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“Your Pro-RGV News”

What Goes Around Comes Around

By Todd Breland

When you give a lead, you receive a lead. How many times has this happened to you? After you've passed a lead to a colleague or industry-related contact on the other side of the Valley, how quickly were you on the receiving end of the same treatment?

Our Valley is where we are and where we're going exactly because of this practice. Let's face it -- we know our neighbors

and our neighbors know us. Mission tells Raymondville about a lead, Brownsville shares a contact with McAllen and Alamo puts a lead in Weslaco's lap. The comradery is priceless.

The handing off of a potential client to a fellow Valley leader puts bread on the table and we all eat. As one unified region, Deep South Texas is thriving because of

strong, community relationships. Business and community leaders throughout our Rio Grande Valley are connected through families, friendships and colleagues.

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Young Entrepreneur Building Presence

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Nayelli Valdemar is a one-woman shop for now, a young mother who has aligned her personal values with a passion to run “a business I know inside out.”

Only 25, with the energy of a budding entrepreneur, Valdemar embodies her motto, *uno solo puede*.

“One can do it” is a general translation and is reflective of the work ethic demonstrated recently at her Funky Flower Shop in Mercedes, just a minute or two from Expressway 83. Valdemar describes it as being “too good to be true to find this location.” It allows rapid access to the expressway and the free deliveries she makes in the La Feria-to-Weslaco stretch of the Mid-Valley.

Building a Presence

Valdemar is a new generation entrepreneur in using social media skillfully to build presence and boost revenues whenever possible. She has a considerable following on TikTok. Valdemar utilized that platform to her advantage recently when a TikTok follower in Nebraska contacted her to do a floral arrangement for her mother, a Winter Texan residing in the Rio Grande Valley.

She spends about an hour a day on social media, including insights on do-it-yourself floral projects followers can do at home. Direct sales may not come from those presentations. Valdemar figures people will share those videos, building awareness of her business and eventually some sales.

When it comes to revenues, she said, “If I get five percent produced from it, I’m OK with it.”

When there is an online search for “flower shops near me,” Valdemar wants her business to be among the top of the list.

“Once they come to me, I’m confident they’ll be back,” she said.

Work/Life Balance

Valdemar’s primary motivation to start her own business last September arose from a need to spend more time with her young son.

She was building a career at H-E-B in being a retail manager in floral departments at RGV stores. Her most recent job with the large supermarket chain was running the floral department of an H-E-B store in Mission. Valdemar enjoyed the work and the job. It did

keep her away from home for long stretches of time, including the traffic-heavy commutes going and coming from her Mercedes home.

“I needed to be a more present figure in my son’s life,” she said of the possibility of owning her own business. “I’ve always had aspirations but more than anything I needed to spend more time with my son.”

Being her own boss means Valdemar can have her son at the Mercedes flower shop while she works on orders from customers.

Having such flexibility comes into play when a busy season – like Valentine’s Day – arrives. Valdemar will work from 6 a.m. to midnight, crafting floral arrangements, greeting walk-in customers and making her daily deliveries.

Birthdays and sympathy centerpieces make up the majority of her business, with “just because” coming in third when a husband or boyfriend surprises a wife or girlfriend with flowers. Valentines covers that broad category



Nayelli Valdemar has better work/life balance as a young mother since starting her own business. (VBR)

of “just because” but on a higher level. Mother’s Day beats them all for floral sales, she says, with those busy days ahead in May.

Artistic Edge

A floral arrangement from Funky Flower Shop means getting a product made by a florist with a trained artistic eye.

Valdemar is a graduate of the South Texas ISD Science Academy, a regional magnet school district based in Mercedes. Its schools have a reputation for teaching mathematics and sciences at a high level. She said attending a South Texas ISD school was “a great awakening.” She excelled in math.



Nayelli Valdemar is proud of her emerging Mid-Valley business and the flexibility it gives her to spend more time with her son. (VBR)



Nayelli Valdemar’s flower shop is a bright addition to the floral business in the Mid-Valley. (Courtesy)



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Valdemar didn't find a passion for it, so in attending UTRGV she majored in fine arts and graphic design.

