

Volume IV, Issue 7  
March 2013

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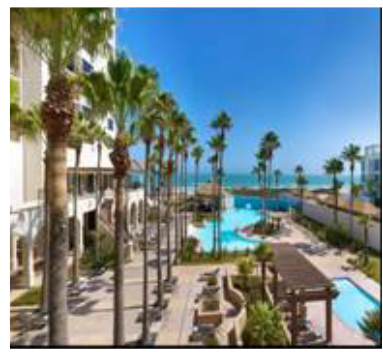
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# Gems of Our Region

Who's on first? What's on second? Commercial or residential development: which comes first? Some say it takes commerce to bring the people. Others say if you have residents, the businesses will come. Some even simultaneously.

It's true – timing is everything. Shops, stores and restaurants in a viable region encourage residents and visitors to spend money yet businesses must see a supportive economy before they think about buying or leasing property. So we return to our original question: which is first? Why not both? When the two work together in harmony, you've got a beautiful relationship.

So what drives this marriage? A region's employment, spending power, traffic count, infrastructure, location convenience, trade population area, along with simple but crucial elements such as entrance and exit accessibility, etc. Other deal makers or breakers are proximity to Expressway frontage roads,

level of congestion, route access points, possibly 24-hour business patronage, security "friendliness" and many more.

What else will bring the people? What other features/benefits/amenities are investors seeking? A city, town or community must also have its ducks in a row with visual attractiveness, invitation and acceptance to growth, cosmetic appeal, cohesiveness with the region's political system, planning, zoning and code processing, favorable tax incentives, ability to meet development and construction deadlines, building regulations, etc. Many elements play important roles in economic development. There's a reason why it's referred to as a process not an overnight success.

Does South Texas have such jewels? Are there untapped areas of potential development? Is frontage road space on Expressway 83 and 77 available where businesses should set up shop and take advantage of very competitive real estate pricing? How might one find such needles in a haystack? Just get on the road and drive. Sure, gas prices are rising at the 2008 rate but consider the ROI. A \$60 - \$80 fill-up might just

help you find the right piece of property for a new business or to expand your existing company. Maybe it's time to rediscover what our region has to offer. Gem finding can be awakening.

Change is inevitable; staying constant is not an option. A region or area, but more specifically, a town or a city is either going forwards or backwards. Opportunities for commercial and residential development are all around us. For those of you who drive city to city, town to town as much as I do, you may share these same sentiments. I pass through certain areas and think, "I could see stores, rooftops, a dealership, restaurants and maybe a hotel or two here." What do you see?

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# Adding Water to the Menu

By Eileen Mattei

From the sparkle of sunlight on a resaca to moonlight bathing the Gulf, waterside dining adds a special magic to a meal. Along the Arroyo Colorado, resacas, the Laguna Madre, the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico, Valley restaurants find that good food served with a water view results in a happy clientele.

The Riverside Club may be the granddaddy of waterside restaurants and remains the region's only riverfront eating place. When Johnny Hart bought the place 30 years ago, he became the third owner of the popular destination tucked between La Lomita Mission and Chimney Park in south Mission. "Being on the water and right on the border where they can look into Mexico appeals to a lot of people," he said. The view, combined with icy pitchers of beer and house specials like pork tenderloin, fried shrimp baskets and fried green beans, attracts Winter Texans and local residents in a 70:30 mix.

"We try our best to make Winter Texans welcome," Hart said. Live music six afternoons a week helps. So do the one- and two-hour Rio Grande cruises on the Riverside Dreamer, a pontoon boat that Hart added 20 years ago. The river cruise brings in birders, local people and tourists.

Seated around a long table on the shaded patio, a convivial group of Minnesotans wintering in Mission figured they have been coming to the Riverside Club for 10 years. Two newcomers said they have visited the restaurant twice in 10 days. The draw? "Cold beer, nice weather and watching Border Patrol boats cruise past." Those who crave German music, bratwurst and schnitzel visit the Riverside Club on Saturday afternoons.

The riverside location resulted in the club being badly damaged during the 2010 summer flooding. Hart spent six months rebuilding about 50% of his operation and managed to open for

the 2011 Winter Texan season.

## Downstream

The Wharf on the Arroyo Colorado is a casual weekend destination for outdoorsmen who tie up their boats at the Arroyo City restaurant's docks. Manager

Marco Salazar, following in the footsteps of his parents and grandfather, presides over the eatery which has been around for more than 30 years, although the present building is only seven years old.

"Our menu has over 100 items, from seafood and Mexican food to hamburgers,"

Salazar said. His customers are fishermen and families escaping from the urban scene. Restaurant guests can fish for free from the Wharf's four docks; others pay \$7 for three hours.

**"You've got to have great service and great food, but water does give you a uniqueness. In this business, you've got to have an edge."**

**--Joe Kenney**

*On Pier 19, customers can bird and boat watch before being served. (VBR)*



## Resaca-side

In Brownsville, it's surprising that the resacas meandering through the city have so few restaurants on their banks.



*At the Riverside Club, the beer flows only slightly slower than the Rio Grande in the background. (VBR)*

*Cobbleheads Bar & Grill is a mix of good eats and good times. (VBR)*



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Customers love waterfront decks and patios, said Joe Kenney, the owner of Cobbleheads on Resaca de la Guerra. "Anywhere USA, water is a natural attraction: sitting and watching it move, watching rain dance off of it. It's relaxing no matter how stressful your day has been," he observed. Kenney started the current resurgence in resaca-side dining when he bought and renovated the dilapidated Trudy's Piano Bar next to what was then a weed-clogged resaca 18 years ago.

"You've got to have great service and great food, but water does give you a uniqueness. In this business, you've got to have an edge," Kenney said. Cobbleheads' menu features shrimp caught by local trawlers. And no one has more authentic Philly Cheese Steaks than Kenney, a Philadelphia native who has developed seven variations of the original.

Across the resaca, Alicia Lopez said the water view creates a romantic setting at Madeira. "The view is one of the reasons people come here.

The first is for the food and the second is service." The well-maintained resaca doesn't have mosquitos, she added.

Around the Island

The Friedman family- father and brothers- between them own four waterfront restaurants: Pirate's Landing, Sea Ranch, Pier 19 and Laguna Bob. Scott Friedman, owner of Pirate's Landing, said the waterside locations turn the restaurants into destinations. "It's the attraction, what you come here to see-- the Laguna Madre." Besides views of the sparkling bay and a menu of tasty dishes, his restaurant boasts the longest fishing pier in Texas (open round the clock in the summer) and rollicking entertainment aboard the Black Dragon pirate ship. Providing guests extra reasons to come - and to come back - is important, according to Friedman. If he had an inland restaurant, the visual focus would probably be a courtyard.

