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Proactive Always Beats Reactive

By Todd Breland

We all know the saying about April showers. Sure, blooming flowers bring a fresh feeling of growth but also pollen. Allergies are definitely in full force.

I also call April - May preparation time for the upcoming Atlantic hurricane season. With the transition from El Nino to La Nina this early summer, the National Hurricane Center is predicting an active summer. The switch means cooler Pacific water and decreased wind shear across the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean.

The El Nino effect over last few years minimized tropical systems' presence and intensity in the Gulf of Mexico mainly because strong west to east wind deterred tropical development and strength. The upcoming pattern, La Nina, means Gulf-bordering states should be very attentive to the 2024 Atlantic Hurricane season which is June 1 - November 30.

Over the next several weeks, it is a very

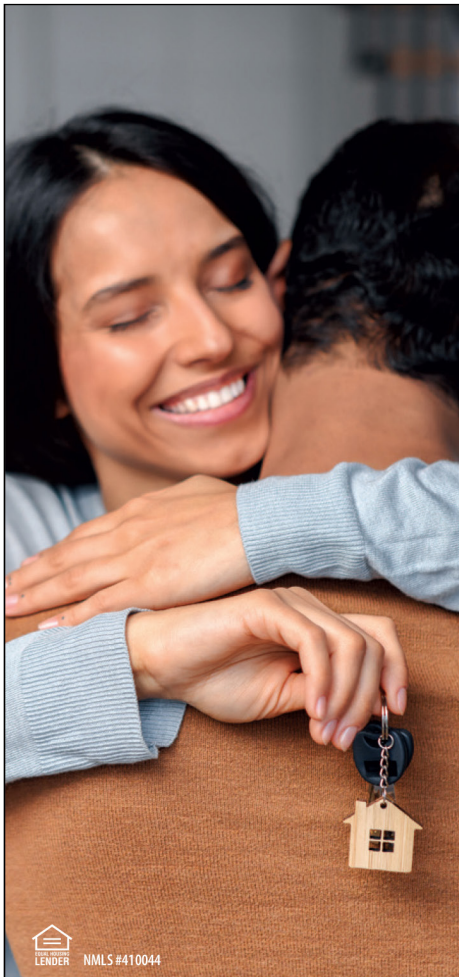
good idea to make sure we are up to speed on insurance, inventory and belongings. It is advised to digitally store business and home photographs and documentation no later than May. These preparations plus drafting a potential evacuation route before the season begins is smart.

Let's make time to prepare our work teams, properties and families for any threats Mother Nature decides to throw at us. Hurricane season forecasting by Colorado State University will be available mid April. Be vigilant, safe and alert.

We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.

Getting Ready for a Hurricane

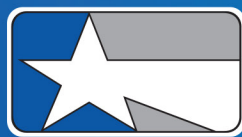
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Butterfly Center Bolsters Eco-Tourism

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Rio Grande Valley's well-deserved renown for being a national birding hotspot overshadows another element of wildlife that attracts eco-tourists to the region.

The Valley has a stunning array of butterflies. Almost 40 percent of the over 700 species of butterflies in the United States live in the region. The National Butterfly Center south of Mission is at the forefront of this brand of eco-tourism. The center's 100-acre site features native botanical gardens and trails for exploring and observing the many species of butterflies found in the Valley. The North American Butterfly Association operates the nonprofit nature preserve, open seven days a week to the public.

The 100-acre center and a 350-acre site just west of the butterfly center that it recently began managing give the Valley a boost to

the region's already thriving eco-tourism industry. The larger site will eventually provide public access and add to the services already offered at the butterfly center.

"The Rio Grande Valley has the greatest diversity of butterfly species in North America," said Marianna Trevino Wright, the executive director of the butterfly center. "We have such a rich and diverse plant life here on the edge of the subtropical Americas."

Impact Of Weather

The butterfly center is located on the banks of the Rio Grande and was once the site of an onion field among other forms of farming in the area.

The national butterfly association has owned and managed the site for over 20 years and has worked to bring the tract back

to its natural habitat state. Wright has been a passionate advocate for what the butterfly center represents in preserving native Valley habitat, and attracting students and tourists to a site that's located near Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park.

Wright has been in national news reports regarding construction of the border wall, which through litigation and legislation stays off butterfly center land. In a recent conversation, however, she was all about the higher-than-normal numbers of butterfly species at the center during the Valley's winter months. Fall months are usually the best times of year to see butterflies in the region. In February, 72 species were seen at the center as compared to 62 in October.

Wright attributed weather changes, drought and the extreme heat of summer 2023 as the



The National Butterfly Center is a popular spot for eco-tourists visiting the Rio Grande Valley. (Courtesy)

causes for the leaner-than-usual butterfly species seen last fall. Butterflies are wholly dependent on plant life for their existence to feed and to find the right host plants to lay their eggs. Each butterfly species has a unique plant where eggs are laid and from which newly hatched caterpillars eat the leaves of the host plant.

The monarch butterfly, for example, can lay its eggs only on the milkweed plant. Wright calls it “a feeder relationship” and nature’s way of restricting butterfly species to specific plants for reproducing less hungry caterpillars that consume all forms of plant life.

Representing The RGV

It’s the sort of information the butterfly center widely shares with schoolchildren who visit by the hundreds every year during field trips to learn more about RGV wildlife.