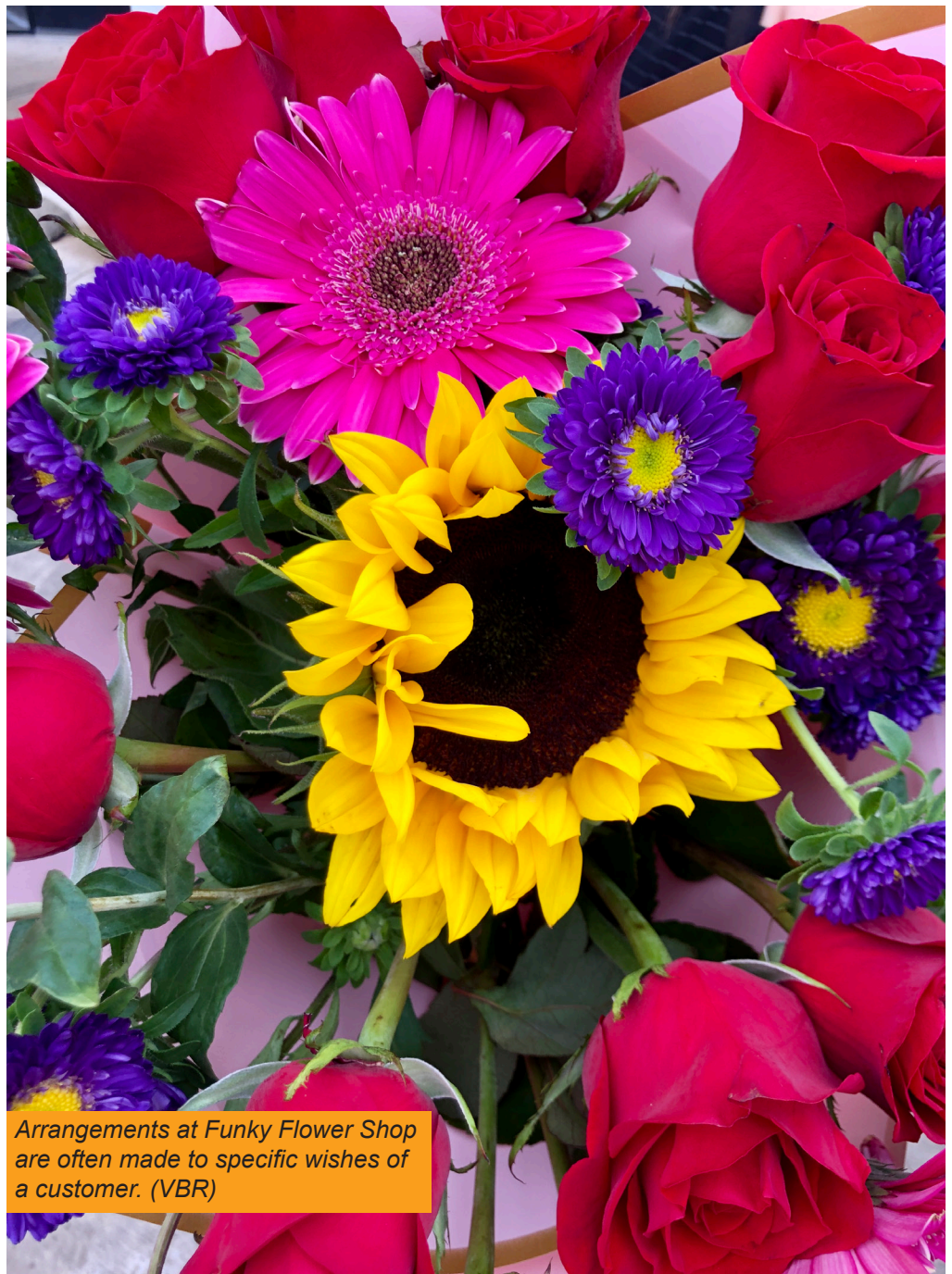
Those elements are evident in her arrangements as is Valdemar's flexibility to craft something specific to a customer's wishes. Individualized orders are something most large florists will not do in that their products are of generalized styles and ready to buy in a rush. Valdemar works to fill that gap between the purchase of flower on a whim and customers who want more of a specific arrangement geared to a loved one.

Moving ahead, she hopes to expand her business in adding staff, improve her website and continue to offer customers the added benefit of free Mid-Valley delivery.

Uno solo puede.

Nayelli Valdemar is determined to get there.

Nayelli Valdemar uses an artistic background to custom make floral arrangements for her customers. (VBR)



Arrangements at Funky Flower Shop are often made to specific wishes of a customer. (VBR)

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Reading Turtle Offers Break From Online World

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Harlingen Mayor Norma Sepulveda is known for making the rounds of her city and dropping in on locally-owned small businesses.

In mid-January, she made such a visit to The Reading Turtle. In the mayor's words, it's "a cozy bookstore" and where she made a pact with her young son.

"I've made a deal with my son," Sepulveda wrote on her Harlingen mayor Facebook page. "Every time he completes a book, we'll visit The Reading Turtle to choose the next adventure."

For Isabel and Gabriel Torres, the mayor's support of their business along with social media mentions by the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation, are huge boosts to their goal to bring a new and used bookstore presence to their city. The world is now cluttered with Kindles, Nooks and the tablets where millions now read their books.

Isabel Torres is one of those Kindle readers, but she believes there should be a place in a community like Harlingen where adults and kids find solace and comfort in sitting down in a shop and holding a book in their hands.

"There comes a time when you need to get away from screens and get a break from all of that," Isabel said. "You can come to a shop like this one and pick up a book, hold it and feed your imagination with a story."

'Getaway Place'

The Torres couple had been involved in running other small businesses in recent years but none brought any particular joy.

Isabel Torres has long been an avid reader. The closest new bookstore to Harlingen was 40 miles-plus away in McAllen and required getting through heavy Pharr Interchange construction to get there. The thought of opening a small bookstore in Harlingen was her idea and won the quick support of her husband. Gabriel could add his love of collectibles to the mix of a Harlingen bookstore.

Their goal became a reality last September when they opened their shop in a small plaza on the northern side of the Business 77 Sunshine Strip. The bookstore is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a two-hour midday break each day.

"This is our getaway place," Gabriel Torres said. "We can't wait to get shipments in and

interact with our customers."

The Reading Turtles' collection is a mix of new and used books with requests by customers met. Searches for first-edition books signed by their authors is a niche the Harlingen bookstore is trying to fill locally. Book collecting is a time-tested hobby, and ownership of special editions or rare books become important objects for their owners.

"It's like a trophy," Isabel Torres said of a collector getting a desired book. "Writers

make such an impact in the lives of their readers."

Bookshops Growing

The long-range plan is to eventually move The Reading Turtle to downtown Harlingen – likely on Jackson Street – and add a coffee bar to the mix.

