

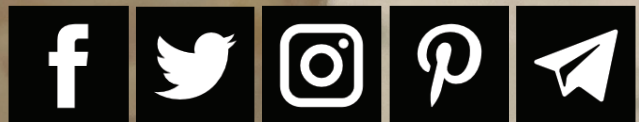
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RING! RING!

By Todd Breland

As school has started or will very soon, let's ease off the accelerator and keep an eye out for our little ones. Hot summer temperatures of course are really kicking in, and so are the classroom doors for a new year of learning, growing and exploring.

Back-to-school sales, stuffing the backpacks and new sneakers are all part of daily lives this month. The roads are again congested, and the frequent braking are the most important stops of our day. These children are our precious blessings who are filled with anxiousness, rekindled butterflies and yes, also some serious disappointment their summer break is done.

The bright side is Texas football is back! For us sports junkies, the return to Friday Night Lights has finally arrived including the inaugural season of UTRGV football! The pageantry and sounds of screaming fans, halftime band performances and concession tasties have returned to the Rio Grande

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PJ's Offers 'Happy Place' In Los Fresnos

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Israel Vega is a nurse practitioner who dabbles in renovating classic Chevys and is a founding member of a Rio Grande Valley-based semi-pro soccer team. Since January, you can add co-owner of a Los Fresnos coffee shop to his portfolio.

PJ's Coffee is a shop he co-owns with his business partner and fellow Los Fresnos native, Adam Abrego. They wanted to create a sense-of-community kind of place where people could gather and meet and enjoy a *cafecito* in their hometown. Walk into PJ's Coffee on state Highway 100 (Ocean Boulevard) and you will experience a well-designed and inviting coffee shop.

There's comfy furniture and framed imagery on the shop's walls explaining coffee history and the process of bean roasting. The range of menu choices from lattes to cold brews to drip coffees has everything a coffee shop aficionados could desire. An array of pastries is readily available, including the New Orleans-originated beignets, which is the city where the PJ's franchise began.

Staff friendliness and warm greetings as customers walk in reflect the vibe and personalities of the business owners.

"We had over 100 applicants and we chose 20," Abrego said. "If we hire you, be

happy, smile, this has to be a fun job if you work here. Their attitude reflects us."

Getting Into Coffee

During a classic car show on a recent Saturday at PJ's Coffee, traffic rumbles by as people head to and from South Padre Island.

Vega says PJ's customers are about evenly split between Island travelers and local folks. There are lots of the latter stopping by for a coffee beverage and to get a close-up look at classic cars from the 1950s-to-1980s era.

A county constable drives into PJ's



Adam Abrego and Israel Vega have established a successful coffee shop in their hometown of Los Fresnos. (VBR)

parking lot to ask about one of the classic editions. Vega has one of his own models out there and he chats up the law enforcement officer about cars. A family member of one of the owners eases himself into a favorite spot on a couch in the shop. It's just what Abrego and Vega envisioned in opening PJ's in early 2025.

"We didn't do coffee because we thought, 'Los Fresnos doesn't have anything like this, so let's open a business here,'" Vega said. "We wanted to offer a place that families and the community could enjoy."

The genesis of the idea that led to PJ's

Coffee came after a trip to Puerto Rico. Abrego's visit to the Caribbean island piqued his longstanding interest in coffee. Returning home, where he works as Vega's practice administrator at the nurse practitioner's medical clinic, Abrego offered up a business proposal.

"What do you think of doing a coffee shop?" Vega recalls Abrego asking.

They were already plenty busy with the VHC Family Health & Night Clinic in San Benito. Vega's involvement in helping to launch the Rio Grande Valley Red Crowns, a semi-pro soccer team based in Harlingen,

was still up ahead. Before that team formed, the search for the right coffee shop company began. Locations in Los Fresnos and Harlingen were in mind.

Finding PJ's

The two-year process of looking and vetting "different scenarios," as Vega puts it, would lead the budding entrepreneurs to PJ's Coffee of New Orleans.

The New Orleans-based coffeehouse chain was founded in 1978 in the Crescent City. It is today a growing franchise with locations across mostly Southern states

PJ's roasts all its coffee beans in small batches at its headquarters in New Orleans. (VBR)



with a few PJ's in the Northeast and Midwest. The company's website shows there are 25 locations in Texas and is a recent entrant to the RGV market.

PJ's describes its coffee shop brand as being "known for its commitment to sourcing high-quality beans and its unique cold-drip brewing process which results in a less acidic coffee." Abrego and Vega were impressed by PJ's roasting process in New Orleans and that it is done in small batches. They also like that PJ's works closely with small local farmers in Central America. The duo felt a positive reception in helping to establish the brand in the Valley.

Their initial hope was to open in Los Fresnos and Harlingen. The latter fell through, for now, but a successful start in their hometown bodes well for a second Cameron County location.

