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PAN AMERICAN RETURNS

Back when flying was new, before jets, Brownsville was aviation's Gateway to Latin America. Pan American Airways flew into Brownsville-Pan American Municipal Airport, the airline's western headquarters, on their way to Rio until the 1950s. Today a new air cargo company named Pan American Airways is operating at Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport with big plans for flights to Central and South America. Is Brownsville ready to again become the Gateway to Latin America?

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Executive Summary

RGV COMPETES TO WIN!

Peak retail season is almost here, new automobile models are hitting the floor, residential communities are developing and commercial buildings are under construction. Back to school traffic and crowded store aisles were as wild as ever. The kiddos are back in class and long-awaited Friday, Saturday and Sunday gridiron traditions have finally begun.

This time of the year brings us to our feet, cheering for the winning touchdown or big goal line stance. Locally, we can also celebrate victories of another kind. We're weathering this recession far better than most regions of the country, thanks in large part to our friends in Mexico. In the Rio Grande Valley, we have a very popular vacation destination, companies are relocating here, a re-born airline is taking flight in our back yard, financial institutions are expanding and opening new locations, restaurants are full every night and holiday shopping is about to start. Are you kidding me? Pat yourself on the back. These things don't happen by accident and when we do business with our neighbor, our local economy scores a big touchdown.

I'm not ignoring the current global, national and local economic challenges but we do have a choice on how we deal with it. To a certain extent, we can choose to either participate in the ongoing recession or decline involvement. Sulking and whining about it is a way of participating. But what I see among many Valley business leaders is pressing forward and not accepting the current recession. It's no secret; south Texas in many ways is separated from the mainstream of the national economy. And the way I see it, that's not such a terrible thing. We have our own little world here and congratulations Rio Grande Valley – for making our world better by building, buying and hiring!

As Valley Business Report celebrates our one year anniversary this month, we congratulate you for providing us with pro-business news. Our editorial purpose is to promote local economic development and with the business activity we see in the marketplace, our staff will continue to be very busy. We are truly blessed to have loyal readers and advertisers and on behalf of the Valley Business Report team, thank



you. Your input and support is how this journal keeps presenting business success stories throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

Year two has now begun.
 Todd Breland
 General Manager, Valley Business Report

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AUTHORIZED RETAILER

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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 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 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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Business News

NEW COMMUNITY BANK BUCKS THE TREND

By Eileen Mattei

Texas Regional Bank, the newest bank in the Rio Grande Valley, formally opened in Harlingen on August 16 following a two-year quest for a community bank by five business leaders with decades of financial acumen and experience. Texas State Bankshares, Inc., the holding company organized by Bobby Farris, Michael Scaief, Tudor Uhlhorn, Bill Elliff and Jim Greene, owns Texas Regional Bank.

"We're a bank owned by many rather than by few. Our investor base is spread across the Valley from Brownsville to Rio Grande City," said Michael Scaief, Texas Regional Bank's Chairman of the Board. The holding company, which aimed to raise \$18 million to capitalize the new bank, instead raised \$24 million from 250 investors. "The response was overwhelming. It really showed a need," he added.

Texas Regional Bank reflects local financial leaders' reactions to 30 years of major banking changes in the Rio Grande Valley. Bank deregulation in the 1990's started the process, according to Scaief. "We've seen banks grow and branch. That also allowed large banks from outside Texas to come into the market. In the 1990's we saw a consolidation in the banking industry." The consolidation accelerated as more owners and investors in home-grown banks sold their interests to national and international financial corporations. The region's community banks dropped from 55 down to 11.

While numerous Valley consumers were content dealing with a multi-state financial institutions, many businesses were unhappy with the large banks' extended turnaround times and lack of community input on commercial loan applications and services.

That's why Texas State Bankshares, Inc., organized in October 2008, began exploring options for forming a new Harlingen-based regional bank. At weekly meetings, the organizers were soon dealing with the national melt down of financial markets and the uncertainties surrounding proposed banking regulations. Federal regulators redirected the organizers' efforts to purchasing an existing small institution rather than building a bank from the ground up. Multiple revisions of the holding company bylaws marked continuous adaptation to the changing marketplace. In May 2010, the holding company acquired Falfurrias State Bank with assets of \$17 million.

Banking regulators expected Texas Regional Bank to open with a capitalization of \$10 to \$12 million, the norm for community banks, according to Bobby Farris, board vice chair. Instead, the strong investor response that started the bank off with \$24 million will enable Texas Regional to aggressively pursue its goal of opening banks in McAllen and Brownsville within three years.

Developing relationships with borrowers is essential. "We're here strictly to take care of shareholders and the community," Farris said. "Tudor Uhlhorn and I learned from years of serving on the Texas State Bank board. Now we're copying that model." Learning also from the experiences of other closely-held banks, Texas State Bankshares, Inc. put limits on family investments. No single extended family was allowed to purchase more than a ten percent interest.

"Decisions for our bank are made here in the Valley. We are able to respond to (loan application) requests without going out of the area," Scaief said. "We are going to bring banking back to the way it ought to be. Texas Regional Bank's mission is not to reinvent banking."

Scaief outlined five success drivers for the Harlingen-based bank. The five are building relations from personal checking accounts to business loans; regional leadership and decision-making; capital for growth; first class technology; and diversity of services and products to meet demands.

Falfurrias State Bank, like so many other banks before it, it gained a new name and new look in August. Unlike others, the Texas Regional Bank-Falfurrias branch will remain a community bank, retaining its staff and its customers, and taking care of local needs from checking accounts to car

loans and business accounts.

Health problems prevented James Greene, Texas Regional Bank president, from attending the bank's opening ceremonies held on August 17. The new bank's temporary modular structure near the intersection of Ed Carey and Sunshine Strip will be supplanted by a permanent headquarters in 2011.

"A whole lot of people have put their trust in us. I can't tell you how humbling that is," Scaief concluded.



The organizers of Texas Bankshares Inc form the Board of Directors of the new Harlingen-based Texas Regional Bank: Bill Elliff, Tudor Uhlhorn, Bobby Farris and Michael Scaief. (E. Mattei)

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Cover Story

FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX – PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS RETURNS TO BROWNSVILLE

By Eileen Mattei

Eighty years ago, Pan American Airways made Brownsville the “Gateway to Latin America,” anchored by a Spanish-flavored airport terminal for travelers flying down to Rio or Cartagena or Mexico City.

