

October 2025

# VBR

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## RUBBING IT IN

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# Strength In Numbers

By Todd Breland

When the right puzzle pieces come together, a masterpiece is the result.

As a committee of classmates and I recently planned a high school class reunion, I am reminded of the power of excellent team members. When strong forces come together and press on with passion, work ethic and fun, successes happen.

It's the same with our Rio Grande Valley's efforts of taking our region to new heights. Local business and community leaders are steamrolling on the tracks resulting in increased prosperity and improved quality of life for our four counties' residents. When determined and relentless captains are leading qualified and hungry personnel, what happens is everything you see.

Decades ago, the push for Valley

excellence was managed by a handful, but the times have changed and for the much better. Our greatest strength is when teams of support have each other's back, and that is exactly the status of today's Rio Grande Valley. From new development to expanded growth to a much friendlier transportation system, Deep South Texas is one of the most aggressive markets not only in Texas but also in the great U.S.A.!

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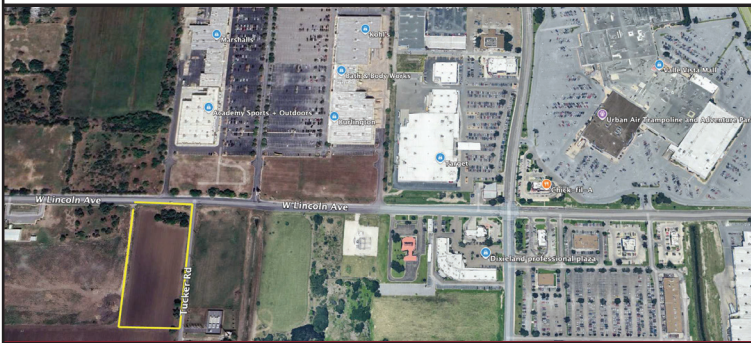
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# RGV Rubs Spice Up Texas Cuisine

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Lou Castro creates what his TXQ Rubs call “Texas love” in the kitchen of a north Brownsville home nestled by a resaca.

Castro’s kitchen serves as a laboratory for the mix of spices, powders and ingredients that make up his growing collection of rubs that are applied to meats, vegetables and Mexican pastas. The TXQ Rubs are today found on the shelves of hundreds of H-E-B stores, meat

markets and specialty shops across Texas. In 2017, it was just an aspiration, a dream “born late at night on a driveway in Brownsville, Texas,” as stated on TXQ bottles.

The beginnings were modest ones as these ventures often are. Castro started out selling his first batch of rubs in 2017 from the back of his pickup truck at the Academy parking lot in Brownsville. Believing in his product, Castro

entered local product pitch competitions in gaining contacts and having some successes before moving on to H-E-B’s Quest for Texas.

He competed multiple times in the grocer’s best local products contest. Castro never placed among the top list of finalists in the H-E-B competitions that feature some of the best up-and-coming food and beverage products from Texas entrepreneurs. He did make enough of



Lou Castro creates his RGV-made rubs in the kitchen of his north Brownsville home. (VBR)

an impression to gain H-E-B's attention for his rubs and eventually gained access to suppliers who stock the grocer's shelves.

By 2020, the first of Castro's TXQ Rubs were making their way to H-E-B store shelves, an accomplishment he said that "gave me chills."

"To see your product that you worked so hard on in a store like H-E-B, it was just amazing," he said of seeing TXQ Rubs at the H-E-B on Paredes Line Road in Brownsville.

**'Echale A Todo'**

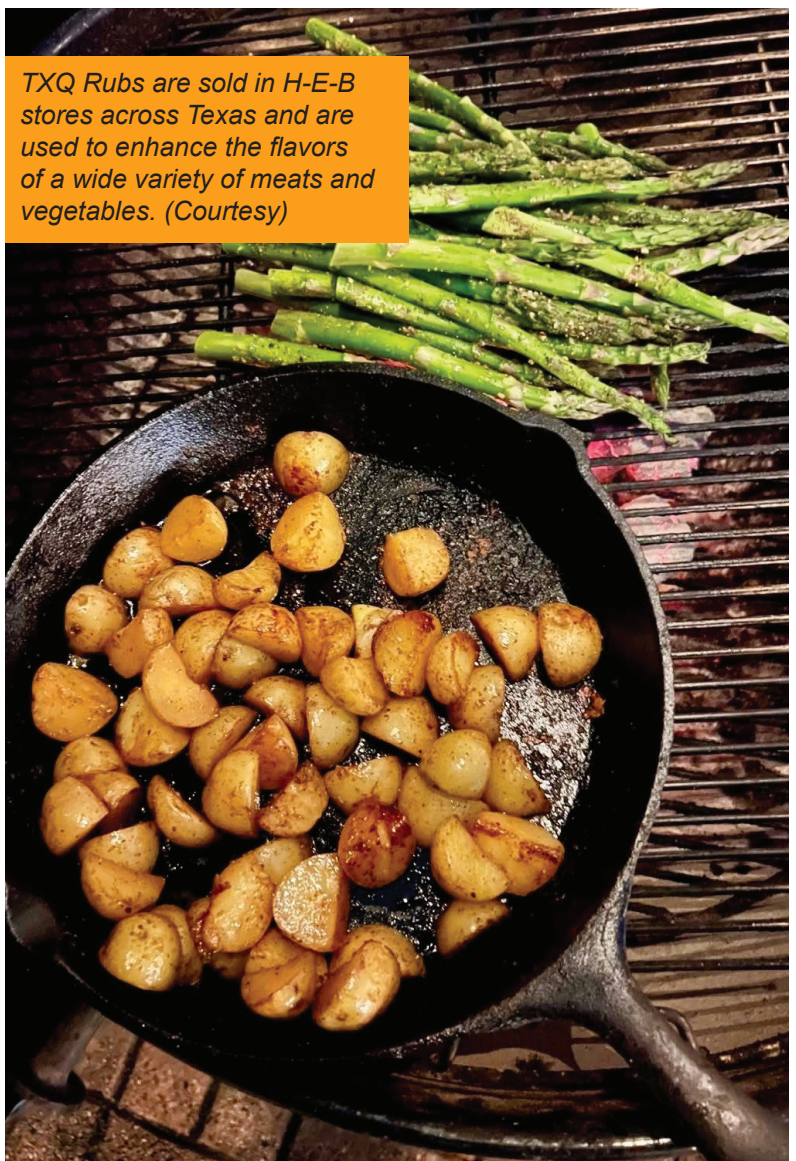
How Castro got to being an entrepreneur with products in H-E-B stores is a story of many journeys that led to his kitchen and the tinkering that led to TXQ Rubs.

