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“Your Pro-RGV News”

It May Happen. It May Not.

By Todd Breland

On the heels of RGV StartUp Week, where Valley-wide businesses and community leaders celebrated and encouraged the local entrepreneurial spirit, we reflect upon our own journeys.

Starting a new company or organization comes with huge risks. There are no guarantees of success. The road is bumpy. Good days happen, and setbacks stumble our path. We get knocked down, but we get back up and fight to live another battle.

Coaches, mentors and advisors help us with business plans, capital funding options and development opportunities. Ideas evolve into action, and the fun begins. Starting a company from scratch takes initiative, knowing the selected industry and a boat load of will power.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses are the backbone of our Rio Grande Valley. Risktakers rely on support and guidance from respected colleagues, friends and family. Some who begin this journey may have come from Corporate America, and others may have recently

completed their education and are ready for the plunge.

“My company, my way” is one of the early mindsets why entrepreneurs get started. They may have seen other companies’ pluses and minuses and vow to copy the good with discarding the not-so-positive ideas and actions. Upon graduation of a degree, skill or trade certification start very green, but have acquired mountains of knowledge to now be put into practice.

Our grandstand ideas may or may not come to full fruition, but we give it 150 percent. Struggles may deter us, but the diehard entrepreneur keeps pressing forward turning negativity into motivation to win. Sure, we get punched in the face, but we find solutions to hopefully never repeat the same mistake or at least prepare more so the next hit does less damage.

The Rio Grande Valley is strong. We have resilience, determination and passion. Thankfully, our region has an abundance

of resources to foster local entrepreneurs. From our local colleges and universities to commercialization and development institutions to incubator centers throughout the RGV, help is here and willing to provide assistance for entrepreneurs to live the American dream.

If you can dream it, you can do it. Our Valley will survive and prosper because of small businesses.

We are one. We are the Rio Grande Valley.



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Family Celebrates Vintage & Style

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Carmen Garza describes she and her daughters as antique collectors who “love the hunt” and they have plenty of spaces to fill at their shop in downtown Harlingen.

Jackson Street Antiques on the corner of Jackson and Commerce streets is one of the anchors of the specialty niche that downtown Harlingen has developed over the years. The collection of antique stores and like-minded businesses have given the downtown area an identity and shared purpose. These shops are the catalysts for the monthly markets and festivals that have energized downtown Harlingen.

The Garza family’s 6,000-square-foot-plus antique store has been at the forefront of those efforts. Carmen, Mia and Victoria Jackson are a formidable mother-daughter-daughter

trio. The family has been doing business in downtown Harlingen for over 20 years. Their Jackson Street Antiques store is a fascinating blend of furniture, kitchenware, artwork and vintage items ranging from typewriters to old world globes.

The store is stylish in its arrangements and layouts. It appropriately honors the history of what is on display. The items for sale span many decades and eras. There are Victorian-era pieces from the late 1800s/early 1900s and mid-modern century items from the post-World War II era. Throwback pieces from the 1960s and 1970s delight many Baby Boomer shoppers. The family owns and operates a second store – Modern Vintage by Jackson Street – in McAllen that is managed by Mia Garza.

“I guess you could say we’re old souls,” Carmen Garza said. “We like the nostalgia.”

Appeal Across Generations

The hunt for interesting and worthwhile pieces means “going anywhere and everywhere to find items,” Mia Garza said.

It often leads to outside-of-the-Rio Grande Valley trips in search of items. Staying local and regional also turns up intriguing pieces. The Garzas are hired to do estate sales and stage and decorate homes for events and presentations. Another specialty is curating items when a family heirloom comes to Jackson Street Antiques for a refresh or touchup to revitalize a piece.

“They like what they see when they come here,” said Victoria Garza, who specializes in



Victoria, Carmen and Mia Garza make up an impressive mother-daughters team at Jackson Street Antiques in Harlingen. (VBR)

curation work. “They trust our style and taste and will come to us and tell us they need help and will ask, ‘how do we do this?’”

