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Regionalization: small areas coming together as one region by natural or outside forces. It’s happening in the Valley.

One question is being discussed throughout our four counties. Has this region (deep South Texas) ever experienced a series of economic boosts like the one we are in the middle of right now? These are special times, and history books will have chapters covering the current phenomenal developments in the Rio Grande Valley.

Many emphatically proclaim that it’s our time. We’re certainly due. Whatever the case, such positive economic impacts include I-2 and I-69, UT-RGV and now SpaceX. All together let’s say, “Welcome Elon Musk!” The Valley has landed (figuratively speaking) a world changer. That’s right. SpaceX here is much more than a game changer; it’s a world changer!

Luck could have something to do with it, but I firmly believe luck is brought about by hard work practiced the right way and for the right reasons. Local organizations, businesses and other community leaders throughout the Rio Grande Valley, along with many federal, state and regional leaders from Washington, D.C., to Austin, are operating collectively with the mindset, initiatives and practices that benefit us all. We are so much stronger as a cohesive, win-for-everybody region. The ongoing collaboration of city and county governments, economic development corporations plus private and public partnerships is a collective effort unmatched, perhaps, in the Rio Grande Valley’s history.

Sure, geography played a big part of why SpaceX had its eye on Boca Chica Beach as a future launch site. But equally important were the local professionals working together to present Cameron County as the most viable location in the world. Yep, in the world! Cheers to Brownsville Economic Development Corporation for taking the lead in this quest to bring Mr. Musk and his team to our home, our Rio Grande Valley.

If the schedule stays intact, rocket launches from Boca Chica Beach will commence in less than two years. Wow! Our skyline on those evenings will be breathtaking. What an attraction for local, regional, national and international tourism! And this truly is a total RGV win. While the launch site is between Brownsville and Port Isabel, our entire region is the winner. The economic impact of SpaceX on deep South Texas -- jobs, housing, education, tourism, manufacturing, etc. -- is projected to be the single biggest boost to the local economy we have ever experienced.

Due to the ongoing work of so many businesses, organizations and community leaders across the region, the stars are aligned for great achievements in the Rio Grande Valley. We must continue raising the bar, fulfilling obligations and working side by side. When one town scores a touchdown, the entire Rio Grande Valley cheers the victory.

Todd Brelund - General Manager
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Primping Your Ride

By Eileen Mattei

Our cars, trucks and SUVs represent major investments and lifestyle choices. Investing money in keeping them running well and looking great is a wise decision. We take pride in our vehicles and baby them to keep them in optimal condition: washed, waxed, oiled and aligned, accessorized with custom sound and alarm systems, new tires and window tints. A wide range of Valley businesses stand ready to primp our ride. Vehicle dealers like Hacienda Ford with its Quick Lane and Clark-Knapp Honda cater to numerous drivers, of course. But given that the average vehicle in the Rio Grande Valley is 12 years old, the region’s care car companies see a lot of customers.

Pueblo Tires & Service may have started as a tire business doing a little mechanical work back in Brownsville in 1972, but it has expanded to 100 employees and 11 locations, including Kingsville. “We have grown to where we can do anything mechanical,” said Pueblo operations manager Ben Valdez from company headquarters in McAllen. Alignment, shocks, brakes, tires and fluids are part of everyday car care. “We offer a one-stop shop, so you don’t have to run around town. We fix everything except broken hearts.”

Still owned by the founding Ivey family, Pueblo is remodeling its McAllen corporate store and has plans for future growth. The company holds property on the expressway in San Juan and in a Corpus Christi suburb that will eventually be store locations.

“In today’s economy, people are aware they need their vehicles in good shape to get to work. Research show they would rather invest in their vehicles because they need them. It’s costly to put things off,” Valdez said. Pueblo’s customers get emails and mail-out reminders for preventative maintenance and services that keep them in the loop. The open line of communications contributes to the steady stream of repeat customers. “There are a lot of free things they get from doing business with us, like free rotation and balancing. We sell package deals and have competitive prices. Nobody loves them more than Pueblo.”

After Eloisa Hurtado’s 2010 Toyota RAV4 was hit by flying gravel on the Expressway, she took the vehicle to Cheap Auto Glass. A side window had been shattered and the windshield cracked. Yet Darren Tiffin, who launched Cheap Auto Glass 27 years ago, said the incidence of expressway windshield problems probably has decreased from previous years. “Now all the on-ramps are at least a half mile away from caliche roads (which gets kicked up as vehicles speed down the road).” That change in traffic reduces breakage as does less construction. Of course, Tiffen benefits from both sides of the pie. He repairs the windshields of the road contractors’ equipment, which get broken by vandals, as well as private and commercial vehicle windshields which have been broken by roadwork debris.

Cheap Auto Glass used to primarily work with dealers and insurance companies, but no longer, Tiffin said. “With insurance companies, after a while, I was lucky to make two or three percent over cost, plus paperwork and the wait for payment. It wasn’t worth my Las Brisas Handwash and detailing, including a carpet shampoo, can make a 12-year-old vehicle look nearly new. (VBR)
time. I went after the cash market, and we grew so fast.” Given that most deductibles today are $250 or $500, Tiffen’s customers are paying out of their own pockets for replacement windshields and windows. The fact that the average Valley vehicle is 12 years old also impacts who will be paying for glass replacement.

Cheap Auto Glass crew installs only Dow glass. “I want to know when I put in glass, everyone’s going to be safe,” he said.

When your car needs more than the rapid wash that grocery or gas station drive-thrus deliver, it is time to visit a popular neighborhood hand wash and detailing business, like Las Brisas Hand-wash. A top to bottom, inside and out, clean and polish job, complete with Armor All, that would cost $50 in Washington, D.C., costs $20 at the Harlingen company operating from a repurposed gas station. Oscar Ortega heads Las Brisas’ seven-man crew which never gets to slow down on Saturdays, catering to both the date night and Sunday church crowds. In contrast, the newest car washes in the region are the three self-serve Blue Wave Express locations. They pride themselves on using only 35 gallons per vehicle and recycling the water and reclaiming the cleaning products.

