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## Executive Summary

# BRINGING PRO-BUSINESS NEWS TO THE VALLEY

Welcome to your publication! Valley Business Report is a new way of sharing economic development news for and to the Rio Grande Valley and we are thrilled to do what we love to do - connecting business leaders from Mission to South Padre Island, Edinburg to Hidalgo. Look all around you; products and services for your business and home are here, just down the street and throughout the Valley.

When I say a new way of sharing economic development news, I mean there's a flavor of the past with some new ingredients added to this recipe that we call the Valley Business Report.

As a part of the founding crew for The Business Times of the Rio Grande Valley, I will bring many elements of that publication that you told us you wanted to see again. One very necessary and new element, an online version will launch in late October at [www.valleybusinessreport.com](http://www.valleybusinessreport.com). Daily, we will keep you informed of current local business stories as they happen and available at the click of your mouse.

My former business partner Richard Baxter and I were very fortunate to have the writing talents of Kevin

Knoch, a long time Valley resident. Today, Kevin and I partner to bring you the Valley Business Report, a multimedia business journal sharing positive economic news and encouraging leaders throughout the Rio Grande Valley to trade locally. Publication design and production is directed by Dallas native and Valley resident, Sharon Campbell. Also, look for other familiar Business Times names such as Elizabeth C. Martinez, Eileen Mattei and other guest columnists.

Monthly in print and daily on the web, our team of writers, designers will present business growth articles, insight into our commercial future and profiles of you, leaders of the local economy - all in a true journalistic manner. Our purpose is to create an even stronger business environment and to highlight those responsible for our market surviving and succeeding while other metropolitan areas are struggling.

While things are not perfect, the Rio Grande Valley has abundant resources in many industries, and we at Valley Business Report are pleased to connect you to your neighbor and your neighbor with you.

As we all know, positive business growth begins with



a positive attitude. Let's show the rest of the world why the Rio Grande Valley is one of the most successful areas in the country to live and do business.

Welcome, Rio Grande Valley, to your publication.

Todd Breland

General Manager

Valley Business Report

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**On the cover:**

September's cover photograph was taken by Richard Stockton. See more at [www.Stockton-Photography.com](http://www.Stockton-Photography.com)

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### Philosophy

We are a pro-business publication committed to reporting business news concerning the Rio Grande Valley's business community. We will strive to create a forum in which business leaders can exchange ideas and information; to providing in-depth perspectives on business trends affecting the community's economy. Our goal is to serve the interests of economic development in the Rio Grande Valley.

Our editorial philosophy is to cover local business news and to bring you relevant state, national, and international news that affects our region. Look for links on our Web Site at [www.valleybusinessreport.com](http://www.valleybusinessreport.com) to business news and stories pertaining to the RGV from across the country, plus local everyday events and business news. Our print publication will present stories of interest about local business people, businesses, and issues of interest pertaining to our area.

### Letters to the Editor

Valley Business Report welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be e-mailed to [editorial@valleybusinessreport.com](mailto:editorial@valleybusinessreport.com) with the subject line: Letter to the Editor. Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates will not be accepted. Please keep letters to 300 words or less and should include your full name and city of residence.

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## Health

# HARLINGEN WELCOMES UNITED HEALTH GROUP

By Kevin Knoch

UnitedHealth Group Service Center opened its doors in Harlingen, on Thursday, August 7, 2009. The center is staffed by 150 employees and is located near the intersection of 77 Sunshine Strip and Ed Carey Drive at 2222 South Sunshine Strip.

United Healthcare invested \$6 million to renovate the former supermarket building which could be home to 250 employees by the end of 2009. Kim Whitaker of UnitedHealth Group related, "The center will support the Medicare business of Ovations, United Health Group's health and well being unit for seniors." Whitaker continued, "The center will perform a number of critical functions for members in our Medicare Advantage plans." Harlingen employees will field questions concerning enrollment, benefits, billing, and prescription drug coverage.

UnitedHealth Group Service Center Site Director Blake Thomas stated at the center opening, "We have a lot of people to thank, Governor Perry's Office of Economic Development, the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation (HEDC), their Chairman Armando Elizarde, Mayor Chris Boswell and the city."

Thomas pointed out Harlingen was the winner in a nationwide site selection completion. "What



**UnitedHealth Group Service Center Site Director Blake Thomas will oversee a facility that could employ 700 in years to come.** (Kevin Knoch)

put you ahead was your people. We choose Harlingen mainly because of people." Evidently the city made a good impression from the beginning. HEDC Director Bill Martin related that the first site visit was during the week Hurricane Dolly hit the Rio Grande Valley on July 23, 2008. Martin added, "Negotiations became significant after the initial visit."

The project came together rapidly. The city approved the details of the deal on February 27, 2009 and the opening followed five months later. Martin stated the genesis of the interest in Harlingen started in April of 2008 when a Phoenix, Arizona site search firm C. B. Richard Ellis contacted the city. The HEDC are the owners of the building, UnitedHealth Care has leased the facility for 10 years, with an option for five more years.

Mayor Boswell was enthusiastic in his remarks, "The payroll will bring \$20 million to the city annually. We told them we would find them great employees and we prove it to them."

After the ribbon cutting Boswell expanded on what the relocation means to the city, "We already have 150 new jobs created in the city. In the next few years that number could grow to 700 jobs. We have turned this huge building that was vacant into a state of the art service center. The multiplier effect of the payroll will be a great benefit to the whole community."

Boswell pointed out the economic health of the city has been good in recent months. Harlingen's unemployment rate has been running under the national average in the city recently. According to Boswell the city's rate was running 7.8 percent during the summer, nationally the unemployment rate was pegged at 9.4 percent in early August.

Governor Rick Perry stated after the February announcement, "UnitedHealth Group's new service center will strengthen this community by providing hundreds of new jobs for Texans, and the prospect for expansion and capital investment make this a great move for both UnitedHealth Group and Harlingen."

UnitedHealth Group is headquartered in Minnetonka, Minnesota. The umbrella corporation oversees the operations of six companies, that serve 70 million customers. The new jobs in Harlingen add to the companies employment base of 70,000.



**Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell states Harlingen's unemployment rate is below the national average.** (Kevin Knoch)

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## Industrial Assembly

# PIPELINE ASSEMBLY PLANT OPENS IN PORT ISABEL

By Kevin Knoch

The layout of the facility is impressive; from one end to the other it covers nearly a mile. The assembly building runs for 1,000 feet, followed by a 4,000 foot pipe rack. It's location at the Port Isabel/San Benito Navigation District (PI/SBND) will be a real shot in the arm for Port Isabel area economy. The near \$40 million investment by the Norway based underwater engineering and construction firm Subsea 7, also represents what many in the area hope is the beginning of an offshore oilfield supply industry in Cameron County.

Subsea 7 is adding to their roster of pipeline assembly facilities located around the world. The company refers to them as a "spool base," where 40 foot lengths of pipe are welded together to form pipelines. The lines carry pressurized hydrocarbon products underwater, often connecting offshore production platforms with mainland processing plants.

The Port Isabel plant joins other Subsea 7 spool bases located in Scotland, Norway, Angola, and Brazil. All locations are a long way from the Gulf of Mexico. Subsea 7 Operations Manager for North America Greg Donnelly pointed out those bases, "it is 17 to 18 sailing days to the Gulf from our other spool bases." Donnelly enumerated other advantages the Port Isabel location affords the pipeline construction company is quick access to the Gulf and short distances to a growing number of deep water developing petroleum projects.

