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Remember, Seasons Are Seasonal

By Todd Breland

A recent run-in with a friend and VBR reader sparked some thoughts, and Janine's perspective is gold.

There is nothing brand new about the words I'm sharing with you this month, but there are gems to focus on when we're persevering during highs and lows.

Seasons are just that. Mother Nature's laws are inevitable; periods of changes keep us in check. Our businesses run like our personal lives so we're always straddling the fence of how long will this increase continue, and will this downfall ever end.

The rains come, and the sun shines. Deep South Texas heat scorches us for three quarters of the year, and it snows Christmas morning 2004. Trying to figure out exactly when peak seasons will be and for how long combined with the uncertainty of a drought's duration is exhausting.

Being prepared for the seasonal ups and downs and knowing they won't last is the battle. Our companies' positive trend of increased revenues will experience levelness and even a downward run. A seasonal drought will happen and when we press forward and stick it out, we will see an upward turn. Every organization sees change.

The nature of business is constant. Things will never be always perfect, and rough times don't have to last forever. We take on the challenges like a bull in the Coliseum, and we enjoy a positive ride while knowing a bump in the road will come. Business is life, and life is business.

Seasonal seasons happen. So do we. We are the Rio Grande Valley, and we endure. Enjoy the new year, VBR family and friends.

God bless our 2025.



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Bequita's Flowers Sees A Vision Bloom

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Rebecca Rodriguez describes herself as being a florist – and a farmer.

The latter is a distinction well-earned given Rodriguez grows many of the flowers she sells at her shop in Harlingen. Rodriguez tills the soil and grows an array of flowers at a family farm located between Harlingen and Santa Rosa. Her farm-grown flowers include marigolds, zinnias, cosmos and anemones. She refers to the farm-to-shop model as being “sustainably grown flowers” that offers her customers a fresh alternative to go local.

The Edinburg native got a view of that while living in Connecticut and seeing an array of shops in walk-around areas. Rodriguez is now emulating that concept in Harlingen. Rodriguez's Bequita's Blooms & Botanicals is located on an artsy stretch of West Van Buren Avenue in Harlingen. It fits the bill for what she envisioned while living in Connecticut. Returning home in early 2021, Rodriguez set out to establish her flower farm and seek the ultimate goal of having a storefront.

“I really fell in love with flowers and the shops and farms I saw up there,” she said. “That’s where I got my inspiration. I wanted to go back home and try it out.”

Getting Started

Rodriguez, like many entrepreneurs, started with a business based out of her home – or in this case a farm.

She planted the first seeds for her business in the fall of 2020 on a visit home. Rodriguez knew a return to the Rio Grande Valley would follow soon thereafter. Her first flowers were sprouting when she got back in early 2021. Bequita's was in business. She encouraged her customers to visit the farm and enjoy the rural atmosphere on state Highway 107 along with the homemade biscuits provided by her mother.

Rodriguez also took her RGV-grown flowers and brand to area markets and did some pop-up retailing to expand awareness of her products. Business opportunities came along with floral arrangements for weddings, baby showers and holidays, especially Valentine's Day. Rodriguez over the course of three years was building up to having a storefront, which she viewed as a

business necessity.

“I needed a place where people are walking around and I could get some foot traffic,” she said. “It’s hard to get walk-ins on 107.”

'Cool Area'

One area Rodriguez could imagine getting that foot traffic was on the 400

block of West Van Buren near downtown Harlingen.

She became acquainted with that part of the city during her visits to Bandera Coffee, a popular indie coffee shop in Harlingen. Another local favorite, Don Gollito restaurant, is a neighboring business. This section of Van Buren also includes arts and ceramic shops along with an upscale



Rebecca Rodriguez describes herself as a florist and farmer in opening her business in Harlingen. (VBR)

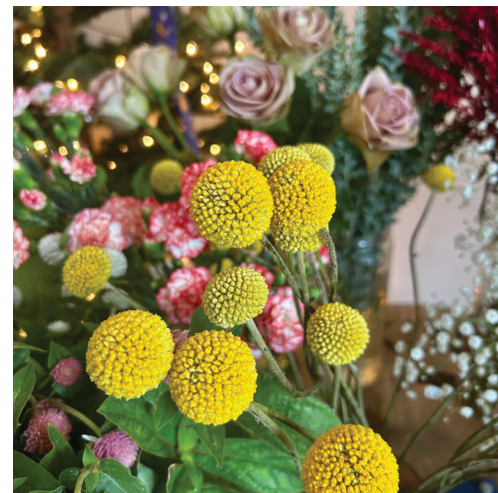
martini lounge.