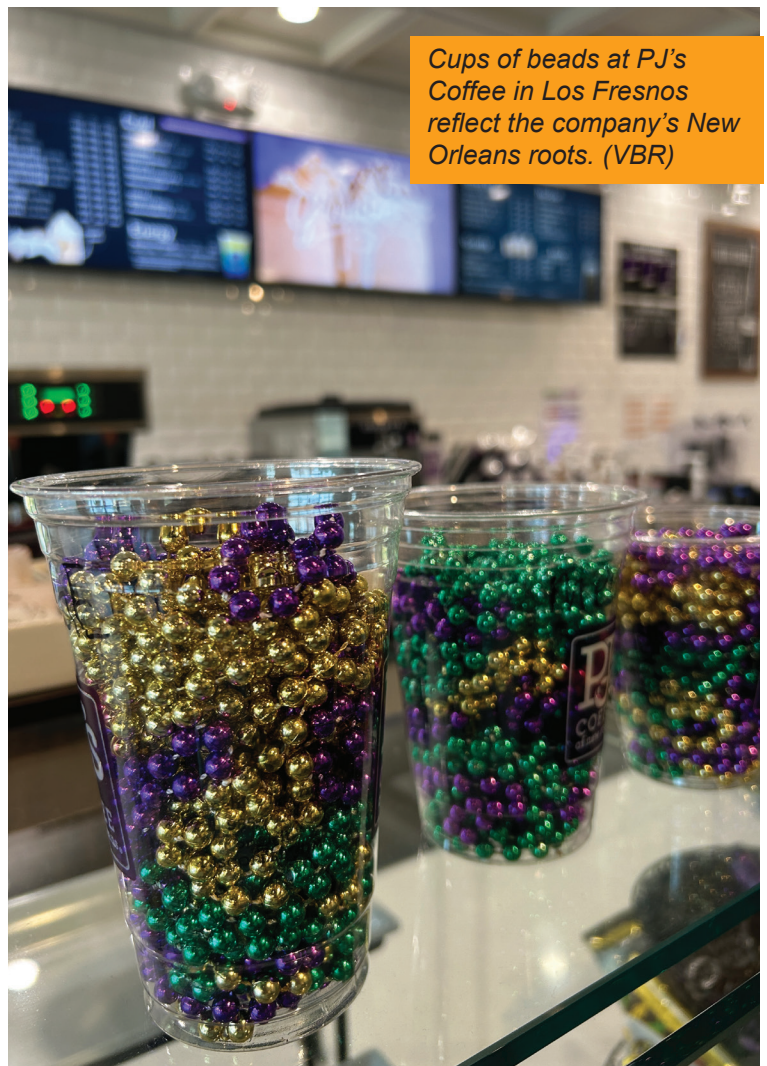
"This is my happy place," Abrego said. "We're not absentee owners. We're here every day. I get behind the counter and run the register. It's something different for me. We're really enjoying it."



PJ's Coffee is a popular spot for residents and motorists going to and from South Padre Island on Highway 100. (VBR)



Another coffee brew comes pouring down at PJ's in Los Fresnos. (VBR)



Cups of beads at PJ's Coffee in Los Fresnos reflect the company's New Orleans roots. (VBR)

Summit Touts Delta Area Unity

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The Delta Area communities of Edcouch, Elsa and La Villa are a cluster of cities along state Highway 107 and located away from the main strip of regional business activity along Expressway 83.

These communities are steadily getting a foothold in raising their collective profile in the Rio Grande Valley. Elsa is seeing retail growth and the rooftops of new homes along FM 88 that are located near a Wal-Mart Supercenter and an IDEA charter school. Neighboring Edcouch boasts of building more than 100 new homes this year in its community. La Villa has focused on a number of infrastructure improvements.

The three communities see themselves as a mini-region within a region.

It's in that spirit of being a Delta Area that leaders from three communities recently met during an extended breakfast meeting at the

Edcouch-Elsa school district's technology center. The Delta Summit brought mayors, city managers, department heads and staff together to seek collaboration across city lines. Daniel Rivera, the executive director of the Elsa Economic Development Corporation, said the leaders "came together, not just to meet, but to move forward."

"Our people don't live by borders," Rivera said in comments that summarized the meeting. "They work, shop, play and raise their families across this region. And if that's how our community moves, then it's time our cities start moving that way too."

Proud Of Progress Made

The Delta Summit, Rivera said, "wasn't just a feel-good event."

Real world community issues were discussed and plans made with specifics

to set things into motion. They included fixing address mismatches across the three Delta cities to improve public safety. The cities pledge to work together to look at sharing the use of a vactor truck, a critical piece of equipment in sewer maintenance. Leaders from the three cities also agreed to collaborate on storm prep and drainage cleanup.

