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VALLEY MARKET ON THE MOVE

How will the real estate market fare in 2010? A good question and the answer can differ if you are talking about the residential or commercial market. It can be different if you are talking about the national, state or regional markets. One long time real estate watcher looks around the United States and feels you couldn't be in a better place than the Rio Grande Valley, especially in the McAllen/Edinburg/Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

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Business Update

BUSINESSES TO BENEFIT FROM GSA'S PRESENCE IN THE RGV

By Rick Carrera, PTAC Procurement Specialist

The Rio South Texas Regional Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at The University of Texas-Pan American recently hosted the General Services Administration (GSA) and its newly appointed Regional Administrator Juan "J.D." Salinas at its office in Edinburg, Texas.

Former Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas visited the PTAC during a seminar on "Getting on a GSA Schedule" – an informational workshop presented by GSA Small Business Liaison Albert Garza.

The event held on January 20, 2010 was coordinated and designed to inform local business owners on the advantages of doing business with GSA. Garza shared with participants the process of how to do business with the organization and the procedures involved in becoming a vendor listed on the GSA Multiple Awards Schedule.

"Although the process of becoming a multiple awards vendor with the GSA requires an investment of time on the part of the small business owner, the result is the ability to sell products and services to the GSA," shared PTAC Procurement Specialist Rick Carrera.

Salinas, who is acutely aware of this necessary, but pre-

liminary and arduous process, vowed to have Small Business Liaison Albert Garza available to assist interested South Texas small business owners through one-to-one appointments every other month at the PTAC offices in Edinburg.

GSA provides workplaces by constructing, managing, and preserving government buildings and by leasing and managing commercial real estate. The acquisition solutions of this federal entity offer private-sector, professional services, equipment, supplies, telecommunications, and information technology to government organizations and the military.

Besides procuring a wide array of products and services for the federal government, the GSA also manages several federal buildings and properties, including new ports of entry such as the new Anzalduas Bridge and the soon to be opened port of entry in Donna.

Salinas addressed the numerous attendees at the UTPA Annex and stressed the GSA's readiness to do business with the small business owners of South Texas. In attendance and listening to his comments were business owners from various industries, all with the same interest in becoming vendors for the GSA.

With growing demand by this organization for products

and services that many small business owners in South Texas may be able to provide, the new Regional Administrator related his commitment to bolstering new business relationships between South Texas small business owners and the GSA.

Garza also shared his enthusiasm on becoming a regular visitor to the PTAC and feels his direct assistance will lead to greater relationships between GSA and South Texas small business owners. He believes that becoming a vendor for the GSA will provide more opportunities now and in the future. "As the area continues to grow, more federal government support in the area will be needed and much of this is supplied by the GSA," he added.

In addition to the assistance provided by Garza, the PTAC also assists small business owners through the process of becoming vendors for the GSA. PTAC Procurement Specialists believe this business relationship can open up new markets for local businesses and intend to press forward in supporting small business owners throughout their federal contracting efforts.

For further information on the PTAC and its services, please call (956) 292-7529.

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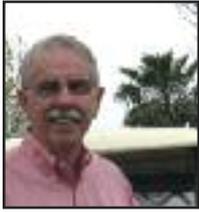
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Philosophy

We are a pro-business publication committed to reporting business news concerning the Rio Grande Valley's business community. We will strive to create a forum in which business leaders can exchange ideas and information; to providing in-depth perspectives on business trends affecting the community's economy. Our goal is to serve the interests of economic development in the Rio Grande Valley.

Our editorial philosophy is to cover local business news and to bring you relevant state, national, and international news that affects our region. Look for links on our Web Site at www.valleybusinessreport.com to business news and stories pertaining to the RGV from across the country, plus local everyday events and business news. Our print publication will present stories of interest about local business people, businesses, and issues of interest pertaining to our area.

Letters to the Editor

Valley Business Report welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be e-mailed to editorial@valleybusinessreport.com with the subject line: Letter to the Editor. Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates will not be accepted. Please keep letters to 300 words or less and should include your full name and city of residence.

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Business Feature

CENSUS INFORMATION CAN HELP BUSINESSES

By Davis Rankin

It won't be long before we citizens are barraged by television, radio, newspaper advertising, and news coverage, all on the same theme. I refer not to the March 2nd party primary elections in Texas, although we'll get a barrage about that, but to the Census, taken every 10 years starting in 1790. We count every resident because the Constitution requires it in Article 1, Section 2.

The Founders required a census so that seats in Congress could be apportioned equally among the states, so no state would have too many Congressmen or too few. Over time, the Census grew from a mere head count to an examination of many aspects of American life, asking questions about income, education, even how many toilets in a home.

Census questionnaires are to be delivered or mailed to all households in February and March and Census Day 2010 is April 1, an easy-to-remember date to call attention to the need for everyone to fill out and send in their forms. Thereafter, Census workers called enumerators will seek out those who haven't replied and count them. Gone is the long form with questions many found intrusive. This year the form is all of 10 questions which the Census Bureau says will take no more than 10 minutes to fill out.

It will seem as if everyone is urging you to fill out your Census questionnaire, to participate in the Census, because if it shows we have more people living in the Rio Grande Valley, we'll have more political representation in Austin and Washington, we'll get more money, too, in the form of federal and state spending. While those reasons might not persuade everyone in the Valley to answer the 10 Census questions, here's one that should: businesses use Census information to decide whether or not to come to the Valley and where to locate.

"At the end of the day, it's all about the numbers," said Gilbert Salinas, Vice President for Marketing, Communication and Public Affairs with the Brownsville Economic Development Council, the city agency charged with attracting businesses to locate there.

Census information is "an integral part of the way, how we portray not just Brownsville, but the MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) and the Rio Grande Valley," he continued. "That's something we use almost on a daily basis because it's all about how many people do you have there, what's your labor force like, how many rooftops do you have, how much money is there and it all goes back to the Census."

McAllen Chamber of Commerce President Steve Ahlenius argues that the Census means not just state and federal dollars coming to the Valley, but it "tells our story

accurately when businesses are looking at an area as far as investing, it tells our story when people are looking to start businesses. It is the foundation to everything that moves forward from that.

"Without good solid information, Census information, household incomes, people per household, all those things that people look at when people make a business decision, our economy wouldn't be as strong as it is today," he explained.

Ahlenius says the Chamber uses a proprietary demographics program that is based on Census figures and Census updates and they use it "every day." For example, they might help an individual interested in opening a restaurant and who says "The franchise tells me I need to have household incomes of \$50,000 or more; tell me where it is in the McAllen market and (what's) in the mile ring and tell me in the three-mile ring what's surrounding it."

I was talking to a guy yesterday," continued Ahlenius, "and they're looking to investing in opening a business and they're looking at household incomes that are \$65,000 and above and have disposable incomes toward jewelry, so where does that go? Where is the best place? So those are the types of things what we do on a daily basis."

For Miki McCarthy, Executive Director of the San Juan Economic Development Corporation, the Census is about recognition, getting on corporate radar, a prerequisite to being chosen for a new store. "The Census information for us is very important in representing the wealth capacity that our community provides."

McCarthy says that what has helped make San Juan more competitive in the economic development arena is emphasizing the town's trade area or area of likely shoppers. "Our trade area would then take a three-, five- or ten-mile radius from a specific location within our town and then we can represent that number" to businesses.

According to McCarthy, San Juan has an estimated population of 32,000, but "within our trade area, when you talk about the use of Census data, even the trade area data is Census data, within a three-mile radius San Juan is now a town of 86,000 people and within a 10-mile radius, we have 436,000 people. We're taking in some of Pharr, hitting the border of McAllen, encompassing Alamo and Donna...and does reach into the southern part of Edinburg.

"Now you've just taken...what has historically been a bedroom community and made it very, very attractive just by representing the Census numbers in a competitive way."

Using information from a proprietary source which includes Census data, McCarthy said the Development Corporation was able to woo a new Mercedes Benz dealership to a site on the Expressway. Mercedes Benz of



Keith Patridge, President and CEO of McAllen Economic Development Corporation. (courtesy)

San Juan planned to begin construction late last year.

"They knew being centrally located within the Valley was also important for them, too, and they really pride themselves on being a destination so they know wherever they're going to go, if you want their type status in cars, you're going to go to them so they really don't need to be in McAllen because they know all the folks are going to come to them anyway." McCarthy hopes to attract other niche businesses in this way.