In analyzing their customer base, the mother-and-daughters team speak of younger people in their 20s and 30s who are looking for a piece to highlight a room in their home. Original vintage pieces can carry an appeal across the generations.

“The younger generations are creative and don’t always want things that are mass produced,” Victoria Garza said. “They look for items that are curated and vintage.”

Furniture pieces are plentiful at Jackson Street Antiques. There is one section dedicated to the Mid-Century Modern period of the post-war years and spanning to the early-1970s. Defining this period in style was a shift from ornate and decorative styles toward a focus on simplicity and functionality. This era and others presented at Jackson Street Antiques offers a striking contrast to today’s furniture making, Carmen Garza said.

“It’s not particle board or pressed wood,” she



Items from the Mid-Century Modern era are among the many items at Jackson Street Antiques. (VBR)



A collection of 1930s kitchenware are among the items at Jackson Street Antiques. (VBR)

said of the older furniture pieces at her store. “You’re getting actual wood and it doesn’t lose its value.”

Thriving Business

Carmen Garza over her many years of doing business downtown has a good perspective of how the district is doing.

She describes it as a time when her business is thriving. The array of market days and festivals has brought back local residents to the downtown area and is attracting area visitors as well. The fact that she is operating her businesses with her daughters is a significant added bonus.

“We love it,” Carmen said of the various aspects of the family business. “I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

Loving the hunt and being collectors with the skills for curating means always having the aspiration to do more in serving and delighting their customers.

“We were raised here,” Mia Garza said at the Jackson Street shop.

Recently, the heavy rains that drenched Harlingen in late March had passed, and the sandbags from front doors had been removed. It was time for Jackson Street Antiques to start a new week in the hunt and search for vintage and class.



Kitchenware items are among the vintage pieces at Jackson Street Antiques. (VBR)



A vintage medical dispenser stands on a desk at Jackson Street Antiques. (VBR)



At about 6,000 square feet, Jackson Street Antiques offers a good many items and pieces from previous decades. (VBR)

Entrepreneur Views Challenge To Help Others

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Joseph Mayers by training is an auto technician who also has a flair for style and design as part of his skill set.

All of those skills and others would be called upon in his early 30s when he became visually impaired due to an ongoing medical condition. Today, Mayers says, he is legally blind and is not able to see clearly past 20 feet without magnification. The adversity he is facing poses considerable challenges, but not ones Mayers sees as insurmountable.

Mayers has turned his current situation into an entrepreneurial opportunity with the launch of his Thru My Eyes company in Mission. He has become an apparel maker in creating clothing for the visually impaired. Mayers puts a premium on products that are stylish and meet his standards for being “hip and fashionable.”

“There’s not much out there that’s cool for us,” Mayers said of clothing choices for what he says is his “new community.”

Maintaining Independence

Mayers grew up in a military family, moving from one city to another before meeting his wife, a Mission native, and moving to the Rio Grande Valley.

His years of experience in auto repair and technical work provided a good living even as he dabbled in design and graphics work. Mayers’ worries and concerns were many as he began losing his vision. Among them was maintaining a degree of independence in being able to care for himself.

“People who become visually impaired can struggle to be independent,” he said. “You can’t do this or that, asking for help all the time, and I’m the kind of person that has always gotten things done on my own. I didn’t want people holding my hand for the rest of my life.”

Igniting a Dream

Mayers attended a school in Austin that gave him guidance and instruction on how to live with his visual impairment. While there, he began working for the Austin Lighthouse. It’s a nonprofit organization which warehouses, manufactures and distributes a wide variety of merchandise for governments and the private sector. Half of the Lighthouse’s 400 employees are legally blind. In that manufacturing environment,

Mayers began to generate ideas on new lines of work and business possibilities he could pursue.

Utilizing his mechanical background, he worked as an industrial mechanic in repair and maintenance of the equipment and machinery utilized by the lighthouse. It’s

where the spark came to create a company that produces apparel for the visually impaired.

Mayers would return to Mission and get a significant boost from the local economic development corporation in pursuing that dream.

Joseph Mayers has not let visual impairment deter him from seeking business opportunities in forming a new company in Mission. (Courtesy)



Gaining Respect

Thru My Eyes was in need of capital and guidance to establish, as any new startup company seeks to do.