Subsea 7 is in Port Isabel for the long haul, signing a 25 year lease with the navigation district. Construction started on the pipeline facility in May of 2008. In late June of 2009, the plant started linking

*In this photo from the ribbon cutting ceremony are (left to right) Ian Coppan, Vice President, Subsea 7 North America, Michael Delouche, Subsea 7, Board of Directors, Robert C. Cornelison, Port Director - Port Isabel San Benito Navigation District, Port Commissioner Bobby Ostos, and Port Commissioner Bill Weekley.*

*(Photo courtesy of SubSea 7)*



lengths of pipe for the Port Isabel plant's first project. The local operation will be supplying pipeline for a \$45 million project for Houston headquartered Marathon Oil. The facility will deliver pipeline for two eight-inch 36 mile lines located 112 miles south of Houma, Louisiana.

The Subsea 7 plant is the first tangible proof of what has been whispered and rumored in the area since earlier in the decade. Big oil was showing an interest in the geological formations Alaminos and Keatherly Canyons running parallel to the Rio Grande Valley, from Kenedy County south to the Rio Grande River, 120 to 160 miles offshore to the east. PI/SBND Port Director Bob Cornelison laid out the chronology of the oil companies growing interest.

"In 2002, I had several visits from a number of oil industry interests," Cornelison related. He added the visits started after Shell Oil confirmed their discovery of the Great White field located in the Alaminos Canyon east of the RGV. "Site visits continued on and off as more prospects were proven and more players came to the Alaminos Canyon."

The likelihood of a need for an offshore supply base was enhanced in 2006. Shell Oil along with partners Chevron and British Petroleum announced they would be constructing the world's largest deepwater offshore spar production gathering platform. Named the Perdido Regional Development Spar (PRDS) it will have the capability of servicing 22 wells while being manned by 150 workers.

The completed platform was towed into place, 122 miles east of the Brazos Santiago Pass, in August of 2008. Tethering to the 7,800 foot deep ocean floor

and connecting to nearby wells will take some time. Shell spokesperson Robin Lebovitz stated, "The spar is expected to be operational in 2010." The PRDS is capable of processing 130,000 barrels of oil and 200 million cubic feet of natural gas per day. Putting the platform's size into perspective it slightly smaller than Paris's Eiffel Tower.



*Greg Donnelly is Subsea 7 Operations Manager for North America. A native of the United Kingdom, he has worked in offshore construction for 30 years.*

*(Photo courtesy of SubSea 7)*

Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos clearly sees the economic impact on the Laguna Madre area. "During the construction phase dollars vibrate throughout the county. Once built, the payroll has a multiplier effect in the local economy." Subsea 7 has completed their hiring, bringing 90 new jobs to the Port Isabel area with most filled by local workers.

Port Isabel Mayor Joe Vega sees Subsea 7 as just the beginning and hopes more companies will relocate to the navigation district. "Not only is Subsea going



*Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos feels the Subsea 7 plant is the beginning of a new industry for Cameron County. (Kevin Knoch)*

to have a great impact on the economy of Port Isabel.; hopefully it will attract more international and national companies to Port Isabel.” Vega emphasized one of the area’s industries shrimping, has been in a downward spiral for a number of years.

For decades a major part of the fabric of Port Isabel’s economic life; shrimping’s profitability has been slowly strangled by a combination of government regulation, foreign farm raised imports, increasing labor and fuel costs. Fishermen have watched dock side prices dive in recent years. The once formidable fishing fleet, “is now down to 150 boasts,” according to Cameron County Extension Agent Tony Reisinger. A decade ago the Brownsville/Port Isabel fleet put 585 trawling vessels to sea.

Besides the multiplier effect Judge Cascos alluded to, their is a direct economic spike expected several times a year. Subsea 7’s spool base will be visited

**“During the construction phase dollars vibrate throughout the county. Once built, the payroll has a multiplier effect in the local economy.”**

**- Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos**

regularly by the companies pipe laying ship Seven Oceans. The ship will take on pipe on a regular basis. Donnelly related it will make its first port of call in mid-September or early October. “During the Marathon job the Seven Oceans will pick-up pipe at least three times.”

Cornelison points out every time the Seven Oceans is at the dock for five to seven days, “Everything going on the ship, besides pipe will come through Port Isabel. All of the supplies will be loaded here. I could be worth \$1 million to the local economy.” Donnelly concurs with the port director’s assessment, “The Seven Oceans will be taking on half a million

**Jim Bailey, President of Port Isabel Logistics Offshore Terminal (PILOT) has leased most of the Port Isabel Turning Basin in anticipation of offshore oil supply companies locating there. (Kevin Knoch)**



**Port Isabel/San Benito Navigation District Port Director Bob Cornelison. (Kevin. Knoch)**

dollars in fuel, you add in the spending in stores, restaurants, and hotels by the crew it could easily go over \$1 million.”

As for Mayor Vega’s hope that other offshore oilfield supply companies will follow Subsea’s lead, one company has prepared for that eventuality. The Port Isabel Logistics Offshore Terminal (PILOT) company was created. PILOT has leased most of the navigation district’s turning basin hoping to accommodate an influx of offshore oil related companies.

PILOT’s first project is the construction of a fuel depot to service Subsea 7 and other ships calling on the port. Jim Bailey serves as president and heads up PILOT from Houston, and will soon have office facilities at the navigation district. “Our primary focus is getting our fuel depot on line. We will be building two 420,000 gallon tanks to service two docks.” Bailey added presently PILOT is concentrating on filling Subsea 7’s needs.

In the future, Bailey stresses PILOT will be pushing their services to the offshore exploration and production companies. “We feel we are an ideal site for mud companies, for drilling mud used in the drilling process. Ideally we would like to have one of those companies partner with us and have a site where we supply the drilling mud on vessels going offshore. We want to load pipe on boats that are delivering both drilling and production pipe offshore. We want to do all of the ancillary services for the offshore drilling and production businesses.”

Infrastructure improvements are in the offing for the navigation district. Vega explained how a long talked about connector road from State Highway 48 will siphon truck traffic off of the heavily tourist traveled Highway 100, improving safety and delivering trucks to the port’s front door. The project has moved at light speed from the talking stage, to possibly becoming a project for Cameron County’s Regional Mobility Authority in the next eight months.

Long term, more dock area could be built by PI-



**Port Isabel Mayor Joe Vega sees a bright future of job growth for the area. (Kevin. Knoch)**

LOT on the east side of the of the turning basin. Short term possibilities include an upswing in work for Subsea 7; putting on a second shift, and positioning another pipe laying ship in the Gulf of Mexico, calling on the Port Isabel spool base.

As Judge Cascos stated about Subsea 7’s start up, “This is just the beginning of a whole new industry that will be a plus for Cameron County.” Bailey succinctly predicted, the PI/SBND will soon become, “The South Texas gateway to the Gulf of Mexico.”

## Economic Development

# RIO SOUTH TEXAS COUNCIL ON A REGIONAL ROUTE

By Kevin Knoch

How would you sell a region with the following assets? A growing population predicted to fly past the 1.2 million mark next year, nine land ports of entry, and a deep water seaport.

What do you tell people about a region that will bring shoppers in droves? It's a shopping destination that attracts like a tourist destination. One McAllen shopping mall has weekend parking problems that other malls only encounter the week before Christmas and sparse parking space is a problem year round.

How do you explain that a small version of Los Angeles is a few hours driving distance and your retail outlets are the target of their spending?

In case you haven't guessed, we are talking about the Rio Grande Valley and how to sell our four county area. This is the focus of the Rio South Texas Economic Council.

All said, the area has an abundance of land, but also an inventory of property ready to develop with utilities, close to major transportation routes. A region with two highway connector routes heading upstate, with an east to west expressway that links the city and towns in the region. Your choice of three commercial airports. Two universities, a college, and technical college emphasizing workforce training. Nearly 60,000 students are enrolled in institutions of high education.

Besides an abundant ready and willing workforce, don't overlook attractions that would be the envy of many. Mild winter weather, golf, fishing, a beach resort often mentioned among the best in the nation. A growing nature tourism sector, and an equally potent historical tourism segment. Plus a low cost of living across the area.