The Texas Butterfly Festival that takes



A Clouded Sulphur butterfly is among the hundreds of species at the National Butterfly Center in Mission. (Photo Harvey Bryan)



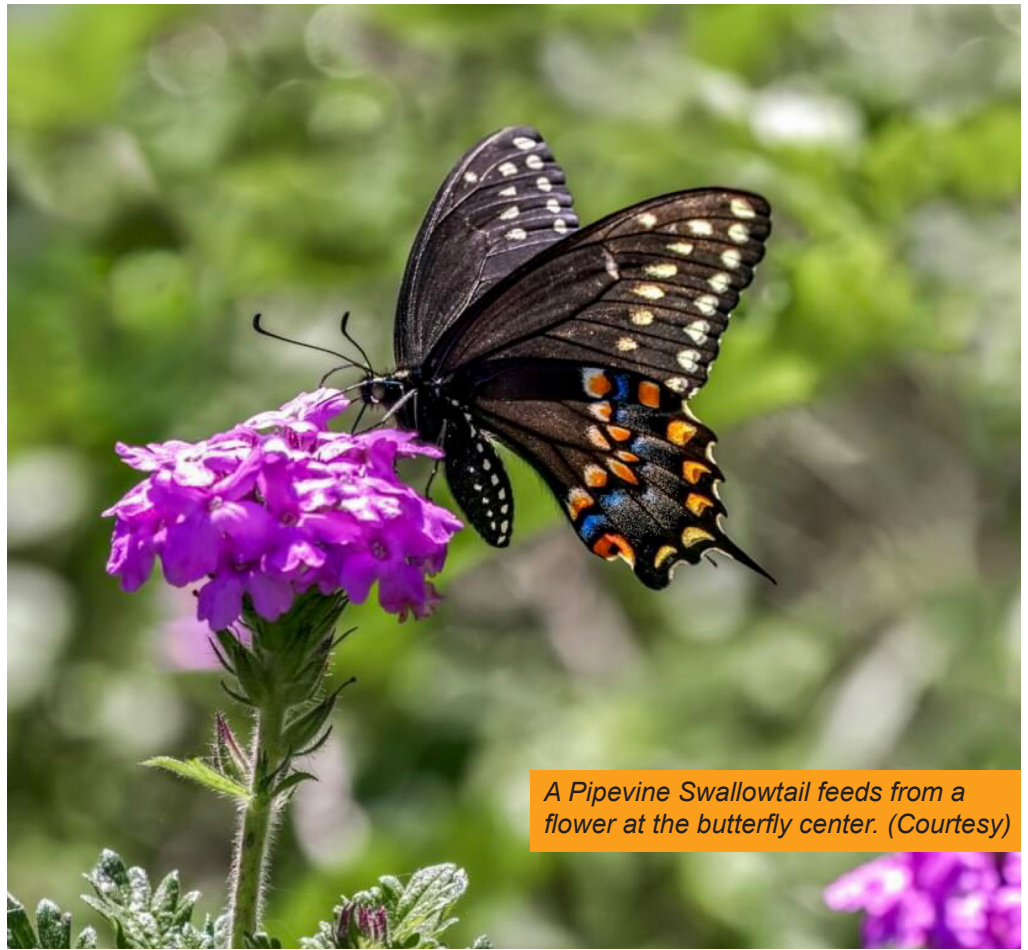
Painted Buntings are among the many species of birds found at the butterfly center. (Courtesy)

place every October at the center attracts more than 3,000 visitors. Over 35,000 “unique visitors,” as Wright calls them, come to the butterfly center as tourists, which she says does not include local residents who are frequent visitors. The center is part of collaborative efforts with the National Park Service to ensure the survival of monarch butterflies on their mass migration through the Valley. It also works with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on trails restoration and partners with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to plant rare grasses and endangered flowers.

And it’s not just about butterflies. One can see about 300 species of birds at the center, including all manner of ducks, geese, doves, hummingbirds and hawks. The butterfly center has been featured on PBS nature shows. Wright said a crew from Expedia were recent visitors to shoot pictures and videos to inform travelers about the butterfly center.

“We’re so proud of the Rio Grande Valley and its natural treasures,” Wright said. “We’re always excited to represent it and to share information about the Valley.”

The center is located at 3333 Butterfly Park in Mission and more information is available at nationalbutterflycenter.org.



A Pipevine Swallowtail feeds from a flower at the butterfly center. (Courtesy)



Hundreds of children visit the butterfly center yearly during school field trips. (Courtesy)

Partnership CEO Building Regional Reach

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Daniel Silva spent 19 years at the Mission Economic Development Corporation, starting as a fresh college graduate and ascending to being the organization’s chief executive officer.

The climb to the top job was fulfilling, but eventually there was an aspiration for another challenge. In 2022, when the opportunity to serve more than one Rio Grande Valley community came along, Silva took it in seeking to have a bigger footprint.

In July 2022, Silva moved to Weslaco to become the president and chief executive officer of the Rio Grande Valley Partnership.

“I wanted my next job to have a regional reach,” he said.

Nearing the two-year mark at the Partnership, Silva has quickly reached that goal and then some in working to connect more communities across the Valley to the

regional chamber’s activities. He has continued mainstay Partnership programs such as bringing delegations of state legislators to the Valley so they can learn more about the border region beyond negative coverage offered by the national media. Silva has also continued previous efforts in having the Partnership play a leadership role in dealing with regional issues like water and drainage.

“One region, one voice,” Silva said, emphasizing the consistent message sent out from his office.

All Representing RGV

Silva’s background in working at an area EDC gives him credibility in working with colleagues in individual communities that are focused on economic development.

