



See Tribute to Kevin Knoch on Pg 4

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### Executive Summary

Community should back NAAMREI / page 3

### Transportation



Valley International Airport / pgs.14 - 15

### Feature



ERO Architects designing views / pgs. 10 - 11

### Evolution

NRS Consulting Engineering / pg. 17



## EVERYONE'S VACATION SPOT

The first few days of July will once again feature bumper to bumper traffic, no vacancy signs, and crowds on the beaches of South Padre Island. Not unusual for the days running up to and following the Fourth of July. The holiday is still what one would consider a Rio Grande Valley gathering at the Island.

See COVER STORY, pages 6 - 8

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## Executive Summary

# OUR REGION NEEDS TO BACK THIS INITIATIVE

Our cover story about the North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative took sometime to put together. During the last few years, I had heard of the group but never quite received a clear explanation of what they were doing or trying to do. But as I listened to people associated with the alliance I underwent an epiphany and this swift understanding came during a conversation with one of the group's founders McAllen Economic Development Corporation President Keith Patridge.

Listening to the MEDC President explain rapid response manufacturing I could hear the subtle excitement in his voice. He didn't know it, but in my mind I was cheering his conviction and belief that the United States could regain the initiative in innovation when it comes to manufacturing. Once again we would be the thinkers, inventors, and leaders in implementation in manufacturing.

In the last few decades we have watched our manufacturing base leave our country. The reasons can be debated endlessly, but it always seems to get back to costs. Now much of what was "Made



in the USA" in our father's time is commonly made in other parts of the globe. As Patridge explained the advantages of advanced rapid response manufacturing, it is possible for us to regain the edge and take the lead again. One person familiar with rapid response manufacturing put it more bluntly, "This will put back together what off shoring tore apart."

The question remains can this be accomplished? Can our region become a center for rapid response manufacturing? The hand in hand cooperation of the private sector and institutions of higher education in research and problem solving is the right direction.

The planned research park in south McAllen will be a platform for innovation and work towards its start-up is moving quickly.


I know some will say the Rio Grande Valley will never pull it off. Tell the Nay Sayers to step back and look at how far this region has come in the last two decades. Look at the changes, our infrastructure, and growth in population. The change in attitude and education is important. Now, we hear about high school graduations, where numerous students are receiving their associate degrees through dual enrollment programs.

The growth of a center for rapid response manufacturing will benefit all aspects of the area. It will open up opportunities for students, graduates, create jobs, increase commerce, and growth. The Valley should be united in its encouragement and aid in the success of the NAAMREI project.

*Kevin Knoch  
Managing Editor  
Valley Business Report*

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# Contents



Island's a favorite  
pages 6 - 8



Fun in the Summertime  
pages 18 - 20

**Cover:** View of South Padre Island from Isla Blanca Park northward, including the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway. (Richard Stockton Photography)

**Executive Summary** ..... 3  
Rapid Response for the Region

**Business News** ..... 5  
South Texas Manufacturing Luncheon

**Cover Story** ..... 6 - 8  
South Padre Island is Attracting a Variety of Tourists

**Business News** ..... 9  
Texas Workforce Commission Chariman Speaks

**Feature Story** ..... 10 - 11  
ERO Architects

**Business Feature** ..... 12 - 13  
Santana Textiles

**Series Feature: part 2** ..... 14 - 15  
Valley International Airport

**Business Profile** ..... 16  
NY Deli flavor in the Valley

**Business Evolution** ..... 17  
NRS Consulting Engineering

**History & Heritage** ..... 18 - 20  
1952 Brownsville Little League

**Opinion** ..... 21  
Plumbing Industry Gains College Credit

**Business Features** ..... 22 - 23

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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.

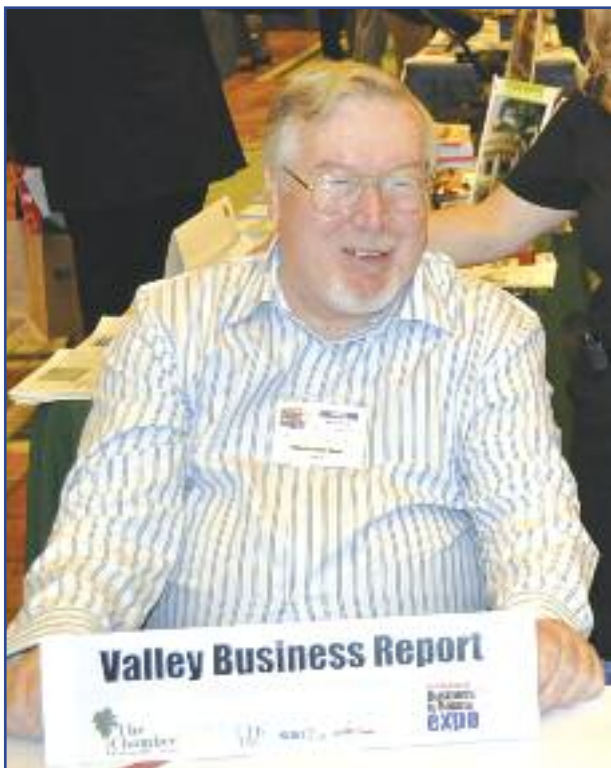
Our editorial philosophy is to cover local business news and to bring you relevant state, national, and international news that affects our region. Look for links on our Web Site at [www.valleybusinessreport.com](http://www.valleybusinessreport.com) to business news and stories pertaining to the RGV 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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**Kevin Knoch**  
Managing Editor  
Valley Business Report

My friend, business partner and our managing editor entered into the glory of his eternal life on Thursday, June 24.

Kevin Knoch, a natural born reporter and news hound blessed so many people with his professional journalism, love for baseball and never-ending knowledge of history. Although Kevin was a native of Chicago, his home was the Valley for 46 years. Now in his new home, I will look up to him for editorial guidance as Valley Business Report continues the mission that he and I started almost one year ago - promote the positives of the RGV economy in his unique style of "old school journalism."

The business community and our staff will miss a pioneer, but Kevin Knoch's legacy is on every page. It's here and we're lucky to carry on his work. Thank you, Kevin.

Todd Breland  
General Manager  
Valley Business Report

## Business News

# EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR SKILLED WORKERS

By Kevin Knoch

Manpower's Martha Artiles stressed a couple of points at a joint luncheon of the South Texas Manufacturing Association (STMA) and the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Human Resource Professionals in McAllen on Tuesday May 25, 2010. Two major themes emerged: employers in the not too distant future will find it harder to find people with specific skill sets while older workers can look forward to being encouraged to stay in the workforce longer.

Artiles serves as Manpower's Global Chief Diversity Officer from her headquarters in San Jose, California. She related that Manpower finds 4,000,000 million employees worldwide for 400,000 clients. Observing that the world is changing, one of the biggest challenges employers face isn't finding people who will be available for work, but in finding the specific skills employers are in the market for.

The Manpower executive elaborated on her statements pointing out that the workforce is multigenerational. The demographics of the workforce should concern employers. Older high skilled employees are at one end of the spectrum. "One in 10 employees in the United States will soon be 65 years old, that ratio will be one in five in a few years. In some places one out of four workers will be over 60 years old."

One key point she emphasized is that often younger workers don't have the education or experience to fill the employment needs of the future. Some of the needs of employers may come as a surprise, Artiles emphasized. During the last five years Manpower has conducted interviews with 35,000 employers in 36 countries. The in-demand positions were repeatedly identified as "skilled trades, sales representatives, technicians, engineers, and accounting."

Skilled trades includes the construction trades. Plumbers, carpenters, and repairmen have a bright future. The results of the survey in the United States mirror the world wide survey with skilled trades and sales reps taking the top two spots. Employers are going to be looking for employees with soft skills, like public speaking and networking. They also know it will be harder to retain qualified employees in the future.

