

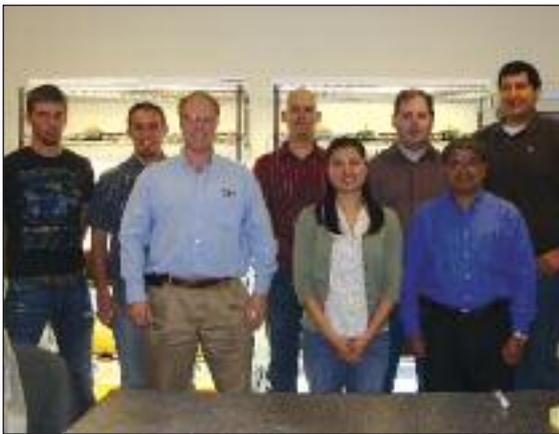
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FUTURE OF MANUFACTURING

A good advertising agent will tell you it is all about the 'brand.' What is it that you want to be known for, what will people think about when they hear your name? A coalition of educational institutions and economic development corporations covering eight counties from Brownsville to Laredo has its own branding goal in mind.

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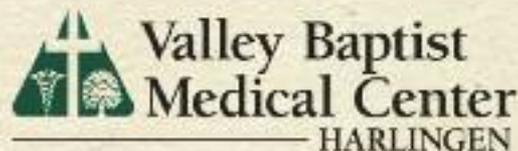
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Cover: Campus proposal of America's Third Coast Research and Education Park in North Carolina at North Carolina State Campus and Centennial Research Park build out. Raleigh is in the background. (courtesy photo)

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Valley Business Report Staff

Managing Editor

Kevin Knoch
 kevin@valleybusinessreport.com

General Manager

Todd Breland
 todd@valleybusinessreport.com

Marketing Consultant

Lili Asfour
 lili@valleybusinessreport.com

Production Art Director

Sharon Campbell
 sharon@valleybusinessreport.com

Website Design

Valley IT Solutions

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.

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Education

WIND ENERGY TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM OPENS AT TSTC

By Dave Ralph

The only in-depth college level Wind Energy Technology Program of its kind in South Texas is under way at Texas State Technical College Harlingen.

A \$238,678 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy funds the first development phase of the program, which includes \$75,000 in free tuition for qualifying students. Course work will start with online lessons and laboratory experience before the program expands.

The first set of Wind Energy Technology online classes began May 24 and completion of the summer semester courses is scheduled for August 20. Instructor Enrique Carrillo and Vice President for Student Learning Al Guillen said that the program would start with 15 to 20 students. They also expressed optimism that companies within the industry would join partnerships with TSTC to offer students training opportunities.

"This is a brand new program and it opens up many possible avenues, many versatile options for trained technicians," Carrillo said. "The skill sets students will master also apply to the repair and maintenance of wind energy equipment and the assembly of parts and components to build wind turbines."

En route to a Certificate of Completion Level One diploma, students will become familiar with wind energy turbine functions involving DC and AC circuits, digital fundamentals, fluid power (hydraulics and pneumatics) and computerized control systems. The TSTC Harlingen program will gradually phase in more diploma options.

"The online lessons are easy to access, follow and complete because they include details about specific vocabulary terms and definitions. Students should be able to follow the sequence for study modules and participate in online forums for discussion," Carrillo explained.

"Students will complete quite a bit of reading as thorough background for the second phase of hands-on learning in the laboratory setting. For example, there are fifteen online lectures about basic electricity to prepare for further instruction and work in the laboratory." Students may use computers in the Learning Resource Center on campus or alternative online connections to complete the lessons.

Many of the online courses through TSTC Harlingen are based on curriculum implemented during the past three years at TSTC West Texas based in Sweetwater, an educational hub at the center of one of the largest wind energy fields in the world. Three wind farms are operational in South Texas and the companies plan to double the South Texas wind energy production with two more wind farms in the planning stages for the region.

"We have a large number of equipment manufactur-

ers and operation and maintenance companies in the Sweetwater area," said Daniel Templeton, chairman of the Wind Energy Technology Program at TSTC West Texas.

"These companies participate on our program's advisory committee panels, provide current technology, support our program and hire our graduates." Instructor George Lister of TSTC West Texas will also add his expertise to some portions of the classes delivered through TSTC Harlingen.

Carrillo worked in the energy industry for 30 years in specializations such as instrumentation, electronics, quality control, environment, operations, and mechanics before accepting the wind energy challenge. He added to his resume by training in Advanced Manufacturing Integrated System Technology from TSTC, passing credited college courses and industry workshops statewide, and completing safety classes presented by the federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration.

For details about the Wind Energy Technology Program online go to www.harlingen.tstc.edu. Businesses or prospective students also may directly contact Carrillo (800.852.8784, extension 4729, 956.364.4729, enrique.carrillo@harlingen.tstc.edu) or Guillen (956.364.4602, al.guillen@harlingen.tstc.edu).



Students at Texas State Technical College West Texas, located at Sweetwater, prepare to climb a wind turbine. TSTC West Texas is providing curriculum to TSTC Harlingen for its new program.

(D. Ralph)

Dave Ralph is a communications writer for Texas State Technology College in Harlingen. He worked as a city editor of the Valley Morning Star before joining TSTC.

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Cover Story

RAPID RESPONSE MANUFACTURING A PART OF VALLEY'S FUTURE

By Kevin Knoch

A good advertising agent will tell you it is all about the 'brand.' What is it that you want to be known for, what will people think about when they hear your name? A coalition of educational institutions and economic development corporations covering eight counties from Brownsville to Laredo has its own branding goal in mind. When people hear "Rio Grande Valley" they want them to connect it with 'rapid response manufacturing.'

The phrase 'rapid response manufacturing' (otherwise known as 'RRM'), packs a punch, so it takes some explaining. But the group, numbering nearly 60 organizations, has a plan to develop the concept and create research centers that ultimately will include a research park. Such a complex should propel our region into the forefront of advanced manufacturing. The driving coalition? The North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative (NAAMREI).

Are you having a hard time getting your mind around 'rapid response manufacturing?' An explanation is in order and there is no better way to get it than through a hypothetical example. McAllen Economic Development Corporation President Keith Patridge is a founding member of the NAAMREI, which is headquartered at South Texas College's Technology campus in McAllen. Patridge lays out an example of the benefits of rapid response manufacturing.

But he prefaces his product sample stating, "We have been working towards a group of rapid response manufacturing centers. The centers would be focused on a different area of advanced manufacturing in different cities, and each city in the NAAMREI network would select a focal point. Generally these are in conjunction with an institution of higher education. Our plans are to build centers of excellence in a particular area of advanced manufacturing, after which all of these centers will be interconnected into a regional advanced manufacturing cluster."

Patridge discussed one such center that has been developing at the University of Texas/Pan American for several years. "The center focuses on two things: taking a product from the concept to the market place, in as short a time and at the lowest possible cost" Patridge qualifies there are other cities that are concentrating on segments of the concept but adds, "We are really the first in the world that I know of to focus on

the total process."

"What that does is give us the potential to do the same things the space program has done for innovation in new products over the last several decades," He emphasized.

Patridge poses a hypothetical question, "When you come up with an idea how do you take it from idea to product in as fast a time as possible?" Replying to his own query he says "You start removing constraints."

He goes on, "If you build a product that has a plastic part it requires you to melt the plastic and then inject it under very high pressure into a mold. That is what these injecting molding companies do... they build plastic parts." Summarizing, he stated when you take a product from start to finish it can take about eight to 18 weeks to build one of the molds.

"We have a company here that wants to get to a 30-day design cycle... meaning they want to go from concept to delivery of the first product to the customer in 30 days." He readily admits that is physically impossible right now. "But at this point we are focused on integrating technology with process to make this possible."

Then the MEDC President gave a glimpse into the future. "What we have going on at the university, (University of Texas/Pan American) is the process of learning how to use nano technology and other types of new emerging technology to build a replacement for the plastic mold. This process can literally build a mold in hours versus the usual eight to 18 weeks. Now we are getting closer to that 30-day window."