The President and CEO of McAllen Economic Development Corporation has long talked about the coming labor shortage in the U.S. as a result of Baby Boomers aging and retiring and low fertility rates. Keith Patridge says that when a company is choosing a new location, "labor's the number one issue. What we do is, we use the Census data... to show the ages of our workforce, the growth in our workforce and our population base, so we use it for every company because that's becoming one of the most important elements that these companies look at when they select locations.

"A company is nothing more than a legal piece of paper; it's the people who work in that company who make it successful," continued Patridge.

Finally, is the new shorter Census form going to be adequate for business to get helpful information? No, affirms Patridge, it is going to affect the ability of companies to make decisions. Patridge said he was reviewing a web cast from a private company talking about that very issue. The Census is moving to fill in the gap left when the long form was omitted. According to the 2010.census.gov website, the American Community Survey will be sent to a "rolling sample of addresses every month, every year, throughout the nation Our nation is not static...and communities need current data to make informed decisions."

Feature

DONNA BRIDGE OPENING MAY SNEAK UP ON SOME

By Kevin Knoch

The opening may surprise some, in fact many may not be aware it being built. The opening of the long anticipated Anzalduas Bridge just west of Hidalgo has been in the news of late, opening in mid-December, with an official ceremony in early January. The news of Anzalduas will just be settling in when the Rio Grande Valley will be opening its 11th bridge crossing in April or May; the Alliance International Bridge connecting Donna and Rio Bravo, Mexico.

The Donna bridge will be unique because of its length; covering one fifth of a mile from shore to shore over the Rio Grande River. Compare that to the 2.7 mile long Anzalduas overpass. Donna makes up for its lack of distance, with eight traffic lanes, doubling its recently opened western neighbor by four lanes. One reason the Alliance Bridge has been under the radar is that it hasn't experienced the delays often associated with major construction projects.

"Traditionally these bridge projects take forever," explained Donna City Manager Oscar Cuellar. Stressing the project hasn't quite been accepted in some peoples minds. "Those who know we have been working on this are a little skeptical. We have only been under construction for 17 months. They hardly believe how much is finished." Summit Construction of Weslaco, served as general contractor on the bridge work.

Speaking in early January, Cuellar pointed out the actual bridge is finished. Work was being completed on custom offices and toll booths on both sides of the bridge. If the connector is opened in April of 2010, the work will be completed in two years.

The Alliance International Bridge construction has gone on unnoticed and without fanfare is unusual, what isn't out of the ordinary is the concept of a bridge has been around for decades. Some date the earliest talk of a Donna/Rio Bravo span back to the 1950s. The momentum from the early discussion days came to fruition in 1979 when the City of Donna received a Presidential Bridge Permit allowing them to build an international bridge.



Bridge overpass nears completion. (courtesy)



Toll bridge at the Donna (courtesy)

Many in the RGV know the Presidential Permit is essential, but the bridge doesn't always immediately follow. An example is the City of Mission has held a permit as long as Donna. Little progress has been made on a proposed railroad bridge south of the city.

Bridge consultant Ernesto Silva of Silva, Otting & Silva LLC has been working on the Donna project since 2004 and picks up the history story behind the bridge. Silva related not much action took place from 1979 though 1995. "A lot of meetings took place between the two cities, but not much came of those meetings. But at that time there was no interest in the bridge on the Mexican side. In 2000, a new administration in Donna revived the project." Silva noted Mercedes joined Donna in pursuing the bridge project.

Spokesperson for Congressman Ruben Hinojosa, Patricia Guillermo stated, "Congressman Hinojosa helped the City of Donna in all of their applications for the Donna Bridge." Guillermo pointed out Hinojosa helped with obtaining a new permit when the original one issued in the 1970s was lost. Adding the Congressman helped with funding for access roads, inspection stations and border patrol facilities.

Necessary studies were started in both countries including the design of the bridge. But then Mercedes dropped out of the project; Donna went ahead alone and diplomatic notes were exchanged in 2007, with construction stating in April of 2008. The only partner in the bridge is the Mexican state of Tamaulipas which chose to get into the bridge business serving as the Mexican side operating concessionaire.

The bridge cost \$75 million on the United States side representing city and federal government expenditures, Silva stated. An additional \$35 million for work on the Rio Bravo section and toll facilities. The Mexican side included an additional canal crossing and a connection to the Matamoros/Reynosa toll road. Infrastructure improvements will be made well north of the bridge into and through Donna along Farm to Market Road 493 during the next 18 to 24

months.

Silva said, "What we have heard preliminarily from federal agencies when we started this project the bridge would be opened from 6:00 AM to midnight." Once open the bridge will accommodate passenger vehicles, commercial trucks will not be part of the traffic picture at Alliance. "We are working with Congress to get the funding for a second phase to build the needed truck inspection area." Cuellar added, "The General Services Administration has promised us within 18 months of the regular inspection facilities, we would have the truck inspection area."

Estimates after the opening call for 1,500 cars a day to cross the southbound lanes. Silva feels that number will grow to 3,500 a day a year after the bridge is opened. Projecting those yearly numbers out after a year Alliance would be handling 1,260,000 non-commercial vehicles annually. Based on 2008 vehicle crossing numbers compiled by the Texas Center for Enterprise and Development at Laredo Texas A&M University, Alliance would fall in the lower tier of crossings. Alliance would be way behind the multiple crossing cities of Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo, and now McAllen. About 350,000 less southbound vehicles than Pharr, but ahead of crossings at Progreso, Rio Grande City, and Roma.

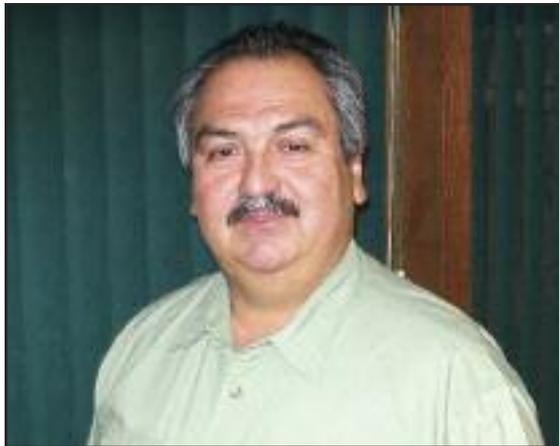
Silva estimates the new bridge will be handling trucks in two years. Adding there isn't any arbitrary truck traffic



Roadway section under construction. (courtesy)

number formula excluding the commercial trucks that governs the Anzalduas/Pharr Bridges. If northbound truck traffic hits 15,000 at Pharr on a weekly basis, the prohibition of large trucks using Anzalduas would be lifted. Otherwise trucks will be barred until 2015, from using the Anzalduas lanes.

Asked if the new bridge at Donna is in demand, Silva stated. "The more crossings the better for the area. The population continues to grow and more people are crossing on both sides of the border. The more restrictions they are



Donna City Manager, Oscar Cuellar Jr.
(courtesy)

putting on people during inspections the longer it takes to get across. You need more inspections points otherwise hours are going to be added to crossing."

On the Mexican side of the bridge plans call for commercial development, industrial parks in the vicinity of the approach to the bridge, plus the connection to the east west Matamoros/Reynosa toll road.

On the U.S. side long range plans call for developing an expressway quality road north, Silva pointed out. "The Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority is proposing an expressway from Anzalduas to Donna and then north eventually connecting to Highway 281 north at Edinburg.



Construction near the Donna bridge. (courtesy)

The goal is that a truck or a car leaving the Valley will never have to go through a town or stop at a traffic light."

Much like Farm to Market Road 396 will undergo a major face lift north of Anzalduas, the same can be expected for FM 493 from Hwy 281 to Expressway 83 in Donna. "The work on FM 493 will be done over the next year and a half," Silva stated.

City manager Cuellar added, "All of the public hearings have been held for the widening of 493. The environmental's and the acquisition of the right of way are under way. We estimate 12 to 15 months and it will be done in terms of construction. We have the funding." The widening will stretch from the Military Highway to Business 83 in Donna.

Once the Alliance International Bridge is opened what can Donna and the Mid-Valley expect in terms of economic development in a couple of years after bridge and infrastructure are complete. Cuellar was succinct in his answer. "We expect a huge impact." Cuellar related more work is underway in preparation for the effect the bridge opening will have on the area. "We have financed and are going to build a industrial park south of the city to accommodate the business from Mexico."

Congressman Hinojosa summed up the bridges impact. "I believe the bridge is critical to economic development in the Mid-Valley. It will bring more customers to the Outlet



Congressman Ruben Hinojosa. (courtesy)

Mall (Mercedes) and the Delta Mercado. (Edcouch -Elsa area) It will also promote ancillary business along the access roads to the bridge and will bring much needed revenue to the City of Donna."

