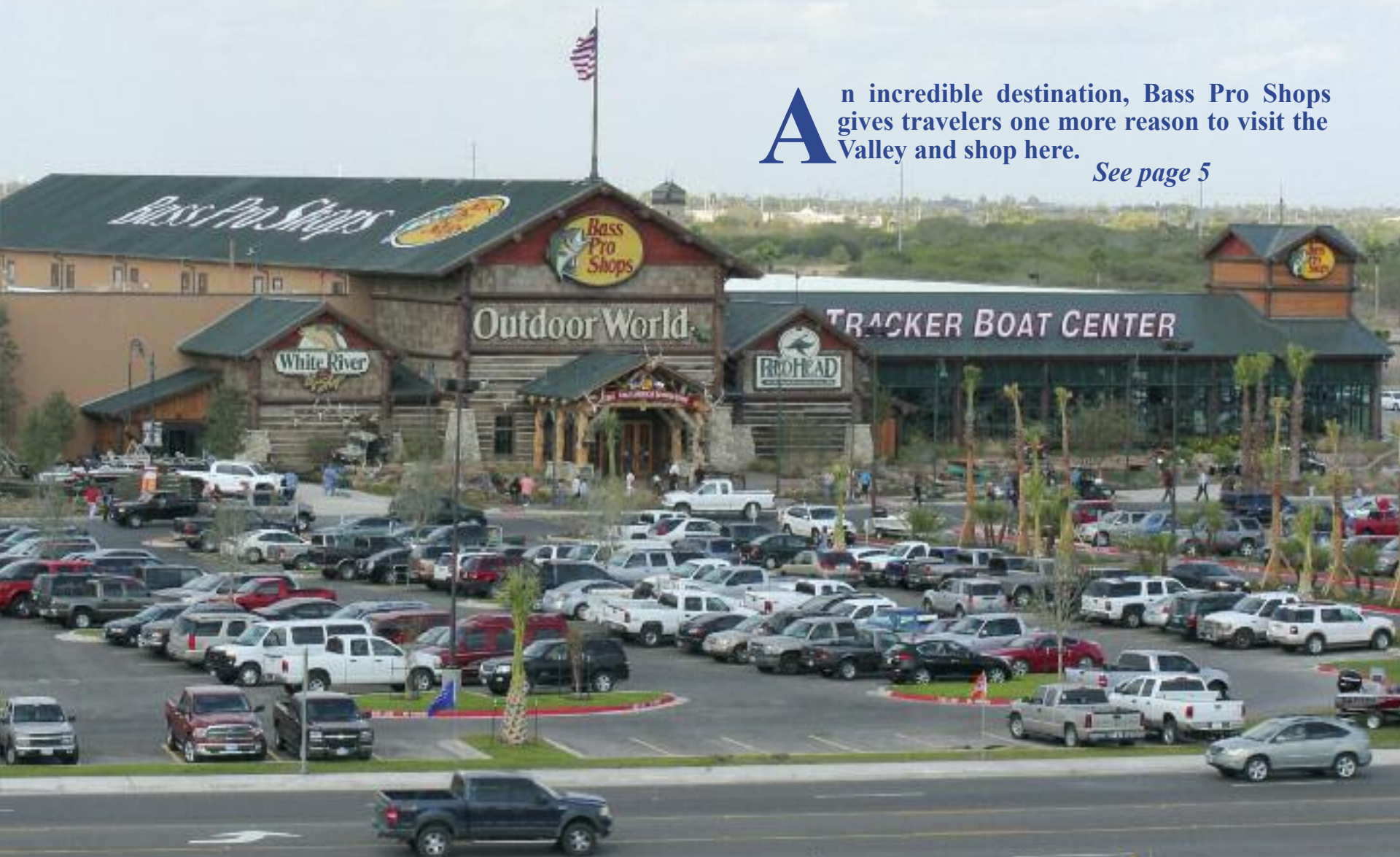


THINGS ARE LOOKING UP IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

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See page 5





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Speaking of quick – another year is almost in the books. Not to scare you, but do you have a plan for business growth over the next twelve months? Are steps in place to handle human resources, production, sales and marketing, etc.? Do you know what lines or models your company will have available for 2012? Has a marketing budget been established?

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LOOKING UP IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

By Eileen Mattei

A proven, popular destination with no admission fee, Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World welcomed the first of a projected two million annual customers to its newest store which opened in Harlingen at Cameron Crossing in November. Outside, ATVs are perched on rocks amid native plants flanking a picturesque flowing stream. Inside, arrays of merchandise vie for attention with huge, colorful murals of Valley outdoor scenes that covered the walls and in some cases the ceilings. Life-size dioramas of south Texas wildlife in brush country feature mounted geese, white-tailed deer, javelina, coyotes and much more.

Part art gallery, aquarium and natural history museum, the newest Bass Pro store certainly qualifies for the destination rating, given its “undersea” bowling alley, free outdoor skills classes, restaurants and target arcades. Shopping the boats, deer blinds, camping equipment, fishing and hunting gear counts as entertainment, too. The outdoor store and its visitors are

projected to inject over \$38 million into the Harlingen economy over 10 years. Local businesses have already benefited. Palermo Taxidermy of Port Isabel, for example, supplied some of animal mounts in the exhibits. Gunsmith Troy Bauer expects to see a surge in business with new gun owners wanting modifications.



TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Bob Vacker, property developer and president of Bert Ogden Motors, said he had nurtured plans to de-

velop Cameron Crossing for 15 years, after purchasing the property at the junction of Highways 77 and 83 in the 1990s. Vacker’s developer-partner Jim Collins is part of a group that holds 50 percent interest in the

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106 acre site. Cameron Crossing has 18 pad sites suitable for hotels, restaurants, and small retailers. Vacker said negotiations are underway with businesses eager to tap into the flood of customers who visit Bass Pro. "In 45 to 60 days, we expect," he said, to announce the names of one or two business which will be building at Cameron Crossing. "It's a long term development."

The Harlingen Economic Development Corp. (EDC) purchased 25 acres at Cameron Crossing and issued \$32 million in sales tax revenue bonds to pay for the construction of the Bass Pro building, an arrangement common with the Missouri-based company. Bass Pro will pay rent based on a percentage of sales.

Negotiations with Bass Pro began over four years ago, according to Bill Martin, EDC CEO, and the project was announced publicly in April 2010. "The beauty of this project is the way the community pulled together to make it happen," Martin said. "I don't think it would have happened without Mayor Chris Boswell."

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

"This is going to have major impact on the entire region. People will drive here specifically to

shop at Bass Pro and spend three to four hours in the store," Martin said. "I think it's a safe assumption that many of those people are not now shopping in Harlingen." In addition, almost half of Bass Pro's out-of-town visitors tend to stay overnight nearby. The typical Bass Pro store attracts visitors within a 150 mile radius, which includes Mexico. Martin noted that dozens of charter buses from Monterrey are already booked to come to Bass Pro in the next three months.

An economic impact analysis of Cameron Crossing, completed in 2010 by Impact Data Source, projected that when fully developed Bass Pro and the adjacent businesses will bring in \$185.8 million in annual taxable sales and annual lodging sales of \$4.8 million. In addition Cameron Crossing's estimated 1,315 employees will have salaries totaling \$31 million.

Net benefits to the city of Harlingen in the first 10 years of the Cameron Crossing are calculated to reach almost \$39 million, after the costs of services and utilities to the facility are deducted. An estimated \$215 million in Cameron Crossing assets will be added to local tax rolls. Over 10 years, the city is expected to gain another \$5 million from hotel occupancy



Hunter Art Leal checks out tree blinds. (VBR)

taxes and \$26 million from sales tax revenue. "I think the estimates are all quite low," Martin added.