In June 2010, Pan American Airways returned to Brownsville South Padre Island International Airport (BSP), now the designated headquarters for the new and ambitious cargo and passenger service bearing the historic name.

“Our intent is to establish Pan American Airways with its headquarters in Brownsville as the new Gateway to Latin America,” said Robert Hedrick, president of the newly-revived Pan American Airways and of its older-sister companies, World-Wide Consolidated Aquatics and World-Wide Consolidated Logistics. Brownsville/South Padre, he predicted, will

join Miami and LAX as the third major American gateway, the Third Coast’s gateway, reenacting aviation history by flying the southern route on a consistent basis

The groundwork for the enterprise started four years ago and drew on a deep familiarity with the industry. Hedrick, one of the initial shareholders of Emerald Airlines and head of its cargo section, teamed with Richard Alaniz, who had over 20 years experience in aircraft security

With Alaniz as vice president, the pair launched World-Wide Consolidated Aquatics. The company designs and sources commercial water equipment for international projects ranging from water parks, hotel pools and spas to potable water and wastewater treatment plants, as well as irrigation and industrial water systems. As a one-stop shop, WWCA channels multi-million dollar component packages around the world.

World-Wide Consolidated Logistics was launched to assure reliable and timely delivery of WWCA’s complex and often massive shipments. Pan American Airways, the flying entity, completes the vertical integration by carrying WWCA cargo and that of other shippers and manufacturers to South and Central America and, according to the long-range business plan, to Africa.

“The original plan was to place all this at Ellington Field, (near Houston),” Hedrick said. Because he had done business in the Valley with Emerald, Hedrick and Alaniz first took a close look at what Brownsville had to offer. They decided the border was better for their business. “The reception we received, the atmosphere here, the work conditions, all made Brownsville ideal for us,” Hedrick said.

The magic of a historic name

World-Wide leased offices in the architecturally distinctive Pan American Airways building (c.1931) next to the airport’s main terminal. Hedrick and Alaniz succumbed to an irresistible desire to learn



Richard Alaniz and Bob Hedrick are taking off with Pan American Airways, starting with cargo flights to Mexico and points south. (Eileen Mattei)

more about the status of the Pan American Airways name, which had been associated for 60 years with the U.S.’s principal international carrier, the one that had been dubbed the unofficial national airlines. A search revealed that the Pan American Airways name was available and, after negotiations, Hedrick and Alaniz incorporated Pan American Airways in Delaware in June 2010. (A form of the name is also used in Europe by a virtual airlines.) World-Wide Consolidated Logistics is the majority owner of Pan American Airways. The business plan has secured investors from around the country for the three interlocking companies. Local investors serve as officers and directors of their boards.

Hedrick jokes that the business has saved significantly on graphics and image building because Pan American Airways name and the fact that the name was already on their headquarters building! On the other hand, most people think he is joking when he introduces himself as president of Pan American Airways.

Earlier this year, WWCL began transforming a 18,000 square foot hangar into a cargo terminal. The warehouse will include 2,000 square feet for floral shipments requiring refrigeration to service the year-round floral suppliers in Ecuador and Columbia that dominate the market. “We’re very serious about handling this time sensitive cargo,” Hedrick said. Floral

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The historic Pan American Airways building is once again the headquarters of the fabled name and is preparing to again claim the title of Gateway to South America.

orders are scheduled up to one year in advance. Pan Am's cargo flights to Mexico are scheduled to begin before the end of 2010.

TSA Certified Cargo Screening

Opened on September 1st, the cargo facility includes south Texas' only TSA Certified Cargo Screening Facility, a security step mandated by the 9/11 Commission: all cargo going on passenger flights must be screened at the piece level (i.e., pallets no longer allowed.) Approximately 15 percent of air cargo volume

travels on passenger planes. All cargo over #150 pounds on cargo aircraft must be screened. TSA does not fund the \$3 to \$5 million screening equipment investment for independent facilities such as theirs, Alaniz said "We are under their watch, but we have to acquire the equipment ourselves. But we're very excited that this is going to be a job creator." The screening facility is expected to draw other air cargo carriers to the airport. Air freight commercial carriers as of August also must meet higher security standards.

Alaniz said next on the list is the opening of their Aircraft Maintenance and Repair Operation (MRO) slated for next year. That facility will specialize in converting commercial passenger aircraft, of which there is currently a glut on the market, into cargo planes. The MRO initially will do aircraft repairs and work into the conversion phase. Aircraft maintenance is strictly monitored, Hedrick



A Pan Am crew posed at Brownsville in November 1943. (courtesy - City of Brownsville)

said. The south Texas location will offer substantial added security and convenience to airlines now ferrying planes overseas to places like Costa Rica for maintenance.

Passenger service was not in the Hedrick's and Alaniz's original business plan. "Given the political situation in Mexico, the demand for passenger flights to the US border is high now," Alaniz said. "Cargo is simpler. Passengers change the operations dramatically." Nevertheless, the revised outlook brings the possibility



Brownsville resident Mary Yturria was a Pan Am stewardess. (courtesy - City of Brownsville)

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of passenger service sooner rather than later, despite the obstacles encountered opening international flights.

Job creation

The new Pan American Airways and its sister companies are projected to create over 1,200 jobs during the next five years. When fully operational, the annual wage investment will be \$40 million. “We’re working with UT-Brownsville to identify people who fit our job descriptions. A lot of people are involved,” Hedrick noted. The company is be-

ginning to line up administrative, technical, and logistical positions as well as pilots and crew. The bulk of the hires will be in Logistics and MRO aircraft conversion service.

“Things change by the minute,” Alaniz admitted. In late October, a significant portion of the Pan American Airways building will have been renovated and readied for a rededication ceremony.

Hedrick and Alaniz pointed out it is only 5.5 hours flying time to Rio de Janeiro, where the

Summer Olympics are slated to open in 2016. By that time Pan American Airways should be flying regularly to South America and offering three day cargo service to all of Latin America. From Rio, the airline plans to hop west to its World-Wide hub on Cape Verde Island -off the north coast of Africa- and from there to its projected African and Middle East hubs.