Artiles focused on the Rio Grande Valley pointing out that employment in the Brownsville and McAllen, Metropolitan Statistical Area's (MSA's) are both dominated by employment in education, healthcare, and social services. The lower valley MSA showed 30 percent of the workforce engaged in those sectors,

while the McAllen/Edinburg/Mission percentage was slightly lower at 28 percent. The top private sector employer in the valley is retail at 14 percent in the Brownsville MSA, and 13 percent in the McAllen area, followed by construction in the two MSA's.

Two important numbers need to be considered when analyzing the RGV labor market. "Here you have more teenagers, 20 percent more than other places, but 30 percent fewer adults between 49 to 69 years old. A shortage of age and experience."

Another important statistic in the labor make-up of the RGV is education attainment, or low level of it. According U.S. Census numbers in the Brownsville MSA, 37 percent of the labor force had not received a high school diploma. In McAllen MSA the number that had not graduated from secondary school stood at 42 percent.

Artiles concludes a skilled labor shortage is looming. There will not be enough people with the education to meet the area's needs in as short as five years from now. The Diversity Officer believes the solution is in cooperation. "Education and employers need to work



*Martha Artiles with Manpower from San Jose, California was the featured speaker at the South Texas Manufacturing Association luncheon at the McAllen Country Club in late May.*

*(courtesy)*

on the this problem." STMA Executive Director Mike Willis added that educational attainment numbers, "have improved in the RGV in the last decade. We have come a long way since 2000."

After her presentation Artiles reinforced her point that the future looks bright for mature workers. Employers will have to work to retain them. "They have a bright future, and many will start their own businesses, consult or work part time."

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## Cover Story

# SOUTH PADRE ISLAND CONTINUES TO ATTRACT A VARIETY OF TOURIST GROUPS

By Kevin Knoch

This is a RGV beach-going tradition going back decades and often involving multiple generations of families from Roma to Brownsville.

The Fourth of July traditions include fireworks displays drawing from across the region. The gathering has an RGV flavor to it, whether it is the cooking or friends and family getting together in familiar surroundings.

South Padre Island is much different from what it was a generation ago. Not only in terms of the number of hotels and condominiums; the island now has a total of 3,800 hotel rooms and condos available for rent for the tourists who visit throughout the year. SPI is no longer the island your father or mother might remember!

Two of those visitor segments have been well known for a long time. One of the most prominent are Mexican nationals who often visit at certain times of the year, during Holy Week just before Easter and then the month of August, the traditional vacation time in Mexico. Many regular visitors from Mexico are more than tourists, they are property owners and have made their SPI condominium a second or vacation home.

“Spring Break Party at South Padre” is etched in the memories of many former collegians nationally and state wide. The once weeks-long event has changed in the last decade. SPI no longer draws large rowdy overflow college-aged crowds. Due to competition from other destinations, only on the weekends around Texas Week, when most state schools are on break, do the numbers look anything like the large masses of college students that populated SPI during March in late 1980s and through the 1990s.

The island is far from deserted in those weeks running up to Texas Week, points out SPI Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Dan Quandt. “It is about knowing your market. We have seen a family Spring Break segment develop around the college students. Now the hotels know they can book conferences in March away from the busy student times.”

It is the development and growth of other visitor segments that have helped round out SPI’s economy. RGV residents might not even realize how much the tourist make up has changed. Just over two decades ago some SPI businesses would close for the winter, much like business would at other beach locals. Summer was gone, so were the tourists, and so were the dollars.

But the uniqueness of the RGV tourist market came



*The World Birding Center’s newest location draws many birding enthusiasts to South Padre Island and the Laguna Madre area. (courtesy South Padre Convention & Visitors Bureau)*

into play. Winter Texans, long a group associated with trailer parks peppered throughout the valley, began to discover the Laguna Madre area. One veteran SPI businessman commented the upswing in winter rentals of condos for months at a time started in the mid-1990’s. Tourists traded their trailers for a stay near the beach and visits to the area began to rise among winter visitors.

During the last 10 years the summer months have developed another tourist segment benefiting the Island’s economy. Families from the San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston triangle have been making SPI their summer vacation destination. The increase in family visitors shoulders summer business between Memorial Day to the Fourth of July through August. Like clockwork the family vacation business ends with the beginning of the school year.

There is a steady year round visitor sector that even long time residents of the RGV don’t realize is important to SPI’s economy. It is the weekday meeting business... the type of conferences that can fly in and stay a few nights... to the day visitor from the upper valley who drives to SPI for a seminar and lunch. It is these people and their numbers that support the Island’s numerous eateries on weekdays while waiting for the weekend beach crowds.

An example of the numbers of weekday visitors can be found in the weekly publication by the South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau titled Another Great Week on South Padre Island. In the May 31 to June 5, 2010, edition, SPI hosted a two-day Department

of Homeland Security conference attended by 100. From June 3 to 6 The South Padre Athletic Training Seminar was held drawing 500 participants. Concurrently the Region One Superintendent Leadership Conference was attended by 125.

The week ended with a Texas Oil and Gas Association meeting drawing 50 people. The VATA/SPATS Annual Conference June 4-6 drew 500 at the SPI Convention Centre. That is a total of 1,275 visitors, putting many heads in beds and spending at SPI restaurants.

Another visitor slice is nature tourism as the island has long been a destination for bird watchers. The thin strip of land off the Texas coast is strategically located on migratory bird flyways, which pass south in the fall and head north in late spring. After long flights over water, the lights of the island serve as a beacon for the tiring birds.

SPI leaders wanted to focus on this visitor’s group by building a Birding and Nature Center. The building and accompanying hundreds of feet of boardwalk weaving through the marshes opened in late September of 2009. According to Manager Kate Ball the center has drawn over 21,000 visitors in just over eight full months of operation.

The visitors numbers are healthy, but it is a look inside the numbers that is remarkable. In early May, the guest book at the center had a variety of visitors. They hailed from all across Texas, the United States, and a notable number from the United Kingdom. The May guest book might be easily mistaken for the demographics expected in January and February, when winter weary

visitors populate the area.

Ball stresses the guest book proves SPI is a destination for those who want to bird watch. “The activity is particularly popular in the United Kingdom; April and May is part of the migration north. These are real true birders that are here in those months.” The number of visitors from England has led the CVB to market SPI birding opportunities in that country, Quandt added.

There are sub-groups that visit the island on a regular basis. Fishermen depending on what they are fishing for are all over the Laguna Madre area. A loyal group of surfers can usually be found near the jetties in Isla Blanca Park.

Just who and how many visit SPI? The SPI Economic Development Corporation commissioned a study in 2005 to answer that question. Quandt related, “THK and Associates found that we have roughly 1.3 million overnight visitors a year on average. Not a bad number.”

The study also took into consideration everyone who crossed the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway. “They separated out people like me who live on the mainland and work on the island. Then they got it down to where the total number of visitors was over five million.” Backing out the overnight people, the majority of those who visit SPI are from the Rio Grande Valley and termed “Day Trippers.”

If you want a profile of the most common SPI

tourist, 74 percent of them are within driving distance. During an average year they number 3.7 million. The island has a variety of tourist segments, but the largest number of visitors are people from the Rio Grande Valley who visit for the day.

“We have to show the day visitors the respect they

deserve. We can’t just depend on the long distance traveler. Our Memorial Day was pretty much Valley people. You have to be hospitable and receptive to them,” declared Doyle Wells when talking about the largest segment of island visitors.

Wells is owner and operator of Island Adventure



*Hotels and condominium developments take advantage of the sandy beaches of South Padre Island and the beautiful waters of the Gulf of Mexico. (SPI Convention & Visitors Bureau)*

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Center. The name is a recent change from Valley Equestrian Center, where for years you could (and still can) rent horses to ride on the beach. Wells is expanding, adding all terrain vehicle rentals and beach tours to his north island business.

