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## BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

**F**our international bridges connect Cameron County to Mexico, linking the commerce and cultures of Texas and Tamaulipas. Taken for granted for years, the bridges of the Rio Grande Valley continue to pull the region together while other forces push the countries apart.

*See page 5*

# TICKET INFORMATION



THE  
VALLEY'S  
TEAM



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## 2010-2011 Game Schedule

### DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					TEX 3 7:00P	
TUL 9 7:00P	NEW 7 10:30A	NEW 8 1:00P			RNO 10 5:00P	RNO 11 5:00P
					DAK 11 1:00P	DAK 18 1:00P
	NEW 19 7:00P					
TEX 25 2:00P	TEX 27 1:00P					SWF 31 7:00P

### JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						SWF 1 7:00P
					AUG 7 1:00P	AUG 8 7:00P
	FTW 11 7:00P		ERI 11 7:00P			
					DAK 21 7:00P	DAK 22 7:00P
	MNE 18 7:00P	MNE 19 1:00P				
					IA 25 2:00P	IA 26 1:00P

### FEBRUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		IA 1 7:00P	IA 2 7:00P		OKW 1 5:00P	OKW 15 5:00P
	UTH 7 5:00P			AUG 18 7:30P		AUG 19 12:00P
				AUG 14 7:00P		
		TEX 22 1:00P		MNE 12 8:00P		SFD 22 11:00P
	MNE 21 4:00P					

### MARCH

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					DAK 4 8:00P	DAK 5 8:00P
		SWF 14 1:00P	SWF 15 2:00P		AUG 19 2:00P	AUG 19 7:30P
		IDA 19 7:00P	IDA 21 1:00P			
TEX 27 1:00P						

### APRIL

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						SFD 1 7:00P
						SFD 2 1:00P

**Team Legend**

ABY - Austin	LA - Los Angeles	ERI - Erie	OKW - Oklahoma City
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IND - Indiana	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City
MEM - Memphis	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City
NEW - New Orleans	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City
PHO - Phoenix	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City
PHO - Phoenix	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City
PHO - Phoenix	MIN - Minnesota	OKM - Oklahoma City	OKL - Oklahoma City



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# Executive Summary

## WORK: JOB OR JOY?

At what point do you receive satisfaction from your work? Once you meet a goal, can you relax knowing the job is well done? Where's the joy in your business? Is it when your work day starts without a single cloud? Is it when all members of the team are flying in unison on a project? Or is it when the waters are mostly calm in a deadline-filled day?

We can all nod in agreement to this concept: when work is more like a hobby than a job, life is good. Occupational satisfaction varies from one business executive to another. At VBR, the following does it for us:



Dear Todd,

I look forward to each publication of Valley Business Report. Each issue has interesting historical facts along with nice pictures and business articles of interest to me. I don't own a business but I am a great supporter of successful businesses because they provide the fuel for the American economic engine.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth White  
Ret. Superintendent Mission CISD

We are very grateful to you our reader for your sponsorship and input to make this your publication. Pro-business news is all around us. Our job at VBR is to share these economic development success stories with 20,000 business and community leaders every month. We find joy in this job.

Our distinct honor is to spread good news about the Rio Grande Valley. The mailed and distributed editions every month contain positive business news that YOU make

happen. We embrace this opportunity to connect local leaders with one another. Trading amongst ourselves creates a stronger local economy and we are proud to be the Valley's business journal.

I'm a strong believer in "whatever you think, you become", and "if you share good news, good things will happen." So as we soon flip the calendar, let's join as a region and agree to talk about how good business is and do the things necessary to transform this attitude into reality for 2011.

If the Rio Grande Valley is going to recover from this recession and move forward with economic stability for years to come, it's up to us. While we have nothing to do with the sun's rising, we have everything to do with how bright we see it.

Todd Breland  
General Manager  
Valley Business Report  
todd@valleybusinessreport.com

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### **Valley Business Report Staff**

#### *Editor*

Eileen Mattei

eileen@valleybusinessreport.com

#### *General Manager*

Todd Breland

todd@valleybusinessreport.com

#### *Marketing Consultant*

Cori Thomas

cori@valleybusinessreport.com

#### *Production Art Director*

Sharon Campbell

sharon@valleybusinessreport.com

*Website Design:* Valley IT Solutions

#### *Philosophy*

We are a pro-business publication providing in-depth perspectives on business trends and creating a forum in which business leaders can exchange ideas and information affecting the local community's economy.

#### *Letters to the Editor*

Letters of 300 words or less should be e-mailed to editorial@valleybusinessreport.com with the subject line: Letter to the Editor. Please include your full name and city of residence.

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# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: THE BRIDGES OF CAMERON COUNTY

By Eileen Mattei

One hundred years ago on December 12, 1910, the Brownsville and Matamoros Bridge became the first span on the lower Rio Grande, replacing the ferry boats and rowboats that linked the two cities, the two countries.

Proposed in 1879 and designed to accommodate passing riverboats in the closing days of that era, the B&M Bridge has swung open only once, a test in 1910. The inauguration of Brownsville's railroad and horse-and-carriage bridge marked the beginning of a new era and a century-long interest in bridges that bind the U.S. and Mexico together in commerce and cultures, despite bandits, peso devaluations and drug wars.

The four international bridges in Cameron County shuttle goods and people at a remarkable clip. About 5.6 million crossing tolls from south bound cars, pedestrians, multi-axle trucks, trans migrantes, bicycles and busses, were paid at the three Cameron County-owned and operated international bridges – Gateway, Veterans and Los Indios – during fiscal year 2010. The privately-owned B&M Bridge does not release its numbers.

Brownsville and Matamoros have been compared to twins so closely do they share commerce and family. The possibility of Brownsville functioning without its sister city is impossible to imagine. Brownsville's economy was fostered by international trade and it remains the lifeblood of the city. Businesses too numerous to list exist because of the bridges - customs brokers and freight forwarders, industrial parks and logistics warehouses, and all their local suppliers of office equipment, forklifts, mechanics, components, technical and training services, plus restaurants, hotels and housing for managers and employees. In reality, the Port of Brownsville is the transit point for goods crossing into Mexico on Veterans International Bridge. Countless tons of steel head south from there, trucks with pallets of ceramic tile, consumer appliances and automotive components head north.

