

An abstract, expressive painting in a style reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh. It depicts a person's head and shoulders in profile, facing left, with their mouth open as if singing or speaking into a vintage microphone. The person has dark hair with a prominent side part. The background is a vibrant red, with swirling, textured brushstrokes in shades of pink, black, and blue. The overall mood is energetic and artistic.

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# **“Your Pro-RGV News”**



# The Clock Is Ticking

by: Todd Breland

How many hours did you put in last week? Did you accomplish everything on your priority list? Of course not. That's why you were up at daylight to get started today.

Busy addicts live to work and work to live. The hours are plenty, exhausting and satisfying. Planning the projects, managing the team, crunching the numbers -- the responsibilities are endless. But we love it. It's who we are and what we do.

When you enjoy your job, putting in the time isn't painful. Or is it? What does it cost? The million dollar question is when do we turn off the switch. Not for good of course, but when do we take a break? Juggling work and the rest of our lives is an art, not a science.

Taking care of those we love means yes, helping provide and helping provide. That wasn't a typo. Contributing to the financial means of the family obviously is very necessary, but making time to enjoy the family is equally important. The clock will not rewind.

Balancing highs, lows and everything in the middle at the workplace, and sitting down with the spouse and kiddos for dinner is a daily juggle for business and community leaders. Sure, our businesses and organizations are demanding of our

time, energy and every resource, but the ones under our roofs are also as deserving.

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# Arts Studio Offers Everything ‘Under One Roof’

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A view across the social media presence of the Rio Grande Valley Arts Studio reaffirms its founder’s assertion of having everything “all under one roof.”

There’s a “beach dance camp” to go with galleries of colors featuring the artwork of children. There are photos of teenage girls immersed in a sewing workshop in preparing for a fashion show. Little ballerinas in another image are in poses they just took during a practice session. It all goes to highlight the wide diversity of activities and programs the 10,000-square-foot-plus RGV Arts Studio in Harlingen houses.

The comprehensive arts enterprise is the brainchild of Lori Rodgers. She grew up in Harlingen, active in dance and dreaming of being an instructor in her art. She has done all that and more since returning to her hometown in the mid-1990s after completing college at Lamar University in Beaumont. It wasn’t long after when she got her arts studio going in what was once an automotive and storage building.

Rodgers has long since transformed the space into an arts mecca. Here, children and adults are taking classes to sing, dance and draw. There are piano and guitar lessons for newcomers and the more advanced. Martial arts programs have long been offered at the arts studio.

“There’s not another one like it in the Valley,” Rodgers said of her studio.

## Hometown Connection

“This is my community,” Rodgers said of Harlingen. “It’s my home.”

It has been a summer of investment in her hometown. The RGV Arts Studio building on the western end of Jackson Street, just up a few blocks from downtown, was in need of major roof repair. Rodgers spent \$100,000 for the project and received a \$10,000 grant from the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation to help pay for the roof improvement expenses.

In a show of hometown pride, Rodgers prominently displayed a photo of her standing by Harlingen Mayor Norma Sepulveda on the art studio’s Facebook page. The mayor and other city leaders visited the arts studio recently to issue a reimbursement check via a picture of big smiles and a symbolic outsized check being presented to Rodgers.



*Lori Rodgers is the founder and driving force of the RGV Arts Studio in Harlingen. (VBR)*



“To have the city reach out to us is such a blessing,” she said of the EDC’s efforts to assist small businesses in Harlingen.

The city’s support adds to the energy and enthusiasm Rodgers already exudes after nearly 30 years in business. She sees her studio’s mix of programs having a long and positive reach into the lives of young students.

“We’re teaching things that they may be missing at home and in schools,” she said. “We help to take up the slack.”

Many of the instructors at the studio have been with Rodgers for years. In many cases, working at the studio is a second job for the instructors, be they art teachers from area school districts or a police officer teaching karate. The instructors make their own schedules, Rodgers said, with the studio managing those schedules and overseeing registration and the paying of tuition costs.

### **Making Adjustments**

Rodgers and her teaching staff have made adjustments over the years to deal with the change of generations.

