CITY MATTERS

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HARLINGEN MAYOR LEADS LOWER VALLEY COUNCIL

Many key issues that affect the region's citizens involve the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council and Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell serves as the council's president for this year.

"The council is about finding common ground and the things our communities can work on together," he said. "The council's monthly meetings are where we can discuss things that are important to all of us."

Public safety, transportation, water resources, water drainage, and funding from state and federal sources are examples of the LRGVDC's priorities, explained Boswell, who is in his seventh year as mayor. Updating the council's regional strategic plan for Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy counties is underway to coincide with the Texas legislative session in 2015.

He cites monitoring the expenditure of more than $100 million in disaster recovery after Hurricane Dolly to rebuild or repair approximately 800 houses, oversight for the growing Valley regional transit system, management of the Area Agency on Aging, and the administration of grants for police and fire departments as ways the council serves communities. Since its inception in 1967, the LRGVDC has sought to reduce or eliminate the duplication of government programs to increase efficiency.

"It's a way to level the playing field for small cities and fills in the gaps for smaller cities that may not have the same planning resources as the larger cities," Boswell said.

Public water supplies and water drainage following storms are two ongoing agenda topics for the region, Boswell added, because the water issues require cities and counties to develop and implement strategies on a cooperative basis.

A chemical spill that polluted the Elk River at Charleston, W.Va., on Jan. 9 this year affected about 300,000 people in nine counties. It's an emergency scenario the Valley might face because the Rio Grande represents about 90 percent of the Valley's water supply, the mayor said. The council is improving its plans for preventing such and crisis and a regional response to such a widespread emergency.

Valley Metro bus services that began about 10 years ago in Harlingen with LRGVDC support add convenience to the public's mo-

Commitment by LRGVDC leaders to achieve a better quality of life for residents and support business expansion through effective communication on initiatives – such as Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) selecting Cameron County for its launch site – results in many benefits for the region, state and global economies, Boswell said. The region becomes stronger with such cooperation that leads to more success through better partnerships, he added.

"I'm honored to serve as the council president this year," he concluded. "My colleagues and the staff deserve a lot of credit for keeping the region moving forward in positive directions." Go online to www.lrgvdc.org for de-

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Executive Committee members for the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council Board of Directors include (from left) President Chris Boswell, mayor of Harlingen; 2nd Vice President James E. Darling, mayor of McAllen, Secretary Celeste Sanchez, mayor of San Benito, Past President Norma G. Garcia of Donna, and Treasurer Armanndo Garza, mayor pro-tem of San Juan. First Vice President Tony Martinez, mayor of Brownsville, is not pictured.

MDA THANKS HARLINGEN FIREFIGHTERS, LOCAL DONORS

Harlingen firefighters recently received recognition from the MDA for leading all participating fire departments in the Rio Grande Valley for collecting donations during the annual "Fill the Boot" campaign. From the left are firefighter Virgil Garcia, driver Tiburcio Sanchez Jr., fire Lt. Jose A. Ruedas Jr., fire Capt. Patrick Reilly, and fire Lt. Russell Knight of Fire Station No. 8.

Harlingen firefighters led all Rio Grande Valley participating fire departments in raising donations during the Muscular Dystrophy Association's "Fill the Boot" campaign for 2014 by bringing in $35,019.

International Association of Fire Fighters Local No. 3404 set a Valley record for its fundraising total, according to MDA officials. The 99 firefighters gained the funds during three weekends in May and June with "Fill-the-Boot" proceeds that motorists contributed while waiting at traffic signals at various intersections.

The effort benefits children and adults from South Texas who are affected by muscle disease.

Firefighters from Fire Station No. 8 raised $7,183.82 and swept the top fundraising spots among the firefighters' three shifts competing within the city.

"The real contributors are the citizens of Harlingen," said Darrell Loftus, battalion chief.

"It took their (citizens') generosity to give us these numbers," added Lt. Jose A. Ruedas Jr., president of the Harlingen Professional Fire Fighters Association.

Ruedas explained that the MDA "Fill the Boots" fundraiser celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2014 and representing the City of Harlingen is a tradition for the Harlingen Fire Department. The 2014 total for MDA during "Fill the Boot" in Harlingen set a record for the city's firefighters. "Being the number one fundraiser among the region's fire departments reminds us this is worth the effort," Ruedas added.