He grew up in Brownsville as the son of one of Brownsville's more prominent homebuilders. His father, Luis Castro, was one of two builders who developed Lakeway, a signature residential area in what was once considered the northern fringes of Brownsville. It's where Lou Castro

*The TXQ Rubs include products entitled with the area codes of Texas cities as well as regional catch phrases. (VBR)*



*TXQ Rubs products are on the shelves of H-E-B stores in many major urban markets. (Courtesy)*



and his family now live.

In previous jobs, Castro was an educator, restaurant manager and worked in the food service industry. His word of the wise to younger people coming up in business and other fields is that disparate jobs include different skills that can be beneficial later in life.

“Every bit of what I’ve done in the past has helped me to do what I’m doing now,” he said. “All of those past jobs have given me the skills and knowledge to run this business.”

It is a business that is distinctly Texan. Castro’s family of rubs are largely labeled by the area codes of the Rio Grande Valley, San Antonio, Austin and Dallas. On H-E-B store shelves, a shopper can see TXQ Rubs with a (956) label or perhaps a (210) in San Antonio or a (512) in Austin.

There is a larger TXQ Rubs bottle that says *Echale!* It’s a product made to sprinkle on rice, *fideo*, *picadillo*, and other Mexican pastas and noodles. The products labeled by area codes are meant to flavor fajitas, steaks, veggies, and in the case of the 956 variety, *echale a todo*, (put on everything). Castro contracts with a manufacturer in San Antonio to produce all of the TXQ Rubs products.

“Life is too short for just salt and pepper,” Castro says in referring to the wide variety of garlic, spices, chili peppers, tomato powder and turmeric found in his products.

### The Next Big Thing'

The competition Castro’s products face is steep with 25 rubs originating in the Valley as compared to three when starting his business eight years ago.

There is always the need to innovate and add new products because, he says, customers and stores are always “looking for the next big thing.” Castro is nearing rollout of a *pan de campo* bread mix that will emulate the camp bread made by cowboys out on the range over campfires.

Getting to the just-right mix of ingredients that lead to a new product is trial and error, he says, and can sometimes come in days or take several weeks. He knows in his mind “where I want to go” flavor-wise and works toward getting there with the help of his wife, Melissa. Products in hand, Castro hits the road, promoting his rubs at grocery stores, market shows and major livestock shows around the state.

“We have to be unique,” he said. “There are lots of people who make good rubs. We have to come up with stuff that’s unique in its presentation and product.”



TXQ Rubs are versatile and can be used to enhance the flavors of many meats, vegetables and Mexican pastas. (Courtesy)



Customers can order and ship TXQ Rubs gift boxes throughout the state and country. (Courtesy)

# AgriLife Director's Career Spans Border

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

The last week of a nearly 40-year career in agricultural research and education was wrapping up in late August for Ruben Saldana.

“It feels awkward and a little emotional,” he said in his Weslaco office where he served as the administrator for Texas AgriLife Research & Extension, District 12.

Saldana provided leadership for a district that covers nearly all counties south of San Antonio as well as managing the AgriLife extension center in Weslaco. It’s a job he held for nearly 20 years in working with the parent Texas A&M University System while also collaborating with county governments regarding office space and resources for the district’s extension agents.

Saldana managed plant pathologists and horticulturists in Weslaco while also supporting extension agents across 20 counties who deal with real-life issues like what to do with honey bees in backyards and fever ticks on South Texas cattle ranches. In the midst of it all, he also worked with county judges and commissioners and would gain enough insights into political life to be elected a city commissioner in his hometown of Mercedes.

“It takes a special kind of person,” said Saldana, who earned a Ph.D. in agricultural education from Texas A&M. “You have to be comfortable with people and be able to change and adapt and be a problem solver. If you can’t do those things, you won’t be able to do this job.”

## Community Engagement

Those issues will now be ones for others to solve when it comes to AgriLife’s District 12.