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Cover Story

REAL ESTATE MARKETS ON THE UPSWING

By Kevin Knoch

How will the real estate market fare in 2010? A good question and the answer can differ if you are talking about the residential or commercial market. It can be different if you are talking about the national, state or regional markets. One long time real estate watcher looks around the United States and feels you couldn't be in a better place than the Rio Grande Valley, especially in the McAllen/Edinburg/Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).



Ted C. Jones,
*Senior Vice
President and
Chief Economist
for Stewart Title
Guaranty Com-
pany. (courtesy)*

Ted C. Jones, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist for Stewart Title Guaranty Company, based in Houston explains how what happens in the real estate markets is tied into the economy. Jones a former economist for the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M, recently was one of the featured speakers at a forum sponsored by Edwards Abstract and Title Company of Edinburg, held at the McAllen Country Club in late January.

"The first thing we want to talk about is jobs. Jobs are everything to an economy. Right now nationwide we are still losing jobs. We lost 85,000 jobs in December. But nation doesn't apply to McAllen/Edinburg/Mission. Since last November (2008) to this November (2009) you have added 2,700 jobs, that is a 1.22 percent job growth rate. . . . I was just in Fort Myers, Florida, they lost 13,500 jobs in that same period. They lost 6.4 percent of their total number of jobs. You grew jobs."

Jones continued, emphasizing, "While there is such a thing as a national economy, it doesn't apply everywhere. To be in the Valley today, you are different. What a great way to be different!" Jones declared let's focus on real estate residential and commercial.

"On residential nationwide we are about ready to leave this sub-prime debacle. We have gotten through the adjustable rate mortgages. We are now coming up a large number of these Alt A loans." Jones added these loans where also known as liar loans, where borrowers

only had to state their incomes not document them. "Often these loans the monthly payment didn't equal the interest and you wind up owing more than the month before. We have about 18 months of these loans working through the system."

Jones stated sales of existing homes nationwide increased about 10 percent last year. "Much of it was due to the first time home buyer credit. We increased housing sales by about 10 percent for all of last year." He explained Congress extended the credit into 2010, until the end of June. He estimated you can figure a decrease of 5 percent in home sales this year, along as everything else is the same assuming there won't be strong job growth.

"Let's move to local housing sales. I'll use McAllen on this. The realty association recorded 140 sales in November of 2009, up 36 percent over Nov. of 2008 when 103 homes were closed. Some of that was attributable to the tax credit." The housing market is in pretty good shape he stated.

Jones pointed out new building permits are about half of what they were three years ago. According to the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M in 2006 the McAllen MSA 6,870 single family permits were applied. The totals for single family permits in 2008 came to 3,144. Well less than half held true for the Brownsville/Harlingen/San Benito MSA. In 2006, 2,852 single family permits were issued. The number was down to 1,086 during 2008.

The economist emphasized, "The good news is that the builders and the lenders that are enabling those builders are saying, 'We've got a lot of inventory. We are heading back to a normal real estate market if we are not already there. Let's not over build this market. That in itself is a very positive factor that comes into play.'"

Jones was upbeat when it comes to residential real estate and getting through housing issues. His words were distinctively different when talking about the commercial real estate market. In fact he feels we are looking at a train wreck coming in the commercial realty world.

"Our train wreck in the commercial market is just now starting. I'm going to use nationwide numbers, because I don't have this broken down for the Valley. To put it into perspective, there are about \$10 trillion in first lien residential loans outstanding. There are about \$3.5 trillion total commercial loans."

He explained commercial loans are not like residential loans for a period of 30 years but usually 10 years. Refinancing isn't usually an option. "When rates drop, usually you wait until the maturity date and refinance because of high pre-payment fees."

**Lynne Tate of
Lynne Tate
Realtors.
(courtesy)**



The economist continued, "Of that 3.5 trillion in commercial loans, probably about \$400 billion needs to be refinanced this year. The dilemma we have is, Wall Street is telling us there is probably only 50 to 80 billion dollars available to do that. We are going to be about 300 billion dollars short."

Jones tried to put the situation into focus. "We are going to compare the first nine months of 2007 to the first nine months of 2008. Total commercial activity nationwide dropped 66 percent. From the first nine months of '08 to '09 it dropped 72 percent. When you look at those numbers it tells you it dropped over 90 percent." He added some in the industry are predicting a 50 percent decline in commercial property values.

"If you bought retail property at the peak in the first quarter of 2007, say a shopping center it would be worth 28 percent less today. Offices that peaked in the third quarter of 2007, are down on average 35.8 percent. Industrial properties are down 41.4 percent, and apartments also bought in 2007 are down 27.9 percent less." He predicted commercial property will be down 40 to 50 percent.

Jones was critical of last year's stimulus spending



**Mike Blum NAI Rio Grande
Valley commercial real estate
broker. (courtesy)**

not being funneled to job creating areas, but praised Valley Economic Development Corporations. "One thing that has always impressed me in the Valley is that your EDC agency's are very effective about attracting America corporate businesses to do business in your community."

Veteran commercial real estate broker Mike Blum with NAI Rio Grande Valley is in agreement with Jones's assessment. "How true this is. If jobs are the main impetus to a recovery, the recent report from the prestigious Brookings Institute... stated from the second to the third quarter in 2009, only 11 of the 100 MSA's experienced a positive increase in jobs." Blum stressed the McAllen MSA was number one in the United States in job creation with 1.3 percent growth in one quarter.

Jones feels one of the best things going for the economy is that it is an election year. "The economy is still heading south, but at a slower pace. I'm willing to bet in the next sixty days that Congress passes something that gives tax credits to small business to create jobs. They won't call it stimulus two, because that means stimulus one did not work. But I'm guessing a couple of hundred billion dollars will go that way and that is what should have happened in the first place."

Summing up Jones stated, "Let's talk about the commercial market... until we get job growth, this is nationwide, you have job growth, then we will have more retail sales, need for more offices, demand for industrial properties. More demand for apartments. All of that comes into play, It starts with jobs, they mean everything to an economy. The great news is that you (The Rio Grande Valley) is one of the few places that is

creating jobs."

Jones added, Texas remembers the late 1980's, and we won't over build like the rest of the country. Positives about the Valley and Texas include: "Number one you have job growth, number two you have jet service to your airports. Let's look at what corporate America is looking for,... number three is you have highly affordable housing, a great climate.... Most of all you have a very attractive business climate. You just can't say that about many places across the United States."

Even with a difficult commercial market facing them one local realtor dealing with the sector sees opportunities. Cindy Hopkins, CCIM works with AAA Real Estate and Investments in McAllen. "I have had some interest in the offices I'm leasing. Many of my clients are looking for a higher profile in the years to come. Lower prices have generated business because renters have a chance to move into Class A offices at Class B prices."

Hopkins points out some of the national problems are affecting the Valley market. "A lot of people are just sitting on the fence....I have a lot of deals working. People don't want to make decisions. The banks have made it difficult because they don't want to lend money. But single tenants are getting loans."

Adrian A. Arriaga Jr. is a broker and part owner

with AAA Real Estate and Investments, who also serves as the president of the Greater McAllen Association of Realtors. He feels the local residential market is settling down. "It's good to talk to the local people. A lot of our residential is second homes for people from Mexico." Arriaga Jr. continues to see the Valley market as moving in cycles as in previous years when it comes to residential sales. "I think things are getting better, banks are making loans to qualified buyers.... The public is becoming better educated about the residential market."

Just to show how fragile real estate markets can be, and how national market trends can differ from the local market take the case presented by a South Padre Island realtor.

Lynne Tate owner of Lynne Tate Realty sells real estate on South Padre Island. She recently stated an outbreak of red tide (a concentration of microscopic algae in the Gulf of Mexico) affected sales on the Island in late 2009. Red tide can be an ear, nose, throat, and eye irritant to humans.

"I had buyers here who just want to get on a plane and leave." Tate declared. "The fall was weak because of the red tide, we could not show property. Our prices are down and that should encourage buyers." The red tide probably didn't affect people as close as the western parts of Port Isabel or Laguna Vista.

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Business News

HCA EMPLOYEES DONATE TO HAITI RELIEF FUND

By Robin Brechot

The impact of the tragic earthquake in Haiti is still unfolding as relief organizations work to meet the immediate and longer term needs of hundreds of thousands of Haitians. In response, HCA has committed \$1 million in cash and in-kind donations for direct relief to the stricken area. Cash donations will go to the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders.

