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Together Everyone Achieves More

By Todd Breland

It's all about the TEAM.

In case you haven't noticed, our region is in a serious growth spurt. Home construction is increasing, and businesses are opening. Cheers to the RGV!

Synergy between cities, towns and counties are at peak level. Business-friendly breaks are being offered throughout our four counties, inviting additional startups and existing companies to expand right here at home. Local sales numbers are steadily climbing across the board. It's exciting to drive I-2 from one side of the Valley to the other, up & down I-69, and the same for Highway 77. We're poised for more regional economic development so buckle up, Deep South Texans.

Our VBR team encourages you to patronize local businesses. No matter the industry -- restaurants, shops, hotels and more -- the RGV has it all! Dedicated owners, managers and staffs are clicking on all cylinders throughout Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties.

Your Valley positive news print and online magazine company has the pleasure of featuring local entrepreneurs and all the hard work happening day in and day out.

Let's keep the positive energy going, and

more great things are on the horizon for regional companies and local organizations. The Valley is one of the hottest markets in Texas and throughout our great U.S.A. We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.



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Table Of Contents

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Back To Glory Days | 5 |
| Giving It Your All | 8 |
| Empowering Women | 10 |
| A Vital Role | 12 |
| Tech Fixer | 15 |
| Impact Of AI | 17 |

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The Raymondville Chamber of Commerce and the City of Raymondville participated in the May 10th Downtown Market Days partnering with Laura Montes from Raymondville Market Days. She has been doing this for over three years, and the combined effort is to grow this amazing venture for Downtown Raymondville. The partnership was able to expand this market to over 50 vendors with lots of newcomers for the upcoming market days on June 14. Participating vendors include food, gift items, crafts, and more food! The May 10th Market Days was very successful! It helped local Boy Scouts raise money for upcoming camps, and families worked together to put a little extra money in their pockets.



Contact Laura: 808-498-6873 Raymondville Chamber: 956-865-0711 raymondvillechamber1@gmail.com

Citrus Live Brings Back Glory Days

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Downtown Edinburg has lost much of its luster with aging infrastructure and block after block of lawyers' offices filling up what were once retail spaces.

For one day at least, on May 1, downtown was buzzing again. It was the day when the new Hidalgo County Courthouse celebrated its much-delayed completion and the venerable Citrus Theater marked its rebirth with a grand reopening event.

Frustrations mounted in recent years over the many construction and legal delays that put off opening the nearly \$200-million courthouse. Across the street, Nick Cantu, a Millennial-aged developer and hometown boy, was working diligently on his vision to revitalize an over 80-year-old theater. The goal was to remake it into a venue for comedy shows and live music.

Cantu experienced delays of his own in being meticulous in reviving the historic elements of a beloved Edinburg building. It's now called The Citrus Live. His hopes to open in 2023 or 2024 didn't materialize. The neighboring courthouse project received complaints a plenty as delays piled up. For Cantu and the Citrus, there were only words of support, with prayers offered as well.

"We had our share of setbacks and disappointments," Cantu said. "I underestimated a lot of things, but I'm proud of how we've moved forward. The buy-in from the community has been overwhelming."

'A Lot Of Firsts'

The degree of community sentiment for the Citrus is drawn from the library of memories Edinburg has for the 84-year-old Citrus.

The building lay dormant for years with its most previous use being one of storage for a local lawyer. It was quite a different scene at the Citrus during its glory years. It was the only place in town to watch movies for nearly four decades. There were also talent shows and premiere events that had blocks-long lines in anticipation of big shows at the downtown theater.

"The Citrus is a place for a lot of firsts," Cantu said. "First dates, first kisses, everything happened at the Citrus."

The Citrus Live version will serve a

different purpose than its forerunner did. Instead of first-run movies the new Citrus will feature comedy shows, live music, theater and the arts. The venue's seating capacity provides a just-right feel for the events it will host.

"It's just big enough to accommodate having a big crowd, but at the same time

intimate enough to enjoy a great show," Cantu said.