A long time SPI businessman, Wells feels the day tripper segment needs to be taken into consideration. Wells has a unique perspective because of growing up in Port Isabel, and his family's connection to the island is a long one. Wells' grandfather operated a pre-causeway ferry to the island in the 1930s, and his father served as Cameron County Parks Director overseeing island parks until his death in 1981.

Wells confirms the summer "Texas Family" vacation business at the island has been on the upswing this decade. "We were on track in the summer of '08, for our best year until the hurricane hit (Hurricane Dolly, July 23, 2008). We were really getting the increased visitation from up-state." He traces the rise back to earlier in the decade, estimating it started building in 2004.

How has he recovered from the summer of 2008? Business came to a screeching halt as Dolly brushed the island making landfall just north in the vicinity of Port Mansfield. "Right now I'm back up to where I was in 2007."

But he pointed out that the hangover from Dolly

hurt other tourist segments with damage to hotels, and the meeting business took a huge hit with all facilities damaged. The follow-up year 2009 was not that favorable because of a downed economy and a prolonged case of Red Tide (an organism that produces a respiratory irritant) lingering in island waters that had their effect on the number of visitors.

In recent months the island visitor numbers have been recovering. "We are up about 25 percent for the year in occupancy taxes over last year," stated Quandt. A good omen with the summer season starting.

Quandt feels there are several reasons for the increase in family vacations from upstate in the last decade. "It has definitely picked up. It started after 9/11. The CVB marketing has been focused on that business. Beaches are a top vacation destination, plus it is close to home." Quandt also cited the Schlitterbahn Water Park opening in 2001 as a contributor to increased family vacations and day trips to the island.

South Padre Island has seen a number of setbacks over the years. Storms and hurricanes always loom. It seems like a bad memory now but the collapse of the causeway is coming up to its ninth anniversary in September.

Quandt related that he teaches classes in crisis man-



agement for convention bureaus. "It really shows what a draw South Padre Island is. We were down after Dolly. We didn't have rooms, now we are about ready to open another hotel in a few weeks. We are going again, we have beaten back bad economy and all sorts of other things. People just want to come to the island whether they are from Austin, Monterrey, or Minneapolis."

Both Quandt and Wells agreed the SPI economy can be best described by one word ... "resilient."

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## Business News

# SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT, WORKFORCE CHAIRMAN STRESSES

By Kevin Knoch

Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Tom Pauken delivered a few messages during his speech Thursday June 3, 2010, at the Public Affairs Luncheon held at the Rancho Viejo Country Club. Pauken spoke to a joint meeting of the Harlingen and Brownsville Chambers of Commerce. The event drew a sold out crowd of over 300.

Pauken took the attendees down memory lane, back almost 30 years ago in the Rio Grande Valley. Business wise it was not the best of times. He talked about what is needed in the workforce now and how people can influence their futures by acquiring the skills to enhance employment. In finishing he foresees dark clouds on the horizon if the country doesn't make some changes in our fiscal policies.

Chairman Pauken talked about how he worked with the Valley Action Committee representing the White House in the Rio Grande Valley in the early 1980's. The committee was put together by the Rio Grande Valley Partnership, which was headed by Tom Champion. It was a time that is hard to imagine if you didn't live through it. Economically the Rio Grande Valley was rocked on its heels, suffering double body blows.

A Mexican Peso devaluation sent a seismic shift through the area's economy. In the summer of 1982, the Mexican Peso lost 1,000 percent of its value, shocking the economies on both sides of the border. Mexican nationals saw their purchasing power evaporate over night.

Unemployment climbed, and double digit unemployment numbers were common in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. Nationally, inflation was raging, and the state took a hit when the oil and gas sector faltered. If that wasn't enough, a 1983 December deep freeze devastated the citrus industry, putting hundreds of agricultural workers out of work. Thousands of acres of trees were lost and the industry has never fully recovered.

Decades later the RGV and Texas are doing much better, Pauken stressed. But he cautioned and emphasized that in today's workforce, "It is critical to concentrate on skills training. Our community colleges are important training grounds." If there is one sector that is growing and looking for employees it is health services.

He related if you do two things you will be successful in today's workforce. Have a strong work ethic and obtain the skills that make you wanted by an employer. "Develop skills that will make you advantageous to be hired."

The Texas Workforce Commission has developed a

back to work initiative. Employers can receive a \$2,000 cash bonus, if new workers stay employed for 120 days. More information on the program is available at Workforce Solutions offices.

Talking about state government, Pauken stressed that Texas has been careful with its finances, unlike a number of other states. "We didn't fall into a trap. We were prudent and didn't overspend. We have a rainy day fund. Texas is poised to lead the nation, and we will attract businesses from other states."

He warned he does not like what he has seen on the national front in the last decade. Supporting his statement he related, "Texas led the nation in private sector job growth at 9.3 percent in the last decade, while every other large labor market state from 1999 to 2009 lost private sector jobs. We have lost one third of our manufacturing base in the last decade. Business taxes have become onerous and we have shipped jobs overseas."

Pauken made it crystal clear that "We have to deal with the debt problem. We have to get it under control. In the job area we have to level the playing field and encourage creation of private sector jobs. Texas is the




*Texas Workforce Chairman addressed a sellout crowd at a Harlingen/Brownsville Chamber of Commerce Public Affairs Luncheon at Rancho Viejo Country Club. (Knoch)*

number one place in America the number to do business. Let's make America the number one place in the world to do business."

After his remarks, the former Republican state chairman underlined the importance of acquiring trade skills in answer to a question from the Valley Business Report. "I'm encouraging greater emphasis in the high schools on career technical education. Greater attention in our community colleges to skills training, those are critical areas...if you have skills you won't be out-sourced."

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## Feature Story

# FOR ERO ARCHITECTS EDUCATION IS THE MISSION

By Kevin Knoch

Eli Ochoa has been working as a licensed architect and structural engineer for just over 30 years. What is unusual about him is he has been working for himself since he was 27 years old. He is the president and chief executive officer of ERO Architects based in McAllen and his firm specializes in the designing of education facilities.

Many may not realize it but they drive by ERO projects everyday in the Rio Grande Valley. In the western valley Palmview High School for the La Joya Independent School District (ISD) was completed in 2008. The LBJ Elementary School in Edcouch Elsa and the Weslaco Central Middle School was finished in 2009. The Performing Arts Centers at the three Edinburg High Schools will be completed in November of 2010. ERO designed and supervised the building of the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) Engineering Building.

"I focused on education because I love that product type. It is fascinating to me. My brothers and myself were the first wave in my family to go to college. We were



*Palmview High School in the western RGV. (courtesy)*

brought up with this notion that education is critical for advancement in the future. I've always pushed the education envelope... We have to help our children get ready for the workforce... it creates a better quality of life for us."

Ochoa, raised in Mission, wanted to return to the Rio Grande Valley once his education was complete. At first he worked as a one-man operation and gradually became a partner with a firm for a number of years, but went out on his own again early in this decade while concentrating on education work.

What is different about ERO? Their work isn't confined to the RGV as they are known in Central Texas and Central America. ERO has recently been approached because of their expertise in education facilities to design schools in Honduras, Panama and Columbia. As for Central Texas that was something he wanted to do.

"I got started professionally in Austin and I have a lot of relationships and a good network in Austin. I wanted to make a vertical move to get into educational work there. What wasn't vertical was all of the state agency work that is there. You almost have to be in the Central Texas market to get work."

But he emphasizes having a presence in Austin isn't the key reason ERO opened an office in the state capitol. "The primary reason we went to Austin was while our company was growing we just couldn't find an educated labor force down here. Most of the young students who were headed off to Austin, Texas A&M, Rice and all of the architectural schools all wanted to stay in the larger markets. They were not coming back here. It was hard to find educated labor here." Ochoa did say it has changed with the downturn in the economy in the last couple of years and a lot of those professionals are now seeking work.