Pier 19, located on the original causeway, is the only restaurant perched over the Laguna Madre. Surrounded by the bay, diners can select a meal from the menu or bring in their catch from Pier 19's fishing charter and have it prepared for them.

Sea4ever Roof top Bar and Grill, atop the new Schlitterbahn Resort, provides a spectacular fifth floor view of the Gulf of Mexico, jetties and the Laguna Madre. "It seemed like a natural when we purchased the old Holiday Inn Sun Spree," said Mike Bigelow, director of marketing and sales for Schlitterbahn. "Jeff Henry, one of our owners, said the roof was a wasted space. There's no way we wouldn't have spent the money to make it into a place for guests to enjoy."



*Dining with a view: a signature of Cobbleheads in Brownsville. (VBR)*

**“Waterside locations turn the restaurants into destinations. It’s the attraction, what you come here to see -- the Laguna Madre.”**

**--Scott Freidman**

Sea4ever currently serves tapas only on weekends. In mid-May, the full service menu will be available. In the meantime, visitors are welcome to take the elevator up to enjoy the view. They might run into Bigelow there. “That’s where I spend most of my time, working on my laptop. The view of the water clears the mind.”

Over a 20 year span, Parrot Eyes has had three waterside locations, starting with a taco stand on the Isla Blanca Park jetties. In 1986, it opened as a bar and grill on the Laguna Madre, developing that location into a mecca for watersports. By renting wave runners and boats, offering parasailing and fishing charters, owner Ron Guillot gave visitors additional reasons to stop a while. When Parrot Eyes relocated to the Parrot Eyes Channel, Guillot kept the same mix of sunsets over the bay, outside dining, boat slips and water sports.

The sounds and sights of surf is what brings customers to the decks at Clayton’s, to

*Clayton’s mix of fresh air, fried shrimp and surf views attracts visitors of all ages. (VBR)*



the hotel restaurants on the Gulf and to the numerous bar-and-grills along the bay. A good restaurant can’t go wrong if they just add a water view to their menu.

*For more information, contact Riverside Club: 638-1545; The Wharf: 748-0737; Cobbleheads 546-6224; Madeira: 504-3100; Pirate’s Landing: 943-3663; Sea4Ever: 772-7873; Parrot Eyes: 761-9457; Clayton’s: 572-3278.*



*Friendly residents of the resaca looking for leftovers. (VBR)*





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# Ready When Opportunity Knocks

By Eileen Mattei

Last summer, three years out of dental school, Dr. Luz Martinez, 33, anticipated buying a dental practice in 10 or 12 years. Yet when her employer Dr. Rocky Salinas offered to sell her the Weslaco office of Smiles, she found the opportunity irresistible.

Getting from the October 2012 offer to the January 2013 opening of RGV Family Dentistry required an intense effort from Dr. Martinez and her husband Buddy Martinez, who became the practice's administrator.

Born and raised in Brownsville, Luz Martinez graduated from UT Pan-Am and became a science teacher in Donna to pay off college loans. Lulled by a steady paycheck, she delayed her career plans to become a dentist until her future husband and fellow teacher convinced her to go for it. Dr. Martinez graduated from the University of Texas Health Science Center Dental School in 2010 and returned to the Valley.

"One of my biggest reasons to come back to Valley was because it had an underserved population," said Dr. Martinez. She became an associate with Dr. Salinas' five-dentist Smiles practice, which had offices in Pharr,

Weslaco and McAllen and saw Medicaid, private pay and insurance patients. Meanwhile, Buddy Martinez's job as Idea School assistant principal and his working on a doctorate in education left the couple short of family time to enjoy their two children.

When Smiles decided not to renew their Medicaid contract, Dr. Salinas knew that Dr. Martinez wanted to continue with Medicaid patients and made his offer.

"We envisioned this, but we didn't think it was going to happen so soon. We thought maybe when we were in our mid-40s," Dr. Martinez said. "But this was the right patient mix. My patients are established. I like the area."

"She asked me, 'Are you ready? We're doing this together,'" Buddy Martinez recalled.

Dr. Salinas recommended a broker who specialized in transitioning dental practices, because he had used that broker to acquire what became Smiles. The Martinezes flew to Chicago for a seminar by the expert and engaged him to guide them through the process.

"The good thing about Highsmith (the broker): he said if this is not a good deal for you and for them, I will tell you right away," Buddy Martinez, 35, explained. "We put a lot of trust in him, and he came

Dr. Martinez uses dental models to educate her patients about procedures from crowns and implants to InvisAlign braces. (VBR)



through."

First, the Weslaco dental practice was appraised. The financials from previous years were studied. Highsmith looked at the number of active patients, the high retention rate, accounts receivable and the payments that would

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be due on the sale, spread over 12 years. “My numbers were good. The banks like seeing that,” Dr. Martinez said. With strong documentation in place, a bank agreed to finance the sale.

Would Dr. Martinez have considered establishing her own practice instead of buying the Weslaco office? She answered by rolling her eyes and shaking her head no. “It’s so much easier to buy an existing practice. If you have a good rapport with your patients, you are blessed.” Her patient retention rate is 98%. The Martinezes acquired the office, computers, expensive dental equipment, supplies and the patient lists. They agreed to change the practice name since Dr. Salinas still owns two Smiles clinics. The seven employees chose to stay with Dr. Martinez. “We’re a great team,” she said, happy that the team now includes her husband with his experience in management.

“It’s been very exciting. It’s opened up new avenues for us, professionally and personally,” said Buddy Martinez. “We like driving in to work together. We have a rule that once we get to San Juan, going home to McAllen, we stop talking about business,” and switch to family issues. He graduated from Baylor and planned to go into medicine, yet is pleased to be living vicariously. “I feel like I can give back to the community on a bigger scale.” He believes he and his wife serve as role models for what Valley youth can attain.

“No one likes to come to the dentist, let’s be honest,” said Dr. Martinez. “Patients like seeing the same dentist and hygienist each time. I build relationships and get to know the family.”

RGV Family Dentistry is seeing private pay and insurance patients initially and will accept their Medicaid patients after the office obtains a Medicaid number in March.

*For more information, call 968-3300 or see [rgvfamilientistry.com](http://rgvfamilientistry.com).*

*Dr. Luz Martinez and her husband Buddy Martinez became owners of a successful dental practice sooner they expected. (VBR)*





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# Q&A First, Add More Rooftops

Mike Blum was McAllen's City Planner and assistant city manager in the 1970s. Today as Partner and Managing broker for NAI Rio Grande Valley he is deeply involved in the economic growth and health of the region. He talked with VBR's editor about the Valley's sluggish housing construction market and the impact that will have on the future.