The Citrus Live is at just over 1,000 seating capacity. The majority of seating is on the venue's lower level. Up high, there are second floor suites and over 200 original Citrus seats that were upholstered with great care. Taking in the view from



Nick Cantu, an Edinburg developer, worked mightily over the last five years to bring the 84-year-old Citrus building back to life. (VBR)

a spacious and lighted stage is to see with sweep of an 11,000-square-foot facility with a ceiling that’s about three stories high. There’s more than a little wonder looking up at it all in realizing the historic building has been brought back to life.

“I can’t explain how exciting it is to be here and seeing people enjoy the Citrus again,” Cantu said.

Revitalizing Downtown

“It’s movie time in Texas,” says a 1950s-era framed poster at the top of a Citrus Live staircase.

Meet the stars, the poster proclaims, “in person – in Edinburg.” A row of stars from mid-century America is pictured. They visited Edinburg courtesy of Doc Boyle, a legendary promoter and general manager of the Citrus during its 1940s and 50s hey days.

“Doc was a showman and everything he did was bigger than life,” said Joshua



Doc Boyle was a legendary general manager and showman promoter of the Citrus Theater in the 1940s and 50s. (Courtesy)

The Citrus came alive again on May 9 with a premiere show featuring three comedians. (Courtesy)



Kennedy, a local historian who narrated and produced a video about the Citrus' illustrious history. "He took any chance he could to promote the Citrus and its movies."

It's all part of "the vintage aspects" of The Citrus Live. Cantu describes it as "bringing back the personality of these buildings to what they had back in their days." And now it's on to the future. In true Doc Boyle fashion, the first event in The Citrus Live featured a trio of Latino comedians. The May 9 event was a sellout. The Citrus Live could become "the church of comedy" in South Texas due to its size and quality acoustics is how one promoter put it to Cantu.

Another hope is that the revitalized Citrus and the next-door courthouse seven-story behemoth will be the catalysts in revitalizing downtown Edinburg.

"May first was a special day for Edinburg," Cantu said of the Citrus and the new courthouse opening their doors to the public on the same day. "It was when two big projects got going."



The lines were long on May 9 for the premiere show at The Citrus Live. (Courtesy)



Developer Nick Cantu highlights one of the many framed posters depicting the history of The Citrus Live in downtown Edinburg. (VBR)



A view from the stage provides a glimpse of the towering aspects of The Citrus Live building. (VBR)

Network Helps Women ‘Doing Amazing Things’

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

A social media tagline for Con Ganas Mija gets to the essence of the organization and its energetic founder.

“A network of women from the RGV who hustle!”

Mija is a term of endearment in Spanish for a girl or daughter. *Ganas* can translate to “giving it your all,” or “doing your best.” Natalie Garza certainly does both and then some. In early 2024, she opened a storefront in downtown Mission that’s devoted to women entrepreneurs and their aspirations to grow their small businesses. The products of many women-owned “micro businesses,” as Garza described them, are on display and available for sale at the indoor marketplace on 214 E. Tom Landry Street.

It’s also the site for “mija meetups” and conferences where women in business meet to network, share information and celebrate their successes. The marketplace serves the added purpose of providing the backdrop for the frequent social media videos Garza sends out to promote the female entrepreneurs of the Con Ganas Mija network.

“There are so many women doing amazing things and they don’t get any recognition,” Garza said.

She is doing her best and with *ganas* to make sure that they do.

Guiding & Mentoring

Garza’s background is in marketing and customer service, and she is a professional in the food and beverage industries.

She worked early in her career as a special events coordinator for L&F Distributors, a McAllen-based company that supplies retail outlets in Texas and New Mexico with premium beers, wines, spirits and non-alcohol beverages. Garza went on from there to work in marketing for Church’s Chicken, covering a broad area that included much of the southern United States.

She is currently involved in marketing work for a Los Angeles-based holding company that owns several well-known restaurant brands. Gonzalez does that work from her base in the Rio Grande Valley. She is a Mission-area native with undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Texas-Pan American, the forerunner institution to the current UTRGV.

Garza’s deep experience in marketing and customer service serves her well in guiding and

mentoring aspiring women entrepreneurs who are part of the mija network and its marketplace on Tom Landry Street. Running the Con Ganas Mija project is a side hustle for Garza, a passion she has to help small businesswomen gain confidence in growing their businesses.