A next-door space to Bandera opened up in mid-2024 and Rodriguez decided to seize upon the availability. Opening in September, she began arranging and organizing her shop with flowers, books, accessories and other knick-knacks that gives customers a sense of ease and calm upon walking into Bequita's.

A street veggie-food festival event occurred not long after Rodriguez opened her business. It led to sell-outs of her flowers.

"I think this is a cool area," she said. "It's walkable."

And big windows upfront, she says, "are perfect" in displaying her flowers and inventory.



Bequita's in Harlingen offers locally grown flowers along with selections from elsewhere to brighten up the holidays. (VBR)



Bequita's Blooms in Harlingen is located along an artsy section of west Van Buren in Harlingen that includes a coffee shop, restaurant and ceramic/arts businesses. (VBR)

Offering Insights

The mix of customers at Bequita’s ranges from gardeners who know everything to newbies looking to get started.

A customer during a recent afternoon asked for Rodriguez’s advice on indoor plants, which is one of Bequita’s specialties. She can also offer plenty of insights on what flowers to plant and the right seasons to grow them amidst the usually warm and humid Valley climate.

“Many of my customers want to start growing but don’t know where to start,” Rodriguez said. “I try to guide them.”

Rodriguez says a longtime interest in interior design leads her to creatively tinkering with the look and feel of her shop. It would appear she has achieved the feel and vibe of the shops in New England that sparked an inspiration to open a business that is similar but unique to where she grew up. The RGV-grown flowers affirm she is back home.

Bequita’s Blooms & Botanicals is located at 413 W. Van Buren Avenue in Harlingen and opens daily – except Mondays – at 11 a.m. Rodriguez’s business number is 956-320-8575. Bequita’s products and photos can be found on Instagram and Facebook.



Bequita’s in Harlingen was properly adorned with holiday cheer. (VBR)



Bequita’s Blooms offers books, plants and insights at a shop near downtown Harlingen. (VBR)

Fun Runs & Marathon Enhance Community Life

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A 10K race that started in the early 1980s as a way to honor a beloved school teacher and running advocate in Edinburg has gone from lean beginnings to an event that attracts over 10,000 participants.

The namesake of the All-America City David Chavana 10K Run/Walk has called the event and others connected to it as being a “big time race for a small town.” Organizing the yearly event in early February now requires year-round planning by the Edinburg Parks & Recreation Department.

“It has become a tradition in the city,” said Eric Molina, the assistant parks and recreation director. “It has become one of the biggest races of its kind in the state.”

Molina said last year’s Chavana run and walk event drew 10,476 participants. He

expects at least that many if not more for the 43rd edition to take place on Feb. 1. Race participants will include thousands of local and Rio Grande Valley residents who will run and walk in three events. One is the main 10K run that offers cash prizes of up to \$2,200 for top female and male runners. Elite runners from Mexico, Kenya, Australia and Germany come to Edinburg to compete for those top prizes.

There’s also a long list of cash prizes in other categories that includes top runners of ages 40 and above and awards for top runners who are first responders. And there’s more. A two-mile fun run makes its way down Closner Boulevard (Edinburg’s main street) and a Miracle Mile featuring special needs children at the Richard R. Flores Stadium.

The race and its related events have scaled up over the years and although it has gone “big time,” the inspiration for it all adds words of caution and advice.

“We don’t ever want to lose why we started and that we do it for the kids,” David Chavana has said in news reports.

Mercedes Momentum

The Chavana run and others like it demonstrate how signature events can come to define communities.