**Q Noted economist Dr. Ted Jones pointed out that Houston, which has no zoning laws, has experienced remarkable growth recently, particularly a 27% increase in housing starts. How is the Valley doing?**



**A** Metrostudy, which maintains one of the most reliable databases on US residential construction, reported that the RGV had 1,847 housing starts in 2012. In 2011, that number was 2,130. McAllen,

Mission, Harlingen, and Edinburg saw their housing starts fall almost 50% between 2007 and 2011. Brownsville's construction rate dropped by one-quarter. Yet our population is growing about 1.5% annually, which increases the demand for housing.

**Q Why is housing construction so important to overall growth? Why does a commercial real estate broker care about residential growth?**

**A** Rooftops bring in retail. A slower pace of housing growth means a parallel drop in retail expansion down the road. Like businesses as a whole, many developers are putting projects on hold and not investing until they know what the rules are going to be.

**Q Besides the recession and tighter lending regulations, what is retarding housing growth here?**

**A** Cities are imposing rules and regulations that make it more expensive to build a house, which makes it harder for people to be able to buy a home. Cities should review their zoning and subdivision regulations to determine if they are relevant to the current conditions. McAllen, for example, started creating a Unified Development Code in 2007, in part to slow down a wave of new home construction. The city is posed to adopt new regulations but land developers and home builders still do not know how the new rules will impact their projects. The city has not produced documents that allow comparisons between existing and proposed codes. Not knowing what their costs are going to be definitely constrains

builders, lenders, and homebuyers.

**Q But McAllen's zoning ordinances, which you wrote in 1979, have needed updating, right?**

**A** The beauty of a new UDC (Unified Development Code) is that it will allow vertical, mixed use developments that are not currently possible. On the other hand, the UDC 310-page draft is dense reading and contains potentially growth-stopping regulations. Under the new code, a development like the Sharyland industrial park, which is widely considered among the best of its kind, might be severely restricted.

**Q What could cities do to encourage more housing construction and boost the economy?**

**A** Our cities want development, and they collectively think they are doing things to make that happen. But we know one definition of insanity: continuing to do the same thing but expecting a different outcome. Cities should be considering what they can do proactively to change the downward trajectory of housing starts such as investing in infrastructure in new developments. If they absorbed some infrastructure costs, it would reduce the cost of new homes. If they do things that discourage rooftops, in 10 years they will not be seeing the new retail they want.

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*Multi-family construction continues in the Valley but single family construction is lagging behind. (VBR)*

**Q Give an example.**

**A** The City of McAllen thought it would improve things with a new UDC, with everything in one place. But the reality is that it's going to be more difficult, more complicated, to wade through it. Look at McAllen's public utility rule that water lines have to be bedded in gravel. You don't want to not require it, but the city should consider paying for part of the cost of their unique requirement. Also, in McAllen parking criteria in the new code are the same for fast food and for sit-down restaurants. But 50 to 75 percent of fast food customers use the drive-thru. We should work on sensible solutions. Code writers must look at the economic impact of the changes proposed.

**Q Are there any pleasant surprises on the construction front?**

**A** Brownsville is a surprisingly strong market. What is being built there fits the demand. The recent average house value of is \$98,985, as compared to \$175,000 in McAllen and \$137,000 in Mission. To my knowledge, Harlingen does not have a single-family subdivision underway, but they are playing catch-up and seeing a good increase in retail revenue from Bass Pro, and Sam's Club and Burlington will be opening there. Still, the only Valley area with many new subdivisions is Sharyland Plantation. That is driven by the Mexican economy and situation and has nothing to do with the Valley market as a whole. The demand in Sharyland is greater than the supply and the price points range from \$350,000 to \$500,000.

**Q Your father, 60 years ago, was hired by the Cullen family to prevent Houston from adopting zoning laws. You went on to get a Master's in Urban Planning and then became a commercial real estate broker. Have you come to approve of Houston's laissez-faire approach to development?**

**A** Ending zoning is not an option, but giving responsible builders and developers the flexibility to place mixed use neighborhoods should be a goal.

**Q Where is the construction market headed locally.**

**A** It is highly likely in the next year or two that there will be a significant increase in the number of apartment complexes. A family can't afford to buy a home if they are not bringing home \$150,000. Much of what is being built, other than in Brownsville, is at a high enough price point that many people are kept out of the market.

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# Chapa's Busy With Local Moves

By Eileen Mattei

After working in the moving industry for almost 30 years, Ernesto Chapa decided it was time to open his own business. In 1995 he established Chapa's Moving Express LLC with his son Raul Guerrero, running one moving van which they parked in the backyard.

Today Chapa's has grown to 11 moving trucks and three trailers. They operate from a new building on South Ware Road that also serves as the office for their 200-unit storage facility, which opened two years ago. In an industry dominated by national names - Mayflower, Bekins, etc., Chapa's Moving has carved out a high volume service, providing local, regional and pan-Texas packing and moving of household goods and business offices.

"People love that we are here in the Valley," said Guerrero. "We can work around their schedule. They prefer to go with a local mover rather than a national. It's cheaper." Surprisingly, as much as 40% of Chapa's business is same day service. "I wonder why people do that," Guerrero said. "It's like they wake up that morning and they decide to move that day. They call and get upset if we don't have space in our schedule to move them the same day."

The balance of customers call one to two weeks ahead to book their moving date, particularly around the first and last weeks of a month. "We prefer they call ahead," he said. Nevertheless, during traditional moving months, Chapa's has started a few moves at 6 p.m. at night and not finished up until midnight.

The father and son duo has divided the responsibilities, each going with their strength. Ernesto Chapa is the company's dispatcher and oversees all the employees. He manages up to 12 crews who have no set schedules. Some employees are notified the night before that they will be working, while others are called in the morning after the same-day service orders come in. During the off-season, between October and February, Chapa draws on a pool of 15 to 25 employees. During the busy moving season, the moving men number between 25 and 35.

Guerrero is the one who deals with customers, booking moves. Chapa's charges hourly for local moves, paid on delivery. Out of town contract require payment before the truck is unloaded.

"Most of the work is here in the Valley," said Guerrero, after confirming that a Chapa's truck



Ernesto Chapa and his son Raul Guerrero have grown their business from one moving van to 14 trucks. (Courtesy)



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would be transporting a customer's household goods to Dallas that night. "We move pianos, pool tables, safes and Jacuzzis, but mostly household goods. We move at least two to five grand pianos a week. We're moving one in Brownsville right now, from one house to another." Expensive statues and huge fountains, Rainbow play sets and box springs that have to be disassembled to be moved are among the more unusual items that Chapa has handled.

"It's cheaper for the customer to do their own packing in their own boxes," Guerrero noted. "It can save them couple hundred dollars." But Chapa's will supply boxes and pack on request.

