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“Your Pro-RGV News”

In Town Or Beyond RGV

By Todd Breland

What is your business' focus to attract customers? Who is your customer? Where do you target your marketing?

We all deal with these pointed questions. How, when and where we direct our resources to maximize production, sales and revenues is a hot topic.

Here in the Rio Grande Valley, we have the full spectrum of companies and organizations who rely on domestic and international business. Our region is blessed with industry, manufacturing, healthcare retail, hospitality, real estate and more. The customer bases range from down the street to across the globe.

For many RGV businesses, determining the percentage of local vs non-local customers is a first priority. Knowing who our customers are impacts all decisions. A starting point is the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of sales come from 20 percent. Who is that 20 percent? Focusing 80 percent of our resources on that 20 percent should be the target.

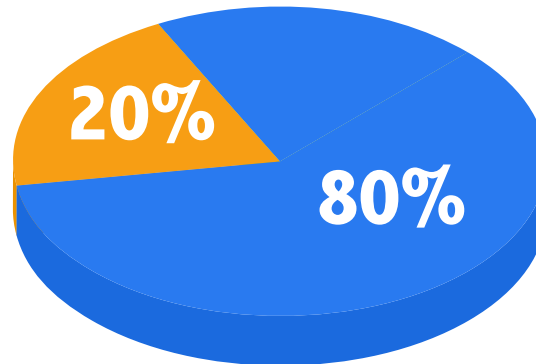
Many companies claim success is when they earn a fair share of the 80 percent of the

customer-pool then pick up bonuses from the 20 percent. Some owners say the bills are paid from the 80 percent and store profit comes from the 20 percent.

Whatever the math is for your company or organization, first knowing who your client population is and then pursuing that core with a majority of your marketing efforts, increases sales and revenue results. Your pursuit of the bonus clientele should only be sought with a maximum of 20 percent of resources.

Valley businesses deal with very unique challenges, and our job as organization leaders is to figure out the best use of time, personnel and dollars. Directing our teams to find the balance between primary and secondary audiences greatly increases the importance for success.

We invite you to share your ideas and tips. Send an email to info@valleybusinessreport.com, and you could be featured in an upcoming article. Thank you, RGV!



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New Bookstore Proving A Point

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Gilbert Hernandez had 500 books and a \$5,000 loan when taking his business from markets and pop-ups to a storefront in downtown Brownsville.

It was the first days of January 2022. His new bookstore Buho now had a physical location in a historic downtown building that got its start in 1921 as a pharmacy on Washington Street. The 29-year-old Hernandez was out to prove a point. His research revealed that Brownsville with a population nearing 200,000 residents was the largest primary city in a U.S. metro market without its own general bookstore.

Waldenbooks closed its doors at Sunrise Mall well over 10 years ago. Since then, Hernandez says no one had done much about “the bookstore situation” in Brownsville despite much grumbling around town. The word he and others heard was that the chain bookstores had no interest in the city.

“They think we’re too poor and illiterate,” said Hernandez, a Brownsville native and Saint Joseph Academy graduate. “We’re going to prove them wrong.”

Hernandez used a bit stronger language in expressing his determination to put his hometown on the map with its own bookstore. The fact that he has done so in a mysteriously beautiful and century-old building in downtown Brownsville adds to the allure of a bookstore whose name translates to “owl” in English.

Twists And Turns

A map near Buho’s entrance has hundreds of pins lodged within the outlines of nearly every U.S. state.

“Forty-three states and 30 countries,” Hernandez says of where visitors have come from to visit his indie bookstore.

His start with a collection of 500 books has grown to having an inventory of over 15,000. Going from storing books in a 10-by-10 storage unit to housing a deep collection of new, antique and secondhand books at the Calderoni building has taken an intensive effort.

The bookstore reflects the energy of its owner. There are a flurry of events and sales every month at Buho. There are poetry nights and author readings to go with clearance sales and “blind dates with a book.” The latter are books wrapped like gifts with brief descriptions of its contents. A string is then tied around the whole thing to tempt a curious mind. It’s all part of creating a fun vibe and making Buho worth

the drive and walk to get to.

“It’s up to me to keep the momentum going,” Hernandez said of Buho’s promising start.

Getting to be a bookstore owner had its share of twists and turns for the youthful entrepreneur. He left Brownsville after high school to attend college in Massachusetts. His first job thereafter was working in New Hampshire in managing

science and technology conferences in the New England area. A visit home turned into a longer stay and he eventually worked in the local family business in the fuel industry.