A STREAM FLOWS THROUGH IT

To encourage an appreciation of the outdoors and to expose more people to the fun found there, Bass Pro will begin offering free classes in January on topics ranging from Cooking in cast iron pans and Using GPS to Fly casting. "Each department will have courses, said Steve Black of Bass Pro. "A lot of guys are interested in learning how to tie their own flies."

Over the years, Bass Pro has donated \$70 million to conservation and education efforts. It began supporting Valley conservation right off the bat. Bass Pro invited the Coastal Conservation Association to sell \$5 BBQ plates at the opening Evening of Conservation attended by 9,500 people, with Bass Pro providing the meals at no charge to the non-profit. "It was a raving success," said CCA member Jay Meade. "Bass Pro said they'd been partnering with CCA at these events wherever there is a CCA chapter." Valley Proud also participated and benefited.

While each Bass Pro Shops is unique in highlighting its region's natural bounty, there is also a slight variation in the merchandise in the stores, said merchandise manager Silver Garcia. "The differences are about staying attuned to the local climate" and the related outdoor activities. Apparel manager Diane

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Warrenberg also pointed out, “We have the largest collection of hunting clothing south of San Antonio.”

Local hunting and fishing artifacts and vintage photographs place the store solidly in South Texas. The 27,000 gallon freshwater aquarium is stocked with two 90 pound catfish, bass, and gar and dominates one segment of the fishing area while murals of tarpon, flounder and other denizens of the deep and shallow waters along with trout adorn one high wall. Look down and you’ll spot deer and raccoon and turkey tracks imprinted in the floor. Follow the tracks to tree blinds on real tree stumps or the home décor area with outdoor-themed bedding, candles, dog beds and huggable alligator pillows.

Working in the Marine department, Todd Cash, a Valley native, is one of the 300 employees who feels at home in the outdoors. “I have fond memories of fishing the bay, Delta Lake and going bird hunting with my dad and family.” In December, he said, the 20 boats in the Marine Center will be moved outdoors so the area can be transformed into Santa’s Wonderland. There will be free photos of kids with Santa and specials for kids of all ages: wildlife puzzles, boomerangs, Lincoln logs and cute animal slippers.

At Uncle Buck’s Fish Bowl and Grill, bowling balls are painted as giant fish eyes.



Murals above and under the lanes create an underwater ambiance, aided by suspended mounted fish, sharks and faux giant jellyfish. The Champion Store of Old Point Isabel was the décor model for the snack stand known as Uncle Buck’s General Store which serves fudge, popcorn and beverages.

From Bass Pro’s entrance, which has a fireplace and lounge chairs in south Texas ranch style, to the restrooms (tucked away in what look like an old boat

The aquarium holds local freshwater fish like gar, bass and catfish. (VBR)

dock), the Valley’s newest destination reveals all the attention to detail and customers’ dreams that has made the Outdoor World a success.

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PHILANTHROPY: THE GIFTS FROM BUSINESSES THAT KEEP GIVING

By Eileen Mattei

Without the philanthropic support of area businesses, Guadalupe Regional Middle School (GRMS), a tuition-free, three-year Catholic school, would not exist. Partnered with Brownsville businesses such as Ziwa Construction, the Martinez Barrera and Martinez law firm, Luke Fruia Motors, Falcon International Bank and Esco Marine, the compact urban school raises its entire budget through year-round contributions and sponsorship of events by committed business and organizations. The long term result is better-educated, more productive young adults.

The small school, part of the national, 60-school, NativityMiguel network, sparks charitable donations of time, expertise and funding because of its mission of providing a quality, free education to children from low-income families. In the 10 years since the school opened next to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, its graduates have achieved an impressive record: 100

percent completion of high school on time and 95 percent of them went on to enroll in college.

The opportunity to enable economically-disadvantaged students to achieve the dream of a Catholic education that they otherwise couldn't afford caught the interest seven years ago of Polo Borrego, Regional President of Falcon International Bank and now chairman of the Guadalupe school board. Because of Borrego's involvement, the Laredo-based bank has backed GRMS's operation. "From the very beginning we saw that the middle school years are very formative. We can help the students get ready for high school and put in their mind that college is always an option," he said.

Falcon Bank asks its employees to be involved in their community, Borrego explained. "That's one of our goals. The bank lets us decide which organization



Guadalupe RMS President Michael Motyl talks with students who attend the business-supported, tuition free school.

to support and where to contribute our time." Time is an extremely valuable commodity, and Borrego's time commitment as board chair is a large one. Eighty percent of the bank's local charitable funding goes to organizations where bank officers are actively involved. Borrego has also served on the UTB/TSC Development Board and Brownsville Community Foundation.

Guadalupe School, which is sponsored by congregations of Marist Brothers, Christian Brothers and Sisters of the Incarnate Word, has just under 90 students enrolled this year. With 15 to 18 kids per class, Guadalupe is typical of the small-community model of the NativityMiguel program. "Our main goal is close the achievement gap," said Michael Motyl, president of GRMS. "They are at risk because of their family's low socio-economic status. Because of that, the achievement gaps keeps getting wider, putting them farther away from opportunities," unless they can find support through a place like Guadalupe Middle School.

The students, who come from across the Valley's largest city, qualify financially for free or reduced rate lunches. All the students take entrance exams in reading, language and math to determine if they have the potential to have academic success. "We don't expect them to be at grade level," Motyl said. But with quality education, longer class days and continuing support from the business community, GRMS expects their students to catch up to grade level and then go beyond, well equipped with learning skills.

Luke Fruia Motors became a major school sponsor this year, following Rosie Fruia's years of contributions to the GRMS booster group that fundraised for the

A large advertisement for Pirates Landing restaurant. The top part shows a photo of the restaurant building with a lighthouse and palm trees, and a sign that says "WELCOME TO PORT ISABEL". In the center is a circular logo with a pirate character and the text "PIRATES LANDING". Below the logo, it says "Famous and Fun Casual Waterfront Dining". At the bottom, it lists "Affordable Fresh Seafood, Sandwiches, Salads, and More! Family Friendly and Fun! Visit the Pirate Ship Along Our Pier." and provides the address "HISTORICAL LIGHTHOUSE SQUARE • PORT ISABEL", phone number "(956) 943-3663", and website "WWW.PIRATESLANDINGRESTAURANT.COM". There is also a small photo of a pirate ship docked at a pier.

school. Her personal interest in the school led to the decision to move the family business into a leadership position in the program, entailing larger donations and greater involvement and more publicized support. Fruia Motors saw partnering with the school was a good way to help build a stronger Brownsville community.

“We have always supported education both public and private and want to raise the level of success,” said Rosie Fruia, a former public school teacher. “Private schools can address the whole child more easily than public schools can,” fostering both the spiritual side and the character-building side.

“Customers see our name as school supporters at different functions,” said Fruia. “This will be one (philanthropy) that we will always do.” She now serves on the GRMS board and various committees which require several meetings a month and has served on UTB/TSC Development Board.

Half of GRMS graduates go on to high school at St. Joseph Academy, thanks to a generous financial aid program, Motyl said. With the vast majority also entering college, the school provides a heartwarming return on businesses’ investment in students’ futures.

For more information about becoming a partner business, call Michael Motyl at (956) 504-2405.

THE SPIRIT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

By Colin Cain

Take a drive down your town’s main business corridor and you can see that the spirit of entrepreneurship is alive and well in the Rio Grande Valley. Every day, we see new businesses break ground, with entrepreneurs investing in local communities and testing their ideas.

