



# Free Magazine

May 2026



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# From the Editor

This is Lisa from Explore Harlingen. Welcome to the 31st issue of the Explore Harlingen Magazine: A Local's Guide to Harlingen, an entertainment magazine about Harlingen, Texas!

Sadly, this will be our last issue. Publishing a paper magazine at a time when most people are online was a risk. But I saw the potential to reach perhaps a different audience: one that wasn't on social media or was on different platforms than the ones Explore Harlingen was on.

I knew if my parents Roberto and Gaudencia Campos were still alive, they would have loved having a colorful magazine in hand so they could read stories about people from Harlingen doing extraordinary things. I believe they would have asked me for copies so they could share them with all their friends and acquaintances.

No matter how resourceful or enjoyable the magazine was, we were unable to make this passion project profitable. Moreover, I found it difficult to manage magazine production monthly while staying committed to my full-time career, growing my social



media accounts, staying on top of my health and wellness, and of course, nurturing my daughter as her only parent.

Thank you to the 150 businesses and organizations that chose to spend their advertising dollars on Explore Harlingen Magazine. I was humbled by their support since day one. Their contributions made this free community publication possible.

Thank you to the staff who designed, sold ads for, wrote, printed, and delivered Explore Harlingen Magazine every month for 31 months. They all had other commitments, but they made time to make this magazine shine each and every month.

And lastly, thank you to the readers of Explore Harlingen

Magazine. The way you would hunt all over the city looking for a paper copy each month amazed me and motivated me to continue it as long as I could. I'm glad you saw the value in the local content we crafted carefully for you.

Please enjoy this last issue, as each subject chosen has sentimental value to me and my family:

- **On the Cover** – With May being the month of Mother's Day, I wanted to write about my mother.
- **Event Spotlight** – Because my father and brother were firefighters with the Harlingen Fire Department (HFD), we are spotlighting two HFD firefighters who competed in the 2026 World's Strongest Firefighter Competition in Columbus, Ohio.
- **Notable Nonprofit** – My parents would often visit the American Legion to dance and socialize with friends.
- **Artist of the Month** – My daughter's art teacher who is already making an impact on her is Alexander Comminos.
- **Sports** – My brother and I used to play ping pong as kids, so we are featuring the Harlingen Table Tennis community.

This isn't goodbye. I'll continue to inform locals and visitors about current events, activities, and family-owned businesses in Harlingen on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (@exploreharlingen). And my website, [www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine), will house the archived issues of Explore Harlingen Magazine. ♦

Lisa Campos  
Editor-in-Chief  
[exploreharlingen@outlook.com](mailto:exploreharlingen@outlook.com)  
Phone: 956-477-4848 (calls only, no text)

Advertising information:  
La Feria Publishing  
ATTN: Victor Moreno  
[victor2883@gmail.com](mailto:victor2883@gmail.com)  
Phone: 956-264-7720



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer



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For a full list of Explore Harlingen Magazine pick up locations and addresses, see [www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine).

## Meet the Staff

### Content & Distribution:

Beth Marie Cantu Ensign, Writer  
Abigail Muniz Garcia, Writer  
Laisa Chavez Macias, Writer  
Roel Rodriguez, Sports Writer  
Jonathan Sanchez, Distributions  
Reva Ayala, Distributions  
Sherre Adams, Distributions

### La Feria Publishing

Landon Jennings, Production Manager  
Victor Moreno, Advertising Sales/Liaison  
Blanca Davis, Advertising Sales  
Emilio Flores, Printing Tech/Assistant  
Sharice Jennings, Billing  
Lisa Campos, Editor-in-Chief/Publisher

# The Legacy of a Mother's Love

By Lisa Campos

They say grief is love with nowhere to go. And I have grieved the loss of many family members, including my father, Roberto Ignacio Campos in 2018, and my former husband, Carlos Javier Lopez in 2023. But the grief I have over my mother's passing in 2020 takes up the most space in my heart.

My mother, Gaudencia Hernandez Campos, was one of a kind. I had the privilege of being raised by my idol: a woman who owned her own business, was a devoted wife, was beloved by her community, and was a nurturing mother to her four children (Gloria Yvonne, Deborah "Debbie" Ann, Robert Ignacio, Jr., and myself, Clarissa "Lisa" Denise).