A key aspect, she says, is to show these entrepreneurs the importance of seeing their businesses from the viewpoints of their customers.

“A business owner will often look at that view strictly from a profit standpoint,” Garza said. “We work to show them how to be a customer-facing business and see things from a

customer perspective.”

Learning From Each Other

Many of these entrepreneurs, Garza said, have full-time jobs and they are teachers, healthcare workers and stay-at-home moms.

Whatever they do, these aspiring micro-business owners are busy people, as is Garza and they are deserving of recognition and assistance. They may not be well-known women in the public sense like the owners of car dealerships and UTRGV administrators who are often feted by area chambers of commerce. And that is one objective of the mija network.

Natalie Garza utilizes her background in marketing and customer service to help area businesses owned by women. (VBR)



“We show up to learn from each other and to share our experiences,” Garza said of the meetups and conferences at the Con Ganas Mija store in Mission. “There are so many local women getting established in business who are not well known and we want to hear their voices.”

Garza and Con Ganas Mijas were recognized in 2024 by the Mission Economic Development Corporation with a \$10,000 grant as part of the Ruby Red Ventures Build Mission Fund. She, in turn, has created a foundation that provides \$500 grants to small businesses owned by women. Their voices are being heard on a network of mijas who hustle.

Visit conganasmija.com for more information about the network and its events to boost women-owned businesses in the Valley.



Con Ganas Mija in Mission serves as a marketplace and network to encourage and mentor women-owned businesses in the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)



Cups, dishware and jewelry are among the products for sale at the Con Ganas Mija marketplace. (VBR)



Natalie Garza's storefront in downtown Mission services as a meeting point for women entrepreneurs to discuss and share their experiences. (Courtesy)



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Women Leaders: Own The Room & Be Confident

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Helen Ramirez was 29 years old when she first applied for a city manager's opening.

She recalled thinking that her chances were slim of actually getting an offer for the job. Ramirez did it for the experience of formally seeking such a job. And she saw it as the beginning of honing her pitch and building confidence that such jobs were within her reach.

Fast forward to 2022 and Ramirez was now the deputy city manager for the city of Brownsville. Her boss – the city manager – was leaving to take a similar job in Colorado. Ramirez was appointed as Brownsville's interim city manager and knew the top job wouldn't be given to her without consideration of other candidates. Six months later, after mulling over two dozen candidates, the City Commission named Ramirez as the first female city manager in Brownsville's 170-year history.

"Sometimes you have to make that decision to take that promotion even if it's scary," Ramirez said at a panel discussion during the recent RGV StartUp Week in Brownsville. "As the deputy, you're right there with the city manager. I have the experience and you want to preserve what you have already created."

"I've Got What It Takes"

Ramirez was among the speakers on a panel discussing insights on leadership from women who manage some of Brownsville's key public sector organizations.

Astrid Dominguez, the executive director of the Good Neighbor Settlement House, spoke of the self-confidence needed when seeking a top leadership position. When those jobs come available, she said, seek them with the same confidence men have. Dominguez spoke of women sometimes having "the imposter syndrome" in doubting themselves when pursuing leadership positions.

"You can start doubting yourself but I go back to 'I've got what it takes,'" Dominguez said of the leadership post she currently holds. "Own the room. Our accomplishments will show we can do this."

Cori Pena had what she called her "you're up" moment when the top job in

her organization became open in 2022. Pena is the chief executive officer at the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation. She previously held the director of community development job at the BCIC. Pena had 12 years of experience with the organization when she applied for the CEO job.

Proving yourself in a top leadership post is the first step, she said, the next being asking for a salary that is worthy of your accomplishments.

"That's one of the hardest things to do," Pena said. "Believe in yourself. Advocate for yourself in what you deserve in pay. Ask

for it and then be quiet. Your work justifies it."

Both Pena and Ramirez had years of prior experience at the organizations they now lead. Both leaders recalled the efforts they had put in to help build their respective organizations to where they stood when the top jobs became available.