The importance of these business owners to the local, state and national economies should not be understated - small businesses employ over half of all private-sector employees, and over the past 15 years, more than 60 percent of all new jobs have been created by small businesses.

As the economy in the Rio Grande Valley continues to suffer the effects of the recent economic recession, the significance of Entrepreneurship and small businesses on the recovery continues to grow.

But what does it take to be a successful entrepreneur? While there is no established blueprint

for successful business ownership, there are some common traits that many successful entrepreneurs share.

Tolerance for Risk. All businesses are risky – people invest their money, time, pride or a combination of these into their enterprises. Many are poised to lose these investments if the businesses do not perform up to standard. Successful entrepreneurs learn to live with this risk and do not allow it to paralyze them.

Passion. Business ownership is hard, and at one time or another, all entrepreneurs will confront significant obstacles to their successes. Entrepreneurs that possess a passionate will to forge ahead are more likely to overcome these obstacles.



continued on page 23



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A PRESCRIPTION FOR BEING HAPPY AFTER SELLING YOUR BUSINESS

By Eileen Mattei

The sign reads Fry's Pharmacy and Registered Pharmacist Ben Fry is behind the counter. But Fry sold his business to pharmacist Ed Walsh in 2004 and has been an employee since. Fry's jump from boss to employee demonstrates one man's approach to the question, "Is there life after selling your business?"

In 1972 after graduating from the University of Houston Pharmacy School, Ben Fry returned home to San Benito and began working for Adams' Pharmacy. As a boy, Fry had watched Adams, a friend of his parents, prosper, and he realized that pharmacy's mix of science and business appealed to him. For eight years, Fry worked at the hometown drug store, learning the pharmacy business from Adams, who had opened his business after World War II. Soon Fry was, in reality, running the pharmacy for Adams.

"It's tough to be able to borrow enough money to buy any business outright," Fry recalled. But in 1980, once owner financing had been arranged, Fry

bought the drug store and re-named it Fry's. "I walked in the front door, and he walked out the back for good."

Over the next 20 years, Fry became the respected hometown druggist, and it became his turn to prosper. When San Benito Medical Associates opened an office in Harlingen, the personable pharmacist opened a Fry's Pharmacy next door. Then he opened a pediatric pharmacy called Small Fry's next to Harlingen Pediatric Associates.

When Fry's wife died, his outlook on life changed. "I lost the fire in my belly. I wanted to just be a pharmacist without all the other complications of running a business," he said. The idea of not having to deal with insurance, Medicaid and the government sounded



When Ben Fry owned Fry's Pharmacy he collected vintage pharmaceutical equipment. (VBR)

good to him. He sold the Harlingen drug stores to other pharmacists. Around that time, Registered Pharmacist Ed Walsh decided to close his South Padre

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Island drug store and went to work for Fry in San Benito, testing the waters more or less for a year.

“We wanted to make sure he liked us and that we liked him,” Fry said of Walsh. With confirmation that their personalities and work ethics were compatible, Fry owner-financed the sale of the pharmacy to Walsh in 2004. Fry, unlike his predecessor, did not walk away, but became an employee, an employee with benefits to be sure. “I am here full time, when I don’t have a better offer to go hunting, fishing or travel,” Fry said, shortly after his return from a trip to France.

Being an employee in the same business and same building where you were the boss is not for everyone. It requires huge amounts of self-control to not take the lead, to not speak up.

“It was hard to let go, and it’s still hard,” Fry admitted. The years of directing employees and even micro-managing them established routines that were difficult to step out of, but Fry transitioned to seeing himself as a pharmacist, not a business owner with 30 employees. “Ed Walsh has a different management style than I, but it has all worked out for the best. Our practice is still thriving and growing.”

Ed Walsh said it didn’t feel awkward to him to become Fry’s boss after working with him for a year. He did note that, “When I came here, I had a full head

of hair.” Because pharmacists are in tight supply, especially someone familiar with the history of the customers and who knows the operation, Fry remains valuable to Walsh.

Not owning the pharmacy has given Fry the time to be involved in pharmacy on a broader scale. In 2004 Gov. Rick Perry appointed Fry to the Texas State Board of Pharmacy, the agency that regulates pharmacy practice. After serving as president of the Board for two years, Fry was reappointed to the board in 2010.

The change in ownership was so seamless that many customers, seven years later, do not realize that Fry’s has changed hands. “There are still a lot of people who want to talk to me and know I can take care of a problem. People feel comfortable because it is so familiar,” Fry said.

The newest pharmacist at Fry’s is an honor graduate of the first class of TAMU-Kingsville’s Rangel School of Pharmacy and a San Benito native.



Ben Fry and Ed Walsh traded places as employer and employee. (VBR)

“That school has had an impact and it is bringing Valley students back home,” Fry said with approval.

Amid the drug store’s displays of durable medical equipment and its collections of antique bottles of pills, potions and lotions, Fry said his arrangement to sell the business and continue working there is not that uncommon for pharmacists. Although he just turned 65, he has no plans to retire. He enjoys being a pharmacist.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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VALLEY FRUIT BOXES ARE A CHRISTMAS TRADITION

By Mark Reagan

While Pittman and Davis' famous grapefruit has deep roots in the Rio Grande Valley, it's the ability to adapt that has kept them in business for 86 years.

"We have to keep developing new gifts. And every new gift is something else everyone has to learn," said Andy Graham, Vice President and General Manager of Pittman & Davis. This year, they have more than 30 new gifts.

To survive in a world and market that constantly changes, Pittman & Davis has introduced different fruits and products like meat and cheeses, as well as dried fruit and nut mixes to its repertoire of products. Graham and a small team of employees develop new products all year long.

However, November and December ushers in Pittman & Davis' main production season. Semi-trucks load up outside the Harlingen warehouse every day and head out across the nation to deliver the famous yellow boxes filled with ruby red grapefruit,

navel oranges, red apples and a variety of pears.

But most of the year, Graham said there are four full-time employees. That number swells to 350 by December. Each day during the season, more than 200 different products will be packed.

Along with speed and efficiency, one key component to a successful season is quantity.

"We have to get a certain amount out. We have packers that pack the same thing all day long," he said. "And then we have packers who are packing other things."

Christmas accounts for 80 percent of Pittman & Davis' business, followed by five percent at Thanksgiving and the other 15 percent is the rest of the year. The gift baskets will turn up in every state as people warm into the Christmas season and string brightly-colored lights on their houses.

"We ship to all 50 states, Puerto Rico and APO and FPO," he said. APO is the Army Post Office and FPO is the Fleet Post Office.

Because Pittman & Davis ships more than half a



million packages each year, it has to have a well-trained labor force. Approximately 80 percent of

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Pittman & Davis' packers are returning employees. That kind of retention rate saves money by reducing the time it takes to train a new employee.

And because of the quantities of gifts Pittman & Davis ships each year, that saves time and money, as well as increasing efficiency.

"Today, we're doing two semi loads of approximately 7,000 packages that will go out today," he said in mid November. "During December, we will ship probably 20,000 packages a day on five or six semis."

On a typical day during production season, a crew will arrive between 5 and 5:30 a.m. to start



setting up and bringing product out. "And then we'll run till we get all of our trucks and all of our packages out for that day," Graham said. "And sometimes that's five in the afternoon, and sometimes that's 10 at night."

Between Nov. 30 and Dec. 19, Pittman & Davis runs seven days a week.

In the hustle and bustle on the packing house floor, packers assemble gift boxes with ruby red grapefruits. Bins holding the citrus are flanked by people on both sides. Once complete, the gift box is postmarked and loaded directly on to a waiting semi parked with the cab facing Highway 77 and ready to hit the road with a slice of the Valley.