Mercedes, for example, has been long known for its annual livestock show. Basilio Mendoza would like it to be known as a prime spot for late year marathons in Texas. On Dec. 8, Mendoza, with the support of community leaders, staged the second edition of the South Texas

The All-America City David Chavana 10K Run/Walk has become one of the largest events of its kind in Texas. (Courtesy)



International Marathon. The route of the 26.2-mile run also ran through neighboring Mid-Valley cities. The event incorporated a separate run - a half marathon – that started and ended in Mercedes. Both races and their courses were certified by the Track & Field Association.

The latter is important because the times recorded can be used to qualify for major events like the Boston Marathon. Mendoza, a longtime runner and former track coach at area high schools, sees the upside of the Mercedes marathon. He says late year events can be used by competitive runners to post better times in bolstering qualifications for major events in the coming year.

“We’re planting this little seed in Mercedes,” Mendoza said. “We have this vision with Mercedes that this event can turn into something big.”

Just like the Chavana run that started with modest goals over four decades ago in Edinburg.

Making It Bigger

The Chavana 10K has come to incorporate thousands of children from the local school district.

Special needs students from the Edinburg school district participate in a fun run at the football stadium. The event inside-the-event has become a major piece of the yearly celebration. Physical education teachers from the district work with race organizers in making it an even more robust event.

“Everyone looks forward to it,” Molina said of the 10K Run/Walk. “It’s a beautiful thing to witness it and seeing it all come together.”

Information about the Chavana 10K Run/Walk can be found at activeedinburg.com.



Two runners exude fitness during the recent South Texas International Marathon. (Courtesy)



Hitting the 6-mile Mark with about 20 to go in the South Texas International Marathon. (Courtesy)



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South Texas ISD Celebrates 60 Years

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A school district that began in 1964 as a rehabilitation facility and today has career and technical campuses across two counties is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

The South Texas Independent School District is based in Mercedes – the city where it got started – and grown far beyond its original mission. In the mid-1980s, the district opened South Texas High School for Health Professions (Med High). It was the first of what would become a network of magnet schools in the Rio Grande Valley. From there, the district would grow to having multiple campuses – covering grades 6-12 – in Mercedes, Edinburg, San Benito and Brownsville/Olmito.

The growing district would need a bigger central office with more capabilities. It achieved that at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year with the opening of a new

45,000-square-foot administrative and learning center in Mercedes. The official grand opening of the new facility did not celebrate its official grand opening until late 2024. The public unveiling of the district's new headquarters was held in conjunction with the district marking its 60th anniversary.

"It's such a milestone for us," said Amanda Odom, the district's administrator for public relations and marketing. "We wanted to combine our official grand opening with our 60th anniversary."

Milestones

The grand opening event was also something of a milestone for the city of Mercedes.

The community has seen the regional school district blossom from its original

campus site on N Mile 2 W Road near Expressway 83 to now having six schools in Hidalgo and Cameron counties.

Mercedes Mayor Oscar Montoya noted the importance the school district has had in the life of his community over the last six decades.

"What you gave us is a flagship," Montoya said at the grand opening, which included a ribbon cutting hosted by the Mercedes Chamber of Commerce. "We really appreciate that, the vibrancy of it, the fact that you've made a difference in our town."

The new administrative and learning center is located along Expressway 83, just east of the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlets. South Texas ISD purchased a vacant building about four years ago that once housed a furniture store. The



Community leaders from Mercedes and other RGV cities join South Texas ISD leadership for a late-2024 ribbon cutting of the district's new administrative headquarters. (VBR)

repurposing and redesigning of the building was a lengthy process. For Mercedes and its mayor, it was worth the wait. The new facility adds to what city leaders say is imminent retail and business development in the immediate area.

“This building adds to the motif of the area,” Mayor Montoya said. “It’s a beautiful building and a strong structure that adds vibrancy to this whole area.”

Reaching Out

The new regional facility is bringing more traffic and visitors to Mercedes and the Mid-Valley.

It is not only an administrative hub for the South Texas ISD. The facility also serves a site for professional development for teachers and staff. Students from the different campuses come to the central facility for student activities. At its core, the district is still likely most known for its health care-related programs. It has, however, branched out extensively over the years to include studies in engineering, information technologies and law and public service.

Odem says non-district entities will utilize the new administrative building for meeting and events. It’s a way for South Texas ISD to connect to area communities. The district is also reaching out to rural RGV school districts such as those in La Villa in Rio Hondo to marshal resources for special education cooperatives.

