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# Small Businesses Dream Big

By Todd Breland

All entrepreneurs have dreams. A significant percentage start a business to guide its growth, make money and hopefully retire. Others have different ambitions.

Some want to continue a family business with his/her own model, and others start a company from scratch with the hopes of quick success and then selling. Yet some entrepreneurs open shop to operate modestly for the long haul with dreams of passing the baton of a successful business to younger siblings, a child or children. Whichever the case, all are possible in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

I am a huge fan of the United States of America. Our great nation is where dreams become realities because the opportunities are endless. Entrepreneurs are the backbone of the USA, and small businesses fuel our local, regional and national economy. The local Small Business Administration office in Harlingen is available to foster an entrepreneur's vision, provide direction for

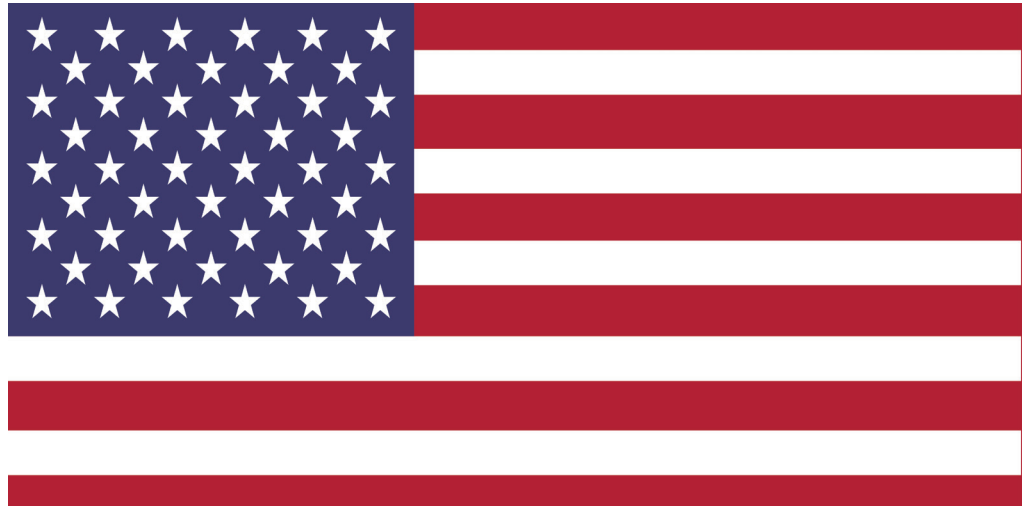
business plan development, offer a list of potential funding avenues, and more.

For businesses of one to 100, all entrepreneurs have high hopes of making it. At the outset, we weigh risk versus reward, do our due diligence of homework and then get to work. Some walk. Others run. The only

race is moving forward. Our four counties were built by entrepreneurs, and our survival will be because of entrepreneurs.

From our VBR team, we wish you -- our family and friends -- a safe and joyous holiday season!

We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.





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# 'Long Road' Leads To New VFW Post

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, Content Editor

The white sign along Business 77 on the Harlingen/San Benito line has seen its better days. It leans over a bit with wear that has not worn well.

It reads "VFW Post 2410" with an arrow pointing north to where the lodge sits on Whalen Road. It is there where post Commander Trey Villela walks among boxes of toy donations for distribution throughout Cameron County. The boxes of Legos, Star Wars heroes and Monopoly games are part of the Toys For Tots program.

The U.S. Marine Corps Reserve runs the

charitable program that distributes gifts to children in need at Christmas. A VFW post like the one in Harlingen with its military heritage makes it an ideal point to gather and distribute the gifts. Many of the contributions come from toy manufacturers and other private sector companies.

"There are some expensive toys in here," said Villela, whose wife, Valerie, serves as the local Toys For Tots coordinator. "Lots of kids will be getting some really nice toys."

## Storied History

The VFW post serving Harlingen and San

Benito has a storied history that includes a post-World War II visit from Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. The native Texan was the commander-in-chief for the U.S. Pacific Fleet during the war.

The 80-year-old-plus lodge building is frayed like the sign along the highway pointing to its location. In recent years, the veterans belonging to the lodge worried if the facility could continue to stand after years of flooding damage. Then one of the Rio Grande Valley's larger commercial builders and a U.S. congressman stepped in to help with resources that went beyond



Trey Villela is a Marine veteran who was deployed multiple times during the Iraq War and is currently the commander for VFW Post 2410 in Harlingen. (VBR)

what Villela and his fellow veterans could have imagined.

The need to do something became urgent after lodge pipes burst and caused extensive water damage after the big freeze of February 2021. Villela set up a GoFundMe account in hopes that the veterans could “bandage everything up.”

