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“Your Pro-RGV News”

All Hands On Deck

By Todd Breland

When the wind changes direction, what's your move?

Running companies and organizations isn't easy. Every day produces new challenges. The playbook must include plans B, C & D if plan A floods or get a lightning strike.

Storms come and go, but a solid executive team of leadership handles business. Winds shift our momentum, and our job as upper management is to guide our departments even with conditions are less than favorable. Troubles will always find a way to disrupt our companies and organizations. Calmly and rationally, we lead by example and with empathy.

True leadership sees storms as obtainable challenges and not from afar, but on the front lines. The mastered skill of delegating keeps the ship afloat with the captain leading his crew. Survival for all is the only option.

Our Rio Grande Valley has weathered rough waters, and we're still here. We fight because that's who we are and what we do. The next storm won't surprise us because we are prepared. That's the key. Having a full arsenal

of lifejackets on stand-by and knowing when and where our next move is drives us.

We win because we're together and unified across our four counties.

We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.



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WELCOME TO THE LSNB TEAM

We are thrilled to welcome Jose Gamez as the new President of Lone Star Insurance Services. Jose brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to serving the insurance needs of our south Texas community.

Jose began his journey in the insurance industry in 2011 when he opened his first agency as an Allstate Agent. Over the years, he's helped families with their insurance and financial needs, building a reputation for exceptional service.

By 2013, his rapid success led him to transition into a corporate role with Allstate, where he served as a Field Sales Leader. In this role, he supported agency owners across Texas, focusing on maximizing growth and revenue.

In recent years, Jose returned to his entrepreneurial roots running his own small business Allstate agency. And now, he is excited to bring his extensive experience and leadership to Lone Star Insurance Services.

A native of the Rio Grande Valley, Jose grew up in McAllen and currently resides in Edinburg with his wife and four children, Daysie (21), Gavin (19), Noah (10), and Evelyn (9).

Outside of work, he is a dedicated family man who enjoys traveling, coaching his son's flag football team, supporting his daughter's dance team, playing golf, and cheering on the Dallas Cowboys.

Jose holds multiple professional licenses, including:

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- Series 6 Investment Company Products/Variable Contracts
- Series 63 Uniform Securities Agent State Law
- Series 26 Investment Company Products/Variable Contracts Principal
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Join us in welcoming Jose Gamez to the LSNB leadership team, Lone Star Insurance Services will continue to provide outstanding service and support to our clients with Jose at the helm.



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Zoo Doubling In Size With Land Buy

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Gladys Porter Zoo opened in 1971 as a gift from a foundation to the city of Brownsville.

The Earl C. Sams Foundation envisioned the only zoo south of San Antonio as a place to feature endangered species and to give Brownsville a distinction of its own. The 31-acre site on Ringgold Street in central Brownsville has more than proven its worth to the city. It has become a prime tourist attraction over its 53 years of existence, drawing a yearly average of 432,000 visitors. Upwards of 500,000 tourists and local residents visit Gladys Porter during peak years.

The zoo began to show its age in recent years. Space also became more scarce as standards raised for housing large animals.

Its national accreditors – the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums – has pressed the zoo to overhaul and redesign exhibits. The accreditors have also informed the zoo it must find bigger spaces for the facility’s larger animals such as gorillas and big cats.

Those expectations and the possibility of the zoo losing its accreditation spurred the city to engage in a multi-year process with the zoo and the Brownsville Independent School District. The goal was to find more space for the zoo. The former Cummings Middle School campus site is in close proximity to the zoo and is less than a block from Ringgold Street. The Cummings site was determined to be the best spot for zoo expansion. Five years of discussions and

studies led to a breakthrough after an early 2024 accreditation site visit mandated that Gladys Porter firm up its expansion plans.

Reaching A Deal

The City of Brownsville announced in mid-September that it had reached an agreement with the school district to purchase the Cummings site on behalf of the zoo.

The interlocal agreement will lead to a \$16 million purchase of the Cummings site from the school district. The city will then provide the property to the zoo to design and develop new exhibits featuring some of the zoo’s large animals. The expansion also promises to revitalize the zoo over the next five years.

“The zoo is moving forward in order to remain a world-class facility,” said Dr.

The Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville houses a diversity of animals and attractions and will be expanding over the next five years. (Courtesy)



Patrick Burchfield, the zoo's executive director, at a recent press conference. "This will show the sincerity and excitement of the entire community in that we are moving forward."

The acquisition of the Cummings site was essential if the zoo was going to keep its accreditation, Burchfield said. The Brownsville zoo was reaccredited in March 2024 with a binding expectation that the facility would expand its footprint in the coming years. The Cummings purchase accomplishes that goal. The zoo will nearly double in size with the property acquisition.

"We must maintain that gold standard of accreditation," Burchfield said. "The Gladys Porter Zoo has to expand in order to maintain current sociobiological standards for our animals."



Two lemurs peer out from an exhibit at the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville. (Courtesy)



Monkeys from Madagascar are among the many attractions at Brownsville's Gladys Porter Zoo. (Courtesy)

'Buy Us Time'

The city and zoo will work in tandem with the school district over the next five years in transitioning the Cummings site to its new purpose. The project will keep the city's biggest tourist attraction current and up to new standards.

The old middle school campus currently houses BISD's Career Technical Certification Center. The district will use the proceeds of the land sale to build a new tech center elsewhere in the district.