The company listened to their customers' suggestions and built the South Ware Road storage facility. "A lot of people wanted us to do the whole service for them," Guerrero said. It was a good move. The facility has stayed almost at capacity, with some tenants there since the opening.

As much as 15% of Chapa's work is moving businesses. "Back in 2008, a lot of businesses were downsizing and moving to smaller locations." Following last March's disastrous storm in McAllen, Chapa's went into overtime getting businesses and people moved into temporary locations and storing office contents until damaged buildings could be repaired. "The bad thing is, it was around the last days of the month when we have so many moves already scheduled."

Chapa's is preparing to consolidate its operation. "A few months ago we bought the adjacent property on South Ware, so we can keep our trucks there," Guerrero said. He expects to soon relocate the moving vans from the congested traffic around their South 23rd Street dispatching center. "It will be more efficient. People will see the Chapa's name and storage units."

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Raul Guerrero books customers' moves at Chapa's Moving and Storage. (Courtesy)

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# Do You Need Social Media?

By Eileen Mattei

When Arturo Gonzalez of Small Business Development Center presented a workshop of Social media in the workplace, the first question was Why use it?

Social media—Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Yelp, YouTube—are ways to reach your market using social interaction. “Social media should be one part of your marketing strategy. It complements other media,” Gonzalez said. Fewer people are using Yellow Pages and instead search online.

If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest by population. More and more businesses are realizing they can't ignore a market of that size. One million business websites are integrated with Facebook in part because Facebook provides enjoyable and relevant networking. Businesses create Fan Pages, instead of the Profiles used by individuals. While individuals collect friends, businesses

accumulate fans who Like them. Individuals can have no more than 5,000 friends while businesses can have an unlimited number of fans. Businesses operating a profile page have been shut down. That said, many individuals legitimately have professional (versus personal) Facebook profiles that are linked to the business fan page. (The professional profile requires a different address than the personal profile uses.)

“You are already on social media, whether you have a social media account or not,” Gonzalez said, pointing out Yelp reviews and other posts. “You want to be in control. Start by securing your company name on a business fan page and then search the competition to see what they post and promote.” Typically your customers are looking for information. Some businesses have created brief instructional videos. Gonzalez described a plumber who posted instructions on how to do simple plumbing repairs. “He found that the more free information he gave out, (showing at the same time what an expert he is,) the more helpful he was seen.

That led to more people asking him to do plumbing jobs,” on both the simple and expert levels.

Businesses can provide content in the form of relevant articles to their clients through Facebook, giving customers links to relevant and informative industry newsletters and useful tools help build relationships. You can offer rewards and coupons. Ask your customers for photos and reviews. Dixondale Farms in Carrizo Springs posts photos of their customers who have grown giant onions. Throughout your social media efforts, adhere to principals of marketing: don't flood them with postings to the point of annoyance.

“In the Valley it is all about Facebook. The Valley does not use twitter much for business,” Gonzalez said. Yet precautions are essential for business use of Facebook. “You have to control employee behavior, what they can post and not. Stay away from political and religious topics on a business site. Be ethical and take the high road. Employees need to know what they can not reveal, such as the recipe of your secret sauce.”

Social media should be managed by one person (unless the business has diverse areas of expertise) to give the Facebook and Twitter postings one voice. That also prevents your employees from wasting time and duplicating efforts on social media sites.

Twitter is for microblogging, a way of telling clients things like, “I just heard a speaker on employee retention that would interest you.”



LinkedIn is the predominant business oriented social network with 74 million users in the U.S. and 200 million globally. Professional individuals find industry groups they can become involved with. Participation demonstrates your relevance and skills. The network leads to contract offers, speaking engagements, increased knowledge and of course, broadening of one's professional network without having to travel to a conference or convention.

Local search networks such as Foursquare and Yelp push promotions to potential customers nearby. They can offer discounts to frequent visitors. Businesses should monitor postings on Yelp and take steps to address a bad review or to change an incorrect phone number. As with any social media, it's important to keep your information and pictures updated.

If you have a client that is promoting an event, you should be sharing that information on your Facebook fan page, Gonzalez said. And YouTube provides dynamic, pervasive multimedia marketing. “More video is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than the three major networks created in 60 years.” The next new thing may be Google Hangouts, said a young workshop participant. “It's like having a TV station on your computer.”

Google Analytics and other measurement tools show how much time fans spend on page, trending keywords and other data. Social media management tools include Hootsuite and Nutshell. Dashboards allow users to see multiple social media streams at one time.



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# When the Dreamers Come

By Susan LeMiles Holmes

Although the final details and time frames are not yet decided, immigration reform, including some sort of conditional lawful permanent resident status, is coming soon. My intent is not to discuss economic impact, political position, fairness or individual stories. I want to examine only the potential effect on workforce availability and quality.

In 1986 only a small share of potential amnesty beneficiaries did not come forward. Unlike that broad general amnesty, the current programs under consideration for people arriving in our country as children would have educational, military service and "good citizenship" requirements. Given that the immigrants who would probably benefit from proposed reforms have grown up in the United States, 95 percent are expected to eventually come forward to register for provisional legal status.

There are many competing (and some contradictory) studies, but the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) conservatively estimates there are approximately 1.139 million people who could possibly take advantage of a "DREAM-type ACT" living in the U.S. without docu-

mentation. MPI estimates that 51 percent (530,000) already have their high school education and that 5 percent (100,000) already have two years of college.

The immediate impact on the workforce will come from the additional workers who already have high school diplomas. They will work in fast food, retail, industrial assembly and labor intensive jobs while they apply for and complete the additional educational or military service requirements.

Those who could make a difference in America's "skills crisis" are in the 5 percent (100,000) who have two years of college with certifications from trade schools with open enrollments. They are now working in jobs below their potential, working "under the radar." There are over three million unfilled, skilled trades jobs in the United States, and other countries need these workers too. We are fortunate they want to live here.

Since two years of college will probably be required to participate in any path to residency or citizenship program, employers can anticipate that graduating classes from trades schools and community colleges will start entering the workforce as soon as two years from the date of application approvals. The only thing that will hinder these young people from participating in this opportunity is classroom space

and financial aid availability.

One of the most obvious demographic trends in America is the aging of the workforce. Baby Boomers are working longer because we want to, we have to or employers need us to. The Baby Boom was followed by a Baby Bust. There are fewer to take our places. Someday soon, the big demographic swell that provided the workforce sending America to the top of the world, is going to disappear.

At the same time that our businesses were relying on the strength of the Boomer workforce and reducing emphasis on training, apprenticeships and mentoring, American education started steering students away from vocational and technical schools and into traditional four-year degrees. Unfortunately, the long term result is a terrible scenario of unbalanced supply and demand.

As a country, we have accepted both the heartaches and benefits of globalization. When you extend that acceptance into understanding of what it takes to retain America's place in the new world order, it's clear that having an educated young workforce is a commodity necessary for global economic survival.