Using those insights and connections, he

encourages his fellow economic development specialists to continue highlighting their local strengths while remembering they are part of a bigger regional community. Silva recently worked with area EDCs so that they could have their booths next to each other at a Las Vegas conference featuring the retail industry.

“Everyone was branding the RGV while they were promoting and selling their communities,” Silva said. “There’s not one city that can say they have everything but together as a region, we have a lot to offer.”

The unity theme was prevalent at an RGV economic summit in late 2023 that was held at Bert Ogden Arena in Edinburg. Silva and the Partnership led efforts to put the summit together. It attracted mayors from nearly every Valley city plus state legislators and included a keynote address from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.



Daniel Silva takes experiences from his time as Mission’s EDC director to expand his reach as the chief executive for RGV Partnership. (VBR)

The meeting culminated with every mayor signing a document, pledging they would step up efforts to work more as a region while continuing individual promotional efforts.

“We’re all representing the Rio Grande Valley,” Silva said. “The Valley is a special place and it’s on an upward trajectory.”

Bigger Picture

Along those lines, Silva highlighted the growth and development smaller Valley communities are seeing.

San Juan for one has blossomed in recent years in having a string of luxury auto dealerships locate there along Expressway 83. Over the last few years, major restaurant chains and coffee shops have followed suit. Away from the expressway traffic and sounds there are communities like Elsa which were formerly off the beaten path.

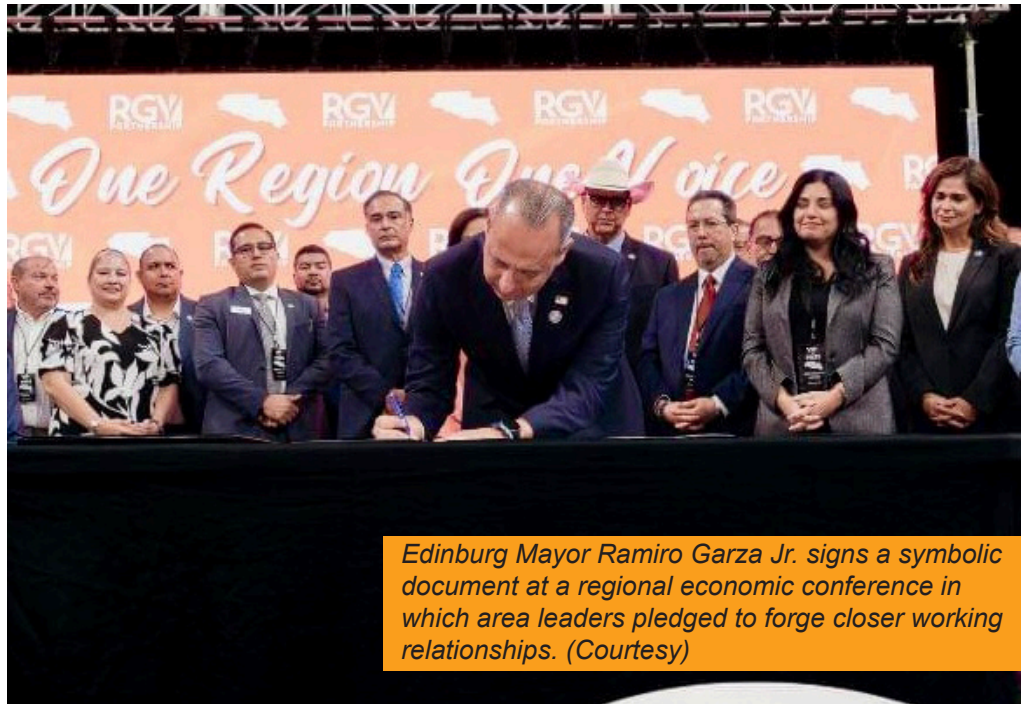
That’s no longer the case, Silva said, pointing out heavy traffic delays with the years-long construction at the Pharr Interchange have diverted traffic to other cities. One of those communities is Elsa on state Highway 107, Silva said. Elsa is now a community that’s part of daily commutes for many motorists seeking to avoid the traffic pile ups at the interchange, he said.

The change in traffic patterns in part explains new retailers and restaurants coming to Elsa, Silva said. He wants those communities to be more involved with Partnership initiatives and projects.

“I’m seeing more communities coming out and feeling like they belong,” he said. “We’re working to get smaller communities to feel like they’re part of what we do because they are.” One region, one voice. The Partnership has solidified that message with a CEO who came from one community and is helping to create a bigger picture that others can see and follow.



Luncheons and meetings across the Valley have heard Daniel Silva’s one region, one voice message. (Courtesy)



Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. signs a symbolic document at a regional economic conference in which area leaders pledged to forge closer working relationships. (Courtesy)



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TSTC Graduates Keep Hospitals Going

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Esmeralda Estrella's students in a Texas State Technical College classroom are huddled around incubator equipment used to support newborns in neonatal intensive care units.

The students on the Harlingen campus are enrolled in TSTC's biomedical equipment technology program. Students jot down notes and confer in teams as if they were in real-world hospital settings. Maintenance and repair of this sort of equipment is critical to sustaining and saving lives.

"The equipment doesn't get a rest," Estrella said of the incubators, IV pumps, X-ray machines and ultrasound devices. "The equipment always needs to be running."

Estrella herself worked for years at Doctors Hospital At Renaissance in Edinburg. She is also a graduate of the same program her students are now in under Estrella's tutelage. The combination of classroom training and real-life experiences bring home what Estrella teaches daily.