"We built this," Ramirez said of seeking the city manager's job. "You want to preserve what you already have."

'Power Is Choice'

Once established, the leaders on the StartUp panel spoke of how priorities and



Helen Ramirez is Brownsville's first female city manager in its 170-year history. (Courtesy)

outlooks had changed as they have grown in their jobs.

“There is a power in being invited to the table,” Ramirez said. “It’s no longer about control and recognition. Right now, it’s about being able to make space for those that have been left out.”

Dominguez heads up Good Neighbor, a nonprofit organization that serves the homeless and low income in Brownsville, providing meals, clothing, health care and support services for those in need. Her organization is the epitome of helping those who have been left out. She sees her role as being one of working toward positive outcomes whenever possible.

“How can I contribute?” Dominguez asked. “How am I going to influence for change in our community?”

At the BCIC, Pena says she often thinks of her staff, a team she has worked with for years, and how she can continue to be a positive influence in leading them.

“Power is choice,” Pena said. “It’s about standing up for myself, still, but also about making sure to lead my staff to rise with me.”



Cori Pena, center, speaks about her leadership role at the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation. (VBR)



RGV StartUp Week in Brownsville featured many speakers and panels, including one featuring women in leadership. (VBR)



LET FREEDOM RING WITH FUN, FOOD, AND DRONES UNDER THE TEXAS STARS



Urban Forests Boost Butterfly Life

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The urban forests found throughout McAllen and at its wildlife sanctuary are creating new habitats to help counter dwindling butterfly populations in the region and across the country.

The efforts to do so have become a citywide initiative with educational programs at the Quinta Mazatlan sanctuary and a butterfly garden at McAllen City Hall. At local schools, students gather for tree-planting events at the urban forests and develop awareness of the plants and flowers butterflies need to feed and reproduce.

“We are putting a lot of plants in the ground that are host plants and nectar plants for our butterflies,” said John Bush, an urban ecologist at Quinta Mazatlan. “It’s important we do so because we’re one of the more diverse places for butterflies in the United States.”

The Rio Grande Valley has more than 300 species of butterflies. A significant portion of the Valley’s butterfly species are unique to the region and are not found elsewhere in the United States. Butterflies like the Mexican Bluewing and the Two-Barred Flasher are

not found further north. The Valley is also a critical stopover point for migrating monarch butterflies heading south to Mexico.

Every bit of habitat creation is vital, Bush said, because “butterfly populations are declining.”

Planting Native Plants

Another urban wildlife biologist, Sam Kieschnik of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, estimates that 22 species of butterflies have suffered a 90 percent decline.

Kieschnik offered that insight in a recent

Butterflies play a vital role in the pollination process in moving pollen between plants. (Courtesy)



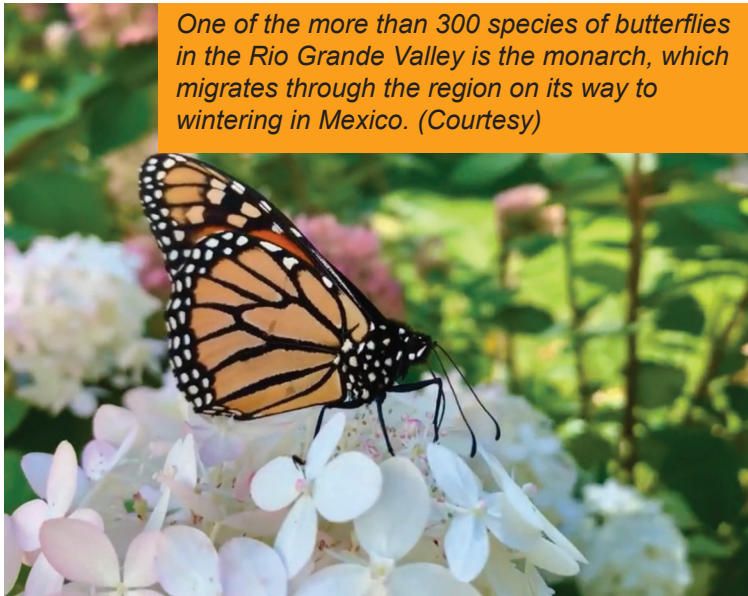
television report and said the dramatic decreases in the Southwest United States are “due to warmer conditions, habitat loss and pesticides.” At the National Butterfly Center in Mission, the grounds specialize in growing and maintaining the host plants and trees that butterflies need to thrive. The Quinta Mazaltan in McAllen is doing the same and Bush says local residents can do likewise.