The district serves Willacy County along with Cameron and Hidalgo. A Mercedes location for the new district hub, Odem says, is “a perfect location in being central to the three counties we serve.”

A snip of the ribbon made it official. Sixty years in Mercedes with more to come.



South Texas ISD has vastly expanded its programs of studies over the last 60 years in the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)



The South Texas Independent School District offers a wide variety of programs, with its signature fields of study being health professions and the sciences. (VBR)

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Arts Center ‘Sparks New Era’ In Edinburg

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Edinburg’s opening of its new Arts & Cultural Events Center marks a new commitment by the community to build upon its “city of festivals” designation.

The 36,000-square-foot facility was opened with much fanfare in late 2024. Having such a downtown-area venue to host art exhibits, live performances and community events has long been a dream for Edinburg leaders active in local arts. The Edinburg Arts & Cultural Center is located on McIntyre Street near City Hall. It fronts a Promenade Park that is the site of numerous street festivals and events. An

amphitheater opened in recent years just down the street from the new center and has added a new element to community life.

The ACE, as Edinburg leaders call the new facility, will serve as an administrative hub for a wing of city government dedicated to arts and cultural events. Beyond the planning and coordinating of events, the ACE is envisioned as a living embodiment of the arts in Edinburg with dance and art classes and discussions about film making and theater.

“This is a place where we’re going,” said Letty Leija, the director of library and cultural arts in Edinburg. “It’s not just a building but a center for learning. Emerging artists will come here to learn new skills. For the community, it’s a place where they’re going to come and celebrate the arts.”

Highlights City

The \$15 million facility is located amidst one of Edinburg’s more historic sections of town.

It sits on the site of what for decades



Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza speaks at the dedication of the new ACE center near the city’s downtown area. (Courtesy)

was Sam Houston Elementary School, which was one of the city's first schools. Across from the ACE is the original site of Edinburg Junior School, the forerunner to Pan American University and today's UT-Rio Grande Valley. A 1920s-era auditorium that was one of the original junior college buildings still stands today and is used for various community events.

In today's Edinburg, the city's population has surged beyond 100,000 residents. It's among the fastest-growing cities of its size in the United States. The city's mayor, Ramiro Garza, has said Edinburg must go beyond brick-and-mortar development and infrastructure



The new Arts & Cultural Events Center in Edinburg marks a new era in the city's 'creative tourism.' (Courtesy)



The new Edinburg ACE building is now a focal point for arts in the city. (Courtesy)



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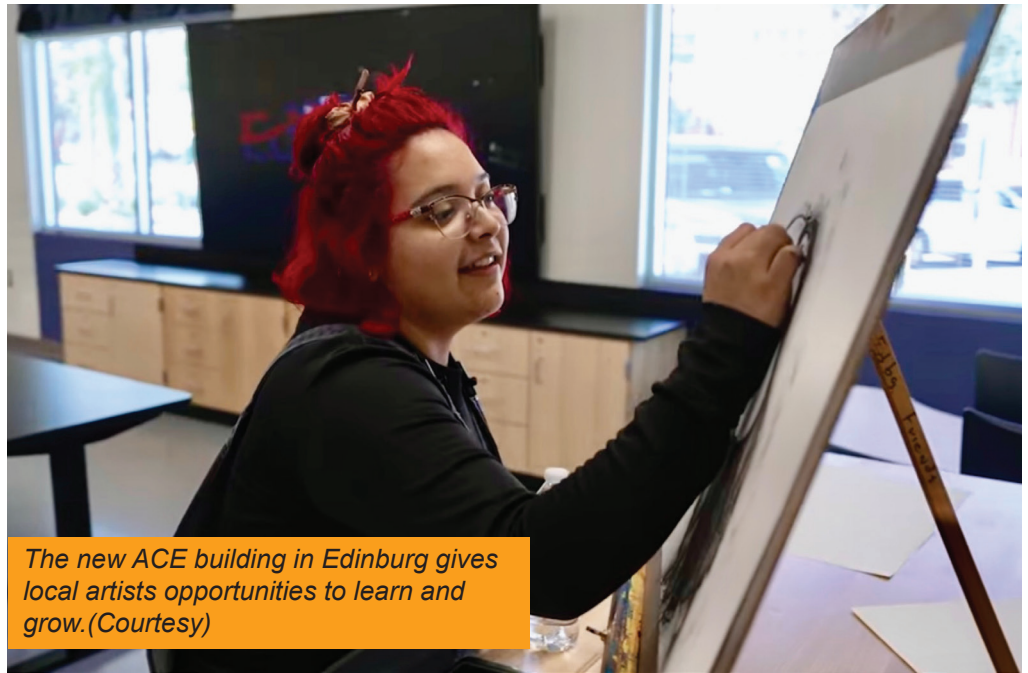
upgrades and provide quality-of-life aspects and things to do in town. The numerous monthly festivals that include celebrating famed Mexican artist Frida Kahlo and live music events at the Promenade Park have become staples in Edinburg.