"These efforts may sound small, but the impact can be big," Rivera said in an EDC news release. "And more importantly, they build the habit of collaboration. That's the real work."

The combined population of the three communities is estimated at just under 12,000 residents. Resources are limited, as Rivera points out, and the budgets of small towns are stretched. Leaders from each city shared successes from their community during the



Leadership Elsa provides training sessions to equip community leaders, small business owners and city staff with the skills to make a positive impact in their city. (Courtesy)

summit.

The Elsa EDC has formed a partnership with UTRGV’s Office of Workforce & Economic Development to boost small businesses in the community. The city of Edcouch has put surveillance towers in place to deter crime and enhance public safety. La Villa calls itself a “small city with a big heart,” and cites infrastructure improvements in water storage tanks and wastewater systems.

“We’re all proud of the progress our cities have made,” Rivera said.

‘Just Getting Started’

The summit brought in speakers from outside of the Delta communities to share their expertise.

Rick Carrera of COSTEP – a regional economic development organization – spoke of the need for collaboration among communities and how it can unlock funding. Sergio Castro from AIM GIS Solutions highlighted how digitizing data can help planning and improve efficiencies. Former McAllen Mayor Jim Darling shared how unity among water districts has created more capacity and control for cities across the Valley.

“Their insights helped give structure to the ideas that were already starting to form,” Rivera said. “They reminded us that we’re not behind. We’re just getting started.”

Rivera emphasized that the items and issues discussed were “grounded and achievable.” “They weren’t wish lists,” he said. “They were next steps.”

Real ideas like cleaning out drainage canals together, helping each other prepare for storms and sharing equipment.

“We know things can get better if we work together,” Rivera said. “That belief is the most important thing we left with.”



Daniel Rivera of the Elsa EDC and Ron Garza of UTRGV’s Office of Workforce & Economic Development celebrate a partnership to boost small businesses in the Delta Area community. (Courtesy)



La Villa calls itself a “small city with a big heart” and its leaders were part of the dialogue at the recent Delta Summit. (Courtesy)



Infrastructure improvements are under way in La Villa. A recent Delta Summit discussed how equipment can be shared among communities in the area. (Courtesy)




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RGV Testing & Growing New Crops

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The footprint of the Rio Grande Valley's citrus industry has largely retreated to the northern reaches of Hidalgo County from what once was a regional reach of over 100,000 acres.

The RGV citrus industry of today counts about 25,000 acres of grapefruits and oranges. The turning points for an industry that historically defined the region's early agricultural history were the freezes of 1983 and 1989. The damage from those weather events was extensive and growers – both local and absentee – decided it was time to sell their valuable properties.

“With citrus, it takes five years before you start getting a return (after planting young trees),” said Dale Murden, the president of Texas Citrus Mutual. “They couldn't pencil out growing a crop so they took the option to sell to developers.”

It would usher in the urbanization of the Valley continuing today. The spaces where orchards once stood within city limits in RGV communities are now neighborhoods and subdivisions. Even in its diminished

state, the citrus industry remains an important one in the region. Murden notes that citrus in the Valley generates an economic impact of almost \$500 million in the region. The industry's grapefruits with their vibrant red colors and sweet juicy flesh are still much sought after produce items in national and international markets.

“The inside quality is the best in the world,” Murden said of RGV grapefruits.

Citrus endures in the Valley even as new crops are growing and developing to supplement its historic role in RGV agriculture.

'Trial And Error'

Matt Klostermann hopes soybeans can one day grow commercially in the Valley.

He is the president of Rio Farms in Monte Alto. The concept of Rio Farms began in the 1930s as a nonprofit corporation to aid and support underprivileged farmers during the Great Depression. It serves today as a private research foundation and works in conjunction with the Texas A&M Research Center and

agricultural interests in the private sector. Rio Farms has 27 tenant farmers per information on its website and farms almost 100 acres of land in the Valley.

Part of its mission is to test new crops such as sesame, soybeans and grapes as well as testing newer varieties of mainstay RGV crops.

“It's trial and error,” Klostermann said of trying new crops and varieties. “With soybeans, we're working on finding a variety that will grow here with the kind of weather and conditions we have in the Valley.”

An Evolving Industry

Rio Farms played an instrumental role in establishing sugar cane as a RGV crop. For a roughly 50-year era – from 1974 to 2024 – sugar cane was grown in the Valley with its mill in Santa Rosa. The lack of a consistent and adequate water source was cited as the primary reason for its closure last year. Klostermann says Rio Farms is leading efforts in “actively looking for a replacement for sugar cane.”

Grapes are among the newer crops Rio Farms is growing and testing in Monte Alto. (Courtesy)



Sesame plants are one of those replacement crop possibilities. It is becoming more visible in area farm fields. Sesame plants can reach heights of up to four feet. Its whole seeds are used in baking and food toppings while its oil is utilized for cooking and salad dressings.