"One of the reasons I went to Austin about five years ago I was that I felt I could find graduate architects. But I couldn't get them to come down here. So I opened up a shop there and we started growing the office. We have been doing work with Austin ISD and Austin Community College, and some of the surrounding communities."

One development has started to send some RGV students his way recently. The University of Texas San Antonio architectural school has been marketing itself locally. "I'm really pleased with the quality of graduates I'm seeing from the architectural school at UTSA. I have four graduate students from UTSA now taking their test for licensing."

Ochoa has had a long-standing interest in education. His father served on the Mission school board, as did he and his brother. Asked to access what he sees in RGV in terms of improvement in the quality of the workforce he says "It has really been improving, the entire market has been improving."

In his dual disciplines as an architect and engineer he observes projects from start to finish. Along with the additional school board experience, he sees things through an owner's eyes. "We are getting a lot of graduates from the construction management schools. You can really see the quality of the contractors in the management of their offices and the management of the job site. In our profession the construction, architecture and engineering have really taken a step forward."

Another academic area has contributed to the improvement of the design/build sector locally. "The emergence of the University of Texas Pan American Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Program has put a lot of great graduates into our workforce." UTPA is starting a structural

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engineer program and he already has an employee enrolled in the program.

Ochoa praises the drafting graduates from South Texas College (STC) and Texas State Technical College and both schools have some complimentary comments about working with ERO. In Harlingen they have just broken ground on a \$7.2 million project, and in Weslaco the architect firm is remodeling classrooms turning them into laboratories for STC nursing program.

Chuck Smith is director of engineering at TSTC. He related, "ERO is the architect of record on our new university center." Smith also pointed out how flexible Ochoa and his firm are. "Eli isn't just an architect, he is also a structural engineer and is very practical in what he comes up with in space configurations. He is very responsive to the clients needs. ERO is innovative without being off of the wall."

The center's contract was let in January of 2010 and the project has just broken ground. "They have sped through the design and he has shepherded a large group of consultants to make this happen within our timeline." Smith, an engineer by training, stated, "It has been a tremendous experience working with the folks at ERO." The new center, which will allow students to take upper level course from four-year universities at the Harlingen campus, will cost \$9.4 million including contents and is expected to be completed in July of 2011.

Jerry Rodriguez is director of facilities, planning and construction for the fast growing STC. He related ERO has done five or six projects for the school. Currently they are converting classrooms into labs for STC's nursing program at the Mid-Valley Weslaco campus.

"It is under construction right now. They are converting six classrooms into vocational nursing skills labs. They will be state of the art." The labs will have life-like mannequins for students to work on. Rodriguez, an architect by trade, has been with the school over 10 years. He talked about the pivotal role ERO played in STC Rural Technology Center in Starr County.

"We just finished in the spring a technology center on our Starr County campus. That was an ERO project. It was a very smooth project. ERO put together a good design and construction team. It was a state grant so we had a timeline to meet in order to get the grant funding. It cost right around \$2 million. We had 24 months to design and build it. ERO delivered."



*ERO did the structural engineering for the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) Engineering Building. (Kevin Knoch)*

Ochoa concluded emphasizing how education has improved the quality and availability in the local workforce, "It is great to get graduate engineers and architects, because before they had to leave the area and wanted to stay in those markets." Speaking about the graduates of STC and TSTC, "They have done a great job in computer drafting programs. We are starting to see those graduates in the market place. They are having an impact on our economy."



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## Business Feature

# SANTANA TEXTILE PROJECT STARTING IN EDINBURG

By Adolfo Pesquera

Following two years of announcements, 2010 is the summer that ground breaks and residents of Edinburg get their first tangible look at a factory project expected to bring 800 jobs over the next five years.

Manufacturing, long an economic sector perceived to be shrinking across the United States, makes its comeback in this corner of the nation thanks to a Brazilian company ranked fifth largest producer of denim fabric in the world.

Santana Textiles S.A., based in Horizonte, Brazil, changed the scope of the project from what was initially announced; the plant size grew, but the cost shrank. There was a delay in the launch date that cost the company some incentive money that came from the state.

However, Edinburg still gets a state-of-the-art factory that promises to be an economic engine for years to come.

"The machinery is brand new," said Roberto

Cantu, chief executive officer for the Santana plant. "It comes from Germany, Switzerland, Japan and the United States. We take the best from each country, which has benefits in bringing down cost."

The world textile industry migrated to the Third World long ago. It would seem counterintuitive to build a factory in the United States, but high-tech automation and proximity to raw materials provides for a more level playing field.

"In Mexico, they use equipment that is almost 100 years old," explains Pedro Salazar, executive director of the Edinburg Economic Development Corporation. "These guys have advanced technologies that are a lot more productive. They'll be able to produce here at almost the same price as in Mexico, but have the 'Made in USA' label."

Santana Textiles puts great emphasis on being in tune with global fashion trends. It participates in fashion events and is able to respond quickly to changes in an industry that reinvents itself with every season.



Artist's rendering of Santana Textile plant site in Edinburg. (courtesy)

"Santana wants to produce denim for the L.A. fashion market and Wal-Mart. That's not to say they would sell discount clothing exclusively to Wal-Mart; any clothing item \$50 or less is considered Wal-Mart," Salazar stated.

The Edinburg factory will be Santana's sixth. Cantu said there are four in Brazil and one in Argentina. The newest plant is intended to supply the North American market, but it was not a foregone conclusion that it would be built in the United States.

"The site selection process included three regions," Cantu said. "We looked at Mexico, Central America and the United States." Other than being able to claim 'Made in the USA,' Santana was attracted to Texas for its dominance in cotton production.

Edinburg City Manager Ramiro Garza said Santana already had relationships with Texas-based cotton suppliers for its factories in South America.


South Texas, the Coastal Bend and the Panhandle are regions known for their cotton production, although much of the cotton ships to China. Cotton bales trucked to Edinburg will be spun into thread, dyed and woven into a variety of denim materials.

Garza, before becoming city manager, was executive director of the Edinburg EDC in 2008. He was among the first to learn of Santana's plans, thanks to the city's trade office in Monterrey, Mexico. Santana maintains a sales and distribution office in Monterrey and that office took the lead in the site selection process. Garza, in turn, assisted them in providing demographic information on Hidalgo County.

By July 2008, Texas Gov. Rick Perry was announcing a state investment of \$1.65 million through the Texas Enterprise Fund to assist the project. Delays later forced Santana to refund more than \$60,000 for not keeping with its original timetable. Santana is to be commended, however, for sticking with the project,

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said City Manager Garza.

"We're very fortunate this project is moving forward, given the timing. It was announced just when the national economy was going into recession," Garza related. "They could have very easily put their plans on hold. But they were confident of the market for their product."

In addition to Enterprise Fund money, the city of Edinburg nominated Santana's project site for an enterprise zone. This will provide state sales tax refunds of up to \$2.5 million on any building materials and equipment purchased in Texas.

Original estimates were for a \$170 million project to be placed on 33 acres donated by the Edinburg EDC. The plant size has consistently been in the range of just over 750,000 square feet, but the cost has come down.

At present, Salazar revealed, Santana has the price tag at \$126.5 million, including the imported equipment. The plant is to be built in four phases, with each phase corresponding to a new production line. Santana wants to be able to have four different products in production simultaneously.

"The first phase is to take 18 to 24 months," Salazar emphasized. "Each subsequent phase is about

as long."

Estimated to be in production by the fall of 2011, the first phase will employ about 250 people. This will include administrative staff and the first line of production workers.

Skill assessment of the Rio Grande Valley workforce is presently underway and Santana will be working this fall with South Texas College in McAllen to develop a customized training model, Garza said.

Much of the workforce will be going through South Texas College, but some of the more specialized workers may visit Santana plants in Brazil or Argentina, Salazar added.

At the helm of the project will be Roberto Cantu. Originally from Mexico, Cantu has been with Santana for four years, but he has 22 years' experience in the textile industry.