Saldana in retirement from those duties can look back on a career that began as an educator with the Mercedes school district. He thought in those first after-college years of following in the footsteps of his parents.

His father, Lauro, was a longtime teacher and vocational education director in Mercedes and is so well known there that his son calls him “an icon in our community.” Saldana’s mother, Irma, was a teacher herself and would become a director of curriculum in the Mercedes

school district. The younger Saldana did have one year as an agricultural educator in Mercedes before embarking on a 30-plus career with Texas A&M-affiliated extension services.

Saldana’s first A&M Extension Service job would be in Laredo. All of his subsequent jobs were also along the border. From his start in Laredo, then to Willacy County and Weslaco, he went on to El Paso for eight years before returning to the Rio Grande Valley in 2006.

Those years before the District 12 administrator job included a four-year stint in Weslaco where he was a 1990s-era project manager for South Texas AmeriCorps. Saldana considers those years among the most satisfying of his

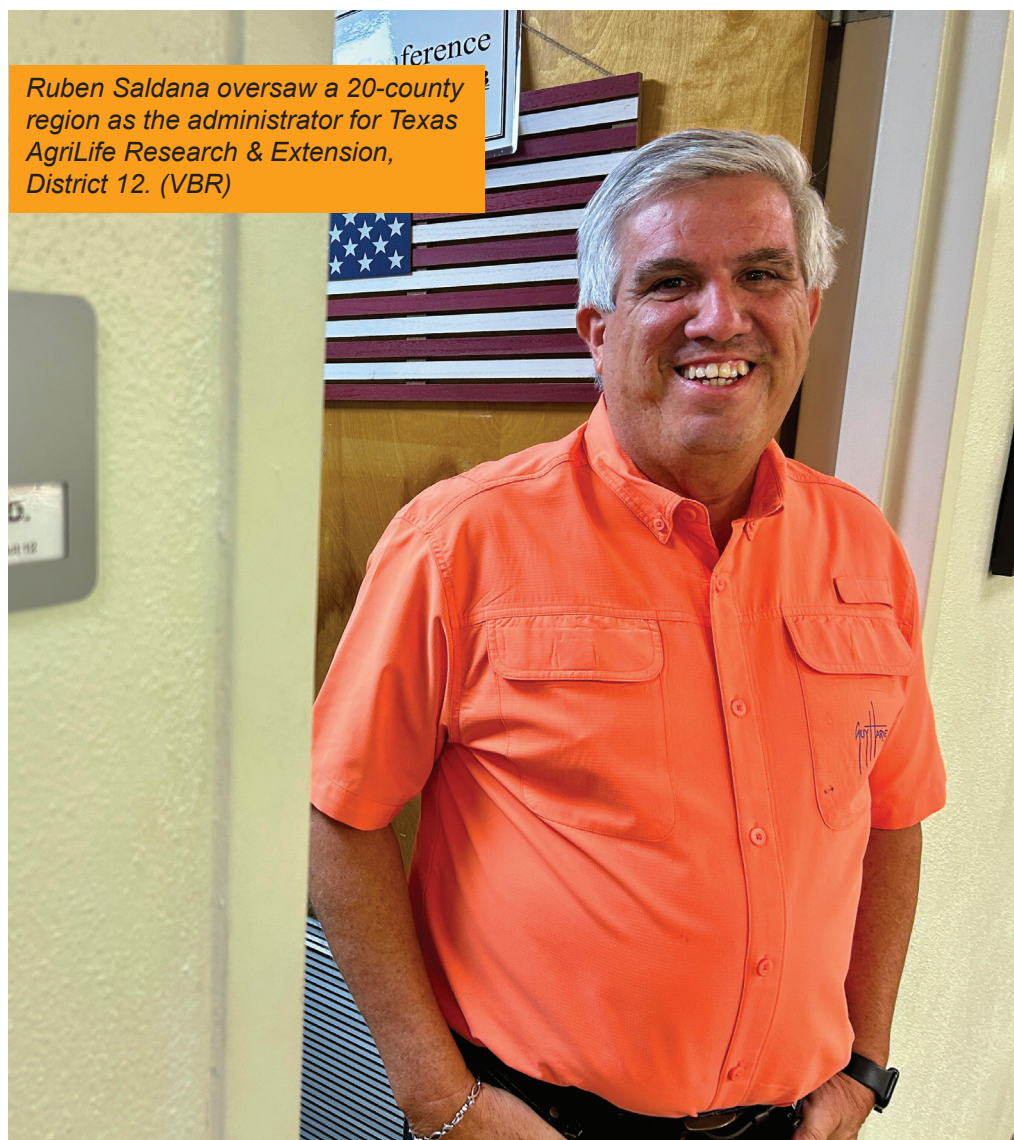
career. He found working with youths on mentorship, education and health initiatives to be fulfilling. He did similar sort of work in Laredo in helping to lift youths up from economically disadvantaged situations.

“You knew those kids would benefit the most from those programs,” Saldana said. “I really enjoyed it. You knew you were making an impact.”

## History & Future Challenges

The history of the AgriLife Center goes back to its establishment in 1923 just east of the newly created town of Weslaco.