"We're the backbone of hospitals," she said of biomedical equipment technicians. "I think COVID made people more aware that hospitals never stop working no matter what situations or circumstances arise."

Biomedical technicians, she said, are critical to "taking care of everything" in keeping hospital operations going.

"People started realizing we're here, we exist," Estrella said of the vital role technicians play in healthcare.

"Hi-Tech Mechanics"

Daniel Rendon is one of those students who Estrella says are willing "to get their hands dirty."

Rendon commutes from Alton in western Hidalgo County to TSTC's Harlingen campus. He is working toward an Associate of Applied Science degree in biomedical equipment technology. There's also a medical imaging systems component to the program. It suits Rendon well in rounding out his skills and capabilities.

"We're essentially hi-tech mechanics," Rendon said. "It's hands on. You can see what you're doing."

Fellow student Anthony Vega of La Feria was working at Home Depot. He was

looking to improve on skills gained from a previous HVAC background and a lifelong fascination with tinkering and machinery.

"I've always liked tearing things up," Vega said. "I want to keep bettering myself and this program is a good fit for my interests."

A significant benefit for the program's students is the frequent recruitment by major hospital systems in the Valley and

elsewhere.

"It's ultimate job security," Rendon said of acquiring skills that will always be in demand – and in great need.

Helping Others

It's not only a matter of knowing how high-tech hospital equipment works and being able to repair and maintain the machinery.



Esmeralda Estrella is a TSTC graduate who returned to the college as an instructor after years of working in the healthcare industry. (VBR)

There's also understanding how the human body reacts to the equipment itself, and structuring and calibrating the machinery to the needs of individual patients. In that way, Estrella said, there is a theory side to what she and other instructors teach.

"At the end of the day, we have to be there for doctors and nurses," Estrella said. "The technology of the equipment we learn how to operate and maintain helps people stay alive."

Ray Longoria, the biomedical equipment program director, calls it "seeing the

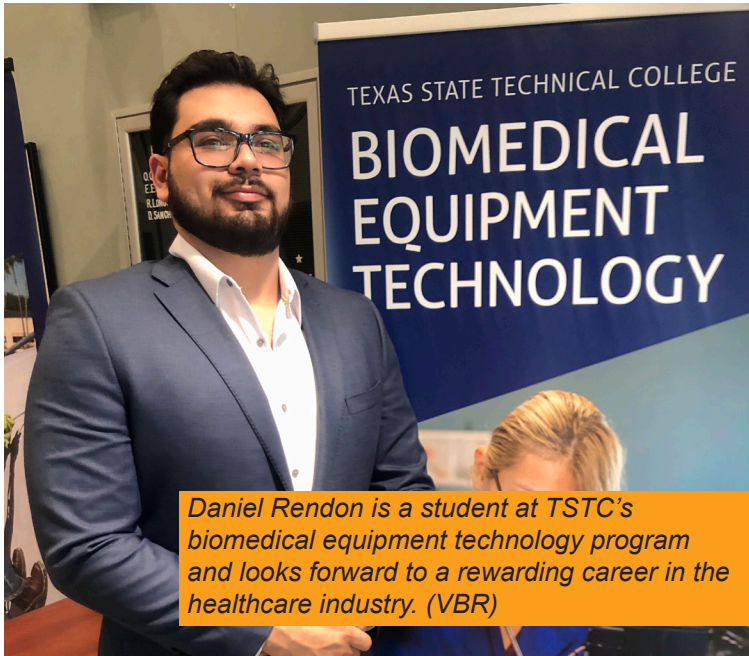
product of our labors" in knowing machinery technicians keep operating at high levels, keep patients healthy, or in some cases, "bring a life back."

Longoria was working as a master electrician over two decades ago when learning of TSTC's biomedical equipment program in the early 2000s. He would enroll in the program, then graduate, and go on to work for many years at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen. Longoria would return to TSTC to teach and eventually become the director of a program of which he is an alumnus.

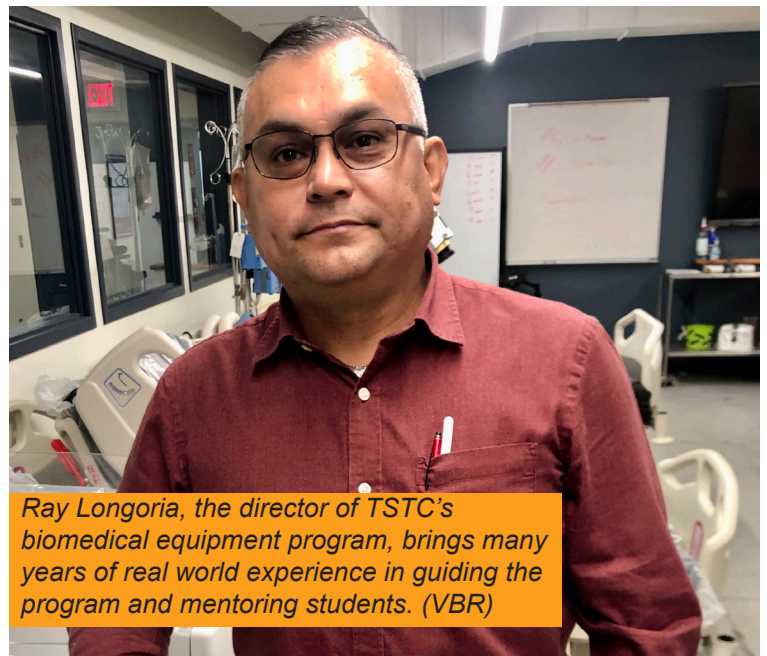
"I wanted to come back here to help change the dynamic in the field," Longoria said. "I wanted to influence the mindset of students after the experiences I had out in the field. Our goal is to continue to provide high quality students and technicians to the industries we serve."

