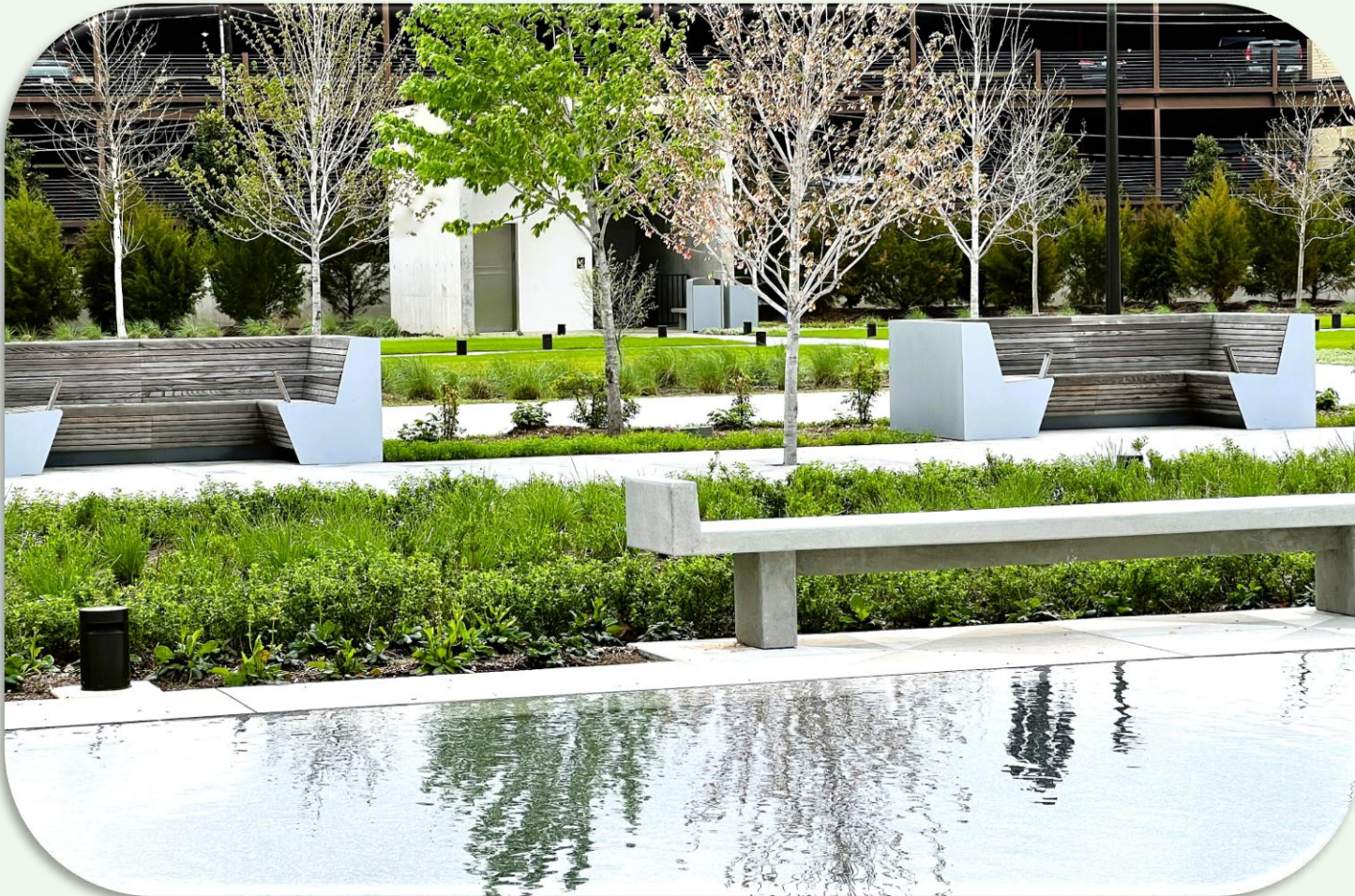


LEOH Trip

The Ismaili Center

March 10, 2026



The Center, located at 2323 Allen Parkway, opened in late 2025.

As members journeyed by Precinct One bus to the Center, LEOH member **Helen Ebaugh** provided a brief overview. Helen is an author and professor emeritus of sociology at UH, and has studied religion among new immigrant communities in the US, as well as the work of interfaith coalitions providing social services. She enjoys occasional visits to the Center.

