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**“Your Pro-RGV News”**



# Place Eggs In Carton Carefully

by: Todd Breland

Entrepreneurs are hustlers, multitaskers and at least slightly hyper -- go, go, go and sleep deprived.

The number of projects in full motion simultaneously would cause a non-entrepreneur to have stress attacks. For many, no two projects are in the same stages. A drawing illustrating active phases would replicate a spaghetti hurricane model five days before landfall.

A seasoned and successful entrepreneur is in control of a limited number of projects, their next moves, and is prepared for setbacks. But how many is enough, and when do we take inventory and say, "Whoa, this is too much?"

When that happens, which projects do we stop, put aside and shelve to the later or never library? Answering those questions is climbing the ladder of professional development. The goal is to strive for absolute perfection, but also knowing that

will never be achieved. It's much like the shooting for the stars analogy. We've been taught that rule since we were kids, and after years of practicing, we realize the stars will always be just beyond our reach.

Early in our careers, we tend to take on more projects than humanly possible to adequately manage. With age and, yes, some failures, we realize our limit. Another level of professional development is the next time we get more than five hours of sleep. We remember past lessons of not overloading ourselves with more than we can handle.

By nature, entrepreneurs take a loss very hard but are also extra celebratory with successes. Also within the successful entrepreneur's repertoire is brief sulking and speedy recovery. That trait also determines the difference between a newbie and a veteran.

With years of some wins and some losses we learn very valuable lessons, including

to not put too many eggs in the basket at one time. When we overload ourselves, cracked eggs (especially these days) could be very expensive, in many ways. Pursuing our passion or multiple passions must be balanced with how many passions can be successfully managed simultaneously.

We try very carefully to not stack eggs. There's a reason, actually multiple reasons, each egg in the carton is separated. Rio Grande Valley entrepreneurs, let's avoid messes and not put 18 eggs in a dozen carton.

We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.



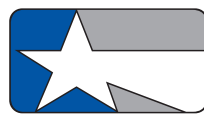
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# Boutique Hotel Highlights PI Charm

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Lighthouse Boutique Hotel is “coastal but subtle.”

It’s a description of the Port Isabel hotel as given by one of its owners, Ana Martha Diaz. The two-story, 8,000-square-foot building sits across the street from an 1850s-era lighthouse, providing a name and sense of place for the specialty hotel. It stands on the land that was the site of a military depot built during the U.S.-Mexican War of the mid-19th century.

“If you’re next to a landmark, there’s always value,” said Gustavo Diaz, who runs and owns the hotel with his wife, Ana.

## A Unique Vision

Gustavo Diaz spent years working in management positions at hotels on South Padre Island. He felt there was something missing among the concentration of Island hotels. Diaz envisioned a smaller but sufficiently sized hotel where event space was only steps away from guest rooms. There would be no need for guests to rush on elevators between floors to arrive at their events. Upscale convenience and a more intimate space for smaller groups to gather would be the premium offered.

“This isn’t something that’s part of a big chain,” Gustavo Diaz said of the PI boutique hotel that is the manifestation of his dream. “This is something unique.”

Ana Diaz highlighted that point, speaking of their guests “having an experience when they’re here.”

“We didn’t want it to feel too beachy,” she said of the specialty hotel’s design. “We did want a coastal feel, with a classic look that will never go out of style. For us, that was very important because where we are is very historic.”

## Getting Started

The Diaz couple purchased the hotel space in 2020 and got to work on a meticulous process to get its design and style just right. They took the time needed to get through various challenges and opened the hotel in July 2022.

The Lighthouse Hotel features an open design concept with lots of natural light streaming in through big windows all around. It has an airy and comfortable feel in walking through it with large pieces of

artwork featuring coastal life hanging on its walls.

There are seven rooms on the top floor and three on the ground floor. An upstairs events room with long tables and ornate vases filled with flowers looks out through large windows to the historic lighthouse. The room can accommodate up to 50 people and is in immediate proximity to the guest rooms.

It recently hosted a meeting and luncheon between PI city officials and representatives from the Texas Historical Commission. The latter were in town to commemorate the lighthouse beaming with a new lens and shining for the first time in over 100 years.

“It kept us busy,” Gustavo Diaz said of the excitement and buzz generated by the Lighthouse event in December. “The first six



Ana Martha Diaz and Gustavo Diaz have achieved their dream of running and owning a business together. (VBR)



months we've been open have been great for us."

### Seeing PI Differently

Port Isabel for some years has taken a tourism backseat to its alluring and younger neighbor to the east over the Queen Isabella Memorial Bridge.

"A passing city to get to the Island," Gustavo Diaz said of the common view of Port Isabel.

Diaz and his wife – who are former Island residents – see it differently. Port Isabel has fine restaurants with shorter wait times than their counterparts on South Padre. Tourists can walk up and down Port Isabel sidewalks and it feels akin to a downtown. There are art galleries and eclectic shops that include jewelry, arts and crafts, a bookstore and full-fledged arts galleries.

Fishing is readily available on the Laguna Madre that runs under the causeway with piers and guides that take clients out to premier sports fishing. There are dolphin-watching boat tours as well among the bevy of recreational choices Port Isabel offers. The community has a charm to it that the Island lacks, Ana Diaz said. She points out the historical aspects along with something else.

"What's charming about it is that everything here is local," she said of Port Isabel. "It feels like an old neighborhood. You can walk everywhere, to fish, to go to a good restaurant, and to shop and look around."