Most of the product shipped during the season is locally grown.

"What we're shipping out of here is coming from Rio Queen Citrus, Hill Valley Citrus. It is graded, sized, polished and we put it in the gift boxes," Graham said. "We bring a lot of product in from out of the Valley, but the vast majority of what we ship is produced here in the Valley."

Pittman & Davis has been at its location at 801 North Expressway 77 since 1972. The company that was founded in 1926 started in downtown Harlingen.



According to Pittman & Davis' website, www.pittmandavis.com, Frank Davis Sr. and his family moved to Harlingen because of an allergy prone daughter. The climate of South Texas was better for her. He soon met a local fruit grower named Howard Pittman, and the two teamed up to found a very successful business using one of the Rio Grande Valley's most well-known products, the grapefruit.

The company's diversity and ability to adapt to change while holding on to quality and tradition has kept them busy all these 86 years.

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WESLACO MANUFACTURERS TAP SKILLS GRANT

By Eileen Mattei

Two Weslaco manufacturing companies have been selected to share a \$234,629 Skills Development Fund grant from the Texas Workforce Commission that will be administered by South Texas College. WoodCrafters LLC and Rio Grande Container Inc. will use the grant to train a total of 212 employees in advanced manufacturing skills.

Rick Barr, executive vice president of Human Capital for WoodCrafters, pointed out that the company's mission statement begins with "The development of people." The 28-year-old business aims not only to create jobs but to sustain them, Barr said, at the formal grant announcement at South Texas College's Mid-Valley campus. "This grant aligns with our vision." WoodCrafters manufactures home furnishing products, such as bathroom cabinets. Its customers include the largest home improvement stores.

Barr already knows exactly what advanced training his workers need for continuous improvement - courses

such as Lean Manufacturing including Total Productive Maintenance and Value Stream Mapping. APICS, the logistics certification course and technical training for electricians and other craftsmen are also being scheduled over the next 12 months.

"South Texas College was created to support companies like yours, to serve as a catalyst for economic prosperity and mobility," said South Texas College President Shirley Reed. For the last 10 years, STC has focused on manufacturing, "where the good jobs are." In that time STC's Institute of Advanced Manufacturing has trained 15,000 people, "making the businesses where they work more productive and more competitive." South Texas College will set up applicable technical skills and contextualized workplace literacy courses for both production crew members, machine operators and supervisors. While the bulk of the grant will be used to upgrade the skills of incumbent workers, a portion has been set aside for training new hires. After training, the workers will be worth more to their employers and in line to earn

higher wages commensurate with their enhanced skills. Similar training has increased productivity and competitiveness at other Valley businesses.

"We are having to tighten our belts like everyone else. We do whatever it takes to get by in this economy," said Harold Jones, president of Rio Grande Container which opened in 1992. The maker of corrugated boxes realized that one way to gain a competitive edge was to upgrade workers' skills through the Skills Fund Grant. Recognized as an environmentally-friendly manufacturer, Rio Grande Container, which has an ISO 9001 designation, uses water soluble glues and inks and the products contain no hazardous material.

"We're happy to have the school (South Texas College) come over to help us. I get applications almost every day from people begging for jobs. This economy just kills everybody, but we'll make it through," Jones added, mentioning the other hard times the nation has weathered.

Accepting the funding requires a significant investment on the company's part. When employees are in training courses, some of which can last 120 hours over several months, their absence leaves a gap in the production line. Nevertheless, Barr said the training is an imperative part of the manufacturer's vision to develop its associates and continuously improve, the mantra of advanced manufacturing. The company has 1,500 employees with manufacturing facilities in Weslaco and Mexico, as well as Mexican and American showrooms.

"We're zeroing in on manufacturing," explained Ronald Congleton, TWC Commissioner Representing Labor. "A good job is the answer to the world's ills. We will never get over our budget problems until we get people back to work. I truly have confidence in South Texas College and the two companies, that you will make this work." Most previous skills development grants administered by South Texas College have been manufacturing industry-specific but open to numerous manufacturers. The most recent grant specifically allotted funding to the two Weslaco fabricators. Congleton said each grant depends on the community college's assessment of manufacturers' needs. The grant takes into account how many jobs will be created or upgraded.

"The future of the nation is in manufacturing," said Wanda Garza, executive officer of NAAMREI at STC. The McAllen Research and Educational Park being built adjacent to the McAllen Foreign Trade Zone is designed to foster the growth of advanced and rapid response manufacturing.

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DENTAL PROGRESO

By Eileen Mattei

The Rio Grande is a fluid border by many definitions. Mission resident Dr. Xavier Aguirre commutes across the river daily to Nuevo Progreso where his dental office has been located since 1996. The separate dental practices of his parents are located in the same block of the small town which has over 100 dentists. Aguirre grew up in McAllen, but it wasn't until he was suspended from junior high for two weeks that he first went to the Progreso dental offices. Playing with Bunsen burners and the wax used to make dental casts got him interested in science and dentistry. He graduated from the Dental School of the Universidad Mexico Americana del Norte in 1994. As a Mexican citizen, Aguirre had a 12-month social service requirement which he fulfilled by helping establish the government health clinic in Progreso. He then worked with an experienced 'Big Case' dentist in Progreso, learning the techniques of multiple-crown, bridge, and full mouth restorations before opening his own office.

Aguirre epitomizes an earlier wave of Mexican businessmen living in the Valley at a time when a new influx of Mexican businessmen carrying just-issued visas are bringing their expertise and investment capital to the region.

Patients who assume that Aguirre is an American because of his South Texas accent and manner frequently ask him why he isn't practicing in the U.S. The question startles him. "I've never felt a need. I see a lot of friends who are American dentists leading a very stressful life," he observed. "Here we are relaxed and laughing during the day. We all eat lunch together." Another advantage he relishes is not having to hire a person solely to deal with insurance coding and processing.

Practicing dentistry in Progreso means accepting the seasonal cycle of patient-tourist visits. Yet Aguirre



Dr. Xavier Aguirre, standing next to a portrait of St. Apollonia, the patron saint of dentistry, commutes to Nuevo Progreso to practice dentistry (VBR)

said his Big Case practice is changing its mix of patients. Previously 90 percent of his Dental Progreso patients were Winter Texans and 10 percent were border residents. In recent years, that has shifted so that now 60 percent of his patients are Winter Texans, 30 percent are local residents and 10 percent are Winter Texan family members and referrals. While more of his business is trending to year-round, he still has abbreviated summer hours. "We have less patients, so I work from 11 to 4, four days a week but in summer it is almost exclusively Big Case dentistry."

"When we first started, we would play soccer in the streets in the summer time," between the occasional customers, Aguirre said. "New people (working in Progreso) don't remember what it was like 10 years ago. Slow times are not new."

In late October, there were parking spots in front of most Progreso main street stores. A week later, the sidewalks were thronged. "It has picked up a little sooner than usual this year," Aguirre observed. While a few shops in Progreso have closed, he said "find me a town on either side of the border that doesn't have a few empty stores."

Aguirre's dental practice employs two other dentists and seven technicians. "People say I spoil my workers," he said. "I spoil them like I spoil my kids. My girls are highly recruited (by other dentists) but they think twice about leaving here. They may get paid more, but they will never be as happy. It's a humane lifestyle. I've never had to fire an employee." Besides paid vacations and an extra day off each



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summer week, Dental Progreso's employees can take maternity leave for as long as they want. Aguirre has on call specialists for root canals, maxillofacial surgery and endodontistry, and refers patients to an orthodontist.