MDA (Continued on Page 4)

NATIONAL RESOURCE NETWORK

The NRN assists mayors and local governments address topics such as workforce development, infrastructure, housing, neighborhoods, transportation, and budget decisions.

Federal officials in Washington, D.C., recently announced the selection of the City of Harlingen government as one of about 50 communities to participate in the initial phase of the National Resource Network's "311 for Cities" service.

The National Resource Network is a first-of-its kind pilot project information and consultation to city governments, Mark A. Linton, executive director of the White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities, said in a press release. The NRN is a $10 million program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that collaborates with the Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) Initiative launched by President Barack Obama.

Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell said the 311 program allows city officials to access the NRN website (www.nationalresourcenetwork.org) for an online account that enables fast, direct contact with private and public sector leaders. He noted that Harlingen is

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HARLINGEN PLANS HISPANIC HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Plans are underway for the Festival y Ceremonia Civic del Dia de la Independencia in Harlingen that will be held from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 13.

All the events are free and open to the public. Residents of all ages are invited to bring lawn chairs and blankets for casual seating on a first come, first served basis. There will be live music by Grupo Contacto Norteño, Las Gavilanes and Grupo Magico from 1 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. as part of the festival at Lon C. Hill Park, across Fair Park Boulevard from the Harlingen Municipal Auditorium. The festival will include food vendors and children's activities.

Doors to the Harlingen Municipal Auditorium, 1204 Fair Park Blvd., will open at 6:30 p.m. for the civic ceremony portion of the evening's proceedings. The ceremony will be held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the auditorium. Rodolfo Quilantan Arenas, consul of Mexico, will be a guest speaker. Mariachi 7 Leguas, the Gloria G. Canales Ballet Folklorico, the Fit 4 Life School Folkloric Dancers, and the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District Mariachi Band.

NATIONAL RESOURCE NETWORK (Continued from Page 2)

among four cities in Texas selected to join consortium.

"It's an honor to be recognized as one of the top cities nationwide chosen for this initiative," Boswell said. "The National Resource Network is a versatile tool for our planning processes. This technological link holds the potential to aid the implementation of many projects already moving forward."

Harlingen City Manager Carlos Yerena said that capitalizing on NRN opportunities will leverage existing federal investments and assist with consideration of evolving priorities.

He said that communities in the consortium are optimistic about identifying new solutions to their challenges by tapping ideas that have proven successful elsewhere.

The NRN assists mayors and local governments address topics such as workforce development, infrastructure, housing, neighborhoods, transportation, and budget decisions.

Cities in the NRN will be able to submit questions asking for the best available resources to address their needs, such as strategies to improve bond ratings, keep pace with public safety standards, strengthen fiscal and operational plans, and reform zoning codes, the HUD reported in a press release.

Submit story suggestions to:
Dave Ralph
Public Information Officer
Phone: (956) 216-5030
dralph@myharlingen.us

"City Matters" is a monthly publication of the City of Harlingen.

HARLINGEN WELCOMES PALMS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Dozens of community leaders joined Strategic Behavioral Health to break ground for Palms Behavioral Health, a 72-bed, acute behavioral health hospital, on Thursday, August 28 in Harlingen.

"Our team has recognized the need for inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services in South Texas and we are excited to expand our reach to the southern part of the state," Jim Shaheen, president and CEO of SBH, said.

In addition to the mental health services, the hospital will bring about 200 new jobs to the area.

Mike Garone, SBH director of development, said the company appreciates the support provided by people from throughout Harlingen as SBH plans to bring hope and healing to its clients and their families. He thanked the City of Harlingen and the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation for demonstrating integrity and follow

PICTURE INCLUDES:

Strategic Behavioral Health executives, Harlingen leaders, and state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. prepare to symbolically break ground Aug. 28 for the new psychiatric health care facility that will be built in Harlingen.

HARLINGEN PLANS HISPANIC HERITAGE FESTIVAL

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as those in attendance will be invited to proclaim their pride in the Mexican culture with a yell or shout. Those attending the festival and civic ceremony are welcome to wear colorful Mexican apparel representing Mexico's colors and ethnic heritage.

For more information go online to www.myharlingen.us or call the Harlingen Convention & Visitors Bureau at (956) 423-5440.

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Rodolfo Quilantan Arenas, consul of Mexico, speaks to a press conference Aug. 28 in City Hall announcing the Festival y Ceremonia Civica del Dia de la Independencia that will be held from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 13, at Lon C. Hill Park and the Harlingen Municipal Auditorium.