## THE OLDEST BRIDGE

Not only is the B&M the oldest bridge downstream from Laredo, it is the only rail

bridge on the border that crosses cars as well as trains. It is also the only border bridge with both north and southbound toll collections on the Texas side. The B&M Bridge Company, jointly owned by the Union Pacific Railroad and the Federal Government of Mexico, operates the full span of the bridge – a unique arrangement.

Changing in response to the growth of the twin cities, the B&M was widened in 1953 to accommodate trucks. Many still remember waiting in line as crossing trains halted vehicular traffic in Matamoros. That ended in 1997 when a four-lane concrete bridge was built next to the original railroad bridge and a dedicated pedestrian way opened.

“Nowadays our customers are the commuters,” said John Hopkins, president of the B&M Bridge Co. “Every hour, it's a different customer (profile) and they have different needs.”



*The B&M Bridge has been a meeting site for American and Mexican military leaders.*

*(courtesy Steve Perez)*

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In a 2007 survey, B&M customers gave the 16 toll collectors credit for making a difference in the crossing experience and building relationships. “Our customers are not shy about expressing their concerns. Our collectors were astonished that they were recognized and appreciated.” Branding itself now as the Low Cost Bridge open 24/7, B&M offers a prepaid discount card, which gives a 10 percent reduction in fare or \$2.25 per trip. Each lane has a card reader.

“It’s a challenge and a half running a bi-national bridge,” admitted Hopkins, who answers to an eight-man board of directors, four from Union Pacific and four from the Mexico government. Mexico receives its share of tolls in the form of dividends.



*Gateway International Bridge is the Valley's primary pedestrian bridge, connecting Mexican shoppers with downtown Brownsville stores and American daytrippers to Matamoros's shops and restaurants in better times. (Faulk)*

#### COUNTY OWNED BRIDGES

“Although we are two countries, we really are one region. Instead of building walls, we should be building bridges,” said Pete Sepulveda, Cameron County International Bridge System director. He described international bridges as lifelines of Brownsville’s economy. “Because of all the issues going on in Mexico, we continue

to have a decline in passenger vehicles but an increase in commercial vehicles.”

That commercial traffic helps sustain the operation of Cameron County government, far

beyond the 80 people employed at the bridges. “The bridge system has always been an integral part of Cameron County,” Sepulveda said. “We transfer about \$10 million annually in net proceeds to the general fund.” The county receives 100 percent of Gateway’s net proceeds; splits the net proceeds of Veterans International 50-50 with the City of Brownsville; and at Los Indios International Bridge, retains 50 percent of net proceeds and splits the rest between San Benito and Harlingen.

Gateway International Bridge, which opened in 1928, has been expanded several times to accommodate pedestrians and private vehicle traffic. It, like the B&M, is open round the

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clock, while the other two county bridges operate from 6 a.m. to midnight, unless there’s a security crisis as recently occurred.

Veterans International Bridge, also known as Los Tomatoes for the tomato fields it displaced, has enabled trucks to bypass Brownsville’s his-

toric center and relieve congestion on streets. It operates a dedicated northbound FAST(Free And Secure Trade) lane for expedited commercial shipment clearances and handles SENTRI cards, equipped with RFID, that speed CBP processing for low-risk travelers.

The Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios, the first of the NAFTA era bridges, handles over 500,000 vehicles annually and brings \$2 million to the county coffers.

Steve Perez of Cargo USA Logistics preaches the benefits of using Cameron County bridges: less congestion and faster crossings at under-utilized ports of entry. In July, Perez spotted the first cargo containers (versus rail cars) as they crossed the B&M Bridge, deflected from Laredo by flooding. Perez is championing use of the rail cargo containers as a more efficient method of moving cargo. Despite high water and the hell of drug war violence, international trade will go on, the cargo sales agent said.

Many people don't differentiate between the bridges and the federal agencies at the bridges. Yet, federal agents from ICE and Customs and Border Protection operate with different missions than the bridges. They collect customs revenue, process incoming travelers, inspect import, and stop counterfeits and criminals. They also address customer service issues. CBP agent Manuel Medrano is the new Passenger Service Manager for the Brownsville Port of Entry. Consider him an ombudsman or facilitator, handling complaints and commendations from passengers going through the Homeland Security gauntlet.

"The idea is to keep international travel and trade moving," he said. The goal is to keep the country safe, but don't let terrorists shut down business. Given the Valley's agricultural foundation, it's not surprising that Maldonado believes that agroterrorism poses the greatest danger.

Nothing stays the same. Within five years, Union Pacific will no longer use the B&M Bridge. Last month pre-construction meetings began on the West Rail project. A long-awaited new railroad bridge will be completed a few miles upstream and funnel trains directly to the Olmito switching yard. The West Rail project will alleviate Brownsville congestion, but it will also bring a 100-year-long era to a close.



*B&M Bridge Company management, includes Oscar Delgado, Julia Araujo, Juan Pablo Sepulveda and President John Hopkins who promote use of prepaid discount cards at the already-low cost bridge. (Mattei)*

 A holiday-themed advertisement for de Sanchez Day Spa & Salon. The background is a festive wreath with green pine branches, red poinsettias, gold and silver bows, and pinecones. The text is centered and reads:
 

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# MAPPING THE FUTURE

By Eileen Mattei

The GIS (Geographical Information Systems) maps created by La Playa Mapping Company tell much more than how to get somewhere. “The challenge of the Information Age is to manage the information and to put it all at your fingertips. GIS is how you put it together,” said La Playa’s David Bartle, the Valley’s only certified GIS Professional.

“GIS is the discipline that has the potential to make a big difference by enabling municipalities and other entities to be more efficient,” said Bartle in Brownsville. He started La Playa nearly five years ago after working for engineering firms, utilities, and oil and gas firms. “With La Playa, there is so much more that I can do,” he said, in contrast to the narrow range of GIS projects he had encountered with a single employer. He welcomed the opportunities to attack situations and provide solutions to municipalities, irrigation districts, and engineering companies developing commercial and residential projects.

GIS maps offer a visually intriguing spatial rep-



*David Bartle, the region's only GIS Professional, creates maps that save time and money for municipalities, water districts and developers. (Mattei)*

resentation, but the application of the information is where their greatest value is found. In a manner of speaking, GIS maps reveal where you have been:

the hidden layers of below ground infrastructure with topographical changes of roads, houses, traffic signals, and other details applied in the upper layers. Typically presented as a series of maps, different data sets can be combined for specific purposes.