Aguirre, who is an American Dental Association affiliate, has completed several training programs with experts in implants and metal-free dentistry at Cuernavaca and Monterrey and a preceptorship at UTHSCSA. "You can't stop training, but it is getting easier to stay on top of things with webinars and videoconferencing."

Aguirre is involved in his community through Rotary International and is vice president of Progreso Dental Society, which has about 65 active members. He expects that group to grow because of new benefits such as classes via webinars and legal protection being added.

In the evening, as he crosses the international bridge, Dr. Aguirre said he leaves work behind other than doing patient call backs on his drive back to Mission. "By the time I reach home, it's all about the kids. Making the transition from dentist to dad is extremely easy."

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Q & A - GLORIA DOYLE

Gloria Doyle, the Director of Sales at Hampton Inn & Suites in McAllen, has 26 years of experience in the Valley's hotel industry. She talked about industry trends and the rise of extended stay lodging with VBR's editor.

Q *Twenty years ago when I first visited the Valley on business, there weren't many hotels to choose from. What's changed?*

A The Valley's hotel industry has just boomed since then. We have better quality hotels and many more choices. The larger cities have added new hotels, and even the smaller cities have larger hotels. Travelers are more sophisticated and expect more amenities. Most of our hotels have been renovated recently, and the quality of the rooms is definitely higher than it was only ten years ago.

Q *More hotels have added Suites to their names. What makes an extended stay?*

A An extended stay hotel has to offer a suite, with a separation between the sleeping and living areas. There has to be a microwave and a small refrigerator in the room. Free internet access is a given, and a free hot breakfast is equally important.

Q *How long is an extended stay?*

A Different hotels have different definitions, but it's

usually at least seven days. Here we consider an extended stay to be about 14 days. On the other hand, we have a handful of people who have stayed with us for almost a year, but they go home on weekends to other parts of Texas or out-of-state.

Q *How do extended stay hotels differ from standard hotels?*

A Often they coexist. Many hotels offer suites for extended stays in addition to their standard rooms. Hotel reward card members at high levels can be upgraded to suites. Some extended stays offer full kitchenettes and full size refrigerators. More hotels, like us, have suites in their names which invite extended stays: Comfort Suites, Drury Suites, Springhill, Staybridge, Homewood, Holiday Inn Express & Suites and Fairfield Inn & Suites.

Q *Who is using extended stay suites?*

A Some guests are consultants staying for a week or more while advising a hospital or a bank, for example. Others are people relocating to the Valley, such as new maquila managers and their families. Border Patrol agents on temporary duty and Winter Texans take extended stay suites. So do people who are having major home repairs or remodeling done along with newcomers waiting to

move into a home.

Q *Do Winter Texans make up much of the market?*

A I know one hotel where Winter Texans take 10 to 12 rooms for three-month stays every winter.

Q *Why are extended stay suites so popular?*

A Travelers think, "If I'm going to be here for a week, I want room to spread out and to relax."

Q *What percentage of rooms are extended stays nowadays?*

A City wide it is not that high a percentage, but there is a solid demand for suites.

Q *How many hotels are in McAllen?*

A McAllen has two full service hotels: Embassy Suites and the Renaissance Casa de Palma, which have restaurants, meeting spaces and a bar. The 36 other hotels are considered limited service ranging from newer ones like Hampton Inn & Suites which has been open about a year and has 112 rooms and suites to 250 room at Embassy Suites. The smaller hotels employ about 30 people full and part time while the largest employ as many as 110.

Q *What is the occupancy rate in the McAllen?*

A The city has a total of 3,370 rooms and occupancy depends on the season, with January through March being the busiest. The 12-month overall occupancy rate runs between 55 and 58 percent, so that includes the slowest summer months and busiest winter months. We can attribute that to our good weather compared to rest of the country. In Hidalgo County there are 7,052 rooms, so larger groups can overflow into the area.

Q *What are the trends in the industry?*

A McAllen is trying to go green, so guests at most hotels have a choice in how often linens are changed. Most people request towel changes every day but don't want their sheets changed so often. And people used to be satisfied with continental breakfasts. Now full, hot breakfasts are expected either as an amenity with the room or through an on-site restaurant.

Q *What lies ahead?*

A We keep hearing rumors of more hotels on the horizon, possibility of a convention hotel on Ware Road. As the economy gets better, more hotels will be expanding to handle an increased number of guests.

Q *What keeps you in the hotel industry?*

A I fell into the hotel business, and I am still having so much fun. Each day is different. My goal is to make everybody happy.



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HOW DO YOU HIRE GREAT SALESPEOPLE?

By Susan LeMiles Holmes

It's easy! Just Google "How Do You Hire Great Salespeople?" to get 44,500,000 answers in 32 seconds. Everybody thinks they know the secret. In addition to evaluating, hiring and training thousands of salespeople in my career, I read a few of these forty-four million articles too, all of them titled, "Ten Traits of the Best Salespeople," "5 Characteristics of the Best Salespeople," "The Seven Must Have Traits of a Salesperson." You get the drift.

I really can't disagree with any of the formulas, but the results just aren't there. Sales turnover is monumental, training is exhausting and failure is expensive. Your fiercest competitor can't hurt you like a bad hire.

Most of us focus on traits and experience, things that are easily seen and evaluated from a resume or interview. We like confident, hard-working, positive people, preferably good-looking, with lots of friends. We like people with experience in our industry and extensive product knowledge. If your evaluation stops here, in your comfort zone, you won't get the best.

Top performers, the ones who light up the sky, are just wired differently. To find them, you must bypass traits and search the deepest core dynamics that are basic to sales ability: empathy and ego drive (Greenberg and Greenberg, 1983). Probably in childhood, long before there was a product to sell, these two dynamics started developing, each reinforcing the other, each enabling the other to be fully utilized.

Empathy allows a salesperson to know what the customer feels, and it includes ability to get powerful feedback from others. Good salespeople become attracted to evasive action and objections. Solving a problem or solving the puzzle of the person in front of them is emotionally and intellectually compelling.

Too much empathy expresses itself as sympathy. If the salesperson begins to identify with and take sides with the customer as sympathy, he mentally and emotionally adopts the obstacles and fears that prevent the sale from being closed. But....the customers really like him!

Poor empathy gives you a salesperson that can follow instructions as long as the customer behaves in the predicted manner. If a customer goes "off script," this employee is doomed. There is no real interaction going on. Your employee is unable to sense what the customer feels, change pace or creatively deal with the customer's true need. The customers don't like him.

Ego drive is expressed in many ways that demonstrate a salesperson's need to persuade, to persevere, to conquer. Many employers look for salespeople who

are hungry for money because that is the only tangible reward they can think of that would motivate someone. True, a stellar seller eventually connects his ability with cash and the finer things of life, but that's not why he performs. Ego drive is why he works hard and sets urgent goals.

His psyche requires that he prove to himself that he can conquer over and over again. Ego strength, another facet of ego drive, is the resilience to ignore or even be motivated by failure. Hire someone with strong ego drive and little empathy and you will have a person unselling your company every time he opens his mouth.

The balance, the synergy of these two dynamics, is what you want. You may find a person who has wonderful empathy and low ego drive. That person knows what to say to close a sale, but his overly-emotional connection will prevent him from using the information. The person with sufficient ego drive needs the sale and is perfectly willing to use the information his empathy provides to reach the goal.

I challenge you to take your own list of "Ten Must Have Traits of a Great Salesperson" and figure out if each represents one of the two core dynamics or is just

nice to have, just comfortable to have. I recommend testing candidates early in the selection process. Don't just test the ones you like; your blind spots and preconceived ideas will probably eliminate the very people you should consider.