As always in times of great need, many HCA employees have asked what they can do to help. Both the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders have advised that money is far more helpful than sending volunteers at this point. There are concerns for personal safety as the country struggles to rebuild infrastructure and flights are still restricted.

HCA has established a way for our communities to give much needed monetary donations directly to a special relief fund, The HCA Haiti Relief Fund, administered through the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. The company will match em-



HCA pledges \$1 Million in cash and supplies to Haiti Relief effort. Company makes match commitment and establishes special fund for employee contributions. (courtesy)

ployee gifts to this fund dollar for dollar through the end of January. All donations are tax deductible and donors will receive a receipt acknowledging their generosity.

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City Economic Development

SAN JUAN SHINES BESIDE SHRINE

By Adolfo Pesquera

When considering ways to spur economic growth in San Juan, the centerpiece of any master plan starts with the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine.

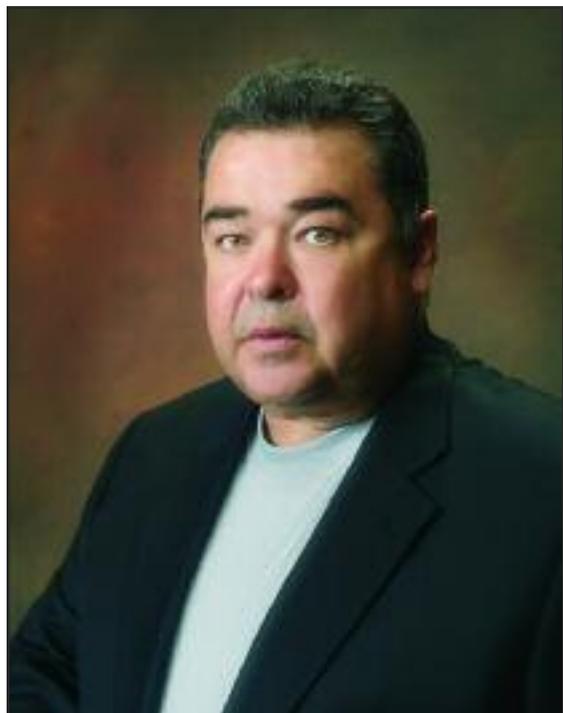
Attracting over 1 million visitors a year, the shrine is the heart of the San Juan community. But San Juan boosters have been busy providing the Basilica and its hometown with an entourage of development projects.

In addition to a downtown revitalization project designed to draw pedestrian traffic from the Basilica to the old downtown, there is a Tax Incremental Zone being established, an auto dealership on its way, a new shopping center, and wetland project constructed that was built from scratch.

Relying on the guidance of Edminster Hinshaw Russ & Associates, a Houston-based land-use planning firm, San Juan leaders envision infrastructure improvements such as broad sidewalks, lighting and green landscaping features leading into the antiquated, century-old downtown.

The hope, stated Miki McCarthy, executive director of the San Juan Economic Development Corp., is that infrastructure improvements will attract entrepreneurs to bring in cafés and novelty shops, particularly shops that are religious-oriented.

The thousands of visitors that arrive each week



San Juan Parks and Recreation Director, Roel Garza, supported creating new wetlands and parks. (courtesy)



The Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine in San Juan. (Kevin Knoch)

benefit neighboring communities by staying in their motels. But more can be done to retain them in San Juan itself, McCarthy said.

"The idea is to engage these folks at staged points around the Basilica, and to enhance their visitor experience," McCarthy said.

The feasibility study concluded last year and phase two research is expected to be finished in August. A complete blueprint for action should be in place by the end of the year, said Bobby Rodriguez, San Juan city secretary and a longtime leader with several city entities.

"We believe in our church and the draw that it has," Rodriguez said. "San Juan, for a long time, has been lagging behind the neighboring towns, but we're working very hard to catch up."

San Juan has an abundance of land, but much of it has been lacking basic infrastructure. Good roads and utilities are limited, and the city and its Economic Development Corporation are now making strides to correct that.

Recent efforts to market the city through economic development conventions elsewhere have had limited success. A couple of discount stores - Rodriguez declined to mention them until the ink is dry on their contracts - are looking to set up locations in San Juan.

"In our conferences that we traveled to, we find out that some of these companies heard about San Juan and made calls," Rodriguez said. "But they find out the infrastructure is not there and they lose interest."

The message Rodriguez and company are trying

to get across is the city is moving in the right direction. When a company expresses an interest, San Juan leaders make the effort to spend tax and government grant dollars to bring roads and utilities to their prospective doorstep.

Such was the case with St. Ives Realty Inc. of Fort Worth and its San Juan Corners project. A 33-acre retail development that broke ground last year, the site is bordered by Cesar Chavez and Carroll roads, and the U.S. 83 Expressway.

The San Juan EDC helped put in \$1.3 million of water, sewer, fire and drainage improvements during the widening of Cesar Chavez. Another \$1.2 million



Newly created wetlands will enhance the local bird feeding and nesting areas. (Kevin Knoch)

went into improving Carroll Road, McCarthy added.

"And by improving Carroll, we created a new lateral access point to the Basilica and downtown," she said.

To date, San Juan Corners has a Bank of America branch in operation and construction is underway on a 20,000-square-foot retail plaza. No tenants have been announced, but the shopping center will eventually boast a host of big box stores, boutiques and restaurants.

Projects like San Juan Corners and the yet-to-be named stand-alone discount stores came together on a case-by-base basis. However, in December the city passed its first tax increment zone - a region encompassing much of the expressway corridor and a portion of Longoria Road, Rodriguez said.

"With a TIZ, we're going to be able to tackle the bigger challenges in our city," Rodriguez said.

San Juan is, of course, but one community in a densely populated region. It is enjoying some of the synergies that come with being a part of a greater community. Within a 10-mile radius of San Juan, the population reaches 436,000, McCarthy noted.

This attracted the interest of Mercedes-Benz of Boerne, a Hill Country-based dealership that was looking for a second location.

The site search began in 2008, explained Ron Heller, one of the dealership's partners. Initially, they considered the town of Mercedes because of the obvious name tie-in, but land in San Juan looked more attractive, he said.

"It wasn't so much the property as it was the San Juan Economic Development Corp.'s willingness to work with us," Heller said. "They brought in water and sewer. That infrastructure was very important to us and ultimately got us to say, 'Yes.'"

Alfonso Cavazos, the dealership's sales manager,



Construction zones work on expanding Valley roadways. (Kevin Knoch)

was made the company's third partner. Cavazos will relocate to the Rio Grande Valley to run the new dealership, which is expected to open in the fall of this year.

The dealership will have 30,000 square feet of roofed facilities, is projected to draw \$15 million in annual sales and employ 20 people. San Juan spent \$300,000 in infrastructure to make it happen, but anticipates \$50,000 in annual sales tax revenue, McCarthy said.

Another synergy being capitalized - and somewhat poetically appropriate given the spiritual nature of San Juan's development - is its wetland project.

In a classic "turning lemons into lemonade" development, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality sought help from the middle Valley communities in dealing with treated waste water flowing into the Arroyo Colorado.

The San Juan EDC received a grant from the state commission and hired Alan Plummer & Associates Inc., an environmental engineering firm in Fort Worth, to design a 7-acre wetland.

Open, vacant land was handed over to Eberle Materials, the Donna-based contractor. Earth was excavated to create seven ponds. Bull rushes, Runyon's water willow, water lilies and many other species were planted to enhance the preserve's ability to clean water and attract wildlife, particularly wild birds that follow the migration patterns through the Valley.

The Rio Grande Valley is home to several popular wetland parks that attract birders from as far away as Great Britain and Australia, including the world famous Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission.

San Juan leaders saw their own opportunity to get a sliver of the Valley's eco-tourism market. Finishing touches on the park were done in January and its first eco-tourist group, the Rio Grande Valley Sierra Club, does a walk-through in February.

"It's amazing to see the transformation," McCarthy said, not just of the land but of the community's excitement regarding its prospects.

She is planning an Earth Day event for the spring with the Pharr San Juan Alamo Independent School District.

All this bodes for a promising future. The city may not see the fully-realized fruits of its labor for



another five years, Rodriguez said, but the momentum is undeniable.

"No more talking," Rodriguez said. "We're walking."

Adolfo Pesquera is a freelance writer living in San Antonio. A former news reporter with the San Antonio Express News and the Brownsville Herald, he has been covering business, government, and crime in South Texas for 25 years. Contact info: (210) 629-2937, or email to ajpesq54@gmail.com

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Business Profile

DOUBLEDAY'S IS UNIQUE TO VALLEY

By Kevin Knoch

Combine casual dining, a bar, a sports history theme, and you have one of the Rio Grande Valley's most unique businesses. When you consider the quality of the establishment's collectables you have one of the top sports topic bars in Texas and probably the United States. Where? On Highway 100 in Port Isabel, look for Doubleday's Sports Bar of Champions.