The Harlingen couple is hardly alone in having an aspiration to own a bookshop. The Associated Press reported in 2023 that there



Gabriel and Isabel Torres are giving Harlingen-area residents an outlet for their bookshop needs. (VBR)

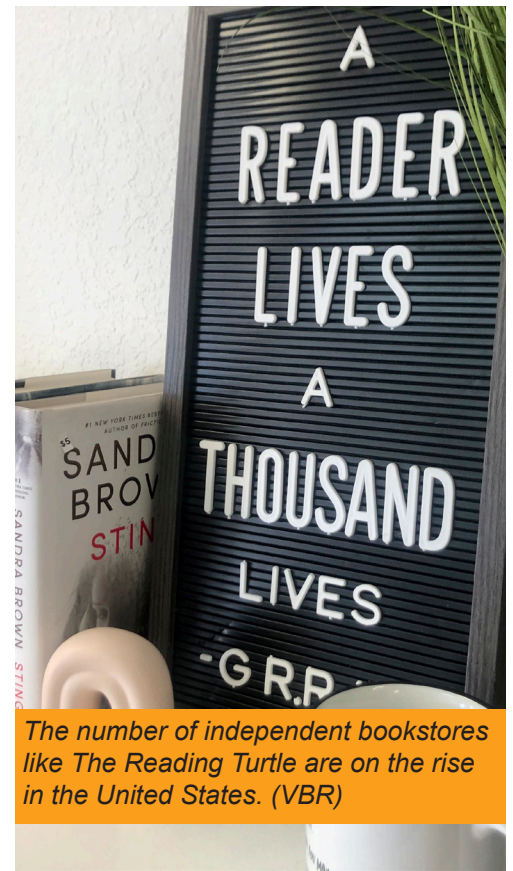
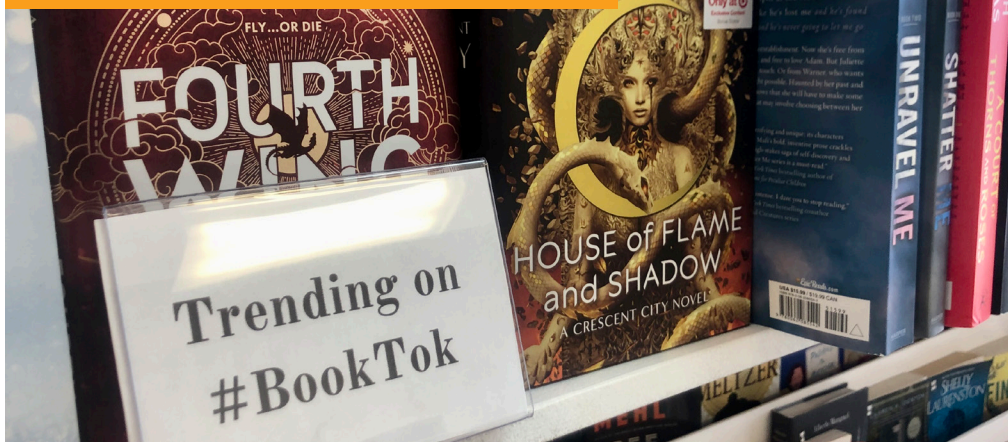
were 300 more members of an independent bookseller's association than there were in 2019. Analysts in the AP story said teens and customers in their 20s are seeking books and rediscovering bookstores. Mayor Sepulveda's young son is one example of that trend and his mother is likewise a fan of the written word in book form.

"I'm a huge advocate for the tangible joy of

holding an actual physical book," the mayor said on her Facebook page after visiting The Reading Turtle. "While e-books definitely have a place in my life, there's something irreplaceable about turning the pages of a book."

And now thanks to The Reading Turtle on 1046 N. 77 Sunshine Strip, there's a place in Harlingen which meets that need.

The owners of The Reading Turtle are active on social media, keeping up with trends to meet their readers' needs. (VBR)



The number of independent bookstores like The Reading Turtle are on the rise in the United States. (VBR)

RGV Leadership Class 9 delved into economic development and workforce issues during their latest session. The class visited the CEED business incubator, Royal Technologies and 5x5 to see innovation in action. They also heard from an esteemed panel representing the four counties, covering key topics shaping the regional economy.

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Island Vibe Suits SPI's Only Dentist

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Dr. Aaron Unterbrink got through 2020 and 2021 when, as a dentist, he tended to one emergency after another.

Unterbrink had five dental offices at the time in Hidalgo County. His main office was in McAllen with another one in Alton and another in Donna. The frantic pace of those years and the constant medical emergencies he dealt with took a toll. It convinced Unterbrink there had to be a better way to live and work.

“When we were finished with dealing with COVID and all of that, we thought, ‘Why do we have all of these practices?’ We decided to sell everything and simplify our lives,” Unterbrink said of the decision he and his wife, Brooke, made in late 2021.

Brooke Unterbrink is a pediatrician by training and education. By 2020 she had given up her own medical practice to help manage the business affairs of her husband’s multi-office locations in Hidalgo County. Brooke felt as her husband did. They needed a change in their lives to have a better work-life balance and devote more time to their two teenage sons.

It all began coming together when the husband-and-wife doctors learned that South Padre Island’s only dentist – Dr. Emma Gavito -- was retiring. Living on the Island is something the Unterbrinks had thought of doing given they previously had a residence there. By mid-2022, the transition was complete. Aaron Unterbrink was set up for a dental practice on 4912 Padre Blvd. as SPI’s only dentist.

“We’re still working but it feels like we’re not working that hard as compared to before,” Brooke Unterbrink said of her husband’s single office dental practice on the Island.

Building A Practice

Aaron and Brooke met in high school while living in Riviera in Kleberg County.

Riviera is the one-traffic-light town on U.S. Highway 77. Its Dairy Queen and two convenience stores are the last places to get a bite and fill up a tank before driving south through the King Ranch and getting to Raymondville. The rural life suited them well as did becoming high school sweethearts.