He continued, "The computer engineering department can now create and write specialty programs allowing an idea to go through a virtual reality product testing on super computers. This would take literally days versus actually building a product. The whole concept of rapid response lends itself well to coming up with new technology to revolutionize manufacturing."

Patridge has some words for those who lament something they feel the United States has lost in recent years... our knack for outstanding innovation



(Standing Left) to Right Paul Curtin Mabnager of Hunt Valley Development, Dr. Miguel Gonzalez UTPA, Keith Patridge, President MEDC, Mike Willis, South Texas Manufacturing Association, Dr. Wendy A. Lawrence-Fowler (UTPA). (Seated Left) Dr. Shirley Reed, President South Texas College, Dr. John Lloyd (UTPA), Part of NAAMREI Alliance leadership pictured at McAllen Economic Development Corporation Office in May, 2010 (John Faulk)

in manufacturing.

"RRM will allow the United States to regain manufacturing capabilities for our market. We will



Texas Congressman Ruben Hinojosa recently secured funding for a master plan for America's Third Coast Research and Education Park. Hinojosa has been a long time supporter of the NAAMREI Alliance. (Patricia Guillermo)

produce customized products and get them to a customer in a very short period of time. If we can do this in 48 hours, then how could a facility in China compete with us? They couldn't! Rapid response can literally cut the rest of the world out as competitors. Others could never produce current generation products in the market because the changes would be so quick."

This isn't theory or science fiction. UT/PA Rapid Response Manufacturing Center has been working with companies in solving these kinds of 'time to market' problems for a few years now. Dr. John Lloyd explains the range of the centers operations. "First off companies are our customers, so there is always a need for a customized solution."

He related how the center would fulfill a company's needs. "We will bring in emerging technologies, and we will bring in the latest and greatest in manufacturing processes to help produce high quality products as agilely as we possibly can. It is possible to do customization of products for individual customers."

Continuing, "We work with companies so they can do it. We could come up with a prototype." He also added that they also make recommendations that streamline the manufacturing processes. The company takes the suggestions and implements them at the factory level.

The center also helps spur entrepreneurship and innovation. "We foster entrepreneurship. We have had several conferences on this subject, and attendance ranges from large companies down to one-person operations."

The RRM Center will incubate new ventures. One under their wing now is FibeRio Technology Corporation. (see Valley Business Report January, 2010), which was recently named one of the top three tech companies in the United States. The company is



Keith Patridge visits with officials from ESP Eunsung Printing, a new Korean company that recently opened an operation in Reynosa. (Victoria Hirschberg)

at present developing nano fibers for numerous manufacturing applications.

Today the center doesn't have capabilities to house a number of incubating companies, but Dr. Lloyd acknowledges that could change in the not too distant future. "We are looking at constructing a new building and a new campus at McAllen in the new research park." Lloyd added although they would have presence at the new America's Third Coast Research and Education Park, one line of thought is to enhance the center on campus in Edinburg, and make it into an incubator for new businesses.

Dr. Miguel Gonzalez works with both the Engineering Department and the Rapid Response Manufacturing Center at UT/PA. In fact he heads up the School of Engineering and Computer Science. He is also a member of the NAAMERI team, emphasizing that all of the planning and work put in the NAAMERI group over the past three years will, in the long range, benefit all Rio Grande Valley students.

"We are working with very good people, such as the economic development folks who are helping us move from vision to reality. We are very excited, because it provides opportunities for our students. Those of us who are in academia are in it precisely for that reason."



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Gonzalez explains that UTPA's engineering program, which launched in 1995, graduates engineers in the disciplines of mechanical, electrical, manufacturing, computer engineering, and computer science. Since the beginning more than 1,000 engineers have graduated, and a civil engineering program is about to commence. "Hopefully there is opportunity for them all, both in terms of employment and projects."

Dr. Gonzalez emphasized the foundation of today's NAAMREI success can be traced to the work and cooperation of three alliances in the area. "They are the North American Technology and Innovation Alliance, Rio South Texas Manufacturing College Alliance, the Region One Education Service Center and the T-STEM Alliance. This cooperation led to the grants that started NAAMREI"

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded \$5 million to support the NAAMREI's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) project. Another \$3 million came from the Texas Workforce Commission to fund employee training. "This is about building the right infrastructure to make this sort of economic development take place in the region," Gonzalez stressed.

NAAMREI's Executive Officer is Wanda Garza of South Texas College, and she knows the alliance has a lot of work to do in the next year. The group re-

cently received \$300,000 for design and planning of America's Third Coast Research and Education Park. Garza explained the design plan has to be submitted within a year.

"We have to submit the application, negotiate the contract and within the next 90 days the master planning will begin. We have exactly 12 months to produce the document." Garza confirmed that UT/PA's Rapid Response Manufacturing Center will be the anchor facility for the park.

Research parks are nothing new in the U.S. and have developed between private sector businesses and universities for decades. NAAMREI received a short course in planning and building successful research parks in 2009 by visiting the Research Triangle in North Carolina, as well as the Centennial Research Park at North Carolina State University...both of which impressed many in the alliance leadership.

The plan for the Valley's new park calls for the use of 80 acres donated by the City of McAllen on south Ware Road just north of STC Technology Campus. Additional adjacent property would increase the physical size of the planned research park and talks are under way to include the property in the park boundaries.

Congressman Ruben Hinojosa worked on securing the funding for developing the research park master



Wanda Garza serves as Executive Officer of the NAAMREI alliance. She is headquartered at South Texas College's Technology Campus in McAllen.

plan. Hinojosa has been a long-time supporter of the project, for a variety of reasons.

"Our area is one of the fastest growing places in the entire country. I have always supported this project because it is a logical step for South Texas. We have the work force in place, the educational institutions to train them and the perfect place logistically to support a major research center for rapid product innovation and advanced manufacturing. We must always stay a step ahead in order to keep the United States first in the global economic scene."

An advertisement for Valley Regional Medical Center's Wound Healing & Hyperbaric Center. The background is a dark blue gradient. At the top, the text "LET OUR DOCTORS HEAL YOUR WOUND," is written in bold, black, sans-serif font. Below this, the phrase "Save Your Life" is written in a large, elegant, golden cursive script. In the center, there is a logo consisting of a blue 'V' with a golden swoosh. Below the logo, the text "VALLEY REGIONAL" is in bold blue, "Medical Center" is in a blue serif font, and "Wound Healing & Hyperbaric Center" is in a blue sans-serif font. At the bottom, the address "100 Alton Gloor Blvd., Suite 160 | 956-350-7291" and the website "www.valleyregionalmedicalcenter.com" are listed. On the left and right sides, there are images of four male doctors in white lab coats with stethoscopes, standing with their arms crossed. In the bottom right corner, there is a yellow starburst graphic with the text "CALL NOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT!" in blue and black.

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Business News

SOMETHING IN THE AIR AT THE PERFUME KING

By Eileen Mattei

Small signs saying “Try me” and “Pruebame” sit propped in front of hundreds of name brand perfumes – Diesel and Liz, Givenchy and Hugo Boss, Sex in the City – at The Perfume King.

Trying new things and taking calculated risks epitomize the business philosophy of the Perfume King himself, Suresh Mansinghani. Ten years ago he was in the jewelry and gold business and was the largest gold dealer in the region. Now El Rey de los Perfumes is the largest perfume retailer south of San Antonio.

“I go with market flow. There is no such thing as a constant. My philosophy is that the market changes rapidly,” said Mansinghani. “In 2003 I saw that gold prices were going up, and we had to change direction.” He got out of gold and into leading-brand trendy and traditional perfumes which he now sells at wholesale prices or lower.

Knowing the market, handling high volumes, and letting the customer test perfumes without a hovering sales clerk have all contributed to the Perfume King’s success. Shoppers have responded to the invitation to spray sample cards with as many perfumes as they care to test. Despite the economy, store sales are running about five percent ahead of last year.

In fact last year, Mansinghani tweaked his operations, expecting a downturn in his predominantly Mexican clientele due to new border crossing regulations, a pinched economy and border violence. “Lately I have changed my emphasis from Mexico to the local market,” he said. Targeting specific demographics, Perfume King’s ads and fliers, complete with sales coupons, let Mansinghani track where his customers come from as they present their coupons. So while sales to Mexican customers have sagged as predicted, new American customers have more than offset that decline.

