

FREEWAY
UPDATEState
completes
I-10 faceliftBy FLORI MEEKS
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

The Texas Department of Transportation has opened Interstate 10 at Westgreen.

The opening represents the Katy Freeway Reconstruction Program's first completion of an at-grade urban intersection.

The intersection's aesthetic design is part of TxDOT's Green Ribbon Project, which outlines hardscape and landscape concepts to enhance the look of urban freeways.

The intersection features specially designed columns and a horizontal pattern and embossed Texas star on the retaining walls.

In addition to the Westgreen intersection, the reconstruction programs Contract B calls for new intersections at South Greenhouse and Park Ten.

The new intersections will be used as alternate routes when Fry Road, Barker Cypress and Mason are under reconstruction.

Details will be posted at www.katyfreeway.org.

Upcoming deadlines for partial closures:

■ Eastbound Frontage Road from Gessner Drive to Bunker Hill Road. One outside lane closed continuously until 5 p.m. today.

■ Eastbound and westbound Frontage Road from Silber Road to Loop 610. Alternate lane closed 9 a.m.-3 p.m. daily through Friday, Oct. 1.

■ Westbound and eastbound Exit Ramp to West Loop southbound. One inside lane closed. One lane will remain open.

Total closures until further notice:

■ Westbound Exit Ramp to Northwest Traffic Center.

■ Eastbound Entrance Ramp from Silber. Enter freeway from the Wirt Road entry ramp.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Family business weaves rich tapestry

■ Businessman transforms love for wife, art into thriving family business

By FLORI MEEKS
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Memorial resident Sam Abraham loves weaving a bit of history into everyday life.

And, as the owner of Abrahams Oriental Rugs, it's part of his job.

Abraham, 58, loves sharing his rugs' rich history with customers who come to the Uptown store he runs with his wife, Omana.

Oriental rugs always been part of life from emperors to the village, the Memorial resident said.

It's not necessarily the career Abraham had in mind when he left his home in south India in 1972 to attend University of Houston Law School as an exchange student.

He and Omana were newlyweds at the time. While he studied in the United States she taught Islamic arts and history at Delhi University.

After he earned his law degree, Abraham became an associate with Vinson & Elkins, where he focused on international customs and trade.

Around this time, Omana moved to the U.S. to live with her husband.

Omana, whose immigration status prevented her from working, quickly became restless with her forced retirement.

Abraham started looking for a family business she could help support.

They developed the idea for selling rugs fairly quickly.

Both were interested in art and textiles.

Furthermore, Abraham's family ancestry includes textile merchants who came to India from the Middle East in the 1500s.



KIM CHRISTENSEN / FOR THE CHRONICLE

MAGIC CARPET RIDE: Sam Abraham poses in the showroom of his Oriental rug store on Westheimer. Abraham started the business with a \$500. Today, he owns a 20,000-square-foot store.

The tricky part was getting started. When Abraham applied for a loan to buy his first one or two rugs, the loan officer turned him down because Abraham didn't have any collateral.

He took a summer job and managed to save \$1,000 and then Abraham borrowed \$500, giving him enough money to send to his family in India.

They bought two rugs for Abraham, which he quickly sold to neighbors for a profit.

The cycle continued. Abraham sent money to India, and

his family bought him increasingly larger orders to sell in Houston.

Eventually, Abraham and his wife bought their first store at Richmond and Fountainview, where they operated for seven years. They spent 12 years at a larger Highland Village location, and seven years ago they bought their store at Post Oak Boulevard and Westheimer.

The family also maintains a 20,000-square-foot wholesale business in The Decorative Center of Houston.

SAM ABRAHAM

■ Age: 58

■ Profession: Co-owner of Abraham's Oriental Rugs.

■ Quick Quote: "I tell people the history of Oriental rug design is like a flow of the river, it was influenced by the constant movement of the nomad. When tribes intermarried, new designs were formed."

■ Fast Fact: During his career in law, Abraham helped initiate and complete negotiations for the construction of an American chemical plant in India. He said bringing U.S. technology to India was a constant goal.

"There's a sense of joy in passing on their passion for rugs to others," Omana said.

"It is a work of art," she said. "You can use it for 50 years, and it looks more beautiful at that point. People say gray hair is a crown of glory."

"It's the same with the rugs." Now, one of the Abraham's three daughters, Annie, is putting her master's degree in business administration to work for the business.

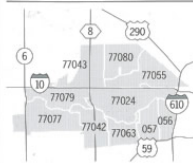
Daughter Elizabeth is a University of Texas Law School graduate and the mother of the Abraham's 8-month-old grandson, and Rachel is completing a college internship at the Houston Chronicle.

In addition to the energy he has put into business and family during the years, Abraham has served on the boards for Houston Grand Opera, Theater Under the Stars, the Mental Health Association of Greater Houston and KUHT TV Channel 8.

He also regularly donates rugs to school fund-raisers.

Reaching out to others is a major priority, Omana said.

"It gives us a lot of fulfillment to help others," she said. "It extends a person beyond themselves."

WHERE TO
FIND US

THISWEEK
Memorial/Spring Branch/Uptown
P.O. Box 4260, Suite 445
Houston, TX 77210
713-362-7932
fax 713-362-7552
thisweek@chcron.com

News editor
Donna Hatch
713-362-6418
donna.hatch@chcron.com

Sports editor
Richard Brown
713-362-6418
richard.brown@chcron.com

ThisWeek manager
Howard Decker
howard.decker@chcron.com

Advertising
Classified: 713-224-6868
Retail: 713-220-7080

Circulation
To subscribe, call 713-220-7211 or 888-220-7211.

Send us your news

ThisWeek accepts press releases by regular mail, fax or e-mail. Photos are not returned. Items should be submitted two weeks before publication date.

ThisWeek is published each Thursday by the Houston Chronicle Publishing Co.

Group offers
free speakers

The Houston Psychological Association offers free speakers to area media, churches, businesses, civic associations, school and medical groups.

Volunteers are available to speak about a variety of psychological issues.

Free information and referral services for therapy and psychological assessments also are available. Call 713-621-0131.