They would go on to attend Texas A&M University in College Station. It was there they got the direction and motivation to

pursue careers in medicine. Brooke’s family roots in McAllen led the young couple to start medical practices in that city in the early 2000s. Their two sons were born there and their respective medical practices flourished in McAllen.

Aaron Unterbrink would grow his practice to include the five offices in Hidalgo County. His office would see 100 or more patients on busy days. It felt good to be successful in building up his practice and business. Brooke Unterbrink would leave her own medical practice to help her husband manage his staff of employees and the business operations of multiple offices. The volume and speed of tending to everything would build through the years and intensify dramatically in the years 2020 and 2021. They reached a point where enough was enough after two decades

of dentistry in McAllen.

“We were looking to scale down,” Brooke Unterbrink said. “We’ve simplified our lives.”

Finding Solitude

The pace of life on the Island is such that Dr. Unterbrink sees about 10 patients a day. It’s a patient load that suits him well after the hectic years in McAllen.

“I’m not burdened with that kind of volume anymore,” he said after wrapping up a recent weekday at his Island office. “I put in a successful 20 years with a bigger practice. It feels great to slow down and have the time to talk to my patients.”

Unterbrink and his family live within walking distance of his SPI office. Brooke Unterbrink has her own presence at the Island



Brooke and Aaron Unterbrink relocated their family to South Padre Island where Aaron has a dental practice. (VBR)

office as it is where she homeschools her sons in an enclosed room by the reception area. The Island dental practice is kept reasonably busy during the offseason tourist months with Winter Texans and year-round Island residents. The spring and summer months will see plenty of drop-in patients who have had some sort of accident or experienced an immediate dental issue while vacationing on the Island.

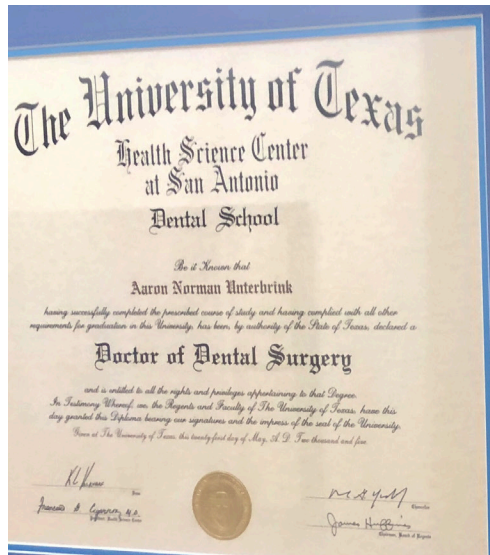
"We patch them up and get them home," Aaron Unterbrink said.

Things have worked out as the Unterbrinks envisioned. It feels good to work at a more relaxed pace in a coastal community that's a great place to live and work.

"We're together," Brooke Unterbrink said of her family's new life. "And living on the Island? What can you say? It's such a nice place to live."



Dr. Aaron Unterbrink scaled back his practice after 20 years of a hectic work life in McAllen and Hidalgo County. (VBR)



Brooke and Aaron Unterbrink are husband-and-wife doctors who now live on South Padre Island where Aaron serves as SPI's only dentist. (VBR)



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Buckeye Brings Gift Of Music to RGV

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Nick Dozer grew up a metal rocker and a buckeye in the rolling hills of southern Ohio.

Dozer considers himself part of Buckeye Nation, as in Ohio State University football lore, but these days he finds himself in the Rio Grande Valley. He met a Valley girl while living in Nashville where both he and Dina Obrego were what he called “musicnaries.” It was ministry through music as Dozer and his future wife went on tours through the southern United States as part of a larger Christian-themed group.

After marriage and with two young children, Dozer moved with his family to Dina’s hometown of Mercedes. It is from there that Dozer started his South Texas Academy of Music. The school is oriented toward teaching guitar with hopes of adding more instruments and instructors as Dozer grows his business.

Operating for now out of the Rio Life Community Church, he is already looking forward to having his own facility, with an eye toward opening a school of music in downtown Mercedes. He grew up in a small town – Chillicothe, Ohio – and sees some parallels to the South Texas community where he now lives. Dozer sees the timing as being right to live and work in his wife’s hometown.

“My wife and I are dreamers,” he said. “I see Mercedes as being a good location in the middle of the Valley. Mercedes has a lot of hope to grow and improve.”

Bringing Nashville To RGV

Dozer grew up a band kid in his high school, drumming away in his marching band.

Playing drums was a sidelight to his real musical passion of playing guitar. Classic rockers like AC/DC, Metallica and Van Halen were the musical heroes of his youth. He has found that the youth of today still gravitate toward these groups of the 1970s and 1980s, asking Dozer to teach them the guitar licks of those enduring rockers.

“You can’t beat the classics,” he said.

Dozer relishes teaching youngsters coming of age and using music to help them find their identities in navigating through the teenage years.

“They are on the cusp of figuring out who they are,” Dozer said of his young students.

“It’s very fulfilling to help them develop an outlet for their gifts. We also help them to learn how to socialize with others and work together in teams to develop social skills.”

He has taken a bit of Nashville and put it into his RGV music school. He learned the Nashville Number System from studio musicians in a city widely regarded as the country music capital of the world. The Nashville system is a way of writing the chords of songs in a universal or neutral key instead of chord names. Understanding the number system provides an easier path for students to play an instrument and learn the well-known songs that inspired them to become musicians.

“We take an asymmetrical approach, not a linear one,” Dozer said of his method of teaching music. “You don’t have to go from A to B. We teach multiple techniques.”