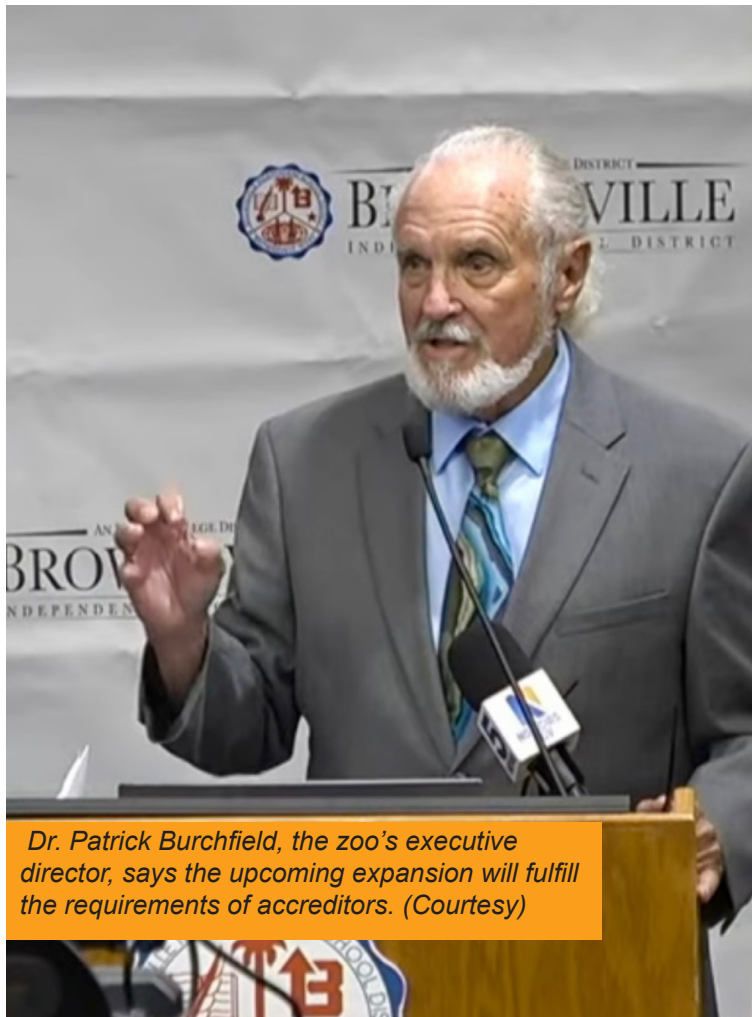
"It will buy us time," Burchfield said of the next few years to plan the site's future animal exhibits.

The zoo's accreditors will now know the facility is making good on its promise to expand. Brownsville, in turn, will be assured its world-class zoo will be upgraded and continued to be enjoyed in the heart of the city's Mitte Cultural District.

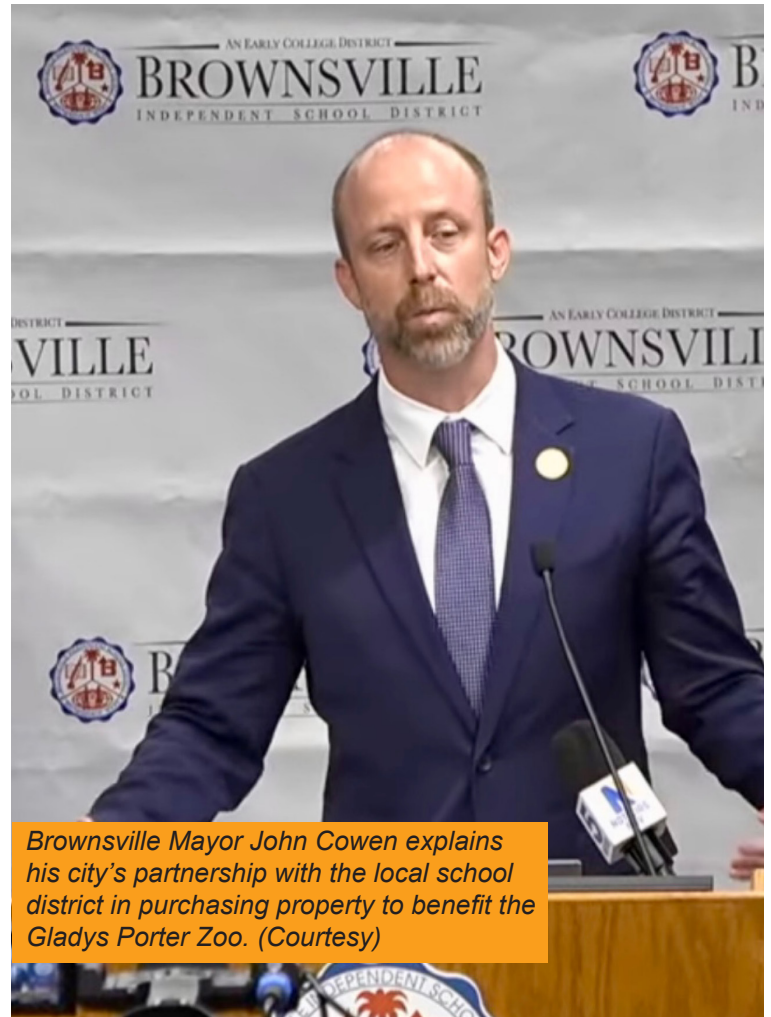
"We worked together to create a path forward," said John Cowen, the Brownsville mayor. "Without doing that, it would have put the zoo at risk and losing everything that makes the zoo special."