Murden and Klostermann each cited sesame as a crop seeing commercial success in the Valley. Corn is also an emerging crop with more acreage of it growing every year as newer varieties take hold, Klostermann said.

“Corn is one of those crops that has come a long way,” he said.

‘Drive Out To Find It’

Even with all of the urbanization throughout the Valley, there is still well over one million acres of farmland in the region.

It’s broken up into irrigated farmland for citrus and vegetables and the drier land farming of corn, grain sorghum and cotton. The majority of RGV farming is the latter as water has become harder to get with low reservoir levels at Falcon and Amistad lakes. There is also a significant volume of water that Mexico owes the United States as part of a longstanding treaty governing how the two nations share management of the Rio Grande.

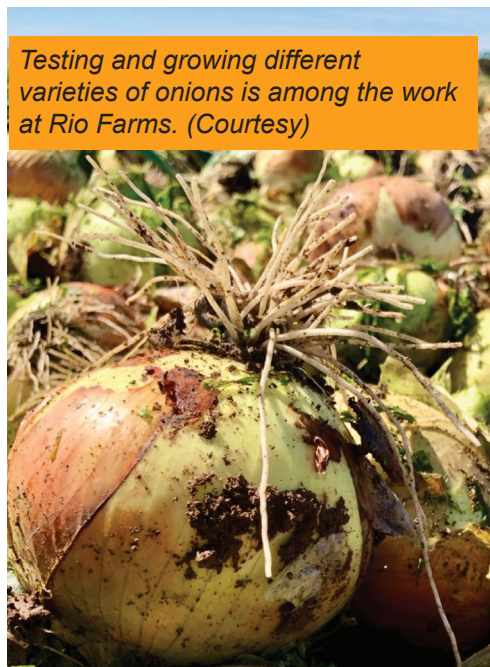
Agriculture may no longer be the RGV’s main economic calling card but the grapefruits, onions, cabbages and carrots the region still grows to go with cotton and grains means the Valley is still a major ag producer.

“We’re not the palm trees-lined roads and citrus groves kind of tropical paradise we used to be,” Murden said. “The Valley is now more of a metroplex.”

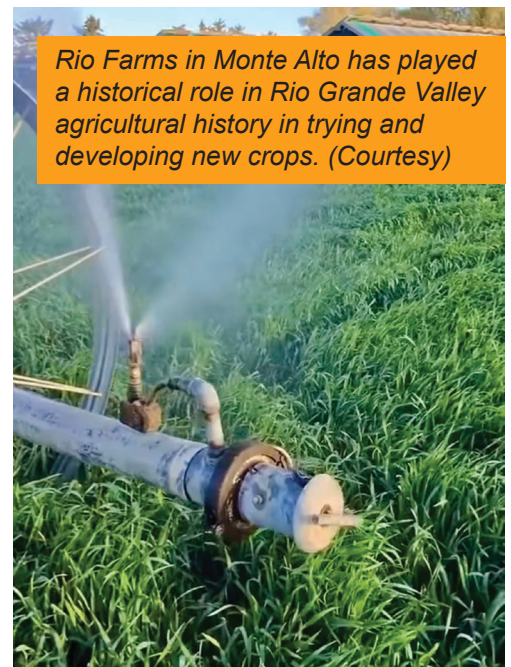
Of the farm fields this region is known for, he says, “It’s still out there. Now you have to drive out to find it.”



The Rio Grande Valley’s red grapefruit varieties reach markets throughout the United States, including this farmer’s market in North Carolina. (Courtesy)



Testing and growing different varieties of onions is among the work at Rio Farms. (Courtesy)



Rio Farms in Monte Alto has played a historical role in Rio Grande Valley agricultural history in trying and developing new crops. (Courtesy)

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Chamber Leaders See Winter Texan Shifts

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The demographics of Winter Texans are changing and professionals in the tourism and hospitality industries are calling for more frequent studies and research into this vital group of visitors with deep connections to the Rio Grande Valley.

Leah Woolridge, the vice president of Visit McAllen, sees an age shift among Winter Texans. Retirees are younger, more active and looking for things to do, she said.

“You use to be able to tell a Winter Texan from a mile away,” Woolridge said. “They wore name tags and enjoyed traditional Winter Texan activities like square dancing. The new demographic isn’t spending as much time in the RV parks. They’re wanting to get out and about and are not into the same traditional activities.”

In Mission, the president and chief executive officer of the local chamber says Winter Texans in their 60s can be seen at a popular brewery, enjoying craft beers and having the means to pay for higher-priced products. The Mission Chamber’s Brenda Enriquez speaks of some residential living shifts from RV parks to Airbnbs. She also cites a decline in Winter Texans from Canada as another trend that needs further study.

It leads her to ask, “What do Winter Texans look like these days?”