Not hard to miss just east of the Port Isabel boat channel on the north side of the street, Doubleday's is adorned with murals of sports legends. Some of those depicted are instantly recognizable, for example RGV native and beloved Dallas Cowboy's Coach Tom Landry. There lies the key to the business' premise, weaving sports and local history; starting with the name Doubleday.

Doubleday's is co-owned by brothers Manuel and Rick Hinojosa, and Manuel's wife Norma. Manuel relates the name was something he wanted to have a little fun with. The restaurant/bar/museum is named after the man many credit as the Father of American Baseball; Abner Doubleday.

A display case shows off a variety of baseball memorabilia including a signed Willie Mays Jersey, baseballs, autographed items and art.
(K. Knoch)



Although historians are still discussing Doubleday's actual contributions to the games development. He remains the integral figure in a story line at the Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown, New York, that today's game was first organized by Doubleday and played at Cooperstown in 1839.

Doubleday's connection to Port Isabel is his military career. As a United States Army lieutenant and recent West Point graduate, he arrived in Port Isabel in the forbidding weeks preceding the outbreak of the Mexican/American war in 1846. Doubleday is stationed at Fort Polk, located on the grounds of the Port Isabel Lighthouse. He is within ear shot of the first hostilities of the war at the Battle of Palo Alto and the siege of Fort Texas in present day Brownsville.

"I used the connection of the inventor of baseball who was in Port Isabel, as the floor format for the sports bar. The idea was early baseball could have been played here. Then I wanted to connect it to world, national, state, and local sports," stated Hinojosa. Connecting to sports was something that started early in life for Hinojosa whose day job is Chief Financial Officer of ERO Architects in McAllen. Hinojosa's combined his talents of businessman, architect, artist, and sports enthusiast to contribute to the development of Doubleday's.

Hinojosa related he had a chance to go to a game at Yankee Stadium when he was a teenager and see his favorite player Mickey Mantle. Explaining like thousands from that

era he was a Yankee fan because, the team dominated appearances on the CBS Saturday Game of the Week. Also, he grew up in Mission, Tom Landry's hometown, where he was legend for his exploits as a Mission Eagle, Texas Longhorn, professional football player, and assistant New York Giant coach before taking the reins as the first head-coach of the Dallas Cowboys.

"Sports was a big part of my early life. I also painted and I painted sports figures. The carrot was to paint a sports figure and get it signed. I have been doing that for the last 20 years." Hinojosa's hobby grew, he would travel to baseball card shows and appearance events where he would have the subjects of his paintings sign his depiction of them. On these trips he would take all kinds of collectables with him such as jerseys, balls, trading cards to be signed to compliment his paintings. Soon he had boxes of memorabilia in storage along with his paintings.

"One day, my friend Pat Marchan approached me about showcasing what I had. I hesitated and finally about six years ago I said 'Let's do it.' We went with the idea of a sports museum/restaurant where you could watch sporting events." He added the project grew and grew not realizing the extent of his collection."

"We devoted a section to all of the sports. Baseball, football, hockey, basketball, soccer, even sumo wrestling. With boxing, we even put a ring in the bar."

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The logo art for Doubleday's reflects its baseball namesake.
(K. Knoch)



The front wall boasts a mural featuring Missionna-tive and sports hero Tom Landry. (K. Knoch)

As you enter the lobby it looks distinctively like a locker room and that is the intent. Hinojosa honors the running backs and quarterbacks, all Texas natives, who are in the National Football League Hall of Fame. Honorees include Earl Campbell, Eric Dickerson, Sammy Baugh, and Bobby Lane.

What takes you back is some of the baseball memorabilia. Where else are you going to find autographed oil paintings of Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle and many

others.

A recent addition accents local sports. Doubleday's pays tribute to the Rio Grande Sports Hall of Fame and local sports teams. The hall started in 1988, honors Valley athletes career accomplishments, making additions to the roll on a yearly basis. Doubleday's serves as headquarters for the hall.

The quality of the collection on display is second to none. Bob Jones, a Houston businessman stated, "He (Hinojosa) probably has the greatest collection of memorabilia that I have ever seen. I have seen tons and tons of different stuff. You are just mesmerized when you go in there. The food is good, but that is secondary."

Jones added the only bar he had seen that comes in a distant second is Bobby Valentine's in Stamford, Connecticut. Carl Swan, is an oil executive, from Oklahoma who visits the Laguna Madre Area for fishing. Swan declared, "It is the best collection I have ever seen."

Howard Lau, is a Houston sports memorabilia dealer. He met Hinojosa years ago at trading card shows. "Number one it is a sports bar, but it should be a museum. He should charge a fee for people to come in to look at it. I know that isn't his intent, but that is how nice the place is. I've been to sports bars around the country, and the Hall of Fame, I haven't seen anything nicer than Doubleday's."

Doubleday's will be celebrating its fifth birthday on

Feb. 13 and 14, 2010. Tentative plans call for former Oklahoma and Dallas Cowboy coach Barry Switzer to be on hand for the festivities.

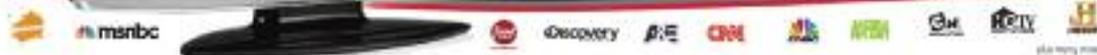


Interior mural featuring the San Antonio Spurs. (K. Knoch)

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Evolution

PALM GARDENS: VALLEY'S OLDEST RV PARK

by Eileen Mattei

With its roots in the late 1920s, Palm Gardens Resort is considered the Rio Grande Valley's oldest recreational vehicle park. Today the Harlingen business has WIFI (internet) access in the recreation hall and library, a new hot tub, heated pool, and a January population around 250. Not content to coast on past success, the manufactured home and RV community has evolved to continue attracting temporary and permanent residents, all in the 55 and older category.

"Compared to the old days, people expect to be entertained more and to have more than bare bones amenities," said Bob Willcox, the resort's manager for the last two years. Willcox and owner Jamie Dougherty share a philosophy that is committed to running a profitable business by taking care of the people who are customers.



Wood carving and other activities are part of life at Palm Gardens. (courtesy)

More than 80 years ago, the Pletcher family in rural west Harlingen allowed visitors hauling travel trailers to camp out in their citrus orchards in exchange for their labor picking fruit. From the 1930s through the 1950s, Jake Pletcher followed by William Pletcher developed the travel trailer park known today as Palm Gardens.

In 1951 a killer freeze wiped out the Pletchers' citrus and led to major changes. Soon Palm Gardens was featured in magazine stories extolling the professionally landscaped park with a spacious double entrance, swimming pool, concrete patios, parking slabs and a family section complete with play areas

for children. Overnights were not required to unhook for services. A supermarket and restaurant shared the property which stretched to Palm Court Drive.

In 1959 the owner's home was converted into Fiesta Hall, which today is the setting for potluck dinners, wine and cheese tastings, dances, card games, music jams, exercise classes and much more. "The owner had the insight to realize he needed to do something to keep them here," Willcox said. Amenities remain essential for success, but equally important is a facility manager that sets the tone for everyone living in harmony.

Thirty years in law enforcement, including a stint as chief of police of Vail, Colorado, gave Willcox the soft skills necessary to supervise a community of mature, often opinionated, adults. "It's no reflection on the people themselves, you know, but groups form and an atmosphere develops." As a police officer and as a park manager, his management style involves soliciting input and opinions. "That's how you learn. I have the ability to listen to people, to get their perspective. When communicating and interacting stops, it's over."

Willcox, who has managed seven other Valley RV parks, works on establishing relationships based on reliability, honesty, and sincerity. Long-time residents have told Willcox that Palm Gardens' atmosphere, under his guidance, is both congenial and satisfying. "In a park like this, regardless of our differences, we are all in the same boat. Every day becomes more important to us. The park becomes like family." And that supportive family resides in a gated community with their own 'mayor,' the resident who heads the park association.

People shopping around for a park often ask Willcox if Palm Gardens has a single owner or if it is part of a chain. "It's important that I can say, "This is my backyard. I've invested my money here. I'm part of it," he said.

Palm Gardens is seeing bigger RV units than ever before pulling off Business 83 to secure a site. It currently has a two-story motor home, "bigger than a Greyhound bus." Willcox said Baby Boomers in the 55-60 age range are arriving regularly and getting involved in the Palm Gardens community. "Last year every (park model) house for sale sold. If I had 50 rentals, I would have rented them all. We're right in the middle of two roads coming into the Valley. This is a great location."



