

The VOICES of

CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND™

Inside /
CEO Update • Christmas Home Tour
• Monthly Spotlights and MORE!



December 2025

contents

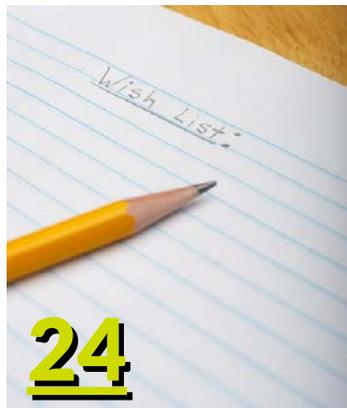


Keeping you informed on our mission:

Strengthen the Child's Voice, Heal the Hurt, and Break the Cycle of Abuse and Neglect for Children and Families in Fort Bend and surrounding counties.



MONTHLY SPOTLIGHTS



NEEDS + OPPORTUNITIES

NEWS + FEATURES

3 FROM THE CEO

CEO Ruthanne Mefford shares what we are up to this month

5 CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR

Get all the details...

6 FEATURE STORY

THE GIFT OF GRACE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Slow down and be intentional this holiday season

7 MONTHLY SPOTLIGHTS

see what we've been up to...

14 CAP-C CORNER

Thank you to our partners in prevention

15 NEEDS + OPPORTUNITIES

Check out what we need this month and how you can help us

18 SAVE THESE DATES

Save these dates and plan to join us for these upcoming events



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WWW.CAFB.ORG



from the ceo

Welcome to our December issue of VOICES. . . .

Welcome friends,

We have much to celebrate this holiday season. Our 34th annual Christmas Home Tour is coming up this Friday and Saturday and will showcase four beautifully decorated homes throughout our community. We expect over 1600 guests to visit the homes over two beautiful days, to be dazzled by the gorgeous decorations and learn about child abuse. As our largest public event, the Home Tour provides a unique opportunity to educate the community about abuse, how to protect children and the prevention of child abuse. It is a magical tour. We thank our many sponsors and supporters and the over 800 volunteers who help us raise \$200,000 over the two-day event.

We expect this year's Toy Distribution to be the largest ever with over 250 gifts, bikes and toys donated by our generous donors and distributed to the delight of our children. It is

a joy to see the smiles and even tears of gratitude and hear the stories: "This is my first bike", "I've never received any gifts just for me." "I can't wait to open all these packages!"

The holiday season is often a time of celebration, family get-togethers, and gift sharing. But it can also increase the risk of child abuse due to factors like increased stress, alcohol use, and disruptions to routine. On a positive note, it can provide an opportunity to be proactive about prevention. Parents and caregivers can protect children by discussing personal boundaries, limiting one-on-one situations with unfamiliar adults, being alert to signs of abuse, and being mindful of online dangers. Children who have experienced trauma may also find the holidays challenging, so maintaining some routine and being understanding is important.

-more



For children in foster care, the holidays can be a difficult time, and they may feel lonely or vulnerable. Look inside for information on how we can support our children during the holidays, keep them safe, and create special memories.

As we close out 2025, I want to thank our donors whose generosity and continued support have allowed us to continue to serve our children without interruption when the need is so great. Thank you to our volunteers whose dedication is unmatched in your advocacy for our children, leadership on our board of directors and councils and incredible teamwork with our staff.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to my staff who demonstrate every day your commitment to uplifting our children and going the extra mile so that the children are safe, healthy, achieve their goals and realize their dreams. Our theme in 2025 was "Better Together" and we are truly thankful to all of you who joined us in working together to realize wonderful outcomes for our children.

For The Children's Sake,

Ruthanne

Ruthanne Mefford, CEO





HOME TOUR

Presented by Fred and Mabel R. Parks Foundation

STARTS FRIDAY - December 5 & 6, 2025

Friday, December 5th ~ 10am - 4pm and 6pm - 9pm

Saturday, December 6th ~ 10am - 4pm

It is not too late to be a part of our fundraiser

WE need YOU!