Studying Trends

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and its related business departments and centers have done a number of Winter Texan studies over the years.

These studies have historically taken place periodically, such as in three-to-four-year intervals. The university’s Business and Tourism Center per its website says the last Winter Texan study its staff conducted was during the 2022-23 tourist season. Prior to that report, the most recent research study done by that office was conducted in 2017-18.

Welcome Home RGV – a multiplatform company dedicated to the Winter Texan industry – conducted a major tourism study in 2022 in conjunction with the UTRGV Department of Data and Information Systems. At that time, Kristi Collier, the chief executive officer of Welcome Home RGV, expressed concern about declining Winter Texan visitor numbers.

RV Parks throughout the Rio Grande Valley continue to be the primary places of residency for Winter Texans. (Courtesy)



She also indicated that for all of many years Winter Texans have been coming to the Valley that much about their economic impact is still not fully understood. Collier said, for example, that 73 percent of Winter Texans receive visits from family members and those visitors stay at area hotels. And when Winter Texans visit South Padre Island, 42 percent of them stay at hotels in providing a boost in business for SPI hotels during leaner traffic months.

More Collaboration Needed

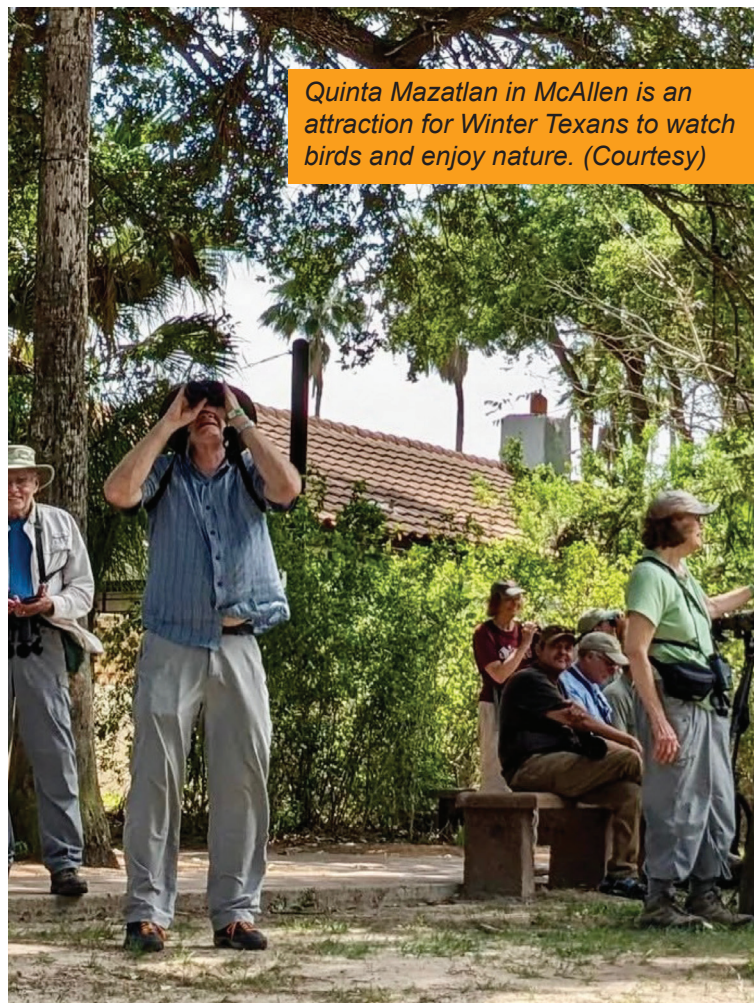
Collier’s point is that Winter Texans are major economic drivers for area hotels, which many local residents may not realize. This sort of information in a tourism industry changing by the year can help area chambers and visitors’ offices in devising new strategies and marketing campaigns. Mission Chamber CEO Enriquez sees the need for collaboration among Valley tourism interests in more frequent updates regarding the Winter Texan market.

“We could invest regionally with other chambers in developing community profiles of RV parks,” Enriquez said. “What are their populations and incomes? Time flies. We need more research.”

‘Keep Our Charm’

Mission has largely kept its profile as the RGV city with the most Winter Texans.

Enriquez says her city has 47 RV parks and a peak months Winter Texan population of about 50,000 Winter Texans. The city hosts an annual Winter Texan Fiesta that attracts thousands of enthusiasts from Mission and around the Valley. The celebration is a way to say thank



Quinta Mazatlan in McAllen is an attraction for Winter Texans to watch birds and enjoy nature. (Courtesy)



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you to the tourists who are so vital to the region's economy.

In neighboring McAllen, the Winter Texas focus isn't on having RV parks but on events and entertainment that brings the tourists to Hidalgo County's largest city. McAllen has developed an extensive portfolio of events. They range from its huge Christmas in the RGV parade down Bicentennial Boulevard to MXLAN, a three-day art and musical festival celebrating Latino culture.