At this point, Rodgers and her instructors are teaching the children of parents that the studio taught when they were youngsters themselves. Today’s youth usually have shorter attention spans and are more apt to grow impatient after frequent use of cellular phones and electronic tablets. The capabilities of the devices to quickly swipe from one subject to another shapes the lives of today’s students.



*Sewing classes are among the diversity of programs offered at the Rio Grande Valley Arts Studio. (Courtesy)*



*Dance classes are among the most popular programs at the RGV Arts Studio. (Courtesy)*



Contrast that stream-of-consciousness thinking to the time, discipline and persistence required by art and dance. Improvements in the arts take time and require patience. Consequently, the teaching staff at RGV Arts Studio have made adjustments toward projects that can be completed in less time and include fun events like paint parties.

“We’ve had to let some imperfections go,” Rodgers said. “There’s that balance of keeping the integrity of our classes while finding new ways to make it fun.”

There’s plenty of that to be had under the reinforced roof of the arts studio on Jackson in Harlingen. Rodgers looks forward to what lays ahead after nearly three decades in business.

“It’s a passion,” she said. “It’s more than a way to make a living. We’re paying it forward and hopefully passing on traditions and discipline.”



The RGV Arts Studio offers a variety of arts classes in Harlingen. (VBR)



Artwork adds color to many hallways at the RGV Arts Studio. (VBR)



# McAllen Branches Out With New Trees

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The grouping of trees bunched on the frontage road of Bicentennial Boulevard and Expressway 83 are just above sapling size and draw little attention from motorists buzzing by on a busy McAllen intersection.

But there they are, breaking up the concrete and urban life of a growing city. They add greenery with the benefits of a sound barrier and deep roots that will absorb stormwater when heavy rains come. McAllen's Parks and Recreation Department has planted over 200 young trees in recent months and sprinkled them throughout the city.

Recently planted trees near the Morris rainwater detention area are among the over 200 native trees planted in McAllen this year.

It comes under the heading of urban forest management. The city has done it so well that in June, it became a 2022 Tree City USA Growth Award recipient. The award comes from the Arbor Day Foundation, a

national nonprofit organization that promotes the planting of trees in neighborhoods and communities.

"The trees being planted and cared for by McAllen are ensuring that generations to come will enjoy a better quality of life," said Dan Lambe, the chief executive of the Arbor Day Foundation. "This program helps cultivate a sense of stewardship and pride for the trees the community plants and cares for."

Planning the work and tree plantings in McAllen is part of the work that Sarai Garcia, the deputy director of the city's parks and rec department, oversees in looking over the city's landscape. Garcia works with staff to strategically find the right spots by roadways, schools and in pockets by the city's existing parks. They then plant 30 to 40 native trees that stand about seven feet tall in a general grouping.

"Where do I have space?" she asked of the

search to plant the young trees. "We look at it from a holistic approach."

## Boosts Quality Of Life

The Parks and Recreation Department in McAllen has eight divisions that includes traditional responsibilities of maintaining parks and supervising aquatic centers.

There is also a horticultural supervisor in recognition of a branch of agriculture that extends to the growth of vegetation and green space in a city. Four of the Rio Grande Valley's larger cities – Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen and McAllen – have made major investments in their parks systems in recent years. In late June, Edinburg unveiled a new municipal pool house and inclusive water pad. Just days later, McAllen broke ground on Morris Park between two north-side schools, which will include lighted walking trails, picnic tables and restrooms.



Planting seedlings has become a community event and cause in McAllen. (Courtesy)



Family get-togethers around picnic tables at parks will always carry importance. City leaders are increasingly seeing that more trees and green space is another element of boosting quality of life in cities.

“Native trees and a natural environment are as important to the prosperity and development of our community as streets, sidewalks, infrastructure, and water and utility service,” McAllen Mayor Javier Villalobos said.

Speaking of his city’s general quality of life, Villalobos said “trees help do that for every living creature in our community.”

### Holistic Approach

McAllen has a goal to plant more than 150 trees yearly in the city, reflecting the mayor’s sentiments.

