



Kay Callender is a pillar of the community and an advocate for Keep Katy Beautiful

“We’ve got the best of both worlds: old-town charm and Neiman Marcus. We’ve got it all.”

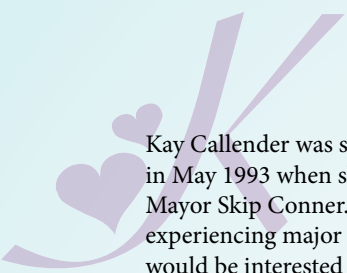
- Kay Callender

Kay Callender

Keeping Katy Beautiful

Kay Callender started Keep Katy Beautiful over 20 years ago, and the organization still impacts the community today

Written by Holly Leger | Select photography by Shanna Kenney



Kay Callender was sitting at a Little League baseball game in May 1993 when she was approached by then Katy Mayor Skip Conner. Knowing that Katy would soon be experiencing major growth, he asked Callender if she would be interested in starting a beautification project to clean up Katy's landscapes and highways.

At first, Callender wasn't sure about committing to a project so grand. "Other people had tried it, and nothing ever lasted more than four or five months," she recalls. But there was one thing Callender was sure of: The City of Katy had a big heart, and she wanted others to see it. "This is a great town, but every time somebody would come visit us, they would go, 'Ew,' because it was just so flat, and there were potholes and litter everywhere. It wasn't very welcoming," she says. "I thought, 'I would love to do something that would let everybody see the heart of Katy.'" So Callender accepted the mayor's offer and began to make plans.

Keep Katy Beautiful

In order to learn more about starting the organization, Callender paid her own way to a Keep Texas Beautiful Conference in Austin the following June. She returned with new knowledge and a notebook full of tips on how to get the project organized. The city gave her a \$2,000 budget, and Callender got to work. As chairman, she selected a volunteer board of five members. They called themselves the Katy Improvement and Beautification Board. The members came up with a five-year plan, which included picking up litter and planting trees, something Callender had noticed was sparse in the Katy area. They also re-landscaped City Hall and Harvest Plaza.

Continued Growth

From there, the organization's agenda continued to grow. The board's name was changed to Keep Katy Beautiful, in affiliation with the Keep America Beautiful Foundation. Today, they host a number of annual events, including the Texas Trash-Off, the proud business awards, city-wide garage sales, Adopt-a-Highway, paint a plug, and Arbor Day celebrations.

This year, there are 12 volunteers on the board, three of which are original members: Callender, Debbie Berger, and Albert Thompson. Now the vice chairman, Callender says she owes everything to her fellow members. "My passion is Keep Katy Beautiful, but my passion is shared by a wonderful group of people who do a lot of work and have a lot of dedication."

Nationally-Recognized Efforts

Thanks to state and national awards and grants, the Keep Katy Beautiful budget has grown considerably since 1993. What was once a \$2,000 budget is nearly half a million dollars. One of those awards includes the Governor's Community Achievement Award, which is given each year to Texas communities with the best grassroots

environmental programs in the state. The competition distributes \$2 million in funding from the Texas Department of Transportation across 10 communities, with the amount based on population size.

