

Volume IV, Issue 11
July 2013



Valley Business Report

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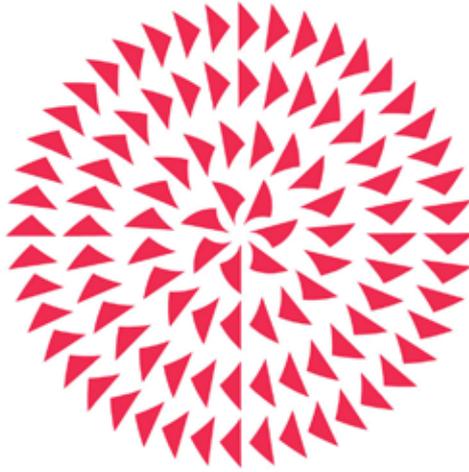
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Our country was created by risk takers, those who were willing to take an idea, turn it into a small business with the hope, intention and courage to provide enough income to shelter, clothe and feed their families. Thank God for the men and women who had no guarantee of success but had the backbone to give it a shot.

Backbone – an interesting word. One Webster definition: “the foundation or most substantial or sturdiest part of something.” That’s America. Small businesses are the backbone of this country, and the success of this nation depends on getting back to the basics. There’s never been a more crucial time in our history for government and small business America to work together, leading us back to the United States of America’s roots: “of the people, for the people, by the people.” While



strides are being made, we still have a long way to go.

It’s way past time to say no to greed, egos and politics and say yes to the most substantial, sturdiest part of our country – the innovation, entrepreneurial and small business concept of running this great nation. It worked in the beginning, but somewhere along the way we got away from it. Our forefathers had us in mind. Do we have our grandchildren in mind? That’s a question everybody must look in the mirror and answer, from those leading this country to those leading the corner bakery.

Rather than playing a big boy’s game (companies where a few people at the top take home way more than their share while the laborers get the scraps), our focus needs to be realigned. The American dream wasn’t founded on that outlook. Small businesses shelter families. Small businesses clothe families. Small businesses feed families.

It is my sincere prayer that everyone associated with leading our country, passing national, state and local laws, take a chapter out of American history and put the PEOPLES’ best interest first. While it may be a paradigm shift, and while many tough decisions won’t

be popular amongst many corporate America’s billionaires, the United States of America was founded on the small business mindset – working people providing for their families. When the goal is sufficiency for the whole, our nation becomes even a greater, global, economic powerhouse. Pride in our country’s heritage means continuing the American dream. We owe it to those who established this great nation, and we certainly owe it to those who will follow us.

Dreamers, keep dreaming. Innovators, keep innovating. Entrepreneurs, keep taking risks. Success is not promised on the first try but Henry Ford, Amelia Earhart, Colonel Sanders and countless others were willing to press on, try again and not allow anyone kill their dream. Are you?

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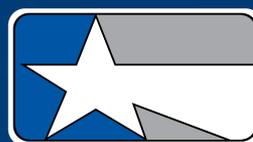
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Philosophy: We are a pro-business publication providing in-depth perspectives on business trends and creating a forum in which business leaders can exchange ideas and information affecting the local community's economy. Letters to the Editor: 300 words or less. E-mailed: editorial@valleybusinessreport.com Please include your full name and city of residence.

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Day Spas - Destination Relaxation

By Eileen Mattei

Wrapped in a fluffy de Sanchez Day Spa robe and sipping chilled cucumber water, I follow massage therapist Melly Barrientos past the inviting Jacuzzi and sauna to a subtly lit room for a relaxation massage. Barely audible classical guitar music and the faint scent of marigolds and chamomile tease my senses as the kink in my shoulder is chased away and my feet are massaged to nirvana.

At day spas, the idea is not to run in for a facial or massage appointment and run out again. It's about de-stressing, leaving behind everything you were doing before you walked into the spa, said David Sanchez. "We want to be the true definition of a spa, where people relax and enjoy their service." For that reason, clients at de Sanchez Day Spa in McAllen are invited to arrive as much as an hour before their appointment to use the Jacuzzi and eucalyptus-scented dry steam room as a way of decompressing. By the time they go in for their signature hot stone massage or brilliant salt glow scrub or organic facial, "they are like butter" in our hands, Sanchez said, already mellow. Relaxed clients can linger to enjoy spa amenities after their service, as well.

David Sanchez and his wife Dora Jean, both hairdressers, were the first to bring the day spa concept to the Valley. "We realized we could put the first full service salon together under one roof," he said, but they had to educate the public about spa amenities and train their staff in the spa service model. The McAllen community responded so well to the spa concept that the first purpose-built spa proved too small for the demand. The most recent de Sanchez expansion took the spa to 8,400 square feet with separate wings, including a decidedly masculine men's spa services area.

Shortly before 3 p.m., the waiting room filled with black-clad, de Sanchez spa technicians and beauticians prepared to greet their arriving clients. "We pride ourselves on being on time," said Sanchez, who doesn't believe clients should have to wait. "I've got a great staff. They have great reputations and are on top of their game."

The overall spa environment — created by soothing colors, textures and fresh flowers, discrete professional service, gentle music and aromas, and beverages — is an open invitation to indulge yourself, to relax as if time didn't matter. "Once they are here, we want them to enjoy themselves," Sanchez emphasized. "We are blessed to have this business, the personnel and our clientele. We built it and they came."

Historic Setting

Ten years ago, Teri Rendon spotted the carriage house of the Kowalski-Fernandez home, a 1893 historic landmark on Elizabeth Street in Brownsville. Nine months later with the help of an indulgent landlord, she had transformed the beige border-brick structure into the Carriage House Day Spa.

"A spa needs a certain ambiance, not only excellent service. If you don't have the ambiance, it's not truly a spa," said Rendon. Tapestry on the lovely weathered walls softens voices; a window wall looks onto the large courtyard shaded by poincianas and tropical greenery. Comfortable couches under a botanical mural offer a place to sip ice water in a

The women's Jacuzzi at de Sanchez Spa offers a luxurious respite. (VBR)



stemmed glass. The stable was converted into rooms for massages and facials. Manicures and pedicures are offered behind the arches of the



The Carriage House Spa sets the stage for pampering with its courtyard entrance to the historic landmark building. (VBR)

Manicures and pedicures are part of spa relaxation at the Carriage House Spa. (Courtesy)



carriage area.

“We have a very faithful client base,” Rendon said. “They walk in tired. They walk out rejuvenated, their skin glowing. They feel pampered and we listen to them. There’s a definite science to this. You need to be trained in what works.” Carriage House clients range from

8 years old (“They need to be turned on to the joys of being a woman”) to 80 and includes males. Nine years ago, Rendon opened a hair salon, by customer request, on the opposite side of the courtyard.

Working in a historical building limits the spa’s growth, but Rendon said Carriage House Day Spa today fits her vision of 10 years ago and wouldn’t do anything differently. “It’s hard to fix perfection.”