A recent Gladys Porter Zoo event gave the community a preview of designs highlighting the zoo's expansion plan. (Courtesy)



Dr. Patrick Burchfield, the zoo's executive director, says the upcoming expansion will fulfill the requirements of accreditors. (Courtesy)



Brownsville Mayor John Cowen explains his city's partnership with the local school district in purchasing property to benefit the Gladys Porter Zoo. (Courtesy)

Mercedes Bakery Offers ‘Taste of Mexico’

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, Content Editor

The “*pan chiquitos*,” as Albaro De La Garza calls them, started out as miniature versions of sweet bread for his then-young children.

De La Garza’s kids often didn’t finish off a full-size empanada or a fluffy concha pastry. So, De La Garza and his baker at the time at the Mercedes *panaderia* made them smaller. The child-sized Mexican sweet bread of De La Garza Bakery and Cake Shop in Mercedes soon grew popular with the grown-ups. It was the early 2000s, not long after Albaro and his wife, Nora, started up their bakery on Texas Avenue in the Mid-Valley city.

The smaller versions of *pan dulce*, as it turned out, were perfect for delicious finger foods at office gatherings and parties as well as ideal snacks with an afternoon coffee.

“It was something different for those times,” Albaro De La Garza said. “Other bakeries in the Valley copied us, but we have the pride in knowing we were the first to do them here.”

Making It Right

The couple had no background in commercial baking when they started up their business 24 years ago.

Albaro was a mechanic and Nora a nurse in their native Mexico. It’s the immigrant story of fulfilling a dream to own and operate their own business in the United States and to turn the unknown into a success.

“The batter is something beautiful to work with,” Albaro said of meshing all of the ingredients together to make great *pan dulce*. “It’s an art.”

A typical workday at De La Garza Bakery starts at 3 a.m.

That’s when the De La Garzas and their bakers start out making their bread fresh

The company motto is prominently displayed above the bakery’s cash register and says, “*Pan Dulce Fresco Diario*.” It means “fresh bread daily.” There is no leftover bread sold the next day at De La Garza’s bakery beyond the ones clearly marked in smaller packages that are sold separately from the day’s fresh offerings behind sliding glass panels.

“*Todo nuevo*,” Nora De La Garza says of the new bread made daily at De La Garza’s.

Getting Started

It all started out in the year 2000 at the north Texas Avenue location where the De La

Garzas still do business today in Mercedes. Having a bakery is an idea that intrigued them even if they had no background in operating such a business. They hired an old school baker who over the next few years taught them everything he knew.

The couple have become proficient bakers in their own right after many years of practice. They strive to be efficient bakers, making only batches of the varieties of *pan dulce* the De La Garzas believe will sell that day. Albaro points out that all sweet bread has essentially the same ingredients. What differentiates one bakery from another is how much of each ingredient is in the bread. If corners are cut, a

customer will immediately taste it in a region like the Valley where people have been eating Mexican sweet bread their whole lives.

“The quantities affect the taste,” Albaro said. “Too much flour and the bread is too thick. Some bakeries use water instead of milk and cut down on eggs. Everything has to be on point. That’s what makes good bread.”

Customer Connection

Beyond the product there’s the interchange with customers.

Nora De La Garza speaks of the rapport her business enjoys with Mid-Valley communities. They came to Mercedes as



Nora and Albaro De La Garza have steadily built a successful bakery on Texas Avenue in Mercedes. (VBR)

newcomers nearly 25 years ago and she says the bakery's customers have taught the De La Garzas about the history of the communities. The couple lives in Weslaco and does business in Mercedes. Albaro describes how they've blended in and become part of their communities.

"We have learned how to take care and save when times are good so we have resources when things slow down," he said. "We've won and had some losses, but we are still here."

There is one true test they say the De La Garza bakery has passed.

"People say our bread has *"el sabor de Mexico,"*" Nora said with a prideful smile. It is the taste of Mexico at De La Garza Bakery in Mercedes.



Sweet bread is made fresh daily at De La Garza Bakery. (VBR)



Pan chiquitos make for colorful displays at the De La Garza Bakery. (VBR)



Sugary hearts of pan dulce are ready to go at De La Garza Bakery. (VBR)



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McAllen Adds Flights, Sets Passenger Records

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The McAllen International Airport is looking to build out its 150,000-square-foot-plus terminal during a time when the airfield is setting all-time total traveler records on a monthly basis.

In July, 114,694 passengers utilized the McAllen airport, which set an all-time monthly traveler record. The July traveler number marked an eight percent improvement over June, which at the time with 105,508 passengers represented a new monthly record. In all, for 2024, air traffic in McAllen has increased 23 percent year-over-year as of July. There are also 70 percent more flights since the same time in 2023.

Driving the growth, said Jeremy Santoscoy, the city's director of aviation, is the addition of more flights by its legacy carriers. Newer airlines also added flights from McAllen to Austin, Mexico City and Tampa/St. Petersburg. The airport's calling card for years was its business travel passengers on American and United Airlines. A decline in that travel category became evident in 2020, when more business meetings went the route of video conferences. That trend has started to go in a positive direction for air travel, adding to the airport's passenger volume growth.