Perfume may be volatile in many senses, but Mansinghani believes he is leading the field and staying one step ahead of his competitors. “Actually I am the competition.” Today following Mansinghani’s lead, a dozen or perfume shops waft seductive scents out to South Main near The Perfume King. Nevertheless, at times customers have had to be metered into his small 2,000 square foot shop so the crowd wouldn’t exceed safety limitations.

Apologizing for not having a “real” office, Mansinghani explained that he is a hands-on, walking-around type of business owner. His employees obviously like his style. Several of them, including managers Santos Vasquez and Javier Rodriguez, have been with him more than 25 years, dating back to the jewelry store days.

Mansinghani has been mentioned in a Wall Street

Journal article on McAllen, has served on the McAllen Chamber of Commerce Board, and has been president of Rotary and the Downtown Merchant’s Association. Not bad for an immigrant from India by way of Malaysia who worked his way through East Washington State with jobs at Montgomery Ward. Starting as a janitor, he ended up in the management training program for the retailer along with a degree in Business Marketing.

Late in 2009, Mansinghani began diversifying: he became an angel investor. A young bowling buddy, Chad Wilson, was seeking a mentor and financial help to expand his Which Wich? sandwich shops. “I liked him and his new market idea. He is going to be our future. He’s coming up in the world and just needs a little support. Our area is so ready for new ideas and new concepts and new products.”

Mansinghani purchased a small shopping center across from the UTPA campus and turned it around. “It was a dead plaza. I changed the mix of tenants and gave it a facelift. With Which Wich there, it is now really thriving.” Flyers advertising Which Wich have ads on the reverse side for El Rey de Los Perfumes.

“I was blessed with family that gave me help,” said



Suresh Mansinghani (center) owner of Perfume King switch from gold to perfume about 10 years ago. (Mattei)

Mansinghani, crediting also “the Good Lord and my employees.” He believes strongly in giving back to society and helping others as part of an ongoing chain. “I want to be a catalyst. At my eulogy, I want different people to say, “He did something for me,” something that helped me become successful.”

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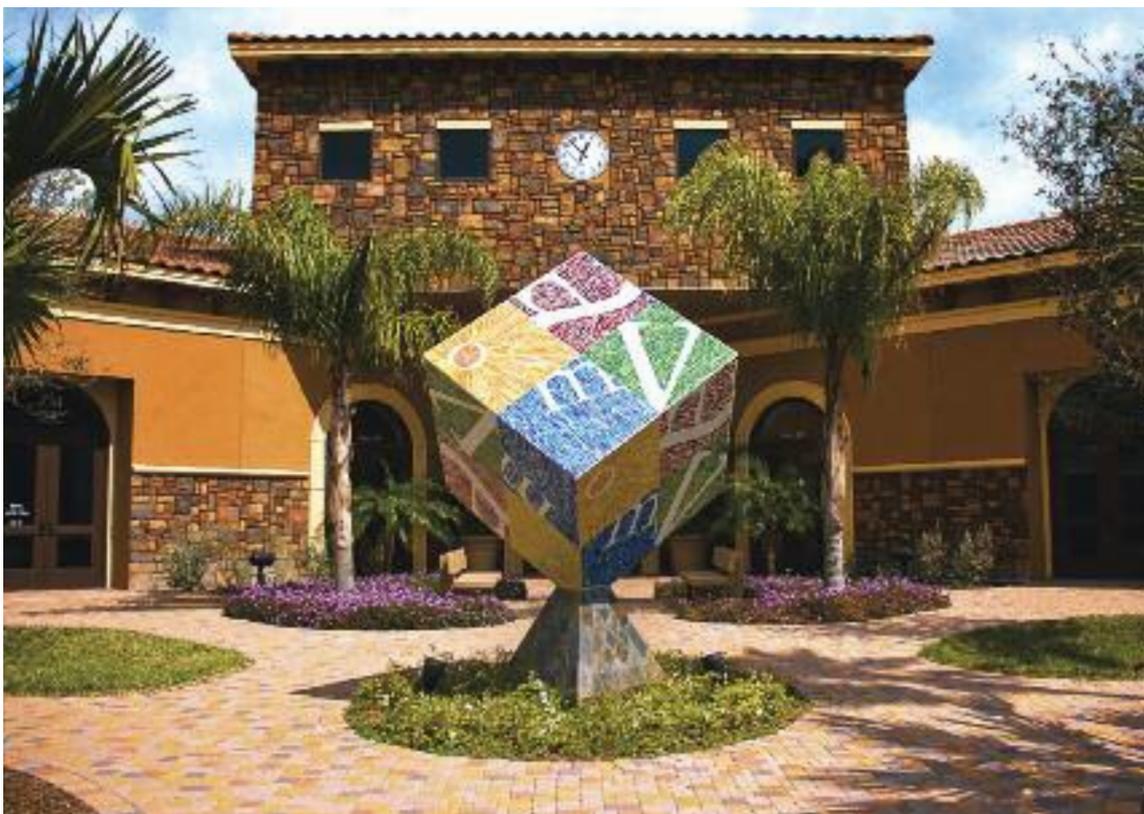
MPC STUDIOS MAKING ITS MARK ON SEVERAL FRONTS

By Kevin Knoch

David Watkins, President and Chief Executive Officer of MPC Studios (with offices in Harlingen and McAllen), refers to his business as an “Advertising Agency for the 21st Century.” The business started in 1998. “It was the right time to get into Web Site development and internet marketing down here in South Texas, because people were starting to feel they needed a Web Site if they didn’t have one already.”

MPC Studios has certainly put in the time to develop their skills. “Since our start up our team has logged over 200,000 hours of custom development and design. We have won dozens of awards for outstanding development and design for Web Site development.” Watkins estimated his firm has helped with the development of over 500 Web Sites.

With this kind of client Web Site numbers, MPC is another Rio Grande Valley company that is building a reputation for quality work outside of the region. MPC has performed development work for state and



MPC Studios office in McAllen. (courtesy)

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national clients. Watkins said that doing one site for the University of Texas Chemistry Department led to work with other departments at the Austin based University.

“As soon as the first university site launched, another department said that they had been looking for just such a site. A third department called and said that they weren’t on the preferred vendors list. They kept looking but couldn’t find what they wanted and came back to us and had us put them on the list.” He added that MPC has recently completed their fourth site for the university.

The Harlingen/McAllen based company’s work can also be seen on American Broadcasting Company Television (ABC-TV) affiliates around the country. “They utilized a tool we have developed. It allows them to put local commercials into the ABC.com video streaming. We were the first in the nation to make that possible. A number of ABC affiliates have asked us to get that going for them. KRGV here was the first, then Austin jumped on a little while later.”

Watkins is quick to point out his success with internet development is attributable to the team that has come together at MPC Studios over the last decade. “We have a very tight team and the core has been with the company for over ten years. General Manager David Winters, our Lead Programmer Sean Clarke

and our Art Director Kate Hurry are all very talented. When we started out they were all young, but they have really grown over the years to become leaders in this industry.”

Another client grouping includes the health care industry. “In the health care industry, we have been doing a lot of custom development for laboratories. We do their internet and employment system.” The CEO stated they represent a number of economic development corporations in the Valley and another out-of-area client grouping is the oil region of Pennsylvania.

MPC Studios doesn’t confine itself to internet interests and web marketing. Watkins points out. “We always start with brand, and make sure that you have a good solid identity.” The 20th century advertising is still relevant. The traditional marketing is still pertinent, but things have changed. If you just rely on radio, TV, and newspaper you are missing out on the tidal wave of change.” The firm works in all avenues of advertising for their clients.

But internet is the company’s strength. “In our logo we have three diamonds and they represent traditional internet marketing. At the core is the company Web Site, surrounded by search engine strategies, social networking strategies and online promotions. We are indeed recognized in our industry for doing

that correctly and well.”