McAllen has already beat that goal for 2023. There are already groupings of over 30 native trees at Municipal Park, Crockett Elementary, Palmview Park and near the rainwater detention area behind Morris Middle School. Another city-run entity – the Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center – has planted hundreds of seedlings in McAllen. Retamas, Mexican wild olive trees, mountain laurels and cedar elms are among the variety of trees that have been planted in the city.

The holistic approach Garcia speaks of with tree plantings throughout McAllen helps migrating birds with food and shelter, supports flooding prevention systems and eases land erosion. They can also serve as sound barriers between neighborhoods and commercial districts. Add in that McAllen has gone from 12 miles of hike-and-bike trails in the early 2000s to over 30 miles today, and it’s apparent that a community which has long described itself as a city of business has branched out to other aspects of urban life.



*Freshly planted trees on Bicentennial Boulevard near Expressway 83 serve as a sound barrier between a major roadway and adjacent neighborhoods. (Courtesy)*



*City of McAllen employees plant native trees to create new green spaces in the city. (Courtesy)*



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# UTRGV/San Benito Link Boosts Growth

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Aracely Salinas' medical uniforms business in San Benito has done well for itself over the last five years, getting established and now hitting a marker where it needs a boost.

The San Benito Economic Development Corporation is helping with that aspiration. Salinas is one of 10 participants in a Kauffman FastTrac program, an intensive seven-week course taught by UTRGV instructors at the EDC offices. It's a nationally acclaimed program that provides content and tools to help entrepreneurs succeed in starting, growing and sustaining their businesses.

The San Benito EDC and Texas Regional Bank are providing \$900-per-student scholarships to cover the cost of local participation. For Salinas, the sponsorship is much appreciated as she seeks to sharpen up her business skills and knowhow.

"You can never stop growing and learning," said Salinas, who owns and runs Uniforms Etc. on Sam Houston Boulevard, which is San Benito's version of main street. "I'm trying to do different things. I want to scale up and expand."

It's that spirit and ambition that Julie Villalon, a project manager for UTRGV's Entrepreneurship and Commercialization Center, is finding in the San Benito classes.

"I see opportunity here," Villalon said. "These are students and business people that are eager to learn and grow. San Benito is looking completely different. The community is more robust and active."

## Focusing On Strengths

Ramiro Aleman's years of working in economic development in Harlingen and Brownsville got him to the point where a realization set in.

"I really wanted to run my own EDC," said Aleman, who in late 2022 began work as the executive director of San Benito's EDC. "I wanted to take what I've learned to develop programs to create an environment where companies and businesses can come here to grow."

Some of San Benito's recent growth predated Aleman's arrival, but 2023 has seen an acceleration of the trend and Aleman is working with his board to see more of it. The investment in local business owners via the Kaufman program is a sure indication of

the EDC's commitment to build sustainable growth in the community. Bringing in the resources of the UTRGV system to San Benito was an early step Aleman took and he found quick cooperation from university representatives.

Connecting the local business community to the expertise of UTRGV staff as shown by Villalon is an example of what Aleman envisioned in taking the EDC director's job in San Benito.

"This program is a good one for entrepreneurs," Aleman said of the Kauffman courses. "It will help them analyze their business from conception to completion. It's a great consultation service provided to them at no charge."

## Corridor Of Growth

The knowledge picked up at the Kauffman sessions will eventually contribute to San Benito's recent trend of growth.

Aleman brought a Cameron County-wide perspective to the city's EDC director job. He's a La Feria native who spent years developing economic growth in Harlingen for that city's EDC and then in Brownsville, where he worked for the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation.

In San Benito, he saw a city strategically placed in the center of the county, along Expressway 77/83, with high traffic counts and a nearby international bridge at Los Indios. Those assets, Aleman said, needed a higher degree of promotion and marketing in



*Aracely Salinas is among the small business owners in San Benito who is utilizing the Kauffman FastTrac program that is being made possible by sponsorships from the local EDC and Texas Regional Bank. (VBR)*



addition to making local businesses aware of the services the EDC provides. Aleman and his staff have taken to going door to door in business areas like downtown, meeting store owners and making acquaintances.