Bartle brings an obvious passion to his work, yet providing a little-understood service does not lead to overnight success. “A common comment I hear is that we can’t spend money and use GIS because we have to fill potholes,” Bartle said. “But it’s not an expense, it’s an investment. By enabling staff to be more effective at their existing jobs, they can be more productive.” He gave the example of Planning Departments which must identify and contact surrounding land owners when a change in zoning is proposed. “I’ve developed a process which turns identifying them into a five-minute effort instead of a full-day effort searching out 100 owners of tracts. It’s a simple process that makes things so much easier.”

Bartle said that municipalities which manage water and storm sewer systems have been the greatest benefactor of GIS technology. “What brings GIS into play in many municipalities is the realization that the person who knows where everything is in the system is not going to be around forever. GIS affords an opportunity to gather that valuable information and maintain it.”

From Mission to South Padre, La Playa’s GIS maps are being used as planning tools, with their layers and layers of information. The cities who utilize GIS receive the benefits, Bartle explained.

An advertisement for MVEC Electric Cooperative. The top half shows a close-up of a showerhead with water spraying out, and a hand is positioned to catch the water. The text on the right reads: "WHEN IT COMES TO WATER HEATING, MONEY BURNS AT 121°." The bottom half features the MVEC logo and the text: "I'm saving \$73 a year by turning my water heater down to 120°. What can you do? Find out how little changes can add up at magicvalley.coop." The MVEC logo includes the text "Magic Valley MVEC Electric Cooperative" and "A Touchstone Energy Cooperative The power of human connections".

WHEN IT COMES TO WATER HEATING, MONEY BURNS AT 121°.

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Better managing assets is one way knowing what assets (such as fire hydrants and water mains down to valves, elbows, and end caps) exist, which enables entities to determine their replacement costs and depreciation. Deploying GIS maps on web sites helps lure in developers who can see that an 18 inch water line goes past a potential site.

Bartle flipped through GIS sewer system maps for the Mission water district that illustrated all the “hidden” below ground assets. The companion asset report cites the meters, valves, water mains and lateral lines, including data on pipe length, diameter and material down to the size of pipe tees. Here is all the information on the components that could be required to fix a broken pipe before it is even dug up. The most astounding element of the GIS map is the vintaging aspect: it tells the age of each system segment. The vintaging map is built on data such as dates of subdivision construction and renovations to create layers and layers of overlapping segments.

This past summer’s storms and subsequent flooding motivated water districts and cities to turn to La Playa Mapping. The company produced a series of GIS maps to help determine what could be done to minimize and mitigate the impact of future floods. Irrigation districts using La Playa maps have “found” missing right-of-ways and exact distances of lines. One of Bartle’s favorite products is a multi-use tool for drainage district, the “preliminary study of local drainage systems.” La Playa has also developed a Rainfall Runoff calculating tool which Bartle distributes free.

La Playa suggest the best way to plan for future development is assess what you have today.

Bartle’s transportation evolution maps use TX-DOT traffic count data. Because the data doesn’t show growth, Bartle compiled the counts and produced GIS maps that show the changes in traffic over time. His land use maps of Brownsville illustrate topography as well as traffic signals, utilities, and elevation, each pixel representing an elevation.

Bartle calls on part-time employees depending on the volume of work.” I take on the first 100 hours of work a week myself for a good reason – passion.”

La Playa also submitted a Pro bono report to City of Brownsville Police Department analyzing GIS mapping of auto theft sites and times. “Interesting things come to light when you put things under microscope and use GIS as a microscope,” said Bartle. “At La Playa, we try to look at the world in a different way.”

For more information call 956-554-0487.



*For their water conservation efforts while raising onion, citrus and grain crops, Jimmy Pawlik and Jim Hoffman were named Irrigators of the Year. Each reduced the amount of irrigation water by one-third while using the border flood method. (Mattei)*

 This is a full-page advertisement for SMART BUSINESS BANKING. At the top, a large white star with blue points is set against a blue background. To the right of the star, the words 'SMART BUSINESS BANKING' are written in bold, red, sans-serif font. Below the star and logo, a man and a woman in professional business attire are smiling. The man is on the left, wearing a light blue shirt and tie, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark pinstriped blazer. To the right of the couple, there is a list of services in blue text:
 

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 Below the list, a short paragraph reads: "Just some of the reasons why more smart businesses choose Border Capital Bank." At the bottom right, the phone number 956-682-2265 and the website BORDERCAPITALBANK.COM are listed. At the very bottom, the Border Capital Bank logo is displayed, featuring a stylized 'B' icon and the text 'Border Capital Bank' with 'MEMBER FDIC' in smaller text below it.

# TAX TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Small-business owners wear a lot of hats. They have to know their product or service, how to run their business and even how to get their business taxes done. Quite often though, taxes end up ignored until tax time. It's easy to forget that the laws are dynamic and are changed or modified almost yearly. For this reason it is important for small business owners to keep up with changes to ensure that they get all the tax breaks to which they may be entitled.

Many small-business owners may be self-employed, and may be the only employees. These businesses closely track their income to keep up with items such as their sales tax payments. They also try to keep track of other business expenses because sometimes these items might change from year to year. One such item that is being extended for 2010 is the bonus depreciation of new furniture, computers or equipment which allows business to immediately deduct 50 % of the purchase cost. Also, for tax year 2010 only, self-employed taxpayers may

deduct the cost of health insurance premiums paid to cover the business owner and family when calculating self-employment taxes.

A tax topic drawing attention is the Small-Business Health Care Tax Credit for 2010. This credit is specifically targeted to help small businesses and tax-exempt organizations that primarily employ moderate-and lower-income workers.

A qualified small employer (25 full-time equivalent employees or less with an average annual per employee payroll under \$50,000) that pays health insurance premiums on behalf of its employees will qualify for a maximum credit of 35 percent of cost. For tax exempt employers it is 25 percent of premiums paid.

In general, the business and/or the tax-exempt organization must pay at least half the cost of single coverage health care for their employees. The credit phases out gradually for firms with average wages between \$25,000 and \$50,000 and for firms with the equivalent of between 10 and 25 full-time workers.

Employers with 10 or fewer employees and average annual wages up to \$25,000 get 100% of credit. The credit phases out for each employee over 10 and to the extent average annual employee payroll exceeds \$25,000.