Bob Willcox and owner Jamie Dougherty share a philosophy that is committed to running a profitable business by taking care of the people who are customers. (courtesy)

That outlook is echoed by Russell Manhard, 61, who with his wife is spending a second winter at Palm Gardens instead of in their Canadian home. "I know 10 people from Winnipeg who come down here. There are welcome signs all over for you. I come here because there's lots to do. People are friendly. Up north it's minus 40."

"The Valley is the best kept secret in the country," Willcox continued. "Where in the world could people live so cheaply? To me, it's awesome to have fishing, golf, grapefruit, and everything else here. And I don't think medical care is better anywhere in the world. I've seen hundreds of people being taken care of for cancer, hearts, knee problems by great doctors and staffs. In a big city, you wouldn't get that kind of care." He was also astounded by the park's outpouring of concern and assistance when his wife Jo-Ella was diagnosed with breast cancer. That strengthened his impression that at Palm Gardens he was in the right place at the right time.



Needlecrafts and quilting groups meet each week creating works of arts. (courtesy)

News Bits

BIG EASY



Welcome to the Big Easy! Bayou Pappy's recently opened at 1601 W. Harrison Ave. in Harlingen. Authentic New Orleans recipes with the atmosphere and decor' just like the French Quarter. Mardi Gras celebrations on Feb. 16. (courtesy)

BIG DAY



Kathy Garza, welcomed everyone as the Mission Chamber of Commerce, City of Mission and the Mission Economic Development Authority kicked off the GO MISSION CAMPAIGN at the Leo Pena Placita Park (corner of Business 83 & Conway). This is a benefit to all Mission merchants and consumers. (courtesy)

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History and Heritage

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN RANCHING: SALOME BALLI YOUNG DE MCALLEN

By Kevin Knoch

Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson's sweeping epic, "I'd Rather Sleep in Texas" relates the history of the early settlement of Rio Grande Valley. The book co-authored by James A. McAllen and Margaret H. McAllen traces the trails and tribulations of a family's effort to maintain their ranching land in deep South Texas. Covering two centuries of history, "I'd Rather Sleep in Texas, is brimming with stories and characters.

First published in 2003 by the Texas Historical Association, "I'd Rather Sleep in Texas" has a backstory. The story starts long before the establishment of the McAllen family's ranching in northwestern Hidalgo County. Nor is the book a detailed history about the establishment of today's thriving city of McAllen. If you want to capulate Amberson's work it is about land.

Stretching over two hundred years, Amberson in-

troduces us to the characters who played a part in establishing one of the longest held ranches in the state. Several of these characters are women and the important role they played in the story. One of the pivotal characters during the 19th Century was Maria Salome Balli de la Garza, who married John Young and later John McAllen in the mid nineteenth century.

The root of the story date back a hundred years earlier when in the 1750s , Spanish settlers arrived under the direction of Jose de Escandon at the banks of the Rio Grande River. "I'd Rather Sleep in Texas" is the story of the Santa Anita Land Grant and its history over two hundred years. The land is located roughly 50 miles north of the river in northern Hidalgo County Early Spanish settlers to the area included the Gomez's, Dominguez, Balli families where the first to become involved with the land grant.

The grant was awarded to Jose Manuel Gomez in 1790. Amberson points out in her introduction, that Dona Rosa Maria Hinojosa de Balli may have influenced the award to Gomez. Amberson states Gomez's, "His heirs and lateral descendents maintained the land grant, beginning with his widow , Dona Maria Gregoria Dominguez y Gomez." The land grant faced the challenging changing tides of history. First awarded by the Spanish, the Santa Anita was claimed by Mexico after 1821, later by an independent Texas after 1836, and became territory of the United States of America when Texas joined the Union in 1846.

Dona Maria Gregoria Dominguez Gomez widow, inherited half of the original grant and the Santa Anita lands north of the Rio Grande in 1812, after Gomez death in 1803. Her part of the grant stayed intact and was taken over by her son Antonio Dominguez, who lived at the Santa Anita until death in 1845.

As Texas joins the United States, and change was in the wind for population centers of Matamoros and Reynosa Amberson, writes "The people of the Santa Anita saw opportunities as well. Many of the Balli



Salome Balli with her two sons, taken during Civil War. Standing is John Young from her first marriage. The boy on her lap is James McAllen. (Photo used with permission from John McAllen Scanlan Santa Fe, New Mexico Collection)

family relocated to Matamoros from Reynosa or to the north bank of the river. Some saw opportunities for land speculation and purchased rights from cash-poor relatives, who were either confused about or did not want the land north of the river, now under United States jurisdiction. The Santa Anita ranch was now one of the area's, oldest settlements predating the founding of Texas."

Along with the changes in government on the north and south sides of the Rio Grande, came a stream of new settlers from Europe and the United States. Many were from the merchant class and quickly established themselves in Matamoros. One figure was Scottish immigrant John Young, who prospered in Matamoros and the newly established settlement of Brownsville, Texas.

Amberson notes that Maria Salome Balli de la Garza was born in Matamoros August 5, 1828. "Many

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of her relatives--- the Balli's, the Dominguezes and Hinojosa's owned large ranches on the left bank it was through them and her father, Francisco, that she grew to know and love the land." Little is known of her early up bringing, except she was probably trained in housekeeping, but as Amberson points out,..."house-keeping would pale in comparison with passion for amassing land." She inherited a small portion of the Santa Anita from relatives.

At the age of 25 she married John Young age 50 in Brownsville in 1853. She began buying portion of the Santa Anita with Young after their marriage. Born to the couple was a son John J Young. John Young senior though died in May of 1859, leaving Maria Salome with large land holdings and a mercantile business. She remarried one of Young's employees John McAllen at the start of the American Civil War in 1861, After the wedding she continued buying portions of the Santa Anita. McAllen and Salome had a son James Balli McAllen.

The two sons grew up together, but before the end of the century the land buying and uniting of the Santa Anita came to a halt. Amberson relates, "By 1894. The Young--McAllen family relationship had degenerated considerably." the two half brothers began to part ways. John Young asked for his share of the Santa Anita ranch. "This no doubt, caused their mother, Dona Salome great pain." Amberson speculated, adding, "When she had worked here whole life to restore the Santa Anita to its original size."

Salome died in Brownsville one year after the property separation was completed. She passed in May of 1898. James McAllen would establish the develop the western side of the Santa Anita, known as San Juanito.

Amberson declared few at the time recognized Salome's determination and perseverance.

"Though the public may not have been aware of her business acumen, her legacy was far-reaching and long-lasting. Salome , a strong willed and enterprising woman, managed to preserve and restore the Santa Anita to nearly the original size it had been granted to Manuel Gomez. She made aggressive business decisions and land purchases that benefited the family for generations. She lived through rough and violent times when men ruled almost every aspect of business."

The Valley Business Report based the above work on "I Would Rather Sleep in Texas" by Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, James A. McAllen & Margaret H. McAllen. The book is available through the Texas Historical Association (940) 369-5200 and other book sellers. A paper back version is expected March 1, 2010.

Salome Balli Young de McAllen posed for in a portrait in 1864 . (Photo used with permission from John McAllen Scanlan Santa Fe, New Mexico Collection)