How do you brand it, how do you have companies from far away focus on our locality? That 'how to' marketing task is what consultants Don Schjeldahl of Austin Consulting based in Cleveland, Ohio and Audrey Taylor of Chabin Concepts headquartered in Chico, California are clarifying for the Rio South Texas Economic Council. (RSTEC)

The council was formed in December of 2008, with the specific task of developing strategies to present a united front to companies contemplating coming to the RGV.

RSTEC wants to be the 'go to group' for site selectors, becoming the one stop information center for firms thinking of relocating to the RGV.

Harlingen Economic Development Corporation Chief Executive Officer Bill Martin credits Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas III and others in the county as originators of the RSTEC concept. "Harlingen was an early supporter of the effort because we see the value," said Martin, who has a unique perspective on what will become essentially a regional economic development corporation.

"This is the first area I have worked in where we didn't have a regional group. When I worked in North Carolina we had a 10 county group. I actually ran a two county group in Washington State. In Kansas we were part of the Kansas City area 14 county group. I am pleased to see that there is interest in a regional effort here," Martin said.

Martin also had a succinct answer to whether RSTEC efforts would be aimed at site selectors. "Yes, absolutely," Martin elaborated, "We see this as a marketing effort to site location consultants, major national, regional realtors and target industries." Adding the council will also be working with state wide groups like the Governor's Office of Economic Development,



**Audrey Taylor of Chabin Concepts and Don Schjeldahl of Austin Consulting are advising the RSTEC board on how to market the Rio Grande Valley as a region.** (Kevin Knoch)

Texas One, and Team Texas.

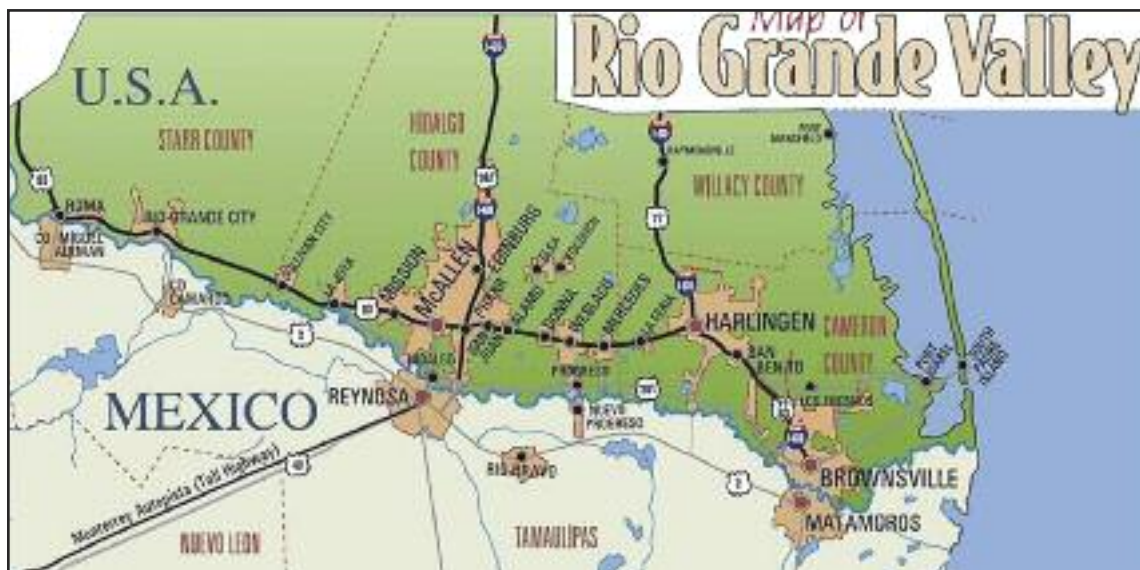
The Harlingen EDC Director pointed out the group has been careful to limit the scope of their activities in the beginning. "We have limited ourselves to trying to generate prospects for relocations. There are a lot of issues we could take on. There are issues that people have asked us to take on. We have tried to focus on generating prospects," he added.

On June 19, 2009, Schjeldahl made a detailed presentation to the RSTEC where he stressed three objectives for the group. Gain a solid understanding of the site selection process, understand the importance of community preparedness, and how the region is positioned to attract investment.

One of the key issues talked about was what the RGV economic development entities need to get ready. Schjeldahl said that by addressing readiness gaps, building the regional brand and establishing targeting strategies through industrial intelligence Rio South Texas will be better positioned with respect to investment opportunities.

Schjeldahl was also quick to take on a problem that has plagued the Valley for decades. What we like to call the Friday Night Football Syndrome. The consultant states, "There is a pre-occupation with the community rivalries. This creates doubt about claims of regionalism, adds confusion to questions of labor force, business costs, infrastructure, and educational resources. Play it down!," Schjeldahl pleads.

On Monday, August 17, 2009, Audrey Taylor of Chabin Concepts gave the RSTEC advice on the mar-



keting side of promoting the area. Taylor stated the group needs to do five things to get their message out. "One is to do messaging. How do they get their message out, particularly to the target audience."

"Secondly outbound events. As a team (RSTEC) needs to meet perspective businesses at key trade shows and events. Meet industry leaders, the decision makers. Third is prospecting and sales," Taylor said. The fourth proposal is inbound events, bring prospects and media to the area. "It's a big area. People need to get their arms around it." Fifth is public relations. Establish a relationship particularly with trade publications of those industries targeted for the area.

Edinburg Economic Development Corporation Director Ramiro Garza feels the RSTEC will lead to



**Ramiro Garza heads the Edinburg's EDC.**  
(Kevin Knoch)

numerous business relocations to the RGV.

"I think the whole idea is to bring everybody together so that we can capture the assets of the whole region. Together is how we will present a more competitive argument for companies to locate here and attract jobs....Other areas are already operating this way, with all of the data centrally compiled," Garza related.

Rose Benavidez represents a regional style EDC right now. She has served as director of the Starr County Industrial Foundation for six years, which works on economic endeavors county wide. Benavidez represents Starr County on the RSTEC.

"EDC directors from around the Valley would meet fairly frequently and we would discuss starting a group like this for our region. A lot of the goals we all have are shared in common. We can put our resources together and make things happen. We are excited to be part of it," Benavidez stated.

Maximizing resources is an attraction for a smaller city like San Benito. Alma Colelli started her career in economic development in Austin in the 1990s working for the then Texas Department of Economic Development. She has headed the SBEDC for two years and is a RSTEC board member.

"There are many advantages and one of them is

**Hidalgo County Judge J. D. Salinas is credited with others, as coming up with a regional economic development approach to selling the RGV across the nation.**

(courtesy photo)



leveraging. We are a smaller community and our marketing budget is going to be limited because of our revenue base. Now we are targeting the industries that make sense for us, as a region. For every dollar we put it, we get back many times over in benefits," Colelli explained.

Hidalgo County Judge J. D. Salinas III, is one of the movers behind taking the regional approach in marketing the RGV. "By collaborating to compete for jobs and investment we become the largest border region in the United States," he said. The RSTEC Chairman continued, "We are working together to attract top companies looking to access markets in Mexico, the U. S. South and Midwest."

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## Transportation

# CONTAINER BUSINESS GROWS AT PORT OF BROWNSVILLE

By Adolfo Pesquera

Two cargo shipping lines - one well entrenched and the other soon to be underway - have revived the Port of Brownsville as a destination for container cargo traffic.

Since SeaBridge Freight, a Tampa, Fla.-based company, launched its first tug-and-barge line last December, the news regarding container activity has been nothing but optimistic. Hank Hoffman, chief executive officer for SeaBridge, said the company started with two accounts out of Monterrey, Mexico and the idea that most of their business would be eastbound hauls from Mexico through Brownsville to Tampa Bay.

"We were not trying to add much business in the first few months," Hoffman said. "We wanted to make sure our port operations were really under control."

Once relations were established with the Brownsville Navigation District and local stevedores, SeaBridge focused on prospects for business and adding clients.

