for voter fraud a top priority, between January and October gave the election integrity unit access to eight additional law enforcement sergeants on top of the nine already assigned to it.

Also, he doubled the number of prosecutors to four, according to records obtained by nonprofit government watchdog American Oversight and shared with Hearst Newspapers.

In its 15 years of existence, the unit has prosecuted a few dozen cases in which offenders received jail time, none of them involving widespread fraud.

Paxton's approach to the issue is the same as that of other top Texas Republicans – including Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Gov. Greg Abbott, who earlier this month backed the attorney general's last-ditch election suit at the Supreme Court challenging President-elect Joe Biden's win in four battleground states.

That approach is to relentlessly insist voter fraud is a major concern, while citing no evidence it's prevalent.

Fraud continues on A29

Having 'The Right Stuff' was automatic for Yeager



USAF photo

Gen. Chuck Yeager is seen in the cockpit of an F-15 at Edwards AFB in California. Yeager, the first man to break the sound barrier, died at age 97 on Dec. 7.

Famed pilot wasn't comfortable with being idolized

By **Sig Christenson**
STAFF WRITER

There was no warning when Chuck Yeager indulged in a moment of sentimentality after we landed one day in 2000 at Stinson Municipal Airport.

As we taxied back in a P-51 Mustang, he spoke of his late wife, Glennis, saying he didn't think he'd ever find anyone like her again.

In the couple of years I'd known the retired brigadier general – an American legend – Yeager never had said anything so personal.

Getting personal wasn't his way. Charles Elwood Yeager, who died Dec. 7 at 97, had a crusty exterior.

Close calls, combat and death might have made him that way. Yeager was a World War II double ace who survived a shoot-down and escape from Nazi-occupied France.

He well might have been, as



File photo

Yeager was a World War II double ace who survived being shot down and then having to escape from Nazi-occupied France.

he said, "just a kid that did his duty" when he made history in 1947 as a 24-year-old captain by shattering the sound barrier in that Bell X-1 rocket plane.

But Yeager was no simple country boy from West Virginia a half-century later, when we first spoke.

Many who met him continued to admire him. He was a highly intelligent, courageous and complex individual. But the ones who said he was rude were not wrong.

Perhaps the worst thing in the world is to be disappointed by your heroes. At the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg some years ago, an older man approached and said: "I just want to shake your hand."

Yeager reluctantly extended his arm, leaving his fan visibly crestfallen.

I told Yeager he'd offended the man, who perhaps had expected to see him as the actor Sam Shepard portrayed him in

His continues on A24

Trump's rage has jobless benefits in limbo

By **Alexandra Olson and Jill Colvin**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. – Unemployment benefits for millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet were set to lapse at midnight Saturday unless President Donald Trump signed a COVID-19 relief and spending bill that had been considered a done deal before his sudden objections.

Trump's refusal to sign the bipartisan package as he demands larger COVID-19 relief checks and complains about "pork" spending also could force a federal government shutdown when money runs out at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday in the middle of a pandemic.

"It's a chess game and we are pawns," said Lanetris Haines, a self-employed single mother of three in South Bend, Ind., who stands to lose her \$129 weekly jobless benefit unless Trump signs the package into law or succeeds in his improbable quest for changes.

Washington has been reeling since Trump threw the package into limbo after it already had won sweeping approval in both houses of Congress and after the White House assured Republican leaders that Trump would support it.

Instead, he has assailed the bill's plan to provide \$600 COVID-19 relief checks to most Americans – insisting it should be \$2,000.

House Republicans swiftly rejected that idea during a rare Christmas Eve session. But Trump wasn't swayed.

"I simply want to get our great people \$2,000, rather than the measly \$600 that is now in the bill," Trump tweeted Saturday from Palm Beach, Fla., where he's

Trump continues on A26

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*BASED ON 2019 SALES DATA FROM MFGS FOR COMPETING DEALERS.

FROM THE COVER



Courtesy photo

Chuck Yeager is seen with the Bell X-1 rocket plane in which he broke the sound barrier in 1947. The aircraft was named after his late wife, Glennis.

His 'Right Stuff' was automatic

From page A1

"The Right Stuff." Yeager gruffly dismissed the idea.

That's not how he saw himself. Yeager didn't mind being a celebrity on occasion, but I always sensed it was ill-suited to his personality. He never seemed comfortable with the way he was idolized.

Our last meeting, in California in 2011, was our longest and best interview. Yeager understood I was there to get material for his obituary, and we touched on a wide range of topics that included his views on religion and his funeral plans.