Oil Can Harry’s, the quick oil change chain locally owned by Hollon Oil Co. of Weslaco, has locations in Edinburg, Harlingen, Pharr and Weslaco. Michelle Hollon Wilson said the company recently addressed the questions of what women want to see and how they want to be treated when they come into Oil Can Harry’s. Nicer bathrooms, waiting room décor that is less utilitarian, and more available information were among the answers that the oil change facility has applied.

The company’s courtesy checks of filters, tire pressure and fluid levels reassure drivers that their vehicles are roadworthy. While the days of changing car oil every 3,000 miles are gone, most motorists faithfully come by for 5,000-mile oil changes, as their manuals recommend.

D-Tronics enables drivers to have some fun with their rides. Custom sound systems are available in a wide range of configurations. Car alarms are another popular type of “sound equipment,” as drivers aware that a car is stolen every 26 seconds in the U. S. Top targets for thieves are Ford, Chevy and Dodge pickups. Texas summers bring in customers for window tints, which does more than make the
owners look cool. The film protects interiors, deflects as much as 72% of ambient heat, reduces glare and deters break-ins.

Preventative maintenance not only helps your vehicle last longer. It gives you one less thing to worry about.

See Harlingenautoglassservice.com, fuebolotires.com, d-ronics.com, Oil Can Harry's at 781-6457 or 969-0049, and Las Brisas at 364-3499.

Determining the cause of under-the-hood problems takes a mixture of technology, looking and listening. (VBR)

At Oil Can Harry's, Danny Martinez drains the used oil before performing courtesy checks on tires and fluid levels. (VBR)

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Spies and Private Eyes

By Eileen Mattei

Has the expressway billboard for the RGV Spy Store caught your eye? Ric Tamez hopes so. “It lets people know we’re here,” said the owner of RGV SpyTek, which carries security cameras, GPS trackers, recording devices, data recovery tools for hard drives and much, much more. “We’re the only spy shop in the Valley, but it’s a competitive world,” he said. “I’ve got to stay ahead of anyone thinking about getting into the business.”

Tamez, a former McAllen Police Department burglary investigator, opened the spy shop in 2008 and worked as a licensed private investigator to support the store until his business got on its feet. “The transition occurred faster than I thought. By the third year, I was able to drop investigation work and focus on the spy shop,” he said.

The North 23rd Street store is filled with gadgetry ranging from night vision binoculars, stun guns, and personal alarms to an astounding inventory of surveillance cameras disguised as globes, mantel clocks, Coke cans, smoke detectors, flash drives and clothes hooks. Private investigators regularly stop by to see if there is anything new they can use in their work, Tamez said. He, in turn, refers customers seeking a private investigator to them.

“Our store is unique. We can afford to have a 15-20 minute conversation with our customers. We want to know what they looking for, what they are going to use it for. Some customers wonder why we want to know. We want to make sure we sell them the right product. Security cameras are a big thing, but they are not all alike, and they are not all going to work the same way,” said Tamez. “We pride ourselves on providing information and service,” even after the sale. “I think the customers who have purchased from us appreciate it.”

Individuals rather than businesses constitute the majority of SpyTek customers. Tamez and technician J.D. Guzman exercise discretion when selling certain items. “We talk to people. I try to keep them honest. We have to be very careful who we sell lock-pick sets to. We never want to sell to someone who will injure or rip off someone else.” On a case-by-case basis, he will request an identification card from a potential customer.

“It’s a very interesting business to stay the
least,” said Tamez, after nearly seven years running the spy shop. He’s excited about new products coming out because analog quality has improved so much. One new item is a personal tracker, small as a matchbox, which has an SOS button and a battery that lasts up to three days. It’s a gadget for people who travel or are concerned about kidnapping. The store also stocks a DVD titled “Expect the Unexpected” about avoiding kidnapping.

Tamez is a proponent of dashboard cams, particularly the newest ones which feature a GPS logger and continuous-motion and shock-activated recordings. “I don’t understand why they are not more popular here. We have a lot of bad drivers.” Dash cams are common in Russia and Europe.

Tamez called Guzman a master technician, proficient in spy gadgetry. “When we get something new, I tell J.D. to test it out. He tells me if he likes it. Some things are very difficult to use, so we stay away from them. Nobody wants to read the book, so what we sell has to be user-friendly.” The store does not install the equipment it sells.

Because SpyTek carries about 100 different styles of surveillance cameras, ranging from nanny cams to store mirror units, they have become the go-to place for those devices. “We get business sent to us from Best Buy and Radio Shack. We specialize in things they don’t carry.”

Even spies who need self-defense tools, rearview sunglasses or Sherlock Holmes-style magnifying lens and microscopes will find their gadgets at RGV SpyTek.

For more information, see rgvspytec.com or call 971-8779.
W.E.T. All Over the Valley

By Anita Westervelt

Logos are an integral part of the business world. They may make us laugh, roll our eyes or leave us wondering. Some, like W.E.T., conjure up exactly what the business is all about – spraying water, getting wet, getting clean. Located on the south side of Expressway 83, La Feria’s million-dollar branch of W.E.T. showcases the powerful, positive logo for Washing Equipment Texas, whose biggest division is industrial cleaning equipment.

Think of the home-owner with a portable power washer cleaning a driveway. Magnify that by a billion bubbles or so and think oil rigs, runways and waste water treatment plants. W.E.T. has been putting together systems to clean just about any industrial set up in the Valley for more than 20 years.

Branch manager Victor De Los Santos started the La Feria branch 21 years ago. “We had three solid existing accounts. I started the dealership in a storage shed behind my house,” De Los Santos said. “It was pretty exciting. It was a challenge.” Now, he averages 8,000-9,000 minutes a month on his phone with customers and has a wall full of sales awards. The branch employs three salesmen, three service technicians and a chemical detail specialist. As manager, De Los Santos does most of the sales and shares his special approach. “I like to talk to the guy who uses the equipment first. Not the owner.”