Now there's a hotel to do all of that from, "a mini-getaway vacay with your event," is how Ana Diaz put it. She mentioned a weekend in February that's booked with a yoga group from McAllen that will combine workouts with leisure. In March, a wedding party is booking all of the rooms at the hotel



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#### Upcoming Events

Weslaco Annual Awards  
February 8

Alfresco Weslaco  
February 16

Weslaco Royal Pageant  
February 11

Texas Onion Fest  
March 25



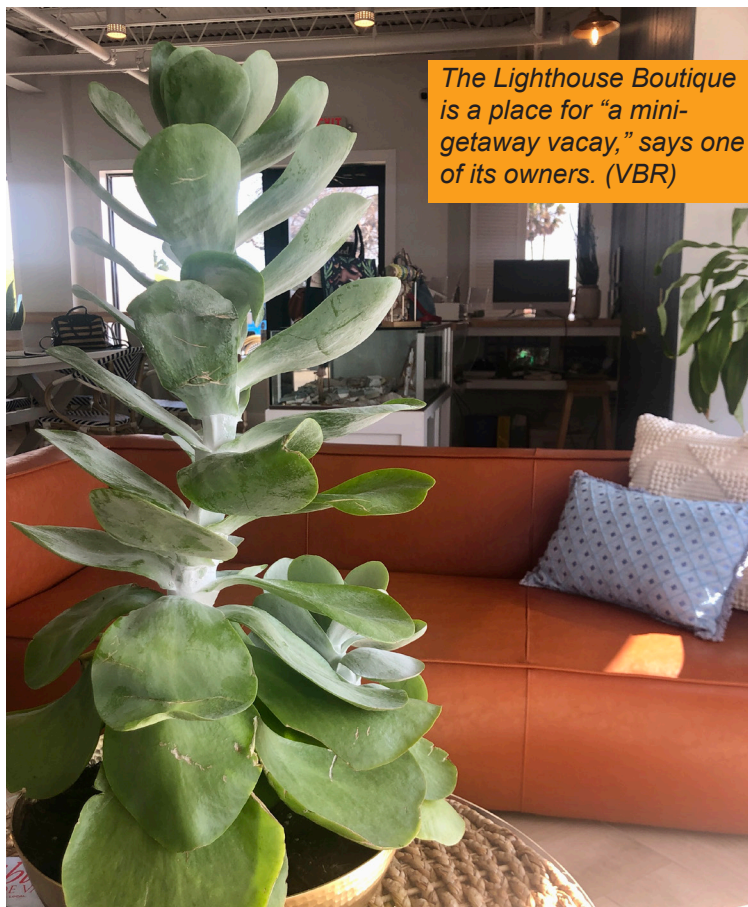
to celebrate the event in style.

Ana Diaz is a registered nurse by training who specialized in pediatric care. She is now living a dream of working with her husband. They are partners in making the business Gustavo envisioned years ago become a reality with a boutique hotel that has a lighthouse view.

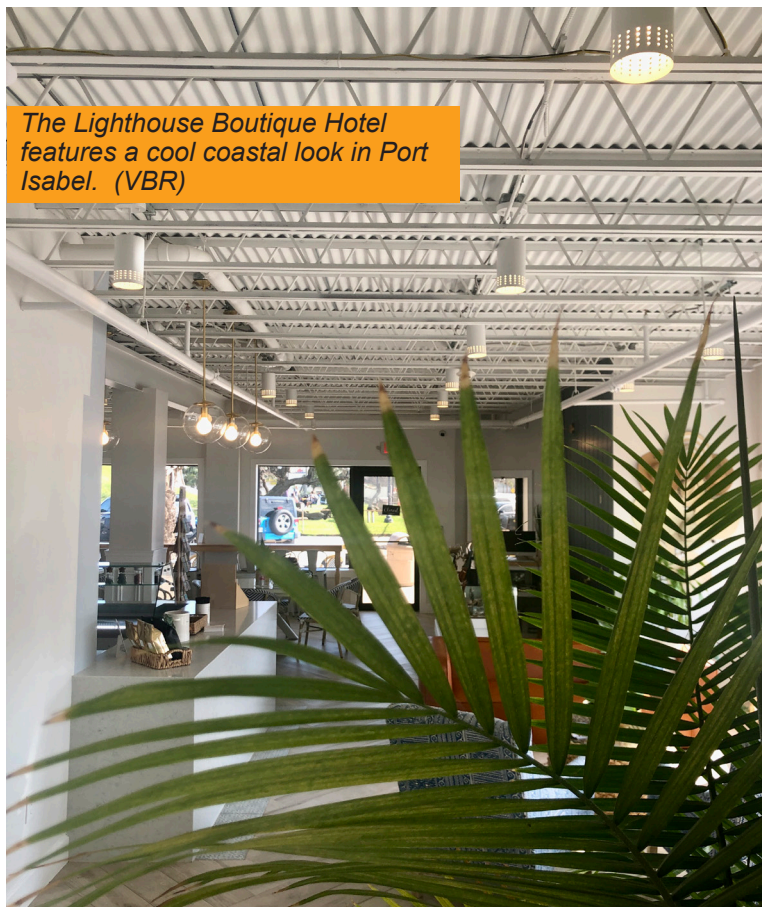
“This is less stressful than nursing but more consistent because with a business you can’t go home and forget about work,” she said. “I always saw myself doing something like this. We always wanted to do something together.”



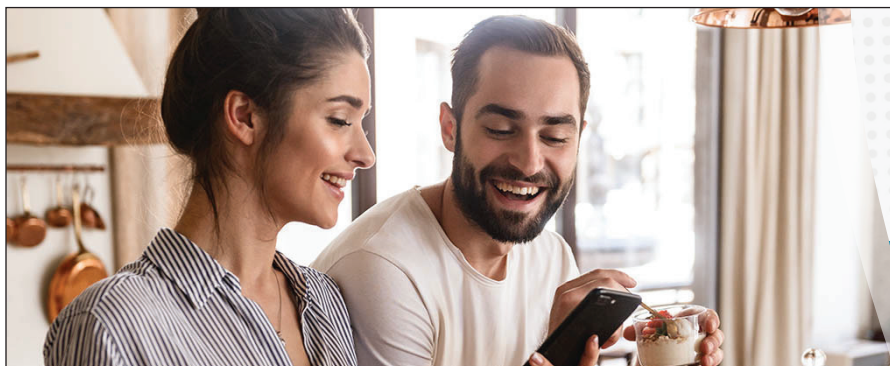
*Coastal but subtle is the feel Ana Martha Diaz was seeking for the Lighthouse Boutique Hotel. (VBR)*



*The Lighthouse Boutique is a place for “a mini-getaway vacay,” says one of its owners. (VBR)*



*The Lighthouse Boutique Hotel features a cool coastal look in Port Isabel. (VBR)*



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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY  
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# Chamber Leader Rises To National Honor

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Danielle Rodriguez's first job is the one she currently holds.