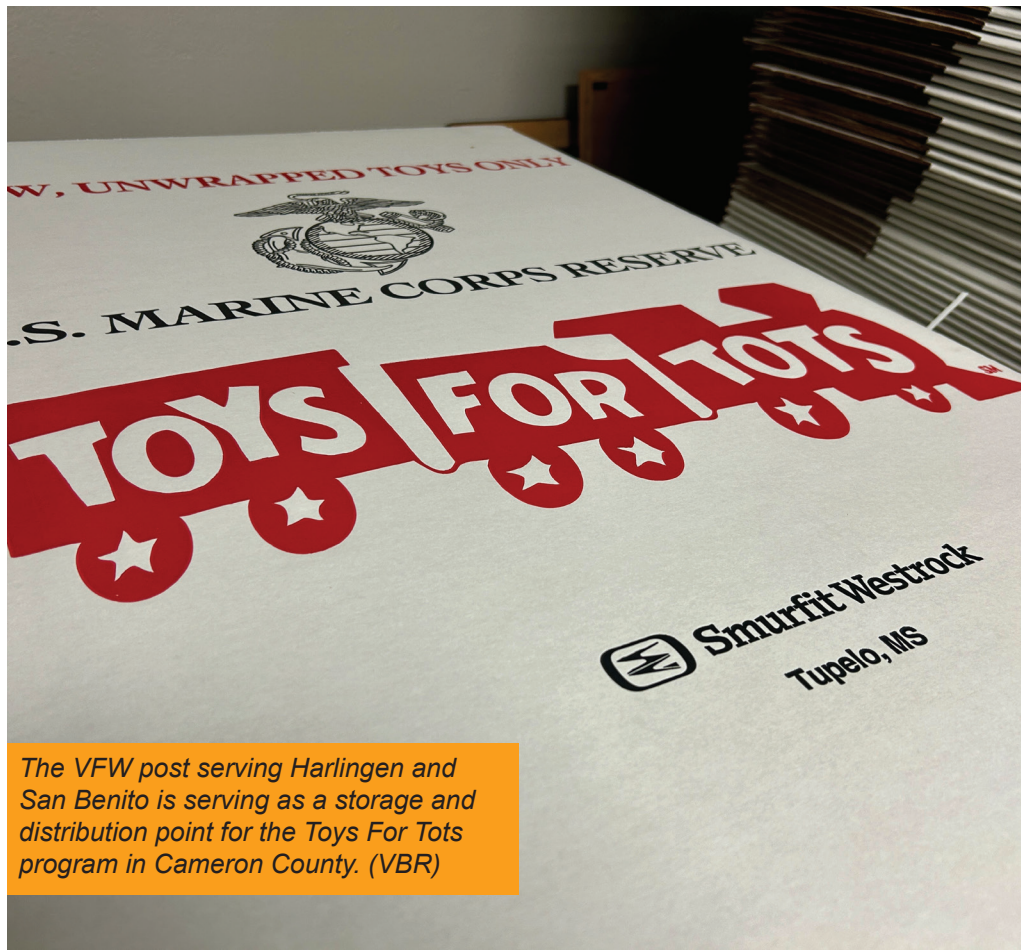
“Everything flooded in here and we already had flooding issues to deal with from past years,” Villela said.

Rene Capistran, the chief executive officer of Noble Texas Builders, toured Post 2410 after seeing a local television story about the damaged lodge. Capistran is a Navy vet and wanted to take a look at the Harlingen/San Benito VFW post. He walked the grounds with Villela and came to a painful conclusion.

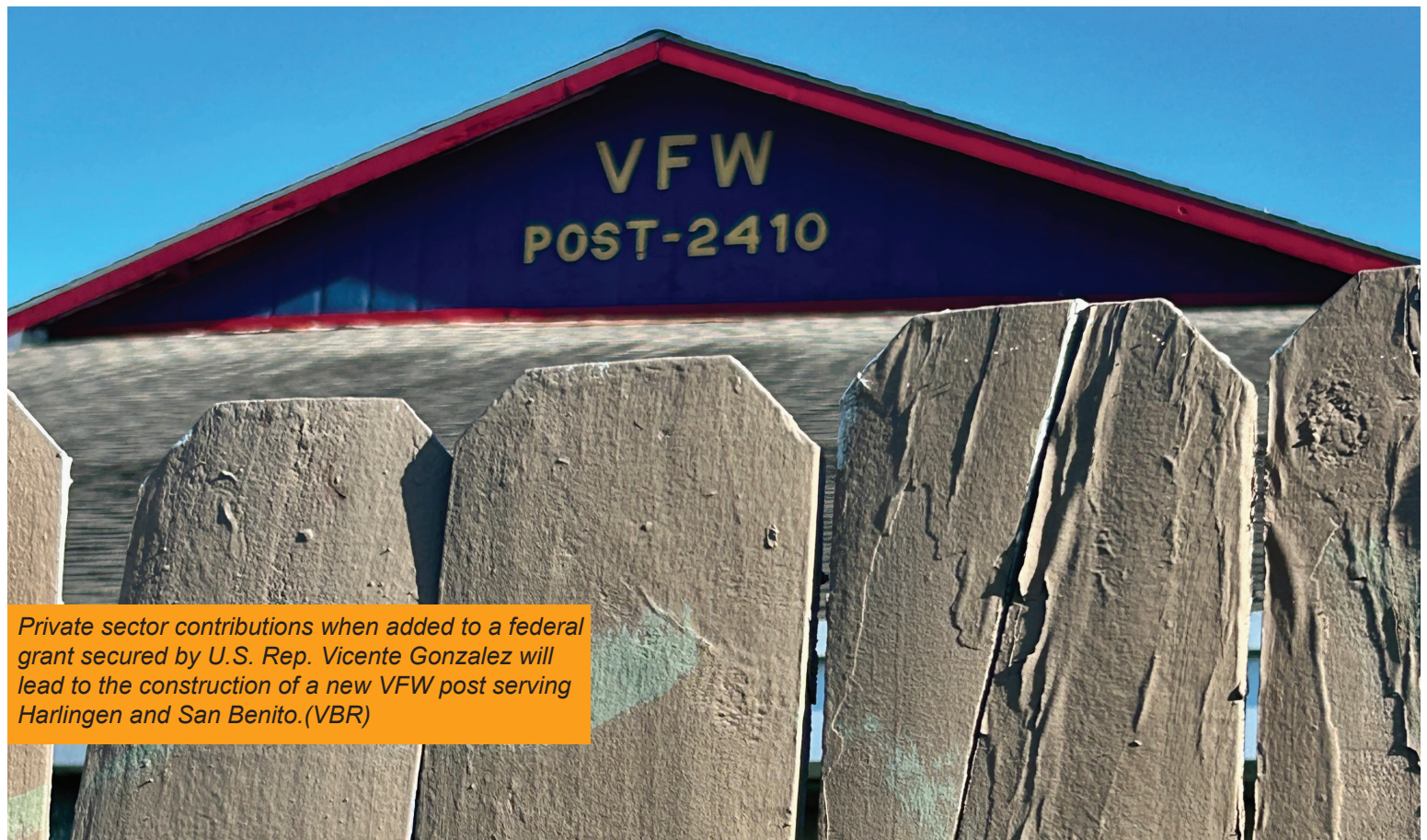
“Rene told us that the building was not salvageable,” Villela said. “We have veterans that have been coming here for over 20 years. At the end of the day, we need to have something here for them.”