The La Feria W.E.T. is the number one seller of LANDA industrial pressure washers. “Our branch has always been number one. We sell 40% of the largest units of the 100 distributors. The average units are $5,000-$6,000. We put together $40,000 rigs to service the oil field industry,” De Los Santos said. “With OSHA, safety is the main issue. They have to have those rigs clean all the time.” Pressure washing equipment cleans oil booms, oil rigs and oil well equipment as well as pipelines, drill pipes and storage tanks at oil fields. De Los Santos sells 80-90% of the more expensive diesel engine units manufactured by LANDA. “It is built better and lasts longer. Diesel is not flammable and can be used around oil fields.”

De Los Santos’ original three accounts were small trucking companies and he still does business with two of them. “My background was in auto parts. My target quickly became trucking. Those three accounts spread like wildfire. Texas Department of Transportation requires trucks and engines be cleaned once a week. At first, they were just small-time trucking companies with two or three trucks. We have grown together.” Now, his customers include local municipalities, cities, state departments, mega-trucking companies, prison systems and airports.

“Heavy equipment on construction sites, prison systems, restaurants, even earth-moving equipment on freeway construction, has to be kept clean. Let’s face it,” De Los Santos said, “everything on this earth needs to be cleaned.” The La Feria sales and service area stretches from Zapata down to the border. Their three top customer categories are the trucking industry, oil fields and construction areas.
De Los Santos spends most of his days on phone calls, talking with new customers, following up, closing deals, fixing problems, scheduling maintenance and service calls. Every piece of equipment sold is serviced, so their service department is on standby around-the-clock. “The oil business is booming from Laredo and San Antonio. At 3 a.m., a machine breaks down -- these machines have to be operating. And you know where oil fields are, they’re out in the middle of nowhere.”

Contract cleaners account for 20% of their business. These behind the scenes, late-night cleaners get chewing gum off sidewalks and deep clean restaurant kitchen floors and vent systems when no one’s there. The contractors clean airport public areas and more: even runways need to be professionally pressure washed. Brownsville and McAllen airports are customers.

“Every industry is seasonal,” said De Los Santos. “The produce companies, for instance, pressure wash their processing conveyors.” W.E.T. sells automatic washers for local car dealerships and coin-operated self-car wash operations.

Just as everything needs to be cleaned, there is a pressure washing unit for the job, from cleaning municipal sewers and culverts, and preparing surfaces of buildings for restoration to removing graffiti, paint, decals and highway stripes. W.E.T. sells equipment and accessories, and services and provides washing chemicals for the equipment which also can be used to apply disinfectants to aid in sanitizing facilities.

The W.E.T. office offers equipment rentals.

For more information, see wet-inc.com.
Renewing an Aging Market

By Eileen Mattei

If you think your business does not benefit from Winter Texans and has no connections to them, it’s time to re-examine the impact of the 100,000 people who stayed in the Valley last winter and spent a total of $710 million here. The average Winter Texan household spends $13,372 during four months in residence. The Valley businesses that provide them with groceries, car repairs, theater tickets, restaurant meals and health care have employees and suppliers who more than likely shop with you or use your services.

For 25 years, UTPA has been surveying and studying Winter Texans: why they come, how much they spend here, and their impact on the RGV economy, according to Penny Simpson, UTPA marketing professor and director of the Valley Marketing and Tourism Research Center. “When compared to the over-65 population in the United States, our Winter Texans have a higher average household income ($59,000) and are better educated. The good news is the number of days they are in the Valley is up,” now at 123 days compared to 106 years ago. Even better, 96% say they are likely to return. The return is linked to the fact that just over 50% own a house or mobile home here. In fact, 2014 saw a surge in mobile home purchases, said Simpson at a forum on the latest Winter Texan survey held at the McAllen Chamber of Commerce.

Canadians now make up 14% of the region’s winter visitors. Like the Americans, they still come to the Valley for the climate, the low cost of living and varied activities. Their preferred activities are socializing, shopping, eating out and going places with others. One local tour agency offer trips with a French-speaking guide for the Quebecois.

But the bad news is that the Winter Texan population is aging. The average age is now 71, versus 68 eight years ago. “The percent of first year Winter Texans in 2006 was 6%. Now only 3% are first year. I think this is pretty troubling. They are older and not being replaced,” Simpson said. The number of Winter Texans has dropped from a peak of 133,000.

Some factors in the decline of Winter Texans numbers are outside our control, said Nancy Millar, director of the McAllen CVB. While the perception of border violence doesn’t affect Winter Texans themselves, their families can be anxious and pressure them not to come. And some seniors’ increasing health problems eventually limit their mobility.

But a lack of recruitment in northern cities is a major problem. “I’ve watched what’s happening,” Millar said. “The individual (Valley) cities have pulled back on advertising and promotion to Winter Texans. Obviously, if we are not reaching out to potential Winter Texans, they are not hearing our story that we have a great place for them. We recognize that baby boomers are going to retire in different ways than their parents. They are retiring later, taking shorter trips, and have encore careers.” Instead of shuffleboard and square dancing, new retirees are seeking “soft adventure” activity such as biking, hiking, and dancing to music from the 1960s.

New Winter Texans are more interested in having a good time, rather than penny-pinching, agreed Nydia Tapia-Gonzales, director of the South Texas Tourism Marketing Cooperative. The organization’s new marketing slogan emphasizes ‘Stay longer’ because the cost of living is so low.

“Because of the enormity of the Baby Boomer market, cities like Houston, San Antonio, Las Vegas and many others have launched expensive advertising and marketing campaigns. We cannot be left behind,” she said. Current members of the co-op are the Hidalgo...
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Q&A - Dutch Fisher

Dutch Fisher and his wife Ludy have operated Dutch Fisher Real Estate for more than seven years. Their new location in Brownsville in April quadrupled their office space and has allowed them to bring aboard new associates. Regional events from Space X to the formation of UTRGV to the impact of Eagle Ford Shale are making it impossible to rein in widespread exuberance about the Valley’s next decade. He spoke with VBR’s editor about developments that are changing the perspective of residents as well as the outsiders’ perception of the entire Rio Grande Valley.