- **Be a SPONSOR**
and join us for the party on December 2.
- **Purchase your TICKET**
to see four gorgeous homes in Fort Bend County!
- **VOLUNTEER in a home!**
please visit our website to sign up!
- **Check out the items for purchase or raffle**
on our website and on the Home Tour.



[CLICK HERE](#) 

Or scan the QR code
to participate TODAY!



FEATURE STORY

The Gift of Time and Grace This Holiday Season

By Jheri Walters, LCSW-S

As the holiday season approaches, many of us feel the pull to do more, shop more, decorate more, and create the “perfect” celebration for our families. But this season is also a reminder of the most meaningful gift we can give: the gift of time and grace.

At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, we work with children who have experienced trauma. Children who may not have family nearby, who are grieving, or who face challenges that make the holidays complicated. For them, and for all of us, the simplest, most profound gift is presence. Spending a few extra minutes listening, playing, or just being there can make an enormous difference.

This is also a time to give yourself grace. It's easy to fall into the trap of comparing your holiday preparations to what you see on social media or what others seem to be doing. Remember: your version of “enough” is enough. Limiting comparison allows you to grow where you are planted and create healthy boundaries for yourself and others.

Here are some easy ways to embrace this mindset:

- **Give your time intentionally:** Volunteer at a local shelter, read to children in a hospital, or simply schedule a special hour with your own children to play a game or bake together.
- **Simplify gift giving:** Focus on meaningful, low-stress gifts such as a handwritten note, a small homemade treat, or a shared experience rather than striving for extravagant purchases.
- **Set boundaries:** Decide how much decorating, shopping, or socializing feels manageable for you. It's okay to say no to events that drain you or don't align with your family's values.
- **Practice self-compassion:** If a project isn't perfect, if a gift is late, or if your table isn't Pinterest-perfect—let it go. Celebrate what you did accomplish rather than dwelling on what you didn't.

When we slow down, prioritize connection over perfection, and treat ourselves kindly, we can truly embrace the spirit of the season. Your time, your presence, and your grace are gifts that last far longer than anything that comes from a store.





monthly spotlights

updates from the programs and MORE!

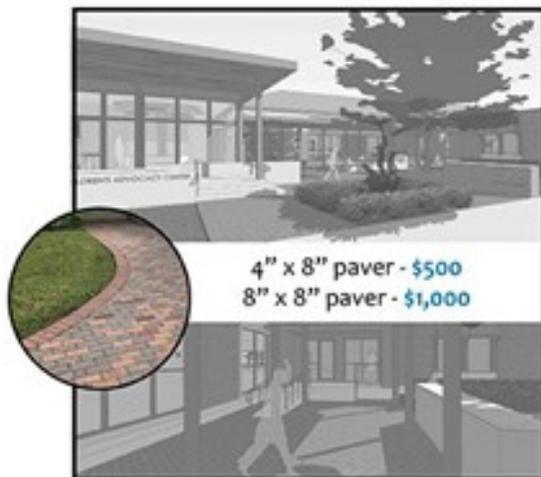
Looking for a way to honor or memorialize someone you love?

Would you like to pay tribute to someone by honoring or memorializing them for a life well lived or a special occasion? Send a donation in any amount with their name, address, and a note about why you are honoring them. We'll send an acknowledgement letter letting them know that you donated on their behalf. Honor someone today by [donating online](#) or by mailing a check to Child Advocates of Fort Bend, 5403 Avenue N, Rosenberg, TX 77471.

What are some permanent honorarium choices?

Pavers. Your \$500 or \$1,000 gift can purchase a medium or large paver in our front walkway engraved with your name or message. Purchase your paver today and someone will contact you to discuss your inscription. If you have already purchased a paver, we thank you!