Eligible small businesses can calculate and claim the credit using the new form 8941 as part of the general business credit starting with the 2010 tax return they file in 2011.

*For more information, contact any H&R Block tax office. Their newest tax office will open in January 2010 at Lincoln Corners. H&R Block tax professionals handle the simplest to the most complex tax situations and recently received the 2010 Valley Morning Star Readers Choice Award for Best Tax Preparation. You may reach them at 956-423-6444, 1-800-HRBLOCK or [www.hrblock.com](http://www.hrblock.com)*



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# PORT OF HARLINGEN HAS A SWEET TOOTH

By Eileen Mattei

The smell of brown sugar hung in the air as the barge settled deeper into the Arroyo Colorado. Six barges were each taking on loads of 1,200 short tons of sugar at the Port of Harlingen's main 650 foot long dock. For over 20 years, front-end loaders had scooped up piles of Valley-grown raw cane sugar and dumped them into barges bound for a refinery in Louisiana. In 2009, the Sam Sparks Sugar Warehouse opened and began using conveyors to load the 160,000 tons of sugar that move through the port in a good year. Shipping sugar by barge keeps thousands of trucks off the highways.

The sugar house was one more innovation for the small but self-supporting port located 25 miles west of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, which connects the port to Florida and Great Lakes. First proposed by Harlingen city founder Lon C Hill in the 1920s, the Port of Harlingen had initial dredge work done on the Arroyo Colorado in 1938, but delays followed. Finally in 1952, with the Arroyo Colorado barge channel dredged to 12 feet deep and standardized to 125 foot width, the newly-opened port received its first cargo: barges of steel pipe shipped from Pittsburgh.

"The Port of Harlingen is an essential element of Harlingen's intermodal reputation," said Butch Palmer, Port Director. "Not many cities can offer water, rail and air cargo choices." The Port enabled Harlingen to become one of the three finalists in the bid for the next-generation Boeing manufacturing facility. Union Pacific Railroad serves the port; Valley International Airport is close by, and the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios is 12 uncongested miles away.

The Port is a 150 acre industrial park with only half its tenants taking advantage of the low-cost transportation offered by barge companies. Harlingen Gin and Rio Grande Gin, Port tenants since its inception, have remained at the Port although cotton is no longer shipped. Also reflecting the region's agricultural heritage, the Willacy County Coop grain elevator is considered the Port's anchor tenant. In 2010, for the first time in years, 18 barges of grain left the Port in what Palmer hopes is a growing trend. Another tenant crane maker Favel-Favco leased its facility because it fit their specifications, not because of access to barge options.



Port of Harlingen Director Butch Palmer checked a barge being loaded with raw sugar destined for a Louisiana refinery. (Mattei)

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A group photo of six staff members (three women and three men) standing in front of a brick wall. They are wearing blue scrubs, except for one man in a white lab coat who is standing in the center.

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*Raw sugar travels by conveyor from the Sam Sparks Sugar Warehouse to a waiting barge at the Port of Harlingen's main dock.. (Mattei)*

Today the Port unloads about 95 percent of the commercial liquid fertilizer used in the Valley and Northern Mexico. Each liquid barge carries 24,000 to 28,000 barrels destined for Helena Chemical and CPS (Crop Production

Services ), two of the Port's tenants. Tenant Cemex is the recipient of the tons of sand and cement arriving by barge. Tenant NuStar, a spin-off of Valero, still brings in barges of diesel and gas. For many years, fuel was the Port's major inbound cargo, but pipelines took over most of that niche. With fuel pipelines operating near capacity, increasing demand might be met through more low-cost barging, Palmer suggested.

A self-funded, autonomous entity, the Port is administered by a three-man Port Authority which sets the market value of port leases. A summer crisis focused the Authority's efforts on maintenance. Hurricane Alex and the tropical storms that brought eight long weeks of flooding to the Arroyo Colorado resulted in over five feet of mud in the

Port's turning basin, according to Palmer. While the sediment has not limited movement in the channel, the Corps of Engineers surveyed the Port and approved dredging to keep it to specifications. With only three employees, the Port operates efficiently, running a tight ship.



*Across the Arroyo Colorado, the tug Safety First waits while the last of six sugar barges is loaded at the Port of Harlingen. (Mattei)*



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# DEALING IN PRECIOUS METALS ON A LARGE SCALE

By Eileen Mattei

Way before recycling was cool, Ray Wilkinson got into the recycling business. “We’re above ground miners,” said Wilkinson, 58. “We buy metals and provide a source of income to many.” His company Wilkinson Ray Iron and Metal Inc. in McAllen handles thousands of tons of scrapped ferrous metals, non-ferrous metals, structural iron and aluminum.

Actually Wilkinson has been working in scrap metal business since he was a child growing up in Brownsville. His grandfather had started a scrap metal business in Carrizo Springs in the 1940s, and Wilkinson’s father had gotten into the business in Brownsville in 1967. Ray Wilkinson and his wife Rosie built the McAllen site on 8.8 acres in 1987 and brought in a railroad spur. In 1991, with the three brothers of the third generation in the family business full time, Ray, Larry, and Jim Wilkinson decided to pre-empt fourth generation problems. They divvied up the family business and became three independent entities. Yet, the Wilkinson name had such a good reputation in the industry that each wanted to keep the attachment. That accounts for unusual business names: Wilkinson Ray along with Wilkinson Jim in Brownsville and Wilkinson Gary in Laredo. The three continue to interact amiably.

“I’ve always loved the business. I like the hustle bustle of dealing with people,” said Ray Wilkinson, who was scampering around scrap metal yards at age 10. The scrap metal industry is as volatile as the



Wilkinson bales 40,000 pounds of aluminum weekly. (E. Mattei)

stock market with the same sudden ups and downs. Wilkinson has turned down friends’ invitations to go to Las Vegas because, in his business, he feels “like I’m there every day. You have to know when to hold

‘em and know when to sell ‘em.” The busy metals yard on Business 83 indicates that Wilkinson has played his cards right.

The company, which started with one crane and



Items of all kinds from antique to the unusual find their way to Wilkinson’s. (E. Mattei)

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two forklifts, now operates six cranes, a massive shear and a car crusher that compacts vehicle into bales which are sold to shredders. The metals go to mills in Monterrey and San Antonio.