Most of the cargo continues to be eastbound, but Hoffman said he was surprised at the available demand for westbound cargo. Recyclable materials, steel reinforced concrete power transmission poles, and portable buildings exit their Port Manatee base at the mouth of Tampa Bay and make their way to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. "We had not initially expected that westbound traffic to be as strong as it is," Hoffman related.

In choosing the Port Manatee to Port of Brownsville route as their first line, SeaBridge's management saw a lot of potential in the two small ports. "Both have a very significant amount of real estate where they can develop," Hoffman said.

Hoffman pointed out many ports are hemmed into a seaside niche of some large city and cannot expand. Being a part of the inner city of some metropolis, many alternative ports also face challenges in terms of transferring cargo to the interstate highway system.

"Both ports also have excellent on-site infrastructure," Hoffman added. "They're serviced by both short line railroad as well as class one railroad."

One advantage that was particularly striking on a map was the Gulf of Mexico. The SeaBridge barge enjoys a straight line route of 800 miles. Over land, a truck must cover 1,400 highway miles through the Southeast and Texas.

Hoffman's background is in trucking logistics.

He worked 25 years in that industry before joining forces with Bill Lauderdale, his chief operating officer and a veteran of the marine shipping industry. SeaBridge is marketing itself to third-party logistics companies and truck lines as the "trucker's best friend," Hoffman emphasized.

"If I were a trucker wanting to be more efficient, instead of using my truck to haul from Tampa to Harlingen, I would tender cargo to the barge. That would free up my driver to go do other work. The truck line wins twice; they're going to bill the customer of the load that went by ship the same as if it went by truck, and their truck is hauling cargo toward a more practical destination."

The Port of Brownsville estimates SeaBridge will have hauled more than 6,000 total equivalent units (20-foot by 8.5-foot standard containers) by the end of 2009. In 2008, the port handled zero containers.

In the late 1990s, the Concord Line did brisk business hauling bulk material, vehicles and other items from Brownsville to Puerto Cortes in Honduras. It was absorbed by another company and ceased operation. Except for a short-lived run in 2005 by another company, nothing happened until SeaBridge showed up, said German Rico, director of business development for the navigation district.

In addition to SeaBridge, Rico estimates total container activity this year will reach 8,000 to 10,000 total equivalent units. The remainder of that traffic will go through Port to Port International Corp., a global shipping line based in New Castle, Delaware. Port to Port's first vessel was expected to arrive in mid-August.

The company's interest in Brownsville was generated by a port tenant, Elite Packaging Services LLC. Elite Packaging is an importer and exporter of plastic resin pellets. It brings them in large bulk containers to its Port of Brownsville warehouse, repackages them into bags and ships them into Mexico and Central America.

The main destination for Elite Packaging's plastic is Progreso, a port on the Yucatan peninsula. The company has been trucking the pellets through Mexico and dealing with all the related headaches and red tape that entails. They needed a more practical way to move cargo Rico stated.

"I made a couple of calls, and I found Port to Port. The idea is to go to Progreso and then to Guatemala. Port to Port would use Guatemala as its distribution hub for the Caribbean side of Central America," Rico explained.

The advantage of bringing in Port to Port was



*Barge caring containers in Brownsville Ship Channel in June of 2009. Tampa Bay, Florida to Brownsville water route is 600 miles shorter than land route. (Vicky Mercado, Port of Brownsville)*

that they already had established relations with the port industry in Central America, Rico added. Rico convinced Port to Port's ownership to sit down at the table with Elite Packaging, they discussed rates and came to terms.

The navigation district's hope is that - as occurred with SeaBridge - once Port to Port establishes a foothold, the company will find other companies in South Texas and northern Mexico interested in shipping with them.

It may seem unusual, given the challenges of a weak national economy, for two shipping lines to be launching operations in Brownsville, but Rico sees their glasses as half full. "The best time to start a service is right now," Rico declared. "If you can make it work now when things are slow, you can make it work when times are good."

Brownsville Port Director Eddie Campirano credited SeaBridge for showing that Brownsville is a viable port for container shipping. Brownsville is proving itself, "to be one of the niche markets of the future for containers." Campirano continued saying the port will go on to look for other shipping lines and other routes. "Brownsville to Houston is another route where I think there is a reason for optimism."



*Adolfo Pesquera is a freelance writer living in San Antonio. A former news reporter with the San Antonio Express News and Brownsville Herald, he has been covering business, government, and crime in South Texas for 25 years. Contact info: (210) 629-2937, or email to ajpesq54@gmail.com.*

*Containers being loaded for eastbound trip from the Port of Brownsville to Port Manatee, Florida. (Vicky Mercado, Port of Brownsville)*

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## History and Heritage

# CHAMPION WAS COMMUNITY LEADER IN PORT ISABEL

By Kevin Knoch

On Saturday, August 9, 2009, the descendents of Charles Champion gathered for a blessing of the refurbished cross above his grave in the historic Port Isabel Cemetery. Nearly 150 family members attended, some traveling across the United States to be part of the ceremony and extended Champion/Orive family reunion. Members of Champion's immediate family lie beside him in a family plot, on land the family once owned, deeded by him; as a cemetery.

The Champion Family name has been connected to Point Isabel, (renamed Port Isabel in the late 1920's) for over 160 years. Charles Champion's uncles, later joined by his father first came to the area as merchant seamen at the conclusion of the Mexican American War in 1848. The Champion brothers migrated to the United States from Italy, where the family name was Campeoni.

Charles Champion's father Joseph arrived at Point Isabel in 1855. At the end of the American Civil War only Joseph Champion, who married Marcela

Garcia, of the prominent land grant Garcia family, remained in Point Isabel. The couple had 11 children, both parents died in the 1880's, leaving the older brothers John and Charles to help raise their brothers and sisters.

The brothers started their business careers as store clerks for Christian Hess. John Champion became Hess's partner in the store near the end of the 1880's. Charles bought out his brother and Hess in 1894, renaming the general merchandising enterprise, The Champion Store.

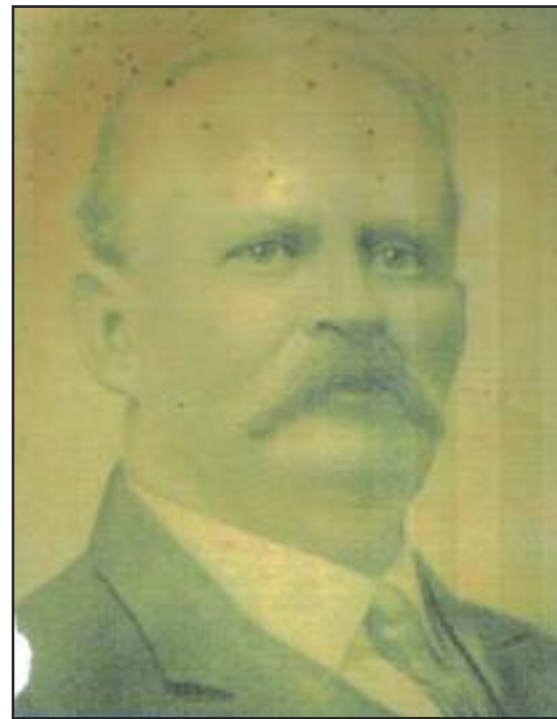
It was a bustling time for Point Isabel, the gateway to the Rio Grande Valley. Sailing ships were the regions connection to the world. Goods arrived by ship, serving the cities of Brownsville, Matamoros, the ranches and villages north and south of the Rio Grande. Freight was moved from the Point to Brownsville via a narrow gauge railroad built in the early 1870s. The rail service eliminated the dangerous off loading of goods in the open Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Rio Grande, the first step in a journey that would carry freight up river by steamboat.