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Opinion

TEXAS CITRUS DODGED A BIG BULLET

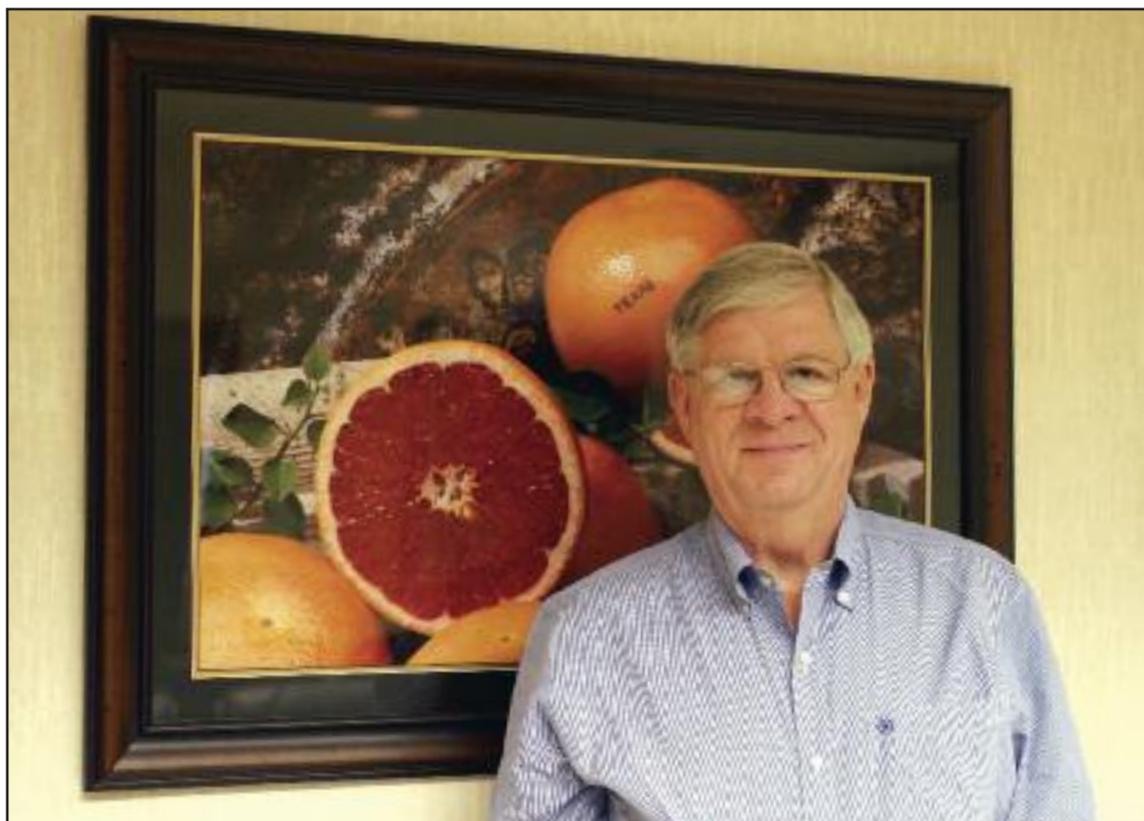
By Ray Prewett,
president, Texas Citrus Mutual

The cold temperatures on January 9 and 10 were certainly the coldest since the snow of December 2004. Fortunately this recent freeze not near as cold in the Rio Grande Valley as the weather events in 1951, 1962, 1983 and 1989. For one thing we are confident that we did not lose any trees to this freeze while the other freezes killed a large number of trees and most of the surviving trees had to be dehorned because all except the trunks of the trees were dead. I was with Texas Citrus Mutual during the freezes of the 1980's but all I know about the earlier freezes is what a few old timers have told me and reading information about similar freezes.

What do we know and what do we not know about freeze damage to fruit and citrus trees from this latest freeze? We know there has not been any significant tree damage. The citrus industry also knows that most of the overall fruit crop came through the cold weather without any damage. For that we are extremely grateful because we know our citrus colleagues in Florida have been hit pretty hard. Many of our growers believe we may not have had any significant damage to grapefruit. Seventy percent of our citrus crop is grapefruit and the lack of damage to our most important crop is huge! Grapefruits are larger than oranges and that is one reason they are generally less susceptible to freeze damage.

We also know it always gets colder on the outer canopy and on the tops of the trees than it does in the center of the tree. In the northwest part of our production area where growers recorded the lowest temperatures, we are seeing some leaf damage in the tops of the trees and on the outer canopy of those trees.

In some parts of the Valley we know the temperatures were 28 degrees or lower for at least four hours (normal threshold for fruit damage) but so far growers are not reporting as much damage as would normally be expected with these temps. While 28 degrees for four hours is a valid threshold for minimal damage, there are a large number of other factors that determine freeze damage including tree dormancy. We experienced some cooler than normal weather in December 2009 and that weather induced a lot of dormancy in the trees. Had we not had the cool weather before the freeze, we would have had a lot more freeze damage to parts of the tree. Finally, the nature of the damage or the lack of it will vary from one grove to another even when they are right next to each other. The reason or reasons for such



Ray Prewett, the current president of the Texas Citrus Mutual. (courtesy)

differences are not always apparent even to an experienced grower.

The citrus industry is confident that damage was not that serious or widespread. In spite of this positive news, we are still fielding many questions about the extent of the damage that may have occurred. In the northwest part of Hidalgo County, we are seeing a few oranges fall to the ground but so far this is not a significant portion of our orange crop. Also, in this same area, we are seeing a fair amount of leaf defoliation. At this point appears that if there is any twig damage that it will be restricted to some relatively isolated areas.

It can take several weeks to months before the full extent of the damage is known. For example, it is simply too soon to know if some twigs were damaged. If twig damage has occurred it could have some negative impact on the March bloom and the size of next year's crop. Some of the juice sacks in oranges could have been damaged that will cause that part of the orange to have less juice. It will be a week or more before we will know the extent of that kind of damage.

We do know the citrus industry dodged a big bullet. In a couple of months we will know a lot more about how some groves fared and whether we dodged the smaller bullets. Needless to say, we feel very blessed.

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Business News

INTERVIEW WITH NEW EDINBURG EDC LEADER

By Kevin Knoch

The City of Edinburg has a new Economic Development Corporation Executive Director. City Commissioners appointed Pedro Salazar to the position in mid-December of 2009. Salazar takes over the office vacated by Ramiro Garza who has moved on to the city manager's position. He joins the city after working in the private sector as a commercial banker, most recently with Lone Star Bank.

Salazar comes to the position with a wealth of experience in community affairs and economic development. Before entering banking he worked for the University of Texas/Pan American in numerous capacities. Salazar was associate director of the Office of Center Operations and Community Services. He ran the Business Development Center for UTPA, and also worked extensively with UTPA's Small Business Development Center.

The new executive director took over his office the first of the year. He gave us some of his time to answer a few questions after only a few days on the job. He qualified some of his replies because he hadn't had time to discuss all of his ideas with his board of directors.

Valley Business Report: What are your near term goals for the Edinburg Economic Development Corporation?

"Right now I'm focusing on the internal operation of the office. We have a very small space. We have a lot of legacy documents, we are going through the process of digitizing everything. We are creating a system where we have easy access but reduce the amount of space we occupy."

Salazar related the second task that is underway. "We are also developing a customer management software. Probably 50 percent of what we do is selling, so it makes sense to have this software. We can better organize the activities we undertake and be more sales focused."

Valley Business Report: What are some of the strategies you plan to employ, when recruiting and attracting companies to Edinburg?

"Historically economic development has been about recruitment. I take a more comprehensive approach. It is called entrepreneur community, recruitment is an activity, but not the main focus. A lot of recruitment concentrates on manufacturing. Really our economy is much more service orientated, not just locally but nationally. I think there is a lot to be said for recruiting more service intelligence based companies. We have some of the infrastructure for service centers in place."

Valley Business Report: What are your views on the Rio Grande Valley promoting itself regionally?

I think it is important. It is hard for a community of 50,000 to 60,000 people to go out and spend enough money so people will take note of you. What ever is done in

McAllen affects Edinburg and vice versa. Just because a company locates in one city, doesn't mean they aren't going to draw employees from another community. So whatever we do collectively, I think has the potential to benefit the whole region. Looking at it from a marketing perspective it just makes sense."

Valley Business Report: Do you think there will be more of a relationship between universities research capabilities and economic development corporations/ private sector funding in the Valley's future.

"I worked for Pan Am for 10 years, in the last five to six years it has become more research focused. As a consequence of this, things will come out of it. I think soft infrastructure will develop. What I mean by soft infrastructure is networks. When someone develops something on campus, what is the process you go through to try to commercialize the development... We have the responsibility to create these networks of programs, organization, groups to help promote the commercialization of what is being developed on campus."

Valley Business Report: How do you see Edinburg and the Rio Grande Valley in the 10 years?



Pedro Salazar, new EDC Executive Director for Edinburg. (K. Knoch)

"I think Edinburg is extremely well positioned. One of the things that is very exciting is the age of the population of the RGV. When you are younger you are more likely to go out and seek new things. There is so much potential. It is just a matter of mobilizing that energy in an entrepreneurial way."

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Business News

MCALLEN STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

By Kevin Knoch

McAllen Mayor Richard Cortez delivered his fifth state of the city address Thursday January 21, 2010 at the city's convention center. Cortez is entering the second year of his second term. He was first elected in 2005 and reelected by a wide margin in 2009.

The Mayor pointed out the City of McAllen has been riding out the nationwide recession well, better than most cities across the country. He talked about how the city's bond rating had been raised to Double A plus, the highest of any city on the border. He stressed McAllen MSA experienced job growth during the third quarter of 2009, while the rest of the country was still shedding jobs in large numbers.