Valley-Wide

In the space of 24 years, Edna Posada has leveraged her Merle Norman store into Spa La Posada with locations in Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen. Posada didn’t start out to run more Valley spas than anyone else, “but at the end of the day I love what I do. I started small. I made sure I did not have debt before I launched the next step. I’ve learned that you’ve got to be a very smart business person. You have to drive revenue in to cover your expenses and manage expenses, the human resource side and marketing.”

Spa La Posada in McAllen has expanded several times and now includes a clothing boutique and since February, a separate men’s spa. “Men need to be groomed, too, but now they are more willing to admit it,” Posada said. Her daughter Alexandria, who has a finance degree, supervised setting up the new masculine brand, based on an old-fashioned barbershop with modern amenities: numerous flat screen TVs

and complimentary beer. She launched the brand with Facebook, instead of commercials and mailers. “We wanted a place for men to feel at ease. We’ve gotten a very good reception from the husbands, sons and brothers of existing clients,” the younger Posada said.

Edna Posada said each of her spas has a different client base. “What works in McAl-

“A spa needs a certain ambience, not only excellent service. If you don’t have the ambience, it’s not truly a spa.”

--Teri Rendon

len does not necessarily work in Harlingen and Brownsville.” And men prefer quiet and beer while women prefer conversations and complementary wine. In the past year, she has noticed that more clients are investing in facials and treatments to make their skin look good without resorting to medical procedures. Meanwhile the cosmeceutical treatments, such as microdermabrasion and peels, available at the spa have become more popular. Spa technicians go through in-depth training and exams before working with clients.

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Slip into a spa robe and start to relax. (VBR)

“It makes our job a lot of fun, having clients of all ages and professions support what you do,” Posada said. “But there is no better feeling than having my daughter love this business. Now we can do this together, bounce ideas off of one another. She brings a fresh perspective. It’s re-energizing.”

Alexandria Posada agreed with that assessment. “I come to work excited. I love that I get to learn from this amazing woman.”

Spas have opened across the Valley. Sapphire on South Padre, for example, finds itself providing services to many vacationing couples. The newest is Blush in Harlingen. Veronica Howell of Blush, who envisions an organic spa said, “I thought it was going to build slowly, but it’s been, like, boom. The challenge is keeping up with the demand.”

Blush clients include women in their 70s, 80s, and 90s splurging on lash extensions and the 24 karat gold facial. Howell expects that her spa, which is in the midst of renovations for new services, will appeal to every age and budget. “Facials have opened the door for a different demographic.”

Spa clients believe that pampering themselves pays off. Spa owners know that pampering does indeed pay.

For more information see desanchez.com or call 682-1306. Carriagehousedayspa.com or 544-4111; spalaposada.com or, 412-6363, 687-7544 ; Blush 456-0822.

Spa La Posada decided their male clients needed a space of their own. (VBR)



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Kindness Counts

By Eileen Mattei

“Lean forward. Look for someone to help.” That’s the instruction Francisco Castellanos, owner of the Chick-fil-A store in Harlingen, gives to his employees. “My job as a leader is talking about the word ‘anticipation’ and about trying to create a meaningful difference in interactions with guests through intentional acts of kindness. If I preach this every day and back it up with actions of my own, you can make it happen.”

Chick-fil-A’s mission is to be America’s best quick-service restaurant. And Castellanos said that will be achieved through remarkable customer service based on attention to detail and genuine kindness, on the individual and corporate level. Each employee watches a short video called “Every Life Has a Story,” which awakens viewers to the reality that everyone (customers and co-workers) is dealing with issues such as illness, single parenting, entrance exams, job jitters, loneliness. Team members approach their work intent on having a positive influence on all who come into contact with Chick-fil-A.

“From a business standpoint, if you’re happier here, you’re going to come more often, spend more, and talk about us,” said Castellanos. That’s why he and his team work to have the cleanest play area and Purell wipes (which appeal to mothers), tasty food and fast, friendly

Kikka Badillo always has a smile as she cleans tables and refills customers’ drinks. (VBR)



service.

Castellanos is a realist, admitting that the workforce at Chick-fil-A is entry level, with few skills initially. So, he hires kind people with genuine smiles and trains them in the necessary skills. Yet 75 percent of his employees come through referrals. “It’s nice to have a pipeline of people you can recruit from.” The recruit pool may be so deep because Castellanos creates situations for team members where they are winning by working at the franchise. “We support any school schedule you have,” he said, and arranges work hours around class hours, an uncommon setup. “That has worked real well for us.”

Frontline employees are empowered to make significant customer service decisions, which most likely impacts job satisfaction. And Castellanos budgets \$500 monthly to reward and recognize his hard workers based on customer feedback, job performance, and other criteria.

The independent business owner listed re-

quired service behaviors, which include helping a mom with young kids, opening doors for people who parked in a handicapped spot, carrying large orders out to the car, delivering trays to tables and refreshing drinks, giving a mini-cow toy to a tired toddler, and holding an umbrella over customers on rainy days. The many different ways of paying attention, being attuned to the customers’ needs, fits into Chick-fil-A’s “second mile service.”

Castellanos champions excellent customer service and the concept of paying forward, while meeting benchmarks for his size of store, expecting accountability, and increasing operational excellence. “If we do 1,500 transactions a day and did 95 percent of them right, that’s 75 transactions we need to do better on.” Operation Excellence is about doing your job right: being surprisingly fast, clean, enthusiastic, and making eye contact and smiling at the customer,

Two to three percent of sales are allocated to the store’s marketing budget. “We have a lot of tools. We invest in fresh flowers.” A huge pepper grinder that makes people smile, balloons, mini-cows, mints, a free food day for teachers and nurses, and compassionate donations claim portions of the marketing budget. Connecting to the community, the store initiated Saturday morning Little Chef lessons where kids learn to make lemonade or salads. The store hosts weekly family nights with games and crafts as well as a weekly bingo



Chick-fil-A owner Francisco Castellano checks on a frequent customer. (VBR)

day. “Our Chick-fil-A is more giving than others.”

New hires spend several days shadowing their job - seeing the company culture in action - before actually getting hands on. Castellanos said that team members, whether sweeping or making salads, understand how their role supports the organization’s goals and their own goals and impacts customers.

“The hardest thing is managing people,” agreed Castellanos, who is well-read in management theory. “Twenty percent of your employees take 80 percent of your time.” When it comes to the point of terminating an unsatisfactory employee, he has the documentation to justify the move. “I ask them, ‘did I terminate you or did you terminate yourself by your actions?’”

“I’ve challenged our team to be the best in the Valley. The success of our business is seen in the repeat customer who comes in several times a week,” Castellanos said. “One team member started saying to customers, ‘See you tomorrow.’ And it works!”

For more information, call 365-3833 or visit Chick-fil-A at Lincoln and Dixieland.

Customer Service Tips

A happy, satisfied customer is likely to return and/or tell others.

Smile

Relax, gain eye-contact and smile naturally. This will help the customer or client to feel at ease and welcomed

Make the Customer Feel Welcome

Start positively with a warm welcome, but don’t overdo it! Continue communicating as appropriate, relax and be as natural as possible.