Charles Champion's acumen for business was soon apparent. In 1899, he built a two story brick establishment, replacing the frame building that had housed the Hess/Champion business. Champion built the most prestigious structure at the Point. The downstairs served as a store, while the upstairs was the Champion family residence.

The building was at the hub of commerce for the village, facing the railroad and a few blocks from the docks. The nerve center of the community. A community that would become a near ghost town; a few short years later.

The Point would see its destiny change radically as upstate train service arrived in Brownsville in 1904. The Rio Grande Valley was now connected to the rest of the country by rail. The days of sailing ships came to an abrupt end. The storied lighthouse at the Point was extinguished by the United States government in 1905. The Point went dormant, commercial buildings were abandon and fell into disrepair, the village would only coming alive on weekends when visitors would arrive by train to beat the summer heat.

In one of the few area real estate transactions of the first decade of the 20th century Charles Champion purchased 320 acres of the Point Isabel Town site from E. K. Butler of Chicago in 1908. Champion along with South Texas political power Judge Jim



Charles Champion was one of then Point Isabel's most prominent citizen. (Photo Courtesy Pat Young)

Wells now owned the vast majority of the 640 acre town site, that today makes up downtown Port Isabel, north, south and west of the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway.

While Point Isabel's reversal of fortune saw the shipping and freight business virtually disappeared. A new industry was on the rise, one that made use of the region's natural resource; while utilizing the newly arrived rail connections to its advantage. Fishing is how you made your living at the Point in the early 20th century, and Charles Champion was a major player in the industry.

Champion opened a fish house, and ice houses soon followed. Men would spend the week fishing on the bountiful Laguna Madre, with market boats regularly off loading their catch; delivering it to fish houses. The railroad north, opened up possibilities for local seafood; previously only dreamed about. Large barrels packed with fish and ice would make there way to Midwest markets on the rails of the St. Louis, Brownsville, Mexico Rail Road.

Champion allowed fishermen to build small homes randomly on his property, near the Gulf of Mexico. He was the now fishing village's main businessman, and counselor to nearly all who resided at the Point. He kept Point Isabel from becoming an abandoned memory, during the first two decades of the century. The Champion Store was the pulse of the community. The youngest of his children Bertha

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Champion Garcia, described what her father meant to the Point in early 20th century in an interview with the Laguna Madre Historical Society in late 1990s.

“My dad had the only grocery store, the only telephone, the only gas station and the only fish house in Point Isabel. All of the men who worked for him as fisherman lived in Point Isabel and built their houses wherever they chose. They never paid taxes nor rent. They would come to my father for advice; because he was like a father to all of them,” stated Champion.

Champion died young, at 56 years of age on May 3, 1926. The winds of change once again blew through Point Isabel. Within a few short years of his death, the property holdings of Champion and Wells were sold to a land development company. The company incorporated the town, changed the name, and altered the design and layout of the original site.

The 1899 store and residence today houses one of Port Isabel’s museum’s, displaying the rich 19th and early 20th century history of the Laguna Madre area. The August reunion was organized by one of Champion’s granddaughter’s Mary Bertha Mallet of McAllen, honoring one of the Rio Grande Valley’s early true business and community leaders.



*The Valley Business Report would like to thank The Museums of Port Isabel, The Laguna Madre Museum Foundation, Author Pat Young, Charles Champion’s Granddaughter Mary Ayers and Port Isabel City Manager Ed Meza for their help and source material for this article.*

*The two story Key of the Gulf Champion Store, housed merchandising on the first floor, and the family residence on the second. It was the main commercial building in Point Isabel when built in 1899. (Photo Courtesy of Pat Young)*

## LA BORDE HOUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN RGC ARTWALK

The historic La Borde House in Rio Grande City will participate in the first ever Rio Grande City Art Walk. The event entitled “Una Noche en el Pueblo” will encompass the RGC downtown district between East Britton Ave. and La Borde House (East Garza St.). The evening will be the first of its kind in a city that is continuing to grow its entertainment venue while increasing awareness to its historical significance. The event is free of charge.

Built in the late 18th Century, La Borde House was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. It housed soldiers during the civil war and First Lady Claudita “Lady Bird” Johnson while on a campaign tour through Texas during the early 1960’s. Its popular Red Room continues to create controversy with stories of ghosts visiting guests during the night.

WHAT: “Una Noche en el Pueblo”

WHEN: September 12, 2009

TIME: 6 - 10 pm

WHERE: RGC Downtown District

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## Education

# AREA SCIENTISTS DEVELOP STRONGER CEMENT

by Dave Ralph

What could make reinforced concrete stronger?

One possible answer is to use an advanced fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP), a new composition made with a different set of ingredients.

Dr. Parviz Ghavami of Texas State Technical College Harlingen and professors M.A. Faruqi, J. Sai and S. Bhadra from Texas A&M University-Kingsville are refining the development of FRP – a composite cement recipe – to improve the construction capabilities of concrete. Dr. Ghavami, on behalf of other co-authors, presented a research paper entitled “An Improved Young’s Modulus for Fiber Reinforced Cementitious Composites” in Baltimore at the Society of Advanced Materials & Process Engineering (SAMPE) International Convention May 18-21.

“We want to introduce a new improvement, what we call a fiber reinforced polymer, on the design of concrete. The SAMPE conference provided an excellent audience because it brings together leading scientists and companies,” Dr. Ghavami said.

The research should lead to progress in concrete for-

mulas using FRP composites and rational design methods for structures made stronger thanks to FRP. Modifying building designs will ensure safe, economic use of the new technology, he said. The FRP composites are formed by embedding continuous fibers in a resin matrix that bonds the fibers. The stronger, lighter FRP bars that do not rust would replace steel reinforced bars in heavily reinforced concrete structures.

“Production of the FRP bars would be easier and more cost effective than existing concrete mixtures. The reduction in material costs for FRP composites contributes to the popularity of this technology,” he explained.

“Our tests prove that FRP leads to less cracking in concrete and cracks mean failure. My job as a researcher is to offer a new material. It’s up to the manufacturers to take the idea and convert it into a new product. Our research into FRP will continue to evolve and improve through more tests.”

Dr. Ghavami said that the paper he presented in Baltimore offers opportunities for more people to work on FRP. A SAMPE panel reviewed the paper for six months before it decided he could present at the conference. The



**Dr. Parviz Ghavami of TSTC Harlingen is on a team of researchers studying fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP), a new composite cement recipe, to improve the construction capabilities of concrete. He presented the team’s findings at a major conference in Baltimore. (courtesy)**

paper cited work done before his group’s project and the paper is published in conference’s official proceedings.

For information online about SAMPE, which delves into topics such as aerospace, nanotechnology, mechanical and structural engineering and other cutting edge technologies, go to [www.sampe.org](http://www.sampe.org).

Making steel stronger for bold skyscraper designs and motor vehicle safety is one example of how modern composites improve products. He also pointed to energy-producing wind turbines as manufacturers seek lighter, stronger materials for efficiency. “The future belongs to composites; there’s no doubt about it,” Dr. Ghavami said.

“Anyone can be a scientist because they can do an original work; they do planned research, and continuous work and testing. We did not know if FRP would work, but we were willing to try. We did not know if we would reach a final solution, but we want to see how far we can go,” Dr. Ghavami stated.

He taught at the University of Texas at Brownsville for 18 years as an adjunct faculty while teaching at TSTC, where he has taught engineering, pre-calculus, physics and algebra for 25 years. Dr. Ghavami said he felt like an ambassador for TSTC as he proudly represented the college at the SAMPE conference.

“We have to tell the world where TSTC is and what we do. Our math students should understand the applications and connections of the equations used to develop materials like FRP because engineers get to the point and apply their knowledge,” he concluded.

*Dave Ralph is communications writer for Texas State Technical College Harlingen. He worked as city editor for the Valley Morning Star before joining TSTC.*

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## Commercial Real Estate

# DEVELOPMENT BOOST ALONG EXPRESSWAY 83

by Elizabeth C. Martinez

As economic pressures seem to be easing in certain parts of the country, phone calls from individuals making inquiries about retail and office space in McAllen has increased recently, according to Mike Blum, partner and managing broker for NAI Rio Grande Valley.