For the new Pan American Airways, the sky’s no limit. For more information, see the website panamer-

Historic Ties Between Brownsville and Pan American

Pan American’s long and profitable link with Brownsville began in 1929 when celebrated aviator Charles Lindbergh inaugurated Pan American’s air mail and cargo flights from Brownsville to Mexico City. A few months later, Pan Am leased the tiny airfield, renaming it Brownsville- Pan American Municipal Airport, and established passenger service. By 1932, Brownsville was the headquarters of the airline’s Western division, where Pan Am aircraft engines were overhauled and tested at the airport. Pan Am became the region’s largest private employer, creating hundreds of well-paid jobs during and after the Depression. After World War II, Pan Am’s overhaul facility prospered, but the age of jets spelled the end of an era. In the mid-1950s, Pan Am relocated the facility to Miami.



*Built in 1931, the original terminal at Brownsville airport is known as the Pan American Airways building today.
(courtesy - City of Brownsville)*

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Business News

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS LEADING THE WAY

By Davis Rankin

She's 29 but she's already logged four-plus years in the restaurant and bar business. Her new place, Vintage Room, opened mid-December 2009. "It's going really well," said Liz Guzman whose son Tyler is almost a year old.

For Seby Haddad, Lumen Lounge (108 S. 17th) is the first business he has owned, or co-owned, although he, too, is not new to the game. "I was always sort of in and out of the industry in different ways and always in the entertainment or service industry," working as a DJ and bar manager in Austin and New York for many years. Haddad is 30 years old.

For Larry Delgado, 35 and wife Jessica, 30, the time was right for a change. They were working as managing partners at two different Carrabba's Italian Grill restaurants in Austin and two restaurants was too much. Jessica had resigned, Larry's contract was almost up. "So it was time" and so was born House.Wine in October of 2009.

Iker (pronounced Ee-care) Urquiola took a BBA degree in marketing from Austin's St. Edwards University, followed by an internship with award-winning LatinWorks in Austin, AdWeek's and Advertising Age's Multicultural Agency of 2009, which specializes in the Hispanic market. He thinks seeing Austin's nightlife and entertainment scene has helped him as General Manager of Alhambra on South 17th Street in McAllen. Urquiola is 24.

Mimi Gonzalez wishes someone would give her the formula, "Every day is so different." Gonzalez's BarCelona occupies part of what's referred to as the Ice House because it was built in 1919 as an ice plant. The place for vibrant Spanish cuisine opened at the end of last year after Gonzalez helped renovate the entire building. She's ended up "running and managing and doing everything here." She worked at a McAllen ad agency and is a youthful 41.

Only 24 years old, Isaac Guerra is sort of the old man of the young businessmen and women who are making McAllen's Entertainment District go. Only 20 when he started Espana Restaurant on North Main Street in McAllen, Guerra had to wait a month to turn 21 to get his liquor license. He closed Espana at the end of last year, turning his energies to a new restaurant & bar, El Divino, at 1410 Austin Avenue, two blocks away from 17th Street and his other passion, Cine El Rey.

These are some of the young entrepreneurs making McAllen's Entertainment District a destination for Valleyites and visitors alike and giving life to McAllen's nightlife even in tough economic times. In atmosphere, their venues echo what the District has to offer, from Haddad's Lumen Lounge—"kind of a bar-club that's pretty much the most chic...well-designed upscale place in the Valley"—to the Delgados'

House.Wine., where they wanted a place "classy and sophisticated but also relaxed and unpretentious, a place that we would like to hang out and I think we've achieved that," ventured Larry Delgado.

"Energy is what they all have in common!" exclaimed Wendy Smith, the McAllen Assistant City Manager who oversees 17th Street and the Entertainment District, "You



Liza Guzman has been a successful business owner for several years in the Entertainment District.

(Rankin)

feel that here in the Entertainment District."

"I think it (our youth) maybe brings...new ideas and kind of sees what our age group likes," thought Vintage Room owner Liza Guzman. "I know what I like and where I want to be, you know, and that's the type of place I'm trying to do with Vintage Room; nothing too crazy, a place where people can go and don't have to scream to talk to one another."

Experience is agreed, offered Alhambra's General Manager Urquiola, seeing how different restaurants and bars work, "but I think being this young you can just kind of go for it with whatever idea you might have and if it's successful, as it has been, it's definitely something we want to keep focusing on."

Adapting is something else they've had to learn in order to survive.

"What we have now is totally different," explained Delgado. When House Wine opened the idea was to combine furniture with a wine lounge but furniture sales never gained momentum. So around July of last year we decided that if this was going to work...that we needed to

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Jessica Delgado of House Wine created an upscale relaxing atmosphere for her customers. (courtesy)

add the bistro concept.” They added a full menu and things turned around.

Guzman ran The Thirsty Monkey on Nolana for about four years, but “with all the business going down in the downtown area, we just kind of had no choice” but to head for 17th Street, thus the opening of Vintage Room, and soon, the rebirth of The Thirsty Monkey behind it on Chicago.

And Isaac Guerra is adapting, again. He just sold his interest in El Divino and is spending time on his arts project in the historic Cine El Rey at 317 S. 17th, which he acquired in 2007.

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Workforce

CHEVRON, TSTC FORM WORKFORCE TEAM

Dave Ralph

Chevron, a leader in the energy industry, and Texas State Technical College are promoting higher education and building the corporation's work force.

The TSTC System offers a Mechatronics Technology Program at its campuses in Harlingen and Waco. It is a hybrid curriculum to equip students with skills in automation, electronics, instrumentation, computerized process controls, and robotics. Graduates generally are placed in companies involved with manufacturing processes, aerospace, defense systems, energy systems, and motor vehicle production. Chevron provides the Mechatronics Technology Program at TSTC Harlingen with scholarship funds, equipment and assistance to help recruit new students who will graduate and enter the work force.

"The TSTC graduates master a combination of skill sets that enables them to understand our increasingly complex field operations," Chevron Recruiting Coordinator Lynne Pettey Daniels said.

Entry-level employees assigned to work at oil and gas wells leased by Chevron maintain and monitor the base field operations on electronic and automated systems, she explained. Guaranteeing safety at the work sites is a priority. "We find that TSTC graduates bring a commitment to fundamental work ethics and they are accustomed to working on team projects in a cooperative environment," Daniels added.

Sergio Martinez of San Benito received an Associate of Applied Science degree from TSTC Harlingen in 2010. He graduated from Los Fresnos High School in 2004. Now, Martinez is a Chevron field specialist trainee monitoring and maintaining oil pumping units and natural gas wells in the Fort Stockton, Texas, area. The starting hourly pay scale for such positions is about \$23, which translates to approximately \$47,000 annually depending upon overtime and other factors.