**Looking For Answers**

Capistran spoke with the vets in general terms of doing fundraisers with the support of Noble Builders after his walk around the lodge.



*The VFW post serving Harlingen and San Benito is serving as a storage and distribution point for the Toys For Tots program in Cameron County. (VBR)*



*Private sector contributions when added to a federal grant secured by U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez will lead to the construction of a new VFW post serving Harlingen and San Benito.(VBR)*

U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez would soon thereafter make a visit to the post. Gonzalez at the time represented a neighboring congressional district and, in that capacity, had helped a VFW in Falfurrias gain funding to make facility improvements.

Gonzalez pledged to do the same for Post 2410. He would later accelerate those efforts when he was elected to a district that includes Cameron County. Gonzalez's staff would assist Vilella and his post with gathering the information and documentation needed to apply for a federal grant.

In the meantime, Capistran invited the Post 2410 vets to attend Noble's annual charity fishing tournament. It would be there that many of Noble's business partners and contractors would hear of the Post 2410 story.

**Donations Offered**

"Rene began telling our story at the fishing tournament," Vilella said. "People began asking us, 'What do you guys need?'"

Companies began offering in-kind donations to the veterans for improvements of their lodge. Central Ready Mix of San Juan offered the concrete. Innovative Block of La Feria said it would contribute building supplies. CT Plumbing of San Antonio pitched in with an offer to provide its services in-kind.

In all, 17 companies would eventually offer services, products and labor for a value totaling \$1.5 million. Congressman Gonzalez by this point had secured a \$850,000 federal grant for Post 2410. There was now enough funding to build the veterans an entirely new lodge that will be located adjacent to the present structure.

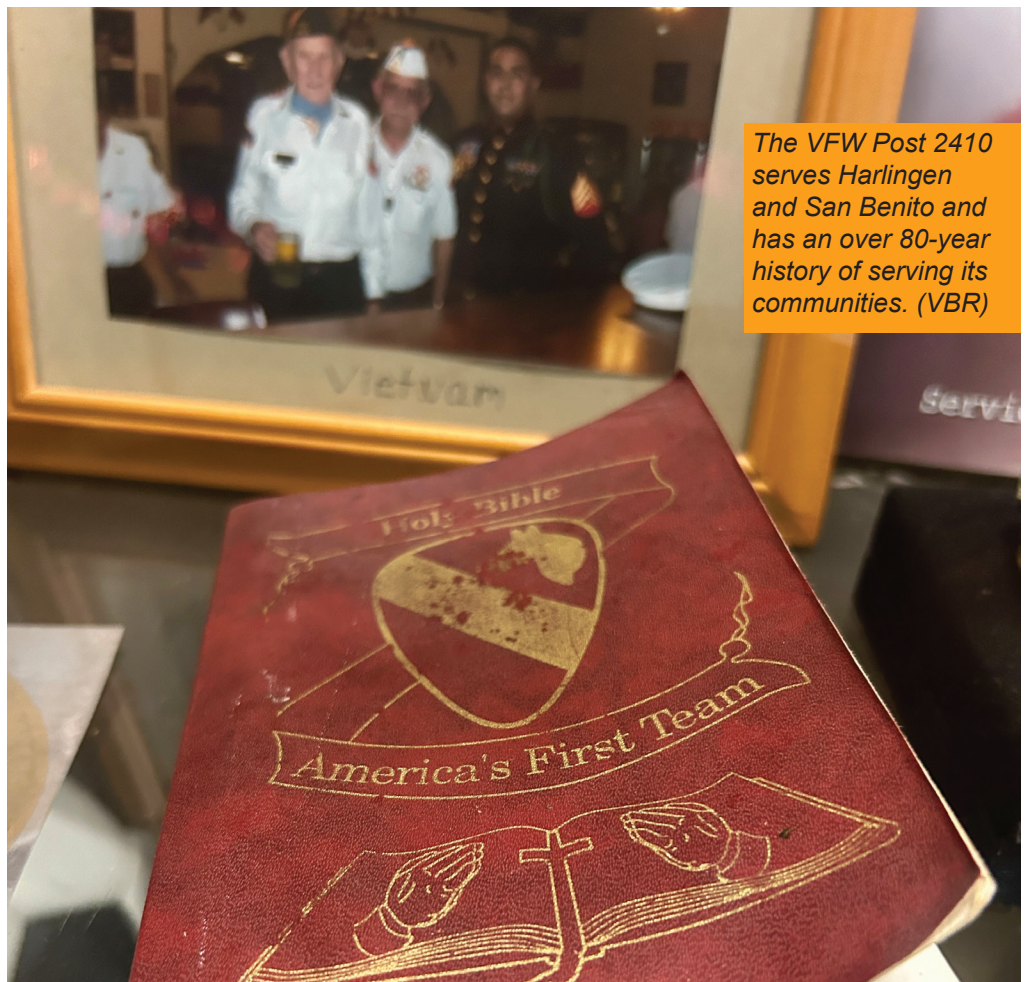
"It's crazy," Vilella said of how everything came together to benefit the Harlingen/San Benito-area vets. "It has been a long road. We were very fortunate Noble and the congressman came to us and in doing so, brought awareness to everyone they work with."