There's also the business corridor of Business 77 leading from Harlingen and eventually to the expressway toward Brownsville. It's that midpoint of Cameron County Aleman speaks of, and along Business 77, the Resaca Village is entering phase two of its mixed retail/commercial development in adding over 10,000 square feet of space. An Austin-based company, SCC Development, has cleared ground and will construct a seven-acre retail and mixed used project on Business 77 in the immediate proximity of a Wal-Mart Supercenter. The entrance of a major Rio Grande Valley developer indicates San Benito is beginning to draw attention for business development, which just a few years ago seemed out of reach for the city.

"I think the community is a lot more optimistic now," Aleman said. "They see things that are going on and it's making a difference."



*Ramiro Aleman has worked since late 2022 to promote San Benito's central county location as the city's EDC executive director. (VBR)*

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# Restaurateurs Build New Brand Across RGV

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Laurie and Robert Lozano met at a Dairy Queen in what would be the beginning of a personal relationship and one that led to the world of business.

They were fellow DQ employees in Premont, a little town along U.S. Highway 281, heading north to Alice from Falfurrias. At the time, Laurie was one of the younger DQ managers in the venerable ice cream-and-hamburger restaurant chain. Years later, and now married, Laurie and Robert purchased a Dairy Queen in Pharr. It would be a springboard acquisition that sparked the founding of a company which today owns 28 DQs across South Texas.

Twenty of those DQ restaurants are located in the Rio Grande Valley and Lynn Lee Inc. is based in Pharr. The company's name is a combination of Laurie and Robert's middle names. Lynn Lee's success inspired their two grown children – and a son-in-law attorney – to join the business and then branch out to start a new restaurant chain venture. The family formed a management company, F&P Brands, to oversee Lynn Lee and a new company – Lotzapan LLC. The latter is overseen by siblings Bob and Lensda Lozano, and her husband David.

Lotzapan has diversified from DQ Blizzards and BeltBuster hamburgers to take on the sourdough rich-sandwiches of the Austin-born Schlotzsky's. The fast casual restaurant chain that started in 1971 isn't entirely new to the Valley. A different owner has long had one in McAllen on 10th Street. The brand, however, has been unable to establish itself across the region. The Lozano's Lotzapan is out to change that with four restaurants in Hidalgo County. Two that recently opened in McAllen and Mission, joining two others in Edinburg and Weslaco.

"We decided to look into a different brand," Lensda Lozano said of Schlotzsky's. "We thought this was a good opportunity for us. It's a strong brand with a following."

## Different Experience

Schlotzsky's original sandwich is a quirky and delicious creation that includes ham, salami, mozzarella, black olives, tomatoes and mustard. It's tangy, thick and moist and the company's own version of Louisiana hot sauce can add a further punch.

The chain has long since gone beyond its signature sandwich to include specialty pizzas,

flatbreads and salads. Aficionados may enjoy the variety of selections, but usually go back to the sandwich that made them Schlotzsky's devotees in the first place.

"It's a little bit different," Lensda Lozano said of Schlotzsky's thick sandwich experience with its meats, vegetables and sourdough buns holding the whole thing in place. "We've found that longtime customers have a strong loyalty to the original."

Lozano family members were already Schlotzsky's fans before opening their new restaurants in the Valley. The family's patriarch, Robert Lozano, who is F&P's president, especially enjoyed the sandwiches. He encouraged his children, Bob and Lensda,

along with son-in-law, David Lozano, to utilize the family's restaurant background to bring Schlotzsky's to multiple Valley locations.

An Edinburg location near the UTRGV campus came first in 2020. That was followed in 2021 with a Weslaco location along Expressway 83. In recent months, Lotzapan has opened a Schlotzsky's in McAllen on North 23rd Street and a new restaurant in Mission on North Shary Road.