“Plant native plants,” Bush said. “The more diverse species you put in your spaces, the more butterflies you can support.”

Spaces, even small ones, can make a positive difference, he said. Honeysuckle plants and native vegetation like the Tamaulipan spring mist flower are great choices for attracting butterflies. The needs of some butterflies are especially focused on one kind of plant or flower. Adult monarchs feed on nectar from a variety of flowers, but its butterfly caterpillars eat only milkweeds and the nutrients its leaves provide.

Playing A Vital Role

Butterflies bring more than beauty to landscapes. They also play a vital role in the ecosystems of wherever they live.



One of the more than 300 species of butterflies in the Rio Grande Valley is the monarch, which migrates through the region on its way to wintering in Mexico. (Courtesy)



Parks and recreation employees work on maintaining the butterfly gardens at McAllen City Hall. (Courtesy)



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Butterflies are pollinators as are bees in moving pollen between plants. They are not as efficient as bees in that process, but the sheer number of butterflies and their visits to numerous flowers contribute significantly to the pollination process.

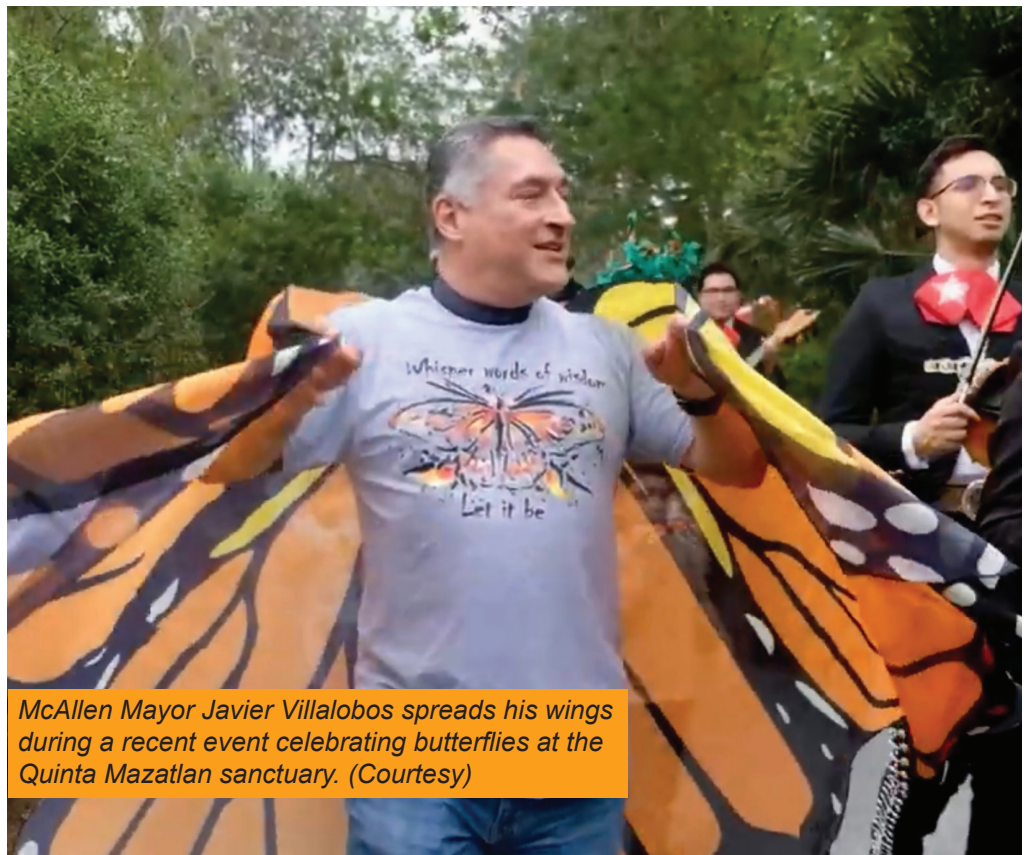
“Butterflies are a really important part of our ecosystem,” Bush said. “Without them, some of our plants would not be as pollinated as well.”