The new ACE, said city Commissioner Daniel Diaz, now becomes the focal point in organizing and adding to the menu of events.

“We’re known as the city of festivals but we didn’t have anything to kind of help tie it all together,” Diaz said. “We needed event space.”

The opening of the ACE “sparks a new era,” Diaz said

“It really highlights our city,” he said. “It’s an economic driver.”



The new ACE building in Edinburg gives local artists opportunities to learn and grow. (Courtesy)

‘Creative Tourism’

Leija, the city’s cultural arts director, says Edinburg attracts over 30,000 visitors a year to its ongoing festivals and events.

She calls it “creative tourism.” There will likely be much more of it in the coming years in Edinburg.

“We hope the ACE becomes a magnet for artists and artists-in-residence, as well as painters, muralists and dancers,” said Dr. Kimberly Selber, a UTRGV communications professor and a member of the city’s Cultural Activities Board. “We want this to be a place where children grow up and have the arts as part of their everyday life.”

Go to edinburgarts.com for more information about the ACE and arts events in the city.



Dance is among the arts that are featured at the new ACE center in Edinburg. (Courtesy)

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Elsa Imagines Delta Area On Ice

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Kristyna Mancias spent eight years at the McAllen Parks and Recreation Department in seeing the impact a range of events can have on a city.

Her last job in McAllen was superintendent of athletics of the city's park and recreation department. In June 2023, Mancias decided to make the move to run and manage her own department as the city of Elsa's director of recreation and communications. It represented a huge shift in city size and scale of a department dedicated to parks and recreation in a community. McAllen's Park and Recreation Department on its own has more employees than the entire city of Elsa workforce.

The parks and recreation department in Elsa consists of Mancias and three staffers. It's big enough for Mancias to have implemented a slew of new programs in Elsa. Youth sports leagues have been organized and launched. Programs for seniors were established. Special events like a recent one featuring Halloween festivities drew over 3,000 visitors.

"Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't do big things," Mancias said.

'Why Not?'

For Christmas and the holiday season, Mancias was true to those words by imagining and then executing an event she entitled "Elsa on Ice."

It's a 20,000-square-foot surface of frozen synthetic ice that is laid down at The Garden at Pacific Trails in Elsa. It debuted on Dec. 13 to hundreds of Delta Area residents who were eager to experience the ice-skating experience in a community that not long ago had a largely dormant parks and rec department.

"I heard 'why Elsa?'" Mancias recalled when pitching the idea of a holiday-time ice rink. "I said, 'why not?'"

Mancias did her research and found a Dallas-based company that sets up and rents out the equipment and materials needed for ice rinks. It may not be the real thing as in a truly frozen ice pond. It's close enough for a semi-tropical region like the Rio Grande Valley where a snowfall can be a once-every-50-years event. It was a one-day setup in mid-December when the Dallas company and Elsa public works

employees collaborated to lay down the surface that would become a temporary but real-enough ice rink.

"We wanted to bring the wow factor here for the holidays this year," Mancias said as she watched the workers lay out the rink. "I

think we're going to do just that with Elsa on Ice."

Community Pride

The Elsa on Ice event is indicative of how the role of parks and rec departments



Kristyna Mancias has brought a new spirit to Elsa as the city's director of recreation and communications. (VBR)

have evolved over the years.