Helping Students On Their Journeys

Dozer’s business is off to a good start.

The Facebook page for the South Texas Academy features photos of Dozer’s students beaming with big smiles while holding guitars in their hands.

Most of his students are teens, but as the Facebook page demonstrates, there are some over 50-year-old-students just as happy to be learning or fine tuning their guitar playing skills. Dozer’s faith continues to play a significant role in his life and that of his family.

“We’re Christians who operate a business,” he said, noting his wife helps him with the planning aspects of the music school. “We want to serve as many people as we can on their musical journey.”

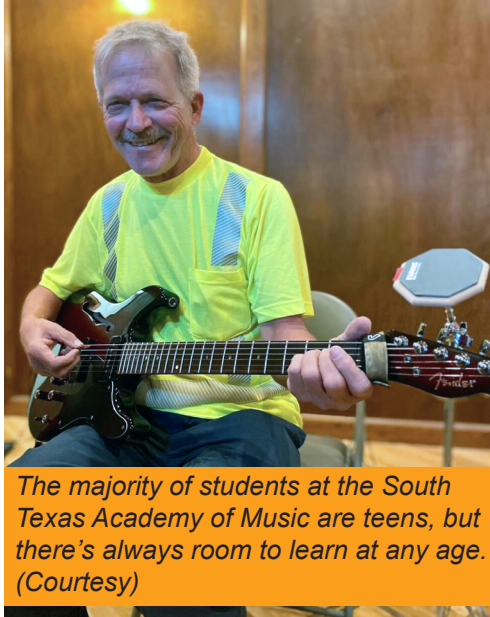
More information about the school is available at stxacademyofmusic.com and by



Nick Dozer is a native Ohioan who has brought his gift of music to the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)

calling 956-593-3326. A lifelong musician, Dozer is bringing to South Texas what he started doing in his native state.

“We did the same thing in Ohio,” he said of his previous work there before relocating to the Valley. “We want to do the same here and serve our community.”



The majority of students at the South Texas Academy of Music are teens, but there's always room to learn at any age. (Courtesy)



The South Texas Academy of Music teaches its student musical skills and highlights the need for teamwork. (Courtesy)

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Wanderlusters Find Home In San Benito

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Fun N Sun RV Resort in San Benito fits the description of a community within a community with its over 2,000 residents coming and going like a small town.

The San Benito resort is one of the longest active RV parks in the Rio Grande Valley. It got its start decades ago in Harlingen near the Air Force base that would be redeveloped into the Valley International Airport. Fun N Sun made its move to San Benito after the base's closure during the Cold War era. It would become a San Benito fixture with its location just off the Paso Real Highway near Expressway 83.

Many of its residents are active in community life outside of the park. John Van Wyk, the resort's general manager, points to the volunteer work and donations Fun N Sun residents make to the local food bank, veterans' organizations and projects benefiting children. Beyond the philanthropy, there are a range of activities at the park to keep residents busy.

"People would be surprised by all of the activities we offer," Van Wyk said. "There are so many different things we do here."

Zooming Around

A few hundred steps away from Van Wyk's office is a remote control track



Over 2,000 residents live at Fun N Sun in San Benito during peak winter tourist months. (VBR)

where the Zoomers meet.

It's the name of a car club at the park and its mini-track is dubbed the "Fun-N-Sun Speedway." A large banner with big red letters says, "Welcome Race Fans!" This is the place where enthusiasts race their mini-vehicles around a compacted dirt track with white piping serving as its boundaries. Make your way further around the 1,400-space park and there are facilities to play pickleball, billiards, sand volleyball, and for those handy with their hands, a woodworking shop.

Van Wyk says by the time retirees reach a park like Fun N Sun, a certain amount of wanderlust has left their systems. A life of jobs and work necessary to make ends meet has come to an end. Children have grown up and time is now untethered from years