"Business travel lagged during the pandemic years, but we do see a trend of it coming back," Santoscoy said. "You can't take out the human factor completely out of doing business, and as we see that return, we will be here to support it."

'Feeling The Pinch'

The increase in passenger volume is crowding current facilities and space at MFE, which is the airline industry's code name for the McAllen airport.

The city received \$7.4 million in federal funding to undergo a study to make design improvements at the airport and determine the additional space and facilities that are needed.

"We are starting to feel the pinch in the terminal," Santoscoy said of more passengers traveling from MFE. "We're going through the process right now of looking at how we could expand in the terminal."

The McAllen airport opened in the mid-1990s with over 100,000 square feet of facility space. In 2015, 55,000 square feet was added to provide more gate space. The current study is looking at all aspects of the airport's facilities

from its baggage areas to boarding gates and security checkpoints along with main terminal areas where passengers check in.

"With the volume of people coming through right now, some areas are getting very tight," Santoscoy said. "We've outpaced some of what was added in the previous expansion."

Growing Volume

The growth in traveler volume at MFE reflects the addition of nonstop flights to Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth and Mexico City.

Delta Airlines, which left MFE in 2006, has returned and now has daily McAllen-Austin flights. Those flights have filled a void in air travel from the Rio Grande Valley to the state's capitol. Santoscoy calls it "a sweet spot," with travelers going to Austin for government meetings and to attend educational and technology-related conferences. Delta has turned the Austin airport into a mini-hub for

flights coming in-and-out of Texas, he said.

Travelers going to Mexico can now do so via Aeromexico with its one daily nonstop to Mexico City. Another Mexican airline, Volaris, offers twice-a-week nonstop flights to Cancun. The latter is considered leisure travel, as are the twice weekly flights to Tampa/St. Petersburg via Allegiant Air.

The core business of MFE may be its business-oriented traveler clientele which flies to Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston via flights on American and United. Each airline offers seven flights daily from McAllen to the state's two largest cities. In recent months, American has had up to nine flights daily to accommodate more travelers going from McAllen to DFW.

"The Valley is a growing region," Santoscoy said. "We're having successes up and down the Valley. We're a true binational market and we're here to meet the growth in demand for travelers."

Jeremy Santoscoy, McAllen's director of aviation, says the city's airport is seeing record numbers of travelers utilizing the airfield. (Courtesy)



Big Picture Issues

Here are two key challenges Santoscoy sees in the commercial aviation industry.

One, he says, is a shortage in pilots. The sharp decline in passenger travel in 2020 and 2021 led to airline liquidations and the early retirement of many pilots. Air travel has picked up, but now airlines face “a real challenge to fill the gaps” in pilots in adding flights to meet demands, he said.

Secondly, he said, airlines are having problems in new aircraft delivery, with delays from manufacturers like Boeing. The aviation manufacturer is under federal review due to incidents such as a passenger jet losing a rear door in mid-flight early this year over the Pacific Northwest. The manufacturing delays due to these incidents makes it difficult for airlines to grow their networks.

In light of these challenges, it’s noteworthy that McAllen and its airport are thriving with more flights and the accompanying growth in passengers.

“Not very many airports have bounced back from the pandemic like we have seen here and in the Valley,” he said.

McAllen International Airport is among U.S. airports seeing a surge in air passenger traffic in recent years. (Courtesy)



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TSTC Program Meeting Mechatronics Demand

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Carlos Reyes opens an empty electrical box in one of the labs of the mechatronics technology program at Texas State Technical College.

The box represents something of a starting point for students in the program. As the program progresses, students will be tasked with filling those empty boxes with the circuits, sensors and other components to make it a fully functional electrical unit.

“We build them up from scratch,” said Reyes, the program team lead of TSTC’s mechatronics and cybersecurity technology program in Harlingen.

A Booming Industry

Mechatronics is an engineering field that combines mechanics, electronics and computing to create intelligent systems. Technicians trained in mechatronics are essential workers in several industries, including manufacturing, transportation and healthcare. Mechatronics systems are part of smartphones, 3D printers and anti-lock braking systems in automobiles.

Reyes, who has decades of experience in the field, says the time is now to get into mechatronics. The demand for technicians has never been higher, he said.

“The main reason is due to COVID and how it impacted our economy,” Reyes said. “The U.S. realized we made a mistake sending work overseas. We’re bringing back industrial jobs. The field of mechatronics is booming.”

Range of Opportunities

“Get jobs that pay \$35 an hour,” a bright red poster with white lettering says in a TSTC lab. “Plus sign-on/relocation bonus of up to \$15,000, with an associate’s degree in mechatronics technology.”

There is no lack of major companies that visit TSTC’s mechatronics building to recruit students. Toyota and Samsung are among the many, with others including Texas Instruments, Coca-Cola, SpaceX and Chevron. The range of companies from different industries points to the fact that “everyone needs to have a qualified technician on their floors or teams,” as Reyes puts it.

One example is Dora Vasquez, who works for Oncor Electric Delivery. The TSTC alumnus’s duties include maintenance and electrical work in substations in north Dallas and adjacent areas. She described her work as “maintenance

on transformers, breakers, insulators and several other components.” Vasquez provides those details in a marketing piece posted in the mechatronics building hallways. Those success stories are inspiring students currently enrolled in the program.