Listen

Listen to the customer’s needs, empathise and find the best solutions.

Learn Your Business - Be an Expert

Make sure that you know more about your business than the customer does, be able to answer questions about your business/organisation.

Be True to Your Word

Only ever offer a customer or client something that you are sure you can give them.

Be Memorable for the Right Reason

Try to make every customer’s experience a positive one that they’ll remember and talk to others about.

Information from <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/customer-service-tips.html>

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Shipley Donuts

By Eileen Mattei

David Duff began working at his parents' Shipley Donuts store in 1978, cutting and frying donuts with the rest of the family in McAllen. That's why it was startling, 35 years later, when Duff, the owner of two Shipley stores, said, "I'm trying to understand the developing marketplace of a food franchise."

Shipley Donuts' customer base requires a fast delivery system. "Our store prides itself on having one of the most efficient and fastest drive-thru windows." The freshly made donuts and coffee are ready to be quickly bagged or poured. Yet, cars waiting in the driveway can back up on the street and potential customers pass by because of the line. Currently Duff is planning a second, manned drive-thru window to make the process as efficient as possible, while working with the City of McAllen to relieve the traffic problem.

"I'm hoping I get a 20 percent increase in business from the second drive-thru," Duff said. He noted that Mr. Shipley (of the third generation of the Houston-based company) cautioned him about the potential for annoying twice as many customers if things went wrong.

But Duff has based his successful business on three essentials: great customer service, high quality and consistency. "Those are the things I fight for," he said. "When customers complain to me, they are complaining for a reason: they want to come back to the store. But they want to see something changed or fixed.

You need to be very genuine and try to do it better."

In Duff's experience elsewhere, he has observed customer service becoming a lost art. "When people go into a defensive mode when they receive a complaint, it doesn't help the business retain a customer. I look at customer complaints as a positive to help me and my workers do a better job. You don't want customers not to come to you. You don't want them to complain to their friends." Putting his philosophy into practice, Duff has his cell phone number on his business cards.

Duff eased into the managerial side of his franchise in the early 1990s. "Businesses like these, you need to know how to do anything in the store yourself."

The donut shop is open round the clock, and a crew arrives at midnight to begin making the day's donuts, cinnamon twists, bear claws and muffins. "A 2 or 3 o'clock phone call was not out of the norm," Duff said recalling the earliest days. "It's still the same way today. Sometimes you are putting out fires."

Duff has seen considerable growth in his Shipley Donuts in Pharr, which he identified as a satellite because the products are made in McAllen. Currently, he is considering opening a satellite Shipley in Edinburg, where a third party is developing a potential property. "Even though you have been in business for 36 years, you are always skeptical about expansion and about risks. Every expansion has its ups and downs." He and his stores have weathered agricultural shrinkage and peso devaluations. "Right now, we are enjoying a strong influx of Mexican nationals. The Valley demographic is unique: a fast growing area with solid retail markets. Entrepreneurial small businesses are reaping the benefits of that. More city leaders are understanding the key to revenue is to keep Mexican national travelers here and spending."

Duff said his expertise is in the smaller market, a niche market of small ticket items where he intends to stay, catering to the 99 percent who make up his retail customers. But that tiny segment of wholesale customers is not neglected. On a daily basis, Shipley delivers donuts for continental breakfasts at local hotels and to the Flying J Truck Stop.

Winter Texan parks have purchased donuts from Shipley for years. "They had always come to me. This past year was the first time I went after them aggressively," Duff said. He began delivering donuts

David Duff, a hands-on Shipley Donuts man since 1978, continues to examine his market. (VBR)



for weekly park events and crafts shows, relieving park activity directors of the task. He has picked up accounts from Alamo to Mission that have standing orders, in season, for 25 dozen.

Duff meanwhile has encouraged the activity directors to recommend his donuts be supplied by vendors doing presentations to Winter Texans.

"I've gotten a good response," Duff said. Well, who wouldn't reach for a warm maple-glaze donut or a nut-crust bear claw?

Shipley Donuts at 1501 N. 10th, McAllen, and 800 S. Cage, Pharr. Call 687-2011.



Donut production goes on around the clock. (VBR)



Cinnamon rolls look good at every stage. (VBR)

Mag-Tek's Patent Keeps Value

By Eileen Mattei

Mag-Tek's patented product is so effective that its primary customer, a major oil field service company, stopped using the product because it greatly reduced the need for their services ... thereby cutting corporate revenue.

Mag-Tek founder John Corney, an Australian chemical engineer, patented a non-chemical fluid conditioner that removes existing scale (picture cholesterol and plaque clogging arteries) and prevents scale formation in industrial and commercial pipes. That was a crucial invention because scale reduces the amount of fluid a pipe can carry; it clogs pumps and motors; rust and corrosion develop under scale. Corney's patent uses powerful magnets placed in the walls of a permanent stainless steel tube segment to generate a magnetic field that prevents minerals and paraffin in the fluid from sticking to the pipe walls. Instead these precipitates remain in suspension rather than adhering to the walls of the pipe.

"The cost effectiveness (ROI) in wells could be worked out in a matter of minutes," Corney explained. Once installed, the magnets in Mag-Tek's stainless steel fluid conditioner never deteriorate or stop working. In contrast, the competing technology used chemicals, which required frequent applications that entailed operations shutdowns, were expensive, and were environmentally problematic.

Corney set up Mag-Tek's small production facility for fluid conditioners in Edinburg in 1985, originally aiming for the water treatment market. But the oil patch accounted for Mag-Tek's income stream for years, until the oil field service company opted out.

Jerry Davis bought Mag-Tek in 2004



Jerry Davis uses Bucky Balls to demonstrate how scale accumulates inside pipe and pumps. Mag-Tek's fluid conditioner uses magnets to keep minerals and wax from adhering and reducing flow. (VBR)

and sold the water conditioner tool to restaurants and hospitals, and businesses with swimming pools, cooling towers and commercial ice machines. No matter how applied, the magnets in the tube segment break up the minerals so they don't cause a problem, he said. "That's the whole science of the patent. All the benefits come from that one effect." The company produced different sizes of stainless steel pipe for various applications, both commercial and residential, and also customized water conditioner to a site.

But then came Eagle Ford shale oil. "Alice, Texas, is the center of the universe for us," said Davis. Instead of the numerous independent drillers of 10 to 20 years ago, the oil wells are today owned by five or so big production companies. Mag-Tek's 'tool' now is marketed to production engineers and designers who have a stake in keeping operational expenses down.

Early in 2013, Davis sold Mag-Tek to Jose Balderas, who owns a Mexican oil service company. Davis has stayed on as production manager and sales manager. John Corney has returned to Mag-Tek as a full-time consultant, developing new uses for the tool, including one suitable for big wells. "It's what we'll be making the most of in the next few months," Davis said, describing the need for the tool at PEMEX's deep Gulf wells.