Its first name was Substation Number 15. The facility sat on a tract of land once used by federal troops sent to South Texas in the early 1900s to deter incursions from



*Ruben Saldana oversaw a 20-county region as the administrator for Texas AgriLife Research & Extension, District 12. (VBR)*

Mexico during that country’s revolutionary war era. From its inception, the center established research and trials into citrus, vegetables, cotton and sugarcane.

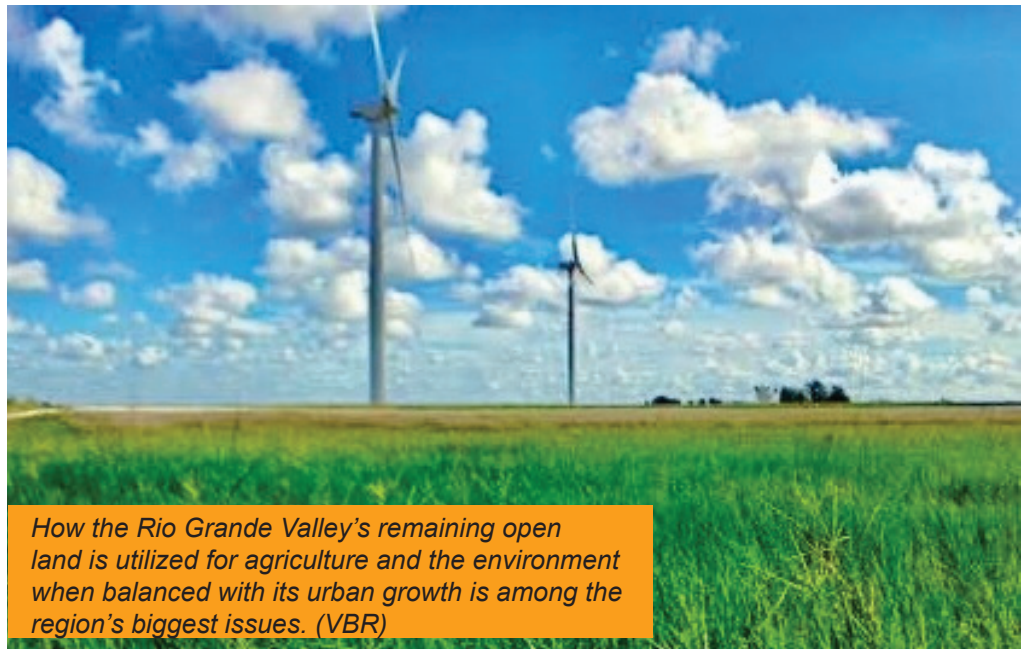
Its most famous accomplishment came decades later when Dr. Leonard Pike led the research that would develop the Texas 1015 Sweet Onion. The Weslaco-bred onion is today the official state vegetable of Texas. The mild and sweet taste of the onion is so popular nationally that in 2023 Texas growers increased their acreage by 40 percent to meet rising national demand.

Saldana walked into this history when becoming the center’s administrator in 2006. He and his team of scientists and researchers would make their own mark in helping growers and ranchers deal with a whole host of problems and challenges in adapting to ever-changing environmental conditions.

“When they run into a problem, they don’t want to go to A&M to get a degree,” Saldana said. “They need a solution. We take the knowledge we have here and put it into place locally to help solve problems. We say, ‘here’s the data, here’s the research,’ and they make the decisions on what to do with the information. That’s why people turn to us.”

From retirement, Saldana will see how the dynamic between agriculture and a rapidly growing RGV plays out, the remaining open spaces contrasted by urbanization on its constant march to develop land.

“To me, that’s the challenge of the future,” he said. “How do we continue to support agriculture and all that it provides us while we see the Valley growing as it is. How do we negotiate these kinds of differences and find that middle ground?”



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# Matt's Pivots Amidst Events & Market Changes

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Jeremy Smith's family-owned business demonstrated a steely resolve in getting through double catastrophes over the last five years – and coming out of both revived and refreshed.

“Two things – the pandemic and the fire – and you learn to take what the market gives you,” Smith said of COVID-19 and a 2022 New Year's Day fire that destroyed Matt's Building Materials flagship store in Pharr. “You never let a good problem go to waste.”

Smith was referencing the succession of changes and shifts in the construction industry since 2020 and how it continues to alter supply chains. Stores like Matt's with locations in Palmview, Pharr, Harlingen and San Benito have gone through what Smith calls “a big learning curve.” Shipping building materials via truck instead of rail has become more cost effective. Southern-grown yellow pine has increasingly supplemented wood sources from Canada and other parts of the United States as a primary material to build new homes.

Since 2020, Matt's has become less retail-oriented and more focused on servicing and supplying contractors and builders. It has sought to refine and improve its delivery services and is providing quicker express drive-through capabilities at its four Valley locations while planning new stores in Brownsville and Edinburg.

“Every year has been vastly different from the year before,” Smith said of the past five years. “One thing we know is that, bottom line, contractors want to get in and out of our stores and get back to their job sites. We want to lead the market in those expectations.”

## Increasing Cameron County Footprint

Matt's is a legacy business in the Valley and is in its seventh decade of operations in the region.

It hit a low point in its long history nearly four years ago when a huge fire wiped out its 120,000-square-foot store in Pharr. Since then, Smith and his brothers, Ben and Isaac, along with Matt's patriarch – their father Danny – have regrouped and

retooled. They reopened in Pharr in early 2024 with a newly built 55,000-square-foot facility. The Smith family followed that up with the opening of a 10,000-square-foot store in Harlingen in late 2024.