“I knew I could create a product for my new community,” Mayers said. “It’s great to have ideas, but at some point, you need to get paid for having great ideas.”

With that in mind, he sought to enter the Ruby Red Ventures competition hosted by the Mission Economic Development Corporation. Mayers called it “an eye-opening experience” in getting the EDC’s guidance on business planning, marketing and the overall strategies needed to build a successful small business. Going through the process in 2024, Mayers was chosen among those allowed to compete in making a sales pitch before judges.

He would ultimately finish third and be awarded a \$10,000 grant that would help his young company get better grounding. It would also help to give Thru My Eyes a higher stature of legitimacy as an aspiring startup.

“To have the EDC recognize my potential brings respect and encourages me,” Mayers said.

It has all helped him to continue to produce specialized clothing that has three touch points that are in braille and raised print that provide information about shirt size, style, texture and price.

“I wanted to do something that helps people,” Mayers said. “I’m in a space where I can do that and where people haven’t figured things out, but are trying to do so.”

Visit tmeapparel.com to learn more about Thru My Eyes and view available products.



Thru My Eyes’ apparel seeks to be hip and fashionable while also highlighting cultural heritage themes. (Courtesy)



Joseph Mayers says he wants his Thru My Eyes apparel to be ‘hip and fashionable.’ (Courtesy)



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StartUp Week Extends Reach In RGV

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

StartUp Texas launched in 2019 as a means to provide local entrepreneurs with modest amounts of capital while providing insights on how to scale up their businesses.

The event coincided with the opening of the 36,000-square-foot eBridge Center in downtown Brownsville, which houses the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation. StartUp Texas is the creation of BCIC and is styled after similar events in other metro areas in the state and country. Bringing such an event to Brownsville has benefitted hundreds of local businesses – and now the event is expanding to include more of the Rio Grande Valley.

What is now billed as RGV StartUp Week began on April 25 in Harlingen and concluded in Brownsville on May 2. In between those dates were Startup activities in McAllen, Mission and Weslaco, and a fireside chat with former Mexican President Vicente Fox in Brownsville. Going regional provides wider access to speakers, panels and workshops while

retaining some of the sales pitch components where business owners inform judges of their products and services.

“We thought the Valley deserved something like this,” said Nathan Burkhart, the vice president for entrepreneurship and innovation for the BCIC. “Regionalism is our strength. We have terrific entrepreneurs across the Valley so this is a way to reach more communities.”

Helping Each Other

It was a robust week for RGV StartUp activities.

There were three days of boot camps in Harlingen on the Texas State College campus as aspiring entrepreneurs received guidance from managers representing Geekdom, a San Antonio-based company specializing in the tech scene. There were numerous workshops at the eBridge Center in Brownsville that included insights on how to use social media and the challenges and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs.

The BCIC’s StartUp has matured to the point where some of its alumni entrepreneurs are being asked to give their insights on launching a business and maintaining success. One of those alumni businesses is Pluton Brewery of Brownsville, which presented a discussion entitled, “business failure is a bruise, not a scar.” The regional aspect of RGV StartUp was featured on April 30 in McAllen. Entrepreneurs of McAllen and Brownsville were brought together on their 1 Million Cups projects, a part of a national effort to champion ideas and help individuals thrive.

The week of entrepreneurship retained the open pitch competition of recent years as local small business owners made their best pitches to judges in seeking grant funding. The proof that such competitions have worked is shown in the entrepreneurs that have gone on to greater successes. Pluton is one example as is La Pale Frozen Bar and Amor Y Pan. The latter two businesses are located in Brownsville and each has scaled up their businesses to sell their



The BCIC’s StartUp Texas has awarded tens of thousands of dollars in grants to entrepreneurs competing in sales pitches during StartUp Texas. (Courtesy)

products to H-E-B and its Central Market, a gourmet chain owned by the San Antonio-based grocer.

Looking Ahead

The BCIC’s Burkhart says his organization feels great pride in how its alumni businesses have developed to the extent where they consult with each other.