Post 2410 is hoping to have its new lodge in place by the end of 2025. For now, there's the matter of Toys For Tots and getting those gifts out to area children.

The VFW Post 2410 is located at 2006 N. Whalen Road in Harlingen and can be reached at 956-399-4011. For more information regarding Toys For Tots, call 760-201-9277 or email at harlingen.tx@toysfortots.org.



*A decades-old sign along Business 77 in Harlingen points toward a VFW post that has served the community for over 80 years. (VBR)*



*The VFW Post 2410 serves Harlingen and San Benito and has an over 80-year history of serving its communities. (VBR)*

# Iconic RGV Theater Endures & Thrives

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Camille Playhouse in Brownsville has a full season ahead and is looking to attract more Winter Texans to its community theater.

Two plays are in the books and four more are on the way. The next show up is “A Christmas Carol,” which has a run of six shows from Dec. 6 to the 13th. In January, there’s “Oklahoma!” and following in February is “Tartuffe.” The season will conclude with shows in April and May. The full schedule reflects how a community theater that got its start in 1963 has persevered through challenges and tough times.

“COVID really did a number on us,” said Martie DiGregorio, who chairs the theater’s board of directors. “We’re still recovering, and slowly but surely we’re making strides.”

The Brownsville theater kept its heartbeat going in 2020 and 2021 with remote performances to keep a flicker of local arts going during the limiting of public gatherings. Board member David Salinas says the community bolstered the Playhouse and kept it afloat when other theaters were forced to shut down permanently.

“We’re still here,” Salinas said. “Thanks to community support and donations we received, we’re not in that bucket (theater closures).”

## Winter Texan Focus

Brandon Binder grew up at the Camille Playhouse in attending the summer workshops for children and learning how to organize and put on productions.

Binder learned well and is today the Playhouse’s artistic director. He works with a large cast and team of actors, choreographers, musicians and stage hands in going through auditions and weeks of rehearsals before performing in front of live audiences. What makes it all the more impressive is that it’s a nearly all-volunteer effort. Binder is only one of two staffers on the payroll of the Camille Playhouse.

The theater appreciates everyone’s talents and contributions.

“We don’t turn anyone away,” DiGregorio said. “This is your community theater.”

That would include Winter Texans. Binder estimates that 30 percent of the Playhouse’s audience comes from the Winter Texan community. The theater is aiming for a bigger

Winter Texan following. The Playhouse’s advertising and marketing campaigns have been revised to focus more specifically on the Winter Texan market.

“We know they’re seeking things to do and events to attend,” DiGregorio said. “Community theaters are nationwide. Winter Texans may have had previous exposure to them and we’re happy to go to them and explain the services and shows we offer.”

Fellow board member Salinas affirmed that

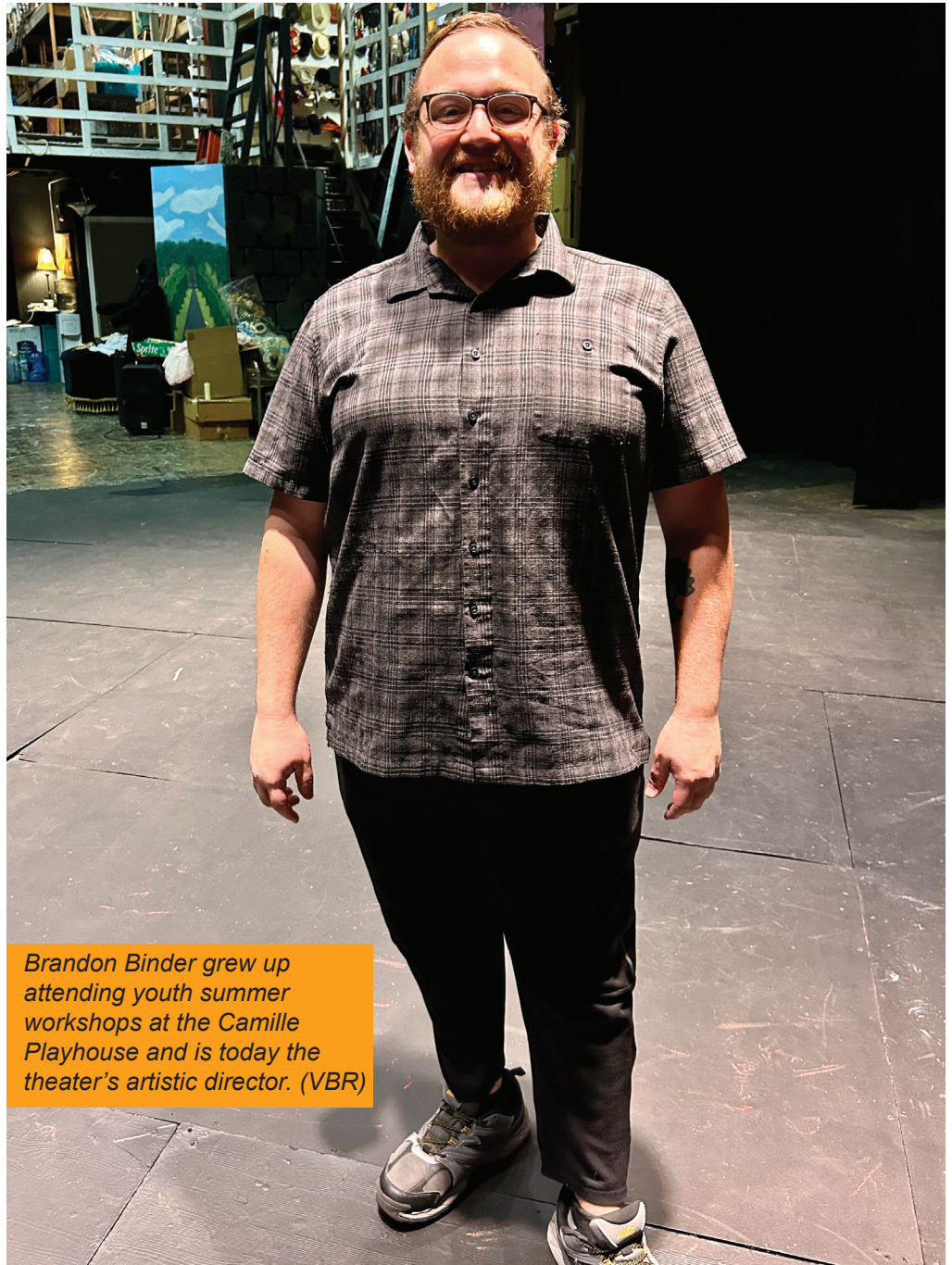
point.