There's also the draw of the Quinta Mazatlan with its nature center and birdwatching. The center's activities are popular with the winter visitors as well as local residents.

"McAllen has become the destination for shopping, dining and festivals," Visit McAllen's Wooldridge said.

Mission's Enriquez is confident of the Valley's ability to continue to draw Winter Texans with its weather and lower cost of living than is seen in Arizona and Florida.

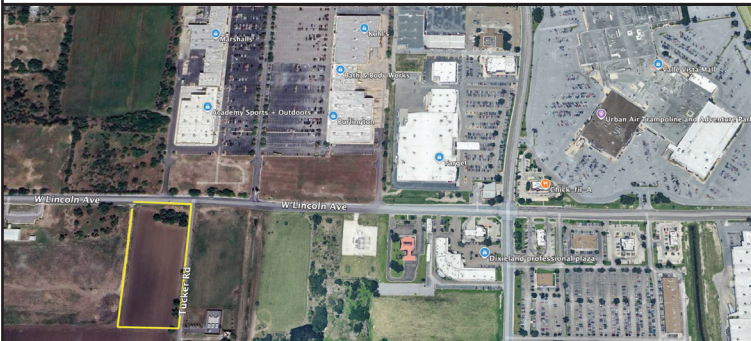
"We need to keep our charm," Enriquez said. "I feel like we have a lot to offer beyond our cost of living."



Winter Texans remain a vital part of the Rio Grande Valley economy. Some professionals in the tourism field would like to see more consistent research done focusing on their demographics. (Courtesy)

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RGV Native Grows Retailing In Region

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

McAllen native Will Collins has built a formidable retail and commercial real estate company whose developments span much of South Texas.

From its headquarters in San Antonio, Merit Commercial Real Estate shows on its webpage dark blue diamonds pinned on a Texas map. Each pin represents a Merit development project with clusters of them in the Rio Grande Valley and the San Antonio-area market. Collins comes from a banking family. He would start his own real estate company and in 2021 it would merge with another company to form Merit.

Since then, Collins and his founding business partner, Ryan Harrison, have worked intensively to develop projects in the two key South Texas markets. For Collins, there are the personal insights and pride of reconnecting to the Valley and finding the right locations to grow his company and seeing his hometown region prosper.

“I’m very proud to be from the Rio Grande Valley and I’m very proud of all we’ve been able to do in the Valley,” Collins said recently after the groundbreaking at the Shops at Mercedes. “We have a very unique culture

here and those of us who grew up here know how special it is.”

As of late, he said, there is no part of the region that has been more important to his company than where he was standing at the July 3 event in Mercedes.

“What I’ve seen as we have gone across the Valley is just how much growth is occurring in the mid-cities,” said Collins, who is Merit’s chief executive officer.

‘Keep People In Mercedes’

It was a full house under a big tent on a large open space located across the street from the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlets in Mercedes.

A procession of photos featuring Collins and elected officials and community leaders followed remarks from the podium. Mercedes Mayor Oscar Montoya thanked Collins and Merit for “investing in a fledgling city.” County Commissioner David Fuentes said development of the Shops at Mercedes shows “the future is right here in the central part of the Valley.”

Suzanne Schwarz Shepard, whose family with deep local ties, sold the property that

would become the outlet mall and now the Shops location.

“Mercedes is the kind of place where you want to be,” Shepard said of her hometown.

A key part of developing the Shops, Collins said, was convincing Shepard that “we were the right team for her family’s land.”

Once completed, the Shops will fill much of the current open space found between the outlet mall and the administrative offices of the South Texas Independent School District. Marshalls, Burlington and Boot Barn are among the retail tenants who have committed to the Shops. Merit, from its previous developments has business relationships with some of the country’s better-known retail and restaurant brands, is working to fill out its roster at the Shops.

Forging Ahead

The outlet mall has a reputation as a prime destination for Mexican national shoppers.

Collins said that factor was a key one in deciding to develop on the busy intersection of Expressway 83 and Mile 1 1/2 East Road. Mercedes leaders say the 250,000 square feet of retailing and restaurants at Shops



Merit Commercial Real Estate CEO Will Collins, center, with Mercedes community leaders and members of the Schwarz family. (VBR)

at Mercedes will keep local shoppers and Mexican nationals in the city longer in spending their dollars.

“We’ve had huge leakage to other cities to the extent we have money being lost to neighboring cities,” said Mercedes City Commissioner and Mayor Pro Tem Ruben Saldana. “With these new developments we will be able to keep people in Mercedes and that will be helpful for many businesses in our community.”