He singled out the McAllen Economic Development Corporation for their continued success at bringing companies and jobs to McAllen and Reynosa. He did say he was disappointed not having more to report on a proposed automobile plant for the city and the Boeye Reservoir Project, projects he laid

out two years ago. He stated both projects had been affected by the banking credit crunch.

The Mayor chose to talk about projects in the city that were on the move. Number one on his list was the completion and the opening of the Anzalduas International Bridge. Planned and talk about for two decades, the bridge opened in time for holiday travel and came in under budget.

The Mayor contended, "In conjunction with the bridge at Hidalgo, an overall net increase in travelers. This important gateway has expedited travel times for our friends coming and going from the Monterrey area." Adding the bridge opening has greatly reduced daily travel time for Maquiladora workers.

Cortez moved on to the plans for a new main library for then city. He related the design for the new structure is completed and bidding on the work will soon be submitted. "We expect this project to be well underway during 2010, with an expected opening in 2011," Cortez continued, "This will be one of the largest single story libraries in the United States."

The Mayor talked about the state of the city's parks. He pointed to the popularity of Schupp Park and the facelift the public facility received in 2009. He related a new park located at Zinnia and 29th street is near completion. The city's new dog park is now opened and popular. Adding Fireman's Park proposed for 2nd Street and Business 83 is being designed.

The Mayor went on to point out the phase one of the WIFI and video surveillance system is now complete. Contributing to the city's reputation as a safe city. He stressed a recent study had ranked McAllen as the 12th safe city in the U.S.

Cortez related Bicentennial Boulevard from Nolana to Trenton is ready for expansion work. He predicted the widening work would be completed by 2011. The Mayor thinks the project will enhance traffic flow in the inner city of McAllen.

The Mayor expects more hotels in the vicinity of the new McAllen Convention Center. He said hotel development had been slowed, by financial markets. But citizens can expect two full service and one limited service facility to start construction in the near future.

He cited the downtown Entertainment District as an example of limited city investment combined with private dollars to create a major destination.



McAllen Mayor Richard Cortez delivered his fifth state of the city address Thursday January 21, 2010 at the city's convention center. . (K. Knoch)

Cortez stated the city's investment will be paid back many times over. Noting 30,000 had attended a recent New Year's Eve party in the district.

The Mayor pointed to projects that had helped the city during the last year, including the improvements to Highway 281 north of the Rio Grande valley. He thanked South Texas College for its continued growth and educational contributions to the citizens of the city. He also cited the development of the University of Texas Pan American Teaching Center in McAllen.

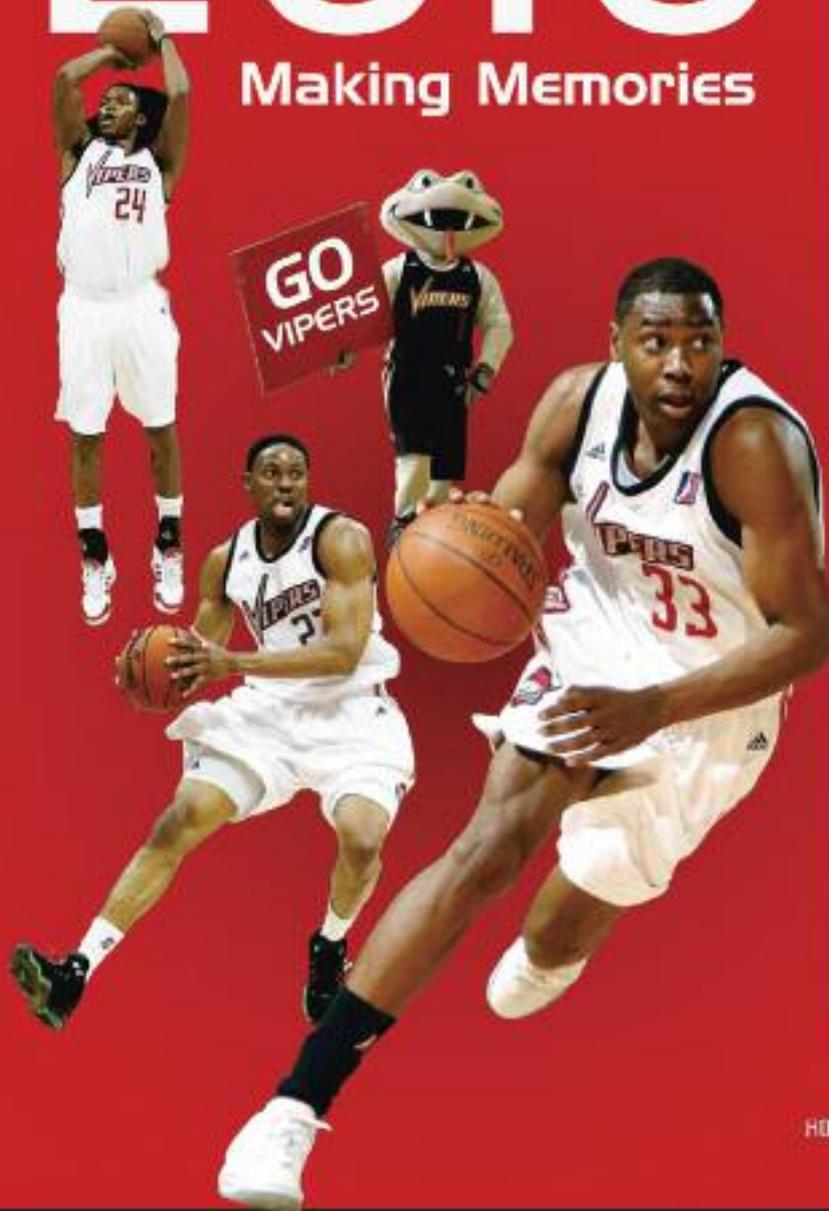
The mayor summed up his presentation by stating, "We know that 'success breeds success.' McAllen, and its people, are moving forward and looking into the future. As I said two years ago, McAllen is a city without limits --- 'A Modern American City on the border.'"

An advertisement for Del Valle Grand Turismo Charter Bus Service. The top part features a logo with a bus and the text "DEL VALLE GRAND TURISMO". Below the logo, the text reads "Charter Bus SERVICE" and "At Del Valle Grand Turismo, our experienced Charter Bus Service Representatives are ready to help you plan your next trip. Whether you need a local charter or your group is heading out of town, we have the right vehicle to serve your groups transportation needs." A section titled "Our ADVANTAGES" lists: "• We do the Driving", "• Professional Drivers", "• Safety First", "• Free Time for You to Sit Back and Relax", and "• Clean, Comfortable Environment". Below this is a photo of five smiling people (three men and two women) standing together. At the bottom, a red banner contains the phone number "1.866.297.2399" and the website "WWW.DELVALLEGRANDTURISMO.COM".



2009 GAME SCHEDULE 2010

Making Memories



NOVEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	22	23	24	25	AUS 27 7:00P	AUS 28 7:00P
	29	30				

DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	TUL 4 7:00P	TUL 5 7:00P
6	7	AUG 8 8:00A	9	ALB 9 1:00P	11	ALB 9 1:00P
13	14	15	16	17	TUL 19 7:00P	TUL 19 1:00P
20	RNO 21 7:00P	22	23	24	25	AUS 26 7:00P
27	28	29	AUS 30 1:00P	31		

JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
LA 3 7:00P	ALB 4 12:00P	5	BAK 6 5:00P	7	8	IA 8 7:00P
IA 10 5:00P	11	12	ALB 13 7:00P	ALB 14 7:00P	15	16
DAK 17 3:00P	18	DAK 19 7:00P	20	21	ERI 22 5:00P	ERI 23 5:00P
24	25	26	27	SNF 28 1:00A	SNF 29 7:00P	30
LA 3 5:00P						

FEBRUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	ALB 2 7:00A	ALB 3 8:00P	4	ALB 5 8:00P
7	8	FTW 9 8:00P	SFD 10 1:00P	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	MNE 20 8:00P
MNE 21 7:00P	22	23	24	25	SFD 26 7:00P	27
DAK 28 5:00P						

MARCH

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	BAK 5 5:00P	BAK 6 5:00P
7	8	AUS 9 7:00P	AUS 10 1:00P	11	12	TUL 13 1:00P
TUL 14 5:00P	15	16	17	18	RNO 19 5:00P	RNO 20 5:00P
21	22	23	24	25	LA 26 7:00P	LA 27 7:00P
28	29	UTH 30 8:00P	IDA 31 4:00P			

APRIL

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	DAK 2 7:00P	DAK 3 7:00P

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