“We don’t think Winter Texans have been focused on like we’re trying to do now,” he said. “We feel like there’s people in certain communities that haven’t heard of the productions that we do here.”

## Regaining Footing

Part of the Playhouse’s comeback is evident in the restoration of its second stage room.

It’s a beautiful grand room with new



*Brandon Binder grew up attending youth summer workshops at the Camille Playhouse and is today the theater’s artistic director. (VBR)*

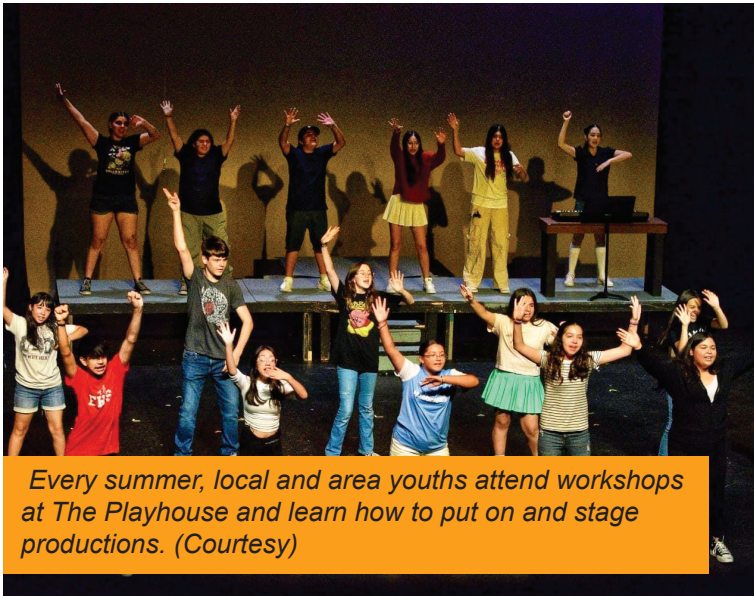
carpeting and stylish high windows near its ceiling that allow in generous amounts of natural light. The walls of the second stage room feature posters of shows from the different eras of the Camille Playhouse. It has served historically as the setting for smaller theater productions to complement the 300 seat-plus main stage where the musicals and classic plays are held.

Binder and the Playhouse's leadership are looking forward to the return of the smaller productions as part of what he calls "the stabilization of the past few years" as the theater continues to regain its footing.

"Poco a poco," said Binder of the step-by-step comeback of The Playhouse to having a full season of productions. "We've had our community and supporters there for us to help us stay afloat."

The Camille Playhouse is located at Dean Porter Park in Brownsville on Ringgold Road and is adjacent to Gladys Porter Zoo. For more information go to [camilleplayhouse.net](http://camilleplayhouse.net), or call 956-542-8900.

*All actors and participants in staging productions at The Playhouse are volunteers. (Courtesy)*



*Every summer, local and area youths attend workshops at The Playhouse and learn how to put on and stage productions. (Courtesy)*



*The Camille Playhouse's second stage room's renovation provides a setting for more intimate theater productions. (VBR)*



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# Winter Texans Host Global Tourney

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The facts and figures of the Winter Texan industry in the Rio Grande Valley are well-researched with data and statistics released every few years to gauge where things stand.

The latest figures from the UTRGV Business and Tourism Research Center show there are just under 100,000 Winter Texans in the region. They provide a nearly \$2 billion economic impact and support 10,000 jobs in the Valley. What can go unnoticed is what Winter Texan themselves do to promote the region and bring newcomers to the area.

The recent World Shuffleboard Championship in San Benito is an example of how Winter Texans elevate the Valley's profile with activities at the RV parks they populate. The shuffleboard championship took place at the Fun N Sun Resort, drawing in more than 80 participants from five countries. The designation of hosting such an event is not an easy gain. Originally granted in 2019, the RGV's hosting of the international event was to take place in 2020. It was canceled, like many other events that year due to limits on public gatherings.