Hint: Don't look for an Air Force missing-man formation.

The iconic Yeager streaked to immortality without orbiting the earth or flying to the moon. He did it with a high school education, securing a place in the pantheon of colorful American heroes by relying on a deep well of talent, experience and grit. The writer Tom Wolfe called that combination "The Right Stuff."

Sig Christenson

Audio of the interview is at ExpressNews.com. Here are excerpts, with clarifying notes in parenthesis, from an extensive interview with Yeager, then 88, conducted near his home in Nevada County, Calif., in 2011.

A lifetime

Christenson: *You seem to have one of the most amazing lives of anyone I know. Like yesterday I was saying what happened in the Pyrenees after you were shot down is a whole lifetime in and of itself.*

Yeager: Well, yeah, and that's the only reason I'm the only Air Force pilot that has a Bronze Star with a V in it, because that's for ground combat with the enemy. And when we got jumped by this patrol and we were in this cabin, they started shooting through the cabin, then all hell broke loose.

The navigator I had with me, actually as he jumped through the window, a bullet hit his knee on the right leg and he fell and I drug him over to a trough that was full of snow that they used to slide logs all the way down the hill into a river. I threw him in this slide and jumped in after him and noticed when we got to the river it dumped us in, this real cold water, and I swam and drug him to the bank and



Isaac Brekken / Associated Press file photo

In this photo from 2010, Yeager steps into an F-15D at Nellis AFB, Nev., for a re-enactment flight commemorating his breaking of the sound barrier 65 years earlier.

looked, the bottom part from the knee down was just being held by that big tendon in your leg.

I took a pen knife out and cut it off, and it was so cold and snow and icy, that he didn't bleed to death. I put a tourniquet on it and squeezed it tight. Anyway, I drug him all night and then down to Spain, put him on the road and then I left him. I took off and the (Guardia Civil) picked him up and took him to a hospital and they took off some more of his leg, and then a couple of weeks later he was repatriated back to the United States. I never did see him any-

more because I went back on combat.

Q: *That's just one story in your life. Do you ever get philosophical about what you've done?*

A: No. I usually don't pay attention to the things in the past unless I learned a lesson, you know?

Q: *Where does that come from, your attitude about that?*

A: Well, probably nowhere. See, having a dad like me and my big brother did, he was a guy that was very honest and he was in the drilling business and like, Colum-

bia Natural Gas Co. would come to him and say, "Would you drill a well up here on this lease, usually on top of a mountain, and how much would you charge to drill a well 3,000 feet deep?" ... They'd shake hands, you know, no paperwork, no nothing, and that's the way it was and most of the companies were that way, too. So we picked up that trait from dad. He was a very honest guy and he didn't screw around.

Q: *Do you have a high point in your life, something you're most proud about?*

A: No, you do things like breaking the sound barrier. It's just you're at the right place at the right time and you've got the capability of doing it. And so you succeed. That's about the way you look at it.

Q: *You always like to hunt and fish and camp. Can you tell people why you enjoyed that so much?*

A: We enjoyed the country and when we flew over it, the high Sierras, we knew every damned tree and rock and lake in the Sierras because we flew over them all the time. And backpacking, you're in the wilderness area and you don't see anybody, hardly, and basically golden trout are delicious and it's a challenge.

Q: *These days, tell folks what you're doing.*

A: Sitting here being bothered by a goddamned reporter. No, I still got friends, I fly different airplanes around and I go fishing down in Mexico or I go fishing in Alaska every time the opportunity presents itself. I work on my guns, reload ammunition.

"The Right Stuff"

Q: *Did they come to you when (another pilot declined to fly) the X-1 or did you volunteer to fly it?*

A: No. When (the Air Force) took over the program from NACA, then Gen. (Albert) Boyd (the chief of the Flight Test Division) called for volunteers. Well, hell, all the guys volunteered because it looked like an interesting program.

... And I wasn't a test pilot, I was a maintenance officer, but that meant I flew every airplane that my maintenance people were working on.

Q: *When you listened to the sounds a plane makes, is that the best part of your flight test, being in sync with the plane and how it's working?*

A: No. Basically, you can detect machinery that is failing, just like you've got 12 spark plugs in a Packard-built Merlin engine. If one of them's not firing, you can feel it in the engine.

Q: *In the movie, people saw you as fearless.*

A: Well, that's not true. Don't believe what you see in movies. You know, don't be stupid. Hell, I



Robert Mora / Getty Images file photo

In June 2003, Yeager attended a special 20th anniversary screening of the movie "The Right Stuff" at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood.