Rendon is one student who's ready and able.

"You can branch out with what you learn in this program to other industries utilizing computer and electronic technology," he said. "But I want to work in a hospital. I like the idea of helping others."



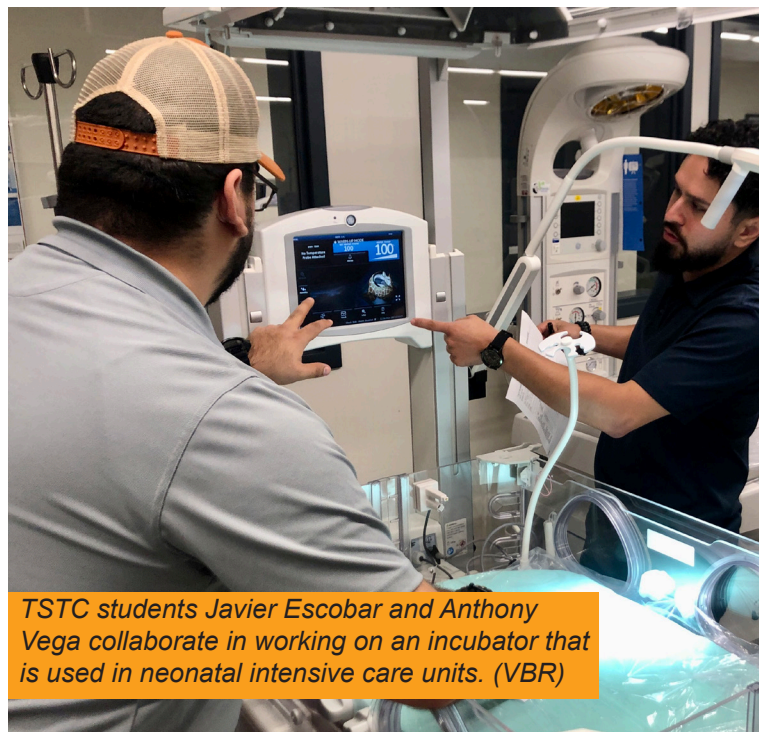
Daniel Rendon is a student at TSTC's biomedical equipment technology program and looks forward to a rewarding career in the healthcare industry. (VBR)



Ray Longoria, the director of TSTC's biomedical equipment program, brings many years of real world experience in guiding the program and mentoring students. (VBR)



TSTC student Nick Villela works on essential biomedical equipment of the sort commonly found in hospitals. (VBR)



TSTC students Javier Escobar and Anthony Vega collaborate in working on an incubator that is used in neonatal intensive care units. (VBR)

Weslaco Entrepreneur Overcomes Challenges

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Pam Le has a story to tell of a mother who came to the United States at age 17, knowing no one and speaking only her native Vietnamese.

Hoa Le is the daughter of a U.S. serviceman she never met and a Vietnamese mother who died when Hoa was only eight years old. Coming to Houston through a sponsorship program, Hoa Le went about building an American life that would feature four Texas-born children. Pam is her oldest child, a daughter who beams when speaking of her mother and the work ethic and tenacity Hoa has shown since coming to the United States in 1988.

Whatever hardships she has faced in this country, Hoa said they were far less severe than what she would have dealt with in her native country.

“My kids always say, Mom, you work too hard, but it’s nothing compared to Vietnam,” said Hoa Le, who owns two thriving small businesses in Weslaco.

At the family’s Le Pho House restaurant, mother and daughter recount how the business came to be. In an online blog, Pam details it all, starting it this way, “story time...how we started a business during quarantine.”

Finding A Way

“Mom, what are we going to do?”

It was early 2020 and Pam Le had lost her job in Dallas through no fault of her own. Back home in Weslaco, her mother’s nail salon business was shut down due to local government mandates.

“It was a dark space we were living through,” Pam said. “It was when COVID was coming in and no one knew what it was or how long it would last.”

In the meantime, she said, “bills were piling up” and there was no family revenue coming in to cover expenses. It was in Dallas when her family was there to help Pam pack up her belongings when the idea of a food-oriented business was hatched. What if her mother whose cooking of dishes from her native country was renowned among family and friends cooked up meals for sale? Pam got on social media to give the notion a test run and received a positive reaction to the idea.

“I’ll cook and you do everything else,” Hoa Le recalls telling her daughter.

And so, the start to having a restaurant

began in mid-April 2020. The launch was Hoa cooking up large volumes of Vietnamese dishes, especially pho soup, which includes broth, rice noodles, herbs and meat or chicken. It’s a staple in Vietnam and Weslaco, Texas took it to it as well. Long lines of motorists formed to pick up orders, queuing up in the large parking lot of a building supply store adjacent to Expressway 83.

Every family member had a role. Mom the cook, with one daughter taking down orders and packing them up, Pam did the marketing and helped with deliveries. Everyone in the

tight-knit group did what was necessary to support the matriarch of the family.

“Mom, she’s a superwoman, she does all the cooking and we would help if she let us,” Pam wrote in her blog.

Finding A Home

Pam Le takes out her cell phone to show videos of those spring months in 2020 when motorists lined up to pick up orders of her mother’s Vietnamese dishes.