“It’s really about building up the ecosystem of entrepreneurs,” he said. “To see the collaboration between entrepreneurs and how they assist each other, that’s where the magic is.”

Looking ahead, Burkhart says the goals are to continue to build up the StartUp week events and extend its reach to more entrepreneurs and those who aspire to do so.

“It could be a legacy business looking to diversify their business to a more year-round model, or a teacher who is looking to change careers and take a hobby to a full-time business,” he said. “Our goal to help make those things happen is to have more workshops, more programming and improve the quality of our speaker panels.”

Brownsville-area entrepreneurs learn to craft and improve their sales pitches at StartUp Texas events. (Courtesy)



Entrepreneurs like those representing TXQ Rubs benefit from the insights and expertise from StartUp Texas. (Courtesy)

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Family-Owned Dealerships Endure In RGV

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

One Rio Grande Valley car dealer whose name is today emblazoned across the region got his start in a modest-sized store selling Buicks just blocks south of the courthouse in Edinburg.

Bert Ogden sold cars as a side business before opening his first dealership in the 1960s. He would purchase used cars from upstate Texas sources, restore them to running condition, and then sell them in the Valley. The downtown Edinburg dealership was the beginnings of what today are over 20 dealerships across the region that carry the Bert Ogden name.

Another early Valley car dealer – J.V. Carpenter of McAllen – swapped his then-Cadillac line of automobiles for a Chevrolet dealership owned by Dwight Yoder. It was the 1930s when that trade happened. The swap among businessmen was the forerunner to a dealership that would become synonymous with

McAllen as Carpenter’s stepson was Charles Clark. Twenty years after the transaction, the Chevrolet dealership in downtown McAllen was renamed Clark Chevrolet.

“Those were old-school automotive businesses,” said Alex Clark, who with his brother Daniel today own and operate the Chevrolet dealership in its 92nd year of business.

There were other auto dealer pioneers of that era. In Brownsville, the Knapp family started their own Chevrolet dealership in 1934 that still operates today as Tipotex Chevrolet. In that same era, M.J. Tipton became a shareholder of the Ford franchise in Brownsville in marking the beginning of what would become Tipton Ford. That dealership continues to the present and is still family-owned and operated.

Family Traditions

The succession of family leadership is vital in the history of any dealership.

For the Clarks, that became evident in 2022 with the passing of Kirk Clark, a beloved figure and community leader in McAllen. Kirk was the son of Charles Clark and they worked together for decades in growing their franchise and eventually adding a Honda dealership in partnership with the Knapp family.

Alex Clark spoke of the admiration he has for the partnership his father and grandfather developed in operating the family auto business. It’s what brought Alex back to the Valley after his college years when his career aspirations were initially in the academic world. His father, Kirk, gave him an opportunity to operate a new insurance business at their Honda dealership and gain new insights into the dealership



Early auto dealerships in post-World War II America attracted crowds such as this one at a Knapp dealership. (Courtesy)

business.

“My father never pressured me to be in the car business,” Alex Clark said. “I found out that I liked it and that I was good at it. I remembered stories of my dad working with his dad and I thought, we’ll try it.”

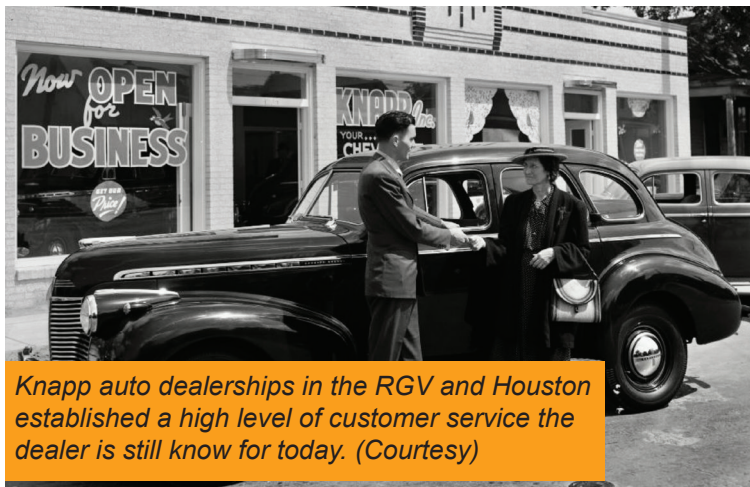
The effort proved to be a good one. Kirk mentored his son to eventually assume the principal dealer role that Alex holds today, just as Kirk did decades before in taking over from his own father, Charles. In the Mid-Valley, the Payne family did the same. E.J. Payne, like Charles Clark, was a World War II veteran, and the Midwest native would come to the Valley after the war to open Ed Payne Motors in Weslaco.