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# The Store With the Right Ingredients

By Eileen Mattei

Rio Grande Valley native Melissa Guerra, an expert on Latin American food, has a clear vision for her eponymous Latin American

cookware and ingredients store located at The Pearl in San Antonio. Melissa Guerra Tienda de la Cocina is on the threshold of becoming the Latin American Williams-Sonoma, the go-to place for aficionados of Latin American cuisine. It would be more accessible and less twee than the California specialty-cookware giant, of course. "Latin American cuisine is known for affordability," as well as for its authentic dishes, steeped in the cultures, said Guerra, who was a James Beard Award nominee.

Guerra sources ingredients, kitchen equipment and selected folk art from small suppliers in Mexico, Columbia, the Andes and beyond. "What I'm doing is challenging, and that's why Williams Sonoma doesn't do it. Sourcing in Latin America is really hard. The vendors are Third World artisans. They don't have inventory. You have to pay in advance. You are hoping you will get what you ordered."

With deep roots in the Valley's ranching heritage, Guerra began hosting the PBS cooking show "Texas Provincial Kitchen" in 1997 and came out with her first cookbook the next year. "I started everything out of my

house. People asked me for ingredients and implements. I opened an online store in 2001." Soon after that, she opened the Melissa Guerra store in Edinburg

After publishing "Dishes from the Wild Horse Desert," Guerra realized her business needed to operate on a broader scale. Around that time, The Pearl realized that her store would make a perfect addition to its upscale mix of shops. The final destination on the Museum Reach segment of the River Walk, the Pearl is the home of the Culinary Arts Institute of America, which has a Latin American focus, and the CIA students' restaurant NAO, which showcases south of the borders cuisines. Guerra's relocated her store there in 2008.

Guerra's company has four divisions: retail, online, Amazon sales and wholesale. "This year our focus is to improve our online business. Retail keeps our name there, and it is our largest source of income," she said. She has seen retail margins getting slimmer and slimmer and a shift to the purchase of more functional items. "People aren't buying decorative items as much, but I do believe in the store experience." Valley native Tina Mendez Ballesteros is Guerra's highly competent store manager.

"You have to focus on what you can do and where you have a competitive edge. We're competing with Amazon now," Guerra said. That's because once Amazon realized how much her online business was selling, they be-



*Melissa Guerra owns a popular San Antonio Latin American kitchen store, but spends half her week at her Rio Grande Valley home. (Courtesy)*

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*The online Melissa Guerra Latin American Kitchen store attracts many New York customers. (Courtesy)*

gan selling the same products.

Yet, Melissa Guerra continues to sell through Amazon. “We’re working hard to keep our Amazon rating really high. We have to have someone constantly online watching our stock and orders. Sometimes our suppliers don’t understand our time sensitivity. Some suppliers have a manana attitude.” Still the company’s online sales continue to grow, with the majority of the customers from New York. The business also fulfills orders for wholesale customers like Chefs’ Catalog.

Melissa Guerra still lives in the Valley with her family, and her sons attend school in Edinburg. “The Valley is always going to be our home.” So Guerra commutes once a week in each direction, spending three days in San Antonio each week, arriving back home so she can be in church on Sunday. “It’s not as hard as you’d think. Everything is online, cell phones, etc. My total commuting time is seven hours.”

Guerra said, “I couldn’t really operate this business just in San Antonio or just in the Valley. The border is the source point, and San Antonio is the sales point.” She is able to find specific items on the border, but changes are evident. “I don’t source the way I used to. Because the situation in Latin America is so bad, vendors are coming to me.” Guerra prefers to

patronize Third World artisans and suppliers, but she set standards. “They need to have their supply lines resolved. It’s very tricky.”

Melissa Guerra, the woman and the brand, is now blogging and posting videos for the Latinkitchen.com, a division of ‘Latina’ magazine. What she writes has links back to her website. She also blogs for Campbell’s and is developing recipes for them. Her own website blogs and Pinterest are important to her company’s growth.

Even while the Pearl is in the midst of major construction, with a boutique hotel due to open in 2014, Guerra said the shopping and food complex has become a leisure weekend magnet. “I can’t tell you how many Valley people I see up there.”

Investors have approached Guerra wanting to know more about the business, but the time isn’t right, Guerra said. But she doesn’t anticipate opening another retail store, aware that she can reach more customers online. Guerra admitted that running the divisions of her business is a big challenge, and that’s okay with her. “You can’t be successful if you’re not challenged.”

For more information, see [www.melissaguerra.com](http://www.melissaguerra.com).



The cookware and ingredients that Melissa Guerra displays have found a ready market in San Antonio. (Courtesy)

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# Web Filtering Saves Money

By Chris Tagle

The majority of managers and owners don't put as much emphasis on Website content filtering as they should. I have worked on thousands of small business owners' computer networks in South Texas and discovered that 8 out of 10 business owners feel monitoring employee web surfing is a small issue in their daily operations. They find web content filtering unnecessary and harsh. I ask them, "What if you knew your company information was leaking and losing you thousands of dollars? You'd jump on this and fix it at once, wouldn't you?"

Web surfing at work costs you money and creates work flow inefficiencies. Most business owners would be shocked at how much time their employees spend internet surfing. They are dumbfounded when they compute how much money is wasted by it. Without an Internet content filtering device, you are allowing your employees to waste time surfing. The problem

is most business owners don't think 15 to 30 minutes of web surfing as wasted man hours.

Fortune 500 companies spend millions on ways to eliminate inefficiencies just to recoup 15-30 minutes of a work day. Time equals money. How much time is wasted?

- 30 – 40% of Internet use in the workplace is not related to business (IDC Research)
- Over 60% of all online purchases are made between 9AM and 5PM (Nielsen's/NetRatings)
- 70% of all Internet porn traffic occurs during the 9-5 workday (SexTracker)
- 37% of workers say they surf the Web constantly while at work (Vault.com)

These independent statistics show employees are spending large amounts of time on the Internet that they shouldn't be.

Let's say you have three employees, who earn an average of \$20 per hour and work an 8-hour day Monday through Friday. Assume that with a website content filtering device in place, you recover 15 minutes of productive time a day from each employee. Fifteen minutes daily is less than one percent of a 40-hour work week. Doesn't sound like much, does it? However, you just regained \$300 in labor costs per month. You just saved \$300 per month from being wasted. That's \$3,600 a year. Compare that to the cost of a decent Web Filtering Hardware device installed at your business.

Most business owners and managers think with tough economic times most employees would stay away from online gambling. Sadly, online gambling is becoming more prevalent at the workplace. I personally have seen it numerous times at South Texas work places.