With bins of wheel rims and old kitchen trays piled in the foreground, mountains of twisted metal wait to be snatched by huge jaws and crunched into manageable bales. Scrap metals have become more regulated, Wilkinson said, just like other industries. Copper purchases in volume must now be logged in with customer identification, a procedure which protects the scrap metal buyer.

The recession is funneling between 300 and 400 customers a day to Wilkinson - about one-third of them recycling aluminum. Shiny 1,000 pound cubes of aluminum represent 30,000 cans. The company produces 40 blocks a week. Wilkinson sees himself as the middle man in a process that keeps the city clean and reduces the volume going to landfills.

Wilkinson helped McAllen get its recycling program started, and his family has long been involved in the Keep McAllen Beautiful program. He buys the collected scrap metals from the city and recycles them. "It's taken a while, but recycling awareness has come a long ways. We believe in recycling, and that it's important to educate people to recycle and reuse. " Practicing what he preaches, Wilkinson's west McAllen office is decorated with 'found' metal



Customers line up to sell aluminum cans, earning themselves money and keeping cities cleaner. (Mattei)


sculptures, like a six foot tall heron, along with brass spittoons, vintage locomotive oil cans and musical instruments. Rosie Wilkinson's art photos of abandoned musical instruments are displayed throughout the office. The business has also sponsored a museum exhibit on recycled art.

Wilkinson's sons Bradley and Stuart have worked part time in the family business. "I tell my boys you've got to like what you do," Wilkinson said. He


expects one might join the family business, but would love to have them both working there. If they did, he joked, then their dad could retire and go into the antique business.

Factoid: A radiator is a perfect blend of metals for making faucets. At one time, Wilkinson sold pallets of crushed radiators to a Mexican faucet company.

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# FINANCIAL STATEMENT BOOT CAMP – WHAT YOUR NUMBERS MEAN

By Eileen Mattei

Do you know the difference between an income statement (P&L), a balance sheet and a cash flow statement? Do you know how analysis of each can help you manage a business better? If you leave ‘all that’ to your CPA, you may be walking away from information that could make your business more efficient and more profitable. You need to know what those documents can tell you.



**To succeed at Financial Boot Camp 201, first turn on your calculator. Then prepare to understand what a financial statement can tell you.** (Mattei)

Putting the numbers to work for you is not that hard. Even better, free help is available from SBDC (Small Business Development Center at UTPA.) They have created a Financial Boot Camp 201 seminar that encourages small business owners and managers to overcome their disdain for financial statements and their fears of math problems. To understand financial statements, you need only to be able to add, subtract, divide and multiply.

The pilot Financial Statements Boot Camp 201 presentation at the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce attracted 33 engineering, architecture, construction, insurance, trucking, florist, mortgage and medical company owners and managers. Almost all attendees used CPAs, but about of them half admitted they did not talk to the expert outside of tax time. That is not unusual, but it is also not good for business, according to SBDC’s Arturo Gonzalez.

“An Income Statement (also known as profit and loss) gives you a view of how profitable an operation is, whether it is making or losing money. It tells you about the sales and expenses, but not about debt or depreciation. It does NOT tell you if you have enough money or when the money is coming in. That’s what other statements are for,” said Gonzalez.

Using calculators donated by the Long Chilton CPA firm, Boot Campers first got hands-on experience calculating a gross profit margin. “Between 80 and 90 percent of our clients don’t know their gross profit margin,” Gonzalez said. Analyzing the income statement kept the calculators clicking as people worked out operating profit margins and net profit margins and then ratios

following formats in their workbooks. But different industries and business models result in different types of income statements, he cautioned. A P&L breakdown for a service business will differ from a restaurant’s P&L. SBDC offers access to restricted databases that let businesses compare themselves to similar companies at regional, state or national levels. Comparing yourself to that industry average lets you see if you spend more or less than others on labor, materials or insurance for example. The information can show where you need to better control the budget and to seek opportunities.

Because overhead doesn’t go up in the same proportion as sales, growing businesses should be able to increase sales using the same resources, resulting in a leaner operation. For Cairo Caldera, materials and purchasing manager at Platinum Surgery Center, the seminar helped him realize the importance of numbers in assessing the business. “You really need to know what the numbers on the statement mean. It matters to the bottom line.”

A Balance Sheet is a financial snapshot taken at a point of time of all the assets the company owns and the claims against those assets, according to SBDC advisor Adriana Rincon. She led exercises in calculating balance sheets ratios, account receivable days, inventory turnover and liquidity ratios. Liquid assets are those that can be converted to cash, such as inventory and equipment. These numbers can be very useful for setting operational policies.

SBDC’s Colin Cain noted that many companies are hoarding cash now because banks are lending less. The only way companies can definitely pay obligations is by holding on to their money and not investing, he said. “Holding cash for longer improves your control on decision making, but does it improve relations with suppliers when you pay later?” Depending on the industry, the best policy may be to take care of your suppliers and consultants promptly.

Retained earnings, Cain explained, are not a reflection of the business’s bank account at the end of the year. Instead it corresponds to the total value of a business, the owners’ equity.

A Cash Flow Statement is a reliable measure of overall financial health and business performance. “Profits are not real money, but cash is,” said Javier Martinez. With an Income Statement and two Balance Sheets, anyone can put together a cash flow sheet. “Numbers should inform your decision, but you decide what they mean for your business.”

“You’re not going to get all the information you need from a seminar,” Gonzalez concluded. “We’re trying to plant the seed— a big seed— to give you a head start.” He recommended reading magazines such as Inc. and Fortune along with industry publications to get tips on how similar businesses have succeeded. A free consultation with an SBDC advisor would be beneficial as well.

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# EXPO SHOWS PUBLIC SAFETY CAREERS AVAILABLE

By Dave Ralph

The simultaneous timing of longtime employees from the “Baby Boom” generation reaching retirement age and overall population growth requiring the expansion of services brought almost 20 government agencies recruiting prospective new employees to the first annual Public Safety Career Expo at Texas State Technical College Harlingen.

Officials from local, state and federal levels sought new employees for law enforcement positions, fire departments and emergency medical services units on November 9. The campus is home to a regional police academy supported by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council and a regional firefighter academy operated by the state of Texas. TSTC Corporate and Community Education offers Emergency Medical Technology courses and that program is working on state and federal accreditation to become the Emergency Medical Services Professions Program. Workforce Solutions Cameron County and the LRGVDC joined TSTC Corporate and Community Education to sponsor the event.