Matt's is looking to increase its footprint in Cameron County. Jeremy Smith is actively scouting for a Brownsville location that is in the general area of state highways 48 and 511 in the general vicinity of the

city's port. The Smiths also have their eye on the fast-growing stretches of northern Edinburg and hope to secure a spot along the expressway of U.S. Highway 281.

The newer stores, in retrospect, were built with too much of a focus on retail, Jeremy Smith said. What has become clear, he said, is that Matt's needs to be more oriented toward contracting business and less so toward DIY customers. The latter



*Jeremy Smith and his family-owned business are adapting to market changes at their four building material stores in the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)*

remains an important part of Matt’s business, but Smith said one of the things learned since 2020 is that providing “retail service is expensive” when compared to the revenues and efficiencies of servicing contractors.

In making adjustments, the new stores in Pharr and Harlingen have been refitted to provide additional grounds to store and distribute building materials. Securing more property at the Harlingen store along Expressway 77 will lead to more storage and distribution bays and expanding services for its contractor business base.

“You need to adapt,” Smith said. “We’re moving toward a smaller retail concept. All of your accessories have to support the meat and potatoes of your business. If you don’t do that, things will get in the way of what you do best.”

### Gaining Clarity

The “learning curve” Smith speaks of is ongoing for Matt’s, and he speaks with exuberance of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The Smith family has often spoken of the importance of faith in how they operate their business and manage and value their employees. There are hints of that philosophy when Smith talks of how the family business dealt with those extraordinary back-to-back challenges. As daunting events as both were, there was clarity gained in how to move forward and best operate the business in a new era.

“When the scariest things that can happen to you happens, everything that comes after it looks less scary,” Smith said. “We’ve never seen challenges like what we’ve experienced since 2020. You learn to pivot and I’ve pivoted a lot over the last five years.”



*Southern yellow pine at its highest quality levels is increasingly being purchased at Matt’s stores for new home construction in the Rio Grande Valley. (VBR)*

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*Retail inventory remains a mainstay at Matt’s Building Materials store, but the family-owned business is transitioning to more contractor-based business and sales. (VBR)*



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# 'Market Minute' Flourishes Into Signature Event

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

Photographs of the early days of Jackson Street Market Days depict an event trying to get its footing in Harlingen.

It's 2001. What few booths and vendors that show up at the street festival's inception space out along a city block in downtown Harlingen. A now long-gone Lack's furniture store serves as the primary backdrop. There were doubts back then that Market Days would stick in Harlingen.

"My husband said, 'better call it a market minute because it's not going to last long,'" Sue DeBrooke said of her husband, Bill, a longtime developer and believer in downtown Harlingen.

The Rio Grande Valley knew flea markets but the concept of an open-air downtown street festival was an unknown in those days. Bringing such an ongoing event to Harlingen was the brainchild of local residents Donna Gayle Gray and Bonnie Keener. They had enjoyed such festivals in Central Texas

communities. Getting started in Harlingen meant recruiting vendors.

"I would see people selling fruits and vegetables around town and ask them, 'would you like to be part of our market days?'" DeBrooke recalls of the sales pitches that launched Harlingen's downtown celebration.

## 'A Huge Deal'

Soon enough, the event on the first Saturday of every month grew from one block to two and the buzz and crowds began to grow.

Downtown Harlingen on Jackson Street brought back memories of the charm and old school appeal of what cities were like before shopping malls and retail power centers. People who knew each other and did business side by side like neighbors.

Today, 25 years later, the Jackson Street Market Days is a multi-blocks affair. The

focal point of the market goes from 4th Street to Commerce, with over 160 vendors and upwards of 5,000 visitors flocking to downtown Harlingen for the biggest event of its kind in the Valley.

"It has become such a core event for Harlingen," said Beth Fuqua, a downtown business owner and a key member of the festival's leadership.

There is an intriguing variety of products sold at the festival on the first Saturday of every month on Jackson Street. Soaps, fishing rods, fruits and vegetables, cookies and pastries, and all sorts of arts and crafts, just to name a few. There's live music as well. It's a lively market vibe during its operating hours of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Shoppers and onlookers walk up and down Jackson, visiting and eating and renewing acquaintances. It's all great exposure for Harlingen and has become vital for the financial well-being of downtown merchants.

*Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Jackson Street Market Days has become a "core event" for Harlingen. (Courtesy)*



“Market Days is a huge deal for them,” said Fuqua of downtown business owners and she is one of them with her J&B’s Café on Jackson. “It can salvage their month.”

### Building Community

Business matters aside, there is little doubt that Jackson Street Market Days has been a key element in boosting the image and confidence of downtown Harlingen.

The momentum it has provided has helped to fill vacant buildings with new businesses. Its success has spawned other downtown events celebrating the arts and local culture. Adjacent downtown blocks like West Van Buren with its coffee shops, restaurants and flower shops have developed their own seasonal celebrations in



About 5,000 shoppers enjoy Jackson Street Market Days every month in downtown Harlingen. (Courtesy)



Jackson Street Market Days has added new attractions over the years, including live music. (Courtesy)

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drawing from the exposure of Market Days.