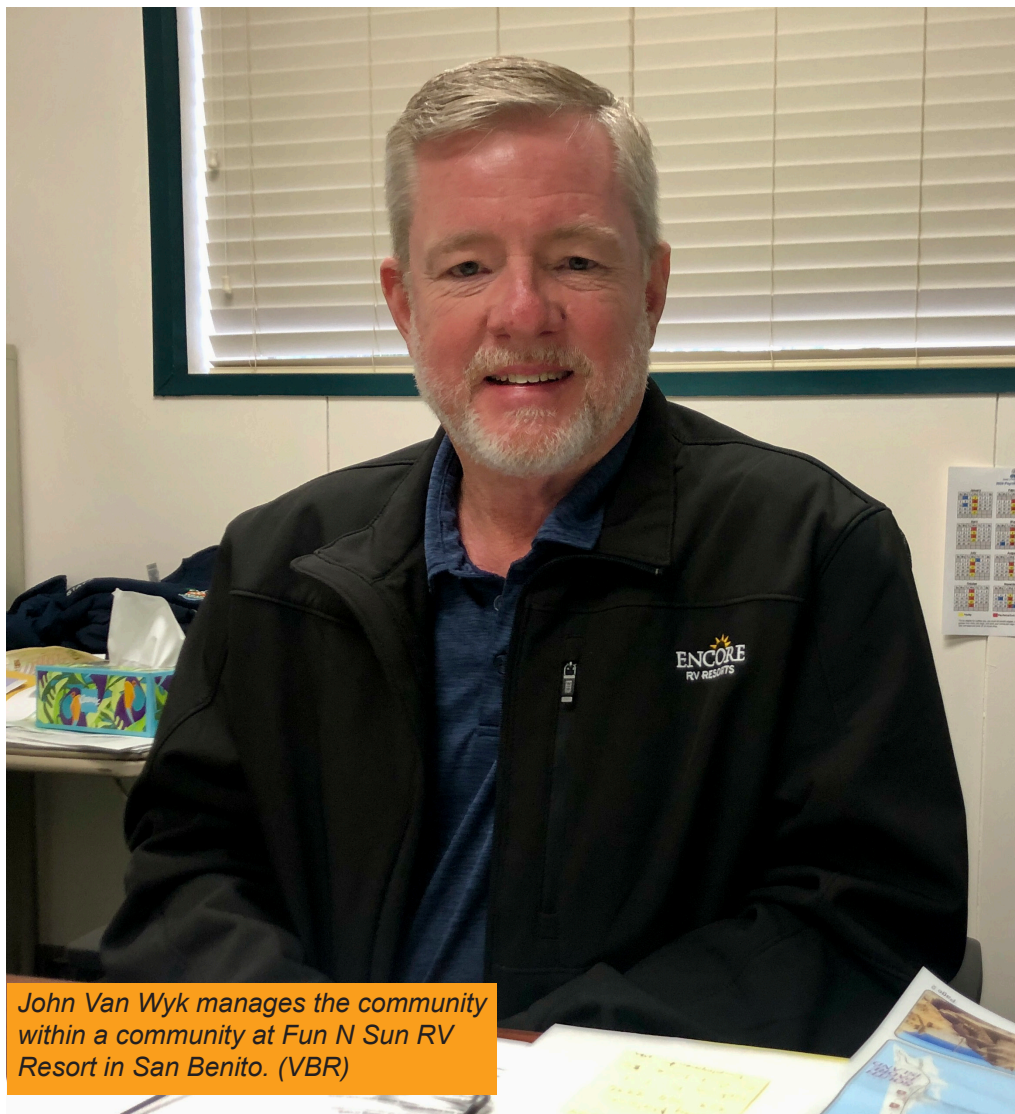
of daily responsibilities. It's the beginning of the RV experience and discovering what to do with the rest of your life.

The first inclination is to go anywhere and everywhere. Eventually, after meeting that need, Van Wyk says retirees "get tired of pulling around the trailer." They begin settling in specific spots, be it a permanent home as a base to continue further travels or a more year-round home. About a third of Fun N Sun's residents now make the park in San Benito their permanent home.

"You get to a place like this," Van Wyk said, "and you realize you don't have to keep driving around so much."

Just Right Spot

In San Benito, Fun N Sun is away from what Van Wyk calls "the hustle and bustle"



John Van Wyk manages the community within a community at Fun N Sun RV Resort in San Benito. (VBR)

of the more traffic-congested portions of the Valley.

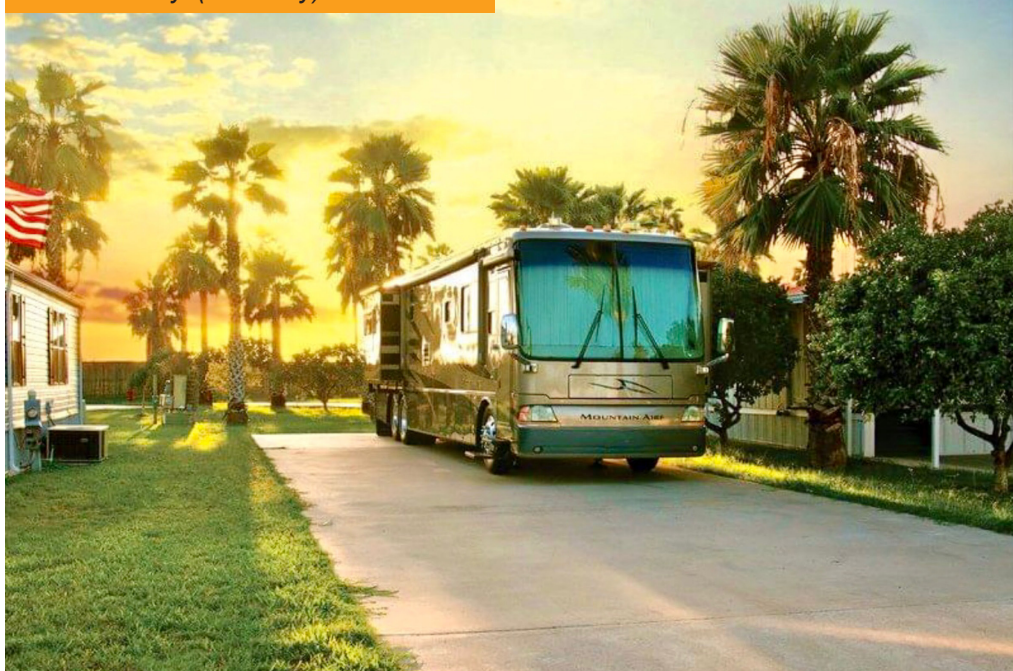
It's not exactly off the beaten path with its quick access to the expressway and a location that sits between two popular Winter Texans destinations. One is Nuevo Progreso and its array of medications offered at discounted rates when compared to U.S. prices. Less than one hour in the other direction is South Padre Island, a major coastal attraction.

Fun N Sun, like all of its RV park counterparts, operates in a world of immediate feedback via online reviews. Many of its residents -- past and present -- assess the San Benito park on everything from safety to roads in the resort to download speeds and cellular service. One review rings true to one of Van Wyk's chief objectives for his park.

"There are activities going on daily that you can pick and choose from," the reviewer wrote. "The activities, the dog park, remote control track, the shuffleboard courts, and on and on."