Mom was born in Donna, Texas, the only child of Elvira Tamez and Felipe

Hernandez. She was a graduate of Harlingen High School class of 1950 and attended Pan American University. On November 1, 1953, she married my father, Roberto I. Campos. They were happily married for 64 years before he passed away on June 11, 2018.

Shortly after dad's passing, mom slipped at home and was sent to Golden Palms for rehabilitation. She ended up never going home after that. She moved into an assisted living apartment at Golden Palms until our family moved her out during the pandemic. Because of the lockdown protocols, we had been restricted from visiting her and did not want her to be alone without us. She went to live with my sister Debbie for a few months before she passed away in her sleep on October 29, 2020, with my sister Gloria asleep next to her.



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

Mom went by the name Gaudi since Gaudencia was a mouthful for others to say or attempt to spell. She'd introduce herself, "Gaudi, as in 'howdy,' I'm Gaudi," letting new people know how to say her name by teaching them a rhyme. She used to say she wanted an Audi car so she could put a capital G in front of the logo. That way everyone would know that car was hers. She was funny like that.

Growing up, my sisters were considerably older than me (18 years and 13 years respectively), so it was just me and my brother (who is 6 years older than me) in my pink brick childhood home on Rio Hondo Road. My mom, who had been a housewife, decided to start her own business, Gaudi Campos Employment Agency, in the

1980s and 1990s, when I was in school. She helped many people with resume writing, interviewing skills, and getting their first jobs. Looking back, she was a pioneer who inspired other female entrepreneurs to pave their own paths.

When I was off from school in the summers, I would spend my days at the office with her. At one point I got to answer the office telephone ("Hello, Gaudi Campos Employment Agency, how may I help you?") and even learn how to use a typewriter so I could help my mom type up index cards about each candidate. In high school, one crowning achievement I had was typing 80 words per minute without errors in my Typing class. I remember mom proudly displaying my perfect typing test up



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

Harlingen Parks and Recreation



# Viva Streets CINCO DE MAYO

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*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

on the refrigerator held up by magnets, knowing my summers at her office enabled me to reach that accomplishment.

During this time, my mom was very active in the Harlingen community. She was one of the first female members of the Six Shooters, the Harlingen Chamber's official greeters and ambassadors. I found her red Six Shooters jacket after her passing. And I finally recognized my work with Explore Harlingen as a business so I could become a member of the Greater Harlingen Chamber of Commerce. As soon as I became a member, I became an ambassador so I could proudly wear her jacket to ribbon cutting and groundbreaking ceremonies. I found some peppermints and business cards in the jacket pockets; my mom believed fresh breath was a must when meeting new people.

In elementary school, I was a good student. But mom wanted me to be better. She would pull out my sister Gloria's report cards from when she was in elementary school and compare our grades subject by subject. She would note where Gloria scored better than me to push me to try harder. I

never lost that competitive spirit.

Another core memory is when mom offered my brother and I some cereal. She said it was Frosted Flakes. However, my brother pointed out that instead of Tony the Tiger on the front of the cereal box, there was a white bear. He took a Sharpie marker, drew stripes on the bear, and put a caption, "They're pretty good!" We laughed and laughed at mom's shopping blunder. It's still funny to me to this day.

We attended church on Sundays at St. Anthony's Catholic Church. I loved singing with my mom in church. We weren't the best singers, but we might have been the loudest. I knew many psalms by heart, always trying not to look at the psalm book to prove that I had memorized them. One psalm in particular that we liked "One Bread, One Body" became an inside joke when we'd eat at Chapita's.

They had a breakfast plate called "One Egg, One Pancake," and my brother used to sing the name of it in the style of "One Bread, One Body."

My mom used to be a lector at St. Anthony's. A lector is the person who stands up at the podium and reads scriptures aloud to the church attendees. When I was in high school, she let me fill in for her when it was her turn to read. I really enjoyed being a lector in high school, so much so that I continued to lector at the University Catholic Center in Austin, Texas, while attending the University of Texas at Austin, and into adulthood. It was selfless of my mom to let me take her place as lector when I know she enjoyed it just as much as I did.