Use tests specifically designed to uncover empathy and ego drive, and start observing behaviors instead of traits. Empathetic people ask quality questions, close their mouths and listen. They know that customers will tell them everything they need to know. They are curiosity driven and have the ability to improvise.

People with ego drive set goals, interpret obstacles as puzzles and are not deeply wounded by rejection. Sometimes, they are even proud of failures because of the ability to rebound. These are the guys who can't wait for the business to come to them...they go after it.

Susan LeMiles Holmes is Director of Career Services at Texas State Technical College and a published novelist. To inquire about hiring TSTC graduates, email susan.holmes@harlingen.tstc.edu or learn about Susan's fiction publications at www.susanlemiles.com.

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LIVING IN THE CLOUD

By Eileen Mattei

While some small businesses delay adopting the latest technology employed by larger corporations, Brisky & Perez Insurance decided last year that they would take advantage of cloud servers and their offsite data processing and storage capabilities. The results of the switch have given principals Linda Brisky Perez and Albert Perez flexibility, reliability and freedom.

“We chose to go with the cloud server instead of in-house servers because we felt it gave better protection of client data, meaning we would have access to client data in case of a catastrophe like a hurricane or fire,” said Albert Perez. “It allows us to set up anywhere we have power and internet access and provide service to our clients. The second reason for making the change is that I can concentrate on my business. A cloud server takes all the responsibility of day to day maintenance of software and keeping up with glitches, off of me.

Albert Perez and Linda Brisky became business partners 25 years ago when each bought 50 percent of her parents’ Brownsville insurance agency. Working together they realized how compatible they were, fell

in love and married within the year.

In December 2010, after eight months of preparation, Brisky & Perez shifted their agencies computing and email functions to the internet. The Cloud server they use licenses its agency management software (AMS 360) to firms like Brisky & Perez. It automatically upgrades the software, integrating it with existing systems.

Albert Pérez said the agency pays approximately \$26,000 per year for the cloud and email server, a fee that is based on the 10 people in the office registered to use the system. Some cloud servers serve charge by time connected. He feels he has come out ahead, given how much time he had previously spent assessing software updates instead of selling insurance and handling claims. Plus he no longer has the labor costs of technicians to repair his computer systems.

“I was very tied to the office,” said Linda Perez. “Now because of cell phones and technology, I can go anywhere and work.” Her responsibilities include policy evaluations, underwriting, accounting and HR. Her husband handles sales and marketing, claims and information technology.

Cloud computing, offering access to company data

from almost anywhere, is a two-sided improvement. Many business owners, who already put in up to 60 hours per week, find they can’t ever get away from work anymore. Then again they don’t have to physically be there to have the information needed to make decisions.

“New technology has given us more freedom. You don’t have to be an expert on everything anymore,” she said. “Previously Albert would have to stop and learn to bring the business up to date. Now it is the best of both worlds.”

Albert Perez is a proponent of Skype’s conference calling used with video hookups and large TV monitors which enables offices in multiple locations to work together. On a recent video conference with potential clients in Canada and Minnesota, he was explaining his proposal to insure their commercial property in Brownsville. “They had been emailed the documents. When one said he couldn’t find the page, I walked up to the camera and showed him what the page looked like,” Perez said. He gained the new client. And he considers Skype conference calling a bargain at \$4.95 per month.

Aggressive marketing and careful attention to clients’ needs and concerns has helped Brisky & Perez grow from a small mom-and-pop shop to one of the city’s larger agencies.

In November the couple attended the Texas Workforce Commission’s Call to Action conference, feeling that an understanding of the direction of the labor market was important enough to be away from work for a day. “If we see what business are going to be growing in the future, we can come up with products to serve needs,” Albert Perez said. The projection that manufacturing wouldn’t have as many employees in coming years led him to comment that the agency would probably pursue less products related to that industry. Nevertheless, the opportunities for providing commercial, health and personal insurance policies were growing with the population.

The cloud servers Brisky & Perez use have redundancy not only with data backed up in multiple locations but with physical servers in various locations, in case of natural or manmade disasters affecting the cloud. In Brownsville, Perez has access to two internet servers with the backup DSL taking over automatically if the first, Roadrunner, goes down.

The two partners see themselves in the future being able to travel and, thanks to the cloud, running their business as if they were home in Brownsville. Technology allows small businesses to create a virtual office.

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WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: CALL TO ACTION

By Eileen Mattei

“Our technology is allowing us to produce more with fewer people. But those people must have significant skills,” Tom Stelman of TIP Strategies said at the State of the Workforce Call to Action conference. While 41 percent of American jobs were blue collar and low skill in 1940, today less than 23 percent are. That jibes with predictions that by 2018, 54 percent of jobs will require advanced training or a four year degree, compared to 41 percent now. Another projection sees that 40 percent of the jobs in 2020 will be based on technologies that did not exist 10 years earlier.

The conference, organized by the Workforce Solutions of Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, RGV Partnership and LRGV Development Council, examined the rapidly changing workforce needs of local businesses and the need for technically skilled employees. The Rio Grande Valley does have several positive labor advantages. During recessions, more people move “back home.” That means that talent which had left the Valley is returning. Some will find a job here or decide to start their own business and create jobs. In addition, the Valley’s young workforce – increasingly educated—is an asset missing from many parts of the country.

The three growth industries on the border—healthcare and social services, government (including education) and retail—account for more than half of the region’s new jobs and over half of its current employment. The problem is that a portion of the ‘growth’ jobs don’t pay that well. Many of those growth jobs are primarily held by females, and some of the better-paying jobs that were cut back were in male-dominated fields like construction.

A MISLEADING STATISTIC

Among the major impediments to workforce development is the fact that 40 percent of the regional workforce over age 25 lacks a high school diploma or GED. That shocking statistic, which unfortunately deters both regional and national corporations, reflects a large immigrant population which arrived from their native countries without a basic education. It is not based solely on the local high school dropout rate.

Yet having the youngest workforce in the nation can give the Valley an economic advantage. “What you do with them makes a difference to the companies you attract and the ones here that decide to expand,” Stelman said.

One of the challenges of regional workforce development is getting young people excited about specific jobs in technical fields. To raise awareness – in students and their parents - about the opportunities and the better earnings in fields requiring advanced skills will take a concerted promotion and marketing effort. In addition, existing workers should be encouraged to raise their level of technical

skills.

At the foundation of workforce development are business-education partnerships that will support increased industry-driven approaches to curriculum development and address literacy and skills gaps. Students through internships, job shadowing and mentoring, like those offered by Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley, can see the relevance of the courses they take.

“The challenge is getting folks all on same page working to the same goal,” said Bonnie Gonzalez, CEO of Workforce Solutions Lower Rio. For example, economic development departments recruiting companies recognize that workforce issues take center stage.

The call to action recommended strengthening entrepreneurial ambitions. “The Valley has a huge number of micro-entrepreneurs,” Gonzalez said. “How do you support them and get business skills to them?” Many people have ideas and the energy to put the ideas into action and build a better future for Rio South Texas. For existing businesses, support could encourage looking at innovative ways to achieve results; for startups, it would be through incubators, counseling and microfinancing. For all entrepreneurs, support services and training are available through the

region’s universities, community colleges and numerous business assistance centers.

Participants in working sessions on economic development, education and workforce, and entrepreneurship debated priorities and selected key goals that would lead to a better trained workforce possessing more technical skills. The next step is setting up limited-goal taskforces using existing resources to help develop a 21st century workforce.