Hernandez utilized the time back home to become active in civic organizations. He also began to make contacts in the local business and legal world. When starting out in the



Gilbert Hernandez relishes the opportunity to prove that Brownsville can support a bookstore. (VBR)

book business, Hernandez says he “gathered connections” with bankers and attorneys in forming business plans.

“Each step helped to build up Buho,” he said.

Hernandez has found his niche and hopes his bookstore is doing the same. It’s one part doing what you want and another building something that can last.

“You have to do it in a way that resonates with you and your natural talents,” he said.

“Then there’s the question, ‘Are you capable enough to create a system that gives you the money and the time you desire?’”

Pressing Need

Hernandez is among the Millennial-aged business owners who are investing in Brownsville’s historic downtown.

Many of the new generation entrepreneurs are Brownsville natives of the city. Their hometown pride is reflected in the downtown investments that have established trendy coffee shops, delis, restaurants - and in Hernandez’s case - a bookstore.

“It feels great right now,” he said of downtown’s renaissance in recent years.

Hernandez, however, worries that downtown



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Brownsville’s revival “is only a novelty” unless the city moves more rapidly to address parking issues in the city’s core. The city, he says, does not have the sort of pedestrian culture that cities have in the Northeast where people are willing to walk several blocks to get to their destinations.

While lauding efforts to make downtown Brownsville viable again, he is blunt in his assessments of how durable it can be without parking improvements.

“It may fade away if something isn’t done about parking infrastructure,” he said.

Hernandez maintains an optimistic spirit amid the realism of being a small business owner facing daily challenges. He enjoys conversations with his customers and greets everyone with a smile. Hernandez embraces feedback – the good with the need to do better – and looks forward to what Buho can be.

“With our events and inventory of new and older books, we can continue to bring back old customers and attract some new ones,” he said. Visit Buho at 1140 E. Washington Street in Brownsville and online at buhobtx.com.



An owl oversees books and people at Buho books in Brownsville. (VBR)



Buho books occupies the bottom floor of a 1920s-era building in downtown Brownsville. (VBR)

Alliance Gives South Texas Higher Profile

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The South Texas Alliance of Cities launched in 2023 with the goal of fostering greater cooperation and collaboration among communities in addressing key issues.

The partnership appears to be off to a good start. The majority of the communities in the pact are in the Rio Grande Valley although it does extend to San Antonio. That city's mayor, Ron Nirenberg, has attended some of the alliance's quarterly meetings. The focus has been on larger cities for the most part. Meetings thus far have taken place in San Antonio, Edinburg, Mission, Weslaco and most recently, McAllen.

One offshoot – a welcome one – is the recent inclusion of smaller South Texas communities into the group. Mayors from Alice, Premont and Palmview have

attended recent alliance meetings, coming away impressed and grateful for ideas that can be gleaned from larger communities.

“Just being here, I’m enjoying it, but at the same time taking ideas,” said Ricardo Villarreal, the mayor of Palmview. “I’ve been texting and emailing and writing notes that I’m sure our city is going to appreciate and our citizens are going to appreciate as well.”

Getting Attention

In late May 2023, the mayors of Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen and Mission signed a compact and pledged “direct unified efforts in advocacy, policy and economic development toward mutual goals that are important for the future of our communities.”

Alliance members meet quarterly in a city

that is part of the group. The most recent meeting in late September in McAllen included a visit from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. McAllen, like other host cities, used the meeting to highlight its issues and aspirations. Part of the day's activities included a visit to Quinta Mazatlán, a venue in McAllen for birding and eco-tourism.

“When you have an organization like this one, they start paying a little more attention to you now that we’re working as a region,” said McAllen Mayor Javier Villalobos of the visit by the Texas governor.

The key issues that cut across all communities are those connected to water, transportation, infrastructure and education when it pertains to producing more of a job-ready workforce. Each of these issues



South Texas mayors and officials listen to a presentation at a recent meeting of the South Texas Alliance of Cities in McAllen. (Courtesy)

is costly in terms of the vast amounts of public resources it takes to make headway on any one of these topics. Resources are taken from different funding buckets be it national, state or local sources. Taking on such huge issues in tandem with other cities can often lead to faster results.

“Edinburg is one of the Valley’s fastest-growing cities,” Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. said. “We now have over 100,000 residents, but we cannot do it alone no matter how much we grow. We need our neighboring cities and in working together to advocate for things that will help our cities and our region.”