Another tradition was going to Luby's after church. Occasionally, mom and I would share a strawberry shortcake. It always felt like a special occasion



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*



# 2026 SEASON SCHEDULE

SAT. MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup> | 7PM-10PM

SAT. APRIL 18<sup>TH</sup> | 7PM-10PM

SAT. MAY 16<sup>TH</sup> | 7PM-10PM

FRI. JUNE 19<sup>TH</sup> | 7PM-10PM

SAT. JULY 18<sup>TH</sup> | 7PM-10PM

SAT. AUGUST 15<sup>TH</sup> | 7PM-10PM

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# MAY 16

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**May 31st**  
1:00pm - 5:00pm

Hosted by Harlingen Wedding & Quinceañera Expo - Event Management

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FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2026  
9AM - 2PM



FOR ACCOMODATIONS CONTACT SOTX AREA STAFF AT (956) 379-7721



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

when we'd eat that dessert together. But we didn't always go out to eat. My mom cooked a lot. She would make a package of ground beef last throughout the week by making crispy tacos one night and spaghetti with meat sauce another. However, her best dish may have been her fideo with chicken. As soon as she served it, the whole skillet would disappear. I have tried to replicate it, but I haven't come close yet.

In high school, I used to participate in poetry, prose, and oration competitions. One piece, "I Loved You Best" by Erma Bombeck was mom's favorite. It was a story of a mother who wrote each of her adult children a sealed letter to read alone after her funeral. At the end of each letter, she closed with "I loved you best," leaving each child satisfied, thinking he or she was the mother's favorite child. It was his or her secret that would not be shared with his or her siblings. When I would practice reading this story with mom, she would wink at me and say, "I loved you best." Although I know she loved all her children

equally, it was our little secret.

As I was about to graduate from high school, and it was only me at home with my parents, my mom and I became very close. I would say we were best friends. But I believe her fear of me graduating and leaving her with an empty nest made her pick fights with me about the boys I was interested in. Even then, I tried to understand her position and knew she didn't mean to push me away.

I left Harlingen to attend the University of Texas at Austin in 1990. After graduation from college, I moved around Texas, living in Houston and Dallas, but spent most of my adulthood in Austin. Then, I got married late in life and had my daughter right before I turned 41. We made the decision to move back to Harlingen (my husband was also from Harlingen) after Lola Elise Lopez was born in 2013 so Lola could be closer to our families.

When I broke the news that I was having a baby girl and moving back to Harlingen, my mom exclaimed, "I thought this day would never come." And I responded, "Neither did I."

Although our marriage ended a short while later, I don't regret moving back to Harlingen. Lola got to know her maternal grandfather and grandmother in her first few years. Lola was my parents' only granddaughter. My mom loved her immensely. She was such a wonderful grandmother to my nephews Robert, Gregory, and Anthony. I only regret waiting so late in life to add Lola to the grandchildren

roster when mom was younger and would have had more energy to spend with Lola.

It was a challenging time in my life with aging parents and a young child as a single parent at the same time. I saw a lot of similarities in their dependence on me, like how I had to help both my mom and daughter open water bottles. And, how to please them with the simplest of gestures. I remember giving my parents a printed picture of Lola and they kissed the picture. That's something you can't really do with a digital image on a phone. Or I would go to Luby's to buy mom fried okra or Church's

Chicken to buy her a corn on the cob. She would be so happy with these small acts of kindness.

In 2018, when Lola was 5 years old, we traveled to New Orleans to watch the Texas Longhorns football team defeat the Georgia Bulldogs in the Sugar Bowl. We found a bright pink sparkly hat with the word Lucky written on it at a store during that trip. I bought it for my mother, who loved anything with bling, whether it be a sequined jacket or glittery hat. Mom wore her Lucky hat to quarter bingo when she was living at Golden Palms and almost always won.



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

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May 2026



2026 STATE OF THE CITY

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3RD PRIZE: IPAD MINI

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SCAN FOR INFO 

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*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

I know the best way to honor my mother is to mirror her nurturing with my own daughter. I try my hardest every day. I've been Lola's only parent since she was 3 (she'll be 13 in May). It has been a tough road.

I remember at one point after the divorce I considered selling my house so I could save on expenses by getting an apartment. My mom urged "You don't want to go backwards," and encouraged me to keep my house, even though it was difficult to do it on my own.