Jose Zamaro of La Feria, a TSTC student who



TSTC student Jose Zamaro, left, discusses U.S. Customs and Border Protection careers with Manny Maldonado and Sylvia Gutierrez at the Public Safety Career Expo held in the TSTC Cultural Arts Center.

(Photo credit TSTC)

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plans to transfer credits to a four-year university toward a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, attended to learn more about U.S. Customs & Border Protection.

"I am interested in the CBP due to a willingness to help everyday people and I want to do something about crime and corruption," he explained. "I understand that working as a field agent for the CBP could be dangerous, but I find it challenging and worth the risks to serve my country."

CBP Chief Sylvia Gutierrez and CBP Supervisor Manny Maldonado said that many new recruits are attracted by the agency's professionalism and a desire to be part of U.S. security.

"We want great candidates who will come on board. Many of them have intrinsic motivation factors that match our core value of integrity," Gutierrez said.

The CBP involves frontline interdiction to halt terrorism on U.S. soil, Maldonado said, and CBP offers a wide range of specialties within the land, sea and air operations. "In our agency, we are a family in terms of camaraderie and fellowship," he added. "I believe that many CBP employees understand that one person can make a difference in what we do together as a team."

Training for new CBP personnel includes an 18-week academy, unless they pass the Spanish language test and finish training in 13 weeks. Maldonado said that potential employees find insurance and retirement benefits for federal personnel very attractive.

EMT instructor Roy Garza said that TSTC plans to receive state and national accreditation to start the EMS Professions Program. Eligible students and adult education students applying for the academic program should qualify for financial aid by fall semester 2011 if plans proceed on schedule, he said.

"Federal and state officials want to push EMS training into academic, hospital and military settings," Garza said, "to make strict curriculum standards more uniform. The new EMS program will mean more clinical training on specific competencies. So, it should lead to more affiliations between TSTC and the medical community."

EMS training at TSTC has prepared many graduates for entry-level jobs that led to advancement in the career field. "The mandatory move toward national accreditation for EMS programs will enhance public perception of these jobs and higher pay for entry-level paramedics should follow," he said.

Susan Holmes, director of Career Services at TSTC, said that hiring organizations at the expo were

very active. "These departments know that cadets attending our Police Academy get the best training available in all aspects of criminal and civil law as well as firearms, driving and arrest procedures," she said. "Eighteen Valley fire departments have chosen the regional Firefighter Academy to train the cadets they hire. We take the confidence that they and the Valley communities place in us very seriously. These are great programs and the organizations seem to know this."

Stella Garcia, vice president of TSTC Corporate and Community Education, said that she hopes a similar public safety career fair – with the addition of information for high school seniors – will be held in the spring.

Police departments at the event included Brownsville, Dallas, Harlingen and Mission. Pro-Medic and South Texas Education Care Foundation represented the EMS profession. Other agencies seeking new employees included the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission, Corrections Corporation of America (the state prison in Raymondville), and the U.S. Army.

TSTC is planning additional cooperative job fairs for 2011.



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# FELDMAN'S UPDATES THE TRADITIONAL LIQUOR STORE

By Eileen Mattei

When Prohibition ended in 1933, Polish immigrant Sam Feldman opened a whole liquor distribution business in Harlingen and then his first retail store, Feldman's Liquor, in 1938. His sons, Harry and Charley grew up in the family business. Charley Feldman expanded the business to 12 outlets, making it the largest retail package store in the Valley.

Fast forward to November 2010 and the opening of Feldman's Market Center at Morrison in Brownsville. The upscale, 21st century wine and spirits store, complete with an extensive deli and tasting center, is so far removed from yester-year's utilitarian liquor store that it's hard to compare the two.

The link between the old Feldman's and the new is Stephen Jabbour, part of an Austin-area family that also got into the liquor, spirits and wine industry after prohibition. Jabbour acquired the Feldman's chain in 2001, added a Corpus Christi chain, and established Statewide Beverage, with a partner, Mark Franklin. Since then Statewide, which has offices in Corpus and McAllen, has embarked on an energetic revamping that encompasses its 13 Valley stores and a Laredo Feldman's schedule to open in December.

Jamie Barnett, who as vice president of facilities has de-

signed Feldman's new stores and expansions, said Feldman's is "moving forward and listening to the market. The focus in the larger concept stores is on the food." That reflects a company passion for giving people quality foods with an emphasis on organic or natural foods for the family - items with no trans-fat or MSG.

The concept Market Center stores in McAllen and Brownsville are totally different in character and similar only in their range of products. At the newest Feldman's Market Center, Martha the Cheese Lady proudly presides over 500-plus types of cheeses-- Dutch goat cheese, French camembert, selections from Ireland, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Texas. Giant wheels of aged parmesan are beautiful in shape and possibilities. The cheese information center features a laminated book with pages brimming with data on sheep and goat milk cheeses as well as standards. Weekly cheese and wine tastings are scheduled in the tasting and education center. TABC allows a one ounce pour, although the tasting focus will be on foods.

Foodies all but have their faces pressed to the glass of Feldman's Deli display cases, mesmerized by the rare lamb chops, grilled eggplant and squashes, red potato salad and much more. Executive chef Justin Rowland manages the Deli which also has an enticing menu loaded with salads, starters,



**Martha the Cheese Lady at the new Feldman's Market Center is ready to help customers discover tasty new cheeses from around the world. (Mattei)**

Panini grill, sandwiches and desserts for eat-in or carry-out.

"The Valley as a whole is taking to the wine market. Wine is much more approachable now and so are spirits," Barnett said. "The liquor companies are doing a really good job making things interesting and fun with new flavors and new recipes." The stores display well-lit rows of rums, vodkas, liqueurs and wines complemented by a full line of bar supplies, tucked next to wooden cases of French vintages.

The weak economy has encouraged people to entertain and have fun at home with more experimentation going on. Barnett noted that current promotional material is geared to prompt people to try new things, such as fruity spirits. In addition, the promotions more and more have food tie-ins, such as pairing Serrano ham and Gruyere cheese, an approach which lines up with Feldman's mission. The new Brownsville concept store has a customer service niche which creates gift baskets from the customer's choice of wines, spirits, cheeses and deli items. It also handles special orders. Unit director Lionel Hurtado supervises a store-wide workforce of 25.