Merit in recent years has forged ahead as the biggest retail developer in the Valley. Its projects and property management in the region run from Rio Grande City to Brownsville and just about every community in between. Collins views the region as still being underserved in that it lacks the presence of large institutional builders. Job growth does not always reflect the population growth in the Valley and a rate of commercial development commensurate with the region’s expansion, he said.

Projects like the one in Mercedes and emerging Shops at 493 in Donna make clear Merit and its RGV-grown CEO are working to change that description.



Dirt is moving as construction work begins at the Shops at Mercedes adjacent to the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlets. (VBR)



Merit Commercial Real Estate is working to add to its roster of stores at the Shops at Mercedes. (VBR)

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Teaching Program Inspires RGV Students

By Chris Ardis

Princeton University student Wendy Kopp formulated the idea of Teach For America in 1989 for her undergraduate thesis.

The first participants in the nascent TFA program began their lifelong pursuit of educational excellence in 1990. Teach for America Rio Grande Valley was founded the following year. The national organization and its affiliates around the country are non-profit institutions. They recruit and train recent college graduates and professionals to teach in mostly lower-income communities for at least two years.

More than 30 new TFA Corps members are spending the summer months preparing to welcome RGV students for the 2025-26 school year. They devote their mornings to teaching at middle schools in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school district. The TFA participants do so under the supervision of district teachers. Their afternoons are spent in TFA training sessions.

“It’s like accelerated student teaching,” said Jon Stevens, a senior managing director for TFA in the Valley.

Stevens emphasized the value of having PSJA ISD mentor teachers and a TFA coach working together to support and provide immediate feedback to Corps members.

“When they start the school year, they are already used to working with colleagues,” Stevens said.

Working In Teams

The third partner in the mix is ACT-RGV.

It’s a state-accredited alternative certification program that works with TFA Corps members so they can earn their official Texas teacher certification. Earning the certification is a rigorous process. There is a requirement of 50 hours of observation by Texas-certified teachers and 150 training/workshop hours mandated to obtain their intern certificate.

This certificate is mandatory in most Valley districts. Corps members receive a standard Texas teacher certificate after completion of their first year of teaching and meeting all alternative certification requirements. The TFA program is expertly designed to avoid overwhelming Corps members.

“We do not duplicate support because then it’s not support, it’s a burden,” Stevens said.

Another important summer assignment is

going through the process of interviewing for available teaching positions in TFA partner districts in the Valley. Among those seeking positions are new TFA Corp participants Cynthia Irwin and Alek Galarza.

Irwin graduated from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio and participated in AmeriCorps in working with at-risk children in underserved communities.

“I saw a lot of myself in many of them,” said Irwin, who was born in Monterrey. “It was a pivotal time in my life.”

She knew she wanted to return to the Valley, where her family moved when she was seven. Irwin enrolled at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, rekindling

her passion for education and science. She considered becoming a physician assistant but changed her mind when she became a mother.

“I reflected on what aligned best with family,” Irwin said.

The TFA Investment

Galarza is a graduate of Edcouch-Elsa High School and finished those years with an associate degree.

He played collegiate tennis in Wisconsin for one semester before coming home and completing his degree at UTRGV at the age of 20. He considered law school, but his passion for writing steered him in the



Jon Stevens, who moved to the Valley in 2006 to teach through Teach For America, now serves as senior managing director, networks and strategy, for TFA RGV. (Courtesy)

direction of education and TFA.

“I believe I’m a piece of every mentor I’ve had,” Galarza said. “I want to give a piece of myself to my students.”

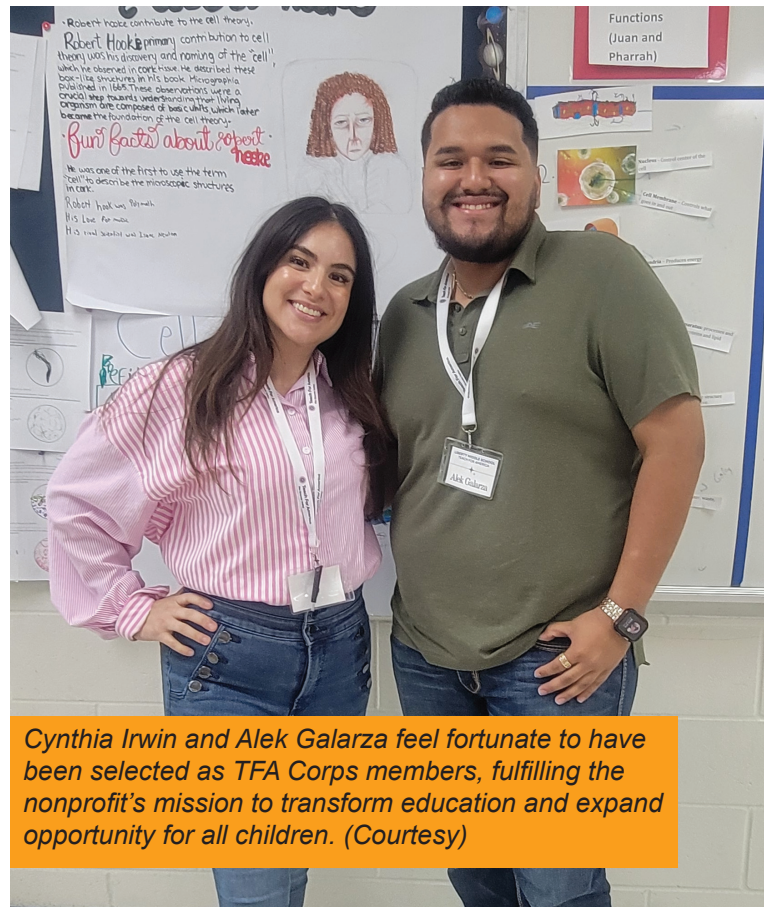
Galarza shared that he is “big on structure and planning” while realizing that “every day in the classroom will be different.” Irwin and Galarza can’t wait to step into their own classrooms to bring the TFA mission to life. For Irwin that means “students celebrating progress with me cheering, establishing a growth mindset in my classroom, raising the bar and challenging my students.” Galarza says he and his fellow Corps members are in this together.