It's no longer just about cutting grass at parks and making sure they are properly maintained. That remains a core function, but now it's just as much about sports and leagues and youths being kept busy and engaged with after school activities. There are events to think up and organize, be it the big Christmas parade with giant balloons in McAllen, or the more modest but still important Elsa on Ice where Delta Area kids experience ice skating for the first time.

"I think something like this is a perfect opportunity to do the kind of things they haven't had here before," Mancias said of the holiday ice skating in Elsa. "It's about having activities and events for not only our community, but all of the Delta Area communities. I think it helps to build pride in your community."

Elsa on Ice continues through Jan. 10 at The Garden at Pacific Trails in Elsa with gates opening daily at 6 p.m. There is an admission price per child and adult and skates and other equipment for beginning skaters is provided.

Ice skating shoes are lined up and ready to go for Elsa on Ice. (VBR)



Delta Area families are enjoying the holidays with the Elsa on Ice event at The Garden at Pacific Trails. (Courtesy)



It's fun galore for Delta Area youth at Elsa on Ice. (Courtesy)

Entrepreneur Builds Brands & Positivity

By Chris Ardis

Gaby Cueva doesn't mind being seen as a disruptor.

In fact, she wears the label with pride. A disruptor was formerly referred to as an individual who causes disturbances or chaos. Today, the term also denotes a person who causes a noticeable or even radical change in a market through innovation.

Cueva has been disrupting the taco and café scene in the upper Rio Grande Valley in recent years, and she's just getting started. She is a McAllen native and graduated from McAllen Memorial High School. Cueva went on to earn a bachelor's degree in fine art from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She was a college graduate at only 20 and knew a traditional nine-to-five job was not for her.

"I have the mindset that I have to love what I do," she said.

In college, she learned a wide range of theory, but she knew it would take relevant practice to develop her skills. She sees herself as a perpetual student, always wanting to learn as much as she can about food, photography, business, marketing and, of course, innovation.

Being Consistent

After college, Cueva created her own studio, focused on branding and marketing restaurants.

Branding involves selecting a logo, colors, a vibe you want customers to feel and even a smell.

"The key is to always be consistent," Cueva said. "You want to show the voice of your business and the only way to do that is through your branding."

Cueva built her clientele, offering her new-media skills and creativity. Cueva developed invaluable insights while working for her clients.

"I thought about what I would change, how I would make customers feel special and how I could offer products no one else has," she said. "I knew I would make my products from scratch, handcrafted."

Branching Out To Business

In the early 2020s, many companies cut costs wherever they could, including marketing, amid economic difficulties.

Cueva is a master baker and began selling six-packs and 12-packs of cookies, as well

as premium cakes. Her customer base, which included local restaurants, surged throughout 2022.

"It got crazy," she said. "My dad would wake up at 4 a.m. to help me."

Cueva traveled whenever she could. Each trip ignited her inner foodie and that always seemed to interconnect with innovation. She

visualized her own business, researching names with friends.

"There's always been a battle between the French and the Italians over who makes the best pastries," Cueva said. "I liked the aesthetics of *rossina*, which means rose."

Rossina is synonymous with elegance and grace. Cueva spent hours on YouTube



Twenty-seven-year-old Gaby Cueva at one of three Rossina locations. The McAllen native also owns Taqueria Los Cuates in Mission. (Photo Gaby Cueva)

and on Adobe programs, creating the packaging for the business she envisioned. A good friend urged her to launch her endeavor. It was the push she needed. In December 2022, Cueva opened her first Rossina location along Expressway 83 in McAllen, featuring pastries, cakes and coffee drinks.

Traveling in Mexico inspired Cueva’s passion for taquerias. She opened her own version in May 2024 with Los Cuates in Mission. A month later, Rossina joined the mix of restaurants at La Plaza Mall in McAllen with a café. In October 2024, Cueva further expanded her business portfolio. She opened a third Rossina location in McAllen on North 10th and Jonquil, transforming a one-time Whataburger into a comfy café.

Positivity Vibe

Cueva is determined to disrupt what many people may think when they see *taqueria*.