The challenge to learn about new technology and develop critical level thinking to solve problems attracted him to Mechatronics.

"I felt that Mechatronics would place me in an interesting career that would teach me something new and exciting every day. I am receiving great experience! I plan to stay with Chevron because the company offers options like financial aid for higher education, medical and dental insurance coverage, and retirement and investment opportunities," Martinez said.

He met Chevron recruiters on one of their regular visits to campus. "Every Mechatronics course I took

relates to my everyday duties. The computer sensors, pneumatics, hydraulics and other equipment elements are things that I had hands-on training with at TSTC," he said.

"My instructors – Diego Villarreal, Arnie Garcia and Leo Gutierrez – are the main reasons for my success. They always provided help when I needed it and encouraged me to learn as much as possible, not just to be satisfied with knowing something. They were strict and challenged all of us to take responsibility for our education."

Janeen McGill, production operations and maintenance recruiter for Chevron, said that TSTC's instructional facilities represent cutting edge technology to familiarize students with the Chevron work environment and TSTC students frequently gain valuable leadership experience.

"Any type of support coming directly from industry tells us that we are doing the right job, that our graduates are meeting and exceeding industry expectations," said Villarreal, chairman of the Mechatronics Program at TSTC Harlingen.

"We want our students to demonstrate professional behavior in the classroom and in the laboratory. They need to be in class, complete assignments on time and become accountable for the quality of their results."

Mechatronics Technology coursework includes motor controls, fluid power, pneumatics, hydraulics, fuel cells, renewable energy, manufacturing processes and more. TSTC adjusts the curriculum to career demands established by industries worldwide to provide students with marketable skills. The Mechatronics Technology Program at TSTC Harlingen includes 22 majors. Villarreal said that corporations like Chevron would like the number of students to grow to more approximately 50 majors to fill employment demand.

For more information about Mechatronics Technology and TSTC Harlingen, go online to www.harlingen.tstc.edu or contact Villarreal at diego.villarreal@harlingen.tstc.edu or 800.852.8784, or at 956.364.4736.

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HAMLIN POOLS, WHERE RESPONSIBILITY AND COOPERATION ARE KEY

By Eileen Mattei

The second and third generations of the Hamlin family are running Hamlin Pools these days. In the hands of the son, son-in-law and four grandsons of founder Francis Hamlin, the 58-year-old business has expanded phenomenally to become the largest pool company south of San Antonio. Fifteen and even ten years ago, this multi-generational scenario was not on the horizon. Yet the six relatives have settled into a working relationship based on a satisfying division of responsibilities related to selling, building and servicing residential and resort pools.

Near a poster that describes 100 convincing reasons to own a swimming pool, a large painting in the lobby of Hamlin Pools gives a visual history of the company's founder. After working in the Laredo Water Plant for 10 cents an hour in 1936, Francis McDonald Hamlin moved to McAllen where he went in to the fruit trucking business

and municipal water treatment.

"One day he decided the swimming pool business was something he wanted to get into," said grandson Taylor Hamlin. In 1952 Francis Hamlin and his wife Jacqueline opened their company in Pharr along Highway 281 North, then a two lane road.

In the late 1970s Mr. Hamlin brought his son Rodney, now 57, and his son-in-law John Stansberry into the swimming pool business. The senior Hamlin had not wanted the company to get too big and had consciously limited the number of pools built each year to 60.

"My dad and uncle saw the potential for growth," Taylor Hamlin pointed out. After gaining experience, Rodney Hamlin and John Stansberry campaigned to grow the company. They assumed ownership in 2003 and hired salesmen. Under their management, Hamlin Pools doubled its output, jumping to 120 pools in a year. The scope of work grew to include pool remodeling and commercial pools.

The third generation - Taylor Hamlin and his Stansberry cousins Travis, Josh, and Tyler - spent their high school summers working for Hamlin Pools "in the hole" digging and building swimming pools, truly learning the business from the ground up. While in college, they came home summers to work on pool servicing routes.

Rodney Hamlin and John Stansberry, looking ahead to retirement, told their sons the company would be sold eventually if none of the third generation were interested in taking it over.

Things fall into place

"It was left up to us. Things fell into place," explained Taylor Hamlin, 26. A Texas A&M graduate in construction services, he oversees pool remodels. Each of the cousins phased back into the business as they finished college. "We have our own area, but each hinges on the other. We have to cooperate. If I design and build something that the service department can't service, they come back to me."

Travis Stansberry, 30 and a TAMU graduate, is construction manager; Josh, 29, with a business degree from Texas Lutheran, handles new pool sales; Tyler, 26, earned an A&M degree in communications and manages the service department. Travis and Josh Stansberry have begun buying a part of Hamlin Pools. Two non-family members hold management positions: John Vera is purchasing and inventory manager and Teresa Cantu is office manager.

Besides communicating at the office early in the morning, the extended family schedules a monthly meeting at home. "We order in pizza and talk about the future. It's never just an hour," Taylor Hamlin said.

In what could be seasonal business, Hamlin Pools functions year-round with a staff of 88, and does not lay people off. "We try not to do that to our employees," said John Vera, who said the company recognizes how much time and effort has gone into training employees. It helps that Hamlin services 900 to 1000 pools year round. During the cooler months, the focus shifts to remodels with some construction.

"What sets this company apart is the way they train their people. They have a neat, structured program for employees: as they become better at their job, things get better for them," said Vera, who worked his way up from pool servicing. "It doesn't take people long to realize if they do their job right, they get paid more."

Hamlin Pools has a mentor program and on the job training with strict guidelines. Most people enter with an

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automotive or mechanical background at Tech level 1. After at least a minimum time at one tech level and showing competency, an employee is tested in a board review. The owners ask him specific question, including questions a customer might ask, based on the tech level.

Despite the soft economy, Hamlin Pools continues to build pools for customers who usually were referred by a satisfied customer. "It's all based on moral values and good business practices selling a quality product at a fair price," said Vera. In August, the company began carving additional offices out of warehouse space. As the Hamlin slogan says, "We build pools for fun"...and family.