THE SKILLS GAP

“Technology is changing the way we live and with that comes the skills gap,” said Andres Alcantar, Texas Workforce Commissioner Representing the Public. “With every innovation we have changes in requirements for job seekers.” Individuals need to have the means to acquire skills that let them adapt to the changing environment. “We can provide a great service in doing a better job of informing students what it means to follow specific (degree) paths.”

“In an economic region like the four county LRGV, everyone shares the same work force,” concluded the TIP Strategies report. Yet jurisdictions continue to compete for jobs and investments. “Addressing workforce challenges and leveraging opportunities in a region can help everyone succeed.”



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MEXICAN COMPANY EXPANDS TO VALLEY TO FIX BROKEN CELL PHONES

By Eileen Mattei

The screen on your cell phone shatters. For a moment, panic overwhelms you. Don't feel alone: over 20,000 cell phones are discarded per hour in the US, according to one report.

But your phone doesn't have to be among those trashed. GC Telecom, a Monterrey-based cell phone and mobile device repair lab, opened its first U.S. location earlier this year with a kiosk at Sunrise Mall and its lab at the UTB ITEC Incubator.

"People can't live without their cell phones. It's their oxygen," said Benjamin Luna, business developer and sales director for GC Telecom in Brownsville. GC Telecom dominates the South and Central American markets when it comes to refurbishment of cell phones. "In Mexico, we work with the carriers and vendors and do all the major brand repairs. We're certified."

While the company is not the first to offer cell phone repair directly to the consumer rather than through the service provider, Luna believes it has a

bright future. "We are very different from our competitors and what singles us out is our lab," he said. Based on the experience of GC Telecom's approximately 25 Mexican logistics labs, the company uses a temperature and humidity controlled room with anti-static mats on the work surfaces and the floor. Repair techs wear anti-static coats, anklets and bracelets, which are grounded. Static build-up and discharge can damage and destroy electronics.

The Brownsville lab keeps the spare parts of most models on hands and is geared up to fix the components that are most commonly broken: the screen, the charger port and the LCD display. Currently turnaround time on repairs depends on the phone brand. HTC's and iPhones can be fixed in an hour if brought to the lab. Most repairs are one day jobs, with the lab aiming to inventory parts for every major phone brand from Blackberry and Nokia to Samsung, Motorola and others. Techs are trained in-house or flown to corporate headquarters for instruction. The Brownsville location should double its workforce in



Benjamin Luna observes technician Ben Duran making cell phone repairs at GC Telecom. (VBR)

12 months.

Phone insurance does not exist in Mexico, and Luna suggests it's time to reexamine the value of U.S. cell phone insurance policies. He advocates for consumer education when it comes to cell phone repair. Consumer-managed repair is greener, cheaper and faster, he noted, plus you get your own phone back, rather than a refurbished, new-to-you model.

Within the next three years, the company projects that it can dominate the Texas market. "We want to be the biggest logistics center in the U.S. for cell phone repair. Not only do we look at logistics side, we're in transition to opening up small cell phone repair shops that are very accessible to the community." The company plans to open small labs for end-consumer cell phone repair in the larger cities and expand from there, not neglecting smaller markets.

In the ITEC Center, the company's lab is across from the Go Green Center, fortuitously. "We have to recycle some of the product," explained Luna who expects to be working with Go Green. The company is also preparing to recycle older phones brought in by customers.

GC Telecom has not limited itself to cell phones. It is the only certified Bose system repair provider in Central and South America. The company also repairs iPads, Xboxes, gaming consoles and related equipment. "It's a very high demand market," Luna said. "From the smallest kid to seniors, everyone has electronics that break and need repair right away."

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(continued from page 9)

Persistence. Failure is a hard pill to swallow, and the law of averages tells us that, at some point, a business will experience serious difficulties, if not outright closure. Successful entrepreneurs possess an ability to learn from their struggles and adapt the next time around.

Adaptability. There is a saying that “no battle plan survives first contact with the enemy,” and the same goes for business. Entrepreneurs must be able to understand what is happening with their businesses and adapt to their circumstances.

Preparation. Savvy entrepreneurs know what they want to do and how to get it done. They also know when to ask for help from experts.

While some entrepreneurs are lucky enough to be born with all of these traits, most are not. They must take the time and effort to develop their skills and competencies through education, work experience and additional training.

Keeping this spirit of entrepreneurship alive and healthy is important for the Rio Grande Valley. Thankfully, there is a new project in the Rio Grande Valley to help entrepreneurs develop the skills and confidence to succeed.

Led by business professors and entrepreneurship experts, the UTPA Entrepreneurship Training Project (ETP) provides free, comprehensive entrepreneurship training to individuals residing in Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties that have been negatively impacted by the economic downturn. The in-depth course takes participants through all aspects of business ownership and provides them with the tools to succeed in a competitive market.

To learn more about the UTPA ETP, call 956/665-7535, or visit the website at www.utpa.edu/sbdcevents.

Colin Cain is the director for The University of Texas-Pan American Entrepreneurship Training Project (ETP), a component of the Business Development & Innovation Group at The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) in Edinburg. Before joining UTPA, Mr. Cain worked on USAID economic development projects in Latin America, and commercial revitalization in Washington D.C.

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WHY YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE MAIL CENTER

By Eileen Mattei

The opposition to the proposed closure of the Rio Grande Valley's Area Mail Processing (AMP) center is not about the loss of 69 jobs in McAllen. It is about the fact that shifting the Valley's mail sorting to Corpus Christi will add days to the in-transit time of mailings from one address in the Valley to another. The exact amount of additional time is unknown because the USPS has delayed the release of its studies, stonewalling even requests from Texas' senators and congressmen.

Nevertheless, informal tests have shown that Valley mail routed through Corpus takes three to six days longer to reach its Valley destination. (Mail picked up on Fridays and Saturdays is processed in Corpus.) "It's in the mail" is going to take on a whole new dimension.

Irrational only begins to describe the projected shift of the AMP mail sorting center to Corpus Christi. First, 80 percent of the mail sent in the Valley stays in

the Valley. Second, the Valley has about three times the Corpus region's population along with higher mail volume now. The forecast for Valley growth is strong while Corpus's population is expected to shrink. Third, the Corpus facility is smaller than the McAllen facility. It's more logical to shift the Corpus Christi processing south.

"This is going to affect everyone," said Dr. Fred Farias, chair of the McAllen Government Affairs Council. "Most people don't know about this issue, and that's the big challenge. The postal service is trying to cut jobs and save money. One way is by consolidation." The cost of trucking mail back and forth to Corpus Christi will be high, but the priority is shedding jobs and the related expenses appears to override other factors.

Steve Ahlenius, McAllen Chamber of Commerce CEO, said, "It would be nice to see the statistics comparing the Valley and Corpus Christi, so we can get a better understanding of where they (USPS) are coming from in terms of numbers. Right now they're

hiding the ball." In fact, of the 240 plus postal centers slated for closure only two are farther apart than McAllen and Corpus. Officially, it is 168 miles one way between the two processing centers.

"If this goes through, it's going to hurt everyone. You're not going to get the same service," said Harlingen resident Ruthie Ewers, who owned a large direct mail business in Dallas for 34 years. Ewers, who served as the first national Postal Customer Council Chair, said she has called the Postmaster General's office and asked how the closure of the Valley AMP could be justified. "Once they make up their minds, they are looking for every way they can to stay on track," she said.

Perry Vaughan of Associated General Contractors said one problem is getting regional unity. "The perception is that this is a McAllen jobs issues. It is a service issue."

If businesses can't count on the mail being delivered in a timely manner, that puts up obstacles in getting bills to customers and payments from them as well. Banks, professional offices, schools, retailers, utilities, non-profits, trade associations are among those using mailings to communicate. When a mailing arrives late, it causes many problems.