If you wish to honor or memorialize someone special in a more significant way, why not name a room in our building after them? We have a variety of room naming opportunities available including private offices, therapy rooms, family meeting rooms, conference rooms and more.



For more information, please contact [Lisa Moore](mailto:Lmoore@cafb.org) at Lmoore@cafb.org



Fort Bend CVRT Conference

On October 30, 2025, Child Advocates of Fort Bend's Care Coordinator, Metoyer Martin, joined experts to deliver a powerful and informative presentation on human trafficking at the Fort Bend Crime Victims Response Team (CVRT) Conference.

Martin presented alongside the Fort Bend Anti-Trafficking Collective and Fort Bend District Attorney Ashley Harkness, offering a comprehensive look at the realities of human trafficking in our community and the multidisciplinary strategies required to combat it.

During the session, Martin highlighted the critical role of trauma-informed, survivor-centered care coordination in identifying victims, supporting recovery, and strengthening long-term safety. She shared insights from CAFB's work with at-risk youth and survivors, emphasizing the importance of cross-agency collaboration, early intervention, and ongoing advocacy.

District Attorney Harkness provided valuable prosecutorial and legal perspectives, while the Anti-Trafficking Collective addressed local trends, resource gaps, and community prevention efforts. Together, the presenters demonstrated the power of unified systems working together to protect children and vulnerable individuals in Fort Bend County.

Child Advocates of Fort Bend is committed to elevating awareness, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that all youth impacted by trafficking receive the coordinated support they deserve.



Congratulations Renee Johnson!

We are proud to share that our Criminal Court Advocate, Renee Johnson, was honored with the Ms. Vicki Compassion Award at the Crime Victim's Response Team (CVRT) Conference!

Renee was recognized for her compassion, courage, and the profound difference she makes every single day. She is the quiet strength during difficult moments, the voice for those who cannot speak, and a true champion for our children and families.

Her unwavering commitment and empathy inspire us all. Please join us in celebrating Renee and the incredible impact she continues to make in our community!

CAFB Participates in Pilot Program to Strengthen Identification of Child Sex Trafficking Victims

By Metoyer Martin

Child Advocates of Fort Bend (CAFB) is proud to participate in a groundbreaking pilot program focused on improving the identification and support of youth who may be victims of child sex trafficking. This initiative centers on the expanded use of the CSE-IT (Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool), an evidence-based screening tool developed to help professionals recognize the signs of commercial sexual exploitation in children and youth.

The CSE-IT is designed for use by child-serving professionals including advocates, caseworkers, clinicians, and law enforcement who interact with youth at risk. By providing structured guidance, the tool helps users systematically assess a range of behavioral and environmental indicators that may suggest a child is being exploited. Rather than relying solely on disclosure (which often doesn't happen), the CSE-IT enables professionals to recognize patterns that might otherwise be missed.

The tool is not a questionnaire for the child; it is a scoring and observation-based assessment completed by the professional after a period of engagement. This approach respects the child's autonomy while equipping the adult with actionable insight.

Child sex trafficking is often hidden in plain sight. Victims may not identify themselves as such, and due to trauma, fear, or manipulation by traffickers, they may be unwilling or unable to disclose their experiences. Frontline professionals are uniquely positioned to recognize red flags, and tools like the CSE-IT enhance their ability to do so.

The earlier a child is identified at risk for or experiencing exploitation, the sooner they can receive trauma-informed support and begin the process of recovery.

Child Advocates of Fort Bend is participating in a 6 month pilot program under the direction of the Governor's Office aimed at increasing the use, consistency, and effectiveness of the CSE-IT tool. The goals of the pilot include:

- Raising awareness among multidisciplinary team members about risk factors and indicators of exploitation.
- Standardizing how and when the CSE-IT is used to ensure timely and appropriate intervention.
- Gathering feedback to improve the tool's implementation in real-world settings.