## Family Role Models

Establishing the Schlotzsky's brand in the Valley is a continuation of what the younger Lozano family members were already doing in helping their parents operate over 20 Dairy



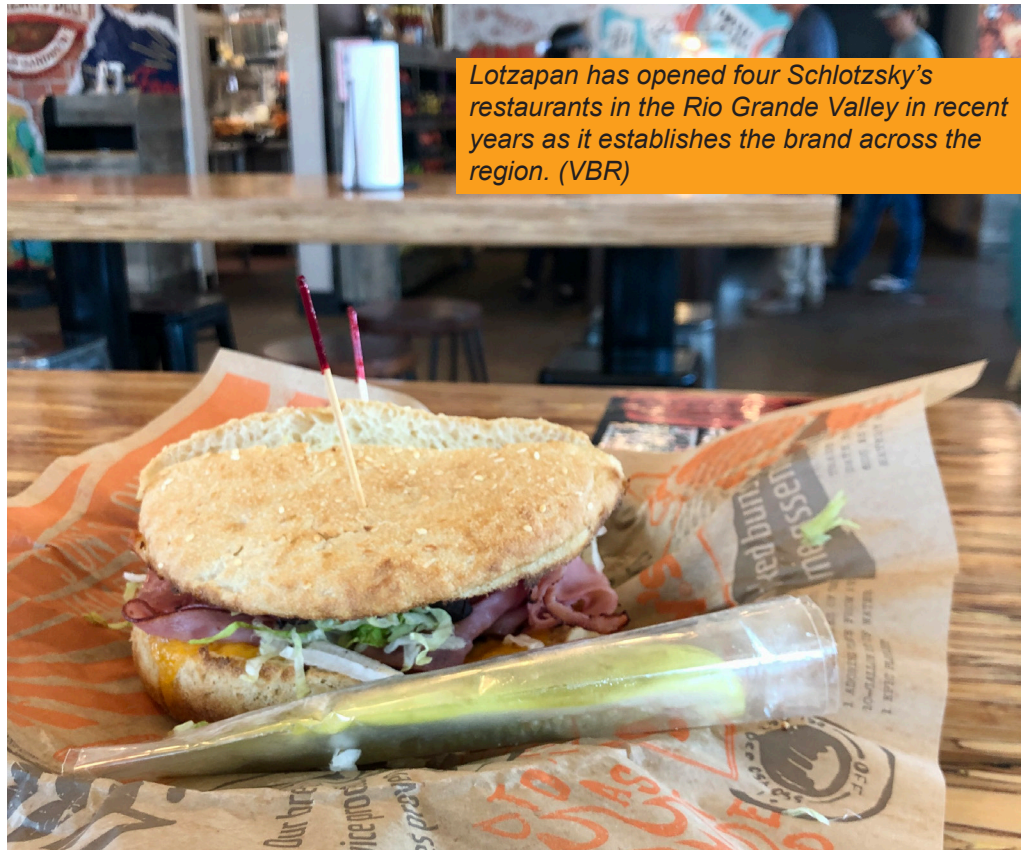


Queens across South Texas from the Valley to the Coastal Bend region.

Bob Lozano is F&P's chief development officer and vice president. David Lozano is the company's corporate advisor and director of real estate. Lensda Lozano is F&P's chief people officer. It is an appropriate job title for a company whose acronym stands for food and people. Lensda Lozano said her parents never pushed their children into the restaurant business. She said her brother, Bob, gravitated toward the business at a young age. She decided to do the same after completing college.

Lensda would eventually meet her husband David, whose last name also happens to be Lozano, and as an attorney his legal expertise has become vital to the family business. She said the younger generation of Lozanos have taken their elders' sense of community and service to others as benchmarks as to how they do business.

"My parents have always been passionate about creating job opportunities," Lensda Lozano said. "They truly value people and communities. We want to give back and build genuine relationships and promote economic growth."



Lotzapan has opened four Schlotzsky's restaurants in the Rio Grande Valley in recent years as it establishes the brand across the region. (VBR)



The Lozano family-owned Dairy Queens in the Rio Grande Valley pride themselves on connections to their community. (Courtesy)

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# Electrician Program Fills Industry Needs

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

In 2006, Daniel Sanchez was an aspiring student working his way through South Texas College's emerging electrician technology program.