The family at Hamlin Pools works together, with or without pizza. (E. Mattei)

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Business Feature

QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTANT

If you've ever had to hire somebody for any type of position you already know how difficult it can be to find the right person for the job. While many people look great on paper, it may be a very different story once they get in front of you. The same can be said for your accountant.

Choosing the right accountant for your small business can mean the difference between success and failure. Your accountant gains detailed knowledge of you, your business and your data. Not all accountants are created equal and many business owners do not have a strong accounting background. Therefore, it is very important for business owners to thoroughly consider their needs when selecting an accountant so that you make a good choice the first go-around. You might also seek recommendations from your peers and when you get in front of a prospective accountant, ask the following questions:

• **Do you have your CPA?** Business owners are often confused as to the certified public accountant (CPA) designation. A CPA has a surpassed accepted financial education levels, passed state-administered tests to prove competency and periodic re-certification exams. Certain situations, such as audits and many loan applications, require CPA involvement.

• **What kind of creative business advice will you offer**

me? A good accountant can deftly handle data and numbers but should also be able to demonstrate quick and creative business acumen. Ask the candidate to offer three quick ideas on how your business might be able to save money right now. Ask them for three examples in which they offered useful business advice to other clients that went beyond just tracking the numbers. While "creative accounting" is usually a negative, having a creative business mind can be a huge asset towards helping your company to grow.

• **Are you tech-savvy?** Small business accounting software has made powerful accounting tools available to everyone. But these accounting packages are only as useful as the person who installs them and runs the applications. Even if you are not a "techie," do your homework to be able to determine whether the candidate understands the role computer technology plays in turning business information into business intelligence. For example, ask them how they will integrate your computer files with the technology in their office. What role will the Internet play in keeping in touch and interchanging financial information?

• **Who are your other clients?** Don't hire an accountant based on the assumption that he understands the basics of your

business. Find out if he has clients that are similar to yours. If so, that's a good sign. In asking about their clients, you will also want to understand how busy they are and whether they have the time and resources to support you sufficiently.

• **How are your fees calculated?** Ask the accountant what you can expect fees to be and will he guarantee that you will not exceed certain amounts that you agree upon up front. In a time-based fee structure, make sure to find out the hourly rate, as well as all fees for expense reimbursement.

• **Are you active in the local business community?** Most experienced accountants do business and network with other professionals that can help you. Find out whether your prospective accountant can introduce you to people who might be useful to you, including prospective customers, suppliers, bankers, investors, insurance agents, etc.

• **Why should I use you?** As a final question, it's always good to let the accountant make the case for why you should engage them.

Quentin Anderson, CPA, PFS is a partner with Long Chilton, LLP and heads up the Harlingen office located at 402 E. Tyler Ave.

He can be reached at (956) 423-3765 or email at qanderson@longchilton.com.

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Workforce

JET FUND SPEEDS TRAINING FOR TECH OCCUPATIONS

By Eileen Mattei

Texas' unemployment rate has been lower than the national average for over three years. Training individuals to fill high skill, high demand jobs is one way to keep Texas unemployment rates low, according to Texas Comptroller Susan Combs. "Take a look at where the state is going. Technology is a big piece of the future," she said. Texas is adding 10,000 to 12,000 new jobs monthly. Yet the growth in jobs requiring technical training and paying above-average salaries is outpacing the number of Texans available to fill those jobs.

Comptroller Combs, speaking at Texas State Technical College, announced that the JET Fund has awarded over \$1 million in grants to three Rio Grande Valley colleges for technical scholarships and technical course equipment. The JET (Jobs and Education for Texans) Fund, administered by the Texas Comptroller's Office, is an initiative designed to overcome that roadblock by granting colleges scholarship funds and education equipment funding for designated technical fields. The JET Fund has targeted workforce training for technical careers in health care, engineering, science, welding, computers, construction, and mechanics.

"Our graduates enter the workforce with highly technical skills that cannot be outsourced, which adds to their economic value for Texas, said Dr. Cesar Maldonado, president of TSTC Harlingen. "The JET program supports this education pipeline." JET curriculum infrastructure funding for TSTC will be used for multipurpose equipment accessed by engineering, welding and other fields.

JET technical and career scholarships were awarded were in proportion to college enrollment: TSTC received \$34,000; South Texas College received \$156,000; and Texas Southmost College in Brownsville received \$83,000.

South Texas College received an additional \$500,000 for support services (tuition, textbooks, transportation) for students in computer technology programs. The multi-campus school also received \$350,000 to develop and equip the renewable energy component of the Electrician Assistant Certificate. "This is going to have a major impact," said Dr. Shirley Reed, president of South Texas College. The Comptroller's Office projects that post-secondary technical education funded by JET enables the graduates to earn \$17,544 more per year.

"It is my belief that the return on these types of investments is absolutely critical," Combs said. "The

point is this is job training for real jobs that are out there."

Three TSTC students benefitting from the JET Fund, are ready to move into their high demand, well-paying fields. Dee Dee Galvan, 19, enrolled in the LVN program at TSTC after being referred by VIDA. "I have wanted to go into nursing since I was a little kid. Then I did job shadowing at the hospital." Without the scholarships that covers her tuition, uniforms, books and equipment, Galvan would not be in school. After graduating next year, she expects to continue her education, become an RN, and work in pediatrics at a hospital.

Michael Martinez, studying engineering thanks to JET support, will graduate this winter. Hector Cantu, 40, had worked

a deadend job until the JET Fund (also known as Every Chance, Every Texan) enabled him to enroll at TSTC to study HVAC. "We want your studies to remind people you can have a stopping place and then get back on the escalator," Combs said.



Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos, Texas Comptroller Susan Combs, TSTC-Harlingen President Dr. Cesar Maldonado and STC Vice President Wanda Garza shared the good news of over \$1 million in JET Fund grants that will develop the Valley's skilled workforce. (courtesy)

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Business Evolution

GETTING A BIONIC BUSINESS ON ITS FEET

By Eileen Mattei

When Douglass Wacker opened NUTECH Orthotics and Prosthetics in Harlingen, he couldn't predict what the future would bring. After working for a Houston prosthetics and orthotics company for 24 years and covering Valley pediatric and rehabilitation clinics for them, Wacker had decided to go out on his own. The Certified Prosthetist and Orthotist did have good relationships with the clinics which had witnessed his care when fitting toddlers with braces for a weak leg. They had observed him helping athletes adapt to orthotics that kept them in their game and assisting diabetic amputees to stay mobile.