Counting On Each Other

Knowing of each other’s strategies and approaches can make for a united front when they address the governor and other statewide officials.

“We’ve gotten to know what each one is doing in our areas,” Mission Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza said. “We know we can count on each other for help and support.”

The larger cities of the alliance are now more likely to take on those big-ticket projects in a more unified manner. Drainage, for example, is one significant issue Edinburg and McAllen have collaborated on given how those projects are connected to water districts and canals that serve both communities.

For the smaller cities, that sort of collaboration can be inspiring as they reach to get a bit of the growth and development their larger neighbors are experiencing.

“I feel like a sponge at these meetings,” said Villarreal, the Palmview mayor. “I’m going to take a lot of the ideas that I picked up here. We’re going to continue to build and get more ideas from the big cities.”



Palmview Mayor Ricardo Villarreal says he is picking up ideas from larger cities in attending meetings of the South Texas Alliance of Cities. (Courtesy)



Mission Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza and Harlingen Mayor Norma Sepulveda confer at a recent meeting of the South Texas Alliance of Cities. (Courtesy)

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McAllen Lauded In Top Business Listing

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

McAllen's inclusion on a national top-20 list for small businesses reaffirms the city's long-standing support for entrepreneurship and development

McAllen Mayor Javier Villalobos made that assessment after learning of CoworkingCafé listing his city as the ninth best place for small businesses among 136 southern U.S. cities surveyed. Coworking Café is a listing service for flex workplace solutions in supporting remote workers, freelancers and employees from all fields seeking user-friendly platforms.

CoworkingCafé used 11 key metrics in its assessments of cities across the Sunbelt and the South. Among Texas cities, only Austin listed at number five and McAllen ranked ninth made the list's top 10.

"It adds to something we already knew," Villalobos said of his city's ranking on the national list. "McAllen has created a supportive environment where businesses of all sizes can flourish, and we are committed to continuing that progress."

Gateway To Mexico

Coworking Café gave McAllen high marks for affordability, strong economic growth and favorable economic conditions, which includes lower labor costs. McAllen ranked fifth for high self-employment rate, meaning the city has favorable conditions for owners of small businesses.

McAllen "stands out as a dynamic location," Coworking Café said in a press release about its rankings. It described McAllen's geographic proximity to the U.S./ Mexico border as a significant advantage in providing businesses with easy access to trade routes and international commerce.

"McAllen acts as a gateway between the two countries, making it a strategic hub for industries such as logistics, warehousing and cross-border retail," said Andrea Neculae, a writer for Coworking Café. "This access to global markets is particularly attractive for small businesses looking to scale operations and tap into international opportunities without relocating to larger, more expensive metropolitan areas."

McAllen's longstanding business and retail ties to Monterrey remain strong. Mayor Villalobos said his city is further boosting its profile in Mexico with trade

mission trips to San Luis Potosi, Tampico and Mexico City.

"I get asked sometimes why we go to Mexico so much," Villalobos said. "My response is that investment and business from Mexico is still very important to our local economy."

Diversifying Economy

Beyond the ties to Mexico, Coworking Café noted that McAllen has worked to diversify its economy with growth seen in sectors like healthcare, education and technology.

"The city is becoming increasingly



McAllen Mayor Javier Villalobos says his city's pro-business policies are benefitting small businesses in the community. (Courtesy)

attractive to a wider range of entrepreneurs, from tech startups to retail and service-based businesses,” said Neculae, the writer for CoworkingCafe.

The city’s workforce, Neculae said, has many young and bilingual workers who are skilled in trades that are essential to the area’s key industries. This serves as an advantage for companies opening operations in McAllen in having a workforce that is adaptable and knowledgeable in operating in a border region.

McAllen is building on these advantages with guidance and resources offered by the local chamber of commerce and economic development corporation via networking and training sessions. As mayor, Villalobos has worked with the City Commission and staff to streamline permitting to make it easier to start and get a new business going.

“We provide the services, but it’s our business community and local industries that deserve the credit,” Villalobos said of his city’s high ranking in the national survey. “I think in many ways that McAllen is still the economic engine of the Valley.”



Logistical operations such as the ones found at the McAllen Free Trade Zone are lauded in a national survey for facilitating trade with Mexico. (Courtesy)



McAllen’s busy 10th Street is one of the city’s main corridors for thriving small businesses. (Courtesy)

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Businesswoman Builds Brands & Learning

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Susan Valverde's background was in business and going to trade shows to attract jobs to McAllen.