It would take another four years to see shuffle-boarders from Germany, Brazil, the Netherlands, Canada and the United States gather in San Benito for the international event. Ann Engell, the local chairperson for the event, says it was worth the wait.

"We finally got it here," Engell said of the event, which ran from Oct. 28 to Nov. 1. "It has been really good in having people from all over the country and the world coming to visit the Valley."

## 'It's A Big Deal'

Garth Bakke describes himself as "a walking, talking billboard for the Rio Grande Valley."

He is a Canadian who winters in Weslaco. Bakke is also a shuffleboard player and enthusiastic Valley promoter. At the tournament, he analyzed the sport and its intricacies. He pointed out how players from different countries apply contrasting strategies to the game. Then Bakke moved quickly to discuss how he and other Winter Texans utilized the tournament to highlight Valley attractions.

"We've got SpaceX, South Padre Island and Mexico, where you can get dental work done at a lower cost," he said, alluding to Nuevo Progreso. "The whole world is getting to know us with SpaceX. We can use that to stimulate the economy."

With that in mind, the 84 shuffleboard tourney participants were treated to

dancing and dining in the area to go with pool parties.

"It's a big deal," Engell said of having the international tournament in the Valley. "They've enjoyed it. The feedback we're getting is that they didn't know how friendly the people are here."

One group the Winter Texans had their



*Eighty-four players from five countries participated recently at the 41st World Shuffleboard Championship at Fun N Sun Resort in San Benito. (VBR)*

eyes on were younger sets of tournament participants from Brooklyn and Chicago. Shuffleboard has the reputation of a game for retirees. The sport, however, is gaining something of a following from a younger generation of enthusiasts living in big cities. Their participation has been good for the sport, said Joe Blumenkemper Jr., a Winter Texan from St. Louis, and also may bring the Valley benefits in future years.

“Think of it like this,” said Blumenkemper, who participated in the tournament. “A younger player visiting here could be a future Winter Texan.”

**‘Bringing Everyone Together’**

Stefan Stadmueller is a committed shuffleboard player and world traveler who goes where the game takes him.

In this case, for the 59-year-old German, it was San Benito after a visit to the Riverwalk in San Antonio.

“This is my first time in Texas,” Stadmueller said. “I’ve enjoyed the games. People are very friendly here, and being from Germany, we are loving the warm weather.”

Stadmueller’s country will host the World Shuffleboard Championship next year.

“Shuffleboard still gets people out and moving,” Engells said, noting that pickleball has risen to become the favorite game among many Winter Texans.

Engells scanned the indoor courts where 84 players were shoving weighted bucks across playing surfaces and said hosting the tournament brought one other local benefit in addition to an economic one.

“It has been good for us too in bringing everyone here together at the beginning of the (Winter Texan) season,” she said.



*Shuffleboard is a game of strategy and placement and has recently begun attracting younger players in addition to retirees.(VBR)*



*Stefan Stadmueller traveled from Germany to participate at the World Shuffleboard Championship which took place recently in San Benito.(VBR)*



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# McAllen Festival Lights Up Holidays

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The McAllen Holiday Parade with its towering balloons and lighted extravaganza of features attracts tens of thousands of spectators. The massive event headlines Christmas celebrations in the city.

Yet, there is another holiday event in McAllen that quietly but surely has developed a following of its own. The South Pole Illuminated Festival, with its month-long run on the grounds of the McAllen Convention Center, now attracts 128,000 visitors annually. It features the country's tallest digital Christmas tree, an illuminated oval park

featuring 24 color-changing trees, a recreated snowfall and Santa's castle.

The illuminated festival also offers a walking journey through the grounds of the holiday festival with train rides, gingerbread house building and a holiday carnival. What started in 2020 as a drive-by/stay-in-your-car event has been transformed into an interactive/in-person experience.

"This event has really grown over the years," said Joe Garcia, the marketing and special events supervisor for the McAllen Convention Center and Performing Arts Center. "It has evolved into a

very walkable experience."

## Enhancing Quality of Life

The illuminated festival runs from Nov. 29 to Dec. 29. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, the festival's hours are from 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday operating hours are extended to 10:30 p.m. to accommodate larger crowds.

Tickets are available at the festival's entrance, although purchasing tickets beforehand is encouraged in case of event sell out days. Food trucks and a wide variety of food vendors are on

*The South Pole Illuminated Festival attracts over 100,000 visitors every year for a month-long event on the grounds of the McAllen Convention Center. (Courtesy)*



festival grounds and offer many tasty options.

Garcia says the development of the illuminated festival is one more attraction in a city that prides itself in boosting local quality of life with memorable events.

“We have a whole catalog of events,” he said. “The festival enhances the holiday experience in McAllen in addition to all of the excitement the parade provides.”

The big holiday parade occurs this year on Dec. 7. It attracts more than 260,000 spectators



*The South Pole Illuminated Festival's lineup is enjoyed by thousands of young visitors every year. (Courtesy)*



*Trees are lighted for the holidays on the spacious grounds of the McAllen Convention Center. (Courtesy)*



*The nation's tallest digital Christmas tree is a centerpiece attraction at South Pole Illuminated Festival. (Courtesy)*

and draws millions of viewers via social media, YouTube channels and local television broadcasts. It is a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade type of event in that it features giant balloons and fabulous floats. The Christmas parade is the linchpin of McAllen's development of events in arts and culture in making itself a festival city.