This is the third attempt to close the Valley AMP center. The previous tries were thwarted, in part, because of public resistance and certain overnight delivery standards that had to be met. Unfortunately those standards are being eliminated. "We've been told through back channels that this decision has already been made," Ahlenius added. Ewers predicted in six years or so the post office will be using subcontractors for various services including mail sorting.

If the postal service degrades the service, volume will go down more as more people begin using online banking and payments, email greeting cards, etc. The Valley is at a disadvantage in this case, Dr. Farias said, because fewer persons are online here than other areas.

What are the options for business? Contact congressmen and senators and the postmaster general. Sign a petition on the websites of the McAllen Chamber and other cities. Suggest a reversal: moving the Corpus Christi AMP to the Valley,

Public comments are being accepted until December 15.

FYI: The cost of first class postage is going up next year.

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CK TECHNOLOGIES OPENS PLANT

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Chairman of Cascade Engineering Fred Keller inaugurated the CK Technologies Brownsville facility where a local workforce already is producing plastic injected molded parts for the large truck and bus industry. CK Brownsville began supplying its customer base in northern Mexico and north Texas this summer.

"The opening of this facility signals not only CK's commitment to providing opportunity for our region, but our city's commitment to help CK succeed. CK providing employment for 120 people means they are providing sustainability to 120 different families in our city," said Jose Herrera, Chairman of the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation.

"Brownsville is moving in the right direction."

"CK Brownsville will anchor and help shape the North Brownsville Industrial Corridor, which connects manufacturers to North and Latin America by way of five modes of international transportation," said Jason Hiltz, President & CEO of the Brownsville Economic Development Council. The location gives CK access to transportation of goods via rail, air, deep water, barge and trucking.

The company announced one year ago it would be opening its Brownsville facility and would hire 121 employees. Since then, CK has installed three plastic injection presses and an overhead crane, and contracted several local suppliers and firms in order to meet its clients demand for large plastic components. CK plans to house an electroplating line, paint line and warehouse for its manufacturing operation. In Brownsville, the plant will produce parts for customers in Monterrey, Saltillo, Dallas and Oklahoma.

CK Technologies, a subsidiary of Cascade Engineering Inc. headquartered in Michigan, qualified for \$425,000 in cash incentives through the Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF), the first ever for Brownsville and Cameron County. Brownsville also is the only city in deep south Texas to qualify for the big three state economic development funds – TEF, the Texas Emerging Technology Fund and the Texas Enterprise Zone Program.



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Valley Baptist - Harlingen awarded first Joint Replacement "Gold Seal of Approval™" South of San Antonio



Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen has become the first hospital south of San Antonio to be certified with a "Gold Seal of Approval" for knee and hip replacement surgeries.

The hospital was certified by the Joint Commission, an accreditation agency that evaluates more than 18,000 healthcare organizations and programs in the United States.

VBMC-Harlingen is now one of only 11 hospitals in Texas which have the "disease-specific" specialty certification in knee and hip replacements.

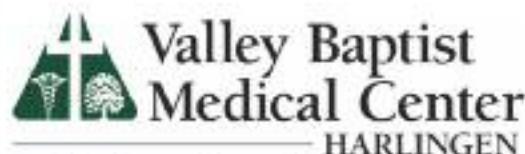
"This certification for our excellence in joint replacement is a testament to the expertise, dedication and care of Dr. Rick Bassett and our entire joint replacement team at Valley Baptist, including all of our orthopedic surgeons and nursing and rehab staff," said Bill Adams, CEO of Valley Baptist-Harlingen.

Mr. Adams noted that the Joint Commission survey team gave the Valley Baptist joint replacement team a perfect score – without issuing a single "requirement for improvement."

For more information on knee, hip and other joint replacement procedures, please consult your physician and visit www.ValleyBaptist.net.



Dr. Rick Bassett,
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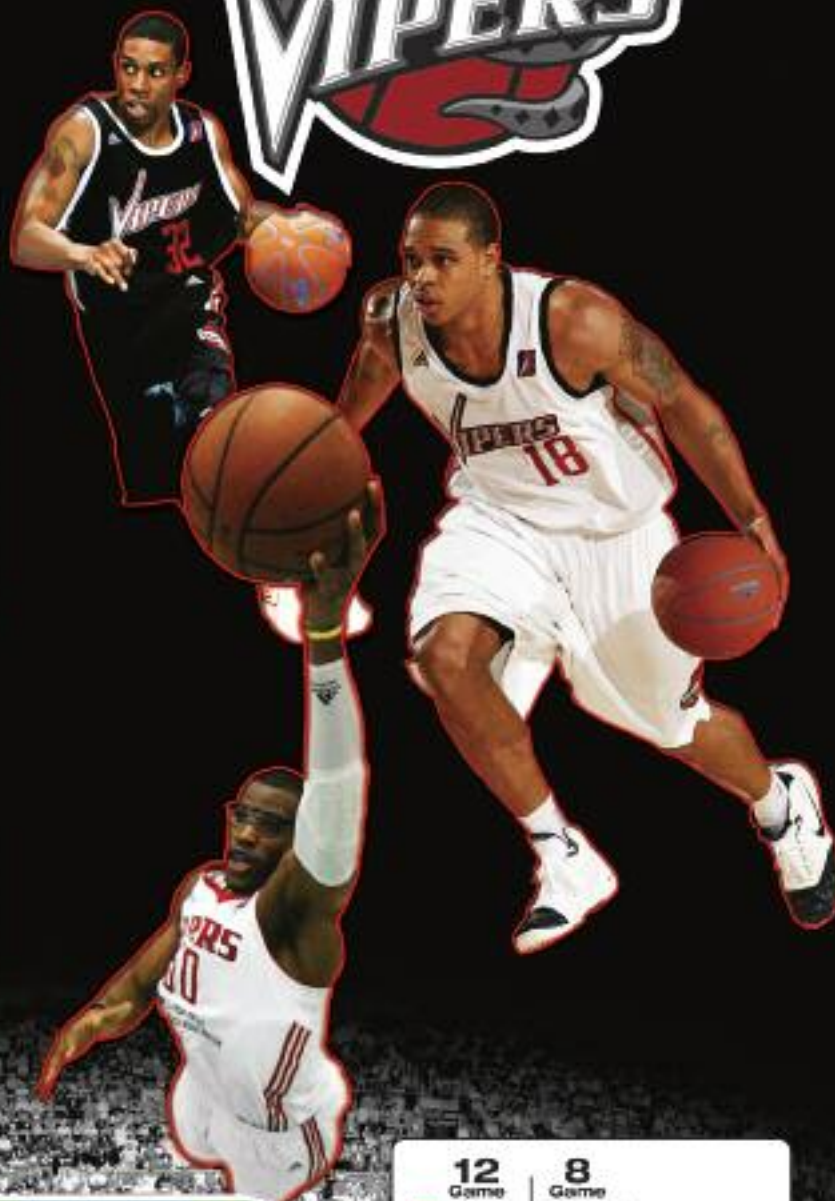
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SAT	Dec. 10	Austin	at RGV-7:00 pm
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SAT	Jan. 7	Dakota	at RGV-7:00 pm
FRI	Feb. 10	Austin	at RGV-7:00 pm
SAT	Feb. 11	Austin	at RGV-7:00 pm
SAT	Feb. 18	Canton	at RGV-7:00 pm
FRI	Mar. 23	Los Angeles	at RGV-7:00 pm
FRI	Mar. 30	Tulsa	at RGV-7:00 pm
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FRI	Feb. 10	Austin	at RGV-7:00 pm
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