Working in business development, Valverde was on the staff of the McAllen Economic Development Corporation. It was a six-year stint that ran from 1997 to 2002. She began to understand that bringing in jobs to her community was dependent on having a better trained and educated workforce.

That fact became even more apparent in traveling to Europe as part of an MEDC delegation. In Germany and Ireland, Valverde saw how the private sector partnered with educational systems to

develop students who were prepared to work in industry and across many economic sectors.

"After that, I got more excited about education," she said.

Building Brand

The budding interest in education led to Valverde opening the first Sylvan Learning center in the Rio Grande Valley in 2002. Sylvan is a private sector company with over four decades of experience in offering personalized tutoring for students in grades K-12 and has facilities in the United States and Canada.

"I was moving into a new career where I

didn't have a background," Valverde said of opening a Sylvan Center on Dove Avenue in McAllen.

She did have the experience of being a student who struggled in school as an immigrant child who moved to the United States knowing no English.

"Maybe that's what drew me to education," Valverde said. "I know what it's like to be that child who needs to catch up in the classroom."

Valverde would open her second RGV center in Brownsville and then a third in Harlingen. She actively worked with area school districts in seeking to be a partner in helping to solve problems and not be seen



Susan Valverde formerly worked for the McAllen Economic Development Corporation and is now the brand president for Sylvan Center. (Courtesy)

as just another vendor. Valverde set an early goal to make the Sylvan Learning centers accessible to area schools and not only for families who have the financial means to pay for personalized tutoring.

She applied for and successfully received state grants which allowed her Sylvan centers to partner with local school districts for after-school tutoring. Often utilizing retired teachers who are state certified, area districts began to see Sylvan as an ally and not a competitor with the establishment of the after-school programs on their campuses.

“We built up goodwill,” Valverde said. “The districts saw it as a partnership and we were able to expand our customer base and replicate our system in more communities.”

Corporate World

The RGV initiatives involving partnerships with school districts and



Sylvan Learning centers utilize personalized tutoring and create an atmosphere where learning is encouraged. (Courtesy)



Sylvan Learning center in McAllen was opened over 20 years ago by Susan Valverde. (VBR)

having Sylvan information made available in Spanish became model programs other Sylvan centers implemented in the United States.

In 2016, with her three centers firmly established in the Valley and the company's programs now mainstays in area school districts, Valverde sold her business and moved on to a corporate position with Sylvan. She is today Sylvan's brand president and often travels to the Dallas corporate office as well as across the country in advising Sylvan Learning centers.

Valverde is based in McAllen, where she has lived in the Valley since moving to the region in the early 1990s. The Monterrey native who is the daughter of a truck driver/diesel mechanic is proud of being part of efforts and programs that show what a positive learning environment can do for students.

"I've been there with language issues," she said of her immigrant background. "You meet children where they are and take our instruction to them in helping them reach their goals."



Sylvan Learning center opened in McAllen in 2002. In the subsequent years, two similar centers opened in Brownsville and Harlingen. (Courtesy)



Sylvan Learning centers specialize in tutoring students in helping them to reach classroom goals. (Courtesy)

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INDUSTRY WORKFORCE COMMUNITY

Barber Passes 'Goodness' Back To Community

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

James Horta is a barber with a flair and a commitment in giving back to his community.

Horta's glow-in-the-dark shop in downtown Mercedes is adorned with deco-style posters that illuminate and feature a cast of characters from Albert Einstein and Albert Hitchcock to racecar driver Jeff Gordon. There's also plenty of memorabilia to be found, especially items featuring his beloved Dallas Cowboys.

The barber's affinity for pop culture is reflected in his shop's name, which carries the acronyms YGDV that are in part a nod to his favorite television sitcom, the 1990s-era "King of the Hill." Beyond the fanfare and style of YGDV Barber Shop, there's a commitment to customers and a connection to the community where the business is located.

Horta is a Mercedes guy having grown up on Mile 2 E Road in the Heidelberg area of the Mid-Valley. He and his shop are known for an annual free haircut day for students heading back to school. He donated 33 free haircuts this past August and calls it passing "some goodness back to the community."

Horta calls it "one of those things I can do to help the community."

Earning His Way

There are other things as well when it comes to being community minded.