**A Grassroots Effort**

Other cities have contacted Market Days leadership to inquire about possibilities of having their own downtown festivals. Often imitated, never duplicated, it could be said about Harlingen’s Market Day. It is not a city government-run operation, but one managed by a core of dedicated volunteers. The festival is run by 501c nonprofit organization with its own board of directors who oversee the event to ensure compliance to its rules and requirements.

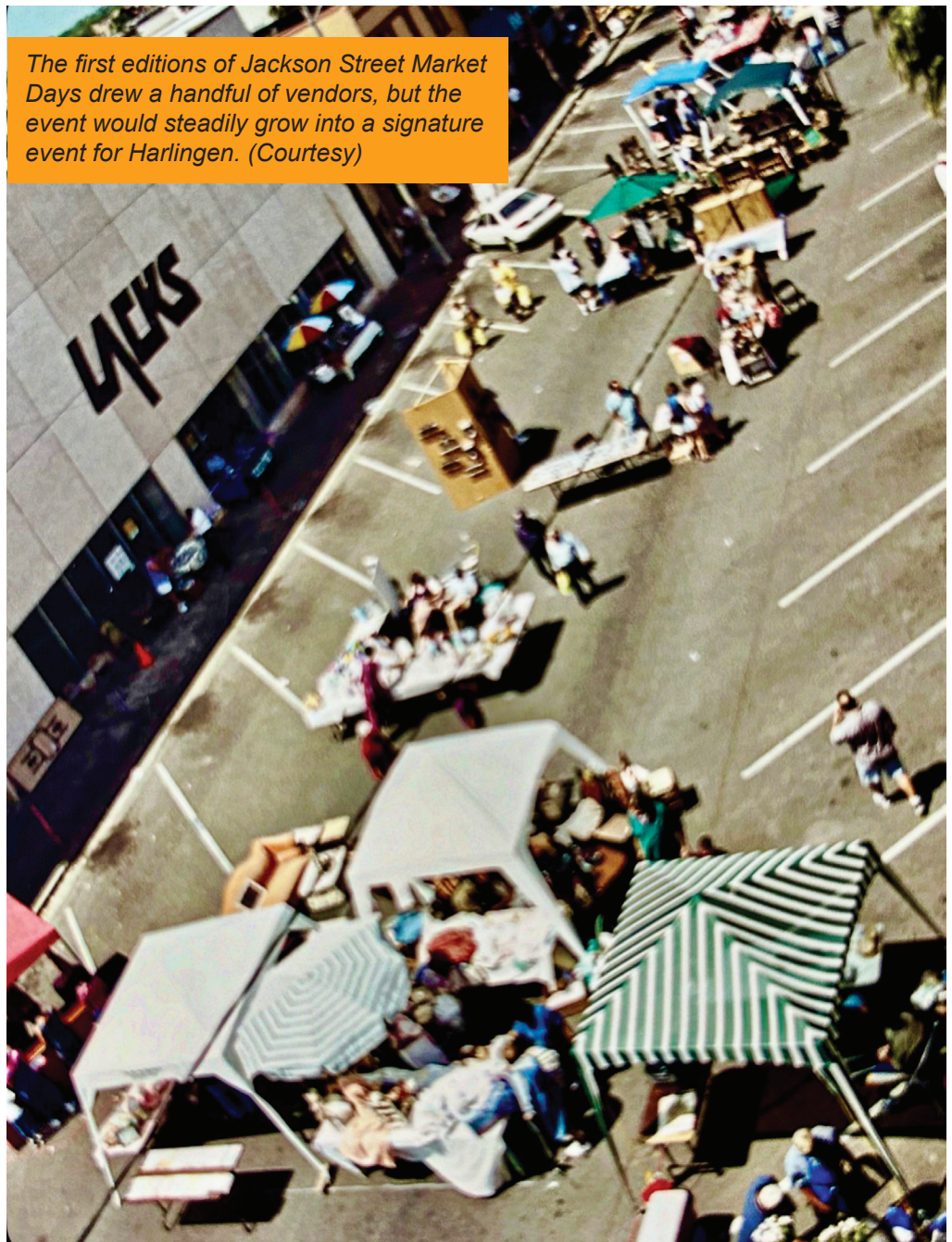
There is no paid staff. Volunteers help set up barricades on early Saturday mornings, carrying tables and equipment and assisting vendors in finding their booth locations. The Market Days leadership works closely with city government and the local police department in coordinating the monthly event.

“Our main goal is to make sure people are having fun,” said DeBrooke, who is known for carrying a clipboard as she makes the Market Days rounds. “There’s something about the exclusivity of just being on Jackson and not spreading it out. I want it to be on this space and keep it in a certain way of how we do things.”

Rain or shine, Fuqua says Market Days will be there the first Saturday of every month in downtown Harlingen, with “a consistency that made us what we are.” Twenty-five years later, the minute has turned into years, with DeBrooke saying her husband is happy to have erred on his 2001 predication.

“Everybody needs to jump aboard,” said Fuqua, who is a Market Days board member, as is DeBrooke. “People are still coming and they’re looking for things to do.”

*The first editions of Jackson Street Market Days drew a handful of vendors, but the event would steadily grow into a signature event for Harlingen. (Courtesy)*



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# Donna's 'New Mindset' Leading To Growth

By Ricardo D. Cavazos, *Content Editor*

April Castaneda is a multitasker as are many city administrators in smaller communities.