Step By Step

Eduardo Garcia of Brownsville is among the 130 mechatronics students at the school. Garcia attempted to complete a standard undergraduate degree at then-University of Texas-Brownsville

years ago before “life happened,” as he put it. He delayed his post-secondary education plans for years before a Texas Workforce Commission counselor made him aware of the mechatronics program at TSTC.

“I’ve always been interested in science and electronics,” Garcia said. “I got to see technicians working on the line and at factories, troubleshooting, pressing buttons and fixing machines. I realized this program could open up a whole lot of doors to enter the field.”

Looking at the list of classes and topics



Mechatronic program director Carlos Reyes operates equipment utilized in the training of students at Texas State Technology College in Harlingen. (VBR)

covered by the program – not to mention the semesters-long task of filling up an empty electrical box – Garcia says “it did look a little bit daunting.” There are fundamentals of electricity, robotics communication and industrial control devices among the mix of classes covered by the mechatronics technology program. The program is linear in nature, taking students through an orderly sequence of knowledge acquisition.

“This program takes you step by step so when you get to step 10 it looks easy because all of the steps that you have already gone through,” Garcia said. “You don’t feel inadequate in applying for a job like you did before because of everything that you’ve learned.”

Growing Enrollment

The jobs will be there.

Toyota has a truck manufacturing plant in San Antonio and has been a consistent recruiter of TSTC mechatronics students. A Toyota skilled groups leader, Harold Archer, called TSTC a “premium school” that helps his company to “ensure we are hiring world-class employees.” Samsung is among the major high-tech manufacturers that have established operations in Austin and the Central Texas area. Samsung, Reyes said, is aiming to hire 2,000 technicians by the end of 2024.

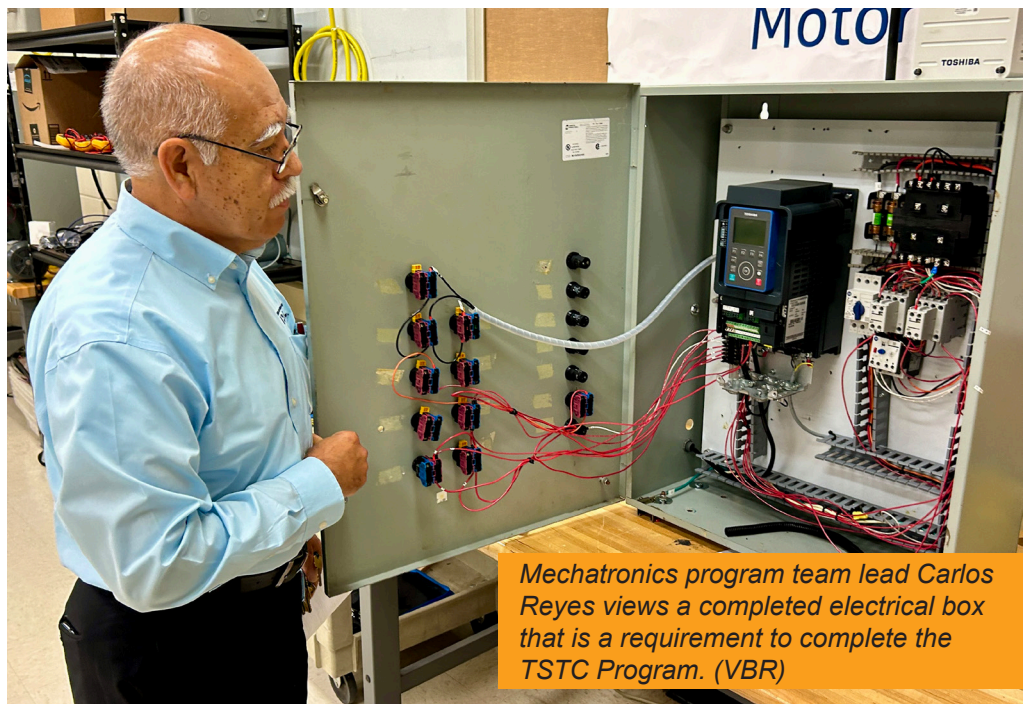
Sign-on bonus and offers to pay for further post-secondary education are among the packages major manufacturers are offering graduating mechatronics students, Reyes said. Garcia knows that as a student if he does well and completes program requirements that employment could be imminent.

“You think coming in that you will have to go across the state and country to find a job, and then you see Toyota and Samsung and Tesla here recruiting, and it was like, wow, that’s amazing,” Garcia said.

High school students are noticing. The Los



Students inspect equipment in a mechatronics lab at TSTC in Harlingen. (VBR)



Mechatronics program team lead Carlos Reyes views a completed electrical box that is a requirement to complete the TSTC Program. (VBR)

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Fresno, Harlingen and Rio Hondo school districts have dual enrollment agreements with the mechatronics technology program at TSTC. Reyes expects program enrollment of about 300 students for the 2025-26 school year as more high schools are expected to sign dual enrollment agreements with TSTC.

“I like to dream big,” Reyes said. “There’s so much opportunity here.”