When my mom passed away, I, along with my siblings, received an inheritance. I used this money to go towards paying off my home mortgage. To have a paid-off house, especially as a single parent, is nothing short of a miracle. And it's because of my parents that I was able to

accomplish that goal. But honestly, I'd rather have them still alive.

Lola's father passed away in 2023 after a lifelong battle with alcoholism. I

haven't remarried or even had a steady relationship since 2016. My standards and expectations are high because of the model that my parents set with their relationship. I can't seem to find a partner who has what I am looking for. I need someone to not only be good to me, but to serve as a positive father figure to my daughter. If he can't meet that minimum, then I'd rather stay alone.

I've always tried to give my daughter more of everything since it's been the two of us since she was 3 years old. I feel compelled to give her the love of two parents. People may think she's spoiled, but she's all I got. And I am all she has. Sometimes it feels like we are on a deserted island by ourselves. However, we are not only surviving, but we are also thriving as a mother-daughter team. The strong relationship I had with my mother is forefront in my mind as I navigate

my relationship with my daughter.

My last words to my mother in her last waking moments, spoken through tears, were, "I love you, I love you, I love you." But not even those words were enough to tell her how much she meant to me. This article is another attempt to convey those feelings to the person who shaped me into the woman I am today.

Six years after her passing, my mother continues to be my guiding light and my inspiration in everything I do.

Mom, of all the different roles I have played in my life, I miss being a daughter. I miss being your daughter. I'll never stop loving you and I will never forget you and the sacrifices you made for me. I am fortunate to have had a love like yours and I will continue to wear my grief for you with honor. Happy Mother's Day in heaven. ♦



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*



# Family Crisis Center

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

## Monet & Mimosas

### FUNDRAISER

Join us in celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Family Center. Enjoy an art-filled morning of brunch, mimosas and community.

**Saturday, May 2**

**Doors: 10:30AM & Brunch: 11:00AM**


**LOCATION: TSTC Cultural Arts Center,  
1825 N. Loop 499, Harlingen, TX**

- Mimosa Bar & Brunch
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## Event Spotlight

# Local Firefighters Compete Among the Best at World Competition

By Abigail Muniz-Garcia

From the Rio Grande Valley to a global stage at the Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Ohio—Harlingen Fire Department’s (HFD’s) very own Gage Richmond and Michael Allen proved they could stand among the strongest firefighters from all over the nation and around the world. Their participation on March 6 and 7 at the World’s Strongest Firefighter competition gave them the opportunity to represent Harlingen on a global platform.

Gage Richmond, who joined the department in March 2024, took home



*Courtesy of City of Harlingen*

9th place in his division. He has competed in local Strongman events, but he said competing at this level was different.

“I’ve only been competing in it (Strongman) maybe two years, so going from competing at a local level to competing at the national level is a huge change for me, but I would say regardless of how I feel about how I performed, I placed top ten,” he said.

Strongman is a competitive strength sport that tests an athlete’s endurance and physical strength. It includes various events and unlike powerlifting, athletes

must complete different tasks that include not only lifting but movement such as the Farmer’s Walk, where a competitor has to carry heavy objects with handles over a set distance.

“The best way I can describe it is moving extreme amounts of weight in the most unconventional ways,” Richmond said. “It’s not always a barbell; you might have a log, a fire hydrant, a natural stone, Atlas stone... it’s just a bunch of odd objects, really.”



*Courtesy of Michael Allen*



Courtesy of Gage Richmond

The sport is both physically and mentally challenging and Richmond said there were moments he had to push through to stay in the competition.

“Sometimes you have those doubts about whether you’re going to be able to pick up this weight or that bar, of course I had those doubts,” Richmond said. “There was a point during the competition that I had to stick it out and push through the pain and suffering and finish those events.”

While Richmond admits that he is still “fairly new to the sport,” he is ready to hone his skills and

improve. He also plans to compete again next year.

“It’s something that I’m really starting to enjoy,” he said.

Michael Allen, who competed for the second time this year at the event alongside Richmond, also plans to return in 2027.

“And my goal is to win the whole thing – win overall,” Allen said.

Allen, who has been with HFD for two years, said he didn’t always know he would become a firefighter, but he always knew he wanted a career that involved serving others.