A new client suspected his employees were internet surfing during normal working hours. We installed a Web Filter device attached to their network to monitor activity. After three weeks of web monitoring, the results came back and the owner was beyond shocked. His employees averaged 2.27 hours on internet surfing and online gambling during an 8-hour shift.

Nevertheless, the most common form of employee misuse of the Internet is to surf porn. For professors and bankers, white and blue collar staff, porn is just too easy to find without Web Filtering Device in place. And for all business owners who naively think only men watch porn during working hours: you would be gravely mistaken. Did you know a co-worker

who sees porn on another employee's screen and becomes offended can start a legal action against the company? Consider the costs of such a lawsuit.

Today, almost 40% of enterprise network bandwidth is being consumed by recreational or non-business applications. Some employees download intensive content like music videos, streaming media and advertising banners that clog network resources and slow down your entire network. With a good Web Filtering device in place, you can quickly and easily identify bandwidth tie-ups and avoid network congestion. You can see which computer is downloading the media, and then stop it by throttling the bandwidth just like you use the gas pedal on your car to speed up or slow down. You can set a limit to the volume of bandwidth that an individual computer is allowed to download which keeps your network resources freed up for important work. This means you probably won't need to add new network bandwidth, after all.

Monitoring your employees internet surfing is a tedious, cumbersome task. I know. We monitor our employees' internet surfing, too. But we do allow full access to the internet during certain parts of the day, as a reward.

Whether you have two or 100 employees, invest in an internet filtering device not only to protect your business, but to protect your employees from themselves. Remove temptation and regain your work day.

*Christopher Tagle is the owner of TagleRock Technologies, LLC a computer IT outsourcing firm in Mission with over 2,000 clients around South Texas. Visit [www.taglerock.com](http://www.taglerock.com).*



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# Speaking Without Nervousness

By Eileen Mattei



Whether you're scared silly or merely hesitant about public speaking, going to a Toastmasters International meeting to test the waters takes courage and determination. Yet an amazing number of members talk about how Toastmasters has changed their life. Mary Thomas, physical therapist and owner of Innovative Therapy, had several patients suggest she begin teaching her techniques. "In order to do that, I thought I might need to hone my public speaking skills," she said. She joined Toastmasters International in 2007.

"It's certainly opened up doors for opportunities that I had not anticipated," Thomas explained. A client who owned a factory asked her to give a presentation on teamwork. "Because I already knew so much about putting together presentations from Toastmasters, I was able to do that on short notice. That has led to other work doing training. It's not what I would have planned. Toastmasters helped me to be prepared for an opportunity to branch out. It's a great way to diversify. That is an asset in today's world where things change so quickly."

Thomas, who concentrated on Toastmasters speaking skills, is a member of the Hub City chapter which meets on Saturdays and Wednesdays. "You need to participate," she said. "It keeps you on your toes."

Pharmaceutical rep Chis'mere Mallard joined Metro McAllen Toastmasters four years ago to improve his public speaking skills and become a more effective leader. "Anyone can join the organization, but if you don't take the initiative you won't reap the benefits. I saw a difference within three months. My speech was clearer and more precise. I became more comfortable with pauses and silences so I used fewer filler words like 'you know' and 'um.'" He noticed his vocabulary expanded.

"Toastmasters tools made me better

at my job," Mallard said. "We have roughly 45 seconds to deliver our message to doctors. Now I get straight to the point and deliver the appropriate message about my product with confidence." The tools Mallard referred to were strengthened by the initial 10 speeches made at Toastmasters and impromptu responses to weekly Table Talk questions. Toastmaster skills include preparation, the use of vivid words, eye contact, body language, vocal variety and the use of visual aids.

"It's changed my professional life because I am sales person. I've learned that two-second pauses give people time to absorb what I have been saying," Mallard concluded. "I'm more aware of other of people's speech patterns. Yet no matter how effective I think I am, I realize I will always have room for improvement. I will never feel I have arrived."

Paul Coronado's work as an IBC mortgage department auditor in McAllen rarely puts him in situations where he is speaking to groups. Nevertheless he joined Toastmasters in 2006. "After the first few times attending Toastmasters, when you are evaluating each other's speeches, you become aware of the things you need to work

on and over time you gradually notice the difference in your presentations," he said. "I enjoy watching new Toastmasters give their first speech and see how they improve." He particularly likes to encourage new college grads. "They have the knowledge but have a hard time communicating."

Currently Coronado is the Toastmasters area governor, a member of both Hub City and Metro, and an active volunteer with several non-profits. "I enjoy meeting the people. Sometimes you don't notice (how much you have changed) until you are out in the real world and someone asks you to speak. You feel more prepared, more confident, even on the spur the moment," Coronado said. Not long ago in Monterrey, he was approached by TV reporters. "I was comfortable in front of the camera. I still get a little nervous but I'm able to control it. We all have things we like to share but don't feel comfortable doing that with more than a few people. Toastmasters changes that."

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# Benchmark Outdoors: A Family Affair

By Nydia Tapia-Gonzales

The entrepreneurial spirit of Steve Jennings led him to different industries from farming to construction to underground utilities. But it was his work in foundation drilling that directed him to consider the billboard industry. After a thorough market study, Steve deduced that the billboard industry of the Rio Grande Valley had room for one more company: a family-owned and -operated business that would emphasize personable customer service while providing a superior job. Benchmark Outdoors opened its doors in 2002, operating from Combes.

Billboards were born to illustrate a message to illiterate people several centuries ago. In the latter part of the 18th century, the lithograph was invented and poster art schools emerged giving way to artistic advertising. It was not until the late 1920s, when regular folks traveled on cars along highways, that the business of roadside advertising came to life. Soon enough, roads were overpopulated with billboards.

“For a time, it was a free-for-all, until Lady Bird Johnson supported the Highway Beautification Act in 1965. That mandated no billboard signs could be installed on state property,” said Jennings. Even as a young man, he thought the new law was not going to work, for the signs were too small to be seen from a distance. Because of the crucial need to be seen, the billboard industry developed into what we have today-- large scale, steel, engineered and illuminated billboards.

Billboards are referred to as off-premise signs and have a different set of regulations than on-premise signs. “On top of state ordinances, we have cities that have even more stringent restrictions regarding the placement of these signs,” said Jennings, stressing the importance of knowing the area in order to find adequate real estate. The next step is making a deal with the land owner and getting all the permits and licenses needed to erect one of these structures. Jennings’ determination to position Benchmark Outdoors at the top led to a growing clientele. When he needed help, his son Landon Jennings answered the call.

Landon graduated from high school in 2000, the same year his father started Benchmark Outdoors. He pursued a PhD in Mathematics from Rice University and taught for four years before heading south and joining his father in the family business. “I had to consider some things before coming down, and being close to family was high on the list,” he said. He also realized that his father’s philosophy of maintaining a low overhead in order to pass the savings onto his customers was something worth protecting. “My father knows how to take on a risk and manage it. That’s what he’s done all his life.”