By being part of this pilot, CAFB is helping to shape best practices for the state and beyond, contributing to a broader movement to identify, protect, and empower children who are being exploited.



Public Policy Update:

Texas CASA

By Aly Ferrante

Texas CASA recently convened a Public Policy Update to provide an in-depth review of the legislation enacted during the 89th Legislative Session and to outline the anticipated implications for child welfare practice statewide. These updates reflect ongoing efforts to strengthen family preservation, enhance accountability within the child welfare system, and promote the safety and well-being of children in foster care. A clear understanding of these changes ensures that we remain aligned with evolving policy requirements and equipped to best support the children and families we serve.

Among the notable changes, here are a few of many legislative changes affecting the child welfare system:

- HB 1151 prohibits the removal of a child solely because a parent chooses not to administer psychotropic medication. This measure reinforces parental decision-making authority.
- HB 1106 further clarifies the definition of abuse by specifying that a parent's decision not to affirm their child's gender identity or sexual orientation does not constitute abuse, narrowing the scope of CPS involvement in matters related to family beliefs or conflict around gender identity.
- SB 2165 prohibits courts from dismissing suits affecting the parent-child relationship while a child is missing or has run away, ensuring legal oversight continues and efforts to locate missing youth remain active.
- HB 116 removes the long-standing "O" ground for termination of parental rights, which previously allowed termination when a parent failed to complete their service plan. Courts must now find at each hearing that reasonable efforts have been made to identify, locate, and refer parents to appropriate services that support reunification, and must determine that a

a substantial risk of continuing danger exists in the home or return the child home.

- HB 140 establishes a Child Protective Investigations Advisory Committee, which will replace the DFPS Advisory Committee beginning in Fall 2026, with the goal of enhancing accuracy and standardization in abuse and neglect investigations.
- HB 908 strengthens responses to missing children by requiring law enforcement agencies to report missing child cases to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) within two hours, a requirement that applies to all missing children, not just those in foster care.
- HB 2809 mandates that DFPS include suicide attempts by children in its managing conservatorship in its annual report and notify parents within twenty-four hours if their child attempts suicide.
- HB 1403 protects the privacy of foster homes by prohibiting DFPS, HHSC, and child-placing agencies from requiring foster families to disclose whether firearms are present in the home.
- Beyond legislation targeted specifically at child welfare, the Texas Sunset

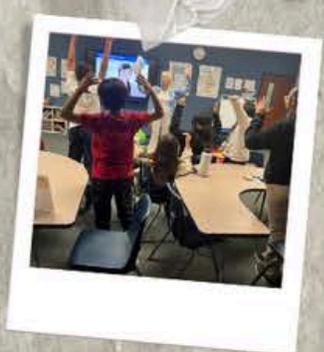
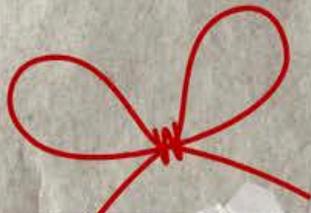
Review Process is now underway. Agencies such as the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) will be evaluated during this cycle.

The above-mentioned bills are a tiny segment of changes stemming from the most recent legislative session. As Texas continues to refine and strengthen its child welfare statutes, remaining informed about legislative developments ensures that we are prepared to respond effectively, advocate responsibly, and uphold the best interests of children and families. Continued engagement with policy updates supports our shared mission to promote safety, stability, and improved outcomes for the youth we serve.

For a full recap of the 89th Legislative Session including key outcomes, funding updates, and policy changes, visit the Texas CASA Website: [89th Legislative Session Outcomes - Texas CASA](#)



Advocacy in Action...



From schools, to professional partnerships to our faith-based communities and agency collaborations, Child Advocates of Fort Bend appreciates the many opportunities you have given us this year to help keep children safe in Fort Bend County.