Horta supports food bank drives and donations of coats to help keep local residents warm during the winter months. On Halloween, children coming by YGDV know they will be treated with full-sized candy bars.

Horta is a believer in the school of second chances. Some of his giving back sensibilities go back to the years of his youth when kids can make mistakes and need adults and mentors to forgive while setting them straight. Horta describes himself as someone who has always been "good with his hands." His working background includes working in welding and heavy machinery. Horta also spent time in the food industry.

He would come to see having his own barber shop in Mercedes as something that was a good fit for his personality, skills and connection to the community. Horta enrolled at Advanced Barber College, which is nationally accredited and one of the Rio Grande Valley's longest-serving and more respected schools in its field. He successfully completed 1,500 hours of the school's curriculum and went on to earn

industry certifications and a state license.

After some stints with local barbers, Horta opened on his own in August 2023 on 242 S. Texas Ave., Suite 6.

"It's something you can do and no one can judge you on it," he said of having his own business and delving into the creative side of

barbering.

'Best Tools'

Haircut and styling appointments at the YGDV Barbershop are booked for a full hour.

Horta wants a customer to feel at ease and leave the worries of the world behind when



James Horta combines fun with precision haircuts at his Mercedes barber shop. (VBR)

stepping into the space of his shop.

“I want you to come here and relax,” he said. “You’re here for one hour to yourself. And then when you leave, feeling like a million bucks.”

Horta says he uses “the best tools in the industry,” and his shop features a high-end barber chair that run over \$1,000 in price. He engages in good discussion before a haircut to understand the look and appearance a customer seeks. He is then meticulous in how he cuts hair so it grows back evenly. The latter is an important measure of a good haircut in Horta’s view.

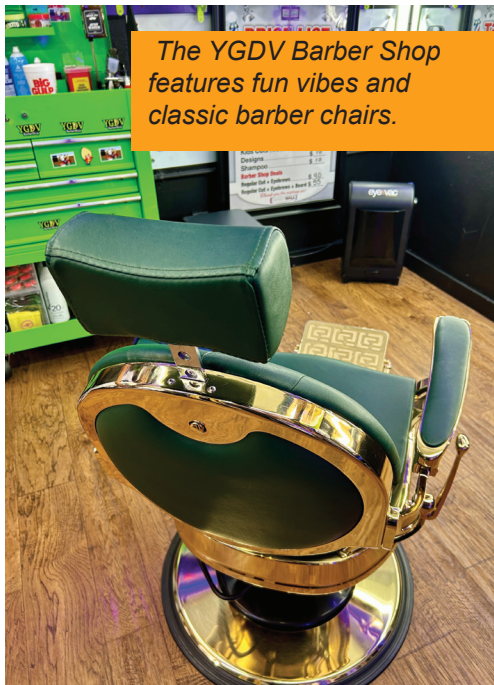
Horta favors traditional cuts but says he’s familiar with all the styles in saying, “everybody comes through here,” meaning men and women, kids and seniors, a wide range of customers.

“It’s an experience I want my customers to have in feeling like a king when they come here,” Horta said.

James Horta had a varied working background before opening his barber shop in downtown Mercedes. (VBR)



The YGDV Barber Shop features fun vibes and classic barber chairs.



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Study Goes Beyond Yearly Mammograms

By Chris Ardis

Dr. Lisa Chapa wholeheartedly encourages women in the Rio Grande Valley to enroll in a groundbreaking national study that measures the risk of women getting breast cancer.

The WISDOM Study (Women Informed to Screen Depending on Measures of risk) can “revolutionize the way breast cancer is detected and risk is reduced,” Chapa said. This multi-institutional trial includes the DHR Health Institute for Research and Development, which serves as the primary site for Texas and Oklahoma.

The WISDOM Study accepts women between the ages of 30 and 74 who have not had breast cancer or ductal carcinoma in situ (in its original place). For more information, go to thewisdomstudy.org.

“It’s important because Latinos do not often join trials,” Chapa said. “We can augment and enhance Latina recruitment to make the study applicable.”

The goal, Chapa said, is to find a more precise, tailored approach for determining when a woman should have mammograms. Is there a better way than the one-size-fits-all recommendations currently followed?

“We are trying to figure it out, collectively,” she said.

Advocating For Women

At the DHR Health Surgery Institute, Chapa treats patients with breast cancer and patients with benign breast conditions that require surgery.