Courtesy of Gage Richmond

“There were signs,” he said. “I’ve always been the type of person to help people... I feel like I fell into the right spot.”

Allen earned 5th place in his division this year. He seriously trained for “a brutal” four months beforehand and said he is already preparing for upcoming Strongman events to be ready for next year’s competition.

“I was pretty close this year. I had a five-second penalty, which threw

me into eighth place. I had to claw my way back up to fifth place, but my performance was a second-place performance... it is what it is.”

Before the March competition in Columbus, Allen took part in two other Strongman competitions to be better prepared. He participated in the Strongman Corporation Southwest Regional Championship in Mesquite, Texas in the spring of 2025. After that,

he made it to nationals, which was held in Las Vegas in September.

“I’ve always been an athlete,” he said. “This was just another challenge to take up and try my best at. I’m always trying to stay active for my job.”

Both Richmond and Allen share similar sentiments about their roles as firefighters and their service to the Harlingen community.

“That’s what we do. We show up to accidents, fires...” Richmond said. “Sometimes it’s these people’s worst days of their lives. I hope that they (citizens) just

have somewhat of an understanding that we are not just doing it for the level of the sport, but for the love of our profession, to represent the department.”

Allen said he also takes pride in having represented the city. He even wore a Harlingen Fire Department beanie throughout the competition.

“It was a good thing to put the Valley and Harlingen on the map— making a name for ourselves and the community,” Allen said. “To inspire the city, let them know that we stay strong for them.” ♦



Courtesy of Michael Allen

# Harlingen Fire Department Memories by the Campos Family



***FIRE DEPARTMENT CAPTAINS - Robert Campos (seated) and Robert De Los Santos have been advanced to the rank of captain in the Harlingen Fire Department. The two received notice this week that in recent competitive examinations they won the promotions over the field of applicants. Both have served the department for 11 years, and during those years have completed all regular basic and advanced firefighting and first aid courses offered [to] them locally and at A. & M. Firemen's Training School. (Star Photo)***



# Reoccurring Events

**Downtown Market Days**  
First Saturday (May 2), 9 am to 3 pm  
Jackson Street and Centennial Plaza

**The Market at Wild August Nursery and Flower Farm**  
Every Friday night  
(May 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29)  
6 pm to 9 pm  
16802 Garrett Road

**Valle Vista Mall Market Days**  
Every 2nd Saturday (May 9),  
11 am to 7 pm

**Downtown at Sundown**  
Every 3rd Saturday (March through August) (May 16), 7 pm to 10 pm  
Downtown Harlingen

**Harlingen Art Night**  
Last Friday (May 29), 7 pm to 10 pm  
"A" Street and Jackson

## May Special Events

**Harlingen Parks and Recreation**  
**Viva Streets Cinco de Mayo Festival**  
May 1, 6 pm to 9 pm  
Lon C. Hill Park

**Free Comic Book Day**  
May 2  
Participating comic book stores

**Family Crisis Center**  
**Monet & Mimosas Fundraiser**  
May 2, 10:30 am  
TSTC Cultural Arts Center

**Rotary Club of Harlingen**  
**Walk of Fame**  
May 7  
Harlingen Municipal Auditorium

**2026 State of the City**  
May 7, 5 pm  
Harlingen Convention Center

**SOTX RGV Tennis Competition**  
May 8, 9 am to 2 pm  
HEB Tennis Center  
Harlingen Parks and Recreation

**Mother's Day Celebration**  
May 8, 6 pm to 8 pm  
Harlingen Municipal Auditorium

**Rooted in Grace Women's Brunch**  
May 9, 9:30 am  
Grace Point Fellowship

**Sunny Glen Children's Home**  
**6th Annual Trivia Night**  
May 14, 6:30 pm  
101 E. Jackson

**13th Annual Drive for Perfect Attendance**  
May 15  
Gillman Chevrolet  
**2nd Annual Transportation Expo & Car Show**  
May 16, 8 am to 12 noon  
TSTC Wellness & Sports Center

**Unbroken Bold '26**  
May 16, 9 am to 3 pm  
Valley Praise Church

**Andy's Toy Box**  
May 16, 2 pm to 7 pm

# Beyond Harlingen

Lon C. Hill Park  
Harlingen Collegiate High School  
Commencement  
May 21, 6:30 pm  
HCISD Performing Arts Center