MDA THANKS HARLINGEN FIREFIGHTERS, LOCAL DONORS

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"Our firefighters realize this cause is for the children, a summer camp, muscle disease research and other valuable purposes."

The 2014 "Fill the Boot" donations will boost MDA's programs of worldwide research, specialized health care, and services to clients and their families such as sending children affected by muscular dystrophy and related diseases to a weeklong, barrier-free MDA summer camp at Camp Aranzazu in Rockport. The MDA of South Texas sent 39 youngsters to summer camp in 2014, an increase over 2013.

As the MDA's largest national sponsor, the IAFF fuels MDA's mission to find treatments and cure for life-threatening muscle diseases. The IAFF is a major contributing sponsor of the "MDA Show of Strength Telethon." The IAFF contributions from charity baseball games and other local events help fund MDA's efforts to raise awareness and provide professional and public education about neuromuscular diseases.

"Throughout 2014, MDA and firefighters are celebrating 60 years of proud partnership, joined together in the fight against life-threatening muscle disease," said Jennifer Molina, RGV area director for MDA. "Firefighters do more for MDA and the families we serve than any other group. In the Rio Grande Valley area, they spend countless hours every year participating in 'Fill the Boot' drives and at MDA summer camp. We're grateful for the support of these inspiring, selfless individuals who have made a profound impact on our families' health, well-being and quality of life."

"BACK THE FUTURE" photos

Fourth grade teacher Ronald Arnold, left, City Commissioner Tudor G. Uhlhorn, center, and Mayor Chris Boswell discuss academic goals with students on the first day of class Aug. 25 at Zavala Elementary School in Harlingen.

City Commissioner Tudor G. Uhlhorn, left, and Mayor Chris Boswell chat with students and parents at Zavala Elementary School on the first day of school.

"Back the Future" greeters at Zavala Elementary School on Aug. 25 include Harlingen District 2 City Commissioner Tudor G. Uhlhorn, Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell, school Principal Tanya Garza, fifth-grade teacher Beatrice E. Cruz, state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr., and schools Superintendent Art Cavazos .

CITY JOINS HCISD, PTA FOR "BACK THE FUTURE"

City of Harlingen elected officials, administrators and police officers joined Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District to welcome students to the first day of classes Monday, Aug. 25, as part of the Texas Parent-Teacher Association initiative "Back the Future."

Communities across Texas participated in a series of events to celebrate the opening of the 2014-2015 academic year. District 27 State Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr., D-Brownsville, and Lee E. Guerra, a Texas PTA representative, greeted students at Zavala Elementary School in Harlingen. They were accompanied by HCISD Superintendent Art Cavazos, Mayor Chris Boswell and District 2 City Commissioner Tudor G. Uhlhorn. The officials visited several classrooms to speak with children and faculty; Boswell provided a school-wide welcome on the public address system.

"It's more important than ever that we advocate for our children by engaging and empowering families and communities to play an active role in the future of our state's education," Texas PJTA President Leslie Boggs said in a press release. "An investment in the education of Texas children is an investment in the future of Texas communities and, as the school year begins, we invite you to back the future with us."

The PTA encourages parents, teachers, community leaders and local residents to participate in PTA functions at the local and state levels to provide valuable resources to students. The Texas PTA has almost 500,000 members in its noncommercial, nonsectarian and nonpartisan organization; it does not endorse any candidate or political party.

"Successful students lead to successful communities and I urge all citizens – not just parents – to support the PTA groups in schools year-round during their ongoing mission to 'Back the Future,'" Boswell said.

For information about the Texas PTA online go to www.txpta.org. For information about the PTA in Harlingen public schools contact Zavala Elementary fifth-grade teacher Beatrice Cruz at beatrice.cruz@hcisd.org or (956) 655-1324.

HARLINGEN OPENS POLICE ACADEMY ENROLLMENT

Applications are being accepted for the 37th Citizen Police Academy organized by the Harlingen Police Department to offer residents an in-depth education about law enforcement issues and procedures.
"The academy brings citizens who live in Harlingen or people who work in Harlingen into an orientation process," Training Officer Sal Carmona said.
Police are grateful that the public often is alert to assisting police in gathering information or reporting suspicious activity, he said, and a portion of the academy training provides the public with instruction about how to support law enforcement efforts.
The free classes will take place from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Mondays beginning September 15. All instruction sessions are open to the public with topics such as awareness of child abuse and domestic violence, Texas laws, emergency driving techniques, active shooter situations, and crime scene investigation. There also will be presentations on the use of mace and tasers, and tours of ambulance and fire department facilities. The weekly classes are scheduled for a 10-week course.