Upon arrival in the Center's parking area, we were impressed with gardens that provided a very tranquil setting.

The Ismaili Center is the only one in the U.S., and one of just seven in the world.
The 6 other cities include London, Vancouver, Lisbon, Dubai, Dushanbe, and Toronto.

The Center sits on 11 acres, 9 of which allow for botanical gardens on both the north and south sides of the building. The building was designed by *Farshid Moussavi Architecture*, and the gardens by *Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects*. More than 800 trees and thousands of perennials were planted, chosen for their ability to withstand both drought and flood. The Center sits atop a 200-year floodplain.

Its development was led by the Ismaili Council, initiated by His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. Unfortunately, the Aga Khan did not live to see its completion. It was completed under the leadership of his eldest son, Prince Rahim Aga Khan V, the 50th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (also spelled Mohammad). The Center is intended to host both spiritual and civic programs.

The current Aga Khan is said to promote an understanding of Islam rooted in values of generosity, tolerance, pluralism, environmental stewardship, and the shared unity of humanity. He chairs an agency which works to improve quality of life in needy communities in more than 30 countries.



Following a security check inside the Center, our group gathered outside the entrance, admiring the gardens while listening to our guide describe them. Features include seating areas and wide walkways conducive to conversations.

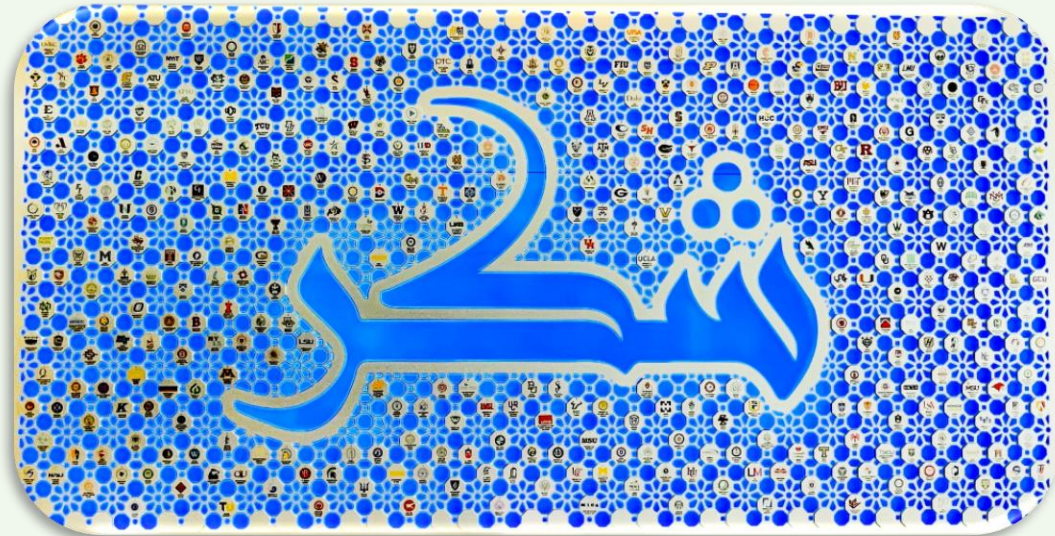
In the photo, you can see most of our group reflected in the building's glass.