There were only about 20 students in the program back then with eight courses and two instructors. Flash forward to the present where Sanchez today is an instructor and program coordinator with more than 100 students enrolled at the McAllen tech campus and branches in Weslaco and Rio Grande City.

The technical programs at STC's Ware Road campus are apart from the college's more traditional academic-oriented main campus on Pecan Street in McAllen. Tech programs like welding, automotive, construction and those in heating, ventilation and air conditioning are vitally important to serving a growing Rio Grande Valley economy.

So are the budding electricians produced by the STC program. The program that 17 years ago offered eight courses today lists 40 courses with two-year associate degrees and a number of certificate-granting programs that take just under a year to complete. Sanchez said the current emphasis is on offering associate degrees in electrician technology at the Mid-Valley and Starr County campuses and getting the resources to provide those locations with more equipment to train students.

"The field is in need of more electricians," Sanchez said. "There's a concern that there aren't people coming up to replace those that are retiring and we have some big industries that are growing fast."

## Patience & Success

The electrician field is one where experience means everything and the accumulation of it leads to knowledge and the capabilities to pass challenging state tests.

Passing those tests is part of a years-long process to reach the master electrician level and having the wherewithal to open and own your own business.

"After that, you can make as much money as you want," Sanchez said.

But getting there takes patience, which some of Sanchez's young students struggle to do as they think of pursuing other interests.

"What career are you going to make of it?" Sanchez said he asks some of his students when they bring up other options.

The careers in front of the graduates of the

electrician technology program are evident. Industrial wiring is in high demand be it refineries or utility companies, or especially these days in renewable energy and solar power fields.

Then there are the fields of robotics and pneumatics, which provides fluid power by means of pressurized air or gasses. Standard career starting points like working for a local electrical company are always there, Sanchez said, mentioning a McAllen company that hired 10 of his students fresh upon graduation.

## Expertise Pays Off

Armando Pena is a student who's reflective of those enrolled in the electrician technology program.

Pena's father introduced him to the field a decade ago upon high school graduation and he tagged along "running pipe and pulling wire," he told STC's public relations department. His father passed away in 2020 and the tragedy of the loss brought Pena back home and to STC, where he earned a certificate in Mechatronics Technology. Now, he's enrolled at STC again in seeking an Associate of Applied Science in Electrician Technology.

"Taking classes at STC helped me understand things like circuits and combined with knowledge I received at work and everything my father taught me, I know now that I want to be in the electrical field for life," he said.



*Armando Pena is following in his father's footsteps by seeking an associate degree in electrician technology at South Texas College. (Courtesy)*



It's what instructor Sanchez would call making a career out of skills and technical knowhow that will always be relevant and needed – and after reaching a high level of expertise – can pay well into the six figures. Sanchez said the students he sees can be overlooked by counselors and teachers during their high school years because they're hands-on learners, not book learners who sit for lectures.

Some of the latter will be required for the associate degrees in electrician technology, but ultimately the real tests lay out in the field, working in challenging industries and earning your keep in refineries, wind farms or up high as a lineman for an electrical utility. Then there's another example Sanchez cites. The electrician field is no longer just for men and he cites a recent female graduate working in Austin for Tesla and making nearly \$30 an hour.

"We have some really bright students seeking technical careers," Sanchez said. "They're different from traditional students, and we need to fill that missing link and promote the kind of programs we offer here."



*STC's electrician technology program has seen steady growth over the last 20 years. (Courtesy)*



*Electricians trained at South Texas College filled the needs of various industries in construction, renewables and solar energy. (Courtesy)*

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# Grant Addresses RGV's Nursing Shortage

By Chris Ardis

The U.S. Department of Labor recently announced that it had selected 25 organizations to receive grants totaling \$78 million to “develop professional pathways to nursing.”

The list of recipients includes only one organization in Texas. It's the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, which is based in Mercedes. A grant of \$3 million was awarded to VIDA to help train and develop more nursing professionals in the Rio Grande Valley.

The Department of Labor figures show there are about 4.2 million registered nurses in the United States. Yet, the

industry is facing significant staffing challenges. Federal labor projections estimate there will be a yearly average of 203,200 openings for RNs through 2031. There are just over 8,000 RNs in the Valley. The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies estimated the Valley's current shortage of nurses could be as high as 6,000.