The volume of customers got so large that the building supply store told them to



Hoa Le has overcome a series of life's challenges to find success in Weslaco with the support of her four children. (VBR)

leave. Pam and family relocated to another parking lot area near a barbecue restaurant. The number of customers only grew and to such an extent that the Le family was again asked to leave. Meanwhile, some customers began showing up at the Le home in Weslaco, pleading for Hoa to make her soup to help ill family members.

The previous concerns of “how are we going to make money?” as Pam put it, were being alleviated, but now what where they going to do with all of the customer demand they had created?

Opening a restaurant was an obvious answer, but operating such a business is something the Le family had never contemplated. It became a necessity as the family moved from one large parking lot to another to serve customers picking up orders. In September 2020, a home for the business was secured when Le Pho House opened on Westgate Drive in Weslaco, serving just takeout orders. The restaurant, which is co-owned by Pam and her mother, opened for dine-in business in early December 2020. By spring of the following year Le Pho House began having sell-out days. Bigger pots were ordered to cook larger volumes and sell-

out days continued.

Now four years later, the business has settled into a nice groove. Hoa Le has continued with her nail salon business as well. Hoa has received a local chamber of commerce award for being a “Rising Star” in Weslaco. She also received a small business state award and was given the honor at a banquet on South Padre

Island.

“She feels a sense of freedom,” Pam said of her mother. “She has accomplished so much and she just keeps going.”

Looking back at the challenges overcome, Hoa said, “I feel proud. It has been a rough life sometimes, but I have four great kids, and I keep working to pay my bills.”



The Pho House in Weslaco is a restaurant that got its start in 2020 with takeout orders. (VBR)

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Hoa Le works over a large bowl of noodles in the kitchen of her Weslaco restaurant. (VBR)

UTRGV Prepares For Football Kickoff

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley opened under its new name on Aug. 30, 2015 to mark a fresh start toward becoming a comprehensive regional university.

On Aug. 30, 2025, UTRGV kicks off another new chapter in its nearly 100-year history when the university's Vaqueros football team plays a Division I football game in Edinburg.

"It will be 10 years to the date we opened the university," said Guy Bailey, the UTRGV president, at a late February event to celebrate the school's new football program. "And what will we do? We're going to play our first football game."

Bailey made his remarks before more than 100 supporters of the fledgling football program. A marching band was also in attendance, with the entrance to the newly named Robert and Janet Vackar Stadium right behind the school's president. The former H-E-B Park that hosted professional soccer will be repurposed to be the primary home of the UTRGV Vaqueros. The university's football team will be a member of the United Athletic Conference. The Vaqueros will play an exhibition schedule in 2024 and start full varsity

play in 2025.

The Vaqueros head football coach, Travis Bush, has extensive experience on both the college and high school levels. The UTRGV job is his first as a college head coach with past experience of being an offensive coordinator at both the University of Houston and the University of Texas San Antonio. Bush has Valley ties via his father, Bruce, who coached high school football across South Texas, including PSJA High and Donna High.

"Now we know where we will be playing," Bush said after his university president's remarks. "For us, it's the final piece of our facility puzzle."

Feeling Game Day

UTRGV's new football home in Edinburg seats nearly 10,000 and will need some major upgrades to its locker rooms and press boxes areas before it can host college football games.

The Vaqueros will also play one home game a season in Brownsville at Sams Stadium, the football home for the city's high schools. Playing in Brownsville reflects the fact that UTRGV has a campus there to go with its

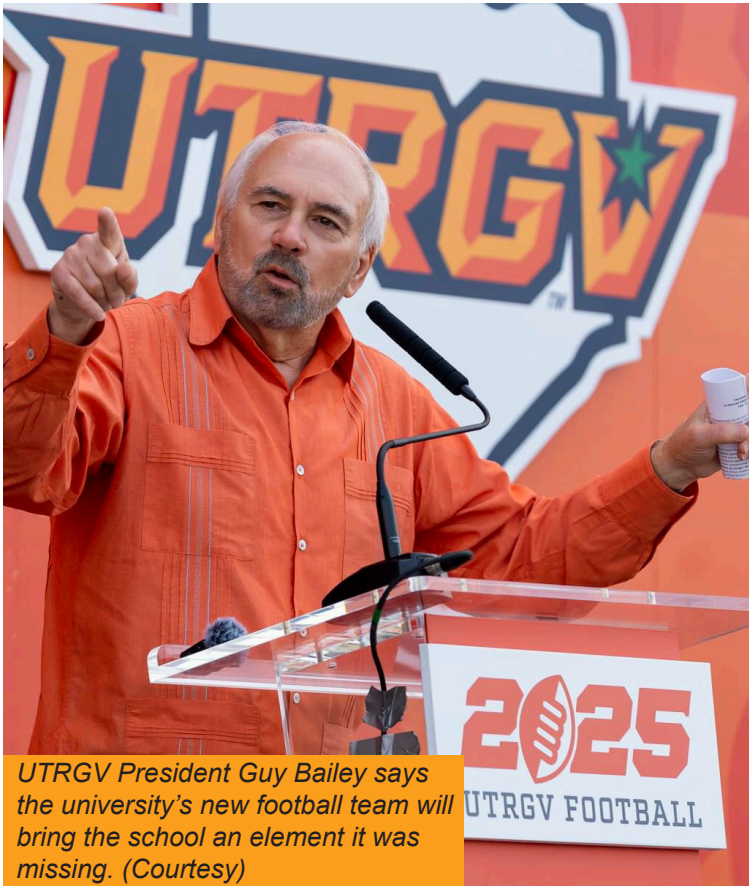
main campus in Edinburg. Chasse Conque, UTRGV's athletic director, envisions a robust game day experience with plenty of tailgating in stadium parking lots in anticipation of kickoffs.