After 13 years of running Benchmark, Steve Jennings admitted he got into the industry at the right time, for he was able to secure a good inventory. His company owns 28 structures equivalent to 56 advertisement faces located between the city limits of La Joya and Brownsville



Steve and Landon Jennings and their families pose with one of Benchmark’s billboards. (VBR)

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in addition to some along Highway 100. Limits placed by state and city regulations leave no room for growth, and new locations are scarce.

"It's not about money, because if there were a spot somewhere today, I would build it," said Jennings. The costs for billboard advertising vary and are determined by the supply and demand, traffic and location. But father and son work with each client individually in order to understand and meet their needs.

The Jennings family does everything from accounting, promoting, designing and selling. Keeping their inventory rented is their greatest challenge. Short and long term leases are available. Designing a good advertisement is also imperative, with Landon doing most of the design work. Yet he never hesitates to outsource when needed to satisfy their customers' needs.

Long gone are the days when faces and people were not featured in large scale ads because the cost was too high and the task too difficult. Today, the industry uses vinyl signs that can be stored and reused frequently. The installation of the large vinyl ads is an arduous task.

"We usually contract professional installers, but we also have people who are semi-retired or have a day job who love to set up these mega signs. We provide them with extra income, and that is something we like to do," said Landon Jennings.

Both Steve and Landon Jennings are proud of their family business. They oversee everything that is going to be advertised. "Our billboards have a conscience. What is up there means something to us. It makes a difference what people see," said the younger Jennings. "We are not going to violate our conscience over a few dollars. We know our family name is connected with Benchmark Outdoors."

For more information, call 425-5437.



More than just a sign on a stick, a billboard requires careful placement, lease arrangements, illumination, engineering and good design. (VBR)

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# Selling Bay Boats

By Lori Vermaas

The U.S. recreational boating industry may just be starting its recovery from about six years of subpar sales, but Rob Youker, owner of The Sportsman, has no major worries. Boat sales have been good, and his outlook is justifiably positive. After all, the family business, established in 1951, is one of the longest-lived in the Rio Grande Valley.

The Sportsman has successfully navigated the sometimes choppy waters of the boating industry by specializing in shallow water boat sales since the early 1950s. Commonly called scooters, the popular fishing boats are ideal craft for the region. "It's really the only

market in the Valley," Youker said. "Our bay systems only average two and a half feet of water on the Texas Coast. We don't even stock up on ski boats. They're going to get stuck."

Shallow water boats are among a group of marine craft that insiders claim are currently saving the boating industry. According to Thom Dammrich, president of the National Marine Manufacturers Association,

smaller versatile boats, which include fishing boats, are "one of the most significant trends" in boat manufacturing.

Although The Sportsman is a boat-dealing fixture in the Valley, it was not originally a marine business. Youker's grandfather initially managed a small sporting goods store at Monroe and First Street in Harlingen as a hobby. But

Shallow Sport boats, sold by the Sportsman, are spotted in their true habitat--the Laguna Madre. (Courtesy)



Now run by the second generation, The Sportsman is a fixture along Business 77. (Courtesy)

after six months, the complications of running a business discouraged him. "It turned out to be a hassle" for him, said Youker. Rob's father, Bob, then living in Kansas, migrated south with Rob, then nine months old, and his wife to take over the business.

It was an auspicious move. The Sportsman flourished under his leadership, at one point encompassing three separate businesses, a marine store in San Benito and two sporting goods stores in McAllen and Harlingen. The latter "were full-line sporting goods stores, like Academy. We were the central focal point for sporting goods" in the Valley, Youker said.

Rob took the helm in 1972, when the U.S. boating industry was just entering its heyday of soaring boat sales, a trend which lasted through the 1980s. As a new salesman, Youker slowly learned what selling style worked best for him, one that he called relationship selling. The technique involves getting to know each customer by conducting a thorough and congenial interview. "The customer and I have a relationship before we walk out on the floor," he said. "I'm going to find out what a customer wants" by asking about his or her experiences with boats. He also likes to keep it light by reminding customers that because "this is a toy store" they should have fun and take their time while considering a purchase.

After a sale, Youker extends his customer service even further by taking customers out on the water with their just-purchased boat for a free orientation on boat handling, boat safety and conservation awareness. The test ride gives Youker one more chance to attend to any last-minute malfunctions, like a weak battery or other problems, including a missing life jacket or even a cosmetic flaw, such as a smudge on the side of the new boat.

Youker's friendly sales technique, in

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which he may even refer a customer to a competitor, has helped his company to develop a strong reputation not only in the Valley but also within the industry nationally. Indeed, the Boating Industry, a trade publication, named The Sportsman one of its Top 100 boating businesses in North America, an annual award Youker's dealership has won each year since the award's inception in 2005. The designation is a prestigious honor, because winners must be nominated, usually from industry suppliers. The pool of potential competitors includes over 5,000 qualifying dealerships throughout the country.

Beaming with pride, Youker said that the importance of winning an award like this "comes from the fact that we are competing against multi-location dealerships: New York City, Dallas, the big guys that are like car dealerships, that have multiple stores."

Having endured all the changes in the industry, running the gamut from technological improvements to the emergence of big box sellers, like Bass Pro Shops, Youker knows his business will ride the next wave of it all ably, because people and relationships are their bottom line. "We have tremendous repeat business, plus referrals. It's our job to make sure customers know they're getting more than their money's worth, so that a customer will want to buy the boat from us rather than us having to sell it to them, even if it takes three years. There's a difference there. That's our goal, to show you the value in your terms, in your language, to meet your needs."

*Visit at 1985 W. Bus. Hwy. 77 in San Benito, [www.sportsmanboats.com](http://www.sportsmanboats.com) or call 399-5123.*



*Rob Youker. (VBR)*

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# Navarro Offers DIY Photos

By Eileen Mattei

Remember when you were a kid and would squeeze into a photo booth with your friends? When wedding photographer Chuck Navarro saw the contemporary version of the photo booth at an industry expo, he knew the on-the-spot concept would go over big with his clientele and also bring him new customers.



Chuck Navarro. (Courtesy)

So a year ago Navarro built his own portable photo booth, which he offers as an option for quinceaneras, wedding and parties. The booth features an encased computer, monitor and digital camera

with an exterior printer. "It's really just pipes and drapes," he said. "The most complex part is the printer. My set up is a little different because it has a touch screen. Kids are comfortable with touch screens. The ready-made photo booths have more mechanical parts."

Navarro's All Valley Photo Booth is bigger than the ones you see in malls. "It can hold up to eight good friends at a time," he explained. It takes four separate color portraits and then prints out two identical strips.