He continued, “The second area is traditional branding and marketing that still has an important role in the success of a business.. That includes print, billboard, TV, radio, direct mail and all of the time-honored marketing outlets.” The third area is custom application development. “This means you are looking for a tool to do a specific process and if you can’t find something like that you have to build it. In our case it has been building it for laboratories, vehicle dealers or for hospitals or television. You can’t buy the tool off the shelf.”

Watkins didn’t start out working in advertising or with a computer always in front of him. He has a varied background, before opening MCP Studios. He spent 12 years in radio and six years in television working as a producer for Channel 4. Add to that a six-year stint in a high school classroom which was split between Harlingen’s two public high schools.

Once he decided to take the entrepreneurial leap, he admitted that he sold assets and maxed out his credit cards. Looking back he feels it was well worth it. Across the Rio Grande Valley there are a number of satisfied customers that are content Watkins left the classroom to captain his own company.

McAllen Chamber of Commerce President Steve

Ahlenius is one who is please about MPC Studios creation. “They have worked with us for 11 years and have done all of our Web Site development. They have redesigned our Web Sites and the CVB (Convention and Visitors Bureau) site several times over the years.” The Chamber’s relationship with MPC is exclusively for internet services.

Ahlenius confirmed the quality of MPC Studios work. “We have won numerous awards, including three or four for Web Designs. We have many changes with our sites. It is a turnkey deal with them. They maintain the sites and take care of our internet needs. It is great to see how that business has grown and expanded over the years. They are an entrepreneurial success story.”

Weslaco’s Knapp Medical Center Vice President of Business Development Debby Rektorik explains MPC Studios performs internet and advertising agency duties for the not- for-profit hospital. “They started working with us on our first Web site and have continued since then.” Rektorik estimated that was seven or eight years ago, adding that about five years ago the person handling the hospital's advertising work passed away and MPC Studios then assumed the ad agency duties.

“That relationship has grown into lots of different

avenues. They do advertising for us, have done photography and videos... all of the Web tools. We are going to be airing some new television commercials for which they did the production work.”

One company with offices in Brownsville and Houston employees MPC Studios. Proficiency Testing Service employs MPC for their expertise in those specialized internet tools. Vice President for Sales and Marketing Ken Schill works out of Proficiency Testing Service’s Brownsville office and explains what his company does.

“We produce proficiency testing programs for clinical laboratories. They are required by law, three times each year, to participate in some form of proficiency testing to maintain their license. What MPC has created for us is an online portal where our customers can enter results. They can also access all of the reports of their testing online. What they have created for us is a paperless process.”

Schill continued, “MPC has done a good job for us. They have created a lot of tools for us.” Adding, “We are always looking for competent companies. They have a very talented programmer in Sean Clarke. They have done some sophisticated work for us. I think MPC does a fine job of internet development in the Valley.”

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Business Feature

BIOFUEL DEVELOPER EXPANDING IN BROWNSVILLE

By Adolfo Pesquera

Within the United States and overseas, interest in algae as a source of biofuel has inspired numerous start-up research and development firms - one of them being Brownsville-based Photon8 Inc.

Brad Bartilson, Photon8's founder, had a chance to rub shoulders with other algae research groups in March at energy technology conferences in Arlington and Houston. Venture capitalists attend these conferences to get a better idea of which laboratories appear to be doing the most promising work.

"It seemed we got the bulk of interest," Bartilson said.

Momentum has been on Photon8's side of late. The company applied for assistance through the Texas Emerging Technology Fund last year and landed a \$1 million grant that was announced through the governor's office in January. Bartilson noted the unique conditions of the TETF money.

"It's not a grant, per se, rather a kind of loan that

goes away when we acquire the next round of funding. Then they take shares in the company," Bartilson said.

Regardless, the review process entailed pitching the firm's concept to experienced venture capitalists. A working prototype was required, "and we had one at that stage," he added.

Bartilson assembled his Brownsville team last summer, drawing in scientists from across the nation on faith that the money was coming. But to get started, he had to convince the Greater Brownsville Incentive Corp. for an advance of \$300,000. With that and help through University of Texas - Brownsville channels, Bartilson got an office and lab equipment.

Irv Downing, vice president of Economic Development and Community Services at UTB, said the university had been working with Photon8 since late 2008.

"It's a part of our mission to be a catalyst for economic development in this region," Downing said.

"With regard to Photon8's goal of commercialization

of a biofuel, this part of Texas provides some advan-



Entrance of UTB/TSC ITEC Campus where Photon 8 is headquartered (A. Pesquera)

tages."

Algae as an alternative to crude oil, requires a lot of cheap land near the sea and plenty of sunlight. Photon8 relocated from New Jersey to take advantage of these regional attributes. Coupled with that is renewed interest at the federal government level in alternative energy research, Downing acknowledged. He also added that the university could benefit directly by having professors and students collaborate with Photon8's scientific team, particularly in the disciplines of chemistry, microbiology and electrical engineering.

"One goal is to look for ways to connect our researchers with out-of-area researchers. These are the kind of tenants we are focused on - new, small companies with the potential to grow. The idea is to help them in the early stages and, hopefully, they will stay in this region."

Photon8's research is in a field that is relatively new, compared to the development of corn, sugar cane and other biofuels. Biofuels that are commercially in use, however, indirectly raise food prices by competing for arable land, and they haven't been sustainable without subsidies. Algae is considered a third generation biofuel - a term defined by the U.S. Department of Energy as designed exclusively for fuel production.

Of the plant organisms targeted, algae is the most promising. As reported in WIPO Magazine, Greg Mitchell of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego, said, "Algae can produce more biomass and more biofuel molecules much more efficiently in time and space than any terrestrial plant. Algae can produce 100 times more veg-

An advertisement for Barcelona Restaurant Bar & Tapas. The ad features a woman in a red flamenco dress. The text includes the restaurant's name, a Facebook link, a slogan, happy hour information, and the address and phone number.

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etable oil per acre per year than soy beans and 10 times more than oil palm."

Bartilson would seem an unlikely algae researcher. His research background, in thermal mechanics and fluids modeling, led him to work on supercomputer architecture with Cray Research, later getting involved in various start-ups working with energy storage concepts.

"A gentleman from Wall Street asked me to look at an algae," Bartilson recalled. "That was not my background. "But I did and I noticed that the way people were attacking the problem involved capital expenditures that were way too big to ever make it profitable."

A lot of the R&D involved dehydrating algae to reduce the material to the density of a tree. The effective cost of this fuel was \$26 a gallon; a viable process had to reduce the cost by two orders of magnitude, Bartilson said.

Bartilson recruited a geneticist to see about producing an algae strain with a higher lipid content, lipids being the vegetable oil to be harvested. The next step was to develop a low-cost photobioreactor; Photon8's initial patent was on this reactor. The nine-person research team has since developed another 21 inventions.

Finally, he needed a cell viable extraction (CVE) process.

"It is a multi-component approach that invades the cell wall to pull lipids out without killing the algae," Bartilson explained.

Photon8 launched into the next round of fundraising in April. The company needs to raise \$6.5 million.

"That will cover our efforts for the next two years and result in an operating test plant," Bartilson said. "We're looking to produce 15,000 gallons of algae oil annually from that plant."

Photon8 has no interest in refining the oil for direct sale to fuel suppliers. That process is well established and should be left to others, Bartilson remarked. The algae oil would be feed stock in other companies' production line, and it would be sold at a rate competitive with diesel.

Most importantly, Bartilson sees Photon8's product as viable without government subsidies. When government subsidies go away, the affected industry can be devastated.



Photon 8 President and CEO Brad Bartilson (third from left) and his research team.. (A. Pesquera)

"These aren't large companies, and they got hurt by subsidy cuts. Two years ago, there were 144 bio-refiners ... there are only a handful operating today."

The plant Bartilson envisions is scalable, and that has drawn interest. He claims to have multiple letters of intent for the construction of plants that would produce 100 million gallons per year.

That level of production, he estimates, would require about 10,000 acres of non-arable land.

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History & Heritage

ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY: STORY OF LA REFORMA RANCH

[In our June issue we present a condensed version of a historical pamphlet by Doctor Cayetano E. Barrera III of McAllen. We are privileged to have Dr. Barrera grace our pages. His work was first published in 1998, and he is responsible for starting the movement to honor Hispanic heritage with a monument on the state capitol grounds in Austin, ten years ago.]