"We've got a lot of work in front of us," Conque said. "Looking ahead, just imagine the atmosphere of the game. You can already feel it."

UTRGV's acquisition of the Edinburg stadium was a two-step process. The City of Edinburg first purchased the soccer stadium on Raul Longoria Road from its owner, Alonzo Cantu, a prominent McAllen developer and businessman. The stage was then set for the university to acquire the property from the city where UTRGV got its start as a junior college in 1927.

"The arrival of Division I football is a milestone for our city," said Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. "It's another piece to having a top tier university in our region."

Bailey has overseen a number of academic and facilities improvements over the last 10 years – especially with its ever-growing medical school, which has clinics and research



UTRGV President Guy Bailey says the university's new football team will bring the school an element it was missing. (Courtesy)



Head Football Coach Travis Bush and his staff have thus far recruited and signed 70 athletes to play college football. (Courtesy)

buildings in multiple Valley cities. Still, he said, there is something special about a university having a football team. Bailey says a college football team brings UTRGV an element it was missing.

“This will transform how people see the institution and how they will talk about it,” he said.

Getting A Team Ready

Now it’s a matter of fielding a football team. Bush and his newly hired staff have been busy. They have thus far recruited and signed 70 student athletes to play college football. The team will eventually compete in the football-oriented United Athletic Conference. Its 11 members include fellow Texas schools Abilene Christian University, Stephen F. Austin University and Tarleton State University. The remaining schools in the UAC are from Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia and Utah.

“We’re 548 days away,” Bush said at the late-February event in looking ahead to opening day in August 2025. “We’ve visualized game day thousands of times. We’re looking forward to getting started and making history.”



UTRGV's football helmets on display during a late February event to announce the university's acquisition of H-E-B Park. (Courtesy)



Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. receives a football helmet from UTRGV President Guy Bailey. (Courtesy)

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Trip Promotes McAllen's Ties To Mexico

By Chris Ardis

The Spirit of McAllen shone brightly during McAllen Day at the Camino Real Polanco in Mexico City on Feb. 29.

The city's delegation included 150 travel agents who arrived at a breakfast coordinated by three leading city officials. They are Daniella Plata, the director of international relations for the City of McAllen, Jeremy Santoscoy, McAllen International Airport's director of aviation and the McAllen Convention and Visitors Bureau led by Leigh Wooldridge.

The Spirit of McAllen actually arrived the day before in the form of a 19-person contingent representing McAllen's municipal government. Representatives from the CVB, the McAllen Chamber of Commerce and the McAllen business community also made the trip.

"We understand the importance of our relationship with Mexico, including the capitol in Mexico City," said McAllen City Manager Roy Rodriguez. "Our area relies on our friends from Mexico to sustain a dynamic economy throughout the year. Most importantly, we recognize our neighbors to the south as friends and family."

New Connections

Daily nonstop flights that began Feb. 1 via one of McAllen's newest

airline partners, Aeromexico, will continue to foster these important relationships.

"This new destination with Aeromexico gives our region the important nonstop daily flight to serve our business community, as well as connecting our family and friends," said Santoscoy.

The Aeromexico flight lands at a new airport, Aeropuerto Internacional Felipe Angeles. The flight between McAllen and Mexico City via AIFA takes just over an hour.

"AIFA serves as a relief airport for Mexico City International Airport, adding more capacity and reducing crowding," said Plata, the director of international relations. "AIFA is a state-of-the-art facility, providing a great travel and cultural experience. The pride of a culture shows in every detail around the terminal."

A Warm & Informative Welcome

Upon arrival, the group raved about the expeditiousness of Customs operations at the airport and their sense of wonderment as they beheld AIFA. Airport personnel treated the contingent to a tour, which was capped by a private meeting with retired Brigadier Gen. Isidoro Pastor Roman, the AIFA director. He delivered a slide presentation to the



A friendly tour guide greets McAllen City Manager Roy Rodriguez and the McAllen contingent when they arrive at AIFA in Mexico City. (Courtesy)



This nearly 33-foot-tall bronze statue of revolutionary general Felipe Angeles graces the entrance to AIFA in Mexico City. (Courtesy)

group, showcasing AIFA’s remarkable growth in passengers and revenue since opening in March 2022. Pastor Roman said passengers traveling through AIFA will soon have access to the electric suburban railway system.

“The new leg of the Tren Suburbano connecting AIFA to downtown Mexico City is scheduled to be completed by June 2024,” Santoscoy said. “It will be the latest leg in the network and is estimated to take 45 minutes to arrive in central Mexico City, with connections and stops at multiple stations.”

Making Connections

Joining travel agents as they listened to presentations was members of the media. Interspersing the presentations was a dynamic

video about the Spirit of McAllen and all the city has to offer.

“Our ability to connect with the media who keep Mexican nationals informed of opportunities in McAllen and to also have travel agents who help move people in Mexico for both business and pleasure is a huge win,” said Rodriguez, the city manager.

Elizabeth Suarez, McAllen Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, said the trip was important to boosting the city’s profile in Mexico City.