*Example of Santana Textile products in a recent advertisement fashion shoot. (courtesy)*

"I have worked with plants in Mexico, the United States, Germany, Argentina and Brazil," Cantu declared.

Santana Textiles was founded in 1963 by a Brazilian entrepreneur who sold hammocks and later became the world's largest hammock producer. The company later focused on textiles, and in 1995 became a regional producer of denim.

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# Series Feature

## FLYING THE VALLEY: A LOOK AT VALLEY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

[The following is the second in a three-part series about the Rio Grande Valley's major commercial airports.]

*By Eileen Mattei*

Typically an airport is a fixed piece of real estate, but Harlingen's airport was remarkably nomadic in its first 42 years. Since then, Valley International Airport (VIA) has adapted to changing times, while remaining the region's busiest and fully self-supporting airport, unsubsidized by the city or airlines.

"The Harlingen Airport Board is looking at a bright future for Valley International Airport," said Michel Browning, Director of Aviation. "Southwest Airlines is adding direct service to Chicago and Las Vegas this year. Continental is looking at adding larger aircraft to accommodate the demand, and Sun County will start its seasonal service in October, a month earlier than previous years.

"The terminal is being refurbished...new restrooms, air conditioning systems and flooring. The Board has committed around \$3 million to the expansion of our general aviation area. A feasibility study for lengthening the primary runway to 9,400 feet is underway."

VIA already operates the region's longest runway, an important factor for the largest passenger and cargo planes. Along with 16 to 19 Southwest, Continental Express, and Sun Country flights departing daily, the airport is the Valley headquarters for the major air cargo operators, as well as aerospace manufacturing tenant United Launch Alliance.

The original Harlingen airport, wedged next to the Arroyo Colorado, consisted of 72 acres and a gravel airstrip when it opened in 1923. In 1918 Army pilot Lon C. Hill Jr, son of the city's founder, had landed the first plane on a football field in Harlingen. A similar vintage World War I plane served the new airport's flying school which was opened by Lemman Nelson and Bill Weller. (Nelson became a victim in an early airplane hijacking).

In the 1930s, Blackwell's, another Harlingen Municipal Airport flying school, graduated the nation's youngest female pilot, Harlingen resident Evelyn Joiner. Today, the site of the city's first airport is part of Tony Butler Municipal Golf Course.

In early 1941 on the north side of town, the War Department started construction of Harlingen Airfield and the Harlingen Air Gunnery School, which became operational in December, two weeks after Pearl Harbor. By 1943, the Army Air Corps' aerial gunnery training field had five runways, the longest at 6,000 feet. During the sixth and final week of training, the gunners were shooting .30 caliber machine guns at targets towed over the Gulf of Mexico by women pilots known as Women Air Service Pilots (WASPS). Aerial Gunner, a Hollywood war movie, was filmed at the field and featured actor Robert Mitchum.

By the time WWII ended, 48,000 airmen had graduated from the school and flown as waist, nose and tail gunners on B-17 Flying Fortresses, B24 Liberators, and other workhorses of the European and Pacific Theaters. In early 1946, the City of Harlingen took possession of the former base and its many buildings. Soon afterward, the Valley's first air cargo shipment...strawberries heading to Canada ... took off from what would be dubbed the All-Valley Airport.

By 1947, the military runways had been recycled

into use as for Trans Texas Airways' 21-passenger DC-3s which offered two flights a day. The Korean War led to the 1952 reactivation of the former military facility for use by the U.S. Air Force. With training for navigators and aviation cadets in full swing on the newly-lengthened runways at Harlingen Air Force Base, the city opened



*Built on the WWII base site, Harlingen Air Force Base trained more than 10,000 cadets between 1952-1962.*

Harvey Richards Field in 1954.

Its two paved runways covered former agricultural land west of town on a site that later became Palm Valley and Harlingen Country Club. Texas International Airlines began four flights a day to Dallas in 1955. Following a major upgrade at Harvey Richards in 1960, Trans Texas began flying from the Harlingen.

The horrendous economic blow caused by Harlingen Air Force Base's closing in 1962 prompted the city to propose a regional airport centered on the Valley's longest runways. Despite objections from McAllen and Brownsville, Harlingen voters approved \$1.25 million in bonds to transform the abandoned base into an international jet airport. Initially called Harlingen Industrial Airport, it began jet service in 1967 with Trans Texas as the airlines moved from Harvey Richards to the larger facilities at the old base. In 1970 the airport adopted the name Rio Grande Valley International Airport.

Businesses took root on the former base property: the Marine Military Academy in 1965 moved cadets into barracks and classrooms. In 1968, the Confederate Air Force brought its collection of aircraft and memorabilia from Mercedes and set up in a corner of the airfield for 23 years. A large hangar became the home



*Women pilots, known as WASPS, towed target planes for aerial gunners and freed up male pilots to serve in combat zones. (photos courtesy of Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum)*

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of EmAir which produced heavy duty agricultural sprayer planes over the next 13 years. FedEx now occupies that site.

THE GAME CHANGER

The defining moment for Valley International Airport undoubtedly came in 1974 when Lamar Muse chose Harlingen as the first expansion airport for the new discount airlines named Southwest. McAllen's leaders had scoffed at sharing Southwest's passengers with other Valley airports, leading Muse to put all his flights at VIA when the upstart airlines expanded beyond the Dallas- Houston-San Antonio 'golden triangle.'

Mexicana soon started flying to Harlingen and by 1981, Continental Airlines, Braniff and America had started service. Like other valley airports, VIA reflected the airline industries' bankruptcies and mergers with a revolving lineup of national and international airlines.

Gulf Avionics, started in 1980 by Don Wiles who was soon joined by David Garza, evolved into Gulf Aviation. The award-winning Fixed Base Operator continues to provide aircraft maintenance and fueling, a flight school, hangar space, 24-hour service and charters.

Renovations and expansions brought Valley International new terminals, the region's first jet bridge service, and passenger amenities such as internet access



A Southwest Airlines plane parked at Valley International Airport. (courtesy of VIA)

at the gate area, KidsPort, and a small on-site conference facility.

In 2003, VIA posted 53 percent of domestic boardings in the Valley. Airport tenancy surged the next year with the opening of NAFTA Cargo Port, a multi-modal facility for air cargo carriers. Stand-alone facilities are operated by DHL, FedEx, UPS, and UPS Supply Chain Solutions.

Making tomorrow's history, VIA was chosen by the FAA in June as one of the first six airports in a next-

generation program known as the Airport Geographical Information Systems, and Electronic Layout Airport Plan. In June it also installed full body scanners, in lieu of secondary inspection pat-downs.

Offering a control tower open from 6 am to midnight and US Customs clearance of cargo, corporate and general aviation, Valley International Airport continues to lead the region's passenger and cargo statistics.

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## Business Profile

# N.Y. DELI IS HOME GROWN RGV OPERATION

By Kevin Knoch

The New York Deli delicatessen menu has become popular with area patrons. Some might think the owners are originally from New York, but the family migrated from Dallas to Brownsville in the early 1970s. With locations in Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen, the NY Deli has a loyal customer base.

Owner Gilbert Rendon points out that “We have a customer in Harlingen who has been coming in for 13 years now and orders the same thing. . . the number two meat loaf sandwich and says one of these days he is going to order something else.” Laughing, Rendon relates he has been saying that since the day we opened. “We have a number of customers like that.”

He feels the secret to their success relies on three things. “The consistency, the quality of the food, and the service.” Rendon points out that they had to educate the public about some of their menu items. “When we first started out a lot of people didn’t know about our meats. They didn’t know what

pastrami, corned beef, Reuben, and French dip sandwiches were.”

Continuing, “People did know what a club sandwich was. We would get big orders for them and they are hard to put together when you are using three different breads and making a number of them at one time.” Gilbert Rendon Jr, improvised and came up with a Manhattan sandwich very similar to the club, but with a bun as the featured bread. “It probably has become our second best selling sandwich,” he added.