SPOTLIGHT FRIENDSGIVING

Last month, CAFB hosted a heartfelt Friendsgiving event that brought together volunteers, staff, and board members in celebration of the spirit of Thanksgiving.

Everyone enjoyed good food, lots of laughs, and meaningful moments. With no formal agenda beyond sharing food and fellowship, the event served as a fun occasion to reflect and express gratitude for the many blessings in our lives—most notably, our volunteers, whose dedication is an invaluable gift to CAFB and the clients we are honored to serve.





Child Abuse Prevention - Collaborative (CAP-C)

Our Mission:

To speak in one voice as a collective of child abuse professionals to advance the understanding of the issue of child abuse across Fort Bend County so that prevention and early intervention of child abuse are possible.

Our Vision:

To reduce the number of children and youth in Fort Bend County experiencing abuse or neglect.

Why it Matters:

Child abuse affects children from every socioeconomic group - rich, poor and middle income and every gender, race, ethnicity, religion and community. Child abuse is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) that can have lifelong consequences for the health and wellbeing of survivors well into adulthood. Child abuse can also have a ripple effect and generational impact resulting from the trauma of abuse.

As the year is coming to an end, we want to extend heartfelt thanks and much gratitude to the organizations that are part of the CAP-C and are instrumental in its success. We look forward to continuing this important work with you all and the exciting things we will do together to protect children from abuse in Fort Bend County.

thank you — thank you

Access Health, Adullam Home for Boys, Aid to Victims of Domestic Violence, Arms Wide, Attack Poverty, BakerRipley, Baylor College of Medicine/TCH-Public Health Pediatrics, Big Brothers/Big Sisters-Fort Bend & Greater Houston, CACs of Texas, CAFB Board of Directors, Child Advocates of Fort Bend, Crimestoppers Houston, Daya, Inc., Depelchin Children's Center, DFPS Faith Based & Community Engagement, DigiWell Foundation, FBC Constable-Precinct 4, Fort Bend Behavioral Health Services, Fort Bend County Court 4, Fort Bend County DA's Office, Fort Bend County Libraries, Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office, Fort Bend County TBRI Collaborative, Fort Bend County Women's Center, Fort Bend Health and Human Services, Fort Bend ISD, Fort Bend Regional Council, Fort Bend Star/Atlas Global Insights, Gingerbread House Daycare Center & Kids Academy, Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council, Henderson-Wessendorff Foundation, HHSC-Texas Health and Human Services, Karen Sullivan, LCSW, Therapist, Katy Cares, Kids and Cops, Lamar Consolidated ISD, Lamar Consolidated ISD-Police Department, Midas Football Academy, myQabila, Parks Youth Ranch, Project Protect the Children, Sanctuary Foster Care, Stafford MSD, Sugar Land Police Department, Texas Agri-Life Extension, Texas CASA, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners, TexProtects-The Texas Prevention Network, The George Foundation, The Landing, The Sanctuary Foster Care Services, Unbound Now-Houston, UT Health Houston-McGovern Medical School, YMCA Fort Bend & Katy