Bud and Jimmy Payne would succeed their father, E.J., as the principal dealers and continue to grow the business to include the autoplex the family owns and operate along Expressway 83 in Weslaco. The Payne family sells new vehicles across the Valley from different manufacturers such as Buick, Dodge, Chevrolet, Ford and Volkswagen.

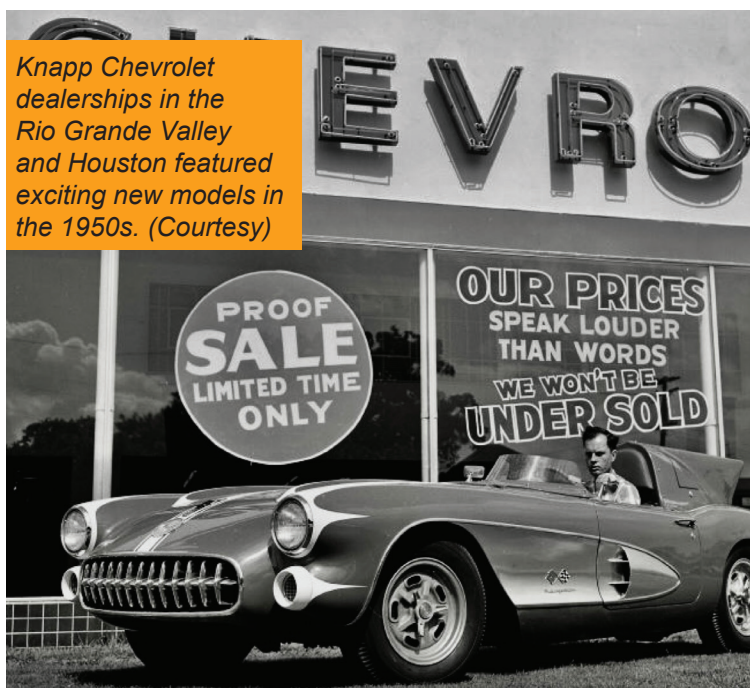
Moving Forward

The Bert Ogden auto dealer story suddenly reached an inflection point in 1992 when the dealer and his wife, Dorothy, died in a car accident.

Plans were already in place for Ogden’s son-in-law, Bob Vackar, to eventually take over principal dealer duties. Vackar is married to Bert



Knapp auto dealerships in the RGV and Houston established a high level of customer service the dealer is still know for today. (Courtesy)



Knapp Chevrolet dealerships in the Rio Grande Valley and Houston featured exciting new models in the 1950s. (Courtesy)