Another aspect about the New York Deli is that it is definitely a family affair. Their endeavor has been supported by a number of long time loyal employees. In fact you might need a scorecard to keep the Rendons straight.

Fred Rendon Sr. opened the first New York Deli in Brownsville on Central Boulevard in 1983. Rendon wasn’t unfamiliar with deli style restaurants, having operated similar establishments in New York, Chicago and Florida.

Rendon retired in the 90s leaving his Brownsville operation to his son Dennis. Son Gilbert, wife Christine, and Gilbert Jr. opened the Harlingen location at 122 N A Street in Harlingen in 1997. Gilbert Jr. branched out to 829 Dove Avenue in McAllen in 2003.

The original Brownsville New York Deli closed because of illness a number of years ago. Gilbert Rendon reopened a Brownsville location on East Price Road in August of 2008, and in October of 2009 the deli moved a few blocks into the former Pancake House location on the east side of the intersection of Price Road and the Expressway 77/83. Since moving in Rendon has refurbished and renovated the building.

Before the Harlingen location opened, Christine Rendon and her son Gilbert Jr. worked for years with Fred Sr. at the original Brownsville location. Today Christine and her son John oversee operations in Harlingen. Both daughters Anne and Stephanie have put in time waitressing at deli locations, and Anne’s husband George Wolfe is one of the cooks at the Brownsville restaurant.

Not only are the New York Delis a classic RGV family style business with everyone involved, but those hired tend to stay a long time. Cook Leo Ortega was hired by founder Fred Rendon a few years after graduating from Brownsville Pace High School in 1986. Kitchen worker Minnie Briones has worked at the Brownsville and Harlingen restaurants for just as long. Mary Ann Balboa and Raul Arreano are long time employees in Harlingen, along with Jessie



*Long time employee Minnie Briones, owner Gilbert Rendon and cook Leo Ortega in kitchen of newly remodeled NY Deli in Brownsville. (Knoch)*

Moroyquiki in McAllen.

Brownsville businessman Bill Rusteberg agrees with Gilbert Rendon’s assessment of why people eat at the NY Deli. “The food is consistent, it is good, and the service is very good. You can get in and out have a quality meal during the lunch hour, which is important for working people. And it is different. You can go down any major street in McAllen, Harlingen or Brownsville and you can find Mexican food or fast food restaurant chains. It is a niche market and people like it once in awhile.” Rusteberg also likes to host business lunches at the deli locations.

There is another thing that sets the restaurants apart. Adorning the walls, decorating the inside of the New York Deli’s is Beatles Memorabilia, enough to make any collector envious. Background music plays the hundreds of recordings by the “Fab Four.” Gilbert Rendon, a Beatles devotee, claims he has enough memorabilia in storage to open three more locations.

Asked if another New York Deli location is in the offing, Gilbert Rendon would not commit, but did indicate it is possible. Christine Rendon was quick to add. “I’m not sure we can add more restaurants as we didn’t have enough kids.”

“We appreciate our loyal customers and have enjoyed them over the years, stated Gilbert Rendon. “We have been blessed and very fortunate. All of this started because my dad couldn’t stay retired. He wanted to open one more restaurant, after a career in the business.”

The New York Deli’s menu is available for take-out orders. Call 550-0025 in Brownsville, 425-3500 in Harlingen or 631-8787 in McAllen.

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## Business Evolution

# GOING WITH THE FLOW: NRS CONSULTING ENGINEERS

By Eileen Mattei

In 1988, one of the first projects of the newly-formed NRS Consulting Engineers set the direction of the business. Engineers and partners Bill Norris, James Rice and Larry Stone, who bought an existing firm with Harlingen and Texarkana offices, took on the task of designing the desalination plant at Harlingen's Fruit of the Loom (FOL) manufacturing facility.

The reverse osmosis operation (using desalination technology), was the first of its kind in Texas. Aimed at transforming wastewater into a high quality water supply for FOL's bleaching and dying operation, the project was so successful that FOL moved all its bleaching and dying operations to Harlingen. NRS led the project from planning and permitting through construction management to personnel training.

Over the last 20 years, NRS Consulting Engineers' proven expertise in desalination, water supply planning, wastewater reuse, and water system efficiencies has taken NRS engineers to Ireland, American Samoa and Mexico City. They have also completed numerous projects in Texas and around the country.

On April Fools' Day, 2004, Bill Norris and Jesus Leal, P. E., became the two principals of NRS with Harlingen as their headquarters and offices in Austin, Dallas and San Antonio.

"Jesus and I are polar opposites, but we have the same goals," said the amiable Norris, returning to his office after the Texas Water Conservation conference sponsored in part by NRS. "I like to say I make the promises he has to keep."

The Valley's mild drought around 1988 set the stage for feasibility studies on alternative water sources, specifically treating brackish well water to municipal drinking water standards, Norris related. NRS researched Florida pilot projects and planted the seed of possibility in the Valley. That began to pay off as cities and water suppliers moved pro-actively to ensure a water supply for growing populations served by an aging supply infrastructure.

In 1999 NRS provided the design and shepherded construction of the region's first municipal reverse osmosis treatment plant at Valley Municipal Utility District #2. NRS construction management enabled the plant to save 30 percent over conventional plant prices, and the plant began producing 250,000 gallons per day. Other water districts sought NRS' services, too. In Brownsville, Texas's second largest brackish groundwater desalination plant was designed and built by NRS. It now produces up to 7.5 million gallons of drinking water per day.

NRS has promoted cooperative efforts of water districts, lowering the costs of stand alone plants. "We've proven that they can work together pretty well and save money doing that," the professional engineer explained.

NRS' water conservation project for the irrigation district

in San Benito, a NAD Bank-financed project, replaced antiquated pumps and canals. The changes now save the district 3.6 billion gallons of water annually. The project came in \$2.2 million under budget and was completed 6 months ahead of schedule.

Three years ago, NRS completed the North Cameron Regional Water Project's desalination facility in Primera that can produce 2.25 million gallons of drinking water at a wholesale cost below \$1.40 per 10,000 gallons.

Now a showcase facility, the Primera plant resulted in the "Guidance Manual for Brackish Water Desalination in Texas," which NRS Consulting Engineers and partners prepared for the Texas Water Development Board. Communication plays an important role at NRS which owns WaterPR, the entity which produces Texas Water News, an information service on water quality and quantity issues. "We believe we are educating the rest of the world."

NRS pilots tested Texas' first saltwater desalination facilities in Brownsville and South Padre. Although various companies had approached NRS about being acquired, Norris and Leal deflected the offers until Befesa, a Spain-based multinational that manages water projects, wanted to discuss NRS

becoming their US partner.

"They sparked my interest. They had the same company culture. They worked hard, enjoyed life and took care of the people. It seemed a really good fit," Norris stated.

Befesa acquired 51 percent of NRS in 2008, but the well-known NRS name was retained. Norris and Leal have since branched out with Befesa WaterBuild, a sister company that provides construction services from bid to design build and construction management at risk. Combining engineering and design services with construction services leads to a more collaborative effort, according to Norris. When issues arise on a project, there is less finger pointing and greater cooperation.

NRS employs six engineers and regularly takes on college interns. "They are potential leaders for the company," said Leal, rushing to catch a Dallas flight. "We follow them along and get to see how they work and fit in."

With conventional water treatment using sand filtration moving to obsolescence, NRS has the talent and technology to take new challenges in stride. Regulations continue to define new contaminants that need to be removed with advanced technology, added Norris, who has anticipated the changes. "I like to look at things in the future."


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## History & Heritage

# THE SUMMER OF '52, A MEMORABLE ONE FOR BROWNSVILLE BOYS

“Play Ball,” Umpire Jack Loff boomed as the crowd quieted to a buzz of whispers. The near silence was broken with a pop of the ball hitting the catcher’s mitt. First National Bank’s third baseman Ernesto Parra had taken a cut at a head high fastball, a pitch Brownsville Herald catcher Praxedis Piña had to leap to capture. “Strike One!” Loff intoned and the game was on.