She focuses on quality, great customer service and atmosphere.

“Our cuts of meat are high quality,” she said. “We make all of our own salsas, our peanut sauce and our tortillas. And our ambiance



Gaby Cueva meticulously chose lighting, flooring, colors and all other details to create the Rossina vibe. (Photo Gaby Cueva)



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is completely different than a traditional taqueria. It has all the vibes.”

Customer favorites at Los Cuates in Mission include the papa asada with fajita, trompo tacos, street-style corn in a cup, aqua frescas and micheladas. She aims for the same kind of quality at her Rossina locations.

“We use agave from Jalisco (Mexico), matcha from Kyoto (Japan), coffee from Chiapas (Mexico), and chocolate from Belgium,” she said. “All of our products are sourced from their origin. The food here is comforting. It’s something your abuela would make.”

At Rossina, customers crave the blondie drink, the strawberry mostachón and the club sandwich, the café’s top seller. They also serve up smoothies and bowls, avocado toast, bagels, pastries, lattes and much more. You can see Cueva’s branding expertise in everything at Rossina and Los Cuates. It’s in the consistency of the colors she uses, the packaging of her products and in the distinct energy in each location.

All of Cueva’s locations are pet-and people-friendly. Friendliness resonates at Rossina and Los Cuates.

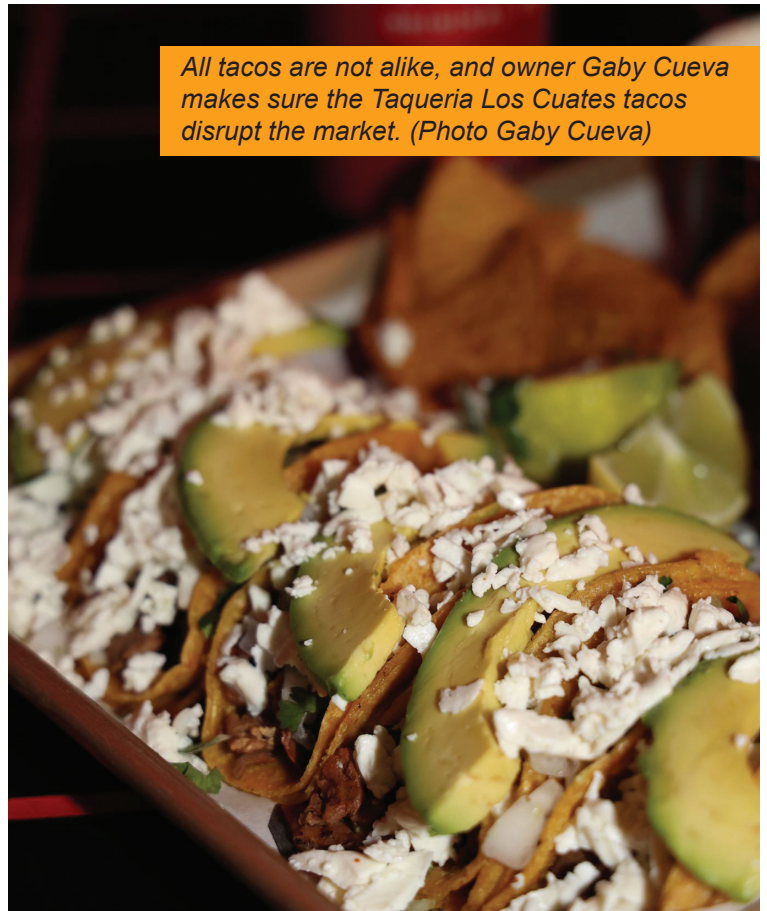
“I send my positivity to all my people, and that is reflected in how they treat people,” she said.



The newest Rossina location, on North 10th and Jonquil in McAllen, opened Oct. 18. The location was once home to Whataburger. (Courtesy)



Gaby Cueva, top right, and part of her Rossina team enjoyed a chat with Santa after serving coffee and hot chocolate at the Christmas tree lighting at The Tower on Nolana in late November. (Courtesy)



All tacos are not alike, and owner Gaby Cueva makes sure the Taqueria Los Cuates tacos disrupt the market. (Photo Gaby Cueva)



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