It's a good place for RV wanderers to settle for a bit before the travel bug bites again.

The 1,400-space Fun N Sun Resort in San Benito is among the longest active tourist and residential parks in the Rio Grande Valley. (Courtesy)



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Teen Promotes Financial Literacy To Peers

By Chris Ardis

David Arturo Muñoz-Matta has had a fascination with finance for years.

He moved to the United States with his mom, Mariel Muñoz-Matta, at the age of 6, having no idea where that fascination would eventually take him. Muñoz-Matta would talk about stocks with his science teacher, Mike Aranda, during his years at Brown Middle School. He laughs, noting he was not a stellar student then. He preferred to study people with significant wealth.

“You don’t have to create your own path,” he says. “Just follow what millionaires do.”

Times got tougher for Muñoz-Matta and his mom during the COVID years, he said, noting that his mother’s sole source of income vanished when teaching Zumba at a local fitness center was prohibited during shutdowns.

One day, Muñoz-Matta’s mom asked him to create a household budget. He turned to YouTube and watched videos about tax audits in beginning to learn about budgeting. David’s budget plan and federal economic impact payments covered their basic necessities during those years.

Forging Ahead

He is now a senior in the McAllen ISD’s International Baccalaureate program at Lamar Academy. Muñoz-Matta recalled seeing the Bezos Scholars application posted at Lamar last school year.

“Something beckoned me to apply,” he said.

His English teacher, Araceli Guzman, served as his recommender. David received an email notifying him he had made it to the semi-final round of 32 candidates. Muñoz-Matta explained his project in applying for the scholars program. In a Zoom interview, he introduced FLARE - Financial Literacy and Advancement for RGV Equity – as his proposed Bezos Community Change Project.

“Our mission is to promote financial literacy amongst teenagers, starting in the RGV,” FLARE’s Instagram page reads.

Muñoz-Matta began forming the idea after developing the family budget. Bezos Scholars attend the week-long Aspen Ideas Festival in late June, along with an educator from their schools. It’s a trip Muñoz-Matta would make. He is the McAllen school district’s first-ever Bezos Scholar.

“I’m on this journey with David,” said Aimee Nunez, a counselor at Lamar who made the trip to Aspen, Colo. with her student.

Making The Trip

Muñoz-Matta and Nunez flew to Aspen, all expenses paid by the Bezos program, to attend the festival.

He joined his 11 fellow scholars and their educators. While there, the scholars and educators met notable philanthropists and entrepreneurs, including Miguel “Mike” Bezos, Rainn Wilson and Sal Khan. Two events stand out to Muñoz-Matta. The scholars learned the principle of “20 seconds of courage.” Muñoz-Matta applied the principle in dealing with the large crowd at the festival.

“I turned off my mind and raised my hand in a room of at least 500 people to ask the speaker a question,” he said.

He was thrilled that a picture of him posing the question was later posted on the Bezos Scholars Instagram page. Attending the “Meet the Disruptors: Paving a Path to a New Economy” session, Muñoz-Matta says, was a game changer.

“My ideas crystalized,” he said. “I knew I wanted to go into finance but now I want to disrupt, to change systems.”

Muñoz-Matta wants to teach teens how to begin creating generational wealth. He also wants to provide access to financial resources for people unaware of opportunities like investing in the S&P 500 or a 401(k). The festival kicked off a year-long dedication to the Scholars’ projects. Bezos Scholars receive



Bezos Scholar David Muñoz-Matta stands outside of McAllen ISD's Lamar Academy in front of Albert Einstein's relevant quotation. (Courtesy)

\$1,000 in seed funding.

“It’s a legacy project,” Muñoz-Matta says. “We apply annually for the \$1,000 grant to keep FLARE going,” Nunez said.

Over the first semester of this school year, Muñoz-Matta and Nunez met with FLARE members twice weekly and invited speakers to address the group on financial topics. FLARE continues to meet regularly and Muñoz-Matta and Nunez join their Bezos cohort on Zoom every other Saturday. On Feb. 10, the McAllen Scholar and Educator presented the entire FLARE project during the online Bezos Scholar Showcase.

Their signature public event is scheduled for April 20 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the McAllen Public Library.

“One FLARE member is a volunteer there,” Nunez says. “She told them about the project and they immediately wanted to get involved.”

Jose Aleman, a vice president for community development officer at Frost Bank, has partnered with FLARE for the event, which will include hands-on activities and speakers. The FLARE event will be both the conclusion and the commencement.

David Muñoz-Matta with his fellow Scholars during the Aspen Ideas Festival in June 2023. (Photo Caelinn Elizabeth Photography)



Efficiency Redefined: The Contact Center

Serving the community for almost 40 years, Rio Bank prides itself on its founding principles: Commitment to Honesty, Integrity and Quality Service.

In order to properly service its various communities, the bank has made sure to properly invest when it comes to employee interactions with customers, and how quickly they are able to respond to any inquiries received. With the intent of elevating its quality of customer service, the bank created a new department dedicated to handling frontline customer service and external communications: the Contact Center.

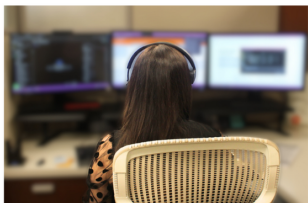
Omar Rodriguez, Chief Operations Officer, believes customer service is central to everything done at Rio Bank. With 16 locations in the state of Texas, Rodriguez and the bank keep in mind every facet related to the customer experience.

“Whether you are a frontline employee helping our customers or you are in our back office supporting our frontline employees, our focus is to create the most positive experience possible,” Rodriguez states, “We train our employees to provide excellent customer service and provide them the authority to immediately resolve any issues.”