In the beginning, Wacker employed no technicians. He did all the fabrication of orthotics or braces and the fitting of prosthetics himself. Ruth Wacker joined her husband in the business as a specialist in mastectomy prostheses.

Five years and a half years later, on September 1, 2010, NUTECH officially opened a larger office after outgrowing their original building.

"There is no doubt in my mind that moving down from here from Houston was the best thing to do, the right thing at the right time," said Douglass Wacker, a graduate of Northwestern University's Orthotics and Prosthetics programs. During the years he commuted to Valley clinics, he worked with--and helped train-- a generation of physical therapists, occupational therapists, and pediatric orthopedic techs across the region. Those individuals saw his insistence on quality, and they saw the results of his professional expertise as toddlers and amputees became able to walk alone.

Prosthetics is a rapidly changing field. "Every time there's a war, the technology improves," Wacker said. While it's unfortunate that it takes combat injuries to spur rapid upgrades in prosthetic capabilities, the disabled public benefits.

"Microbionics are available for prosthetic knees and feet and hands. The biggest changes we've seen are the bionics in the knee. Think of the Bionic Man," Wacker said. "There are heat and cold sensors now for hands, too. Orthotically we're seeing a progression



in what is called stance control." With orthotics, 'bad' knees can follow a more normal gait cycle so there is less chance of stumbling or tripping. Sports injury treatment has changed over the years, too.

To keep abreast of all the developments in prosthetics and orthotics, Wacker accumulates 100 CEUs

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every five years by enrolling in state and national training sessions.

NUTECH now employs two technicians who work with Wacker creating foam impressions, then casting and shaping braces of strong but flexible plastics in a large workroom and lab. The local diabetic population, augmented seasonally by Winter Texans, has prompted Wacker to hire a full time foot care specialist who fabricates diabetic insoles and fits diabetic shoes.

Beyond the technical side, NUTECH fits orthotics (or orthoses) in kid-pleasing prints and colors. Adults too can choose brighter colors and contemporary styles.

Ruth Wacker survived two rounds of breast cancer and went into her field to help mastectomy patients. "I wanted to give women better care than I received," she explained. She prefers to meet mastectomy patients, who range from 32 to 90, before their surgery and to reassure them. "I can show them what they will be dealing with and can take part of their fear out of the picture." Wacker said women who arrive to be fitted with a prosthesis walk with their shoulders slumped and are withdrawn. Once Wacker fits them and drapes a pink silk robe around them, she lets them see a mirror. "They come out smiling. Its such a gift to be able to help them." She also fits prosthetics

for avid swimmers.

With evolving technology and a flood of patients, NuTech now concentrates on patients in the lower Valley, Brownsville to Weslaco.

"I'm ready to do more things with our business. With new technology we can provide more opportunities to our patients in a more comfortable setting," Douglass Wacker said. Easy patient access and visibility -- missing from the original location-- is not a problem at the NUTECH clinic at 501 Ed Carey. Positioned between Harlingen's two hospitals and near several pediatric offices, the office is reaching out to walk-in patients for the first time.

Business growth dictated a larger orthotic fabrication space behind the scenes as well larger waiting and fitting rooms plus a mastectomy boutique. Now stocking eight different lines of corrective and diabetic shoes, NUTECH goes beyond basic black to satisfy their customers' preferences. "Just because you're a diabetic doesn't mean you have to have ugly shoes," said Ruth Wacker. "One of my favorite things about patients here is that they are so family oriented. When a child comes in, you see mom, dad, grandparents, and aunts. I love this. The Rio Grande Valley is not like the rest of Texas. We think it's better."



Working together Douglass and Ruth Wacker have built NUTECH Orthotics and Prosthetics into a busy successful enterprise. (E. Mattei)

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Viewpoint

DREAMS CAN COME TRUE

R. K. Whittington

Opportunities for a quality education are the key to opening doors to better lives and a richer future. Both UTPA and UTB/TSC have grown exponentially in enrollment and in available degree programs. With STC and TSTC, these four institutions have an annual enrollment in excess of 62,000 students. Despite that growth, the annual budgets of all four combined are substantially less than any one of several major public universities elsewhere in Texas.

As late as 1997, graduate degree opportunities in South Texas remained scarce and professional degree programs at medical, dental, pharmaceutical, or law schools were non-existent. That vacuum was not due to lack of effort. Senator Rogers Kelly of Edinburg spearheaded a serious effort for a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley as early as 1949. Almost fifty years later, under the leadership of Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. and the support of then Representative Juan

Hinojosa, the door was finally cracked open with the creation of the Regional Academic Health Center -- a branch of two University of Texas health science centers in San Antonio and Houston -- devoted to the education of 3rd and 4th year medical students, resident physicians and public health professionals. The RAHC opened its doors to medical students and internal medicine residents in 2002 and has expanded to include a clinical research facility and VA outpatient and surgery centers in Harlingen, a bio-medical research facility in Edinburg, and a public health school in Brownsville. Over 800 medical students and residents have received at least part of their education at the RAHC, and many of the graduates of those programs are now practicing physicians in the Rio Grande Valley. The RAHC education programs have been exemplary. Its medical students have performed as well as or better than their counterparts in other Texas medical schools and have been accepted into premier residency programs across the country.

In 2009, the door to opportunities opened even further. With the enthusiastic support of the South Texas legislative delegation, Senator Lucio introduced and passed S.B. 98 which authorizes the UT Board of Regents to convert the RAHC into a full four-year medical school as a component of a new University of Texas Health Science Center – South Texas. To many, the dream envisioned over sixty years ago had finally been achieved. In reality, the work has only just begun and the most difficult challenges remain in the road ahead.

With the Texas legislature facing projected budget shortfalls and other areas of the state competing for new medical school dollars, finding and developing funding to establish and operate the UT Health Science Center – South Texas will be no small task. To achieve accreditation for the medical school, the creation of quality new residency programs in surgery, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, and pediatrics will be required to supplement existing internal and family medicine residencies. Developing basic science teaching infrastructure for 1st and 2nd year medical students will be essential – along with integration or cooperation with existing allied health programs across the Valley.

In short, this effort will be a marathon – not a sprint – and it will require all of us across the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas running side by side to achieve a common goal. We need look only 250 miles to the north to San Antonio to see how a unified effort over some forty years resulted in the transformation of open pastures and a dairy farm into a medical education, healthcare and bio-medical research complex that employs more than 120,000 and generates a \$16.3 billion annual impact on that city's economy. That is what can happen when everyone works together toward making a dream come true.