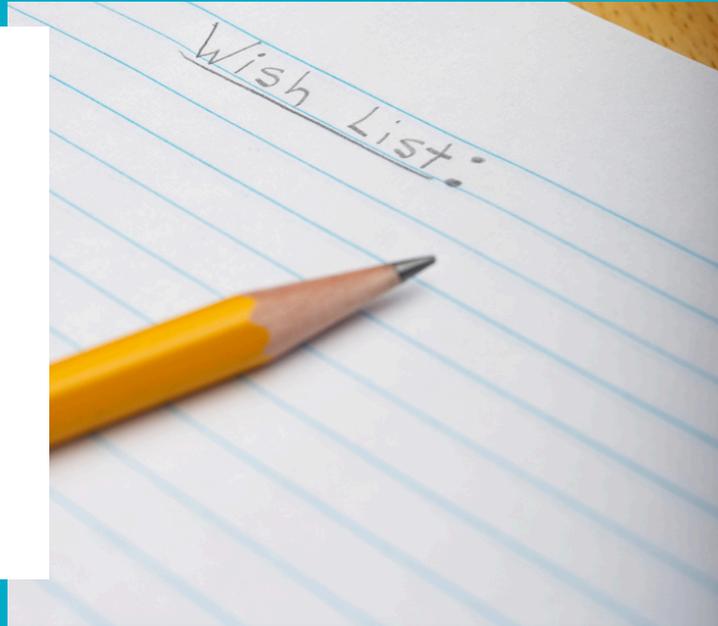
our needs

This month, we have immediate need for:

- NEW medium-sized stuffed animals
- Gift cards
VISA/ MasterCard, Walmart, HEB

View our [Amazon Wish List](#)

View our [Holiday Wish list](#)



License to Help!

Did you know that Child Advocates of Fort Bend participates in the TX CASA Specialty License Plate Program? You can order a custom license plate with the phrase "Big Voices for Little Texans". Not only can you spread awareness and show your support for us but a portion of the cost of the plate goes to Texas CASA and the local programs to increase our statewide efforts to advocate for



every child in the foster care system. To order your plate go to <https://www.txdmv.gov/motorists/license-plates> and search for CASA under specialty plates OR visit your local tax assessor's office and ask for the Court Appointed Special Advocate license plate.



Let's Do Something BIG together!

Year End Giving - As the year comes to a close, many supporters are interested in making a Year End Gift to take advantage of a tax deduction or to fulfill their annual charitable giving goals. Please consider giving children the hope and encouragement they need to know that there are kind people in this world who care about them. We have received a Challenge Gift by a generous donor who believes in all of us and will double your gift by matching every dollar you donate with a second dollar up to \$25,000.

01

Donate

Make a donation [here](#) or mail a check to 5403 Ave. N - Rosenberg, TX 77471. Please mark #GivingTuesday in the (Leave a Comment) box so we can double your dollars. Be sure to keep CAFB in mind for your year-end giving.

02

Honor Someone

Make a special gift in honor or in memory of a friend or family member. To give a financial donation or personalized brick paver in their honor. Click [here](#)

Would you like a named room in our building or in our new Wellness Garden and Park? Contact LMoore@cafb.org

03

Payroll Match

Do you have connections with a company that matches your financial donations or volunteer hours? Let us help you get those donations set up. Contact Jodell@cafb.org

04

Planned Giving

What legacy will you leave when you pass? Join our Forever Angels Legacy Society and let your legacy become the future for children. There are so many choices visit [here](#) to learn more.

CHILD **ADVOCATES** OF FORT BEND™



Darkness to Light

Stewards of Children

Learn how to prevent child sexual abuse

We will teach you how to:

- Recognize risky situations
- Talk to children about boundaries and abuse
- Learn strategies that keep children safer
- Report abuse if you suspect something

Scan QR code to register
or follow the link below:

[REGISTER HERE](#)



 DARKNESS TO LIGHT'S
STEWARDS OF CHILDREN®



December 5 + 6

Christmas Home Tour

December 8-11

CAFB is accepting holiday donations

January 27

Darkness to Light Stewards of Children

10:00am until 1pm

Reserve your spot [here](#) today!