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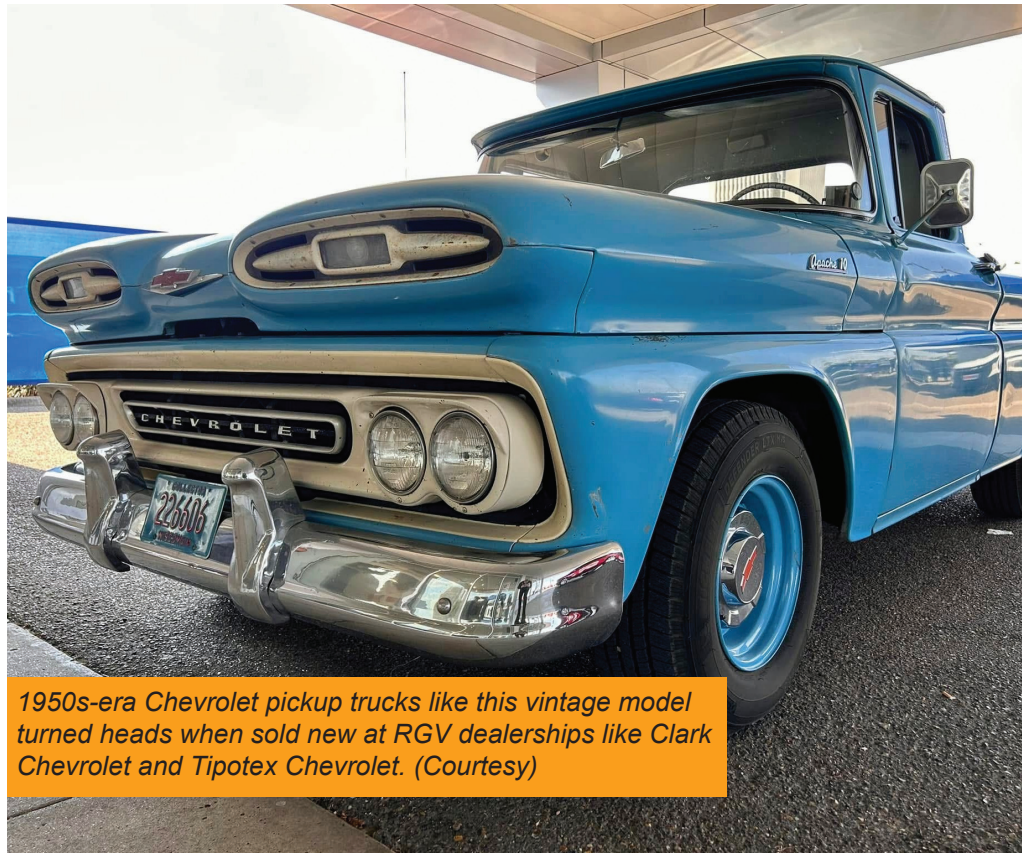
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and Dorothy's daughter, Janet, who with her father, appeared in many of the dealership's television commercials in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Vackars in the years that followed Bert's passing would take the Edinburg-based business and expand the business to new dealership locations on McAllen, Mission and Harlingen, along with adding more dealerships in Edinburg.

The Vackars have given generously to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and the university's college of business is named after Bob Vackar. A renovated football stadium in Edinburg is named after the Vackars, with UTRGV starting its inaugural football season this August.

All of the RGV's auto families share some essential things in common. They are rooted in the Valley and know service and connection to customers is vital to keeping their businesses successful.

"We try not to make crazy promises," Alex Clark said of his dealerships. "We pride ourselves as being dealers who are present and available. I have a vested interest in serving our customers and solving your problems."



1950s-era Chevrolet pickup trucks like this vintage model turned heads when sold new at RGV dealerships like Clark Chevrolet and Tipotex Chevrolet. (Courtesy)



Alex Clark represents the newest generation of leadership in his family's automotive history in McAllen and the RGV. (VBR)

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Edinburg Highlights Growth & Quality Of Life

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Edinburg’s mayor describes 2024 as marking the “end of an incredible three-year run.”

From 2021-2024, the Rio Grande Valley’s fastest-growing city surpassed the 100,000 population mark and today stands at about 106,000 residents. Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. described Edinburg as “a city on the move” during a recent state of the city speech at the new Arts, Culture & Events Center. The mayor’s speech included an elaborate and well-structured video presentation that highlighted the city’s growth and development.

The economic growth numbers were front and center in Garza’s speech. Those numbers included \$1 billion in direct construction activity since 2022 and sales tax revenues soaring past \$100 million. Just as important, the mayor said, were the completion of quality-of-life projects such as the long-sought ACE center and a new turf park which includes seven baseball and softball fields that are hosting regional and national tournaments.

The range of improvements in the city and seeing how Edinburg includes its residents in community development drew praise from the National Civic League. The organization named Edinburg as an All-America City in 2024 in recognition of its civic engagement, innovation and collaboration in addressing community challenges.