In early June, new CEO Balderas was meeting with PEMEX officials when the Edinburg office received notification of the Mexican patent registration of Mag-Tek's Mag-Well magnetic fluid conditioner for oil field products. Balderas has invested in growing the company, Davis noted. "Apparently we are going to need more employees (in production)."

Yet the resurgence of oil has not led Mag-Tek to drop the water treatment market. The company has produced a magnetic conditioner for a 500-gallon unit going into a sewage plant. "It causes suspended solids to drop a lot faster, so the liquid doesn't have to stay in retention tanks as long," Davis explained. That reduces the number of retention ponds needed.

The fluid conditioner is also being applied inline to diesel engines on tractors and trucks. The result is better fuel economy and better combustion, so there is no black exhaust. Filters last longer and downtime is reduced. On the other end of the spectrum, a residential unit can eliminate scale buildup on shower doors, dishwashers, and faucets.

John Corney and Jerry Davis, former owners and current employees of Mag-Tek, stand behind the company's magnetic fluid conditioners that will be installed on a PEMEX project. (VBR)



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Fresh as Can Be ... Frozen at Sea

By Nydia O. Tapia-Gonzales

For three generations, the Burnells have been shrimping in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. In 1941, Burnie Bernard Burnell initiated the family business. He probably never

envisioned the future of the shrimping industry in the Rio Grande Valley, nor did he anticipate that his family, in 2013, would offer the freshest, chemical-free, locally caught shrimp.

The Shrimp Outlet is a family owned

enterprise managed by Burnie Bernard Burnell's son Charles Bradford Burnell, son-in-law

Christopher Korab, his daughter Lela Burnell, and her brothers J. Keil and Charles R. Burnell. All work hard to offer their customers the best of what the Gulf has to offer.

In 1967, before Lela and her brothers came along, their father Charles realized he could earn more money shrimping than some school teachers he knew. Furthermore,



he found he not only enjoyed following in his father's footsteps, but he was good at it, unlike some of his friends who could not tolerate even two hours at sea.

But the early days were not easy in Port Isabel. "My father owned a row boat and a gill net that he used to catch fish during the depression," said Charles, adding that his father was a pioneer of the local shrimping industry. "He would put the fish on ice and he and my mother would go all over the Valley to sell it. Nobody had any money then, but they managed to make it." In those early days, sirens would blow to let the people know that iced, fresh shrimp had just arrived. "Things changed with the freezing process after WWII," he recalled with nostalgia.

The family business has come a long way since those hard years. Technology such as GPS devices help locate shrimp and assist with navigation. The Internet has opened the doors for the family to promote and sell their product outside of the Rio Grande Valley. "We went from ice boats to freezer boats, and from cotton nets to synthetic nets in just a few years," explained Charles. But it's government regulations that have reshaped the industry and resulted in the saturation of the market with farm raised seafood brought from Vietnam, China and India.

Regardless of these obstacles, the family remains firm on their guarantee to deliver FDA approved, American wild caught shrimp that is frozen at sea. It is preserved using chemical-free methods.

The fresh shrimp debate is complicated, for shrimp can be frozen and defrosted to appear fresh at some local markets where shoppers demand the "fresh" product.

Lela and her husband Chris handle the marketing and online sales. The family owns a fleet of eight boats that are managed by her brothers Charles and Captain Keil. Every year, they harvest tens of thousands of pounds of shrimp per season, which runs from July to May.

Lela said Winter Texans are their big-



Shrimp Outlet's owners have a fleet of eight trawlers. (Courtesy)

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gest clients and promoters, for they love to explore the shrimp basin when they buy shrimp, and stay to hear about the packing and processing that takes place within a 50-mile radius. Winters Texans, even after they leave, continue making online purchases.

“Our main selling point is the appeal of our location,” Lela stated, about their location on Fishermans Place Road. The family recently purchased an adjacent building which will be remodeled into a spacious new store. Spanish is spoken at the Shrimp Outlet, which has facilitated the interaction with customers from Mexico who stop to buy shrimp on the way to South Padre Island. Local restaurants such as Gabriella’s, Cobbleheads, House Wine, Colletti’s, and Chilli Willies are among those choosing the company’s high quality shrimp.

In addition, Lela is working toward increasing online nationwide sales, and hiring more employees to expedite the packing and shipping of the product. For Chris, it is imperative to keep moving toward a 100 percent chemical-free product.

Their frozen shrimp is sold in large, jumbo and colossal sizes for retail and wholesale orders. But how is the best way to boil shrimp? “You do not want to overcook shrimp,” said Charles firmly. After some friendly debate, the family agreed that adding shrimp to a boiling mix of Old Bay seasoning, onion and garlic is best. Take the shrimp out after a few minutes. They recommend adding lemon to the water or placing it on ice to loosen the shells of the best shrimp the Gulf has to offer.

For more information visit www.shrimputlet-brownsville.com or contact Lela at 831-8114.



Grampa Burnie Burnell in the early days at Port Isabel. (Courtesy)

2013 Baseball SCHEDULE

H=HOME

A=AWAY

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
	A 1 SAN ANGELO Colts	A 2 SAN ANGELO Colts	A 3 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 4 TEXAS Stars	H 5 TEXAS Stars	H 6 TEXAS Stars
H 7 TEXAS Stars	8	H 9 TEXAS Stars	H 10 TEXAS Stars	H 11 TEXAS Stars	H 12 TEXAS Stars	A 13 TEXAS Stars
A 14 TEXAS Stars	A 15 TEXAS Stars	A 16 TEXAS Stars	A 17 TEXAS Stars	A 18 TEXAS Stars	A 19 TEXAS Stars	A 20 TEXAS Stars
H 21 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 22 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 23 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 24 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 25 TEXAS Stars	H 26 TEXAS Stars	H 27 TEXAS Stars
H 28 TEXAS Stars	29	A 30 SAN ANGELO Colts	A 31 SAN ANGELO Colts			

JULY

H=HOME

A=AWAY

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
				A 1 SAN ANGELO Colts	A 2 SAN ANGELO Colts	H 3 TEXAS Stars
H 4 TEXAS Stars	H 5 TEXAS Stars	H 6 TEXAS Stars	A 7 TEXAS Stars	A 8 TEXAS Stars	A 9 TEXAS Stars	A 10 TEXAS Stars
H 11 TEXAS Stars	H 12 TEXAS Stars	H 13 TEXAS Stars	H 14 TEXAS Stars	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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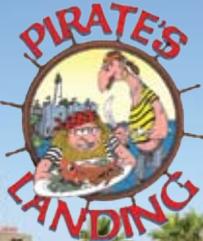
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Medical Research Benefits All

By Eileen Mattei

Discovery Clinical Trials, a San Antonio facilitator of medical research studies, has begun partnering with Valley physicians. Participating in research trials brings benefits to physicians and to their patients, according to Trudy Madan, chief executive officer of Discovery Clinical Trials.

“Conducting a research study can supplement a practice’s income as an ancillary revenue opportunity,” Madan explained. Participating in a clinical trial gives physicians an opportunity to be on the cutting edge of medicine, and it often enhances a medical practice’s reputation. “Many times when patients and colleagues see a physician involved in clinical research, it’s very positive.”