"Our police department is based on ethics and integrity. The academy allows the department to give participants a close-up view and some experience with our procedures to fully understand law enforcement strategies," Carmona said.

A dinner will be held to present certificates of completion to CPA graduates. Applications may be picked up at the front desk of the Harlingen Police Department, 1018 Fair Park Blvd., or they may be downloaded online at www.myharlingen.us via the department's home web page.
Applicants must complete a short background check before September 10.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, reside or work in Harlingen, and have a clear criminal record without excessive traffic violations.

Carmona said that the Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association is working toward organizing a reunion. He estimated that there are more than 1,000 CPA graduates and he noted that many CPA alumni continue their involvement with the police department as volunteers.

For details, contact the following personnel:
Carmona at (956) 202-2722 or scarmona@harlingenpolice.com,
Officer Juan Carlos Garcia at (956) 216-5517 or jcgarcia@harlingenpolice.com, or
Sgt. Alfredo Alvear at (956) 535-8517 or aalvear@harlingenpolice.com.

NATIONAL RESOURCE NETWORK

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within three business days will send an initial response including an online package of annotated resources, referrals, and tools," the press release indicated.

Teams of experts from the NRN provide on-the-ground support in Miami, Kansas City, Kan., and Fall River, Mass., to work side-by-side with city officials. At least seven more cities will receive expert teams for up to 12 months to assist with needs analysis and NRN implementation, according to HUD, and more cities will benefit from the expert teams. Some of the team members represent entities such as Enterprise Community Partners, Public Financial Management, HR&A Advisors, New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and the International City/County Management Association.

HUD also announced that the NRN consortium plans to raise an additional $10 million within three years to match the federal investment. The Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation and Surdna Foundation are partners with and support the network.

HARLINGEN WELCOMES PALMS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

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"Harlingen is happy with SBH's announcement to open a new in-patient facility here; and is excited to have another great provider of much-needed services in the region. Strategic Behavioral Health's new facility will save lives, and help reduce expenses to both the public sector and the families of those impacted by mental or behavioral illnesses by providing a facility closer to home," said Raudel Garza, manager and CEO of the Harlingen EDC.

Garza said that Mayor Chris Boswell, members of the Harlingen City Commission and the city administration played integral roles in developing the project. The new facility will be located on the corner of Hale Avenue and Victoria Lane between Harlingen Medical Center and Valley Baptist Medical Center.

The mayor said the hospital's addition to the health care industry in Harlingen represents an investment in the well-being and quality of life for the community and the region.

The team at Palms Behavioral Health will consist of psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and nurses with compassion to serve those who are struggling with feelings of depression, anxiety, grief/loss and personal crisis situations. The state-of-the-art 52,000 square foot hospital will offer program options to serve seniors, adults, children and adolescents.

Construction plans call for five units, three courtyards, two classrooms, on-site pharmacy, private ambulance entrance, and on-site outpatient suites at a total of investment of about $12 million. The company anticipates opening the facility in late 2015 and the hospital's payroll will be an estimated $5 million.

Information about Strategic Behavioral Health is available online at www.palmsbh.com or www.strategicbh.com. SBH operates a behavioral health hospital in College Station, Rock Prairie Behavioral Health, in addition to several other facilities in the United States.

BEAUTIFICATION BAROMETER

Quarterly City-wide Trash-off Statistics

Date	Tons of Debris	Tires
Feb. 22 (Districts 1 & 2)	14.1	200
May 24 (District 3)	6.63	140
Aug. 23	1.33	57
Year to Date	22.06	397

The next City-wide Trash-off is scheduled for 8 a.m. to noon Saturday, Nov. 22, 2014.

Monthly Neighborhood Cleanups

Jan. 11 (District 5)	3.89	67
Feb. 15 (District 4)	10.14	27
March 8 (District 3)	1.26	6
April 12 (District 2	3.44	61
May 10 (District 1)	2.58	69
June 14 (District 5)	2.88	18
July 12 (District 4)	4.49	103
Aug. 9 (District 3)	8.30	36
Year to Date	36.98	387

Upcoming Neighborhood Cleanups – each from 8 a.m. to noon – include the following Saturdays and locations (subject to change): **Sept. 13**, South 26th Street to South 27th Street including Rainbow Circle to Chuparosa (District 2); **Oct. 11**, Lemoyne Gardens and Lazy R Trailer Park (District 1); **Nov. 8**, Bush Street to E. Coolidge Avenue including Reagan and Carter Avenues (District 4), and **Dec. 13**, Between 7th Street to 11th Street from Austin to Pat Neff (District 2).