Q What was it about recent project announcements that prompted you to say, ‘The future is so bright we’ve gotta wear shades’?

A Cameron and Hidalgo County now appear to be cooperating as one metroplex. The leaders of Brownsville, McAllen and Harlingen are pro-active and encouraging growth. What used to function as a hunter society with everyone for themselves, is now more like a farming society, sharing information.

Q Since you’re originally from Florida and attended numerous Apollo launches, you must have backed SpaceX from the beginning, right?

A SpaceX is close to my heart. I have been an ardent supporter ever since Brownsville became a contender a few years ago. The project is not only going to positively affect the economy of Brownsville, but all Valley communities. The true economic impact beyond SpaceX’s $85 million investment and employment is immense. Very conservatively, BEDC said it would mean $50 million in annual salaries alone, not counting jobs with suppliers. That will build on the investments made in infrastructure and education.

Q Is the infrastructure capable of supporting this surge in good news?

A Brownsville’s infrastructure should be more than capable of supporting this and other ventures. After many years, I-69 is a reality. Highway 550 (from I-69) and Highway 48 (from Brownsville) are both overweight corridors leading directly to the Port of Brownsville and tying into Mexico’s Superhighway 2 from the Pacific. The world class Port of Brownsville, home to a major oil rig manufacturer and the largest concentration of ship-breaking facilities, has a new partnership with private industry that paves the way for development of terminals and industrial parks. The west rail relocation project is a few months from completion and will divert trains from downtown Brownsville. The elimination of traffic congestion and back-ups there will result in a better quality of life in Brownsville and open up the western quadrant for residential, commercial and professional sites. The gas-fired electrical generating facility coming online in north Brownsville near the desalination plant will be of great benefit. Roads, electricity and drinking water are essential ingredients for a growing, prosperous community.

Q If we’ve got the infrastructure, what about the workforce?

A The most important element of the Valley’s prosperity has to do with educational opportunities. The youth of today are the workforce and leaders of the future. We need to keep them here. Major contributors to this are the merger that has created UTRGV and its medical school, the growth of Texas Southmost College, TSTC and South Texas College, and the improvements to K-12 schools. All businesses, small and large, require educated, responsible community members to achieve success. The Valley is developing the people needed to grow the region.

Q What’s happening on the real estate front?

A It’s exploding. Retail and commercial activity throughout the Valley is amazing, not just in Brownsville, but in Harlingen and Hidalgo County. Since 2013, one-third of our commercial transactions are with locals, another third are with foreign nationals, and the last third are with folks from outside our region. Because of growth in the commercial, medical, academic and law enforcement sectors, the residential housing market is quite strong. We are experiencing robust activity across all socio-economic levels, in both single-family and multi-family units.

Q Did you promise your wife to cut your work week below 100 hours?

A Yes, I did and so far I am adhering to it. Lady is the person most responsible for our growth and success.

Q What’s the future look like?

A As I said before, the future is so bright, we’ve gotta wear shades!
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- Jeremiah 33:6

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Why We Choose As Our Multimedia Marketing Partner

For decades I have often said: “what you make look important, becomes important.” Valley Business Report has taken that statement to the highest level. Congratulations on your half decade of success. We appreciate your commitment to our region and to our collective success.”

--Michael J. Blum, NAI Rio Grande Valley

Placing our advertising dollars in VBR is a great investment, because VBR is distributed to Valley businesses. The content is strong and helpful to Valley businesses and this education provides strength to our local economy.”

--Dora Brown, IBC Bank

Relevant content. Consistent quality. The only resource of its kind in the Valley. Just three of the reasons I count on the Valley Business Report.”

--Michele Sparks, Clark Chevrolet & Clark Knapp Honda

The Valley Business Report is a reflection of our wonderful community we call the Rio Grande Valley. Their hard work in telling the story of Valley business has helped keep the community connected throughout the years. Congratulations!”

--Edna de Saro, Lone Star National Bank

VBR’s quality material, pertinent information and extensive distribution channels made it easy to choose them as our multimedia partner. VBR, a small business venture itself, understands the importance of targeting the right audience, and this has played a tremendous role in the success of our Ruby Red Ventures initiative.”

--Alex Meade, Mission Economic Development Corporation

The Valley Business Report is an important periodical which allows All Star Metals to learn more about our local economy. It also serves as a powerful tool to present our services to other local businesses so we can grow with them.”

--Nirav Shah, All Star Shredding Scrap Metal Services

VBR reaches those who we want to reach. VBR is an extension of our marketing efforts showing business prospects why they should ‘Come Home to Harlingen!’”

--Raudel Garza, Harlingen Economic Development Corporation

VTX1 chooses to promote our business in Valley Business Report because it is a reputable forum that connects businesses throughout a four-county area. The content provides an excellent resource for pertinent economic information and in-depth business news in the Rio Grande Valley, and we look forward to continuing our partnership.”

--Jenny Hull, VTX1 Companies

VBR gives PTT Financial a great opportunity to cross-promote with businesses that complement ours. We are so happy to have chosen to advertise PTT Financial in VBR and I know with time, we will develop a structure of business partnerships that will give us a large number of leads that will make PTT Financial even more successful.”

--Letty Romero, PTT Financial

Valley Business Report” + “Rio Bank”= “Local Community Business Partnership”

--Craig K Lewis, Rio Bank

VBR has quickly become a respected source of information on business development and issues in the Valley. We find it to be a great vehicle to communicate our business profile to other valley business leaders. Congratulations Todd, Eileen and everyone at VBR for five years of service to the Valley business community!”

--Ben Pena, Burton McCumber & Cortez, LLP

The Development Corporation of Mercedes uses Valley Business Report on a fairly consistent basis. It is a very positive pro-business publication reaching a strong Valley business audience which helps us to reinforce our message regarding the Mid Valley and why Mercedes is a good choice for business.”