Randall .K Whittington is President and a founding Trustee of South Texas Medical Foundation, a nonprofit organization created to promote and facilitate regional cooperation, collaboration and advocacy for the growth and expansion of the RAHC and its ultimate conversion to a four-year medical school and health science center as a critical component of improved educational opportunities and healthcare outcomes and a dynamic medical education, healthcare and research complex in the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas.

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REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE GETS NEW PRESIDENT/CEO

The Rio Grande Valley Partnership Board of Directors has announced that Linda McKenna, successful business and community leader, has been named the new President and CEO of the Valley Chamber, following an extensive effort by the Search Committee.

"We couldn't be more excited about this decision," said Sergio Contreras Search Committee Chairman, "Linda has great leadership qualities and governmental affairs experience that will enable her to increase visibility to the region and be a tremendous force in legislative advocacy."

Linda McKenna states, "My passion for the Rio Grande Valley with its distinctive opportunities and challenges led me to apply for the position of President/CEO of the Rio Grande Valley Partnership." She adds, "My interest in legislative advocacy and success in my professional career made it my desire to share my unique blend of educational, personal, and senior level executive experience."

Linda McKenna has a strong background working on health care policy & advocacy, including involvement with the Texas Medical Association political action committee and political campaigns. Linda has been in leadership roles with many local board of directors including the American Heart Association, Harlingen High School PTSA and the Cameron/Willacy County Medical Society Alliance. She was appointed to the Governor's Commission for Women by then Governor George W. Bush and was named Chairman her second term. She is a graduate of Leadership Texas, then returned to college attained a Bachelor's degree in Government and a Master of Public Administration. McKenna is a former Senior Vice President with Valley Baptist Health System and currently serves on the Texas State Technical College Board of Regents. These were all invaluable experiences that make her an ideal choice for such an important Partnership role.

Linda McKenna states, "Bill Summers was a wonderful visionary and his legacy will live on for years to come in our work here at the Partnership. I am honored the search committee as well as the Board of Directors has placed its confidence in me and I am humbled to serve in this distinguished position."

McKenna's first day with the Chamber will be September 7th and she will be working closely with Board Directors to focus on helping frame strategies for Rio Grande Valley Partnership, with a strong focus on increasing membership value and reviewing key regional issues. Linda McKenna and her husband have been Valley natives for over 28 years living in Harlingen and having raised two wonderful sons.

The Rio Grande Valley Partnership is the region's leading advocate and resource for businesses and fosters the relationships that advance a vibrant regional economy. "One Region, One Voice" is a common goal.

SOUTH TEXAS COMPANY OFFERS NEW WAY TO STAY COOL

Isabel Owen

Blanca Zapata fans herself with a paper napkin at the Brownsville Coffee Shop #1 on a recent hot morning and talked about old family remedies on finding ways to stay cool.

"We don't have an air conditioner at home, so I spend my days visiting friends who have a cooler place than I do," she said, with a bead of sweat dripping from her temples. "My daughter goes out and buys rubbing alcohol, put is on a hand towel and places it around her neck. Then she stands in front of a fan to feel the cool effect." While this remedy gives instant relief, it leaves her skin dry, burned and irritated.

Zapata then tried a new product called COOL OFF™ – a pre-moistened cooling towelette – designed to provide instant relief from the summer heat, and felt renewed, refreshed and re-energized. "Wow, this feels good," said Zapata, as she rubbed the soft towelette on her temples and the back of her neck and arms. "I can see how this product can even help me with my hot flashes"

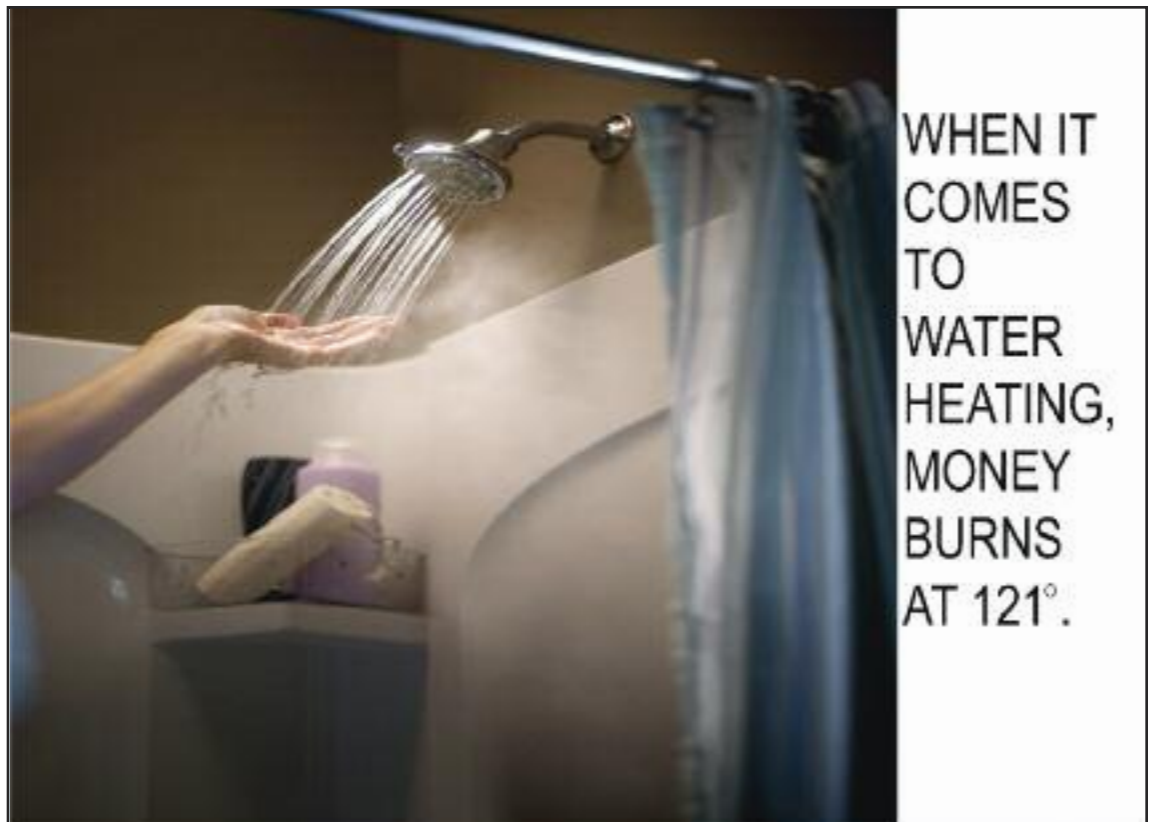
COOL OFF™ towelettes are infused with natural ingredients that include cooling herbs, plant botanicals, and essential oils, all with a clean, fresh scent. The product soothes and moisturizes skin as it provides instant and long-lasting relief from the heat.