Eduardo Garcia of Brownsville is looking forward to the new opportunities provided by the mechatronic program at TSTC in Harlingen. (VBR)



The mechatronics program at TSTC in Harlingen is seeing a growing enrollment among area high schools in dual enrollment programs. (VBR)





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Pooches Goes 'From Ground Up' To Success

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

El Paso native Michelle Franco-Mar fell in love in the aughts and moved to the Rio Grande Valley in 2009.

"I married a Valley boy," Franco-Mar said of her husband, Greg, who is from Brownsville.

Once here, the former newspaper graphic artist sized up her job possibilities, and wondered, "What can I do here?" Her new husband, an accountant, advised Michelle to do something she liked and to think about starting a business. In Harlingen, where the couple settled, a look around town 15 years ago showed a void for dog grooming and boutique services. Other than PetSmart and another local business at the time, there was not much available in that business sector in Harlingen.

Michelle, with the support of her husband, moved judiciously and wisely to get such a business started. She traveled to Houston to receive some necessary training and to earn industry certifications. A location was secured on north 77 Sunshine Strip with Boggus Stadium in clear view across the busy Harlingen thoroughfare.

Pooches Corner opened in October 2009 "with zero customers," Greg Mar said, and launched "from the ground up." Michelle's hunch about Harlingen's need for dog grooming services proved to be on the mark.

"The calls started coming in right away to set appointments," she said. "There was a big need."

Rewarding Work

Franco-Mar has two basic questions for anyone wanting to work at Pooches Corner.

"Do you love dogs?" "Have you ever had dogs?"

A business that started 15 years ago with Franco-Mar and a receptionist today has three groomers, with a fourth to be added soon with business continuing to grow.

"This is a specialized skill," Franco-Mar said while standing in the room where she and other groomers work.

Grooming a dog properly can take up to three hours, she said. Pooches Corner has shampoos made for specific breeds of dog. Senior dogs receive special care in making sure they do not stand for long periods of time. Understanding the different personalities of the variety of dog breeds is

another important consideration they keep in mind. Customer loyalty runs strong with Franco-Mar's business as shown by the fact that Pooches Corner is booked for two months solid.

"My pups don't seem as stressed coming home," said one online reviewer. "Pooches Corner is so patient with them."

Another customer, Barbara Bolding, says

she has been taking "my babies" to Pooches Corner for years.

"Each time we go, my dogs don't hesitate and their tails are wagging," Bolding said. "That says a lot about the staff and the care."

The kind words are well-received by Franco-Mar.

"It's rewarding to see that people value



Michelle Franco-Mar, with the support of her husband Greg, has built a successful small business in Harlingen. (VBR)

our business and what it does for them,” she said. “It’s not a glamorous job but it’s very rewarding.”

Emotional Connection

And it can be therapeutic.

When Franco-Mar’s beloved dog, Toby, passed away in recent years, she had her business and all the dogs it cares for to get her through a rough emotional patch.

“The best part of this job is I get to see dogs every single day,” she said, who keeps a photograph of Toby in her office. “This type of business helped me grieve his passing.”

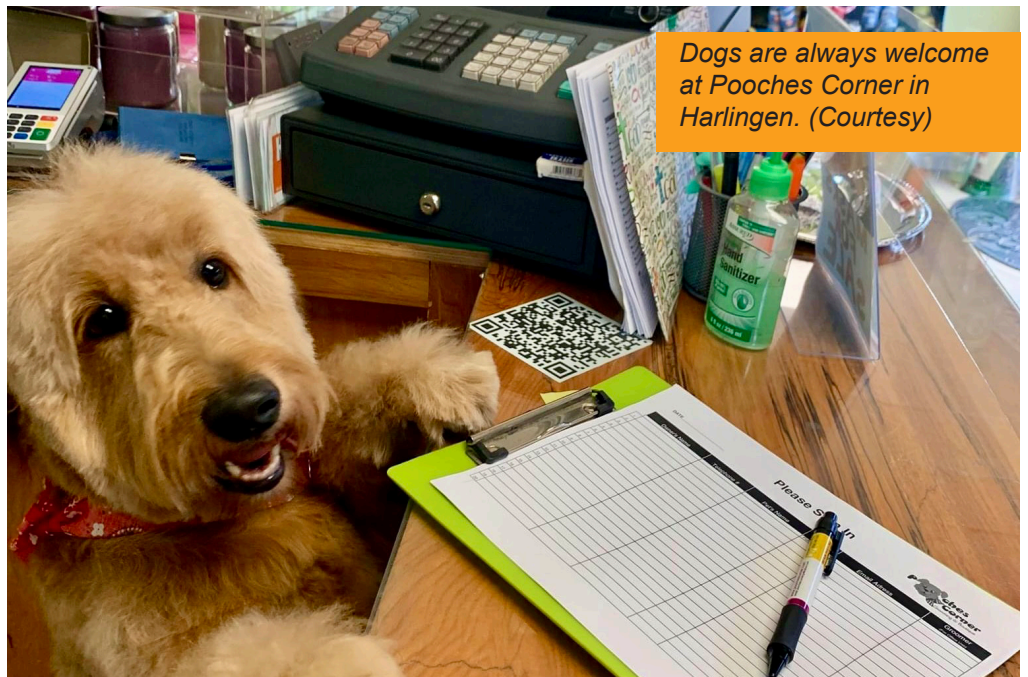
The emotional connection to dogs has grown stronger over the years, said Franco-Mar, who keeps a photograph of Toby in her office.