Kieschnik, the state biologist, puts it in more stark terms in describing how butterflies play an integral role in the pollination process.

“If butterflies and bugs go away, we will soon follow,” he said. “If we lose bugs, if we lose pollinators, we lose food.”

The over ten urban forests established and growing in McAllen are doing their part to keep the local ecosystem a vibrant place where butterflies, bees, and other beneficial insects can thrive to make the city a better place to live and work.

For more information about which native plants attract butterflies, visit quintamazatlan.com.



McAllen Mayor Javier Villalobos spreads his wings during a recent event celebrating butterflies at the Quinta Mazatlan sanctuary. (Courtesy)

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Urban ecologist John Bush explains the importance of butterflies to nature’s ecosystems during a recent event at Quinta Mazatlan. (Courtesy)

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Veteran Returns Home & Reconnects

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Rene Jackson is a La Joya native and a nearly 30-year veteran of the U.S. Army with an expertise in logistics and the transportation of goods and products.

“Ammunition and missiles,” Jackson said when asked in a television interview what materials he supervised shipping. “We would bring in all of the support sustainment stuff for the war fighters doing the actual fighting.”

Jackson would rise to the rank of lieutenant colonel before health reasons compelled him to retire from military life in recent years. Jackson returned to South Texas with an open slate after decades of being away from home.

“I knew I had to do something,” Jackson said of post-military life. “I considered different options, but really, I wanted to be my own boss.”

The first step was becoming an owner of a Little Caesars franchise in the San Antonio area. The second opportunity came after his wife took her cell phone for a repair at a uBreakiFix store in San Antonio – and came away impressed with the results. Asurion, a major U.S. tech care and insurance company, is the parent company of over 900 uBreakiFix stores in the United States, but there were no such stores in the Rio Grande Valley.

Seeing an opportunity, Jackson would seek and eventually secure a uBreakiFix franchise for the South Texas region, opening his first store in McAllen in 2022. He would recruit his younger brother, Reggie, in the business and today the two siblings own and operate five South Texas uBreakiFix stores. The newest one is in Brownsville, which opened in April.

“We can repair anything with a power button,” Rene Jackson said at the family-owned Brownsville shop.

‘Making Up For Lost Time’

Reggie Jackson brought a logistical background of his own to the new business.

He formerly worked for UPS and also worked in law enforcement, including stints in police departments and at the Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Office. His most recent job was working in a supervisory job for United Airlines at the McAllen International Airport. The request from

his older brother to partner with him on operating uBreakiFix stores in South Texas was met with a quick yes.

There were personal reasons as well for agreeing to the business partnership. Reggie is 14 years Rene’s junior. The brothers had not spent much time together in years and the appeal of working with his brother was a strong motivation to form South Texas Techie Repair with uBreakiFix stores in Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Edinburg, Laredo and McAllen.

“It’s an opportunity to work with my brother and reconnecting with him,” Reggie said. “It’s making up for some of the lost time he was away (in the military).”

The brothers have gotten their hands into all aspects of the business. It has included training provided by Asurion in learning some of the minute technicalities in knowing what it takes to repair smart phones, tablets, game consoles and other types of electronics. Common repairs include cracked screens, battery and WiFi issues, liquid damage, and operating problems after a device has been dropped.

“Bringing your device to us is like it going back to the factory,” Reggie Jackson said. “If we can’t do it, it can’t be done.”