By Dr. Cayetano Barrera

La Reforma Ranch in northern Starr and Hidalgo counties was established in 1898. The matriarch that brought her family to La Reforma was Antonia Guerra, a native of the town of Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Antonio's husband, Manuel Guerra, had died of a heart attack in 1865, just before the birth of her last child, Arcadio. The marriage produced three chil-

of notable ancestors of La Reforma families. He picks up the story on rainy winter Sunday in the late 19th century in Mier, Tamaulipas, over 100 years later.

It was sometime before 1880 in Mier, that Antonia Guerra had a quarrel with the local priest during Mass, and as a result decided to become a Methodist. This was told to me by Belen Guerra de Longoria, her granddaughter. It was a cold rainy Sunday in January and only Antonia with her baby and her sister-in-law were in attendance at Mass and the priest was angry because of the poor attendance. When her baby began to cry, the priest called out and told her to take "that bawling calf" out of the church, and she in turn gave the priest a piece of her mind and left the church.

Methodist missionaries from the United States

The Charco Redondo was isolated and at the time small bands of Indians still hunted and roamed the area. In 1898, after 15 years and six more Barrera children, it was decided to move from Charco Redondo to La Reforma Ranch in northern Starr and Hidalgo counties. The reason for the move is not known, but it could be because of the drought that year or the brackish well water, or possibly to be nearer to Mier.

Several thousand acres were bought by Arcadio Guerra, Cayetano Barrera and Dario Guerra in the San Jose Grant located in northern Starr and Hidalgo counties. It is said the name La Reforma or the Reformation was chosen because they were surrounded by ranches named after saints: San Isidro, San Juanito, Santa Rita, San Ramon, and Santa Elena.

A large well was dug as the first order of business. The large eight foot square well straddled the fence between Barrera and Guerra ranches. The well wall and cistern were made of local caliche stone and plaster. Antonia's cattle brand, which she had registered in Mier and Starr county, was the "Muneca", or doll, a variation of this brand is now used by Felo Guerra and Guerra Brothers. It can still be seen on the entry gate of the ranch today.

Arcadio, Antonia Guerra's youngest child, apprenticed himself at a young age in his uncle's store in Falfurrias, Texas. Arcadio would later become the merchant of the family and established stores in Falfurrias, Texas, Monte Cristo, Noria Cardenena Ranch and La Reforma. Arcadio also started a cotton gin and a lumber yard at the ranch. By 1939, Arcadio had acquired over 15,000 acres of land and several businesses, but his family stayed on at La Reforma.

Arcadio Guerra became well known for his philanthropic activities, sponsoring many ranch children in their higher education, mostly at Holding Institute in Laredo, Texas, and Business College in San Antonio. Don Arcadio was a serious man, not much given to levity and ran a strict ranch through Caporales. Drinking alcohol and drunkenness were not tolerated on the ranch.

In 1923 Don Arcadio was knocked down by a mule and sustained a severe concussion that left him partially incapacitated. He was taken to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota by Dr. Cayetano Barrera, his nephew, but not much could be done for him at that time. He moved his family to San Antonio to be near a doctor specializing in his condition. After eight years in San Antonio, Don Arcadio moved back to the Valley and died in Mission in 1939.



This picture was taken in 1902 at the La Reforma Ranch. Family Matriarch Antonia Guerra is in the middle. After a yellow fever epidemic in 1882, she had lead the family from Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico into South Texas. First settling near present day Falfurrias, Texas. Later they started La Reforma ranch in northern Starr and Hidalgo counties in 1898. (courtesy)

dren, Crisanta Guerra de Barrera, Dario Guerra, and Arcadio Guerra.

The family had deep roots in Mexico and Spain, and each root has it's unique journey to the ranch in South Texas. Most of the ancestors of La Reforma families came to Mexico during the conquest of Mexico or soon thereafter. The ultimate goal was land, abundant land, where they could raise their families and prosper. At least ten patriarchs of the Guerra and Barrera families received Porcion land grants on the Rio Grande in 1767, during the Spanish Colonial period.

Dr. Barrera then outlines the accomplishments

had frequented Mier since about 1860, holding services in private homes. These missionaries were undoubtedly Antonia's Guerra's connection to the new Methodist church missionary school, Holding Institute in Laredo, Texas. Although not all of Antonia's descendants became Methodist, many years later Antonia's descendants became the nucleus of a large Methodist congregation in south Mission, Texas

Dr. Barrera explained the family first settled at Charco Redondo (west of present day Falfurrias) for 15 years, but in 1898 the family moved and settled in La Reforma Ranch, in northern Starr and Hidalgo counties.

Don Arcadio's children Arcadio Jr. and Rafael, and later Rafael's children, as Guerra Brothers, gained national and international reputations as premier purebred cattle breeders, selling their cattle around the world. The family later moved from La Reforma to their ranch in Linn, Texas.

Dario Guerra sold his interest in La Reforma to his brother Arcadio and moved his family back to Mier around 1906. Dario's family would visit La Reforma frequently, especially during the summers. In 1913, Dario had to leave Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and moved his family to safety in Mission, Texas, where he started a wholesale business and also had a retail store. Dario later bought Los Caballos Ranch a few miles south of La Reforma where he established ranching operations.

Cayetano and Crisanta Barrera also moved to Mission where he helped his children establish themselves in several businesses including a drug store, a general store, and an auto supply store. Cayetano Barrera Jr. attended Baylor University College of Medicine, and in 1920, became the first Hispanic to graduate from a Texas Medical School. His brother Pedro later became a pharmacist in 1931.

Older son Francisco bought out most of the Barrera heirs, and established his headquarters at

Puerto Rico Ranch, on the southeast corner of La Reforma, about three miles from the main ranch.

La Reforma was a way station for families from Mier who traveled to their ranches in the Mier jurisdiction of south Texas, which extended from the Rio Grande to the Nueces River. At one time twenty families and over 100 individuals lived at La Reforma.

Around the turn of the century Antonia Guerra became very ill and expressed her desire to die in her home town of Mier. In a semi-conscious state she was transported by wagon to Rio Grande City and before she died she had regained consciousness long enough to realize she was back in Mier.

At first when children of the three families got married, they established satellite ranches within the La Reforma Ranch community. As the families at La Reforma grew larger, most of the new families moved to Valley towns, namely Mission, Texas, where they established businesses. At one time there were 22 households, members of the Barrera and Guerra families, living in Mission, all within a two block radius.

The family stories of La Reforma, with a few



Dr. Cayetano E. Barrera is a native of Mission, Texas. His family on both sides can trace their presence in the Rio Grande Valley back 250 years. Dr. Barrera is credited with starting the movement to have a monument placed on the Capitol grounds in Austin, Texas honoring Hispanic Heritage in Texas. (courtesy)

variations, are typical of hundreds of families who form our unique culture on the South Texas ranch country. We hope that this modest account of one family's history will stimulate others into inquiring into their own family's past.

The Valley Business Report wants to thank the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg and Dr. Barrera for their help with this presentation. A complete version One Family's Journey, The Story of La Reforma Ranch is available at the museum.

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Business Profile

HARLINGEN WELCOMES OUTDOOR RETAILER AND NEW DEVELOPMENT

By Kevin Knoch

It was good news for the City of Harlingen when the announcement was made that Bass Pro Shops would be calling the city home. The major outdoor retailer announced its plans to open the doors of one of its stores in the city in October of 2011. A full house at the Harlingen Cultural Arts Center applauded approval of the revelation Friday April 30, 2010.

Bass Pro Shops are not only noteworthy for their size (the Harlingen outlet is expected to cover 130,000 to 150,000 square feet), but as tourist attractions experienced by millions of visitors from far and wide. The Harlingen site will be Bass Pro Shops' 57th location across the United States and Canada. The store will be distinctively designed with a South Texas outdoors theme. Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell pointed out "that Bass stores on average attract three million visitors annually."