She performs oncoplastic breast-conserving surgeries, (breast cancer surgery in conjunction with plastic surgery), as well as mastectomies. It’s important, Chapa said, for women with breast cancer to know about a federal law addressing reconstructive surgery.

“This is another example of women advocating for women,” she said, referring to the fact that persistent lobbying by women resulted in the law’s passage. “This is not cosmetic surgery. Women did not choose to lose their breasts or part of their breasts.”

This law, Chapa said, requires private insurance companies to cover reconstructive surgery, with the patient covering any policy co-pays and deductibles. The law applies regardless of whether the woman chooses to have reconstruction in conjunction with a lumpectomy or mastectomy or at a later time.

Chapa says the choices women make

when faced with breast cancer are extremely personal.

“It’s not for me to decide which treatment is better for a woman,” she said. “It is my job to sit with the patient and really counsel and educate her on what each surgical decision means for her body, means for her recovery, means for other treatments down the road, and then to let her make an informed, educated decision.”

Chapa understands that many patients need to educate themselves through other resources, as well. She supports this, with one caveat.

“The internet is an amazing place for information and for misinformation,” she said. “They need to rely on vetted sources, such as the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen, Memorial Sloan Kettering, Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic and MD Anderson.”

A Tool To Save Lives

Educating the community on breast cancer includes prevention and early detection.

“Fear actually is a huge deterrent to women getting their annual mammogram,” Chapa said. “A mammogram is not going to



The Medical Office Specialist Team at the DHR Health Surgery Institute on Dove greets and registers patients when they arrive for their appointments. (photo DHR Health)

grow the cancer. A mammogram is a tool to save your life from that cancer.”

Knowing pertinent statistics is also important. Many women think they do not need an annual mammogram if they have no family history of breast cancer. However, Chapa said, “one in eight women will get breast cancer and only 10 percent of those are due to a genetic mutation.”

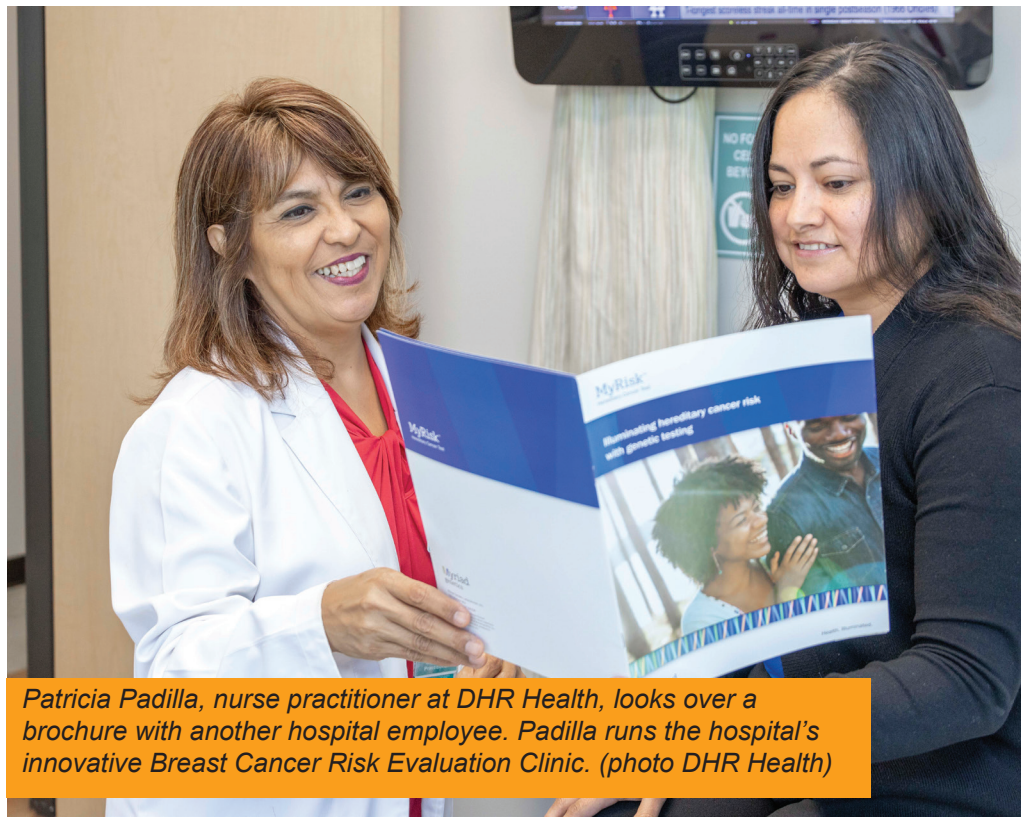
Men can get breast cancer, too. One in 800 men will receive a breast cancer diagnosis, Chapa said. She emphasized that families with the BRCA2 gene tend to have men in their families who are diagnosed with breast cancer.