“In the past few weeks there have been more calls and showings of property for office and retail space,”



**Jackson Triangle gives street front views to most tenants.** (Elizabeth C. Martinez)

Blum related. “The properties that people show most interest in McAllen are on North 10th Street, the downtown area, and especially along Expressway 83.”

One commercial retail plaza that has been constantly improving is Jackson Triangle, which is located on the Northwest corner of the intersection of Expressway 83 and Jackson Road in McAllen. The property will consist of approximately 37,800 square feet of retail space. The first of the Jackson Triangle tenants included Taco Cabana and AT&T. Since then, Baskin Robbins and Pay-N-Trade have joined them. Most recently, a sign for Cabrito Grill Steaks and Piano Bar went up.

Some of the most important things that businesses think about when choosing a retail or office space include: Is the location an ideal spot? Is there traffic in the area? And is it the right price?

Pedro G. Ayala, president of PGA Studio, Inc., a McAllen-based architecture firm, thinks about these questions when he signs on to work on a project.

“As a design principal for the firm, I feel I have a responsibility to create spaces that are going to be right for the occupants as well as their consumers,” Ayala explained.

“When it comes to building a retail environment, we always think about not only accomplishing the owner’s goals such as maximizing the site and cost constraints, and creating an attractive facade for the community and not turning it’s back on a major street as seen in other Big Box Retail Zones.”

Ed Alvarado, AIA, who worked on the Jackson Triangle project with Ayala, noted that the area is exposed to over 170,000 vehicles per day. Because of it’s unique triangular shape, doors face the bordering streets, thus creating the most storefront for the owner and the tenant. Not bad, for businesses who seek visibility.

Given the positive signs commercial real estate is beginning to move in the Upper Valley, there still remains to be a heightened focus on falling rent prices and the increasing number of defaults on commercial real estate loans.

*Elizabeth C. Martinez is a partner in the public relations firm of Media Morphosis phone (956) 821-8662. Martinez served as Managing Editor and General Manager of The Business Times of the Rio Grande Valley.*

## LARGEST DEEPWATER SPAR HEADED EAST OF RGV



The Perdido Regional Development Spar was towed into place from Port Aransas to 120 miles east of South Padre Island in August of 2008. The offshore gathering platform was first constructed in Europe, and it was outfitted in Ingleside, Texas. Once tethered to the nearly 8,000 foot deep ocean floor, the platform will service over 20 production wells in 2010. The spar the largest operating in deep water, and the first production facility in the hydrocarbon rich Alaminos Canyon.



## Entrepreneur

# AFFORDABLE CLINIC AIMS TO SERVE LARGE MARKET

By Kevin Knoch

The healthcare debate has dominated the national conversation for the last two months. President Barack Obama's drive to reform the nation's healthcare delivery system is on the national radar screen. One component of the puzzle is regularly mentioned; the uninsured.

A Rio Grande Valley businessman wants to provide the uninsured with reasonably priced healthcare. Richard Garza opened Affordable Clinics at 814 N. Expressway in Brownsville in early August. He hopes to add a Harlingen location in the vicinity of Valle Vista Mall in September, followed by a McAllen clinic in October.

The target group is the uninsured market. The company's mission statement is, "Quality healthcare at an affordable price." Affordable Clinics does not accept Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance. It is a cash, credit or debit card business.

The Austin based Center for Public Policy Priorities, relates Garza may have a healthy uninsured

market to cater too in the RGV. Based on 2005, U.S. Census Bureau numbers, Hidalgo County had 190,501 residents without health insurance or 30.4 percent of the population. Cameron County had a higher percentage of uninsured at 33.6, with 114,605 residents going without coverage. The four county uninsured total came to 325,412.

According to the Texas State Demographer, the number lacking health insurance is a growth sector. Statewide the uninsured number is expected to top seven million next year. Projections for the number of uninsured in the RGV are predicted to climb to just short of half a million in 2010, estimated to reach 466,115. The percentage of inhabitants without coverage will also climb in 2010, in Cameron County 40.9 percent and Hidalgo County 38.9 percent of the population will go without health insurance.

Clinic owner Garza explains why he runs the clinic on a cash business, "It is how the system works, if I accepted those programs I couldn't charge what I charge the uninsured. I would have to charge those without coverage the same as the government and private plans." He uses the example of \$100 per doctor visit as a typical cost, Medicare and private insurance reimburse a portion based on that number, "if we were to participate, that is what we would have to charge everyone for an office visit."

Instead an office visit at Affordable Clinics runs \$35. The Brownsville clinic is overseen by Dr. Rolando Posada, with Physician Assistant Luis Tamez seeing most patients. Tamez relates, "Most of what we do here is in the minor illness and injury category. If there is an immediate need for emergency care, off to the hospital they go."

The clinic treats a variety of ailments in the office. Examples include; colds, coughs, flu, strep and sore throats to name several. Nurse practitioners and physician assistants can write most prescriptions. The Affordable Clinics also offer laboratory work for patients. Blood work performing two test cost \$15, results for four tests runs \$30. Tamez related the clinic is negotiating with imaging providers for price levels for the clinic's customers.

Garza, a Houston native, now resides in Harlingen, relocated to the RGV four years ago. He takes on one



An office visit at Affordable Clinics runs \$35. The Brownsville clinic is overseen by Dr. Rolando Posada, with Physician Assistant Luis Tamez seeing most patients. (Kevin Knoch)

of the main complaints all people have about doctor's visits; time in the waiting room. "We have learned it is a good idea to limit the number of patients seen a day, to 40. We set appointments and have walk-ins as well. I want to say; we try to have you wait no more than 15 minutes."

Garza declares in order for his clinics to be successful, "It is about internal efficiency. In our Brownsville clinic we have six examining rooms. We do things to move the process along quicker. We have equipment in every exam room. If we are able to save a minute on every patient that is 40 minutes in a day that our employees can be more productive elsewhere."

Asked about other walk-in style clinics where waits can be extensive, Garza emphasizes, it is about the business practices of the treatment center. "We have the business knowledge to build in these efficiencies, a lot of people don't realize the efficiency internally is what makes or breaks you in these medical clinics."

Garza is looking to expand his services. He hopes to have in-house x-ray abilities at the Brownsville clinic in September. He talking with specialists about seeing patients at his coming Harlingen location. If the doctors could see patients at his clinic, Affordable Clinics could offer reduced rates for patients in need of specialized analyses and care.

Affordable Clinics offers packages of treatment for set prices, aimed at managing conditions, like cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure, women's and men's wellness. The packages include the office visit, and related tests. Prices range from \$65 to \$125. Services also available at the clinic are vaccinations and employment physicals.

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## Agriculture

# ORGANIC PRODUCE FOR VALLEY RESIDENTS

By Kevin Knoch

The program has a catchy name, Grow'n Growers and its goal is to educate local residents in the art of growing organic fruits and vegetables. Texas AgriLife Extension Service County Agent for Horticulture Barbra Storz is a combination program director, professor, and program promoter. Grow'n Growers was started in August of 2007 and the number of skilled local organic growers has been growing ever since.

"We teach classes for nine months a year, one day a week for the families. They learn vegetable production, food safety, food preparation, finance, and marketing." While the first group of growers was training, Storz established an outlet for the fresh produce.

Working with Hidalgo County Commissioner Hector Palacios on a new park being developed in San Juan, Storz secured a location in the North San Juan Park for a Farmers Market in one of the park pavilions. Opening in February of 2008, the market operated on the third Saturday of the month. Market hours are from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Storz advises to go early, as the market will often sell out by noon.