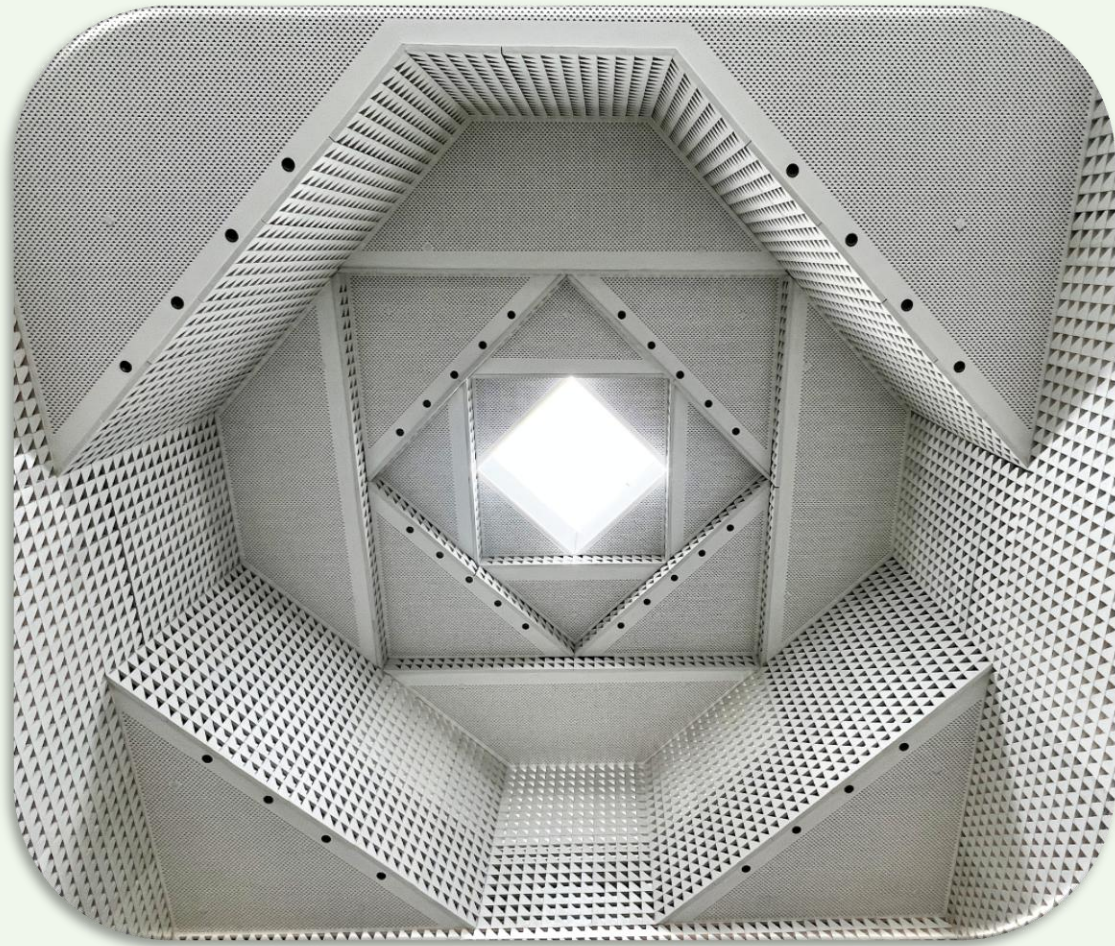
Moes Nasser
Tour Guide

Ismaili Muslims are a branch of Shia Islam who follow a living, hereditary Imam (Aga Khan V). The majority of the world's 12-15 million Ismaili's live in India. There are an average of 45,000 living in the U.S., with many living in the Houston area.

FACES OF THE FUTURE



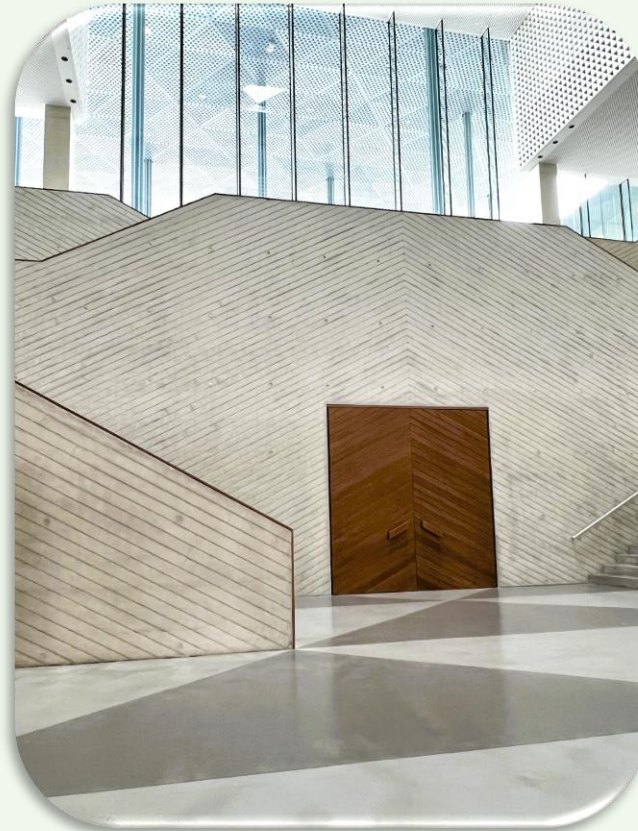
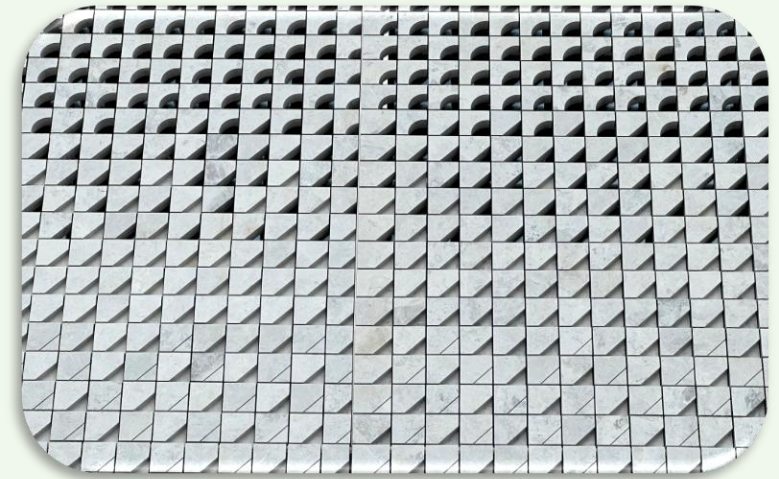
Upon entering the Center, our group noted this large interactive art piece. It honors the history of the U.S. Jamat, which began with a generation of young students who crossed oceans in search of education, opportunity, and a better future. The Ismaili student community now numbers over 3,500 students across nearly 400 institutions in more than 40 states.