Technically, Rodriguez's initial job at the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce held a different title, but she views it as a continuation of the opportunities given to her by Esmeralda Villarreal, the Chamber's chief executive officer. Starting as an intern in college, Rodriguez has worked her way up, diligently, learning and growing in a rising career.

She is today the Brownsville Chamber's director of marketing and programs. Rodriguez's growth in the chamber industry was recently recognized nationally as she was chosen as one of the 40 Under 40 emerging leaders for 2022 by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. The 28-year-old chamber executive said the national honor surprised her given that she is still early in her career. Rodriguez sees the recognition as a testament to the work the Brownsville Chamber does.

"I think it says that we're on the right track at the Brownsville chamber," Rodriguez said. "It lets me know that I'm now on that level with other professionals in my field."

## More Than Commerce

Rodriguez is among the younger and rising chamber executives who are expanding the industry's work beyond the usual norms.

Supporting and nurturing small businesses in the community remains essential work to what chambers of commerce do nationally. There is now a wider definition of community service at many chambers like the one in Brownsville. It includes working with youth, forging stronger connections to higher education and working more collaboratively with partners in economic development.

"Every city is different and has its own issues," said Rodriguez, a Brownsville native. "You want to be able to speak to your entire community and not only businesses as we continue to support them in their growth and development."

## Connecting To Area Youth

Rodriguez points to a National Civics

Bee program the United States Chamber of Commerce administers as an example of new directions. The bee is an annual competition that encourages middle school students to improve their civics literacy. In Brownsville, Rodriguez is overseeing that program and taking it across the Rio Grande Valley. The civics bee involves more than 400 middle school RGV students, and Rodriguez is leading the efforts to nurture engagement and knowledge of local issues.

"It makes them feel like they have more

of a voice," Rodriguez said of the students, and how the program connects them to area legislators in discussing issues. "They write about issues relating to infrastructure, lighting of streets and roads, and programs for pets."

The Brownsville chamber was the only one chosen in Texas to administer the Civics Bee. Rodriguez is the point person in directing the program. Her success with the initiative was among the reasons for her selection to the national 40 under 40 chamber executives list.



*Danielle Rodriguez is one of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives's top 40 under 40 chamber executives. (VBR)*



## RGV Voices

The national honor is especially meaningful for Rodriguez because her mentor, Villarreal, the Brownsville Chamber CEO, received the same recognition in recent years.

Rodriguez's accolade comes in the same year that Barbara Jean Garza, the CEO of the Weslaco Area Chamber of Commerce, was also selected for the 40 under 40 list. She praised both Villarreal and Garza as being role models. Rodriguez said Weslaco's Garza is "a phenomenal leader," and lauded Villarreal for "taking a chance on me" in guiding her to take on new challenges.

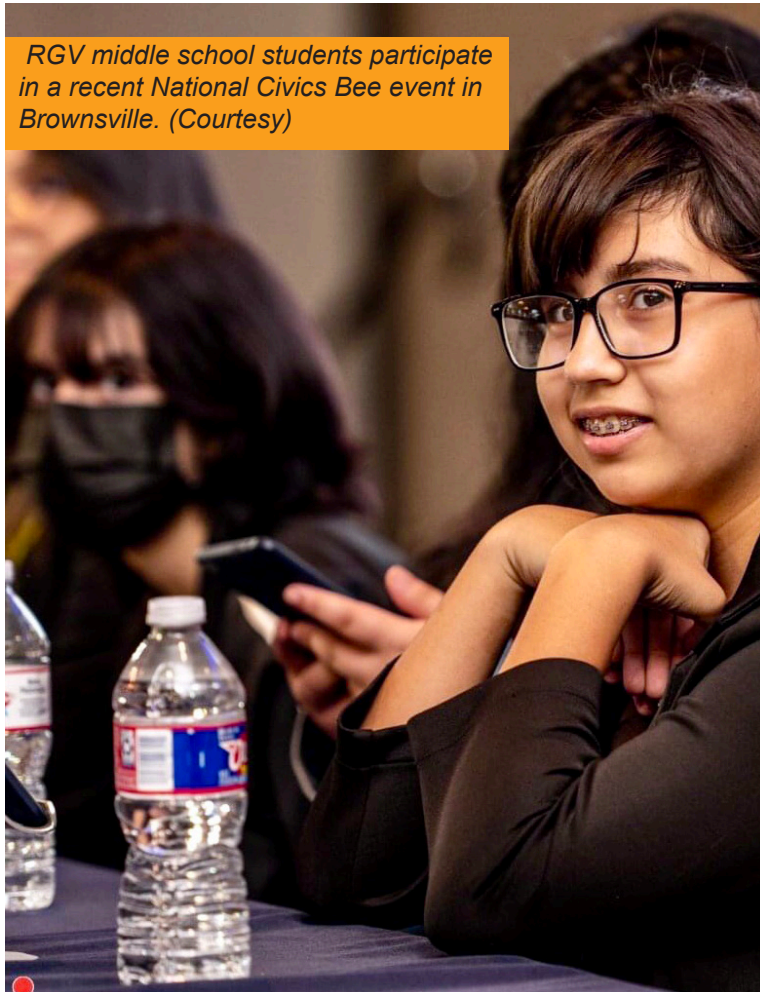
The chamber industry is still a male-dominated industry, Rodriguez said. The inclusion of voices and talents like Villarreal, Garza and herself, she said, are bringing a new dynamic.

"They see us in those rooms," Rodriguez said of being at national chamber industry meetings and conferences. "We're representing our communities, the Valley, demonstrating that we now have a voice."



*The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce is reaching out beyond the business community in connecting to more segments of its community. (Courtesy)*

*RGV middle school students participate in a recent National Civics Bee event in Brownsville. (Courtesy)*



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# Clinics Feature Connection To Patients

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Angela Menchaca was a busy physician assistant, rotating among cardiac clinics in Edinburg when she felt the pull to be closer to her Weslaco home with a young daughter to raise.