“It used to be dogs were kept mostly outside,” she said. “What I’ve seen is that younger generations are teaching their parents to treat dogs like family and not outside dogs.”

Outside of her business, Franco-Mar has become active in her community. She serves on a city board dealing with zoning adjustments and is a member of the small business advisory committee. Franco-Mar is also a board member for the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce. She is encouraged by the city’s residential and business growth in recent years and the support the city’s economic development corporation is now giving small businesses in Harlingen.

Celebrating 15 years in business this month, Franco-Mar and her Pooches Corner are part of Harlingen’s recent successes – plus taking care of so many “fur babies.”

Pooches Corner is located at 116 N. 77 Sunshine Strip in Harlingen and more information is available at poochescorner.com.



Dogs are always welcome at Pooches Corner in Harlingen. (Courtesy)



Dogs dear to Michelle Franco-Mar adorn the walls and shelves of her office in Harlingen. (VBR)



Dog treats and art add to the ambiance and appeal of Pooches Corner in Harlingen. (VBR)



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Surgeon Makes A Difference In RGV

By Chris Ardis

Dr. Lisa Chapa completed a surgical fellowship in breast surgical oncology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. She now treats breast-cancer patients at DHR Health.

Lisa Chapa graduated from McAllen Memorial High School in 2003 and headed to Texas A&M University in College Station.

Chapa did not have a clear vision of her career path but she knew it would lead her back to the Rio Grande Valley.

“Coming back home was always the plan,” she said. “We’re very close, as a family. I love this community. I love the culture. It’s the place I was raised and the place I wanted to get back to.”

Sixteen years later, she did just that, coming home in 2019. After completing her undergraduate degree, Chapa earned her medical degree at Texas A&M. She then completed a general surgery residency at the prestigious Baylor Scott & White Medical Center in Temple, Texas. She furthered her training with a breast surgical oncology fellowship at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

“I fell in love with surgery during my surgery rotation in medical school,” Chapa said.

She is now the only fellowship-trained breast surgical oncologist south of San Antonio.

Seeing Value Of Ideas

Once she chose surgery, Chapa felt drawn to the multidisciplinary care involved with cancer patients, sharing that all of its nuances and complexities challenged and invigorated her.

Chapa knew she wanted to work at DHR Health in Edinburg. The hospital’s Breast Center of Excellence gives it a distinction she refers to as a “gold seal of approval” from the American College of Surgeons. Hospitals with this distinction must go through the accreditation process every three years.

Four months after her arrival at DHR Health, Chapa accepted the role of director, a position she relinquished in late 2023. Statistics show that men dominate the surgical field.

“Now 20 percent of surgeons are women and that is a huge, huge gain,” she said, with only two percent of surgeons being Latina.

“It took all 16 years of study for me to meet another Latina surgeon,” Chapa said.

Chapa says DHR Health hears her voice.

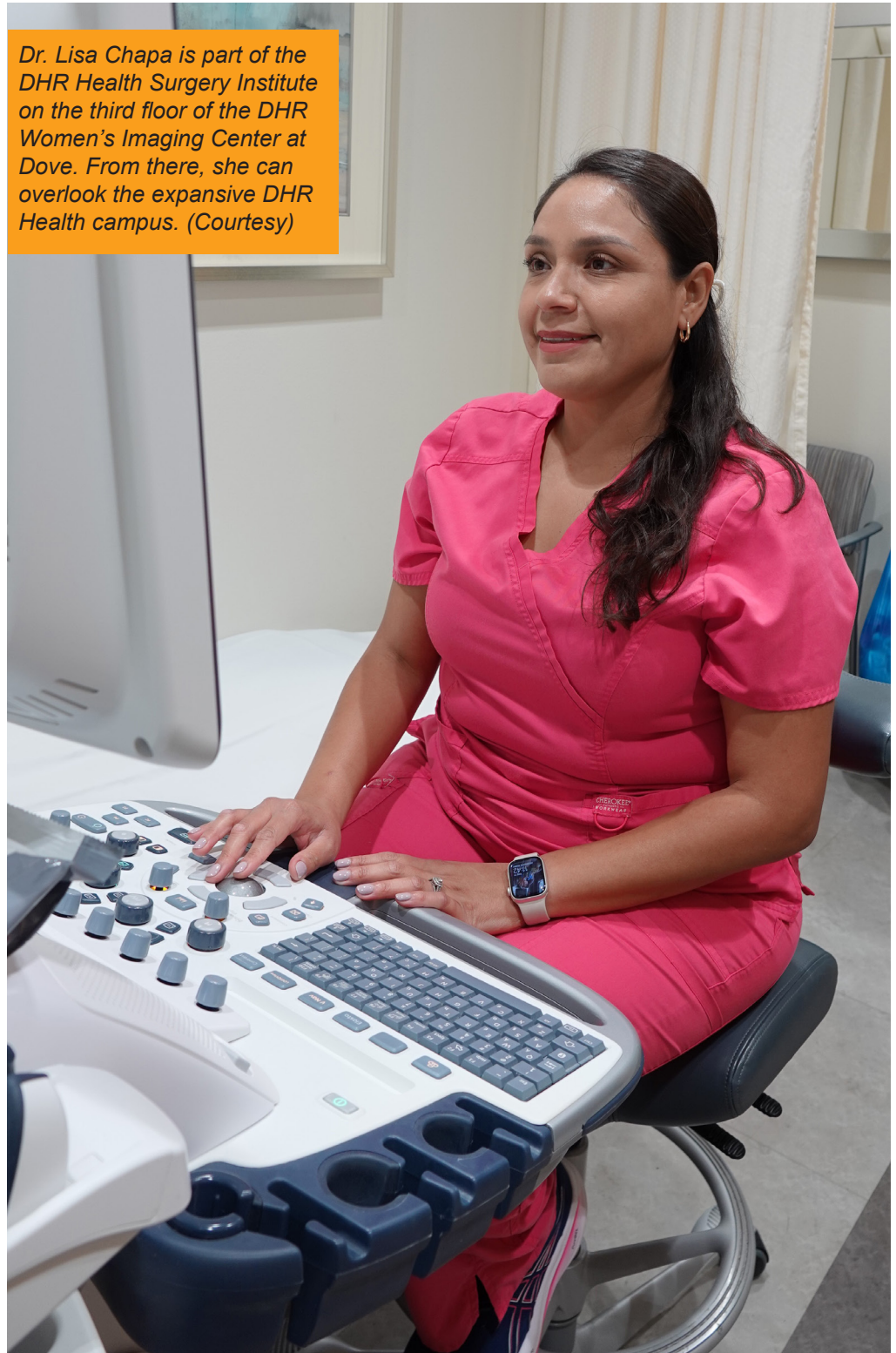
“This is one institution that does see my value,” she said. “Any ideas I have, for the