Feldman's recently upgraded its Harlingen and South Padre mid-concept stores. Statewide's view of the island as a family destination, rather than a spring break bonanza, is reflected in the store's greatly expanded wine selection. While both stores have diversified their wine and spirit selections, they are considered "quick-pick" not full-service party planning stores. Prepared foods are brought in from the full service store daily.

Feldman's customer loyalty program called My Card has been very successful, Barnett said. Free of charge, the card offers customers a newsletter and weekly emails. Different levels of spending qualify customers for either gold, platinum or premium levels.

While pushing forward with the new marketing approach, Statewide was equally happy to be able to tap into tradition at the flagship store on North 10th in McAllen. "We are fortunate enough to have a historic landmark, what used to be Spurlock Grocery," said Barnett. "It has character and we're excited to be part of the downtown revitalization. South Texas has been very good to us."

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# HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS...AND MAYBE LONGER

By Eileen Mattei

When adult children return home from the bright lights of bigger cities for the holidays, it's understandable to wish they lived closer, back in the Valley but not back in the house. One way to open your visitors' eyes to the benefits of Valley living is to take them grocery shopping with you. A shopping expedition will graphically demonstrate the purchasing power of \$100 bill and reveal what the Valley's lowest-in-the-nation cost of living means to their grocery bill and their lifestyle.

The Cost of Living Adjustment, issued by the ACCRA, helps people accurately compare the same shopping cart of groceries and consumer goods in different Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

McAllen was named the cheapest place to live in the U.S. in 2006, topping the ACCRA chart. The Brownsville-Harlingen MSA claimed the Least Expensive Place to Live in the United States spot in 2010. The Valley's MSAs always rank among the top ten places with the lowest cost of living. Currently it costs about 18 percent less to live here—and eat, shop, drive and be entertained

here—than in the average American city. While it's not surprising that tropical fruits are sold here at a fraction of the prices found on the east coast, I've noticed that everything from chicken to detergent and gas are considerably cheaper here, too. The most startling difference is visible when you take your visitors house hunting. They'll discover that Valley local housing costs are about 28 percent below the national average.

The 2010 Labor Market Information Report released by Tech Prep of the RGV in September offers a comparison chart that could influence decisions on where your children live. "Another way to think of cost of living is to compare the level of earnings necessary in different cities to enjoy a similar lifestyle," the LMI stated. Start with \$21,000 in the Valley. The equivalent "necessary to enjoy the same lifestyle in the largest Texas cities" are as follows: Austin (\$38,930); Dallas (\$39,200); Houston (\$38,114) and San Antonio (\$28,068.) That is what cost of living is really about. That is one reason Winter Texans come here. That is one reason the Valley is still growing even during a recession.

Admittedly, that initial \$21,000 reflects the per capita

income for Cameron County. The RGV's four counties "comprise a self-contained and distinct labor market," according to Census Bureau data. And yes, Valley wages are lower, which prompts many young adults to move elsewhere to earn what sounds like much more money. But the people who leave probably have not considered all the data that would allow them to make an informed decision. The region's laudably low cost of living is a positive factor for companies considering a new location here.

The areas with the greatest job opportunities in the Valley are federal, local and state government, hospitals and healthcare services, and professional and technical services—skilled fields with many well-paid career paths. Unfortunately, a major contributor to the Valley's low household income is low educational attainment. People without a high school diploma, and, increasingly, without any post-secondary training, according to the LMI, simply are not going to earn as much money as people with more education and greater skills. But post-secondary education costs less here, too.

Overall, when compared to points farther north, the grass is greener here, both financially and biologically.

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# THE EYES HAVE IT FOR DR. MANRIQUE

By Adolfo Pesquera

Across the Rio Grande Valley, when the near-sighted want corrective surgery, they are most likely to go to one of the offices of Manrique Custom Vision Center. Dr. Carlos Manrique, a pioneer in spreading the best practices in Lasik procedures, has performed more than 14,000 laser vision correction surgeries in the Valley since his arrival in 1999.

More recently, Manrique opened offices in the Woodlands near Houston, and in San Antonio. So, while the majority of his surgeries have been in the Valley, the doctor's reputation has a statewide following. He has performed surgeries on professional athletes and counted on them for testimonials. Among his star athlete patients are former NFL Houston Texans, pro bowler Jerome Alvon Mathis and former Texans defensive end Alfred Malone.

Manrique opened his first clinic in McAllen at the behest of Valley residents who were having to travel to Texas A&M University in College Station. "At the time, there was not a fully dedicated laser center in this area," he said. "I used to get a lot of patients from the Valley."

There was a doctor with a general ophthalmology practice who did some work in lasik, but no one with Manrique's background. Within three months of opening the McAllen clinic, Manrique recalled doing about 40 surgeries. It was the beginning of a lucrative practice, but it was also a moment for Manrique to reflect on his having come full circle.

Born in Reynosa, Mexico, Manrique left the Valley region to start college at Tecnologico de Monterrey. Baylor University's medical school program came next. That was followed by training and experience in hospitals in Baltimore, Maryland and Galveston, Texas. He first developed an interest in ocular medicine at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. He built on that experience by studying neuro-ophthalmology at Michigan State University. From there, he trained at the Jules Stein Eye Institute in Los Angeles and then became chief resident at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

Manrique became certified in Lasik procedures at the onset of the Lasik era in 1996. He has since become a recognized leader in the field. Richard Doinoff, Manrique's marketing director, notes the doctor is a proctor (appointed supervisor) for Alegretto Wave Eye-Q, the



**Dr. Manrique opened his first clinic in McAllen.**  
(courtesy)

fastest Lasik system in use today. He is also a medical advisor on the blade-free Z-Lasik, another high-tech tool.

Manrique's stature in his field put him in position to be one of the founders of the ophthalmology department at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance in Edinburg, which opened in 1997. Manrique joined and invested in the hospital - which is majority physician owned - in 2001.

In 2004, he opened a second Valley clinic in Harlingen. Today, Manrique has about 30 employees on staff in the Valley and another 10 split between the Woodlands and San Antonio clinics.

It may seem like overload but Manrique does all surgical procedures at the four clinics and the two Valley hospitals. He also has privileges at Valley Baptist Medical Center. That involves considerable travel, and Manrique prefers to drive. He will often take his family on the road with him.

Doinoff isn't surprised by Manrique's energy. "He loves what he does," Doinoff said. "And most doctors don't burn out until their mid-60s. He's got another 20 years before he gets there."