Anticipated for months, Little League in Brownsville got its start just after 6:00 PM on Monday, May 19th, 1952, at Ringgold Park. The first contest featured two teams from the East Brownsville Little League. The opening day capped weeks and numerous hours of work done by the Brownsville Kiwanis club who were instrumental in the formation of a Little League program for the city.

The head of the Kiwanis sports committee, M. M. Jones, had received word by phone in late March that Brownsville would be granted a charter for a six- team league. The news came from Little League’s national headquarters in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The program for boys 8 to12 had been sweeping the country since its

inception in 1939. The post World War Two years saw Little League spreading like wildfire from community to community.

The popularity of the program was emphasized by the number of participants in 1951. Starting with a three-team league in Williamsport in 1939, Little League had 776 leagues in 1951, representing 3,858 teams and involving an estimated 60,000 players.

The announcement was certainly the big news for the city’s youngsters, but adults had something else on their minds... rain or the lack of it. The Rio Grande Valley was suffering through a serious drought, underscored by a dwindling amount of water in the Rio Grande River. The area was up against the wall and a storage reservoir behind the planned Falcon Dam wouldn’t be completed until late 1953.

The building of Falcon Dam had altered the flow of the river and the dam would control future flooding. During construction, however, once the river dried up the water supply would soon follow.

The Little League charter news made the sports pages, while the water crisis dominated the front pages.

An attempt was made at cloud seeding in early April by the “Valley Rain-Increasing Association.” Los Fresnos pilot Sam Hughston, Jr. stated some likely cloud formations sprayed with water didn’t produce any precipitation in the first such experiment in the early morning of April 2nd. Brownsville City Manager Emory W. Watts put the city on a split shift when it came to watering lawns.

Despite the water worries plans for the inaugural season of Little League moved swiftly. Within days of the charter announcement officers for the city wide league were selected the evening of April 7th. M. M. (Barney) Hale was named president, Jim Bazan filled the vice-president’s post, and John O’Brien and Charley Harriman served as treasurer and secretary. At large members included Jones and Miguel Sanchez.

Tryouts were slated to start Saturday April 19th and a tentative league startup date was penciled in for the week of May 11th. Teams were expected to play at least a 20- game schedule to be completed by the end of July.

Baseball was by far the dominant sport in the sports pages during the spring of 1952. The city had a minor league professional franchise in the Gulf Coast League... the Brownsville Charros, operated by the Brownsville Lions Club. Coverage of spring training and the regular season for the Major Leagues, Texas League, Gulf Coast League, a semi- pro Valley league, plus high school



*Courtesy of Little League International, South Williamsport, Pa.*

baseball and softball could be found in the sports pages of the Brownsville Herald.

The Charros were original members of the Rio Grande Valley League, switching to the Gulf Coast League after the 1950 campaign. The club was competitive in its first three seasons, making the post season playoffs each season. The Charros were the Gulf Coast League defending champions having taken the 1951 title from Corpus Christi by winning four games to three.

The eight-team league stretched from Lake Charles, Louisiana, to Port Arthur, Texas, south to Texas City and Galveston and down the coast to Corpus including teams in Laredo and Harlingen. The league played the same amount of games as the major leagues 154, with 77 home dates. All the promotion and operation of the club was handled by the Lions club. Home games were played at the Lions Field located at West Fifth and West St. Francis Street in Brownsville.

The Lions did their job promoting. In 1951 they won the league opening day attendance trophy by drawing 3,110. They repeated as the attendance champs with their home opener again in 1952, which brought in 3,702 paid attendees.

The Charros served as a major entertainment venue for Brownsville residents in the summer months... much as movie theatres did year round. Going to the movies was still the one of the cities favorite activities and residents had a variety of theaters to choose from. Two drive-ins served the city... the Star and the Charro... along with downtown theatres the Grande and the Mexico Theaters on Washington Street, the Queen and Majestic

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on Elizabeth, and the Capitol on Levee Street.

A sample of the movies playing the day Brownsville learned it would receive a Little League Charter included; "A Streetcar Named Desire," playing at the Majestic with Vivian Leigh and Marlon Brando. At the Star the academy-award winning "A Place in the Sun," was part of a double feature with "The Last Outpost," featuring Rhonda Fleming and Ronald Reagan.

Television was available for little over four hours an evening on Channel 7 broadcasting from Matamoros on XELD-TV. For those fortunate enough to have a set the test pattern would come on as early as 3:00 PM, scheduled shows started at 6:00 PM. On the radio dial six stations served the city.

As the Saturday April 19th tryouts approached the Brownsville Little League had their sponsors lined up for the six team league. The backers included the Brownsville Kiwanis, the West Brownsville Lions Club, Brownsville Herald, Pan American State Bank, First National Bank and the Brownsville Shrimp Exchange.

Just before the tryouts City Manager Watts threatened city wide water rationing if water levels in the river didn't increase or the city didn't receive a healthy rain. Watts stated the water would be cut off and service would be limited to an hour in the morning, an hour at

noon and an hour in the evening. Police were patrolling the streets looking for water violators. Citizens took heed and started conserving water and Watts didn't implement rationing.

The Little League tryouts were held at Ringgold Park and sure enough it rained enough to interfere with the activities. Over 250 boys signed up for the program and the baseball skills auditions were rescheduled for later in the week. The tryouts were held throughout the week and League officials estimated as many as 400 might sign up before the season started.

After a week of judging the city's young baseball talent, league officials and coaches got together at 10:00



**HE WAS OUT**—Bobby Balmori, Herald third baseman, stirs up the dust as he tries hard to get to the plate in the second inning of Monday's game against the First National Bank. Catcher Luuro Vera has already put the tag on him though and umpire Jack Loff called him out on the play. (Herald Photo)

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**KEEN HUH!**—Uniforms for six of Brownsville's Little League teams have arrived and were modeled Wednesday for the Herald photographer. Above, John Teran shows off his First National Bank uniform a while near catching equipment to Duane Anderson, the Brownsville Kiwanis Club team. (Herald Photo)

AM Sunday morning April 27th to choose players for Brownsville's six teams. Managers involved in the player draft included Fred Williams, First National Bank; A.C. Riskind, Pan American Bank; Louis Pashos, Brownsville Shrimp Exchange; Chuck Childress, Kiwanis Club; Jim Bazan, West Brownsville Lions Club and Jim Lees for The Brownsville Herald.

Rosters would top out at fifteen players and at no time during the season could a team have less than twelve listed on its roster. More than fifteen could be taken that Sunday, but a cut down to the maximum had to come five days before opening day. Other requirements included no more than five twelve year olds at any one time could be carried and all teams had to carry five players ten years old or younger at all times.

Over 400 boys signed up for the program. Only ninety would be on teams on opening day. Plans were under way for possibly two supervised minor leagues for



*Image from the 1952 Little League World Series Championships. (courtesy)*

boys not picked in the original player draft. After several hours the draft was complete and opening day was just over two weeks away, so league officials thought.

- To be continued -



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## Opinion

# TRADING UP: GIVING APPRENTICESHIPS A COLLEGE DEGREE

By Pat Bubb

Plumbers protect the health of the nation, according to my friend Jo Wagner, past national chair of the National Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors Association and CEO of CTO Inc., a major Valley plumbing contractor.

Yet the traditional plumbing apprenticeship program is not producing anywhere near the plumbers needed now or for the future, she told me. Plumbing is not a job that can be outsourced overseas.

The answer to this shortage is the College Tech Prep/ Apprenticeship Program in Plumbing Technology which results in an Associate of Applied Science Degree.

Tech Prep has long guided high school students into career and educational pathways that lead to high skills, high wage, in-demand occupations. The College Tech Prep/ Apprenticeship is the first time we have focused on the trades.