Finding ways to stay cool during the hot summer months is a must. Health officials recommend staying indoors in an air-conditioned room, or cooling off in a swimming pool and drink plenty of water to stave off a heat stroke.

The cooling effects of COOL OFF™ lasts about 45 minutes, unlike the rubbing alcohol that lasts a few seconds. COOL OFF™ is also affordable costing less than 50 cents per packet and can be found at any H-E-B store in the Valley, next to the rubbing alcohol.

The Texas Department of Health Division of Emergency Preparedness recommends drinking two to five times more water and non-sugar, non-alcoholic beverages to replace fluids lost in perspiration when outdoors. Blanca Zapata recommends keeping COOL OFF™ handy in at all times to keep you and your family cool and comfortable.

"It's unbelievable how hot it gets down here in the Valley," said Bolner, who graduated from Texas A&M University in College Station with a degree in Food Science. "I couldn't have selected better ingredients to help Valley residents stay cool. I'm glad I brought a few packages along on my trip."



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Latest News

HARLINGEN HAS LOWEST COST OF LIVING IN U.S.

After consistently ranking among the ten lowest costs of living in the U.S., Harlingen, TX took over the top position in the nation for the second quarter of 2010. The rankings are compiled by the Council for Community and Economic Research.

“Companies consider low cost of living as a positive factor when considering potential new locations,” according to Bill Martin, CEO of the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation. “With our housing costs over 28 percent below the national average, we look pretty good to executives living in areas with high housing costs.” Martin continued. “Being able to boast a cost of living 18.2 percent below the national average is useful in our economic development efforts since a low cost of living is an indication of a low cost of doing business,” Martin concluded.

McAllen and Brownsville, Texas, are two other cities in the Rio South Texas region that made the “least expensive” list at number five and seven respectively.

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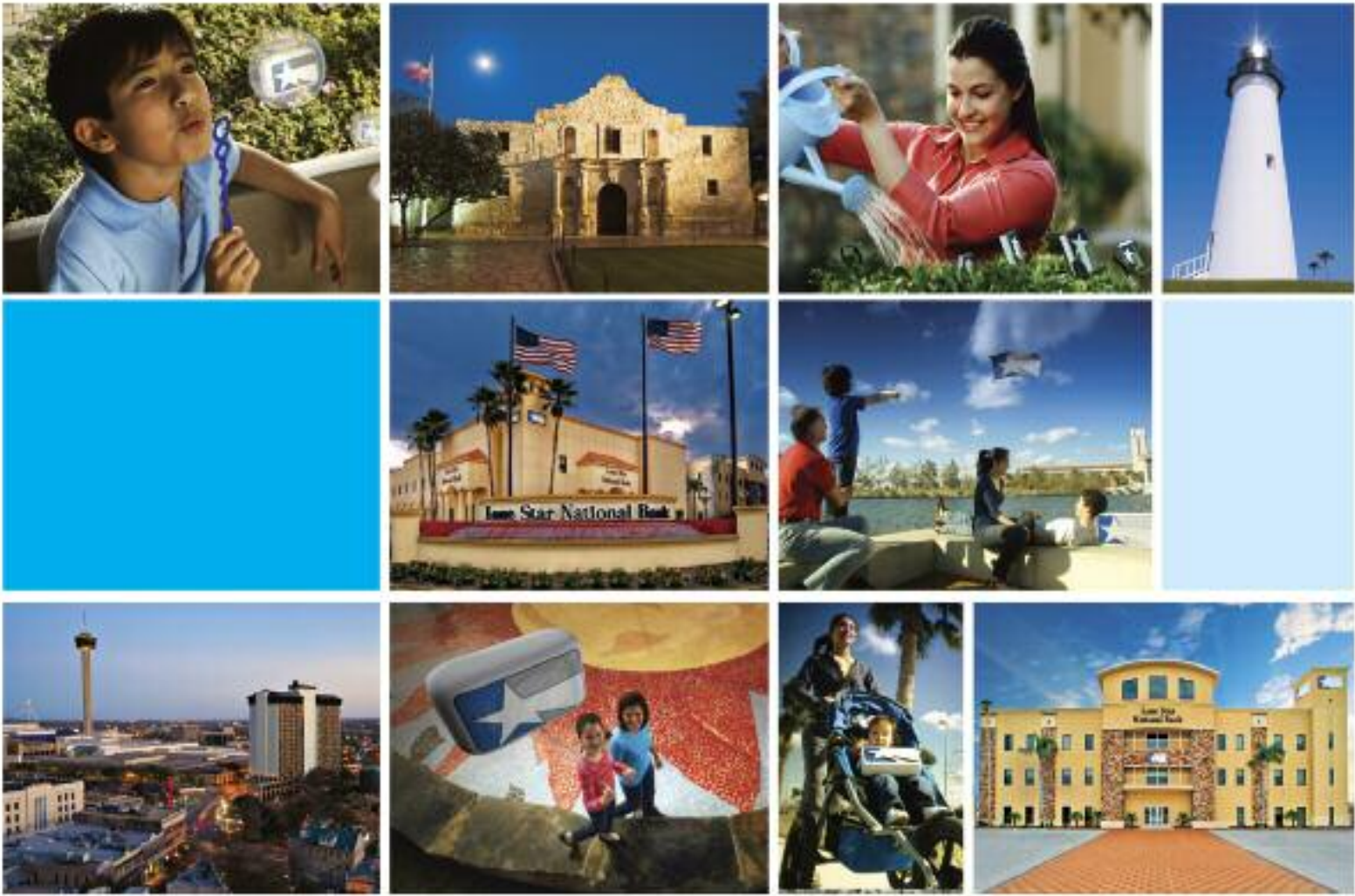
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