She is the new executive director of the Donna Economic Development Corporation while also serving as the de facto manager of the local chamber. The latter had been inactive and the former was close to it before Castaneda recently made the move from the Weslaco Economic Development Corporation to lead a similar organization in Donna.

For Castaneda, it's an "opportunity and challenge to build from the ground up," she says at the Donna Public Library with Mayor David Moreno seated nearby. The Mid-Valley city of nearly 17,000 residents has seen a spate of new retailing with the Shops at 493. The 200,000-square-foot retail power center has most recently seen a Chick-fil-A and a Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen open on its grounds.

The view from nearby Weslaco, where Castaneda was the EDC's director of business development, was one of a community growing but that could do even better with an improved focus and more expertise.

"I'm goal oriented and I like to chase opportunities," she said. "We're getting the word out that Donna is here and we're the next community to grow in this region."

## Seeing The Potential

Donna and its neighboring Mid-Valley cities of Mercedes and Weslaco are experiencing some of the most visible and rapid retail and business growth in the Rio Grande Valley.

Unlike McAllen and Pharr, these three cities still have open land to capitalize on along their Expressway 83 corridors. Developers like San Antonio-based Merit CRE are active in building and opening new retail shops in the three cities.

"We have a new mindset here in Donna," Mayor Moreno said. "We now have the anchors (stores) and developers want to come here more than ever."

Gaining additional growth in Donna is much more likely if it can build a sound EDC and revive its chamber. Castaneda with her four years of experience at the Weslaco EDC to go with a previous 10-year tenure at South Texas College brings a record of experience in economic development and organizational management. She is also a Mid-Valley native in being from and still living in Mercedes.

"She sees the potential we see here," Moreno said of the city's new EDC director.

## A City With A Bridge

Castaneda is in her fourth month on the job and is going through an active to-do list.

Building a good marketing plan and getting in front of developers and investors was an early priority. Engaging with the community and small business owners via personal contact and a social media presence were early action steps. Having events like ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings and job fairs add a

buzz to a community's momentum.

Donna is unique in that it is a small community with an international bridge. The Donna-Rio Bravo International Bridge just south of the city has crossings of over 50,000 vehicles per month. The city's leadership is conferring with its representatives in Congress and Austin to work toward improvements in inspection facilities that will boost cargo traffic across the bridge. Castaneda sees industrial opportunities in cold storage and light manufacturing in areas adjacent to the bridge.

"We were waiting for people to come here,"



*April Castaneda is Donna's new executive director of the economic development corporation and is working to revive community celebrations and chamber of commerce type of events. (Courtesy)*

Mayor Moreno said. “Now, we are being intentional and making efforts to go out and recruit and look for business.”

**Quality Of Life Issues**

Beyond economic development, Donna is working with the Texas Water Development Board on a \$10 million project to make much needed improvements in its waste water systems.

Donna has long struggled with municipal water issues. Those problems not only frustrate local residents but also create enduring image problems and can lead developers to wonder if the city can meet its water needs. The water development board project would go a long way toward repairing those shortcomings.

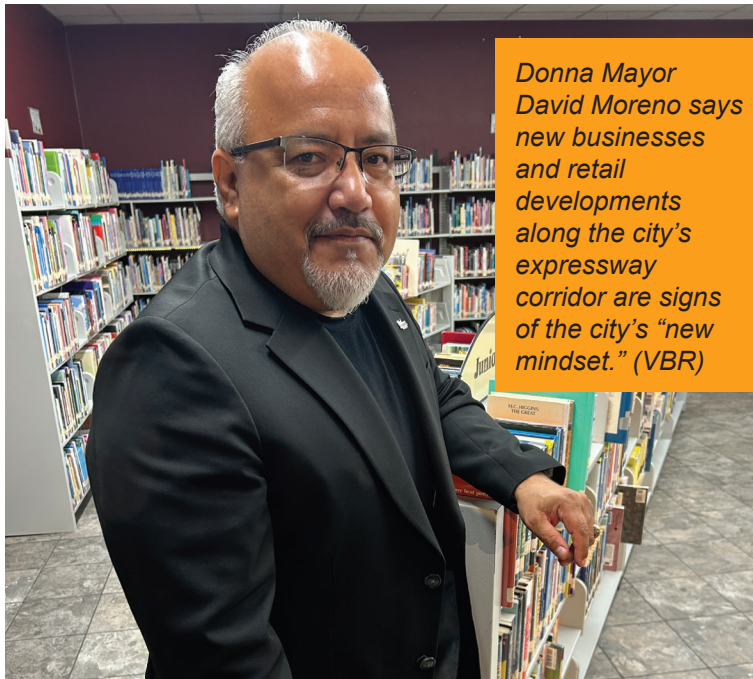
Another quality-of-life issue is parks. The city broke ground in early September on the Donna Sports Memorial Complex at 200 East South Avenue. The mayor says it’s Donna’s first new park in over 20 years and will include baseball fields, an amphitheater, walking trails and a dog park.

It’s all part of a story Mayor Moreno and new EDC director Castaneda are trying to bring together in working with other city leaders. A city strategically located between McAllen and Harlingen with open stretches of expressway frontage is poised for growth.