Outside of his clinics, Manrique is known for his steady presence in the media. The clinics get regular commercial time in television, radio and print, thanks to Doinoff's aggressive marketing.

But Manrique is known for his civic work too, particularly for his dedication to the Boys & Girls Clubs in McAllen. Elected president-elect in 2010, he becomes president in December. Since joining the board in 2004, children's membership has grown from 9,000



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to 14,000 full-time students, and special outreach programs have brought in another 2,000. "I'm really proud I've been part of giving back to my community during this incredible growth phase," Manrique said.

State Rep. Armando "Mando" Martinez, Dist. 39 of the mid-Valley, had Manrique do the Lasik procedure on him four years ago at the McAllen clinic. "I'm very pleased with it," Martinez said.

He recognized the doctor as a prominent member of the Valley community. "People generally do know who he is. I enjoy speaking with him on different necessities that the Valley may have. He's always involved with different organizations." Martinez also appreciates Manrique's ability to attract celebrities to his practice, because it reflects well on the Valley.

"Some of the players for the Dallas Cowboys have had it done," Martinez said, "including (wide receiver) Miles Austin."

Manrique, his wife and six children - they range in age from 2 to 17 - attend Our Lady of Sorrows in McAllen. And Manrique supports the Catholic school there as well.

"My father was a doctor also," Manrique said by way of explaining his community work. "He always told me you take care of your community and your community will come back to you."

Doinoff, who lives and operates from San Antonio, joined Manrique in Houston seven years ago. As he has gotten to know Manrique, he has marveled at how popular the doctor is in the Valley.

He is a household name in the Valley," Doinoff said. "Everybody knows him. We get stopped literally for hours when we go out."

Except for the McAllen clinic, Manrique's facilities are small. He prefers boutique-style clinics in stylish retail centers in Woodlands and San Antonio. But the McAllen office, due to the volume demand, is larger.

"The lobby area is a lot bigger because we have to facilitate all general ophthalmology patients," Doinoff said. "It seats 60 people, but its patient-friendly with flat screen TVs." Manrique also hit upon the idea of



Dr. Manrique and patient Miles Austin. (courtesy)

providing patients a view into the surgical room by constructing a glass wall. Procedures can be observed by other patients, but this doesn't happen often. "We try to do these live Lasik procedures once a month," Doinoff said. "We used to do them more often. But we have to have the patient's permission. They take a lot of planning, to be honest."



Richard Doinoff, Manrique's marketing director, spreads the word in the Valley. (courtesy)

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# ARE YOU ASKING THE BEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?

*By: Jeff Heavin, Instructor for South Texas  
College's Human Resource Specialist Program*

Many people think of the hiring process as a positive time, and it is, if it's done correctly. For the hiring party, the process can be stressful and lengthy because of the legalities involved. From every perspective of the process, there are numerous legal and ethical guidelines that must be adhered to, to ensure that the process is fair for every applicant.

Not every employer thinks about the ethical and legal parameters of the questions asked during an interview. For many, the interview questions may be the last things developed. The thought behind this is, "I know what I am looking for, and I know what questions to ask." That thinking can create a dangerous situation for your organization.

If not thought through carefully, interview questions can exceed legal and ethical boundaries. All interview questions should be job-related or used for clarification of an application. What does this mean? Questions should address gaps in employment history, incomplete or missing information, help understand salary expectations or clarify vague answers to reasons for leaving a previous employer.

One way to ensure the questions you ask are legal and ethical is to simply look at the job description. Your company should have a clear job description available for each position that includes an overview of the job function, a detailed list of daily responsibilities, a salary range and physical, time and educational requirements. This description will help you set the priorities for the questions. For instance, if the job requires night and weekend work, ask candidates if they are comfortable with those hours. Document their responses for future reference.

There are gray areas for any employer. Can you ask if a spouse will have a problem with the amount of time an applicant will spend traveling if they secure the position? Can you ask if an applicant rents or owns a home, has children, lives alone or has health problems? No. These questions all go into



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personal issues in an applicant's life that have no bearing on his or her ability to perform the desired task.

A very tough and seemingly important question to ask in this day and time is if an applicant is a U.S. citizen. Can you legally ask this question? No, because it is not relevant if the applicant is a U.S. citizen. The proper way to address this issue is to ask, "If hired, can you present evidence of your U.S. citizenship or proof of your legal right to live and work in this country?" Asking the question in this way will get you the information you need while keeping you out of trouble for discriminating on the basis of national origin.

Another seemingly gray area addresses what are called "Bona Fide Occupational Qualification" questions. These address job requirements, which, when viewed on the surface, seem biased, but are reasonably necessary if you can demonstrate that they are relevant for the performance of the job. For example, if a job is very physical, explain those requirements and ask candidates to explain their abilities to perform necessary functions with or without accommodations. Some of the

issues that fall under area are physical exertion or being a certain sex, age or religion. It may seem like discrimination to ask age, but if a candidate is not 18, the person cannot work in a liquor store. If a candidate is Baptist and not Catholic, that person may have a problem working at a Catholic summer camp.

One last concern is whether or not the interviewer has internal biases. Do you have a bias against persons of a certain race, who may be overweight, who have a disability or wear clothing a certain way? These biases can impact perceptions in an interview and can cause as much ethical and legal damage as asking the wrong questions. Because they can impact your perception of good interview responses, you could miss out on the best candidate for the job. There is no easy solution to controlling biases, but the best place to start is to understand how they truly influence you as an interviewer. To learn more, take the Implicit Assumption Test by visiting <http://implicit.harvard.edu>.

What will asking good questions and controlling for bias reap? Good answers. You will have your basic questions answered. You

will understand the applicant's perception of their skills, experience and willingness to learn new functions. The applicant will have a chance to demonstrate their abilities, motivation, knowledge and empathy. And you will get more insight into the applicant's true self.

It's rewarding to call an applicant and say, "You're hired," but the road getting there can be hard. The good news is that there is plenty of help. Many small business centers will provide human resource materials and training. At South Texas College, we offer classes leading up to a certificate and an associate's degree through our Human Resources Specialist Program. Through the program you can take classes in labor relations, benefits and compensation, employee management, and HR law. Also, I suggest seeking legal counseling on all hiring practices to ensure your policies are sound.

*For additional information on this or other HR topics contact Heavin directly at 956-872-6226 or a [jeffh@southtexascollege.edu](mailto:jeffh@southtexascollege.edu).*

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