Staff file photo

While in San Antonio for a reunion of the 357th Fighter Group, Yeager chatted with admirers while standing on a wing of a P-51 Mustang.

FROM THE COVER

never risked my goddamn neck.

Q: Really?

A: I figured everything pretty well out, that if I didn't like something, I backed off. I didn't do it just because the test card said to do it.

... When the risk builds up high enough you say, "Hey, if I go farther I stand a good chance of busting my ass." So, you back off.

Q: One of the best pieces of advice came from you when we were at Edwards AFB in 1997 for your retirement as a \$1-a-year test pilot. A girl there asked how you find a career and you said, "Find something you like and you'll probably be good at it."

A: The guys that are good at their jobs usually enjoy them.

... And if you don't like your job, what the hell are you working for?

Q: With "The Right Stuff," you became famous to a new generation of Americans, but I have also seen that you don't really enjoy your celebrity status so much.

A: Well, what do you mean, the movie?

... In the way Tom Wolfe wrote "The Right Stuff," he pretty much picked out the important parts, you know the things that were mysterious and exciting for the reader. Tom, he's a marvelous writer but he's not a technical guy.

In the air

Q: Was flying combat the most favorite part of your flying all those years?

A: Well, combat is the reason you're trained. And obviously when you accomplish it, you're fulfilling why they trained you. And see, you may be successful, but for every guy like yourself who was successful, there's a half a dozen that died. That's one of the reasons a lot of the guys aren't successful, because they get killed.

Q: You've lived a long time. ... Do you worry about the direction we are going as a country?

A: I can't do anything about it. If I can't do anything about something, I forget it.

Q: If I boiled down the type of man I think you are, I would say practical.

A: Well, basically, that's the way I was raised, you know.

Q: You once told someone there is no such thing as a natural-born pilot but people often see you as just that.

A: The guy that's got the most experience is the best. That's true in every nationality. ... The best pilots I've ever flown with are Pakistani. ... Because they fly the most. And they were flying about six different types of airplanes.

Q: I forgot to ask this, but you're still working at Edwards. You're going down there periodically?

A: Yeah. Sort of a consultant deal, not as much as I used to because I don't fly anymore down there except in the open house air shows, and I always fly with an (instructor pilot) because that's the regulations and that's the way it should be.

... You don't put your butt in the back seat of a modern airplane with a hot rod pilot flying it because it's a damned good way to get killed because a guy wants to impress you, you know? So I'm very careful about who I fly with.

Q: You tested in-flight refueling, didn't you?

A: Well, we developed it and we used it. I've made half a dozen flights to Taiwan, across the Pacific in F-100s, F-4s, also to Norway and Germany, take a whole squadron.

... The only thing we have changed, we didn't have the navigation facilities to take us to where the tankers were so you had to eyeball it – fly a heading for two hours and then start looking. Now your communications with INFC, tankers can give their latitude and longitude, you put it in your navigation system, takes you right to them. In the old days it was different, but that's the way evolution is.

Q: Do you think you'll quit flying?

A: When I can't pass the physical.

... I never smoked. I might drink a beer once a month or something like that, but I don't drink wine or don't drink booze, don't have to. I think smoking is what gets most guys. What was interesting when I deployed to Korea over the Pueblo flap with 75 F-4s, each F-4 had two pilots in it and I used to have my crew chief keep a record of the amount of liquid oxygen they serviced their airplanes with after the



Staff file photo

Famed flyer Chuck Yeager answers questions during an interview session in San Antonio in 1999.

trip and you can just go through the plot and pick out the smokers. They use twice as much oxygen as a nonsmoker.

Q: Wow. Did you drink moderately when you were younger?

A: When we were in combat we drank too much.

... If you're flying combat, you don't get drunk the night before. You can't hack it.

Q: Before you took off, were you nervous?

A: No. Why, hey, no, that's not the way it is. You've been briefed, you know, and it's a way of life.

Q: When you were doing that, were in a zone, you knew how the other guy was going to react, you anticipated him. ...

A: No, I don't know what he was going to do. But you'd better be prepared to counteract it. Some guys were easy and others were hard, you know.

Q: I think you've had to bail out three times? Do I have that number right?

A: Well, P-39 I bailed out of, the P-51 and NF-104. Yeah, three of them.

Q: What is that like? Can you explain that?

A: No. No. You got an ejection seat or you jettison the canopy, crawl over the side, freefall, pull the D ring and the parachute opens. That's it.