Her best option was one she knew well. Her husband, Michael, is a family nurse practitioner who has opened a direct primary care clinic in Harlingen. It's not a clinic like many others with long patient waits. There are also no hassles over insurance policies and how much co-pays will cover. The Menchaca Family Clinic operates on a monthly membership concept with no limits on visits and affordable costs for many common procedures and treatments.

The Harlingen clinic opened in 2017 and earned accolades from patients who appreciated the simpler and more efficient style of no-insurance-required health care. Michael and Angela knew the concept could be replicated elsewhere. The need for good primary health exists in every community.

"I was excited that this was something new for the community," Angela said of her husband's Harlingen clinic. "Here was this new model for the Valley. It could turn into something great. We saw where we could expand and open a second location."

In September 2020, they did just that with a location on West Pike Boulevard in Weslaco, Michael's hometown. Here where the couple also resides, Angela as a PA is taking up the duties of a primary care clinician.

The Weslaco clinic had more of a soft opening initially before Angela could devote herself on a full-time basis. The emphasis is on spending the time needed with patients at both Amenity Direct Care clinics. There is no rushing with a room full of patients waiting to see a medical professional like at insurance-reliant clinics.

"We're not double and triple booked," Angela said. "We can sit down with patients and learn about them as people and keep that connection with them. It's important we do that because they're going through things and we're here to help them."

## Small Town Roots

Menchaca is a native of Bishop, a small community along U.S. Highway 77 near Kingsville.

She earned her undergraduate and master's

degrees at Texas A&M University-Kingsville before being accepted to the physician assistant program at the University of Texas Pan American in 2016. It was during her rotations at cardiology clinics associated with DHR Health hospitals in Edinburg that she met the nurse practitioner who would become her husband.

By then, she had decided to live in the Valley rather than go back home to the Coastal Bend area. Coming from a small town in a sparsely populated part of South Texas, she said "you have to put yourself out there." In the Valley, she found opportunity and a place similar to the culture of her hometown.

"I didn't know a single person when I got

here," she said. "I decided that this was the place that gave me the opportunity and I saw it was growing, but it wasn't like living in a huge city."

Meeting Michael deepened her commitment to the Valley, as did their similar views and values, on a personal level as well as sharing medical careers focused on serving their communities.

"Here's this person that understands the profession," Angela recalled in first getting to know Michael. "He understands the time it takes, the stresses, and the work ethic needed. We both understand all of those things related to this profession and we get to feed off each other."



*Angela and Michael Menchaca own and operate two clinics that provide a range of services that uses a membership model for its patients. (Courtesy)*



## Connecting With Patients

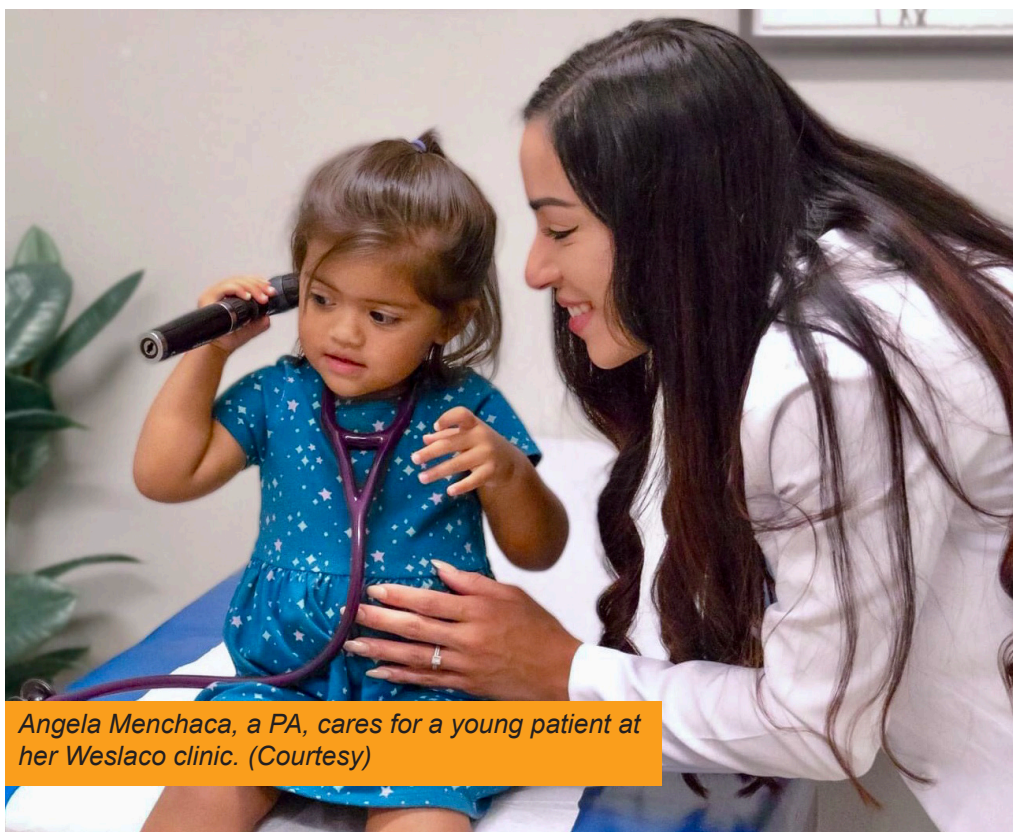
Angela refers to her Weslaco clinic as a “one stop shop.”

Screenings, lab work, IVs and stitching are provided at Amenity Direct Care, along primary and general health care. Like her husband’s Harlingen clinic, the connection to patients is continuous in Weslaco via texting and emails and virtual visits. There are no limits on how often or when a clinician can be reached.

A busy day, Angela said, would be 10 patient visits to go with the frequent messaging with her patients. It gives her the time to visit with patients in having that “small town connection” with those she treats. The Weslaco clinic charges \$89 monthly for adults, \$20 per child when they are part of a patient’s family, with a \$50 rate if they are not with an Amenity family.