The Farmers Market has grown in popularity. Starting in January of 2010 through May the market will be held on the first and third Saturday's of the month. The market doesn't operate during June through October. The next Farmers Market will be held November 14, 2009, followed by a December 5, 2009 marketing day to finish out the year.

The new organic growers develop their newly learned skills in their yards. "Each person has growing beds in their backyard. Plus the people who have been doing this since the first class, many have expanded. I have one lady who bought the lot next door to multiplying her growing space many times. Some started with three or four beds and now have taken the whole yard."

Not many teachers can say this, the 17 people who went through the first nine month course have come back to take the second offering joining six new prospective growers. Storz' students come from low income backgrounds and are mostly women. All classes are taught in Spanish. "Some want to repeat something or learn more about it," Storz explained.

The programs popularity has led to Storz to add a second growers class last month. "The number of students varies according to their interest. It is hard work, working with dirt." The teacher estimates 10 to 15 future growers are attending each class."

The new growers aren't doing bad on market day. Storz relates she has been tracking the sales at the farmers market. "They have been making anywhere from \$75 to about \$300 on a market day." She pointed out the students have developed other outlets for their fruits and vegetables. "Some have formed community supported agriculture groups where people can go to their homes and buy produce. I haven't been keeping track of that. It is another income opportunity."

Storz outlined the growing process. "We start planting seeds and seedlings in Aug. By September or mid-Sept they are in their beds. In Nov. we open the first farmers market and we will have markets every month through May. After our May market it is just too hot." Adding after May the growers plant a cover crop in their beds that replaces nitrogen in the soil.

Other organic growers also participate in the North San Juan Park market. "We have organic citrus growers in the Valley that have participated in our market. An organic avocado producer contributed last season. A lot of people in the community are finding out about the program and the market."

Storz offers a five day growing course for people who are working or don't meet the low income requirement of the growing growers classes. Classes are in English, garden yields are eligible for the Farmers Market.

More information about organic gardening is available through Storz's office at 956-383-1026.



*The next Farmers Market will be held November 14, 2009, followed by a December 5, 2009 marketing day to finish out the year. (Barbra Storz)*



*Grow'n Growers was started in August of 2007 and the number of skilled local organic growers has been growing ever since. (Barbra Storz)*

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## Opinion Page

# SPENDING, DOUBLE TALK, LAWSUITS SLOW RECOVERY

by Bill Summers

When politicians make showy displays of big plans to help people, but then push agendas that blatantly run counter to those promises, we're right to feel betrayed. That's exactly what's going on in Washington, DC and it's an extension of what some attempted here in Texas during the latest legislative session. President Obama's showy display took the form of a \$787 billion taxpayer-funded stimulus package, heralded as the life boat for our sinking economy. Why then – an astute taxpayer might ask – is the administration pushing measures that will directly undermine economic recovery by increasing consumer prices, expanding ways to sue, stifling access to healthcare, and making small businesses vulnerable? This is certainly not the way to right a capsized ship.

It seems our leaders in Washington are only paying lip service to real economic recovery. Check out President Obama's latest foray into double talk: At a recent meeting of the American Medical Association, Obama talked about overhauling our healthcare system and lowering costs for everyone. He even told the doctors that "excessive defensive

medicine," conducted out of fear of lawsuits, should be limited. But in the next breath, Obama said he won't support efforts to rein in one of the biggest healthcare cost drivers: runaway medical liability lawsuits. You can't expand access to healthcare, keep doctors in the examining room, and control costs while letting healthcare lawsuits spin out of control.

Speaking of lawsuits, we're starting to wonder if the President and Congress have a special stimulus package just for personal injury lawyers up their sleeve. Both appear committed to stripping away liability protections for manufacturers of highly regulated products like cars, medicines and other equipment. Even if manufacturers follow every rule and regulation set by the government, they'd still be subject to an avalanche of lawsuits. Carefully-reasoned, uniform federal safety regulations would be replaced by a system where an individual jury (hearing a single lawsuit) would set safety standards that could vary state to state. Consumer prices would skyrocket as manufacturers grapple with a maze of conflicting state by state regulations and an onslaught of random lawsuits. This personal injury lawyer bonanza does not bode well for our health or our wallets.

*Bill Summers, Founder and President, Rio Grande Valley Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse (courtesy)*



In more head scratching news, President Obama took a breather from talk of job creation to sign a bill that will threaten jobs by targeting employers with ridiculous lawsuits. The new law creates a legal trap that can ensnare any organization that receives money from the federal government. Under the law, businesses of all sizes, universities, health care providers, nonprofits, and federal grant recipients could face so-called "false claims" lawsuits for making an innocent paperwork mistake or misinterpreting a complicated regulation. The law perverts current, legitimate tools to combat intentional fraud against the government and establishes a definition of fraud that borders on the ridiculous. You can't be for job creation while planting lawsuit landmines for the employers who support those jobs.

Perhaps our friends in Washington would do well to look to Texas for examples of how to build and maintain a strong economy. Lawmakers here have wisely resisted relentless attempts by the personal injury bar to invent new ways to sue. Texas is nationally renowned for its civil justice reforms, which are credited with helping Texas to fare better than other states in this economy. Common sense legal reforms in Texas have safeguarded thousands of jobs, welcomed new doctors, attracted capital investment, and kept consumer prices in check. By and large, Texas leaders have served their constituents well by holding the line against efforts to roll back progress here.

On the other hand, our federal leaders should be ashamed to trumpet their efforts to "save us" while pursuing an agenda that erodes our nation's economic foundation through expanded litigation. The two-faced maneuvering in Washington is nothing short of betrayal.

*Bill Summers, Founder and President, Rio Grande Valley Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse*

*CALA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots, public education organization dedicated to serving as a watchdog over the legal system and those who would seek to abuse it for undeserved gain. With more than 25,000 supporters statewide, CALA strives to raise awareness of the costs and consequences of lawsuit abuse.*

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Don't let your tickets go to waste! Take your unused tickets to the Dodge Arena box office to exchange them for a future 09-10 regular season home game!

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Ask your ticket representative about our payment plan options.

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Access to exclusive Season Ticket Holder information and events such as the weekly Vipers Nest e-newsletter

#### PERSONAL ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVE

Have your Vipers ticket and game experience questions handled by your personal account representative.

#### 10% DISCOUNT ON MERCHANDISE

Receive a 10% discount on all merchandise at the Team Shop.

Invitations to exclusive Season Ticket Holder Parties

Meet the players, coaches, mascots, and dance team at select season ticket holder events.

#### SAVE ON ADDITIONAL TICKETS FOR INDIVIDUAL GAMES

Purchase group tickets and additional tickets at special prices available only for season ticket holders.

#### PLAYOFF PRIORITY

Have the first option to purchase your existing seat locations for the playoffs and additional playoff tickets.

#### COMMEMORATIVE GIFT

Special gift for all season ticket holders (1 for every 4 seats)



Call the Vipers today at (956) 972-1144 or visit [rgvipers.com](http://rgvipers.com) to purchase your season tickets today!

## Last Minute News

# “SMALLEST HEART PUMP” OFFERS PATIENTS NEW HOPE

Valley Business Report

A miniature pump, smaller than a number 2 pencil eraser that can be threaded through an artery and placed inside the heart, offers new hope to critically ill heart attack and heart failure patients who have run out of options.

Valley Regional Medical Center's commitment to excellence in patient care was once again demonstrated when they introduced the Abiomed Impella 2.5 considered the "world's smallest heart pump" during the first patient procedure in the Rio Grande Valley. Valley Regional Medical Center is the only hospital south of San Antonio offering this procedure.

"My heart was very weak and I felt hopeless," said Donald R. Porter. My doctor said I could go to Houston for a special procedure that could help save my life. I told the doc; I'm tired, my wife is tired and I don't have any family in Houston. I was ready to give up. I then learned this same procedure was now being offered right here in Brownsville. I decided to go for it. I was up walking and able to go home in just 3 days. The procedure was a success, it saved my life. I want more people to know this is available in their hometown".