**World Festival City**

The development of events is such that the International Festival and Event Association has recognized McAllen as a world festival and event city.

Joe Vera, an assistant city manager, has said the holiday parade has "set the pace" for McAllen becoming a festival city. The illuminated festival is certainly in the mix of those festivals. Planning for it is a year-round event, said Garcia, the marketing and events supervisor. Unlike the parade, the illuminated festival is not a single-day event and is structured to accommodate the work and school schedules of area families so they have many days to attend the event.

"We think the festival has a lot to offer," he said. "We have a 118-foot-high Christmas tree. It's the largest in the United States and we have it here in McAllen."

Children enjoy visits with Santa during the South Pole Illuminated Festival in McAllen. (Courtesy)







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# New CEO Finds Harbor In Brownsville

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

William Dietrich was fresh out of college after serving in the U.S. Army when deciding he wanted to be a police officer.

That ambition brought him to Brownsville. The city's police department was hiring and Dietrich went to where the job was being offered. Starting as a police officer, he saw the job as a stepping stone that would soon enough take him out of Brownsville. The first scenario may have been true but the latter was not as the Seattle native found a place he wanted to stay in deep South Texas.

"I fell in love with the community," Dietrich said of Brownsville. "There were so many aspects that I came to enjoy and appreciate."

He would work for over two decades in the Brownsville Police Department. Dietrich would rise in the ranks to occupy some of the highest levels of command in the department. In 2022, an opportunity arose at the Port of Brownsville. He applied for and would be hired to be the port's chief of police. The post required oversight of a department that is tasked with the security of 40,000 acres and 62 square miles. There were also overlapping jurisdictions to deal with in working alongside federal and state agencies that have operations within the port's boundaries.

## Serving Others

Those two years as the port's police chief gave Dietrich the opportunity to get a grasp of working at the harbor and understanding what it takes to keep commerce moving at one of the nation's top five export ports. In 2024, the port's chief executive officer position became open with the retirement of its longtime leader, Eduardo Campirano.

"It was never my intention in starting at the port to seek the position," Dietrich said of the CEO job. "In moving along and understanding the port, I knew it was something I could manage."

The Brownsville Navigation District's Board of Commissioners would agree.

After designating Dietrich as the interim CEO, the BND board in August 2024 officially hired Dietrich to be the port's new director and CEO. The one-time police officer would have never imagined that years later he would manage the operations of a port. Dietrich is a believer in servant leadership where the whole of a team is greater than one single person.

"The port should never be associated with just one person," he said. "People should think of the 145 people who work here. No matter what job you get, everything gets done through the people on your staff."

Coming into the port CEO job with a law enforcement background instead of the usual business pedigree brings a different dynamic to the leadership post. Dietrich says it's something he and the BND board discussed. The ultimate call was to stay with a proven port leader who knew the staff and current management team in providing continuity.

"We have a culture where we support each other," he said. "We have the same management team in place with deep industry knowledge. It's fluid with a structure I can lean on. I'm the

beneficiary of the team we have in place."

## Adding Value

Dietrich takes the helm of the port at a time of significant growth.

Cargo tonnage is up by over 15 percent since 2023. There were over 2,500 vessel/ship calls in 2023, which at that time represented a 46 percent increase from the previous year. Operating revenues continue to grow year over year and now surpass \$40 million. The port's foreign trade zone is among the nation's leaders in exports, ranking second in recent years.

The port is one of the Rio Grande Valley's largest job-generating areas. There are over 5,000 private sector jobs just in the turning



*William Dietrich, who has an extensive background in law enforcement work and leadership, became the Port of Brownsville's CEO in August. (Courtesy)*

basin. The liquefied natural gas plants being built at the port have already added over 1,000 jobs to area payrolls.

All of those figures are impressive and Dietrich says the port is striving to be more than a go-through harbor. A big picture goal is to make the port a place where value is added to some of the raw materials and products shipped to the Brownsville harbor. The tons of steel exported to Mexico are an example. Dietrich says having industries that can take iron ore and scrap steel and make viable commercial products adds value. It would capture more capital at the port.

“We’ve got the workforce and we’re in a good position globally,” he said of the port’s value-added aspirations.

Dietrich is working to make that goal more of a reality with a team ready made for the type of leadership he is providing as the port’s new chief executive officer.

*Over 2,500 vessels/ships utilize the Port of Brownsville every year, with double-digit yearly percent growth reported in recent years for ship calls. (Courtesy)*



*The Port of Brownsville ranks as one of the nation’s top five export ports and has over 5,000 private sector jobs employed in its turning basin. (Courtesy)*



# McAllen Students Reach Elite Level

By Chris Ardis

The Lamar Academy IB Science Olympiad Team will represent McAllen and South Texas at the 11th annual MIT Science Olympiad Invitation Tournament in January 2025.

The students sat around a large table in the science lab at Lamar Academy in McAllen.

Their exuberance felt palpable, smiling as their teammates spoke. The Lamar Academy International Baccalaureate Science Olympiad Team discussed how they got to this point.

In January, the 20-member team will travel to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass. to compete against 65 other teams in a national tournament.

The Lamar Academy Team is the only South Texas team competing in the 11th annual MIT Science Olympiad Invitational

Tournament.

Jose Luis Gomez, their coach, accepted the role in 2018 when he started teaching at the Lamar Academy. The team placed 29th at a state tournament in his first year as coach.

Each year, they have moved up in rank, placing fifth in the state at the Texas Science Olympiad in spring 2024. The team has held the title of regional champions for eight years.