The Center features contemporary architecture with glass and lighting providing well-lit, open spaces throughout.

The photo above shows the oculus, at a height of 68 feet. It appears to be allowing sunlight in; however, it is actually a lighted feature.

Spacious, open-columned verandas, called eivans, are part of the architecture, allowing natural light into each side of the building. Eivans are typical in Persian architecture.



The triangular shape is an important architectural feature throughout the Center.

The Center itself is composed of 3 interlocking triangles, repeated 7 times to form a heptagon.

The triangle is a key symbol in Islam, symbolizing the harmony of faith, community, and intellect.

This area of the Center housed an interactive exhibit by Iranian-born artist **Raheleh Filsoofi**, currently an Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University. Below, musical instruments were joined by strings and meant for visitors to play. The mirrored ceiling is a tradition in Iranian architecture, creating dual carpets.



LEOH member Mark Polhemus tried out the *ShahTar*, one of the 4-stringed instruments displayed on a traditional Kermani rug.



Imagined Boundaries: A New Vision

Artist Raheleh Filsoofi



Above: In 2017, two companion pieces opened, one in Tehran, Iran, and the other in Florida. Live video streamed a variety of everyday Iranians to Florida, and vice-versa. The intent was to meet another's gaze and recognize shared humanity that can transcend divisions.

The current Ismaili Center exhibit includes those in the U.S. of the Ismaili faith and others who share a common spirit of service and belonging.

Art pieces can be found throughout the Center.



Artist *eL Seed* is a French-Tunisian contemporary artist inspired by the tradition of calligraphy.