The outdoor retailer can expect customer base from across the Rio Grande Valley, north through the Coastal Bend area incorporating Corpus Christi and south from Mexico including

the Monterrey area. The Harlingen facility will be the anchor for a new development...Cameron Crossing... located appropriately at the junction of the Valley's east/west and north/south expressway's Highway 83 and Highway 77. Construction is expected to break ground in September of 2010.

The Harlingen Economic Development Corporation had been in negotiations with the company for a number of years prior to the pronouncement. Harlingen EDC Board President Armando Elizalde affirmed the retailer will draw outdoor enthusiasts from South Texas and Northern Mexico, declaring that the potential of Cameron Crossing development, with Bass Pro Shop as the flagship facility, could "transform Harlingen."

Once built out, Cameron Crossing will have an impact on the city tax revenues and employment. An economic impact study performed by Austin's Impact DataSource relates the new development will have over 850,000 sq. ft. available for development. The Bass Pro Shop plans call for restaurants, other retail outlets and a hotel. Cameron Crossing developers plan to invest \$203 million into the 89-acre site.

The Impact DataSource study approximates Cameron Crossing's future sales. "When fully developed, the facility will have estimated annual taxable sales of \$185.8 million, lodging sales of \$4.8 million and 1,315 workers, with annual salaries of \$31 million." The build out is expected to take eight years.

Direct benefits to the city are estimated at just over \$38 million for the first ten years of operation at Cameron Crossing, stated the economic impact study. Included in the number is nearly \$25.5 million in sales tax revenue. The expected hotel is projected to generate just over \$5 million in occupancy taxes. The city will spend over \$3.6 million on providing utilities and services for the development.

Just as the HEDC studied the influence of the store and the development, Bass Pro Shops did their homework when it came to Harlingen and the Rio Grande Valley. "What we look at for at any location is the number of catalogue and internet customers we have in the area. We want to know if we have a built-in data base of customers in that area," related Larry Whiteley, Manager of Communications for Bass Pro Shops located in Springfield, Missouri.

Whiteley pointed out the company also researches the number of hunting and fishing licenses sold in an area. "We always look for high traffic locations. We are mainly at the intersection of major highways and are very visible from major highways, with high traffic numbers going by." Whiteley added the company has yet to work on the theme or the design of the Harlingen location.

The Harlingen EDC in a prepared statement set out what customers can expect at the new Bass Pro Shops location.



Bass Pro Outdoor World in Oklahoma City. (Bass Pro Shops)

"The Harlingen store will offer outdoor enthusiasts three and half football fields of shopping excitement with the area's largest selection of equipment and clothing for hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, camping, outdoor cooking and more. A gift and nature center will also serve up a wide variety of outdoor-related items from lamps and dishes to bird feeders and furniture."

The story behind the story has been that mum is the word. HEDC Chief Executive Officer Bill Martin explained the genesis of bringing Bass Pro Shops to Harlingen predated his time with the city. In fact talks started before a separate EDC office existed, and first contact was made with the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce.

"It has been a long term project," stated Martin. Talks had started with the Chamber over two and half years ago before he was on the job. "At that time the Chamber had one of the contracts to provide economic development services for the city. Then I was hired in September of 2007 for those duties."

"In 2008 I signed a non-disclosure agreement with Bass." Martin recalled that he would hear conversations around town speculating about the possibility of a major retailer coming to the area. "Because of the strict confidentiality of the project, most people were not told who the company was. A code name was assigned to it; we called it 'Project Nebraska'. We would have regular briefings of the city commission and the EDC board to keep them informed of the negotiations." Only a handful of people knew the identity of the company.

Martin added, city officials met with Bass about five times in the last two years. "We went to their headquarters (Springfield, Missouri) twice. He emphasized, "People shouldn't look at this as just a Bass Pro Shop deal. You need to look at Bass Pro Shop and the entire development. It is going to have a huge impact on the community."

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Business News

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND TO HOST NBA D-LEAGUE SHOWCASE

By Kevin Knoch

National Basketball Association Development League (NBAD-League) President Dan Reed predicts that "South Padre Island will be the center of the professional basketball world in January, 2011." When it comes to scouting and assessing talent, Reed is right on the mark. The South Padre Island Convention Centre will host the annual NBA Development League Showcase January 10-13, 2011.

The NBAD-League Showcase brings all of the league teams to one site, where regular season contests will take place. During the Showcase each team will play two games, and while this is not a separate tournament the games will count in the regular season standings. What will make it the focus of the professional basketball is the fact that all 30 NBA franchise scouting departments will be present evaluating talent. During the four-day event 16 professional games will take place.

It is the first time since the Showcase was launched in 2005 that the event will not be held at a league arena. The Showcase is intended to give NBA player personnel executives, general managers and scouts a close-up look at league talent. The exposure can lead to call ups from NBA teams. Reed pointed out, "19 players who participated in last year's Showcase played in the NBA this past season."

SPI Mayor Bob Pinkerton welcomed the event. "We keep stepping up the ladder," Pinkerton related. "The SPI Convention Centre has hosted high school tournaments, National College Athletic Association division one tournaments and now professional basketball." The SPI building has also hosted a late November major college tournament for the last seven years.

Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Dan Quandt said, "Talk about bringing the Showcase to the Island started a few years ago." The discussion picked up after SPI hosted a Rio Grande Valley Viper exhibition game in November of 2009. Quandt added the league made the decision to bring the event to SPI over a month ago, but it was in the middle of the Viper playoff run to their first NBA D-League title. Thus the announcement was held back until May 18, 2010.

Rio Grande Valley Viper President Brian Michael Cooper declared, "This is a reach out to fans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley." Cooper wants the Vipers to be seen in Cameron County and exposed to different market segments naming Winter Texans who visit the Laguna Madre Area in the winter as one the franchise would like to reach. As for his team's prospects for the 2010-2011 campaign, he would only venture "We are looking for great things next season and defending

our D-League Championship."

The Town of South Padre Island is looking forward to the next Showcase because of the potential of its economic impact. Quandt pointed out this is a first for the league and the Convention Centre. "It is the first time away from a team arena. They are really doing it to build attendance, and this is the first time they are holding it in a place that is good for tourism. Our whole goal is to bring more people here and to create more awareness of South Padre Island."

Quandt went on to say the SPI/CVB is going make a special effort to promote the event. "There are 17 teams in this league." Many of these teams are in cold weather climates. The CVB will be advertising in league markets that "This is your special Christmas gift, a trip to South Padre Island during the Showcase." The Executive Director went on to say the publicity and the awareness of SPI from the 30 NBA teams sending people to visit is priceless. "They are going to start to talk about it in a few weeks at the NBA League meeting in Chicago."



Left to Right RGV Vipers President Brian Michael Cooper, SPI Mayor Bob Pinkerton, SPI CVB Director Dan Quandt announce the D-League Showcase will be held January 10-13th, 2011 at the SPI Convention Centre. (courtesy)

Pinkerton feels the economic impact will be hard to calculate. "I think it will be good will and word of mouth advertising more than anything else... just having all of the NBA teams aware of us is going to generate a lot of excitement."

An advertisement for Indian Ridge Bed & Breakfast. The top half of the ad shows a lush tropical scene with a swimming pool and a large waterfall. Overlaid on the image is the text "A Refreshing Place for" in a large, stylized font. Below this, a list of amenities is presented with diamond-shaped bullet points: "corporate retreats", "special events", "getaways", and "birding". At the bottom of the ad, there is a logo featuring a silhouette of a person on a horse, followed by the text "Indian Ridge BED & BREAKFAST". To the right of the logo, the contact information is listed: "(956) 519-3305", "209 W. Orange Grove Rd.", "Mission, TX 78574", and "www.indian-ridge-bb.com".

Business News

HOW DO WE REVIVE DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE?

By Kevin Knoch

It has been a question floating around the city for decades. "What can we do to revitalize downtown Brownsville and bring people and merchants back to the central city?" Ideas and suggestions have been put forward for years, but outside of some individual outstanding historical preservation work, an accepted overall plan for revitalizing the 1,584 acre downtown has yet to take hold.