--Alicia Aguilar, Development Corporation of Mercedes

VBR has always been a quality publication that appeals to our customer base.”

--Edna Posada, Spa La Posada
Multimedia Marketing Partner

“Why We Choose VBR as Our Multimedia Marketing Partner

VBR has always been a quality publication that appeals to our customer base. We choose VBR as our advertising partner because it represents the Rio Grande Valley with the most beautiful, relevant, and informative publication in Texas. VBR shows people what is really happening on the border and who is making it happen.”

--Mike Bigelow, Schlitterbahn Beach Resort

The Valley Business Report is a positive promotional tool for the business world as it is inspirational for existing and new businesses offering an abundance of success stories and how to’s. The Raymondville Chamber of Commerce proudly presently utilizes and will continue to use this publication.”

--Elma Chavez, Raymondville Chamber of Commerce

Congrats to Valley Business Report on five impressive years of success! We have partnered with VBR in the past to help promote our products and services and increase our visibility. We feel it is an excellent vehicle to reach our target audience and we are proud to support this voice of positive economic news for our region.”

--S. Scott Allex, CWS®, Long Chilton CPA

The Weslaco EDC chooses VBR because of the quality of throughput; we know that our ads are going the distance and getting into the hands of decision makers that are looking to relocate or expand their business to Weslaco. The VBR team always goes the extra mile to make sure we are satisfied customers and you can’t beat quality customer service.”

--Vanessa Barrios, Weslaco Economic Development Corporation

TSTC supports VBR because it gets us right where we want to go - to the members of the business community. It’s a win-win partnership we plan to maintain. Congratulations on the anniversary!”

--Lynda Lopez, TSTC

VBR is the perfect partnership for businesses and advertising. Not only is VBR widely known and recognized throughout the Rio Grande Valley, but it is very professional, and is filled with a wealth of information.”

--Kathy Payton, Aspire Consulting Group

The Weslaco Area Chamber of Commerce chooses to advertise with Valley Business Report because they are a respected business news source for South Texas. Valley Business Report reaches our target audience, business and industry leaders. Congratulations on your 5-year anniversary!”

--Martha Noell, Weslaco Area Chamber of Commerce

Selling and servicing a big ticket specialty item like a boat, much of our success, is based on target marketing. The Valley Business Report provides the channel to reach our target … and does it in a professional manner.”

--Rob Youker, The Sportsman

The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce is proud to have a publication like VBR in our region, dedicated to promoting the accomplishments of local business leaders and the entrepreneurial sector. Over the years, VBR has been devoted to local commerce and has proven its commitment to be a leading source of business news in the Rio Grande Valley.”

--Maria Hall, Brownsville Chamber of Commerce

I enjoy working with the Valley Business Report team because they provide personal service such as contacting me on a regular basis with special programs and/or topics that benefit our industry. Congratulations to Valley Business Report, and best wishes for continued success!”

--Elva Jackson Garza, Edwards Abstract and Title Co.

I selected VBR Magazine as one of the magazines to advertise with because it caters to a professional adult audience.”

--Sally Avila, Avila Plastic Surgery
Written Agreements Between the Owners

By Brent Bishop

A wellness evaluation for your business, like that for your body, is a comprehensive process requiring consideration of various aspects of the business. Each aspect of the business is like an organ of the body. In August, we discussed the need to look again at written agreements with clients and suppliers. This month, we examine the importance of putting in place written agreements between the owners of a business.

I heard an interesting story years ago about how and why owners of a business remain together and why they break up. First, businesses that are extremely profitable break up because one part of the ownership feels as if it is responsible for the success(es) despite the failure and/or refusal of the remainder of the ownership to adequately contribute. The tension created from this dynamic leads one group to disassociate from the rest.

On the other hand, businesses that are suffering from extreme unprofitability become so miserable for all involved that the tension created from this dynamic leads each group to disassociate from the other. In other words, the raft is small and it’s out in a large body of water. Each owner is barely hanging on and barely has his/her head above the water. This is no time for any of the owners to “go it solo.”

When you agreed to become an owner of your business, did you envision reporting to the spouse and/or children of your co-owner(s)? If you do not have a written agreement in place to address how to resolve conflicts between owners and the voluntary or involuntary termination of an ownership interest, you may be doing just that.

It is prudent to identify a specific procedure for addressing the voluntary and involuntary transfer/disposition of an owner’s interest. Whether you fit into one of the categories above, or somewhere in between, having a written agreement in place can assist all owners to understand the specific procedure for addressing an owner’s departure.

This task involves social psychology as well as state law and tax law. Identifying ownership transfer/disposition procedures and dollar amounts (if any) is a difficult matter. Each owner approaches this task with a different mindset from the operation of the business as a whole. On this issue, individual goals tend to take precedence over the goals of the business entity as a whole. Striking a balance on an acceptable ownership transfer/disposition procedure can take several rounds of reviewing and negotiating draft agreements.

A written agreement allows for planning. The default position may not be palatable to any involved. The Texas Business Organizations Code consists of hundreds of pages of statutes that will guide when no enforceable agreement addresses the situation at hand. But then the question becomes, when was the last time you planned your future according to the terms of the Texas Business Organizations Code? And, is your subjective view of what a statute allegedly says the same view held by the widow and 19-year-old child of your deceased co-owner?

Brent Bishop is a commercial and employment litigation attorney in the McAllen office of Cox Smith Matthews Incorporated - a full-service law firm with offices in McAllen, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin and Dallas, Texas. His full biography is available at coxsmith.com.
Internal Controls for Small Businesses

By Ben Pena

What is internal control? How does it affect your business? Internal controls or internal checks and balances in companies are extremely important to safeguard your assets such as cash and ensuring accurate and reliable financial accounting reporting.

One component of internal controls consists of segregation of accounting duties. For example, if a company has one person who is able to 1) create a new vendor in the accounting system, 2) process invoices, 3) prepare checks, 4) sign checks, 5) record the checks in the accounting system and 6) perform monthly bank reconciliations, there is a lack of segregation of duties. The risk of embezzlement is very real and present. In this case, there are no controls relating to the disbursements of cash.