These pieces are entitled *Open Your Heart* and *In Your Face*





Hana Shahnava

British-Iranian artist

Hand-made paint
and Austrian crystals
on linen canvas



Nocturnal Journey

A collaboration between artist

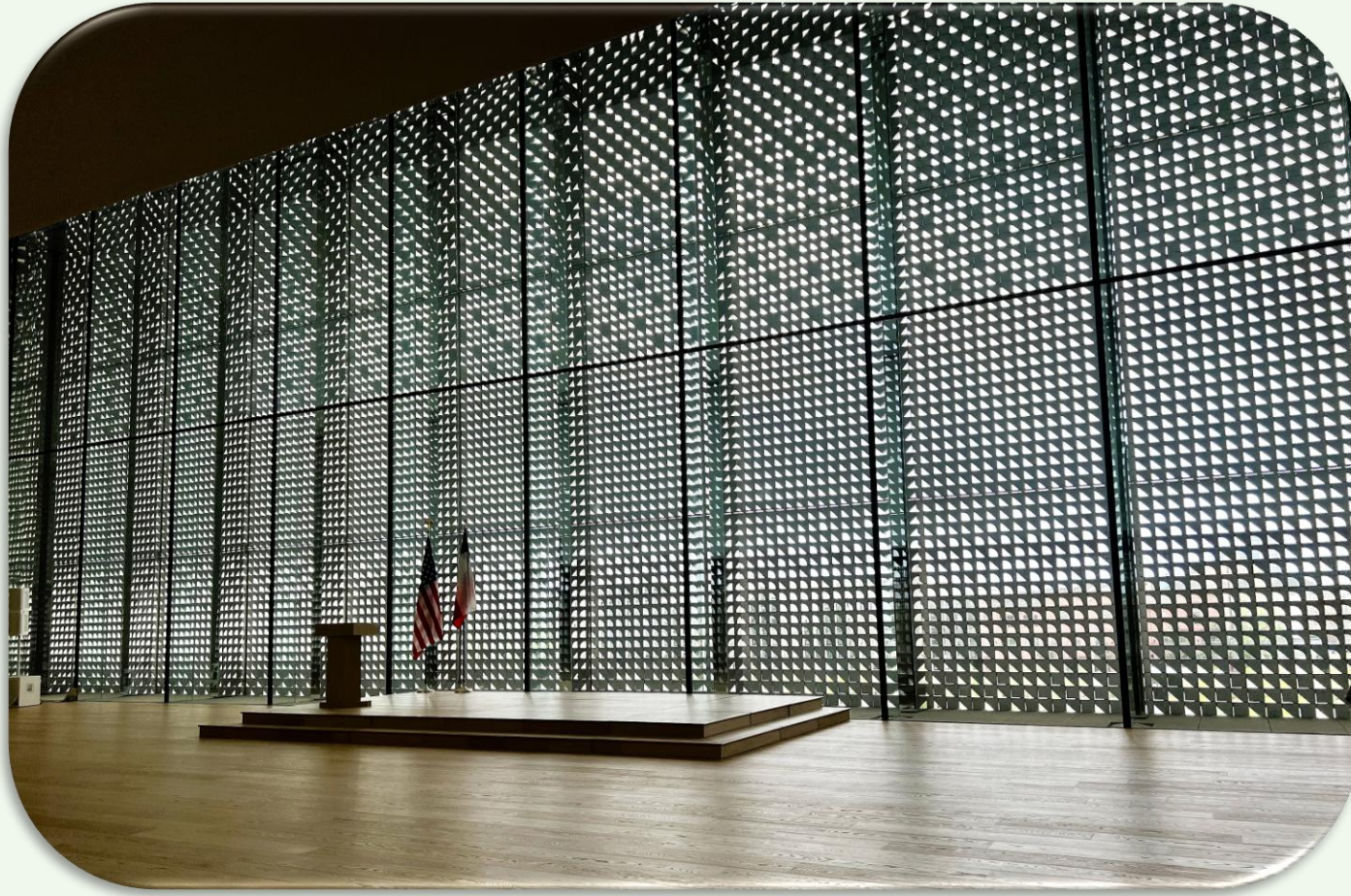
Ahmed Moustafa

Egyptian-British artist

and the **Ismailia Helping Society**

Mumbai, India

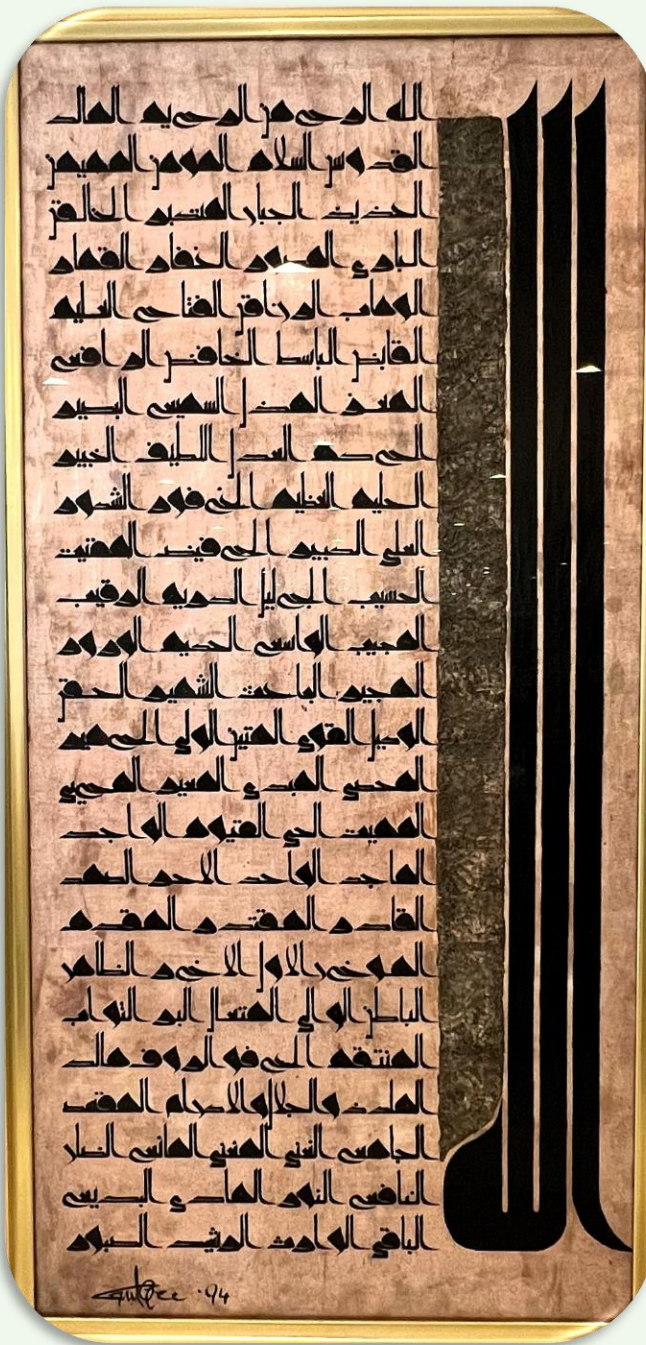
This very large piece was hand beaded with 4,000,000 beads



This multi-use room includes a large wall of glass which allows for natural light. The patterned screen in front of the glass consists of triangular and semicircular shapes.



The Center's **Black Box Theater**, used for a variety of events, is totally soundproofed, including the flooring.



99 Names of Allah

Calligraphy

Mixed media on canvas

Ismail Gulgee

Pakistani modernist





The diamond-shaped prayer hall (Jamatkhana), designed to face Mecca, is intended as a place of worship for Ismaili only. Our group was allowed to visit the hall as part of the tour; however, photography was not permitted, and we were required to remove our shoes.

It is a large, carpeted room, with a prayer niche, known as the mihrab, in one corner. Of interest was the fact that the mihrab was partly composed of oyster shell.

The ceiling consists of a thick fabric stretched over thousands of LED lights, giving it a very pleasing, aesthetic effect.

The Vista Terrace and the Gazar Garden are intended for relaxation. The Social Hall is designed for conferences, performances, and public events.

There is also a cafeteria, offices, schoolrooms for early child development programs, and numerous open spaces to enjoy throughout the building. What a view from the top!