A clinical trial offers opportunities for patients to receive additional healthcare at no cost, from study-related medications to lab tests. Many patients are also reimbursed for their travel.

Medical research trials compare an experimental medication or medical treatment to an existing treatment or medication or to a placebo to determine the safety and efficacy of

the new product. Discovery Clinical manages a physician’s or clinic’s research studies through a turnkey joint venture. Discovery, which oversees approximately 150 clinical trials annually, matches the physicians’ expertise to relevant research studies, recruits the participants, and assigns a Discovery employee to manage the research details, including regulatory, financial and legal service. Currently, the company manages ongoing studies in Arlington, Austin, Dallas, Mission, San Antonio, and Florida.

The Valley’s future four-year medical school, an outgrowth of the Regional Academic Health Center of UTSA, was a major reason for Discovery’s expansion to the border area, Madan said, along with the area’s growing population. The medical school will bring more physicians and more awareness of health issues to the Valley. “Patients are more likely to stay in the Valley for complicated cases.”

A Discovery Clinical Trial partnership removes the roadblocks to research for a private practice physician. “We take the hassle out of it,” Madan said. “We have the overall responsibility for the research, not only finding the study and establishing the relationship with the pharmaceutical company, but managing the staff.

We have the experience to handle everything. Our model allows the physicians to focus on the research and their patients.” Discovery’s reimbursement comes from pharmaceutical companies and is based on recruiting qualified patients into a study and providing quality data. Typically, the Discovery recruiter interviews 10 patients in order to find one person who fits the criteria of the study.

Physicians share in the revenue as compensation for providing office space and carrying out the research on approved patients.

Given the predominant Hispanic population, Valley clinical trials will tend to focus on diseases that affect many people: diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma. Discovery is actively recruiting Valley physicians in private practice, focusing on those specializing in family practice, internal medicine, gastroenterology, allergies and asthma, and cardiology.

A single clinic’s study may involve 10-15 local patients, Madan said, because the pharmaceutical company wants a variety of patients from different areas. But multiple studies frequently are set up in a single medical practice. Currently, Shah Eye Center, the first of Discovery Clinical Trials’ Valley partners, has one glaucoma study and two uveitis studies underway. The more complicated the disease state, the lengthier the trial is. Most run for six to 12 months; some are run consecutively.

“The doctors of the Shah Eye Center are highly motivated to advance the diagnosis and treat-

Dr. Shah is the first Valley physician to participate in medical research through Discovery Clinical Trials. (Jesse de la Llata)



ment of various ocular diseases. We want to help not only the patients of today, but would like to leave a legacy where we are also helping the patients of tomorrow ... patients who may never know us personally or by name,” said Dr. Pankajkumar Shah.

Madan said most clinical studies are Phase II, III or IV. Phase II, done after the initial safety trial, assesses how well a drug works. Phase III is a randomized, controlled, multicenter trial on large patient groups (up to 3,000) that gives a definitive assessment of how effective the drug is in comparison with the standard treatment. Phase IV, after a drug is on the market, continues surveillance of the safety of a drug.

Low participation in clinical trials delays the arrival of new medications in the market, Madan added. Only four percent of physicians are involved with research studies in a year, according to the Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation. Only two percent of patients are involved in a study. Yet, 90 percent of those who participate in a clinical study said they would do so again.

For more information, call 210-591-1155 or see discoveryclinicaltrials.com

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Performance Appraisal Basics

By Marco Garza

Despite lots of attention, money and effort, performance appraisals remain an area with which few managers or employees are satisfied. Nevertheless, it is a critical part of developing employees.

At the heart of performance management is the idea that an employee's effort should be goal directed, which involves clarifying expectations and quantifying them by setting measurable standards for each objective. That begins with clearly defining the employee's goals and work expectations.

Guidelines for effective goal setting include assigning specific goals, assigning measurable goals, assigning challenging but doable goals, and encouraging participation.

Employers want to appraise performance for at least four reasons. Appraisals play an integral role in the employer's performance management process. The appraisal lets the boss and subordinate develop a plan for correcting any deficiencies and to reinforce those things being done correctly. Appraisals serve a useful career planning purpose and play a part in salary decisions.

Supervisors must be familiar with basic appraisal techniques, understand and avoid problems that can cripple appraisals, and know how to conduct appraisals fairly. It is important that a manager be candid when a subordinate is underperforming.

A supervisor prepares for the appraisal interview by assembling the data, preparing the employee, and choosing the time and place. During the appraisal, the supervisor should be direct and specific, using objective examples. The employees should be encouraged to talk. Additionally, the leader needs to ensure the interview leads to improved performance. The chances of this are increased by clearing up any area in the employee's job that is unclear.

Much depends on a good rating, including career progress or being able to obtain a raise. Yet it can be difficult to rate performance for several reasons. Some problems are caused from setting unclear standards. Some supervisors stick to the middle of the rating



scales. Other supervisors show bias based on individual differences such as age, race, and sex in appraisal ratings.

Appraisal problems can be minimized by learning and understanding the potential problems and solutions, using the right appraisal tools, training supervisors to reduce rating errors, controlling outside influences, and keeping a diary of an employee's performance over the year.

Inadequate appraisal systems tend to be at the root of illegal discriminatory actions. In addition to being done legally, appraisals should be done ethically and honestly. The following are some general guidelines to a sound appraisal process.

- Base the review on duties and standards from the job description.
- Try to base reviews on observed behavior and objective performance data.
- Make sure whoever develops the review has observed the employee's job performance.

- Document as you go, not only at review time.
- Tell the employee ahead of time how and when you will conduct the review.
- Let the employee provide input during the review.
- Most importantly, train supervisors who will be conducting the review.

Despite your best efforts in planning for a performance appraisal discussion, problems can surface. The most common is that the employee can become defensive. To manage this situation, be prepared by recognizing that defensive behavior is normal and never attack a person's defenses. Secondly, be aware that the first person you must manage in an escalated situation is yourself! Manage your emotions before trying to work on someone else's. Lastly, the main goal is sustained performance improvement. Depending on the area of improvement goal, this may take time. It's better to be persistent and realistic than short sighted and impatient.

Marco Garza is the Regional Director for UniqueHR, a Professional Employer Organization. He can be reached at 240-4544.

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Cycling Through the Business World

By Nydia O. Tapia-Gonzales

Henry Roberts grew up in the Bahamas surrounded by a family of entrepreneurial business owners, including a grandmother who taught the young boy an instinctual approach to retail management. Years later, Roberts and his young bride, Kelly, moved to her Rio Grande Valley hometown. Roberts was unhappy in his adopted country, “but I had my true rock here,” he said. His mother-in-law believed in his potential, although he was an island man without a college education. He told himself, “I’m in America, and if I can’t make it here, I’m useless.”