"Nowadays almost every quinceanera wants one. The kids are lined up nonstop to get into the photo booth," said Navarro. He often rents a photo booth out for events he is not photographing. He estimated that 80% of quinceaneras and 40% of Valley weddings now include a photo booth. Navarro supplies props ranging from oversize sunglasses to hats and boas. With a two hour rental, the hosts can get in about 80 sessions or 150 sessions on a four-hour rental. Occasionally hosts will call a time-out on the photo booth so guests can focus on the main event.

*It's hard to resist mugging for a Photo Booth portrait when you're all dressed up. (Courtesy)*



Once upon a time Navarro was a Channel 4 videographer. The news business helped prepare him for the unplanned situations that arise while photographing weddings and quinceaneras. "Back then, we were constantly on the lookout for what was going to happen. You learned to anticipate." He mentioned videotaping an interview with Bill Clinton in a motorcade after a gutsy reporter managed to approach him. "Weddings are easy compared to that."

Yet weddings can be stressful events. "I've learned to keep calm in those situations," said Navarro, who has perfected fading into the background. Typically most photographers dress in black, but not only to look discreetly professional. "I do it mainly so lights don't bounce off of what I wear."

In 2009, Chuck Navarro and his trusty Nikon took wedding photographs for a sister-in-law who had a limited budget. Because of those wedding photographs, her friends and their friends asked him to shoot their weddings. "It snowballed from there," he said. Navarro had originally planned a business consisting primarily of commercial photography and videos, but he realized he should follow the demand and the money. The business produces a 12 inch by 12 inch album for each wedding.

In late January Navarro relocated the Navarro Weddings office to Harlingen's busy downtown Jackson Street. Besides increasing his visibility and being easier for clients to find, it has ample space for his portrait studio. The studio is going into use immediately for several projects he has taken on, including shooting a large number of headshots for various organizations.

Contact All Valley Photo Booth and Navarro Weddings at 454-4499 or see [navarroweddings.com](http://navarroweddings.com).

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# Staycation with the CAF

By Eileen Mattei

With the price of gas climbing again, it's a good time to consider a staycation and explore the Rio Grande Valley. On March 9 and 10, the Commemorative Air Force-RGV Wing soars into high gear with its annual Air Fiesta at the Brownsville/S. Padre Island International Airport.

"Air Fiesta gives us a chance to showcase our planes," said David Hughston, airshow chairman. "We're bringing in air show performers from all over who will be flying a variety of aircraft. This year we will have a lot of World War II planes." 2013 is the 50th anniversary of CAF airshows in the Valley.

While Air Fiesta thoroughly entertains people for a weekend, year-round the CAF-RGV Wing Museum is worth a visit. The museum's eye-catching exhibits cover World War II aviation and the colorful history of Brownsville's airport. Many of the artifacts, such as weathered goggles, the sextant for navigation, shearling-lined flight suits used in unheated bombers, and the wicker chair which was the passenger seat in a 1929 Ford Trimotor aircraft, were donated by local residents and Winter Texans.

A finned, seven-foot-long bomb sits amid the WWII posters, mockups of tail guns, uniforms, and closet-size radio transmitters. "All these exhibits were put together by our guys using their imagination and hot glue guns," Hughston said. A display on Women Air Service Pilots includes a salute to longtime Winter Texans/ WASP, Ann Hazzard, shown in her flying helmet, circa 1943. Remarkable vintage photos of air crews and their stories bring the war in the European and Pacific theaters home to the Valley. Did you know that the only Mexican fighter squadron that saw active duty during WWII trained in Brownsville?

Don't miss the very large, recently donated tapestry near the entry to the hangar. On Sept. 1, 1939, the day that WWII started, the Germans bombed a Polish airplane factory. Shrapnel from the factory visibly scarred this 18th century tapestry which was hanging in a nearby house. A Winter Texan donated it to the museum.

Brownsville's first historic moment as an airport occurred in 1915. The first U.S. Army plane to ever encounter hostile fire took off from Fort Brown on a mission to observe movement of Mexican revolutionary troops. In 1929, the Brownsville airport was inaugurated with Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh on hand after he completed the first airmail service to Latin America. For years, Brownsville was

a major Pan American Airlines hub and gateway to Central and South America.

Almost all of the museum's aircraft are airworthy, a testament to the volunteers who restore and repair them. The RGV-Wing's 1929 Fleet Finch is probably the oldest airplane in the CAF inventory, Hughston said. It has undergone a \$75,000, ground-up restoration and should appear during Air Fiesta. The collection includes a rare Focke Wulf 44, one of just a few in the world.

On display are a Piper Cub with large windows. It was used during WWII to spot artillery, flying low and slow without any armaments, to report on the accuracy of shelling. "The guys that flew these airplanes were tremendously brave," Hughston said. Nearby World War II pilot training aircraft from Fairchild, Ryan, and Stearman sit against a backdrop of camouflage drapes.

David Hughston likes to show this WWII radio to young CAF Museum visitors. He tells them his cell phone is 100 times more powerful than the old equipment. (Courtesy)



The CAF Museum is open Wednesday to Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Call 541-8585 for more information.

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# In the Spotlight



TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Tom Pauken presented a check to South Texas College President Dr. Shirley A. Reed and representatives from a partnering business consortium at the South Texas College Technology Campus on Wednesday, Feb. 13, 2013, in recognition for an \$801,077 Skills Development Fund grant. The grant will be used to custom train 488 new and incumbent workers to enable the employers to increase worker knowledge of modern manufacturing processes, improve productivity and reduce employee turnover. The businesses partnering in the grant include I. Kunik Co., Val Verde Vegetable Co. Inc., Coast Tropical, Del Monte Foods, and Loop Cold Storage Co. (VBR)



Paul Thornton of Hilltop Gardens describes an aloe product at a Welcome Home RGV event held at VIP Park in La Feria. (VBR)

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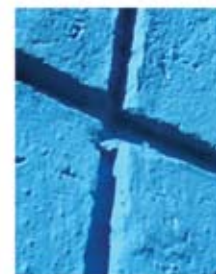
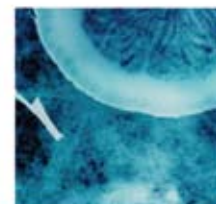
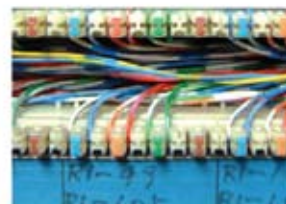
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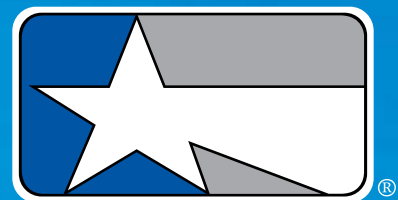
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