It’s a business and practice that’s a collaboration between the husband-and-wife medical team that has expanded its reach to more Valley communities.

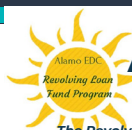
“Weslaco is home,” Michael said. “We’re happy that we’re able to help more people across the Valley.”



Angela Menchaca, a PA, cares for a young patient at her Weslaco clinic. (Courtesy)



Nurse practitioner Michael Menchaca treats a patient at the Amenity clinic in Harlingen. (Courtesy)



## ALAMO EDC REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM

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# Company Rises To Success From Mercedes

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A stately and historic home on Missouri Avenue in Mercedes needed work after years of neglect. Beyond its then-rough exterior, Dr. Barbara Baggerly-Hinojosa and her husband, C.A., saw great potential.

Baggerly-Hinojosa was looking for a corporate office for her Leadership Empowerment Group. Hinojosa, a Mercedes native, encouraged his wife to look at the city as a Mid-Valley hub to grow her business. They would settle on 805 S. Missouri – the Acker House as people in Mercedes know it – as the home office for Leadership Empowerment in 2015.

Their shared vision has gone beyond initial expectations. Leadership Empowerment has used Mercedes – and the renovated Acker House – as home base to grow its business statewide and beyond. The consulting firm advises companies, nonprofit organizations and educational systems on ways to improve their leadership, team building and collaboration skills in managing staff.

“Being in Mercedes makes sense for us,” said Baggerly-Hinojosa, whose company also has offices in Waco and San Antonio. “We’re very proud to be from Mercedes. Part of our success comes from being based in the Rio Grande Valley. We’ve used it as an advantage for our company.”

It’s not only a corporate office location but home as well for Baggerly-Hinojosa and her husband. They reside in the same Mercedes neighborhood where the Acker House is located. For C.A., the two-story, beautifully renovated Acker House provides opportunities for visitors to see what his hometown has to offer.

“This is the vision my wife and I had when we took on the restoring of the Acker House,” said C.A. Hinojosa III, in a Facebook post, mentioning how Valley organizations have used Leadership Empowerment office space to host meetings and conferences. “To bring people from outside of Mercedes to see what we have to offer. We’ve had leaders from as far as Washington D.C. here to meet at the Acker House.”

## Changing Business Landscape

A team of NASA’s top lawyers were recently convened to hear about the

transformation of American workplaces since 2020.

Leading the discussion in late November at the emotional intelligence team-building session in Houston was Baggerly-Hinojosa. It’s the sort of training sessions that Leadership Empowerment has become known for. It has also earned Baggerly-Hinojosa recognition from the Small Business Administration as a business coach to train emerging leaders.

There is no topic more important in her view than helping company and business leaders to understand how workplace dynamics have changed since the economic

challenges of 2020. From that year forward, Baggerly-Hinojosa said, workplace norms have changed. Workforces were separated from traditional office settings and remain so for many companies.

The script has been flipped in her assessment when it comes to traditional office workdays of 8 to 5. Zoom calls and remote interactions are now becoming more prevalent.

“The landscape of business and leadership has been turned upside down,” Baggerly-Hinojosa said. “Employees have much more power now. For years, the message from employers was, ‘you should be glad to have



*Dr. Barbara Baggerly-Hinojosa says being based in Mercedes and the Valley is a key part of her company's success with statewide and national clients. (Courtesy)*



a job.' That's completely flipped today."

The imperative now is retaining employees and not losing them to other employers who offer more flexibility and have open-minded approaches to maintaining work-personal life balance, she said.

"Leaders need the biggest toolbox they can find," Baggerly-Hinojosa said of her work with companies of all sizes and types. "Mostly everyone needs to retool. We have to figure out new skill sets in how to lead in different ways."

### Still Rooted Locally

It's noteworthy that a company from Mercedes that has been bold enough and sufficiently successful to land contracts with the likes of NASA is teaching such cutting-edge management skills.

Baggerly-Hinojosa's Leadership Empowerment remains rooted in the Valley. The Acker House has been used as a staging ground to launch civic organizations like Leadership Mercedes. C.A. Hinojosa is the chief operating officer for Leadership Empowerment and also oversees the running of the Mercedes Enterprise, a community

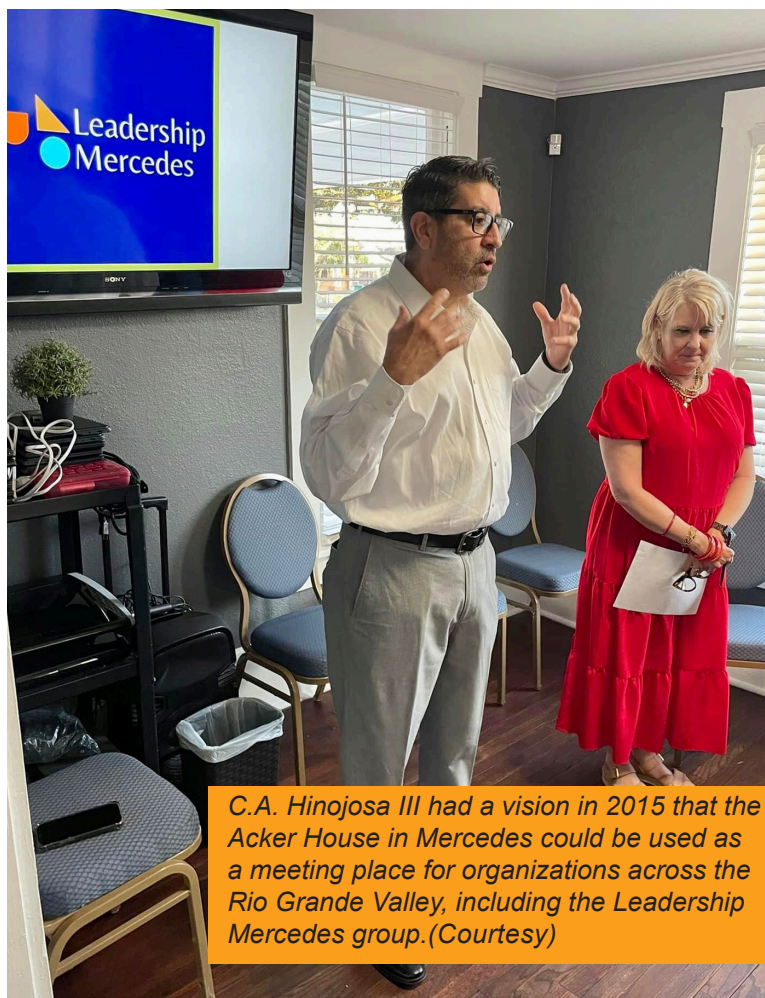
newspaper the Hinojosa couple owns and bases at the Acker House.