The young couple researched businesses and found a Harlingen bike shop that had already had three owners. Roberts, not convinced of the shop’s viability, changed his mind about it when he saw an upscale Schwinn bicycle ad. Roberts began to envision a Dillard’s type of bike shop at a time when local bike shops were primarily repair shops. But banks were not sold on the idea, because bike shops were closing everywhere. In 1977, a bank authorized a \$6,000 loan, marking the beginning of the Bicycle World’s long history.

The original store was named Bicycle Pedlars. Having researched franchises such as McDonalds and Pizza Hut, Roberts introduced sleek displays and employee uniforms. Things went well until 1982 when Roberts signed the

lease for a Brownsville store, two weeks before the Mexican peso devalued.

“It was terrible. I remember him coming home and telling me he’d only sold \$10 worth of merchandise. I could not eat after that and begged him to pay the lease and get out, but he wouldn’t do it,” said Kelly Roberts. “Everything we had made we had put back into the business.” She even took a second job. The couple stuck to their goal of increasing inventory and buying property for their shops. Soon, they were thriving and opened a third store in McAllen, where they faced strong competition.

By this time, Henry Roberts was motivated and full of new ideas. The first was to change the store name to Bicycle World. “I felt empowered,” he recalled. Soon after that, their competition disappeared. The arrival of two beautiful Roberts babies complicated the management of the three stores. That led the Robertses to sell the

Brownsville shop, although they reacquired it three years ago.

The introduction of ATARI and electronic games replaced the bicycle as the favored children’s Christmas gift. Sales were negatively impacted until younger adults discovered Lance Armstrong. Baby boomers were also rediscovering cycling. Still, cycling was a man’s world, and shoes, seats, and helmets had to be adapted to fit women.

Bicycle World’s Rick Seija, an avid cyclist and Ironman competition winner, repairs bikes that might be pedaled as much as 5,000 miles a year. (VBR)



“The perception of cycling has totally changed. It is no longer weird to wear tight shorts and a helmet, but it is actually cool.”

--Henry Roberts

The two huge new markets triggered a shift in the industry, which began addressing women’s and older adults’ needs about 10 years ago. “The perception of cycling has totally changed. It is no longer weird to wear tight shorts and a helmet, but it is actually cool,” said Roberts. But Bicycle World is now facing a problem common

to bricks-and-mortar retailers. People are purchasing bicycles on the Internet, bypassing the personalized service offered at local shops that carry overhead expenses. That has not deterred Kelly and Henry Roberts from supporting multiple cycling events, assisting cyclists in peril and providing everything they need. The two were the organizing force behind the Jalapeno 100, which raised \$20,000 for charity this year.

Early on, Bicycle Worlds’ owners got an education by visiting bike shops all over the state. “There was never a time we did not learn anything, regardless of how small or large a store was,” said Kelly Roberts. Bass Pro Shops, Cabela’s and other retailers have provided marketing lessons. To this day, Henry Roberts signs up for related courses every chance he gets. One he truly enjoyed was in Disney World. “It was over the top. A peer asked me, ‘Why go there when Disney does not sell bikes?’” He answered with a smile. Disney is a firm believer in education and sponsors school courses on merchandising, mechanics and customer service ... things Roberts values for his 20 employees.

After 36 years in business, the Robertses enjoy the third generation customer who got his first bicycle as a teenager, and now brings his grandchild to the store. Both are avid supporters of safe riding education and the creation of more cycling trails throughout the Valley. They look forward to meeting new customers who see the value in what they have to offer. While Henry Roberts considers himself semi-retired and doing less work, he has stayed involved. “I’ve still got the key,” he concluded.



Rick Seija, Henry Roberts, and his son Tracy are part of the team that keeps Bicycle World rolling. (VBR)

For more information, visit www.bicycleworldrgv.com or call Henry Roberts at 423-3168.

Ghost Cleaning from ABC Janitorial

By Eileen Mattei

"We try to be a ghost business. Nobody sees us; we are behind the scenes, usually after hours," said ABC Janitorial owner, Aidina Guerra-Craig. "A lot of people know ABC Janitorial, but they don't know who is behind it." In fact, she prefers to keep a low profile.

Guerra-Craig was a bank clerk when she started ABC Janitorial in November 1998. She had previously worked for an aunt who owned a janitorial service and learned every aspect of the business from cleaning warehouses to dealing with clients. "I always wanted to own a business," she said. ABC's startup costs were low: only \$2,000. "It takes minimal supplies to clean an office."

After six months of working two jobs, Guerra-Craig had enough clients to concentrate solely on her company and rent a small office. Beyond daily and weekly cleaning contracts, ABC offered floor stripping and waxing, window washing, emergency cleaning, and post-construction clean-up (before the tenant takes over from the general contractor.) She recalled the early days, worrying about meeting payroll during lean months while she slowly added more clients. And then, finally getting to the place where she said, "Oh, my God. We don't worry about how we are going to pay our employees anymore."

"I think the reason we've stayed around for 14 years is we don't take on more than we can deal with, and we take good care of the clients we have," Guerra-Craig said. Today she owns a Sycamore Street office, has 30-35 employees, and much more cleaning equipment.

For a self-confessed control freak, Guerra-Craig found it hard to sit back and let her janitors do it. "They're adults and doing a good job. It's very empowering for them as well. They may or may not speak English and or have finished high school, but they are proud of what they do. They get to see behind the scenes. Some janitors have worked with ABC for 10 years. Why? We respect our employees. They realize they can pick up their check and cash it without a problem."

Guerra-Craig has been to every single office and space that her company cleans. Her staff knows that she knows what is involved and has done exactly what they are doing.

ABC's owner now concentrates on troubleshooting and bringing in new customers. "I get more no's than I get yes's, but it is the one yes that gets you in the door. Proving to them they made the right decision, you have to know what you are talking about it." In the male dominated post-construction field, clients

from Chicago and California continue to contract for ABC's construction cleanup.

Technology has changed how ABC Janitorial finds new business. "What we did when we started does not work anymore," Guerra-Craig said. "Advertising for janitorial services has changed 180 degrees with Web sites." The company supports its Web site, Facebook page, and Google page with frequent photo updates. "Our clients are kind enough to let us take pictures. I love doing before and after pictures, particularly of floors."

Guerra-Craig admitted to a passion for floor care, which she said provides instant gratification. "When a floor is shiny, and it didn't used to be, that's so good. When a floor shines, you know they want to showcase their office." ABC has a separate floor crew and flooring contracts.

"Janitorial service is a fabulous place to be," Guerra-Craig added. "It can't be outsourced. It's got to be local." Yet, she has noticed a consolidation of janitorial services. Instead of local banks, retailers and hospitals contracting directly with local providers, the corporate offices of banks and retailers contract with national janitorial companies. The giants then subcontract a company like ABC Janitorial. "Subcontracting is new way for us, but the local client calls me directly."

Guerra-Craig said, as a mother, "owning my own business has been very helpful in being there for my child." She advised females starting a company: "Women need to pull on their big girl panties. There is no crying in business. You have to make your own way. But you can do whatever you want to you do, especially in the Valley. It's such a great place to start a business."

See the Web site abcjanitorialandfloorcare.com or call 682-1700.