January 27

Sip & Stroll

5:30pm until 7pm

Contact [Lisa](#) at LMoore@cafb.org to reserve your spot

CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR

December 5 + 6, 2025

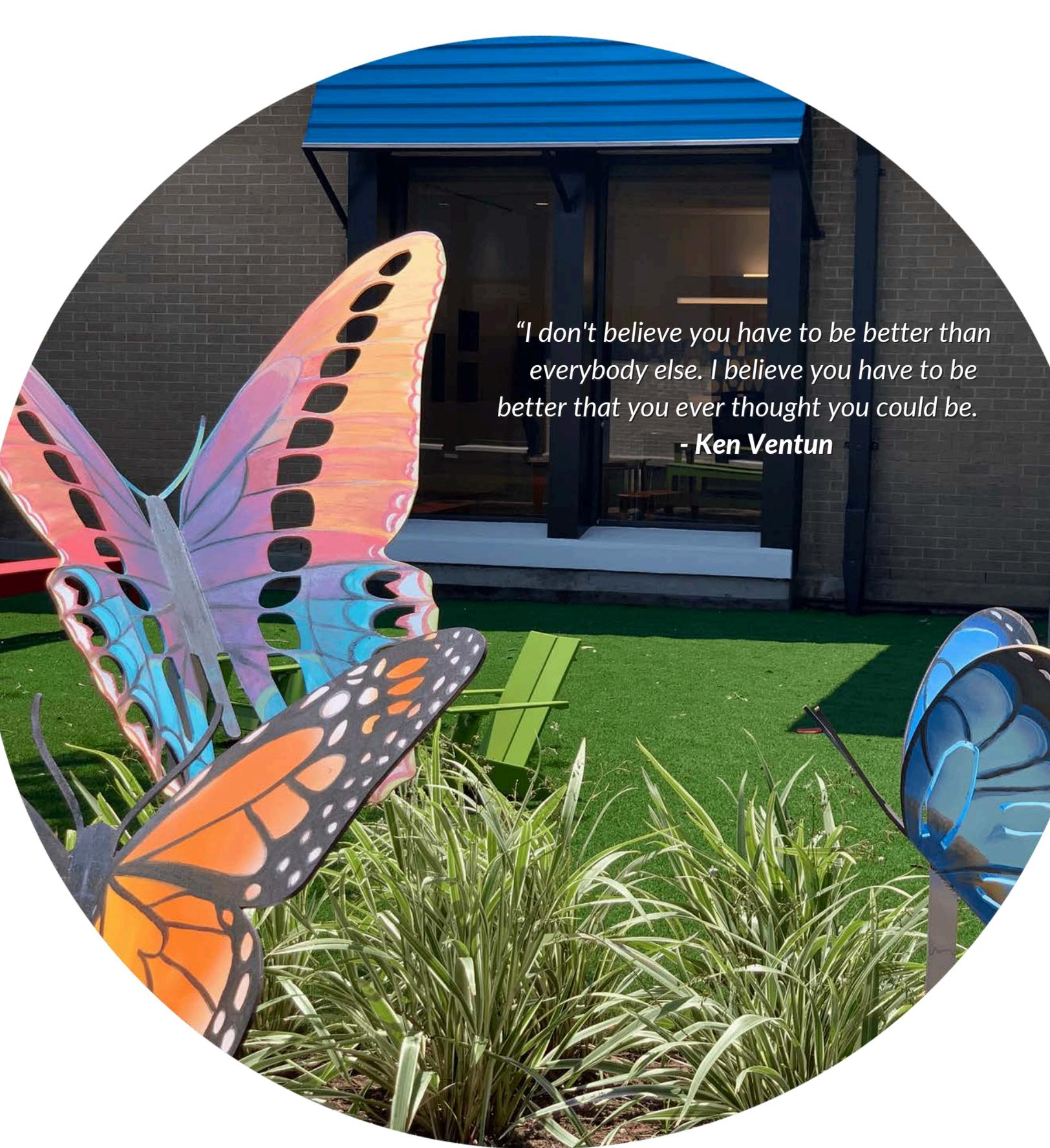
Get tickets today!

Tour four stunning private homes with festive decorations, twinkling lights & holiday touches

- Local entertainers
- Fresh baked cookies
- Festive holiday t-shirts, beautiful ornaments, raffle **and MORE!**

WWW.CAFB.ORG





"I don't believe you have to be better than everybody else. I believe you have to be better than you ever thought you could be.

- Ken Ventun