“This represents the need for a 75-percent increase in the current supply, just to meet the existing demand for nurses,” said Felida Villarreal, the chief executive officer of VIDA. Area hospitals have reported a dire need for more nurses and other health-

care professionals, Villarreal said.

“To address the critical need for healthcare professionals, VIDA is partnering with 12 area hospitals, three training providers, a community advocacy group, and both workforce development boards to collaboratively develop innovative solutions to resolve the nursing and allied health labor shortages,” she said.

Villarreal also reached out to U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez for his support. He said nurses play a critical role in providing health care. Gonzalez said the Department of Labor's Nursing Expansion Grant will bolster nursing workforce and health care



Members of the VIDA team display a symbolic \$3 million check representing the organization's Nursing Expansion Grant Award from the U.S. Department of Labor. (Courtesy)



in the Valley. The VIDA grant will fund training for registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses, patient care technicians and other health-care professionals.

### Rebuilding A Workforce

The timing of the VIDA grant couldn't be better, said Leslie Bingham. The chief executive officer of Valley Baptist Medical Center–Brownsville is also a member of the VIDA board of directors.

“We have such raw talent here, with the values the kids learn from their parents and other people around them and the work ethic (here),” Bingham said. “We have a potential workforce that other areas of the country would kill to have but we don't have the resources to train them.”

Villarreal said VIDA expects to serve 725 program-eligible Valley residents in the program's Nursing Career Pathways Track. The Valley has lower median household incomes than those in many other parts of the country. A program like nursing pathways can make the project transformative.



*VIDA expects to serve 725 unemployed and underemployed Valley residents in its Nursing Career Pathways Track through this five-year initiative. (Courtesy)*

## \$4.7 million to Support Nursing and Health Clinics

In the last three months, the 34th Congressional District of Texas received \$4.7 million in federal grants for our healthcare industry in South Texas.

Of that funding, \$3 million was awarded to the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement to help build and diversify the nursing workforce in the Rio Grande Valley and \$1,736,120 for the Brownsville Community Health Clinic to increase access to health care services for our community.

# \$3 million

**For the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) from the U.S. Department of Labor's Nursing Expansion Grant**



*VIDA expects to serve 725 unemployed and underemployed Valley residents in its Nursing Career Pathways Track through this five-year initiative. (Courtesy)*



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“Historically marginalized populations will graduate with a degree or industry-recognized certificate in a high-demand occupation and achieve living-wage employment in the health-care industry,” Villarreal said. “Through this project, VIDA is simultaneously addressing workforce gaps and upskilling economically disadvantaged individuals, promoting economic development of our communities.”

Bingham reaffirmed the impact the \$3 million grant will have to train new nurses and meet industry needs.

“When people and businesses are looking into relocating, the quality of health care in an area is one of the most important factors,” she said. “The pandemic really decimated our healthcare numbers. We are still in the rebuilding phase.”

The VIDA grant, she said, “will be the momentum we need to grow back the workforce.”

## Partnerships

VIDA has partnered with South Texas College, Texas State Technical College and Texas Southmost College for training in moving the project forward.

Recruitment has already begun. Individuals must be at least 18 years old with a high-school diploma or general educational development certificate. Participants must be eligible to work in the United States and be unemployed, underemployed or meet income requirements. To learn more or to apply, call VIDA at 956-903-1900 or visit [vidacareers.org](http://vidacareers.org).

“This \$3 million grant award represents a tremendous achievement for both our organization and our region because it demonstrates our innovation and our capability of being at the forefront of workforce development priorities,” said Villarreal.



*Felida Villarreal serves as president and CEO of VIDA, a nonprofit organization based in Mercedes that helps Valley residents transform their lives through education and support services. (Courtesy)*

*The \$3 million Nursing Expansion Grant will allow VIDA to partner with three higher-education institutions in the Valley, targeting pathways in nursing, occupational therapy and physical therapy. (Courtesy)*









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