ABC Janitorial prides itself on the transforming effect of floor care. (Courtesy)

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A Makeover for Heritage Village

By Eileen Mattei

Like a cruise ship on land, Heritage Village invites residents to relax and do what they want in a setting of stress-free living. But things have changed dramatically at the McAllen independent living community since Holiday Retirement purchased the property six months ago.

Holiday, which owns more than 300 independent senior communities in the U.S. and Canada, has installed live-in managers. Now residents' all-inclusive monthly billing covers rent, three restaurant-style meals daily, activities, weekly housekeeping and free stays at other Holiday properties, all without a long-term contract.

The Colson family, who was in the construction industry in Washington, pioneered the concept of independent retirement living in 1971, said Keli Childs, Holiday strategic sales leader. The Colsons developed the Holiday concept as a place for their grandmother to move to, where she would be safe, have numerous activities and her meals provided. Holiday communities are designed for active seniors and do not provide assisted living or medical care. Childs is assisting the transition of Heri-

tage Village residents who were accustomed to 12-month leases and a la carte services under the previous ownership. Once their leases are up, Heritage Village residents have to accept the new monthly rent that includes utilities, meals, and more or they can opt out and move. Currently Heritage Village is at 86 percent occupancy.

"The biggest change is that we have live-in managers. That provides the security of knowing a friendly face is going to come to the door," said Childs, of the concierge-like managers/residents. "It's no longer just an apartment. Now, it's a lifestyle." It's a pet-friendly lifestyle. Nearby hospitals provide an added measure of comfort.

"The lifestyle is not for everybody, although it's what everybody dreams about for their retirement. They don't want to do dishes or have to cook or do yard work," Childs said. "We're taking care of seniors and loving on them. They are happy to be pampered." The emphasis with Holiday is on community. "We want to make sure they are socializing, sitting down and having a meal together. They become family and develop a community. When you get to a certain age, it's easy to become reclusive."

Holiday's all-inclusive retirement living in one- and two-bedroom apartments has remained popular nationwide, enabling Holiday to keep building communities to meet the demand. In 2009, the company began acquiring existing properties and bought its first Texas properties.

Heritage Village, which opened in 1989 and is sandwiched between McAllen hospitals, was ripe for a takeover. Holiday is upgrading the existing buildings and mechanical systems, from the welcoming lobby and library to the pool and spa. Holiday brought in a chef, sous chef and a pastry chef so residents can enjoy fresh-baked bread, homemade soups, regional favorites and daily specials with wait-staff service. The new activity director coordinates and actually participates in activities, such as the new water aerobics sessions. "We try to hit activities on all four

Keli Childs chats with Holiday Village residents in the retirement community's dining room. (Courtesy)



levels: mental, social, physical and spiritual," Childs said. "They can be as busy as they want to be. It depends on them."

Valley residents and Winter Texans comprise Heritage Village's target markets. While the minimum age is 55, Heritage Village's active residents average about 78.

Travel is an important activity for seniors, and a major benefit of Holiday Retirement is their exclusive travel program, Childs explained. Residents of any Holiday community can stay as guests in other Holiday communities for seven days and participate in meals and activities without charge (except in Hawaii and Canada). "It's like a time-share without the hassle. My mom and dad love it. As they drive through a town (with a Holiday community), they are able to stop and eat there."

Heritage Village also caters to the adventurous spirit with monthly virtual travel programs. The chef prepares the cuisine of the target country and that is linked to lectures and shows about the destination.

See Holidaytouch.com or call Heritage Village at 631-4422.

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Heritage Village provides a comfortable secure campus for retirees who live independently. (Courtesy)

Exporting to China

By Eileen Mattei

A Made in America label signifies quality to the growing Chinese middle class and has a certain cachet. By 2020, the Chinese middle class is expected to total 700 million. “That’s why we are encouraging American businesses to consider that market,” said Daniel Rodriguez, regional director of the U.S. Commercial Service, a division of the U.S. Commerce Department. U.S. exports to China grew from \$91 billion in 2010 to \$104 billion in 2012. Growth for many U.S. companies is coming from international sales. Web sites give businesses global exposure, but developing markets abroad takes skill.

“Move cautiously, because China is an extremely complicated and challenging market,” Rodriguez cautioned. “Having business relationships is one of the most important things about getting into the country,” typically going through Chinese agents to create those relationships, get marketing support, and overcome language and cultural barriers. Yet it is estimated about 50 percent of Asian brokers are crooks. Rodriguez said checking an agent’s registration status, talking to other customers, and visiting China in person are part of necessary due diligence.

Many U.S. companies already benefit from the assistance provided by the U.S. Commercial Service. “We support the exporter of 51% American original content and jump-start your effort to trade with China,” Rodriguez said. Commercial Service trade specialists, based at American embassies, consulates and selected U.S. cities, advise American companies in commercial diplomacy. “We help you pre-qualify potential business partners,” doing background checks, supplying market intelligence and doing business matchmaking, including setting up appointments with relevant Chinese companies, and inviting investors or manufacturing reps to come listen to you. You can also go on a trade mission to China with other companies. The Commercial Service has Intellectual Property officers, who advise on the potential for loss in specific countries and the measures you can take to avoid loss.

“A visit to China can provide great insight into the country’s business climate and its people,” Rodriguez said. Chinese companies respect face to face meetings, so a trip should be part of a market entry strategy that includes regionally targeted efforts. “First, you should



consider your resources, your experience, and your willingness to commit a significant amount of time to assessing the opportunities.”

Rodriguez said the www.export.gov Web site provides market research links and resources for dif-

ferent industrial and commercial sectors internationally.

Demand for U.S. exports is greatest in education (pre-K through university), healthcare (medical equipment), food, software, and clean or green tech including renewable and green energy and air pollution controls. Tourism – bringing Chinese visitors to the U.S. for entertainment and education -- is an under-exploited category.

All of his Rodriguez’s south Texas clients are small businesses. Small- to mid-size companies account for 96% of U.S. exporters, although they account for only 30% of the volume. They sell products that range from cat litter to playground equipment into Mexico, China, Columbia and beyond.

Commercial News USA, a government publication, has launched overseas ventures for several companies which have advertised in it, according to Rodriguez.

Daniel Rodriguez, regional director, US Commercial Service. (VBR)



“What makes you a global company is how you think,” said Rodriguez, noting that U.S. Commercial assistance is free. “Well, you pay on April 15.”

For more information, see trade.gov, www.stop-fakes.gov or call Daniel Rodriguez at 210-472-4020.

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Loran Finds Contracts for Employees

By Eileen Mattei

“You can do whatever you want to do, but you can’t do it alone. It doesn’t matter if you argue with your team about ideas. You don’t want people who only say yes to you,” said Ankjaer Jensen, adding, “I don’t have that problem.”

Jensen, a retired Danish navy captain, used to buy and sell ships. Today, he heads A.L. Loran International, a contractor which hires experienced welders and supplies them to industrial corporations such as AmFELS and Port of Brownsville shipbreakers. “The welders are our people, but they work at other companies,” he explained. Loran’s other divisions provide project management and non-destructive testing (NDT) in industrial settings.