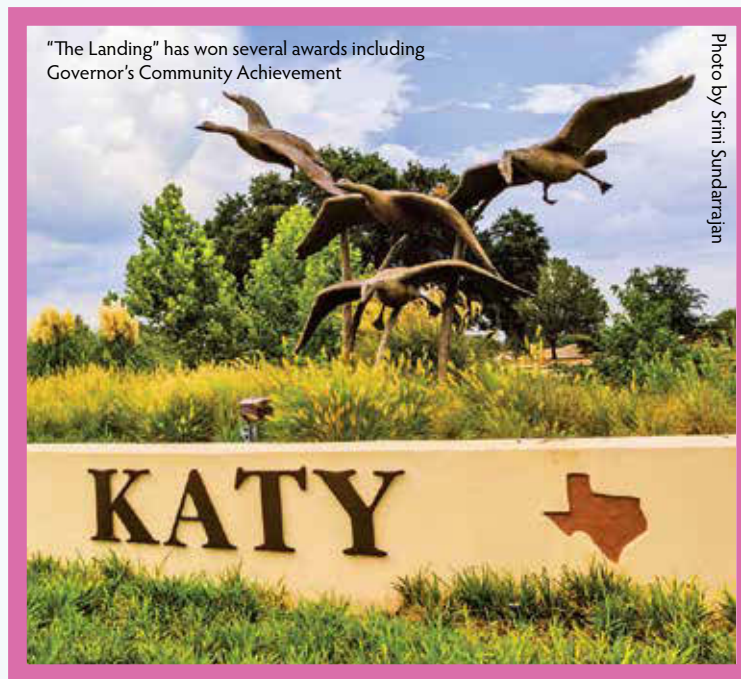
Katy has won the award four times, which has funded the re-landscaping project along FM 1463 and Highway 90 as well as the statue of geese, called "The Landing" by Edd Hayes, installed at the corner of Katy Mills Boulevard and Highway 90. "The fact we've won it that many times is amazing," Callender

says. The most recent Governor's Community Achievement Awards, won in 2010 and 2013, will add 11 more geese in various locations around Katy. Callender says the statues should be in place by the end of the year.

Support of the Community

Until then, Callender will continue helping Keep Katy Beautiful, which she calls her "baby of 22 years." She admits it isn't always an easy task, but the support from the community makes it all worth it. "It's all been a blessing to me," Callender says. "I've loved the city. The biggest blessing has been their response. I mean, the constant 'Thank you' from the citizens, council, and businesses, this is always what I've wanted people to see - the heart of Katy." **KM**

HOLLY LEGER is a freelance writer who enjoys reading, taking walks, and spending time with her husband.



"The Landing" has won several awards including Governor's Community Achievement

Photo by Sriini Sundarajan

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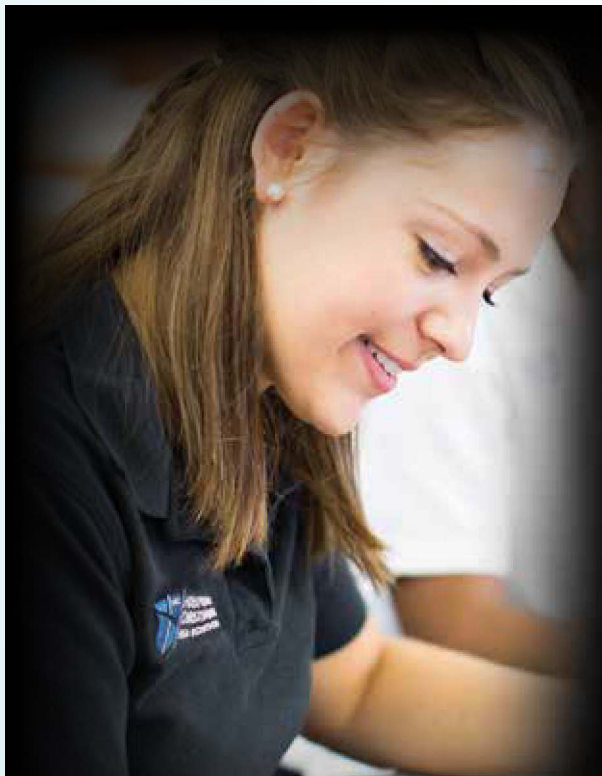
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Getting to Know *Kay Callender*

- ♥ *Largest project has been “The Landing,” a bronze geese sculpture at FM 1463 and Highway Boulevard by artist Edd Hayes (pictured on page 107)*
- ♥ *Married to former City of Katy Mayor Doyle Callender*
- ♥ *Kay has two grown sons, John and Kyle*
- ♥ *She loves spending time in Katy’s parks including Mary Jo Peckham Park, City of Katy Dog Park, and the VFW Park*



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