patients and for the community, I have gotten the red carpet rolled out to implement them.”

Identifying Risks

One of these ideas led to Chapa developing

Dr. Lisa Chapa is part of the DHR Health Surgery Institute on the third floor of the DHR Women’s Imaging Center at Dove. From there, she can overlook the expansive DHR Health campus. (Courtesy)



the framework in establishing the DHR Health Breast Cancer Risk Evaluation Clinic.

After seeing an unusually large number of women in their 20s and 30s receiving a breast-cancer diagnosis, Chapa began investigating and learned that many unknowingly had a strong family history of breast cancer. Chapa began collaborating with the Radiology Department at DHR.

Chapa gathers family history on patients who have mammograms and ultrasounds. She also asks additional questions, such as the ages patients began their menstrual cycles and when they began menopause. The information goes into an algorithm to determine the patient's lifetime risk of developing breast cancer.

The average lifetime risk for women is 12 percent. When this algorithm identifies patients with a 20 percent or higher risk, their names go into a monthly report that goes to the clinic.

"Every month, the list has 160 to 175 names on it," Chapa said.

Those patients receive invitations to be part of the Breast Cancer Risk Evaluation Clinic, which provides the patients with proactive measures they can take to reduce their risk. Lifestyle choices can reduce the risk of breast-cancer, Chapa said.

These steps include limiting alcohol consumption to one drink per day, exercising for a total of 150 minutes per week and maintaining a healthy weight. Genetic testing and counseling offered by DHR for women enrolled at the clinic regarding risk-reducing surgery (elective double mastectomy) can reduce the risk by up to 90 percent. Risk-reducing medications, taken for five years, can reduce the risk up to 50 percent.

Incorporating the Latest

Last month, a new law went into effect that requires all mammogram facilities in the United States to notify patients of their breast density. Many facilities, like DHR Health, have been doing this for years, and the information is critical, Chapa said.

"Breast density refers to the thickness of the person's breast tissue," she said.

Age and genetics both play a role. A mammogram is an x-ray that passes through breast tissue to identify abnormalities. Breast cancer is dense, so if a patient's breast tissue is also dense, the cancer can hide. Knowing the density of their breasts allows women with dense breasts to discuss their supplemental breast imaging options with



The DHR Health Medical Office Building at 1100 E. Dove in McAllen houses the hospital system's Women's Imaging Center at Dove and Surgery Institute. (Courtesy)



Dr. Lisa Chapa completed a surgical fellowship in breast surgical oncology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. She now treats breast-cancer patients at DHR Health. (Courtesy)

their physicians.

Chapa had much more to share regarding the latest treatments for breast cancer. Those treatments include the role psychology plays in the treatment of breast cancer, estrogen and body weight, and the importance of The Wisdom Study. The latter brings together hundreds of thousands of diverse women from across the United States to find the safest and most effective ways to detect breast cancer.

Additional information covers viable breast-cancer resources, breast cancer in men, and the federal law regarding reconstructive surgery. Look for all of this in the November issue of Valley Business Report.



Ariana Sanchez, tech supervisor at DHR Health Women's Imaging Center at Lindberg, displays one of the Center's mammography machines. (Courtesy)

An advertisement for Edinburg Economic Development Corporation. At the top, the logo features a stylized star and the text 'EDINBURG Economic Development Corporation'. Below this is the large headline 'FIND EVERYTHING IN EDINBURG'. The main visual is a collage of two images: the top one shows the HEB Seafood Steakhouse building and the Bert Ogden Arena stadium with orange seats and a green field; the bottom one shows a close-up of the Bert Ogden Arena's modern glass and metal facade. At the bottom, contact information for Raudel Garza, Executive Director, is provided: 'RAUDEL GARZA | raudel@edinburgedc.com | Executive Director | (956) 388-8914'. The website 'EDINBURGEDC.COM' is listed at the very bottom.

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