The City of Brownsville Planning Department and the United Brownsville Downtown Committee hosted a workshop May 11, 2010 to discuss avenues to bring the city's core up to its potential. The event drew an overflow crowd at center court of UTB/TSC International Technology Education and Commerce Center (ITEC) (formerly the Amigoland Mall). Several speakers made presentations followed by a question and answer period.

Downtown, once the vibrant commercial center of Brownsville, changed much as country changed after World War Two. Only locally the change was a little slower than most parts of the country. Many cities and towns saw the start of mass movement to the suburbs in the early 1950s. It didn't happen to Brownsville downtown commercial interests until the opening

of Amigoland Mall in the late 60s and early 1970s.

Downtown at one time buzzed with business, buoyed by pedestrian purchasers from Matamoros. Competition from merchants located on Central Boulevard and Boca Chica Boulevard to the north started to take a toll on downtown retailers. A population shift north with another mall opening on the city's northern edge, combined with several Mexican Peso devaluations which diluted the Mexican shoppers purchasing power, sealed downtown's fate. The combination of circumstances sent downtown into a spiraling decline by the early 80's that many believe continues to this day.

UTB/TSC History Professor Emeritus Anthony Knopp took the lectern first and outlined the history of the city's central district. Knopp pointed out the 1920's brought growth to Brownsville. "Many businesses started during this period. The El Jardin Hotel and the Gateway Bridge opened during the 1920's. A street car line opened on Elizabeth and Levee Street." Knopp added the end of WW Two brought a population surge and the closing of Fort Brown had a major affect on the city's commerce.

He continued pointing out that merchants knew they were losing ground by the 1980s, but the results of an attempted re-



Interior courtyard of Galleria 409 on Elizabeth St. The art gallery was mentioned at the workshop as an example of the individual renovation work that has improved Downtown Brownsville. (S. Campbell)

talization in a sense backfired. "The idea was to modernize, but in doing so we lost many of our historic buildings." Knopp feels there is reason to be optimistic about the future of downtown. "The growing impact of UTB/TSC campus will have a positive effect."

Not surprisingly the professor feels history will be the key. "Historical renovations at the Gallery 409, Bullock Building and Dancy Courthouse have added to downtown's appeal, but the picture is still incomplete." Adding historical tours would bring newcomers to the central city he believes.

George Ramirez is president of Polibrid Coatings, an industrial paint manufacturer in Brownsville. He is a member of the United Brownsville Downtown Committee, a coalition of several city-related governmental entities mandated to implement cooperation in long range strategic planning for the city.

Ramirez is a firm believer Brownsville's downtown revitalization will come about through tourism, with history being the attraction. "We want downtown to become the premier historical destination in the Rio Grande Valley." He strongly suggested tax reinvestment zones may be the vehicle to spur investment in the area. Emphasizing the city isn't likely to invest large amounts of funding from the general fund.

Brownsville's Comprehensive Planning Manager Ramiro Gonzalez was the last speaker of the evening. Gonzalez stated there are a number of reasons to revitalize the city's core... heritage tourism, urban living, expanding entertainment and cultural venues. He pointed out that Gladys Porter Zoo and the Fine Arts Museum on downtown's northern corridor draw a combined 450,000 visitors a year. ..hypothetically asking how do we get those numbers into downtown?

Gonzalez said after the meeting that he expects the first step in the process, to be taken by the city commission. He feels waving "conditional use fees" for parts of downtown would be a good first step in the process of attracting investment in the inner city.

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Health News

VALLEY REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER CELEBRATES 35 YEARS OF CARING

By Robin Brechot

Thirty-five years ago, on June 16, 1975, Valley Regional Medical Center (VRMC) admitted its first patients under the name Valley Community Hospital. Since its humble beginnings as a small facility with 117 beds, Valley Regional Medical Center has doubled in size, now providing 214 licensed beds and staffing more than 200 physicians representing 25 specialties. The hospital is affiliated with HCA, the largest healthcare company in the world.

"This month we celebrate thirty-five years of history... thirty-five years of providing exceptional healthcare to the families in our communities," said David Handley, CEO, Valley Regional Medical Center. "The care we provide at VRMC reflects our innovative technology and unwavering commitment to patient care patient safety and compassion. When you come to Valley Regional Medical Center, we want you to feel like family."

Many things have changed since VRMC first opened its doors, but the sense of family continues to permeate the culture of the hospital. In fact, three employees who started with the hospital back in 1975 are still working at Valley Regional Medical Center.

Sostenes Mireles is one such employee who remembers his first day on the job very well; he had to be transported to the hospital by trailer because the area around the hospital was flooded. "There have been many changes during the past 35 years but the biggest and one of the best changes was moving to our current location near the freeway, making us much more accessible for our patients," said Sostenes, Clinical Manager of the Laboratory Department.

The heart of Valley Regional Medical Center is certainly its staff, not only in their delivery of compassionate care, but in their level of commitment to excellence. VRMC leads the Rio Grande Valley with the number of nurses who have obtained advanced certifications. The hospital is also a leader in a vast array of high quality programs, including advanced diagnostic imaging, interventional cardiac catheterization, open heart surgery, laparoscopic and endoscopic surgeries, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, women's services and neonatal intensive care.

VRMC's Emergency Department is a designated Level III Trauma Center treating a wide range of emergency needs 24 hours a day.

It's not surprising that VRMC is known for its healthcare leadership and innovation. It is a hospital recognized for its many "firsts" in the Rio Grande Valley and the recipient of many top rankings and awards. VRMC was the first facility to offer CT scans in Brownsville and followed as the first to

offer the advanced technology of 16 and 64 slice services. In 2004, the facility was the first hospital south of San Antonio to offer Robot...RX, a robot that dispenses patient medication ensuring more accurate dosing and fewer errors. From 2006-2008, VRMC was rated in the top five percent in the nation by HealthGrades.

In 2008, the hospital also had the most employees with national Certifications in their specialty areas (34) and as of April of this year, that number has risen to more than 60. In 2009, the hospital determined it would beat the minimum wage by 20 percent, offering its minimum wage employees an opportunity to earn a living. Also in 2009, VRMC was the only hospital south of San Antonio offering the innovation of the smallest heart pump and a PDA wireless system providing 24/7 contact between obstetricians and their patients' progress.

Valley Regional Medical Center, located in the rapidly developing north side of Brownsville, also serves South Padre Island, Port Isabel, Los Fresnos, and San Benito.

We're proud to have 60 employees that have made Valley Regional Medical Center their home for more than 15



Valley Regional Medical Center staff in front of new facility 35 years after VRMC start-up in 1975. (courtesy)

years. For the past 35 years we've been committed to providing quality and compassionate care and we'll continue to treat our patients like family, making Valley Regional Medical Center the community's first choice for healthcare.

Robin Brechot is Community Relations Manager of Valley Regional Medical Center.



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Business Feature

MCALLEN AIRPORT BUSINESS INCREASING

[Editor's note: First in a series on the Rio Grande Valley's three major commercial airports]

By Davis Rankin

McAllen is on the verge of being the Valley's largest airport, at least in terms of passengers. It almost happened last year when McAllen Miller International Airport boarded only 82 fewer passengers than Harlingen's Valley International Airport and 2010 is also off to a strong start for McAllen. Harlingen had 370,028 enplanements, or passenger boarding's, in 2009, while McAllen counted 369, 946. The two cities account for 90% of Valley boarding's and Brownsville has the remaining 10%.

"We have in the last few years closed the gap," observed Director of Aviation Philip K. Brown. "Part of the reason for that is that seven out of the last eight months or so McAllen has had positive growth of 1 or 2 percent, whereas Harlingen has had negative growth consistently for the last couple of years, in terms of en-

planed passengers."

McAllen's good fortune continued the first three months of 2010, with boarding's up 4% over 2009 while Harlingen went down 8%. Brown credits the local economy for the growth, saying "McAllen's economy continues to be strong. We have the maquilas operating right across the river and that causes the business traveler to come into McAllen."

Four airlines serve McAllen: American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Allegiant Air and Continental Airlines, which has flown into McAllen, in one form or another, since 1952.