The revitalization of the historic Mercedes house is a source of great pride for the Hinojosas and how it has connected their company's successes with their hometown pride and what it has to offer.

"Some of the bigger cities in the Valley have something like this and now Mercedes has one as well," C.A. Hinojosa said in a YouTube video about the historic home. "If you have some kind of something, be it a talk, book signing or an art show, and Mercedes can benefit, we'll talk about it."



*The mobile classroom of Leadership Empowerment pulls away its home base at the Acker House in Mercedes. (Courtesy)*



*C.A. Hinojosa III had a vision in 2015 that the Acker House in Mercedes could be used as a meeting place for organizations across the Rio Grande Valley, including the Leadership Mercedes group. (Courtesy)*

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# National Honor Caps Career For SPI Businessman

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A letter from a former president said it all in expressing appreciation for a job well done.

“Nancy and I know how much work goes into the preparation of such wonderful meals, and we greatly appreciate all you did,” wrote Ronald Reagan in an August 1992 letter to Arnie Creinin. “Thanks to you and your staff, our stay was delightful!”

It wasn’t the first time Creinin had cooked for President Reagan. He had done so previously when he worked as the executive chef for the Kahler Hotel in Rochester, Minn. It was just one stop among many as Creinin cut a wide swath of distinction across the country’s hotel industry. It’s a three decade-long career of accomplishments as a premier chef. His stays included exclusive hotels in Palm Springs; Jackson Hole, Wyo.; and Disney resorts in Florida. He then went on to become the executive chef for the Kahler corporation.

## Going South

He would eventually land in South Padre Island in 2001.

He was recruited to help one of the Island’s legacy hotels, the Bahia Mar, reinvigorate itself and regain its rightful place on hotel row at SPI. Creinin would find a new home on the Island. He would go on to own restaurants on SPI in addition to going into catering and food trucks. He became a community leader and served on the board of SPI’s Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“I fell in love with it here,” Creinin said of the Island. “I enjoyed the community, still do, and got to know the business community here and the property and business owners.”

In 2006, he established Coastal Lifestyle Property and Rental Management. The company features private beach houses, bungalows, penthouses and condominiums, and 24-hour concierge service. In late 2022, the International Association of Top Professionals added another major accolade to Creinin’s distinguished career, naming him Top CEO of the Year of 2022.

“He is brilliant at what he does,” said Stephanie Ciriemi, the president of IAOTP. “His list of accomplishments and accolades are beyond impressive.”

For Creinin, who has battled health setbacks in recent years, the national honor caps a long career he has loved and

demonstrates that “I didn’t give up,” a story of succeeding against stiff challenges.

“It means a lot to me because I’ve been through a lot,” he said of the industry honor.

## Chicago Roots, Island Lifestyles

It all started in Chicago where Creinin said he “grew up in a great environment.”

He’s the son of a father who ran and owned a longtime deli in Chicago. His grandfather had a fish market and an uncle was a butcher.

“I grew up in it,” Creinin said of the food service business.

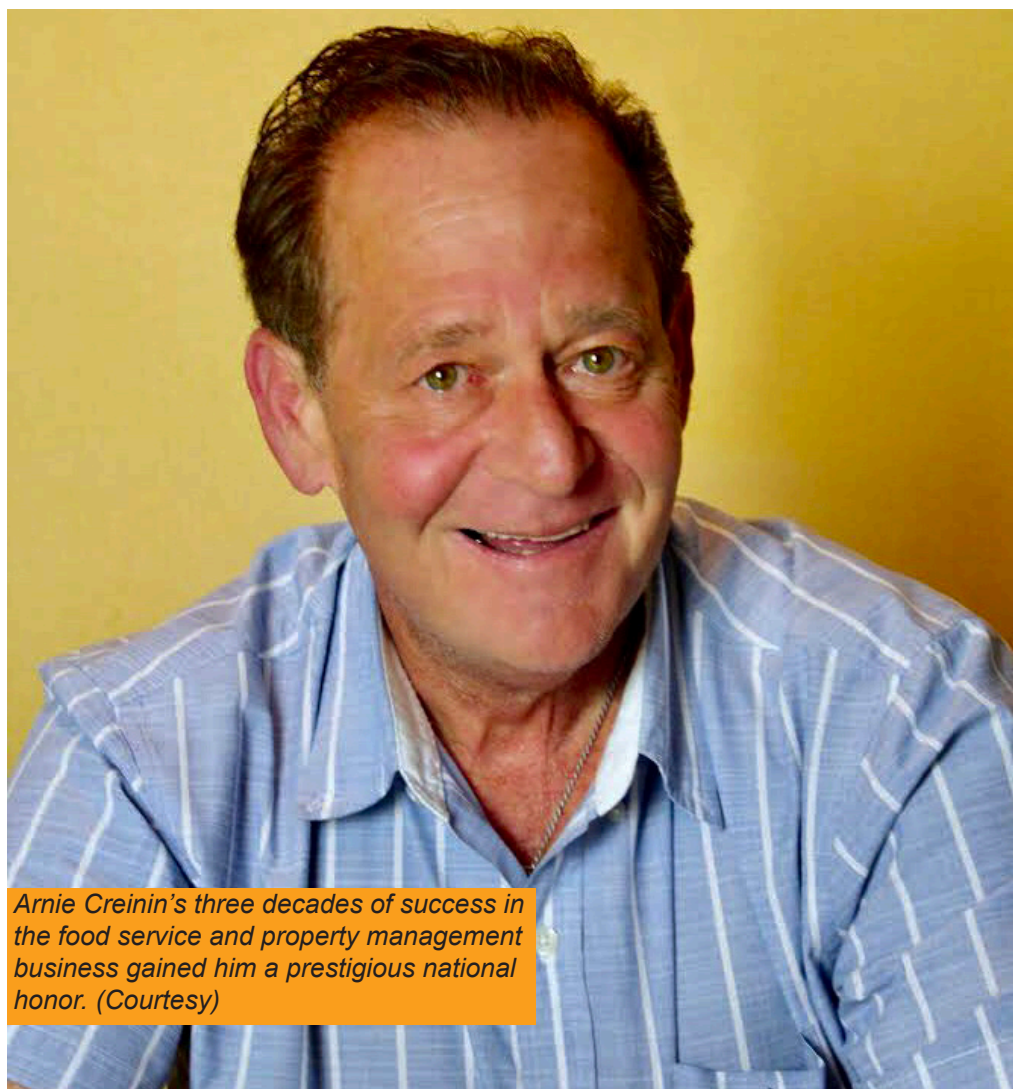
Just shy of turning 20, he moved to California with his brother. Here, they launched their own deli in Orange County. They would both go on to become executive chefs. Creinin’s journey would cross paths with presidents like Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter, and there are photos