In June 2008, the Impella 2.5 catheter-based heart pump received 510(k) clearance by the Food and Drug Administration. As the smallest heart pump on the market, Impella 2.5 works by temporarily relieving the heart's pumping function and providing the time needed to initiate life-saving interventions.

Impella 2.5 is inserted percutaneously in the catheterization laboratory (cath lab) via the femoral artery into the left ventricle, a procedure that lasts just a few minutes. Up to two and a half liters of blood are delivered by the pump from the left ventricle into the ascending aorta, providing the heart with active support five times faster than current industry devices and three to five times more blood flow than the present standard of care.

"This procedure gives new hope for patients that otherwise had no options for treatment of their cardiovascular disease," said staff Interventional Cardiologist at Valley Regional Medical Center, Jaime S. Gomez, M.D., the first to use this device. "We can now perform complex and ultra-high risk procedures with an element of safety never before available in our cardiovascular program".

The American Heart Association estimates that 1.5 million heart attacks occur in the United States each year, with up to 500,000 deaths. With more than 700 hospitals across the United

States currently using Impella 2.5 Valley Regional Medical Center adds to the growing number of healthcare institutions that are committed to optimal heart recovery.

Abiomed's Impella 2.5 is a cardiac assist device which is inserted percutaneously in the cardiac catheterization lab, providing patients with up to 2.5 liters of blood flow per minute. It is the world's smallest heart pump and has been used to treat conditions such as acute myocardial infarction (heart attack), cardiogenic

shock and low output syndrome. Due to a rise in conditions such as triple vessel disease in patients with poor cardiac function, which is caused by coronary vessel blocks in three vessels of the heart, the Impella 2.5 provides a new treatment option that aims to improve patient outcomes. The Impella 2.5 can be quickly inserted into the left ventricle through the femoral artery, into the ascending aorta, across the valve and into the left ventricle and can remain in place for short-term support. Now being used in over 500 hospitals in the U.S., the Impella 2.5 is approved in more than 40 countries, including in Europe under the CE Mark. The

Impella platform has been used to treat more than 1,900 patients outside the U.S. and has been the subject of more than 50 peer reviewed publications on the topic.

Based in Danvers, Massachusetts, Abiomed, Inc., is a leading provider of medical devices that provide circulatory support to acute heart failure patients across the continuum of care in heart recovery. Their products are designed to enable the heart to rest, heal and recover by improving blood flow and/or performing the pumping of the heart. For additional information please visit: [www.abiomed.com](http://www.abiomed.com).

## Spotlight

# A NIGHT OUT FOR GIRL SCOUTS



*The Girl Scouts of Greater South Texas gathered for the 5th year to honor distinctive citizens of the Valley for their dedication to assisting the Girl Scout organization in reaching their goals. Also honored was State Representative Veronica Gonzales.*

*David Guerra, President & CEO IBC McAllen (far right) joined by friends and fellow Girl Scouts supporters (Todd Breland)*



*Blanca S. Vela, Former Mayor City of Brownsville (middle) celebrates evening with family.*



*Girl Scout's night to shine!*

## Spotlight

# MCALLEN CHAMBER LEARNS ABOUT PATIENT CARE

*Valley Business Report*

Marissa Casaneda shared with fellow McAllen Chamber members at a recent networking social how Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Cancer Center is leading the way for cancer treatment in the Rio Grande Valley. The doctors, support staff and equipment combine for the best medical care available.

Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Cancer Center does not just treat cancer, it treats people with cancer. Their patient-centered approach is distinguished by comprehensive diagnosis and a compassionate support for each patient.

A high caliber, multi-disciplinary team of oncologist's, nursing staff, and counselors determine the treatment plan best suited for each individual. Throughout the treatment, the team works together tending to the patient's physical and emotional needs to ensure they receive the best possible medical care.

With state-of-the art images, Renaissance physi-

cians are able to accurately diagnose and stage cancer and also to assess treatment progress.

Doctors Hospital at Renaissance has a wide range of Imaging Services including a 64 Slice CT, MRI, and PET-CT to give doctors the information they need to diagnose disease and plan treatment.



*Patti Roschel, Susan Valdez, Nanette Palomo & Marilyn Fox attended the mixer in early August.*

*Danaji Gonzalez and JC Cervantes enjoyed the evening.*



*Marissa Casaneda from Doctors Hospital at Renaissance (right) and a staff member passing out door prizes.*



*Lisa Marie Jordan, Eddie De la Rosa & Nicole Zagata were all smiles at the event.*

## RIG COUNTS ARE UP WITH INCREASED FORECAST

*E & P News / RigZone*

Baker Hughes, Inc. reported that the international rig count for July 2009 was 974, up 7 from the 967 counted in June 2009. The international offshore rig count for July 2009 was 275, up 6 from the 269 counted in June 2009 and down 37 from the 312 counted in July 2008.

The U.S. rig count for July 2009 was 931, up 36 from the 895 counted in June 2009 and down 1,001 from the 1,932 counted in July 2008. The Canadian rig count for July 2009 was 175, up 50 from the 125 counted in June 2009 and down 237 from the 412 counted in July 2008.

The worldwide rig count for July 2009 was 2,080, up 93 from 1,987 counted in June 2009 and down 1,356 from the 3,436 counted in July 2008.

The number of rigs drilling for oil and natural gas in the U.S. rose this week as producers increased drilling activity on hopes of an economic recovery that will spur energy demand.

The number of oil and gas rigs climbed to 985, up 17 from early August. The number of gas rigs was 695, an increase of seven rigs from last week, while the oil rig count climbed to 280, an increase of eight rigs. The number of miscellaneous rigs was 10, an increase of two rigs. The number of gas rigs in use peaked at 1,606 in September 2008.

Producers have reined in oil and gas drilling over the past several months amid falling prices, but companies have begun putting some rigs back to work.

"There is optimism that prices will rebound," said Kent Bayazitoglu, an analyst with Houston-based Gelber & Associates.

Gas supplies remain ample. U.S. inventories are expected to approach maximum storage capacity before the winter. Swelling storage levels have contributed to a sharp price decline. Natural gas prices have dropped more than 75% from their highs last summer above \$13/MMBtu. This week, prices dropped below \$3/MMBtu for the first time in seven years.

Analysts anticipate that the sharp decline in natural gas drilling activity earlier this year will eventually bring supply back in line with demand and help bolster gas prices.

## Spotlight

### RG VIPERS OPEN NEW RETAIL STORE



*Top photo: McAllen Chamber of Commerce welcomes RGVipers to Uptown Plaza.*



*Left: Vipers fans awaiting meet & greet with Rockets' legend, Moses Malone. (Todd Breland)*

## LA PLAZA MALL



*Mall parking lots were filled in late August as annual back to school shopping was in full force at LaPlaza Mall. Parents and students took advantage of the tax free weekend to get prepared for school.*

# Weslaco, Texas

# WHAT RESESSION!

*Weslaco, a Regional Commercial Center,  
in the Heart of the Prosperous Rio Grande Valley  
Mid-way Between the McAllen & Brownsville MSA*

2009  
Sales Tax Receipts Year to Date  
**Up 4.05% from 2008**

2008  
Building Permits  
**Up 105.6% from 2007**

2009  
Bank Deposits Year to Date  
**Up 6.6 % from 2008**

2008  
Rio Grande Valley Northbound  
Vehicle and Pedestrian  
**Border Crossings  
19.6 million**

Weslaco benefits from the  
Mexico shopper and investor.  
Northbound traffic into the  
Rio Grande Valley  
remains vibrant.

#### Weslaco Population

3 Mile Radius	40,704
5 Mile Radius	101,795
10 Mile Radius	211,530

*Weslaco has a wealth of charm and is  
a wonderful place to do business,  
raise a family and just live.  
We have a spot for you, just give us a call!*



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