‘Everything By The Book’

Jackson can express that sort of



Rene and Reggie Jackson are brothers who have teamed up to open uBreakiFix stores in Corpus Christi, Laredo and the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)

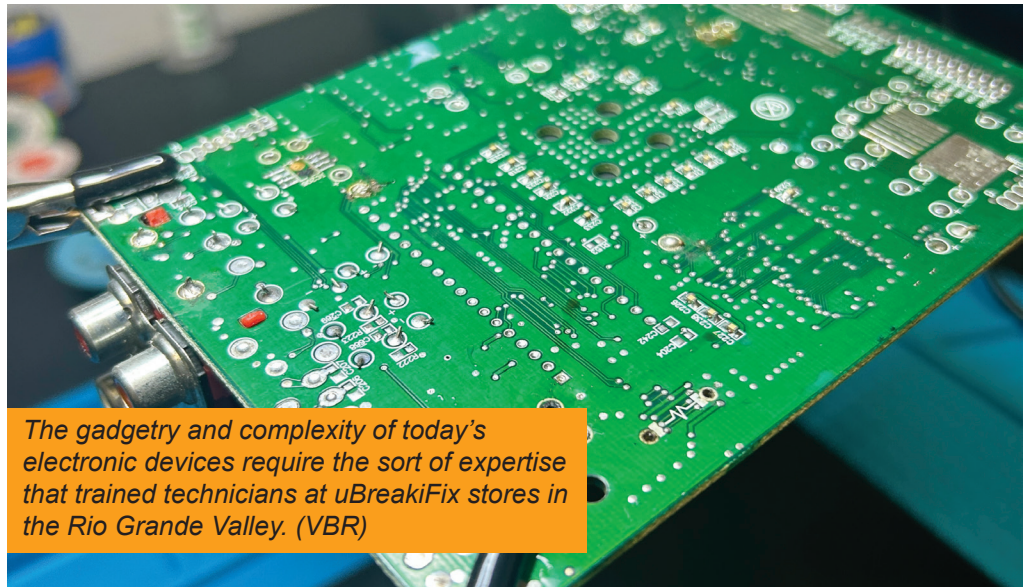
confidence in the repair work because of Asurion’s partnerships with large brands like Samsung, Verizon and AT&T.

Asurion is a major national insurer for cell phones. The uBreakiFix stores like the ones in Brownsville, Edinburg and McAllen work with Asurion customers on their claims – and making the necessary repair work whenever possible. Original parts and screws are used in the repairs and the standards set forth by the major brands – including Apple – are followed in “doing everything by the book,” Reggie Jackson said.

The technicians employed by uBreakiFix are certified by Samsung and Google. Many of the technicians are like Hugo Gonzalez, a Matamoros native who began doing tech repair at age 15 and went on to study computer science at Texas Southmost Colllege in Brownville. The training and expertise are needed when considering the complexity of smart phones and other modern day electronic devices. Cell phones typically include over 40 tiny screws. They are so small that they would easily fit in the palm of an average hand.

With their company growing quickly, the Jackson brothers are already thinking of possible new locations in the Mid-Valley and in the Sharyland/western Hidalgo County area. People in today’s world need to stay connected via their electronic devices and being away from them for too long will cause anxiety and hardships. As an added service, uBreakiFix stores like the ones in the Valley offer mobile services in having technicians go to homes and offices for repair work.

“People can’t afford \$1500 for a new phone,” Rene Jackson said. “We want to get our customers back up and running as quickly as we can.”



The gadgetry and complexity of today’s electronic devices require the sort of expertise that trained technicians at uBreakiFix stores in the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)



Technician Kevin Serrano looks over the tools of the trade at the uBreakiFix store in Brownsville. (VBR)



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Summit Highlights Impact Of AI

By Chris Ardis

McAllen is a leader – not a follower – is how McAllen City Commissioner Seby Haddad welcomed guests to the 2025 MXLAN International Economic Summit.

The event was held Friday on May 9 at the McAllen Convention Center. The summit kicked off the annual three-day cultural arts and music festival. It was hosted by the city of McAllen, the McAllen Economic Development Corporation, and the McAllen Chamber of Commerce.

The Summit welcomed leaders in higher education, industry, small business, banking and health care. There were also representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission, local economic development corporations, and students and program leaders from area universities.

“The 2025 MXLAN International Economic Summit featured key voices in artificial intelligence (AI), workforce and innovation,” said Elizabeth Suarez, the president and chief executive officer of the McAllen chamber and the local EDC.