on his office walls of him with each of the three presidents.

“Reagan by far,” he said if he had a favorite among the three. “He was always thoughtful and down to earth, a real classy man.”

Entertainment celebrities like Jimmy Buffet and Don Rickles also became acquaintances in cooking meals for them at the hotels where Creinin worked. He also had the opportunity to cook for and cater for King Hussein of Jordan and his wife, Queen Noor, when the king went to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. for treatments. As the executive chef for the Kahler Hotel in Rochester, Creinin oversaw an operation of 120 cooks and chefs, a 14-person European bakery operation, and seven full-service food and beverage outlets.

These days, he’s still busy but it’s more of a life of comparative leisure on South Padre. He enjoys Island life and running a successful



*Arnie Creinin's three decades of success in the food service and property management business gained him a prestigious national honor. (Courtesy)*

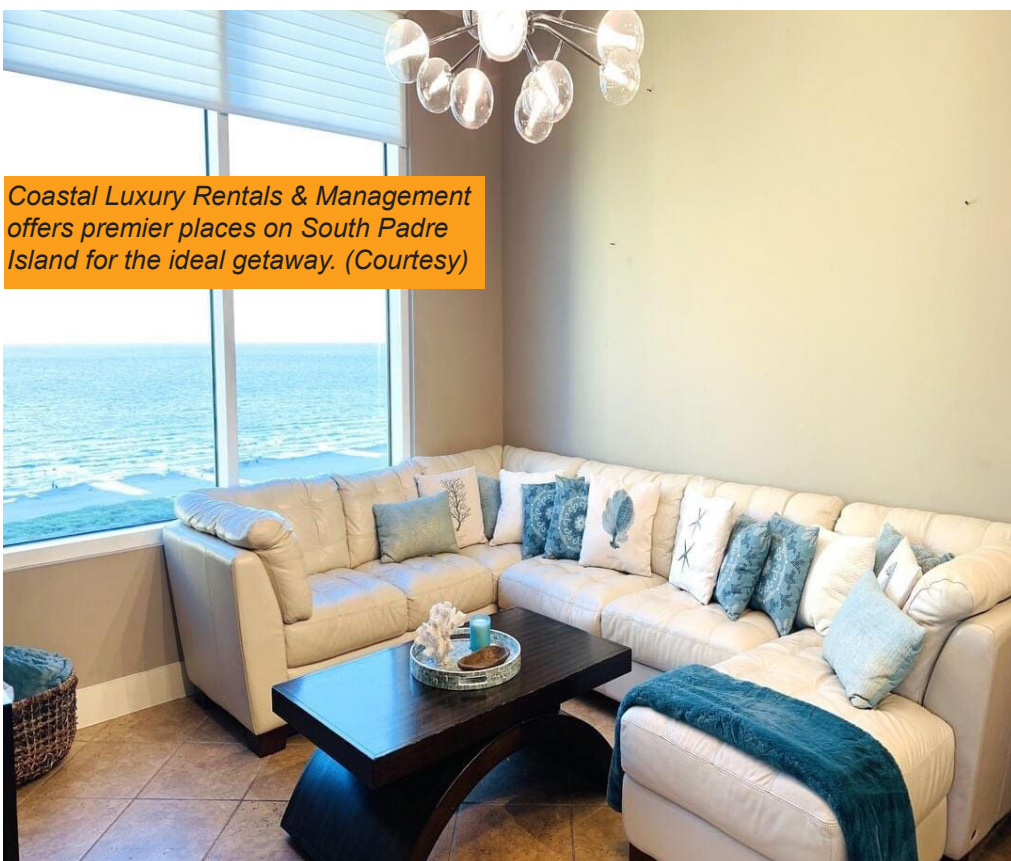


condo and beach house rental business. The national recognition from the International Association of Top Professionals is the exclamation point of a life and career well lived.

“I feel proud,” Creinin said. “And I’m proud to live here.”



Arine Creinin with family members and friends at a late 2022 convention in Las Vegas, where was honored for being a top chief executive officer. (Courtesy)



Coastal Luxury Rentals & Management offers premier places on South Padre Island for the ideal getaway. (Courtesy)

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# Developers Adding To Growth In North McAllen

By Chris Ardis

Banners began appearing in late 2022 above storefronts at Sam's Trenton Plaza Phase II in McAllen.

The west side of Phase I faces Trenton and then wraps around as if highlighting the path for customers heading to Sam's Club. Phase II rests immediately to the north of Phase I. It's all part of the bustling growth and traffic in north McAllen. In this case, it's the broad area of 10th Street and Trenton Road.

"We developed the first phase and then, since we already owned the other piece of property, we decided to develop it, too," said

Rodolfo Chapa, who owns Chapa Group Ltd. with his brother and father.