“I don’t see why a city like ours can’t toot its own horn,” Moreno said. “We have a lot going on and we’re doing things here that haven’t been done for many years in our city.”



*Donna recently celebrated a ribbon cutting of a new Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen restaurant in the city. (Courtesy)*



*Donna Mayor David Moreno says new businesses and retail developments along the city's expressway corridor are signs of the city's "new mindset." (VBR)*



*The growing Shops at 493 highlight Donna's retail and business growth in recent years. (VBR)*

# Bob Mills Furniture Stores Expand To RGV

By Chris Ardis

Bob Mills and his oldest son cut through two ribbons in late August and officially brought a Bob Mills Furniture store to the Rio Grande Valley market.

The company's 12th store in its chain is located in San Juan and is the first one south of San Antonio. The Oklahoma City-based company now has nine stores in Texas. It represents a significant addition among the Valley's furniture store offerings with a 50,000-square-foot showroom.

The Bob Mills store in San Juan is found along Expressway 83 amidst luxury store dealerships. In San Juan on opening day, family and team members, local dignitaries, PSJA Early College High School mariachis, and the community celebrated the new store.

"The community gets really excited when they see new businesses coming here," said San Juan Mayor Mario Garza.

The store opened to the public on August 28.

"We found this property and made a deal in fewer than 10 days," said Bob Mills, the company's owner and namesake. "That proves we are here to stay. When you buy property, you don't just leave town."

## Technology & Customer Service

The company has two stores in Oklahoma and one in Kansas to go with its nine locations in Texas.

The Bob Mills motto: "If it's not quality, I won't sell it. If it's not quality, you shouldn't buy it."

Corinthian, Homestretch and Moto Motion are among the prominent lines of furniture at the new store. Bob Mills Furniture is known for offering "Companion Pricing" in which customers can purchase the parts of a set together in a bundle. They also offer a "No Shopper Stalkers" policy that allows customers to browse without sales staff at their heels.

The company's BedMatch technology is another big draw. Customers lie down and BedMatch goes to work, gathering 18 measurements and using sensor technology to determine the best mattress for a customer.

"BedMatch is life-changing," said Brian McIntyre, the San Juan store manager. "Rest is super important, and it scientifically proves which mattress is best for you."

## Getting Started & Established

The Bob Mills Furniture roots go back to 1971 and how the company's namesake got started in business.

Unable to find work, college graduate Mills took a \$400-a-month job typing late-payment notices for an insurance company in his home state of Oklahoma. He met an insurance salesman at the company who had previously worked in the furniture business. Over time, Mills asked him what it would take to open a furniture store and the response was \$25,000.

"I went to mom and sold her on the idea," Mills said of seeking startup funds from his mother.

While in college, Mills lost his dad and his mom told her only child she would loan him the money, not give it to him. She expected a return on her investment.

Mills and the insurance salesman renovated an old grocery store on SW 29th Street in Oklahoma City and bought merchandise to fill it. They sold some furniture but never seemed to have capital. Mills' business partner would eventually hand over his keys, walk out the



*Bob Mills, his wife Margaret and their oldest son, Bryan, prepare for the ribbon cutting. San Juan Mayor Mario Garza is pictured third from the right. (Courtesy)*

door and leave the business.

Mills knew he had two choices: close the doors or find a way to keep them open. He thought of his mom and of his own reputation and knew he really only had one choice. In 1975, down to two employees, Mills hired Ken Collins, just four years his senior but with knowledge of the business.

“He knew what he was doing and I listened,” Mills said. “That taught me the value of good people. Without good people, you will fail.”

**Finding Success**

Mills and Collins doubled their business four months after forming their partnership. Bob Mills paid his mother back, with interest, and rewarded her in another special way.

“Mom got a new Cadillac every year,” he said. “At the end of every model year, she would call and tell me the car was making a strange noise.”

Laughing, he would ask his mother if she thought it was time for a new one. Her quick response was yes.

Mills has a wealth of experience that dictates his company’s values. Mills and his wife, Margaret, have three children and their company is a family business. Oldest son Bryan is the chief operating officer, daughter Tuesday is the design director and youngest son Chris is the chief marketing officer.

“We have a family rule, and it starts with me,” said Mills, the elder. “If you don’t work, you don’t get paid. It’s simple.”

Mills said there is a reason his company is known for paying their sales hosts well.

“I want the best,” he said. “If we pray to God for help, we want His best. Why shouldn’t we give our best?”

While paying well is important, Mills finds handing out “cold cash” for employee recognition is effective. He believes in discovering each person’s “hot button,” in finding what is valued and unexpected, and then blessing an employee with a gift they will treasure.

“You want to find that button in everybody,” he said.

Mills does not believe in dwelling on errors. “If we make a mistake, we admit it, quit it and forget it. We turn the page. Don’t hold people hostage.”

Now in his 70s, Mills has no plan to retire anytime soon.

“How much longer will I do this?” he asked. “As long as God gives me the physical ability and I continue to have the idea that I don’t have to work. I get to come to work.”



*Bob Mills welcomes the crowd at the grand opening of his store in San Juan on Sept. 12. His wife, Margaret, is second from the left. (Courtesy)*



*Artwork at Bob Mills Furniture reflects the region, trends and traditional styles. (Courtesy)*

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