Prominent attendees and speakers included Bryan Daniel, the chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission and Aaron Demerson, the president of the Texas Economic Development Corporation.

Other speakers included Sanjeev Kumar, an expert in AI and cybersecurity from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and Dr. Maya Yiadom, an associate professor of emergency medicine and digital health at Stanford University.

“The 2025 Summit focused on how AI and emerging technologies are transforming economic growth, workforce development, cybersecurity and cross-industry collaboration,” Suarez said. “With panels covering advanced manufacturing, upskilling and reskilling, and compliance, the goal is to prepare McAllen and the Rio Grande Valley for a tech-driven future.”

Teaching AI To Everyone

The summit included a mix of individual presenters and panel discussions.

One panel discussion centered around the topic “AI: Transforming Manufacturing and Supply Chains.” It was moderated by Dr. Carlos Margo, dean of the Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Apprenticeships at South Texas College. Bob Anderson of Alps Alpine North America said his company is using artificial intelligence for training, diagnosis and predictive maintenance.

“This is where we see the most use,” he said, explaining that their efforts are currently happening in a low-risk environment “because we are still learning.” Anderson said Alps Alpine has already seen how predictive AI can help the company forecast their future supply-chain demands.

Erika Guerra of South Texas College spoke about the use of generative AI for mechanics when diagnosing vehicle problems, nutrition and marketing. There is a strong demand for teaching AI to everyone from elementary students to grandparents, said Guerra, the program chair for advanced manufacturing and mechatronics technology at STC. Anderson addressed the concern that AI will replace humans in the workforce.

“We don’t see AI replacing jobs,” he said. “We see it enhancing them. I see it creating jobs.”

Bringing Industry & Higher Education Together

Guerra says the key is upskilling and reskilling the workforce.

Upskilling involves enhancing the skills of employees so they can meet their industry’s demands and retain their jobs.



Julian Alvarez, executive vice president at Lone Star National Bank, serves as master of ceremonies at the 2025 MXLAN International Economic Summit May 9 in McAllen. (Courtesy)



Elizabeth Suarez, president and CEO of the McAllen Chamber of Commerce and the MEDC, welcome the 2025 Summit audience. (Courtesy)

Reskilling teaches employees new skills so they can transition into new roles using advanced technology.

“Once people know how to use it (AI), they love it,” she said.

Dr. Ahmed Bendaouia of the UTRGV Institute for Advanced Manufacturing says filling in the skills gap is essential at the many manufacturing companies that operate in the Valley.

“We don’t want to replace the employees,” he said. “We want to make sure the skills gap does not lead to that.”

Continuing to bring industry and higher education together via summits like the one in McAllen are essential to the discussion of key issues and developments, Bendaouia said. McAllen plans to be at the heart of these dialogues.

“McAllen is not waiting for the future, we’re building it,” Suarez said. “AI is shaping how we work, live and grow, and this summit proved that McAllen is ready to lead. From global voices to local visionaries, what we saw at the economic summit was the Valley at its best.”



Aaron Demerson, president and CEO of Texas Economic Development Corporation, uses this slide to emphasize the Texas secret sauce of collaboration. (Courtesy)



Hersh Patel, president of the McAllen Chamber and owner of Ruby Red Hospitality, greets Summit guests and refers to McAllen as “the capitol of hospitality in our region.” (Courtesy)

Celebrating 40 Years

From its roots in communities along the U.S.-Mexico border to its branches in metropolitan areas of Central Texas, Rio Bank is proof that community banks thrive where and when needed.

While geography has certainly contributed to Rio Bank’s success, strong leadership guided by the values of honesty, integrity, and quality service have defined its story.

“We’ve created a can-do attitude and culture that encourages employees to make decisions as owners of the company,” says Rio Bank CEO, Ford Sasser.

“Community banks are a uniquely American product,” says Sasser. “Without them, entrepreneurs have to raise their own capital. You see this in other economies, and it makes you realize how important the community bank business model is to entrepreneurship in the United States.”



PHOTO BY CLIFF RANSON

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