“Edinburg really has shown a lot of excellence in its civic activity,” said Derek Okubo, a director of civic assistance with the National Civic League. “Wisdom and that spirit of facing the challenges to bring people together to solve problems. Edinburg has some very important characteristics that need to be celebrated and highlighted.”

Boosting Quality Of Life

Okubo’s comments were among those included in the video accompanying the mayor’s speech.

Also in the video was City Commissioner David Salazar. He highlighted the quality-of-life aspects such as the nearly complete hike-and-bike trail that links Edinburg to McAllen’s trails system. Another city commissioner, Dan Diaz, promoted the turf

field project that was funded by Edinburg Economic Development Corporation at a cost of \$2 million.

“We are now able to host competitions and draw major tournaments in bringing more visitors to our city,” Diaz said.

On the subject of athletics and sports, Mayor Garza pointed to the inaugural UT-Rio Grande Valley football season that is just months away from an August 2025 kickoff. He said bringing Division I college football to the Valley – and to a venue in Edinburg – is “another defining moment” for the city and region.

“UTRGV football will bring a \$197 million dollar impact into our local economy,” the mayor said.

‘Striking Economic Growth’

The crux of Garza’s speech focused on economic and business numbers.

An impressive list of growth trends was presented and among those mentioned were:

- Edinburg now has nearly \$2 billion in taxable retail sales.
- New home permit valuations in 2024 were \$171 million, which were up \$40 million over the previous year.
- Edinburg added 800 new single-family homes and there are currently 146 new subdivisions being built or are in the planning stages.
- The city has seen nearly 5,000 new jobs created in Edinburg since 2022.



Edinburg considers itself a city of festivals and had hosted about 400 events in 2024. (Courtesy)

The mayor said with “great growth comes great responsibility,” and foremost is Edinburg making the proper investments in public safety with its police and fire departments in having the staffing and equipment needed to cover an expanding city. Edinburg has made such investments as well as those in wastewater systems and drainage, a preeminent concern in every Valley city.

For Garza, the state of city address was bittersweet in that it was his last one due to a medical condition that convinced him not to seek re-election later this year. He will leave elected office after guiding a city to “striking economic growth,” and a hope that its momentum can be maintained in the years ahead.



A new turf field complex includes seven baseball and softball fields and is drawing major tournaments to Edinburg. (Courtesy)



Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. has overseen the fastest-growing city in the Rio Grande Valley since taking office in 2021. (Courtesy)



The National Civic League has lauded Edinburg for utilizing its diversity of residents in collaborations to address the city’s issues. (Courtesy)

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Chamber Honors ‘Legendary’ McAllen Women

By Chris Ardis

The McAllen Chamber of Commerce on May 2 will host a special event honoring women who have played prominent roles in business and in their communities.

The event is titled *Legendary McAllen Woman: Celebration of Women in Business*. A luncheon will take place at the McAllen Convention Center in conjunction with the celebration. It will be the fifth such event the chamber has hosted.

“The *Legendary McAllen Woman* initiative celebrates the women whose leadership, grit and vision have helped shape our city,” said Elizabeth Suarez, the chamber’s chief executive officer. “As a chamber, it’s our responsibility not only to support economic development but also to honor the people who’ve made that growth possible.

“These women have led businesses, served our community and paved the way for future generations,” Suarez said. “This initiative is about lifting them up, telling their stories and inspiring others to follow their lead.”

The Women Being Honored

Elvira Alonzo

Alonzo is the public works director and deputy emergency management



For Elvira Alonzo, the support of her daughter, husband, daughter-in-law and son has had a significant impact on her success. Her mother, who she lost, taught her countless life lessons she continues to live by. (Courtesy)

coordinator for the City of McAllen, for whom she has worked for 42 years. Alonzo believes the support of family is extremely important in a person’s success.

“In my life, my mother, sisters, in-laws, husband and children have been my motivation and my inspiration,” Alonzo said. “And, in the workplace, I thank the wonderful mentors God placed in my path and the amazing staff I have the privilege of working with.”