In order to mitigate this risk, a prudent business would segregate the duties identified above between two or more people. The objective of this is to create gaps throughout the entire transaction cycle (in this case cash disbursements) and prevent one person from executing all of the necessary steps from “cradle-to-grave” without anyone else taking notice or having oversight. Segregation of duties provides a way to monitor outgoing cash disbursements and to ensure a company’s lifeline—cash is safeguarded.

A common misconception is that a small business’ accounting staff is too small to have an effective internal control system in place to safeguard assets. In other words, adequate segregation of duties cannot be obtained because the company is too small. The truth is, smaller business can easily implement internal control measures to ensure the safeguarding of assets and accurate financial accounting and reporting. Common accounting areas where internal controls are important to most companies consist of:

- Disbursements of cash
- Receipts and collections of cash
- Payroll and benefits
- Inventory and shrink
- Employee expense reimbursement requests
- Misuse of assets, such as equipment
- Use and payment of company credit cards

The above points are common areas where many small businesses are needlessly exploited, often over several years. An evaluation and response to fraud risks of your transactional processes can bring you the peace of mind and remove the doubt that may be in the back of your mind.

Business owners should seek professional counsel relating to the financial affairs of their businesses. A trained professional, such as a CPA, can make an assessment of your company’s control environment and make recommendations to close the loopholes or areas of vulnerability in a company.

Ben Pena, CPA, is an assurance services partner with Burton, McCumber & Cortez in Brownsville and McAllen, Texas. He is a licensed Certified Fraud Examiner, Certified Internal Controls Auditor and has more than 17 years of assessment of internal control environments and loss risk mitigation. For more information, contact him at McCumber & Cortez, LLP at 956-542-2553.
Create Great Employees

By Susan LeMiles Holmes

As employers, we often define good hiring as being able to hire the person who can prove she has already successfully done the job somewhere else. Even if we find this person, it turns out, “nobody’s perfect.”

She’s late; she doesn’t know everything she thought she did; she surfs the Internet when there are deadlines to be met. There might be someone in the office that “rubs her wrong” or a lack of progress in learning the new job. If you are lucky, a little adjustment period, a few timely corrections, a bit of conflict management and some personalized training can fix these things.

More serious or chronic lack of progress and competency requires the traditional “meet with HR and put her on probation” meeting. You know the drill. This single weapon solution and the EEO compliant improvement plan that goes with it often works because of fear. Fear of losing her job may fix your problems by correcting the symptoms of failure, but the remedy leaves her problems untouched.

True remediation, just as the term is used in “environmental remediation,” includes immediate action to reverse negative impact. The damage must be stopped, then reversed. The contaminants must be removed and prevented from collecting in the future.

I accept that there are no perfect employees, but, I do believe there are perfect teams. If you are a good leader, you have a team that knows how to toss the ball back and forth to each other and pulls together across job descriptions to meet deadlines. They teach each other, share knowledge and want each other to succeed.

With your help, each of them has identified and developed individual abilities. Each understands and enjoys their true strengths. You have designed the work so that each gets to display his talent and can be proud of contributions. You cultivate and reward that pride. It is an honor, maybe even fun, to work on this team because the people on it are going somewhere!

When someone slips or a new hire is struggling, use the strongest weapons you have. The appeal of belonging to something successful and meaningful, the opportunity to grow and learn, self-determination and pride are more powerful than fear. If you must, use them all.

My formula begins with getting the person’s attention. Ignoring the problem has become habitual for this employee. An invitation into a private office with a witness usually works; then I announce that this is going to be a tough conversation. Use suspense to your advantage.

The employee expects a lecture. Don’t do it. Instead, ask open-ended questions. “What is your understanding of your role on our team? What is your understanding of what we are trying to do here? What do you know about the consequences of our failure?”

Establish the fact that the two of you agree. “I’m confident that you understand what we are doing and the consequences of failure.” Now it is time to be blunt. “So, tell me about this Internet surfing/Facebook thing. I’ve asked you to stop multiple times. Talk to me about this.” Even though you probably won’t hear anything new, visibly listen to the answers.

“I just get bored; I’m taking my break; I’m having relationship problems. I’m not doing anything wrong!” Respond reasonably. “Why do you hide it? Why are you embarrassed? Two hours is not too long to expect an adult to concentrate. You won’t be able to hold any job if you accept this in yourself.”

“You are not a bad person, but it’s clear you are not committed to the team and the incredibly important mission we have. Success includes doing some things that just aren’t that much fun, but we all do them.”

“You have seen the kind of boss I like to be, but there is another kind of boss I can be. The next time I find you surfing, you will have demonstrated your decision not to be a part of the team. You will need to find another job. I need to know whether or not you want to work here under these circumstances. I don’t want you to decide right now. I want you to leave, go home for the day, with pay. Come back tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. and tell me your decision. As much as I like you, the success of this team is much, much more important.”

Susan LeMiles Holmes is director of Career Services at Texas State Technical College and a published novelist. You can inquire about hiring TSTC graduates by emailing susan.holmes@harlingen.tstc.edu or learn about Susan’s novel set in The Valley, “Touch the Mayan Moon” at www.susanlemiles.com.
Unemployment and Labor Reports

Special from Manpower

Mike Willis, director of Business Partnerships of Workforce Solutions, issued the latest reports and indicated, “Unemployment rates increased across the region, consistent with seasonal patterns, as we typically see job losses in Education (Government sector).