## Growing Opportunities

This is one of the latest in the company's broad portfolio of shopping-center developments. Chapa Group utilizes signage at the center, their contacts and local brokers to spread the word to prospective tenants. Last month, permanent signage began to replace some of those banners as business owners prepared to open their doors.

On one storefront, "JEREMIAH'S,"

stands out in bold red with "ITALIAN ICE – GELATI – SOFT ICE CREAM" in smaller yellow letters on a black background underneath.

"Around here, you see raspas, where they use chunks of ice, with that texture and pour flavors over the top," said Joey Figueroa, who owns Jeremiah's with his wife, Andrea, and Chase and Grisel Cooter. "But our Italian Ice is made with triple-filtered water, and the fruit and other flavors are all mixed together. The texture is smooth. It's like lake-effect snow."

*Sam's Trenton Plaza Phase I turns to the north and leads directly into Phase II. (Courtesy)*





Figueroa said people who live on the East Coast are known to call it “water ice,” though to Texans, it sounds more like “werter ice.”

Jeremiah’s offers more than 40 flavors of Italian Ice. These include favorites like mango margarita, sour green apple, blueberry limeade, melon fresca and Scoop Froggy Frog, which is similar to mint chocolate chip. Customers can choose from 24 of the flavors Jeremiah’s offers daily, including sugar-free options.

Jeremiah’s also offers vanilla, chocolate and swirl soft ice cream served in a cup, a cake cone or a waffle cone. For the full Jeremiah’s experience, customers can combine the Italian Ice and the ice cream to create a gelati. Indoor and outdoor seating, a hand-painted mural of McAllen, catering, fundraising opportunities, “Caught You Doing Something Cool” cards and more add to the cool Jeremiah’s experience.

### From Home To Storefront

Sonia’s Tamales & More is just a few doors down.

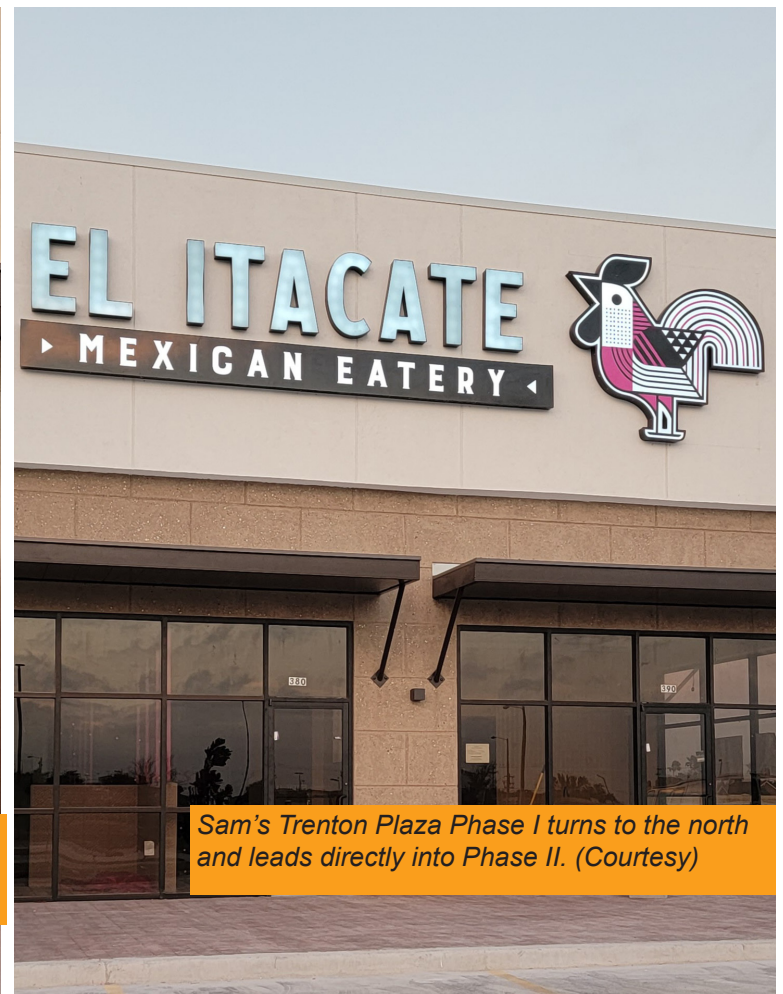
The tamales of Sonia Rodriguez were recently selected in a local television station



*Jeremiah's serves up Italian Ice, soft ice cream and a combination of the two, known as a gelati. (Courtesy)*



*After 20 years with a home-based catering business, Sonia Rodriguez' first storefront is Sonia's Tamales. (Courtesy)*



*Sam's Trenton Plaza Phase I turns to the north and leads directly into Phase II. (Courtesy)*



poll as being the best in the Rio Grande Valley. The restaurant will offer tamale combos like cheese and jalapeno, and bean and cheese, as well as standards like chicken and pork. Customers will also find vegetarian and vegan tamales, menudo and barbacoa on the daily menu.

Sonia Rodriguez first learned the art of cooking and catering from her mother, Maria Carrillo. The two worked side by side for years. The economic challenges of 2020 brought things to a halt, but Rodriguez decided to get back into business, sticking to her expertise in tamale making.

She was overwhelmed initially by the enormity of owning a business. Rodriguez shared her trepidation with her husband.

“Reach for your dreams,” he told Sonia, reminding her of all she had accomplished with a home-based business that had already earned accolades. He also offered reassurances of full family support. Rodriguez plans to open the first week of February and will serve customers seven days a week. Sonia’s will offer her tamales for both wholesale and retail sales.

Joining Jeremiah’s and Sonia’s Tamales in Phase II will be a number of other businesses, including Tila’s Restaurant, Brow & Beauty Art, The Haute Boutique and Spa, Tacos El Andaluz, Kissi Restaurant and Bliss Nails Spa.

“We are going to have a third phase,” Chapa said of future plans. “We are working on the plans for that. Probably by the end of this year.”



*Bliss Nails Spa is one of the new businesses in Sam's Trenton Plaza Phase II. (Courtesy)*

*Sam's Trenton Plaza Phase II offers customers food, a boutique, spa services and CBD products. (Courtesy)*





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