“The goal we all have is to better our community, to better our students,” he said. “And TFA is investing in us.”

The new teachers will become part of the TFA alumni after their two-year commitment and become “free agents,” Stevens said. Corps members present action projects, sharing how they have grown in leadership and their plan for making a long-term impact.

There are approximately 220 TFA RGV alumni who live in the Valley. Seventy percent of these alumni are still working in education. Next year is the 35th anniversary of TFA RGV. The nearly 1,800 TFA RGV alumni will be invited to attend an Alumni Reunion in February 2026. TFA is a nonprofit organization, relying on grants, donations and sponsorships to keep their Corps thriving.

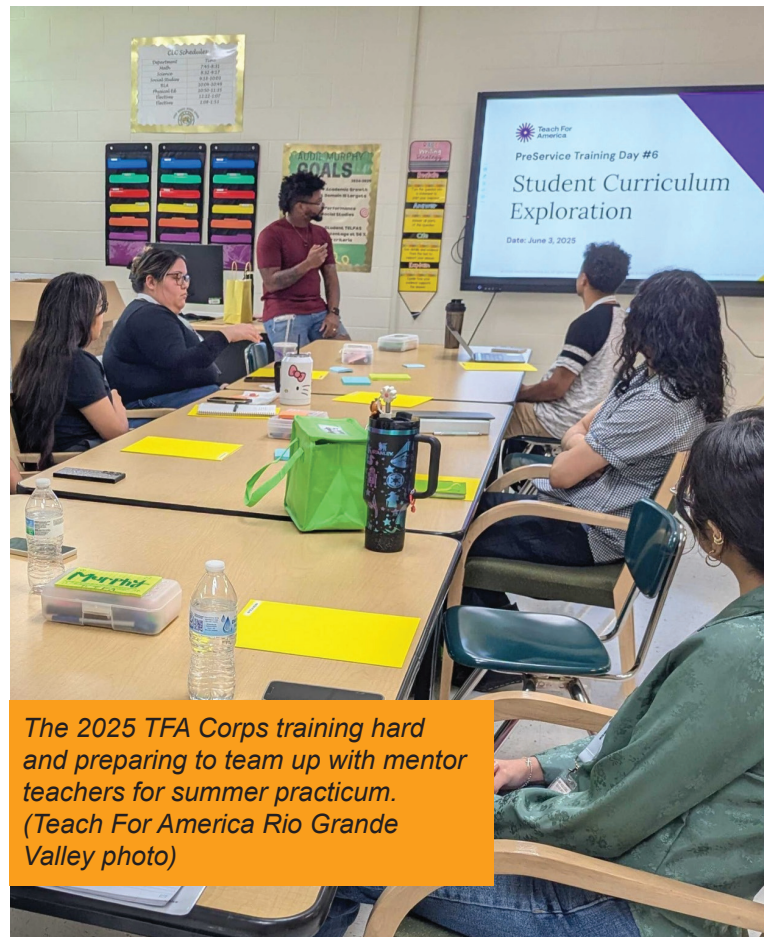
To learn more about TFA, visit teachforamerica.org.



Cynthia Irwin and Alek Galarza feel fortunate to have been selected as TFA Corps members, fulfilling the nonprofit’s mission to transform education and expand opportunity for all children. (Courtesy)



Summer practicum takes place in middle schools in PSJA ISD during the month of June. (Teach For America Rio Grande Valley photo)



The 2025 TFA Corps training hard and preparing to team up with mentor teachers for summer practicum. (Teach For America Rio Grande Valley photo)

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