Comparing the same period in 2013 to 2014:
• Hidalgo County: increased .7% compared to +1.0% now
• Cameron County: +.5% compared to +.6% now
• Willacy: +.5% then, +.8% now
• Starr: +.2% 2013, +1.1% now

Across the region, we saw a net decrease of 600 education jobs, 700 healthcare jobs and a net gain of 400 in Trade/Transportation.”
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Advantages to Business Entity Ownership of Property

By Frank Orozco

The use of business entities (e.g., corporations, LLCs, LLPs and limited partnerships) to hold and operate property has significant benefits for both U.S. and non-citizens. Owning and operating property investments through one or more business entities is generally more advantageous than direct personal ownership of the property. Limited liability protection is the most cited advantage. Debts arising out of the use of or occurrences on property owned by individuals who are not operating under the umbrella of a business entity could – if imposed on the owners personally -- have a devastating effect on the owners for many years. Use of a business entity for personal liability protection is no substitute for liability insurance, however. The “cost of defense” (i.e., cost of lawyers) most insurance policies provide in the event the owners are sued is well worth the premium the owners pay for liability insurance coverage.

Formation of business entities for ownership of real property is one of the most common tools used by lawyers and accountants to minimize the effect of the estate tax. This tool is particularly important for non-U.S. citizens who own U.S. property. The non-U.S. citizen does not have to have an operating “business” in order to take advantage of these business entity ownership benefits. A business entity can be used simply to own or hold title to U.S. property.

As discussed in a previous article, the estate tax exemption amount for non-U.S. citizens is extremely low. A non-U.S. citizen’s ownership of U.S. property with significant value (above $60,000) may expose that non-citizen to imposition of the estate tax upon the owner’s death. Use of a business entity, combined with proper succession planning, can minimize imposition or the amount of any estate tax. The non-citizen may be able to eliminate the need for any probate in the United States, under certain circumstances. This same technique is often used to minimize or avoid estate tax for high net worth U.S. citizens.

Business entities can properly control and manage property when there are multiple owners. If the property is owned outright by several persons, each owner (either intentionally, or through circumstances unintentionally imposed on that owner) has the ability to negatively affect the property and the other owners. Even if only one or two owners have the authority to manage or encumber the property, that will not stop the non-authorized owner
from encumbering the property or affecting the other owners. It will simply give the other owners a claim (i.e., probably a lawsuit) against the unauthorized owner whose actions or circumstances resulted in a loss to the other owners.

In contrast, business entity ownership imposes a structure upon the owners that can prevent a non-authorized owner – or his circumstances – from encumbering the property or adversely affecting the other owners. With a business entity owner in place, third parties dealing with the property must deal with only an authorized person (e.g., an authorized officer or manager) of the business entity. That person’s personal circumstances and debts generally will not be imposed on the other owners or the property owned by the business entity.

This business entity structure also facilitates passive investment by persons who will not be actively involved in the operation of the property. Control and management can be kept in the hands of certain owners, while still allowing others to share in the profits. This can facilitate a managing owner's autonomy in the operation of the property, undisturbed by an owner with limited knowledge of the property or the business being conducted on it.

Estate planners use this advantage of business entity ownership to facilitate moving the “value” of property to children or others during an owner’s lifetime, thereby decreasing the size of the owner’s estate upon death. This results in a concomitant decrease in the amount of the estate tax and may eliminate it altogether. At the same time, through voting trusts or designation of management powers in the business entity, the original owner can maintain the ability to control the property during his lifetime.

The use of business entities to own property has several advantages over individual ownership. Centralized control and tax benefits are but a few of the advantages that – with proper advice from your legal and tax professionals – you can realize. You owe it to yourself and your family to explore the options and benefits available to you.

Francisco Orozco is an attorney with the Kantack Alcantara Law Office, P.C., a Rio Grande Valley law firm whose practice includes estate planning and probate, real estate and business law. See kantacklawoffice.com for more information.
Crowdfunding for Financing a Business

By Aaron Gonzalez

Securing a business loan is a challenge for many businesses, startup or existing. With little or no business financial track records to show a lender their capabilities to repay loans, businesses oftentimes use their own money or high-interest loans to begin or continue funding their businesses.

Businesses with unique products or services, however, have a potential source of funding known as crowdfunding. Through promotional campaigns, crowdfunding can raise money from a large number of people, typically via Internet sites known as platforms, for a variety of purposes, including entrepreneurial ideas, non-profits, charitable crusades and commercial products. Campaigns are generally built on reward-, equity-, or donation-based systems.

To build a successful crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps.

First, choosing the right crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps.

To build a successful crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps. To build a successful crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps. To build a successful crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps. To build a successful crowdfunding campaign and access financing, businesses with unique ideas should take certain steps.

Once the suitable crowdfunding platform has been chosen, the next step is to create the buzz for the business product, service or idea. It is important to research and learn from successful, similar product campaigns.

It is strongly suggested that the business makes two videos for the campaign. One will be used for the promotion of the campaign months before it’s uploaded to a crowdfunding site. This creates a buzz for the product, service or idea. The video should be no more than two minutes long in order to hold the viewers’ attention. It should tell a story and connect with the audience. Initial promotion may take place through social media, local news, newspaper articles, and friends and family. This will ensure that once the business uploads the campaign and second video, it will have an existing network ready to help reach the monetary goal.

Before uploading a crowdfunding campaign and second video, be sure to create a well-thought out and reasonable budget for the fundraising goal. If the goal is too high, the business may not be able to reach it in the time allotted. If it is too low, it may not raise the necessary funds. Many campaigns offer rewards to investors. Therefore, it is important this expense be budgeted along with campaign costs. The funds raised will be considered as income with tax implications. The crowdfunding platform will also take a percentage of the funds raised as well.

Finally, it is imperative to not use the campaign solely as a fundraiser but also as a focus group or market-study for the product, service or idea. For example, campaign backers sometimes comment or make recommendations. It is beneficial to engage with backers to further enhance the product, service or idea.

Following these steps is important to make the most of any crowdfunding campaign. There are no guarantees that a crowdfunding campaign will be successful, but being prepared certainly increases the chances of meeting a fundraising goal in a crowdfunding platform.

On the bright side, a successful campaign doesn’t always mean that the funding goal has been reached. Some platforms allow the campaigner to keep what was raised from investors without meeting the goal. The benefit from the investor feedback alone may be more valuable than any monetary gain needed for successfully starting or expanding the business.