“Men need to look at their family history on both sides,” she said.

Making Good Choices

Chapa knows a cancer diagnosis often results in a period of immense fear and anxiety for patients and their families.

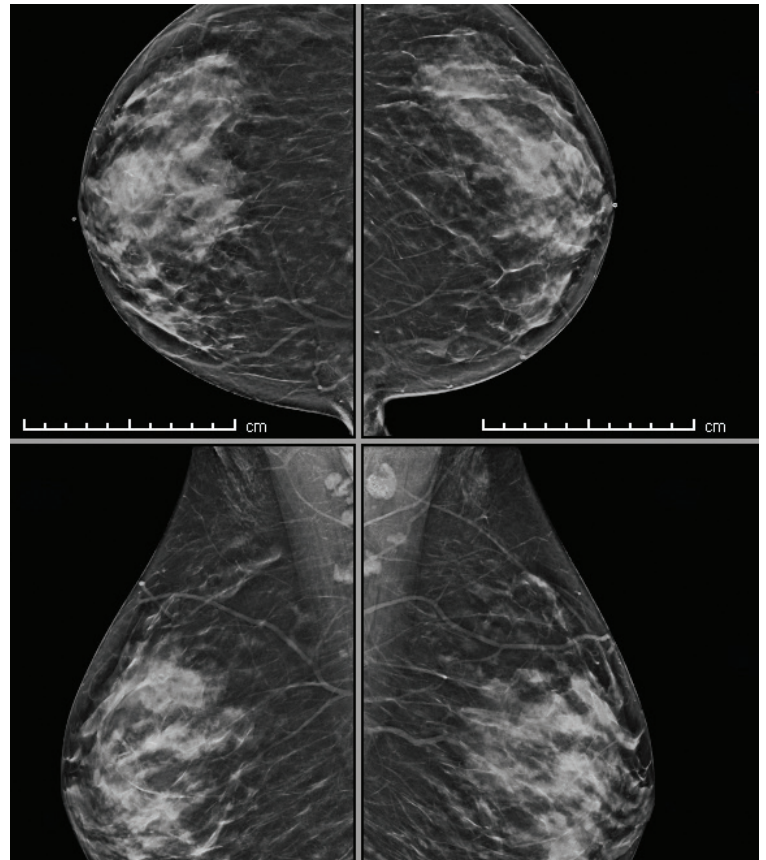
At DHR Health, this is addressed via patient navigators who connect patients and their families with counselors, support groups and other services. A former DHR



Patricia Padilla, nurse practitioner at DHR Health, looks over a brochure with another hospital employee. Padilla runs the hospital's innovative Breast Cancer Risk Evaluation Clinic. (photo DHR Health)



This image shows a breast with breast cancer. (photo DHR Health)



Breast cancer can be difficult to detect in dense breast tissue. A federal law went into effect Sept. 10, requiring all mammography facilities to inform patients regarding the density of their breasts so they can consider supplemental imaging. (photo DHR Health)

patient came up with the idea of a buddy system that has now been implemented. This system provides breast cancer patients with mentor survivors who have also been on the breast cancer journey.

While we cannot change our DNA, we can control our lifestyle choices. Limiting alcohol to one drink per day, exercising at least 150 minutes per week and maintaining a healthy body weight can reduce the risk of breast cancer. Fat cells produce estrogen in men and women, Chapa said.

“Fewer fat cells result in less estrogen production, and estrogen drives cancer risk,” she said.

Chapa expresses excitement about advancements in breast cancer treatment, such as the use of monoclonal antibodies to treat patients with triple-negative breast cancer. She says the goal is to get the same outcomes with less invasive procedures.

When Chapa left the Rio Grande Valley for college, Chapa knew she would come home to serve her community. She is now playing a pivotal role in educating women about their health, advocating for innovative health practices, and empowering women facing a breast cancer diagnosis.



McAllen Memorial High School graduate Dr. Lisa Chapa returned to the Valley in 2019. She is the only surgeon south of San Antonio fellowship trained in breast surgical oncology. (photo DHR Health)

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