With the Plumbing Technology program, the next generation of plumbers will be better prepared academically for the math, science, and computer applications that are essential for a commercial plumber today.

The College Tech Prep/ Apprenticeship program begins in high school and combines rigorous academics with on-the-job apprenticeship work starting the summer following the sophomore year. While earning college credits in high school, students also earn salaries during their vacations working for plumbing contractors. The teens in the structured College Apprenticeship system have a program manager who ensures that the full spectrum of intended learning is covered and oversees apprenticeship agreements with employer partners.

Opportunities for continuous growth in knowledge and part-time income will be very real. By the time the student receives the AAS degree in Plumbing Technology, he or she will have had 2,000 hours of paid apprenticeship work and all the classroom instruction required for the apprenticeship program. Backed by a strong academic foundation, the graduate will be ready for a remunerative career.

The College Tech Prep/ Apprenticeship Program that Jo Wagner and Tech Prep have designed represents a collaborative effort, aided by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison as well as Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr., Rep. Eddie Lucio III and other elected officials. We've worked with the national PHCC, the Texas PHCC, and em-

ployers across Texas since 2007. Full approval of the program has only one more administrative obstacle to be cleared.

The Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners must agree that graduates of TSTC's AAS degree program in Plumbing Technology are eligible to test for Journeyman Plumber licensure. Although the program would still require final approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, we don't believe this would be an issue once we have the go-ahead from the Plumbing Board.

The Plumbing program is designed to deal with a critical workforce shortage and to address high school dropout issues. On completing the program, the new plumbers can take a well-paying job or go on for a B.S. in construction and related fields. The traditional apprenticeship program would remain in place. This apprenticeship model could be adapted easily for other trades that face a workforce shortage.



*Pat Bubb is the director of Tech Prep of the RGV which coordinates with employers, school districts and colleges to guide high school students into well-paid career pathways and in-demand jobs. (courtesy)*

An advertisement for Indian Ridge Bed &amp; Breakfast. The top half of the ad shows a lush, green outdoor pool area with a large waterfall cascading into the pool. The text "A Refreshing Place for" is written in a large, elegant, gold-colored font. Below this, a list of amenities is presented in a smaller, gold-colored font, each preceded by a diamond symbol: "corporate retreats", "special events", "getaways", and "birding". The bottom half of the ad features a black silhouette of a person on horseback against a yellow sun. To the right of this logo, the text "Indian Ridge" is written in a large, bold, black font, with "BED &amp; BREAKFAST" in a smaller, black font underneath. Further to the right, the contact information is listed: "(956) 519-3305", "209 W. Orange Grove Rd.", "Mission, TX 78574", and "www.indian-ridge-bb.com".

## Business Feature

# DPS REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS READY TO BREAK GROUND

By Alicia Aguilar

Weslaco will soon be the home of the Regional Headquarters for the Texas Department of Public Safety. A ground breaking ceremony was held May 14, 2010 for the \$40 million project, and completion of the facility is expected in late June or early July of 2011.

A larger than 110,000 square feet complex will be built on the 20 acre site with plenty of space for growth. The land, located on FM 1015, was given to the state by the City of Weslaco and the Weslaco Economic Development Corporation. Hernan Gonzalez, Executive Director of the EDC, said that the city leaders felt this was an important gesture and the returns in economic impact will be felt for years.

“The high level of jobs and payroll that will be paid out of this facility will transform to home sales, additional jobs, sales tax revenues and so much more,” related Gonzalez. He added, “The employees most likely have families that will be living in Weslaco,

where they will buy homes, have jobs, shop and entertain in our community, adding revenue to the city coffers.”

The facility will house the Administrative Headquarters for DPS Region 3 which extends the South Texas triangle from Del Rio on the west, east through Uvalde to Corpus Christi then south along the Rio Grande. Departments that will be included in the facility are as follows: Texas Highway Patrol Division; Texas Rangers; Aircraft Section; Criminal Investigations Division; Intelligence & Counter Terrorism; Emergency Management Division; Information Technology; Victim Services; Crime Lab, and Law Enforcement Support Division. There will also be a separate facility for a Driver's License Division.

All regional command staff will be working out of the Weslaco offices. The regional headquarters will have a positive economic impact on the city with a substantial payroll that will be moved to Weslaco. The city is expected to receive a positive economic impact from the presence of the DPS Regional Head-

quarters.

Jose C. Rodriguez III, Regional Commander of Texas Department of Public Safety said they are excited about the construction of the DPS Regional Headquarters in Weslaco. “The new complex will allow the Department to enhance public safety and provide world class services. We are very appreciative to the Texas Legislature for recognizing the need for the facility in the Rio Grande Valley and the partnership we have established with the City of Weslaco Leadership,” Rodriguez commented.

Weslaco is strategically located in the center of the Rio Grande Valley, just 15 minutes to the east of McAllen and 15 minutes to the west of Harlingen on US Expressway 83. The DPS Regional Headquarters will be located less than two-miles north of Expressway 83 on FM 1015 on the Weslaco's east side.

*Alicia Aguilar is Marketing Director for the Weslaco Chamber of Commerce.*

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## Business Feature

# MCALLEN HEART HOSPITAL IMPROVES OUTLOOK FOR PATIENTS

By Dalinda Guillen

Patients in the upper Rio Grande Valley who experience a dangerous form of heart attack known as STEMI (ST elevation myocardial infarction) are more likely to receive treatment more quickly and have a positive outcome now that McAllen Heart Hospital has implemented the LIFENET STEMI Management Solutions from Physio-Control.

STEMI can pose a serious threat to a patient's heart muscle if it is not treated quickly.

The LIFENET system is a Web-based approach that helps reduce the amount of time it takes for patients to undergo Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI), such as balloon angioplasty or a stent. The American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association say that the more door-to-balloon (D2B), or the quickest amount of time it takes from the time a patient enters the hospital until the time the balloon reaches the clogged artery, the greater the chance of a positive outcome.

LIFENET STEMI Management Solutions helps health-care professionals manage care for STEMI patients by alerting care teams, and transmitting diagnostic-quality

electrocardiogram (ECG) information to everyone involved in the patient's care through a secure, Web-based system.

"The LIFENET System encourages improved communication between our emergency medical services personnel, physicians and nursing staff so that together we can further enhance the care we are able to provide to STEMI patients," says Mike Adams, Chief Operations Officer at McAllen Heart Hospital. "McAllen Heart Hospital is proud to be the first facility in Hidalgo County using this latest digital technology."

The system allows paramedics in the field to transmit ECGs using compatible LIFEPACK defibrillators to physicians and nurses at McAllen Heart Hospital. That gives the hospital additional time to prepare for the patient's arrival while he or she is still being transported to the hospital, helping to reduce D2B time and reduce damage to the patient's heart muscle.

"Studies show that time from onset of symptoms to treatment... usually stent placement or angioplasty... is critical to improving survival and outcomes for these patients," said Sandra L. Martinez, RN, BSN, McAllen Heart Hospital System Chest Pain and Lead Stroke Coor-

dinator. "Having the LIFENET System will help us to achieve better patient outcomes by further streamlining care and reducing DB2 times."

Paramedics with Med Care EMS have joined McAllen Heart Hospital in using the new technology as the company has recently installed LIFEPACK 15 defibrillators with Bluetooth® capabilities in all of its first line vehicles. "Candelario Ontiveros, President of Med Care EMS, purchased the new defibrillators to elevate the level of care available in the community," says Mack Gilbert, EMT-P Director of Operations at Med Care EMS. "We're working with McAllen Heart Hospital to save more patients' lives and reduce damage to their hearts."

"This is a great leap forward for heart attack treatment in the Valley," states Todd King, RN, BSN Director of Emergency Services. "Our D2B time is already well below national guidelines. We expect the new system to cut our D2B time even more."

*Dalinda Guillen is Public Relations Coordinator, South Texas Health System.*

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