More information or guidance on developing a crowdfunding campaign and technical assistance is available at no-cost for area businesses. The UTPA Small Business Development Center provides confidential, one-to-one business advisement as well as training on a variety of topics to entrepreneurs, including crowdfunding. Contact the UTPA SBDC at 665-7535 to set an appointment or to sign up for the upcoming “2014 Crowdfunding Conference: Building Your Campaign” on Sept. 5 in Edinburg.

Aaron L. Gonzalez is a business advisor with Rural Business Program. He provides one-to-one counseling, business planning assistance, and training. He holds a B.A. in economics from The University of Texas at Austin.
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I-CAR GOLD CLASS PROFESSIONALS
Investing in a Vision

By Nydia O. Tapia - Gonzales

After six years of navigating through numerous obstacles, a new fixed base operations company has opened at Harlingen’s Valley International Airport. Sun Valley Aviation’s considerable investment -- the highest among airport tenants -- indicates its intent to provide the highest quality of services available in the region.

Sun Valley Aviation’s President Pat Kornegay learned to fly at this airport in the early 1970s and soon became a commercial pilot. In 1977, he took over Sun Valley Dusting Company, a crop dusting enterprise founded in Harlingen in 1939, and remains the sole proprietor of that business.

Success does not come without effort, and Kornegay knows this. Sun Valley Aviation invested in a state-of-the-art facility, brought in commercially rated pilots and highly skilled mechanics with inspection authorization. In June of this year, the company began operations in a two-story, 8,000-square-foot terminal built on land leased from the airport on the north general aviation ramp. Navy blue and taupe walls adorned with vintage photographs and the contemporary furniture create an ideal backdrop for customers seeking aircraft maintenance and storage, fuel, flight training and aircraft rentals. Clients appreciate the company’s personalized service in finding rental or courtesy cars for guests and crew. A flight planning area and pilot’s lounge are among the amenities.

But it does not end there, for the company’s comprehensive investment relies on Kornegay’s long-range vision. Sun Valley Aviation provides top of the line services, but their money is placed to take advantage of the future of Valley International Airport. Kornegay’s knowledge and experience convinced him of the enormous potential for Sun Valley Aviation if and when Valley International Airport acquires an Airport of Entry designation. “Last year, of the $40 billion generated by trade between the U.S. and Mexico, about 40% went through Laredo. If we could capture even a small percent, it would be important,” said Kornegay.

The prospect of seeing the company’s long-range plan materialize energizes Kornegay’s conversation. “The quick surge in cargo traffic and general aviation business this designation brings would benefit not only those who service the airport, but the entire Harlingen community,” he said. “The airport has all the elements needed to succeed. There is plenty of land for development, neighboring TSTC provides training through an aviation maintenance program, and there is a nice air cargo facility not being utilized.”

Kornegay explained that the increased flow of international traffic would attract more maintenance repair overhaul business, generating jobs. Added cargo traffic would follow as the result of the shipping of mechanical parts.

Furthermore, the lack of good, certificated aircraft maintenance facilities in Mexico increases the demand for these services in the U.S. border area, he said. “People from Mexico who have moved to the Valley need the flexibility to go back and forth. We manage airplanes for families in Mexico, and we can see the potential. They come and leave their airplanes to be serviced while they spend a few days in the area. They stay at hotels, shop and dine. Others fly to Houston or Dallas, so the designation would even benefit commercial airlines.”

For Kornegay, going after the Port of Entry certification requires a concentrated effort. “A strong political effort from the city of Harlingen to make this happen is important. It should be a priority,” he asserted.

According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website, a “Port of Entry” is an officially designated location where CBP officers or employees are assigned to accept entries of merchandise, clear passengers, collect duties, and enforce the various provision of CBP and related laws. Most importantly, the CBP must have the available staffing or the authorization and appropriations to hire additional staffing. Minimum basic criteria for a port include cargo and passenger facilities, administrative office space, and primary and secondary inspection rooms.

Currently Kornegay holds an ATP license and all fixed wing instructor ratings plus an A&P mechanics certificate with inspection authorization. His professional certifications and his fluent Spanish have allowed for interaction with customers from Mexico and Latin America. “For more than 30 years, I’ve been involved in the export of over 200 aircrafts to Latin America. I’m very familiar with this market,” he said. For those looking to buy an airplane, Kornegay promises a rewarding experience.

The second floor of the new building has private offices available for lease. Some are already occupied, but four are still available, complete with incredible views of the aviation ramp.

The official grand opening of Sun Valley Aviation is tentatively scheduled for Sept. 20.

See svatexas.com for more information.
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Top Left: House.Wine Chef Larry Delgado and Jessica Delgado prepare their Texas Two Step shrimp dish which won first runner-up in 2014 Great American Seafood Competition held in New Orleans in August. The McAllen chef and restaurateur used shrimp caught by trawlers in the Brownsville-Port Isabel fleet.

Top Right: TSTC Chancellor Mike Reeser addresses a crowd of regional and local elected officials, TSTC students and professors, and Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce staff and members.

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Moving On

Valley International Airport, south Texas’ largest airport, announced the appointment of Nick Consiglio to its board of directors for a five-year term. The airport board sets long-range policies and strategies for VIA.

Consiglio, a Harlingen native, earned a bachelor of business administration in marketing from Texas A&M University and has been director of marketing for Texas Regional Bank since 2012. He has been a key player in the marketing and website development industry in the Valley since 2002, and founded dcnc Marketing in 2008 where he was president.

Consiglio currently serves as president of the Harlingen Proud board of directors and vice chairman of the Harlingen Planning and Zoning Commission. He is a member of the Boys and Girls Club of Harlingen board of directors, Harlingen Industrial Foundation board of directors, and a past board member of the Cameron County Children Advocacy Center – Maggie and Monica’s House. For the past 10 years, Consiglio has also volunteered as a CCD instructor at St. Anthony Catholic Church.

Nick Consiglio
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