Q: It sounds like if I have to boil this down, to you, it's a procedure. ...

A: Well, you've been trained. You know the procedures. See, you don't just jump in an airplane and fly it, you damned well have to know it.

Q: This is the question I think will irritate you the most, but it's about NASA. When I think of the astronauts NASA selected, you would have been as good as any of those people.

A: I didn't have a college education. All I had was a high school ed-



Yeager receives a plaque from the National Defense Industrial Association in October 2002.

ucation.

Q: That's such a bad reason.

A: Not necessarily so. You know, most of the NASA astronauts never really flew their vehicle. It was all controlled from Houston.

Q: The movie and I guess the modern perception here is that you kind of got a screw job from NASA.

A: I didn't, I was training the guys. And the Air Force was doing the research at Edwards for the space program.

Q: So you were happy with that?

A: Well, you have no choice. See, in '65, from 1960-65 the Air Force had complete responsibility for space. If you'd read the history of NASA, they took everything we had, our simulators, our money and turned it over to NASA in 1965 because it didn't want the military in space. That's just common – that just shows how chicken some of the leaders were.

Q: So you don't wish you have ever flown in space?

A: No, I have no bones about not making space. It would have been interesting. The sight maybe would have been interesting to see



Ron Siddle / Associated Press file photo

but I had more fun than they did, so.

Q: Were there any astronauts you liked?

A: Well, sure. Sig, if you'd read the book, I trained 26 of them.

Q: From my own perspective, I would love to see them put you on a shuttle, but it's too late for that.

A: Well, hey, I don't want any part of it.

... I don't try to do things that I see as impossible.

... It's just like Walter Cronkite. When they took (John) Glenn up the second time (on the Space Shuttle Discovery in 1998), he wanted me to go on (his CBS) program with him. ... And I said, "Walter, they're taking John Glenn up there. Why?" "Well, this is a lot of research, you know, in age and things like that," and I said, "The only thing they'll get out of it is how many Metamucil tablets we'll see he takes in space."

The inevitable

Q: How would you want people to remember you?

A: It doesn't make a rat's ass to me. I'll be dead anyway. What difference does it make?

Q: This is an odd question to

bring up, but since this is about your obituary story – and you may outlive me – are you planning to have a funeral or service or anything?

A: No. I'm going to be cremated and my ashes scattered in the High Sierras over some lake.

Q: No service? They're going to want to have a big one for you, you know?

A: Why?

Q: You are, whether you see it or not, you are somebody who has lived an extraordinary life and people are going to want to celebrate that, and God knows some politicians are going to want to glom onto it so they can get into the reflected glory.

A: Well, good luck!

Q: So you're not going to let them have a big service at Arlington or a missing man flyover of F-15Es?

A: Why? It's just a waste of money!

... There are 41 streets at Edwards named after dead pilots. Forty of them are dead. They named a street after me and I'm still alive. ... I took 21 of them home. And it's really difficult to stand there talking to some kid's father and mother, and he's in a box and you're standing there alive. Why? You can't explain it, you know. All you can say is the guy did what he loved.

Q: You remember (Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton) the Thunderbird, a four-star general?

... He told me that when he was a congressional liaison, he took some people out of Washington to fly with the Thunderbirds. They were delayed one day because of some problem with a connecting flight. The next morning, all five of those aircraft flew and crashed.

A: Four. T-38s. And really, it's the god damned lead (pilot). What they did, I was director of safety, I investigated the damned accident. (The crash occurred in 1982.) And what they did, they took it into a diamond, did a loop and while they were inverted they put them in an echelon and the leader wasn't paying much attention, got the nose too low, tried to pull out, he was too low to pull out, and he hit the ground and killed all four of them. ... I tried to get the chief of staff to give the mission that the Thunderbirds do to a different fighter wing every year ... because they are the real Air Force.

Q: All those flights you were in, all the danger you were exposed to, did you feel you were protected?

A: By who?... Yeah, I was baptized, but I most certainly don't believe anything that doesn't have technical evidence, so you can figure that out yourself.

Q: You're not religious –

A: I know right from wrong and that's what I was taught. I don't believe that there's a life ever after because there's no evidence that it exists. And it really ticks you off seeing these damned television (evangelists), saying send half your paycheck because without God you wouldn't have got your paycheck, and the poor people are the ones that respond.



USAF photo

This photograph from 1962 was taken at the Test Pilot School that Yeager commanded at Edwards AFB. He also instructed several of America's astronauts.