Yoli R. Cantú

Cantú is the owner of McAllen Stained



Yoli Cantu and her family are avid supporters of Valley Alliance of Mentors for Opportunities and Scholarships (VAMOS), as seen with her husband, Alonzo, and their daughters, Alexis and Allysa. (Courtesy)

Glass in the Art Village on Main.

She and her husband, Alonzo, have two daughters. She taught for six years – three years each in Edinburg and McAllen – before the calling to use her artistic talents became too loud to ignore. Cantú teaches a variety of classes and workshops, acknowledging that her true calling is to lead people to higher education.

“I feel my role is to help everyone go to the next level, usually through education,” Cantú said.

Deborah Case

Case is the artistic director at Deborah Case Dance Academy. She is a business owner, but sees being an artistic director

as her most important title.

“I love keeping an eye on the artistry,”



Deborah Case and her husband, professional photographer Jimmy Kryzak, share a moment of pure joy after one of Case’s shows in 2021. (Courtesy)

she said. “I purposely keep teaching because it keeps me fresh.”

Case begins each day with meditation and prayer, never doubting who guides her.

“I have God training me how to train them,” she said.

Margarita De Leon

De Leon is the CEO of Gorditas Doña



Margaret De Leon said working with her three daughters, Karla, Mally and Stephey, is a blessing. All four of them enjoy working with the company mascot, Doña Lula, too. (Courtesy)

Lula, which currently has 14 locations in the Rio Grande Valley.

De Leon began franchising her restaurants in 2024. There are today seven franchise restaurants, with six in the Valley and one in the Woodlands area near Houston. De Leon expressed gratitude that her three daughters are now involved in the business and that they have so many loyal customers.

“How wonderful that people reward you for something you love to do,” she said.

Barbara Delgado

Delgado is the chief photographer at



Barbara Delgado and her husband, Giovanni Ferrigno, pay a visit to the Prada Marfa sculptural art installation with their Australian Shepherds, Panda and Dulce. (Courtesy)

BD Photography, which recently moved into the historic Roosevelt Elementary School on 17th and Galveston streets in McAllen. Delgado takes great pride in photographing the people who make up her community, knowing that the photos will one day be part of the city and region’s history.

“I am able to capture that now and that’s very meaningful to me,” she said.

Ann Fortescue

Fortescue is the executive director of the International Museum of Art & Science in McAllen.

Fortescue and her husband, Jeff, have embraced the weather, culture and people of the Valley since moving here in 2019. Fortescue sees her role as a change agent and a joy creator.

“I have a deep desire and an obligation to create an environment that instills joy in the staff,” she said.



Throughout her career, IMAS Executive Director Ann Fortescue has built relationships between museums and their communities through programs like Head Start’s Artful Play. (Courtesy)

Veronica Gonzales

A former state representative, Gonzales now serves as senior vice president of government and community relations at



Veronica Gonzales’ division spearheaded Hispanic Engineering, Science and Technology each year at UTRGV. On Latina Day, they brought young women and their mothers to campus to learn about STEM and the importance of a college education.

the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Her division oversight includes legislative appropriation requests, community engagements, the Veterans Business Outreach Center and the Small Business Development Center. Gonzales’ role centers around creating connections between UTRGV and the community and services the university provides.

“If the university thrives, the community thrives,” she said.

Janet Ogden Vackar

Vackar is the president of marketing, co-owner and chairwoman of the board of the Bert

Ogden Auto Group.

She and her husband, Bob, moved home to the Valley to help her parents, Bert and Dorothy Ogden, expand their dealership. After losing them in a car accident in 1992, the Vackars fulfilled their dream and now have dealerships across the Valley.

“God helped me get through,” Vackar said.

Part of that painful process was forgiveness in calling upon her mom’s lessons.



Family: Where life begins, and love never ends. Janet and her husband, Bob, with their son-in-law, Will McCullough, daughter, Kristin, and grandchildren Dorothy Sabine, EmmyLou, Sawyer and Walt. (Courtesy)

“My mother instilled in me the strength to hold my head high, to carry on no matter what life brings, and to always show compassion to others,” she said.

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