Commercial air service started in McAllen in July, 1952, with the arrival of Trans Texas Airways. A route and fare schedule from that year featuring an illustration



View of terminal at McAllen Miller International Airport as plane taxi's to gate. (courtesy)

of a DC-3 Starliner shows TTA (Tree Top Airways to wags) serving 27 Texas cities and towns. These were small towns such as Palestine, Marfa and McCamey, as well as Alice and Brownsville, Harlingen and Mission-McAllen-Edinburg as it was then styled. A round trip from McAllen to Brownsville cost \$8.70.

Trans Texas became Texas International and eventually Continental. It was announced May 3, 2010, that Continental and United Airlines will merge and the new company will be called United Airlines.

In its January 1928 edition, a Valley magazine called Monty's Monthly reported that "McAllen... has decided to purchase land on which to establish an airport. A joint committee from the city commission and the Chamber of Commerce has been appointed to make a survey of the situation and locate a field suitable to meet the requirements.

The airport takes its name from businessman Sam Miller, credited with donating 109 acres in 1930 for an airport. City officials formally dedicated Miller Municipal Airport in November, 1940.

Not only does the airport benefit from the McAllen and Valley economy that is doing better than most of America, but it also helps feed the economy.

"Air service is absolutely critical for the economic development of the area," says

McAllen's top economic developer. It's extremely important because we're a global community," explained the President of McAllen Economic Development Corporation, Keith Patridge.

"For example, right now we have maquilas in McAllen and Reynosa from 19 different countries around the world and we're working about five countries now that are looking at the area as a place to establish operations. They really won't consider some place that doesn't have reasonably good air service and by

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reasonably good I'm saying at least service that can get to that location with one stop, maybe through a hub, and then getting there. And if you have big airplanes, that's even better," Patridge said.

Former Mission Mayor Pat Townsend echoes Patridge, saying the airport plays a regional role "so it is absolutely a large part of our economic activity.

"If you look at Sharyland Plantation, which straddles both Mission & McAllen, in particular the Sharyland Business Park and the manufacturers that are represented there, all of those people use it, particularly since the Delta connection has been added.

Now your first stop is outside the State of Texas, which for some travelers is important," said Townsend, President and CEO of the Mission Economic Development Authority. Delta flies directly to Memphis, Tenn. from McAllen.

Airport director Brown sums it up, saying McAllen International "is entwined with the entire economic development of the Valley.

"When our economic development corporation goes to visit a company to try to talk about that company moving to McAllen, one of the questions that is more than likely asked is 'How easy is it to get to McAllen?' 'Can I get to McAllen, do my business and get out the same day?' 'Is there good air service?' 'How much

does it cost to go to McAllen?'"

Both Townsend and Patridge say they urge Brown to continue pushing for more flights to more destinations. Currently the airport offers direct flights to Dallas, Houston, Memphis, Las Vegas and Orlando (scheduled for June).

"I'm spending a lot of time personally on air service development," explains Brown, "and I'm going to the airlines and telling them what kind of money they're making here, how it's a good market for them."

There's a natural tension between what the airlines want and what passengers want. The higher the ticket prices in a market, the more the airlines like it. "The lower the ticket prices in a market, the more I like it," Brown continued, "because that means more people will fly."

Brown said his "ballpark" calculations show that every enplaned passenger is worth about \$9 in revenue to the airport through landing fees charged to the airline, boarding bridge use, concessions and the \$3 a head Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) included in each ticket. PFC money can only be spent on airport capital improvements.



McAllen Miller International Airport terminal and plane in the mid 1960s. (Museum of South Texas History)

Townsend said the airport is "absolutely a large regional component of what we do," and he views it as a "regional" facility controlled by McAllen, with which he is comfortable. He is also comfortable enough to "regularly" tell Patridge and other McAllen officials to continue to upgrade and renovate the facility.

The airport recently added a food court and passengers will soon see a familiar venue when the existing UETA store is replaced by a CNBC store, which will be about 1,000 square feet, double the size of the present UETA store. He received permission from City Com-

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Opinion

CANCER KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

By Fawn Foudray-Golich

It is called silent, quick, and deadly, and claims far too many lives each year. Mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, friends ...cancer has no boundaries. In its final stages it is a horrible disease that strips all basic pride from its victims. It is the most dreaded of all illnesses, and can happen to anybody.

The 'good news' is that our American Cancer Society has invested nearly \$3 billion in cancer research that has saved millions of lives. And it will be a miraculous day when we can say, "Cancer is no longer the deadly disease it once was."

The motivation of survivors consists of focussing on the positive as they stand united, glad to be alive, and not ashamed to say, "We are cancer survivors." They are driven by a mission that will help educate family, friends and neighbors alike about how important early detection is and how significant it is to saving your life.

The American Cancer Society's suggests the following to help reduce the chance of contracting cancer:

- 1) Change bad habits and live healthfully.
- 2) Quit smoking
- 3) Exercise regularly
- 4) Learn to manage stress
- 5) Eat foods that help to build your body's defenses against cancer.
- 6) Take vitamin and mineral supplements.
- 7) Most importantly, see your physician for regular testing and health screenings.

Resisting the temptation to question 'why' is half the battle. As Nike says, "Just do it."

Each of the shining and very familiar faces of our Valley Mayors has been touched by this horrific disease in some way or another. This fatal illness knows no boundaries...status, age or otherwise. With the help of this year's 'Cattle Baron's Ball' ad campaign we can all work together to change the future of the Rio Grande Valley in an effort to find a cure.

The 'Cattle Baron's Ball' is the single largest fundraiser in the nation for cancer research with the American Cancer Society, and it will take place on Friday, June 25th, from 7pm to midnight at La Antigua Revilla, located at 4101 West University Drive in Edinburg, TX.

This year's event will feature a survivor recognition procession, live entertainment, fabulous finds in the Silent and Live auctions, drinks, dinner, dancing, music by Marshall Law and so much more! Dance the night away while helping to raise money for cancer patients, clinics and local hospitals right here in the Rio Grande Valley! Join us for the party and offer your support to this worthy cause.

For sponsorship opportunities, table information, or donations call us today at 956-682-8329.

Fawn Foudray-Golich is Community Development Director for the Valley Symphony Orchestra and Chorale. She too is a cancer survivor.



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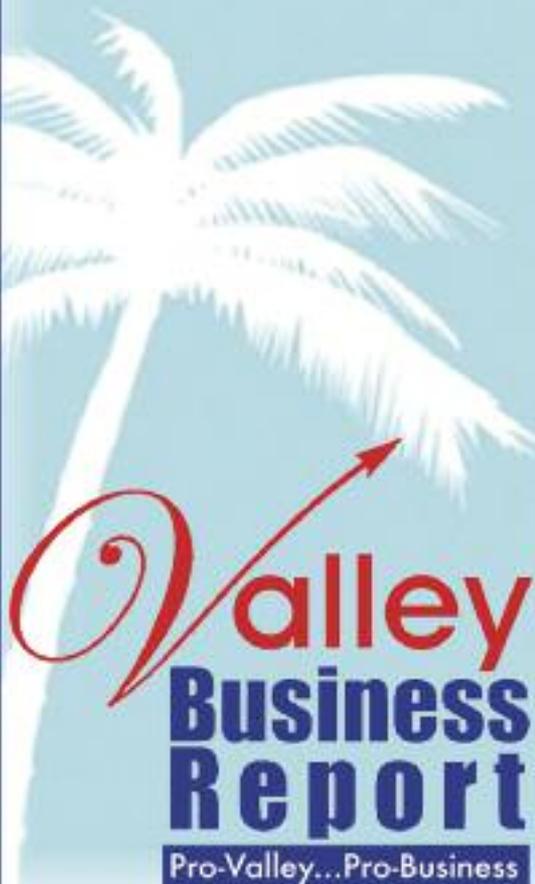
missioners to sign a lease with The Paradies Shops, which operates CNBC newsstands in 41 other U.S. airports.

Brown says he would like to see better air service to the Western U.S. and Patridge would like to see service to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), Chicago and Austin. He and Townsend agreed Mexico City service would be good...Townsend making the point that a Mexico City connection would allow Asian passengers to come here through Mexico.



McAllen Miller International Airport control tower at sunset. (courtesy)

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