More information about the City of Harlingen Recycling Center located at 1006 S. Commerce St. is available online at www.myharlingen.us. Go to the Public Works Department page and click on Recycling Center. The facility is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. The phone number is (956) 427-8824.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR:

- ***DIA DE LA INDEPENDENCIA***

WHERE: Lon C. Hill Park & Harlingen Municipal Auditorium
WHEN: 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 23
DETAILS: (956) 423-5440

- ***OUTDOOR SHOW & SELL EXPO***

WHERE: Greyhound Valley Race Park
WHEN: Sept. 27-28
DETAILS: (866) 639-8940

- ***GOODWILL COOK OFF***

WHERE: Dixieland Park
WHEN: Oct. 24-25
DETAILS: (361) 884-4068

- ***RGV BIRDING FESTIVAL***

WHERE: Harlingen Municipal Auditorium &Casa de Amistad
WHEN: Nov. 5 – 9
DETAILS: www.rgvbf.org

- ***HARLINGEN HALF MARATHON***

WHERE: Lon C. Hill Park
WHEN: Nov 16, 12 noon
DETAILS: (956) 423-5440

For details contact the Harlingen Convention & Visitors Bureau, 311 E. Tyler Ave., at (956) 423-5440 or (800) 531-7346. The CVB web page is part of the City of Harlingen website at www.myharlingen.us

RV PARKS REVITALIZE PROMOTION EFFORTS

WESLACO – RV park managers from across the Rio Grande Valley met Tuesday, Sept. 2, to begin developing a promotion campaign that will re-energize marketing strategies to attract Winter Texans to South Texas.

Rio Grande Valley Partnership President & CEO Julian Alvarez organized the informal gathering to offer regional Chamber of Commerce support to the RV industry. About 25 RV park managers discussed potential marketing outlets like satellite radio, major airports, travel shows, social media and the Internet. Participants agreed to meet again soon for further discussions and implementing plans.

Travel writer "Mexico" Mike Nelson said the RV industry can prove the Valley is safe for Winter Texas, tourists from around the world, and shoppers from Mexico by publicizing crime statistics that reflect larger metropolitan areas elsewhere pose greater risks to travelers.

Alvarez said media reports about a few incidents related to the immigration surge along the Rio Grande led to negative publicity about security concerns reaching large segments of the U.S. population. However, businesses and universities would not continue to invest more in the Valley if there were widespread or serious threats to citizens, he added.

Kristi Collier, publisher of "Welcome Home RGV," said the Valley RV parks should invite journalists to stay in the region for a week or two and gain in-depth, realistic perspectives to provide audiences.

"We have to make the winter visitors and their guests feel more welcome and assure them that this is an ideal place to stay," Alvarez said. "We have to make them feel appreciated more than ever."

Rita Phelps of Siesta Village said RV parks emphasize security, friendship and camaraderie. "We become a family in an RV park," she explained.

"I like to be able to tell people that when they come down here they're going to be able to save some dollars and they're going to be able to party," said Sandra Moravitz, general manager of Alamo Country Club.

Alvarez urged RV industry leaders to share news about SpaceX building a facility to launch rockets in Cameron County, the consolidation of the University of Texas at Brownsville and the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg to become the new University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with a medical school, wind farms rising in Willacy County, upgrades for birding and butterfly eco-tourism opportunities, expansion of travel accommodations via Interstate 69, more economic cooperation between Mexico and the U.S., and the region's reputation for modern medical facilities and specialists.

"Many leaders in our region are optimistic that through mutual cooperation between the private sector, government and volunteers our RV parks will continue to be an integral part of the Valley's quality of life," Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell said in a prepared statement. "We want to renew our tradition of making Winter Texans, tourists and shoppers feel at home year-round."

To join the RV park networking initiative through the RGV Partnership, please contact RGV Partnership Administrative Assistant Sandra De Los Santos at (956) 968-3141 or sandra@valleychamber.com. The RGV Partnership office is at 322 S. Missouri Ave., Weslaco, TX 78596, and the website address is www.valleychamber.com.