Learn more on the website [ISMAILCENTER.ORG](https://ismailcenter.org).

You can also learn much more during a visit to the Center, via QR codes posted throughout. Additionally, [ARCHPAPER.COM](https://archpaper.com), the website for *The Architect's Newspaper*, has information and photos in their Southwest Region section, in a previous edition.

Following our tour,
it was time for lunch at the
Midtown Bar & Grill,
founded in 2013
by Tommy Karagiannis.

Our trip was on a Tuesday;
however, we did not stay for
Comedy Night!



THANK YOU
to LEOH trip coordinator **Ann Fairchild**;
Helen Ebaugh for expert commentary;
and Precinct One bus driver **James**,
who always provides safe driving
and a good joke or two.



Future Trips - all by Precinct 1 bus

Wednesday, April 22 (Earth Day): Artist Boat & Coastal Heritage Preserve in Galveston

This non-profit's mission is to promote awareness and preservation of coastal margins and the marine environment through the disciplines of science and the arts. Enjoy a 1-hr birding tour, followed by a 1-hr Habitat Restoration session with the Habitat Manager. ***At this time the trip quota is full; however, you may ask to be put on the waiting list.***

Wednesday, May 20: Galveston Railroad Museum

Wednesday or Thursday, June 10 or 11: Brookwood Community

The week of July 20-24: Amazon Distribution Center

Details will follow closer to the trip dates

Signing Up for a Trip

Trip Coordinator Ann Fairchild may be contacted at fairann@sbcglobal.net or **281-686-1325**. She will publish complete trip details, with the opportunity to sign up, closer to the trip date.

If the traveler quota is full, you may ask to be put on a waiting list.