“The only way to grow is to work together and build a good team. I’m probably the lowest paid person in the company,” said Jensen, a lung cancer survivor. “We’ve grown by putting these guys to work using their brains.”

For Jensen, what is important late in his career is helping individuals to use their talents, whether in his business or with civic organizations. “I get a kick out of sitting on the Brownsville EDC, chamber boards and SBA committees, and helping out.”

Loran’s new NDT division, headed by Army veteran Jason Gibbs, is one product of Loran’s brainstorming sessions and customer requests. Within three months, NDT had written procedure manuals, submitted its first bids, and begun hiring. Jensen expects that Gibbs will build NDT into a sizable organization in the next few years. Their customers need to confirm

the thickness of metal walls, for example, to meet specifications and for safety reasons.

“NDT will hire veterans only, people we can trust with good work ethics,” Jensen said. In return, employees will find a career, not just a job. “It will take about three years to become a topnotch NDT guy, but by then they are earning \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year.”

Loran’s bread-and-butter work, supplying welders for construction of ocean-going rigs at the Port of Brownsville, is cyclical. Loran is probably the smallest of the companies supplying welders to AmFELS, Jensen said. Yet, all of their welders pass the skills test, thanks to the evaluation process of Loran’s Estaban Rodriguez, who worked in shipyards for years and can accurately assess welders’ skills.

The company supplies project management for a port shipbreaker, providing the on-site foreman Ray Hernandez along with the welders and laborers

The responsibilities of finding contracts, handling project management, vetting applicants, providing NDT and running Loran fall on Jason Gibbs, Ankjaer Jensen, Claudia de la Garza, Myra Jaramillo and Esteban Rodriguez. (VBR)



Loran aims to hire local residents if possible. Despite working in fields like shipbreaking and rig construction that pose more risks than office jobs, Loran has maintained an exceptional safety record. “We have never had a serious accident. In 16 years, we’ve never had a workman’s claim,” Jensen said.

For more information, see alloranintl.com or call 831-0331.



Esteban Rodriguez evaluates the structural and pipe welders who apply to A.L.Loran International. (VBR)

needed to deconstruct old vessels and prepare components for recycling. Loran is also involved in project management contracts for Schlumberger on marine oil rigs, where they are installing cement plants. The company supplies all the equipment, material and manpower needed to complete the project.

When hiring structural welders, pipefitters and laborers to fulfill contracts,



Jason Gibbs, who heads Loran’s NDT division, demonstrates the testing equipment. (VBR)

STC's Path to Teacher Certification

By Martha E. Pena

The support and detailed training of South Texas College's Alternative Teacher Certification Program elevated 31-year-old Harlingen native Abraham Garza from a part-time night school teacher into a full-time position as an English teacher for Ignite Public Schools. With a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Texas-Pan American, Garza knew he had to pursue other educational options that would make him more competitive in the workforce and certify him to teach at the highest of standards.

After researching different alternative teacher certification programs in the Valley, Garza found that STC was not only affordable but also willing to work with him to get things started. "STC opened up their arms to me and set a clear pathway," said Garza.

The mission of STC's Alternative Teacher Certification Program is to empower teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills, ethics and a caring spirit for achieving student success and certification. "There is a place for everyone at STC," explained Continuing Education Director Juan Carlos Aguirre. "We serve

that population that no one else can."

An important part of the alternative pathway is the one-on-one instruction and guidance from STC Field Supervisors Jose Sepulveda and Carmen Sepulveda. This married power team boasts more than 80 years of shared teaching and administrative experience, translating to caring wisdom and high expectations.

"Our main job is to mentor the students going through the program," said Jose Sepulveda. "We know first-hand what administrators expect from teachers they hire. My wife especially has great insight from the teacher side, and I from the administrator side." Carmen Sepulveda added, "We have all of our students' cell phone numbers with us at all times. They know they can always reach us."

One of the skills Garza learned from the Sepulvedas was the art of cycle thinking. By understanding that as a teacher, he must view all situations from multiple angles, including those of the student, parent, administrator and teacher, he has become an excellent communicator and educator. "I honestly don't have words to explain how important Mr. and Mrs. Sepulveda were to my developing into an excellent teacher," said Garza. "It's because of them that I'm flourishing at a school with at-risk students from

less than perfect socio-economic backgrounds. I understand these kids and want to mentor them the way Mr. and Mrs. Sepulveda mentored me."

The support from STC staff does not stop there. Continuing Education Officer Lorenna Treviño was one of the first people to assist Garza on his path to continuing his education. "It is a great feeling to see how students reach a dream or a goal in life," said Treviño. "Continuing Education is a stepping stone for many students, and it allows an open avenue to gain employable skills."

Garza's dream is definitely coming true as his star continues to rise at Ignite Public Schools. By initiating a basketball program, he has earned more respect and admiration from his students. He also acts as a Teacher Leader, which he attributes to everything he has learned from Jose and Carmen Sepulveda. "To this day, Mr. Sepulveda calls me mijo. They are that dynamic duo who has changed my life and inspired me to change the lives of others through the power of education."

For more information on STC's Alternative Teacher Education, call 873-8359.

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In the Spotlight



The Weslaco Chamber of Commerce Red Coat Ambassadors were on hand to help celebrate Blimpie's grand opening. Pictured L-R: Bertha Suarez, Weslaco Chamber of Commerce board chair; Raul Montalvo III, Chief Red Coat Ambassador; Lorenzo Ruelas, Aisla/Coat, LLC and Robert Calvillo, Affordable Homes of South Texas executive director. (Courtesy)



The RGV Cupcake Factory celebrated its second anniversary on June 18th. The McAllen based cupcake shop gained national notoriety when they were named the winners of Food Network's Cupcake Wars on June 24, 2012. The shop is still busy and going strong. Pictured are owners Erica Rodriguez and Sabrina Rodriguez-Louck (sisters), along with best friend Johanna Saenz. (Courtesy)



Left: The Rio Grande Valley's Women's Business Center had their ribbon cutting to celebrate their Edinburg office. The WBC serves the business community within Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy counties. The WBC's mission is to help promote the growth of women owned businesses. (Courtesy)



On June 18th, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at the future site of the Raymondville Family Dentistry. Dr. Pete Mungia and Dr. Juan Villarreal along with office staff, chamber and EDC directors and city officials were treated to a reception indoors. The new location will be at 640 South Expressway, Raymondville, Texas. (Courtesy)



The naiLounge located at 2000 South McColl, Suite L in McAllen, held its ribbon cutting ceremony on June 6th. The naiLounge is the perfect place for everything from a quick beauty tune-up to a full afternoon of pampering. In addition to beauty services, the naiLounge also offers a wide-variety of gifts. The experienced staff will help you determine what services are best for you. The staff at naiLounge promises to deliver the best quality and value that you expect from professionals. (Courtesy)

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*Region is the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Census Bureau Statistical Area as defined by the federal government's Office of Management and Budget