Prior to the implementation of the new Contact Center department, Personal Bankers would assist both in branch customers and those calling into a branch requesting information.

“Now we have a dedicated group of folks that can help those that call in while our bankers can provide our in-branch customers their undivided attention. However, our customers can still contact our Personal Bankers when they want,” continued Rodriguez. “We’re just providing them with the ability to get assistance quicker.”

www.rio.bank



As a whole, branch level activity is very high for the bank, as is the call activity. Having a dedicated group of staff members who can focus on helping customers with balance inquiries, online banking access or disputes made sense for the bank.

With the technology being provided for the new contact center, coming into the branch has become somewhat a thing of the past for most of the situations being dealt with. “Our goal was to provide our customers unparalleled service with quick and easy solutions while keeping that human touch,” Rodriguez emphasized. “Customers have gotten the help they need faster and are more comfortable speaking with any Rio employee. While they may be partial to employees at their home branch, they realize we all receive the proper training and skills to provide them the best customer service possible.”

Customer service, and the customer experience, mean everything to Rio Bank. Francis Gomez, Senior Vice President, oversees the Treasury Management department and now has the Contact Center department under her supervision as well.

Gomez knows of the value that stems from providing customers with proficient and effective service.

“At Rio Bank, customer service is not just a department, it’s a core value ingrained in the organization’s culture,” states Gomez. “Our commitment to providing exceptional service extends beyond banking transactions. It’s about building strong, lasting relationships with our customers. We prioritize active listening, prompt issue resolution, and a personalized approach to meet the unique needs of every client.”

“Whether you are a frontline employee helping our customers or you are in our back office supporting our frontline employees, our focus is to create the most positive experience possible.”



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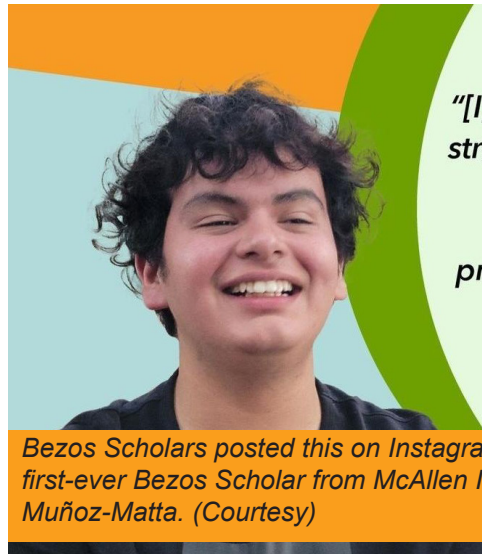
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Muñoz-Matta graduates in May. He has been accepted to the McCombs School of Business at UT Austin, where he will major in finance.

“It’s something I need to do,” he says about earning a degree and planning his disruption. “My community needs it. If I can be in a room of 500 people and ask a question, imagine what I can do!”





“[I] hope to acquire stronger leadership skills and better understand the problems afflicting today’s world.”
- David Arturo Muñoz-Matta

Bezos Scholars posted this on Instagram about the first-ever Bezos Scholar from McAllen ISD, David Muñoz-Matta. (Courtesy)





FLARE, Bezos Scholar David Muñoz-Matta’s Community Change Project, aims to promote financial literacy in teens. (Photo David Muñoz-Matta)

McAllen ISD Bezos Educator Aimee Nunez captures Scholar David Muñoz-Matta’s amazement after seeing snow-capped mountains for the first time while attending the Aspen Ideas Festival. (Photo Caelinn Elizabeth Photography)

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WALKING in the HEELS of GREATNESS!



The Raymondville Chamber of Commerce serving Willacy County created **H.E.E.L.S.** over ten years ago. The idea of **H.E.E.L.S.** became a reality stemming from a conversation expressing the need for a platform to showcase successful women and women entrepreneurs while empowering, inspiring, and educating guests by sharing ideas and resources.

The acronym **H.E.E.L.S.** is short for "Helping Empower Entrepreneurial Ladies to Succeed" and it continues its efforts by

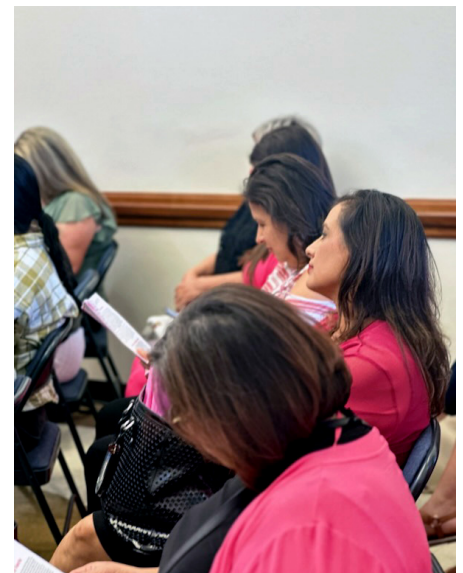
gathering quarterly to enjoy a few hours in a setting of some glitter and lots of excitement and motivation while providing education on business development, self development along with a multitude of resources and useful information. **H.E.E.L.S.** is held alternately as a luncheon or as an evening event allowing those without flexible hours to attend the evening event. We have hosted women speakers in leadership in the legal system, in education, in innovation and product creation and promotion

and in self care. The motivational speakers have touched on topics that have spanned widely over the years, but nonetheless, each one has continued to inspire and uplift our guests.

*The next upcoming **H.E.E.L.S.** will be held in Raymondville on March 28. For more information, please email us at chamber@granderiver.net or call us at 956-865-0711.*



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