“McAllen Day is a premier opportunity for McAllen businesses to personally invite the Mexico City community to McAllen,” she said. “It is an opportunity for McAllen business people to personally engage with

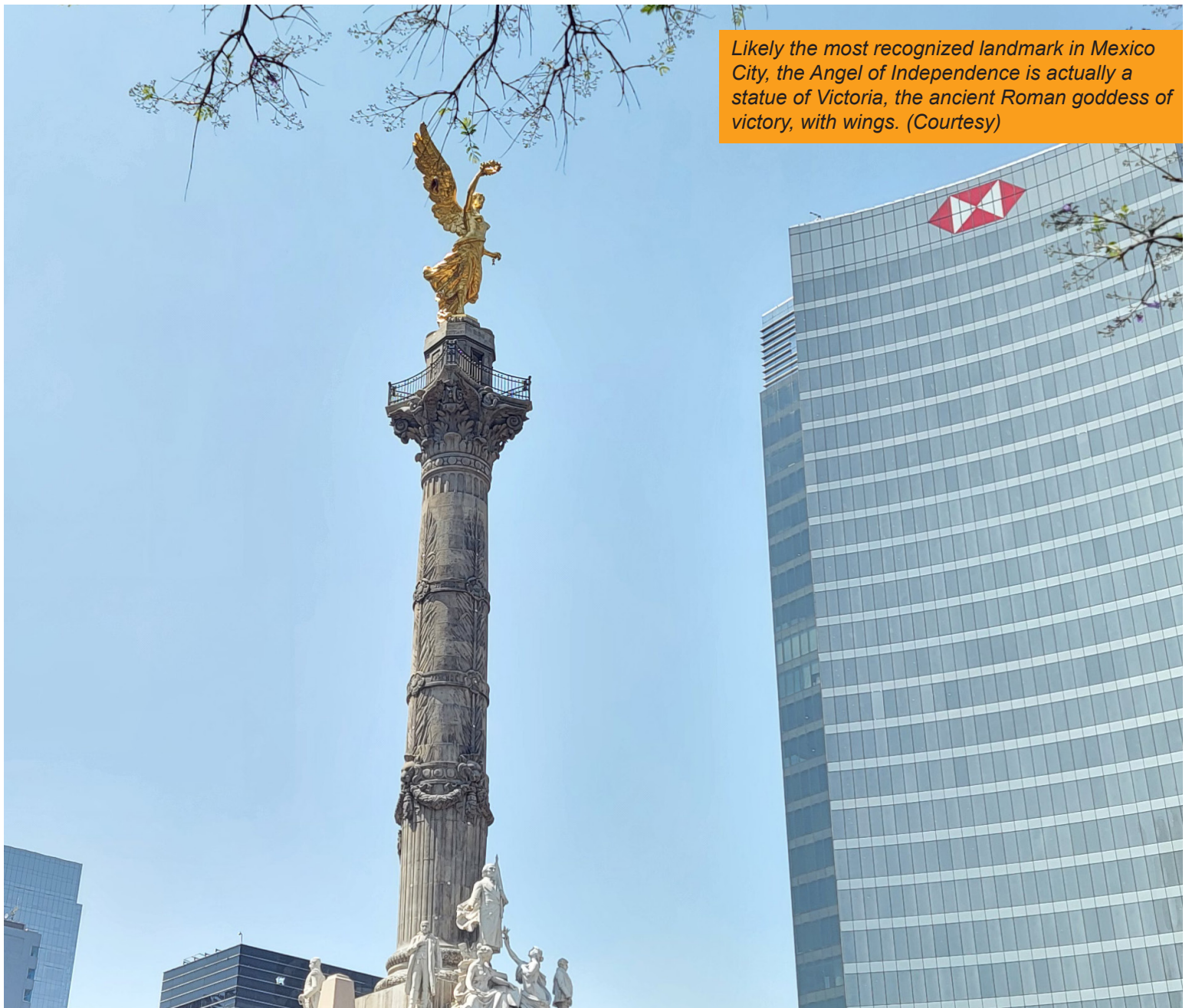
travel agents and promote their McAllen businesses. McAllen businesses take contact information for event attendees and have their sales team further develop sales leads.”

Following the event, Rodriguez and Suarez met with a podcaster who develops destination webinars for travel agents.

“Roy and I pitched McAllen and spoke about hotels, food, and shopping options McAllen offers,” Suarez said.

Getting Familiar

Beyond the new airport, the McAllen contingent enjoyed their visit with sightseeing, a bit of shopping, trompo-with-pineapple taco tasting, and learning the history of this alluring city.



Likely the most recognized landmark in Mexico City, the Angel of Independence is actually a statue of Victoria, the ancient Roman goddess of victory, with wings. (Courtesy)

Plata offers a few must-sees on your visit to Mexico City. “Mercado La Ciudadela for authentic Mexican crafts,” she said. “Palacio de Bellas Artes, the center of arts and prominent exhibits, and Zócalo de la Ciudad de México, the main square, which used to be a ceremonial center of the Aztecs.”

On March 1, the whirlwind trip ended with a quick, nonstop flight back to McAllen. But like the flight, the connections with our neighbors are nonstop.

“Our commitment to keep good relations with our counterparts in Mexico must continue to be part of our culture,” Rodriguez said. “This will not be a one-and-done type of visit. We have continually enhanced the relationship between both countries and will continue to do that.”



The McAllen contingent got a sneak peek at the new leg of the Tren Suburbano, which will connect AIFA to downtown Mexico City. Completion is expected by June (Courtesy)



Mexico City offers an abundance of retail stores, from street vendors to ever-popular shops like ¡Ay Güey! (Courtesy)

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