They did not gain guaranteed acceptance to the MIT tournament, which requires placing in the top 10 at nationals. They instead entered the tournament's lottery. The lottery goal, according to the event website, is "to maintain a diverse pool of competitors while also upholding the rigor of our tournament."

They are the first Lamar Academy and

McAllen school district team selected for the national tournament.

## Testing & Practicing

Gomez has developed a well-oiled Science Olympiad machine.

He holds a meeting for all Lamar IB students on the first day of each school year to share information about joining the team. Prospective Science Olympians take a rigorous test, which is followed by an engineering activity and an interview. Students are evaluated based on hard skills, as well as their ability to communicate, work collaboratively, and persevere in stressful situations.

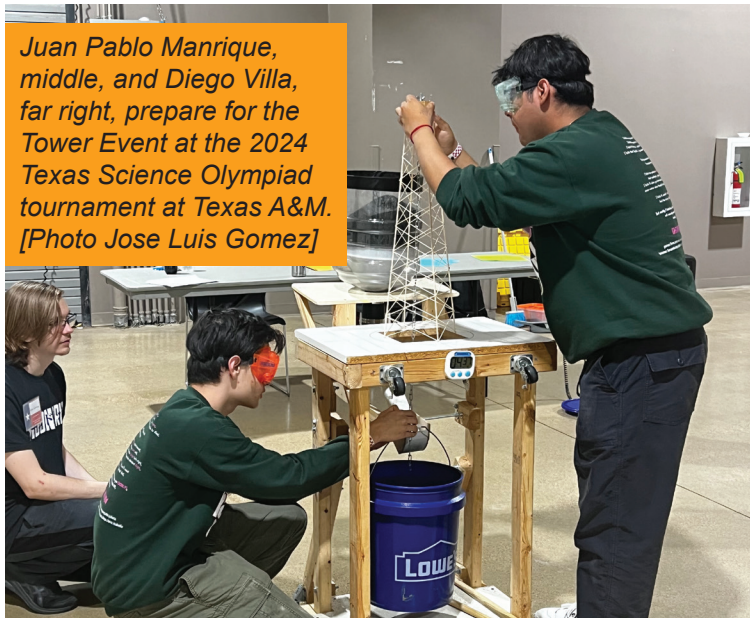
Science Olympiad is a nonprofit STEM



Lamar Academy Science Olympiad 2024-2025 captains Gouri Menon, Isabella Brenner, Alex Reyes and Anthony Ha. [Photo Jose Luis Gomez]



Using their analytical skills, the Lamar Academy IB Science Olympiad Team creates "M-I-T" as they prepare for their tournament in Cambridge, Mass. in January. (Courtesy)



Juan Pablo Manrique, middle, and Diego Villa, far right, prepare for the Tower Event at the 2024 Texas Science Olympiad tournament at Texas A&M. [Photo Jose Luis Gomez]



Lamar Academy's Arianna Guzman, left, and Diego Villa rely on their engineering knowledge, research and extensive trial and error during the Scrambler Event at the 2024 State tournament at Texas A&M. [Photo Jose Luis Gomez]

competition. Events include genetics, chemistry, physics, geology, engineering and more. Two undergraduate MIT students founded the Science Olympiad Invitational in 2013. MIT undergraduates run the entire event.

The SciOly tournaments include two categories, test events and build events. The MIT Invitational includes all 23 Division C (high school) national events, and teams of two to three students compete in each one. Rules, guidelines and that year's builds are provided at the start of each school year. Collaboration, creating builds and materials, trial and error, and logging results begin immediately.

Junior captain Anthony Ha explained that build events are hands-on. Students create, research and repeatedly test their builds. He and his teammate have worked all year to perfect their free-flight, rubber-powered helicopter for one event.

For testing events, students develop a cheat sheet or binder, depending on the tournament. The trick rests in knowing what to include. Builds are heavily guarded by each team, including covering the sides of the bins they take to competitions to avoid tempting other teams.

**Building Teamwork**

The Lamar Academy Team meets three afternoons a week and the sessions run until about 6 p.m. There are also many Saturday meetings and practices that can go from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

As competitions near, team members meet daily, except on Sundays. Spending this much time together creates more than excellent builds.

“The events are great and winning is great, but I think the people you meet are the most important thing,” said Isabella Brenner, a senior captain.

Tracy Pham, a senior, agrees, saying, “The people you surround yourself with are very influential to your growth.”

Lamar Olympians have test-offs, as needed, for event spots, which one might think would create team rifts.

“It takes a great deal of maturity, but everyone on the team understands the best of the best compete at these competitions,” said Gouri Merion, a junior captain. “Ultimately, this is a team competition, not a solo.”

Sofia Obregon, a senior, recalls losing a test-off and “never felt excluded.”

Not only the builds are trial and error. So, too, is each competition.

“We were gauging how we are going to approach MIT,” said Alejandro Reyes, a junior.

Brenner credits Gomez for being such an exemplary coach.

“He motivates us so much,” she said.

Merion said Gomez taught his students that discipline will take them only so far.

“There is this whole duality between passion and discipline,”

Merion said. “Discipline comes in when we make our cheat sheets and binders, meet deadlines, and hold ourselves accountable.

“But Mr. Gomez mentions that discipline is nothing without passion,” she said. “We have that passion for ourselves but also for others, to see them place in the competition. The major take away is how we balance discipline and passion.”

*Note: Each of the 20 Lamar Science Olympians will pay a portion of the cost to attend the MIT Invitational. They have also collected \$7,000 in donations. The team is still seeking sponsors for the remaining \$5,000 needed to fund their trip because the school district is unable to assist.*



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