Harlingen High School South  
Commencement  
May 22, 8 pm  
Boggus Stadium

Harlingen School of Health  
Professions Commencement  
May 23, 12 pm  
HCISD Performing Arts Center

Harlingen High School  
Commencement  
May 23, 8 pm  
Boggus Stadium

Taps Across America by Richard  
Brotzman  
National Moment of Remembrance  
May 25, 3 pm  
Iwo Jima Monument

The Chamber Cup Golf Tournament  
May 30, 7 am registration  
8 am tee time  
Tony Butler Golf Course

RGV Run Bike Run 2026  
May 31  
Harlingen Soccer Complex

Diamonds & Tiaras  
Wedding & Quinceañera Expo  
May 31, 1 pm to 5 pm  
Harlingen Convention Center

Flower Moon Market  
May 1, 6 pm to 10 pm  
34097 FM 1421 (San Benito)

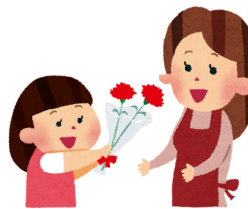
Rio Heat Show  
May 2, 8 am  
Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show  
Grounds (Mercedes)

El Sabor de San Benito  
May 5, 6 pm to 8 pm  
ABC Event Center (San Benito)

Rock'n BBQ Cook Off  
May 16  
Flying Pig Grill & Cantina (Olmito)

Brew at the Zoo  
May 16, 7 pm to 10 pm  
Gladys Porter Zoo (Brownsville)

Fiesta de Mayo Market Day  
May 23, 5 pm to 8 pm  
Combes Community Park Pavilion



*Events subject to change.*

*Check Explore Harlingen on  
Facebook for the latest updates.*

# Moves, Adds, and Changes



*Courtesy of Cookies4College*

**By Lisa Campos**

This column discusses business-related updates in Harlingen.

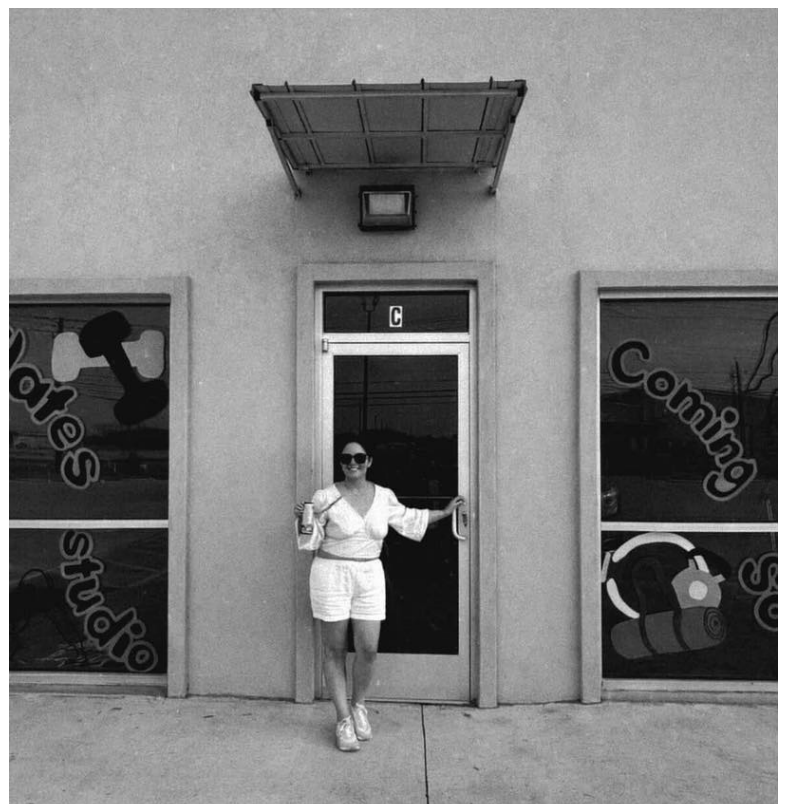
## Announcements

Explore Harlingen previously shared the news in October 2025 that an HTeaO would be opening in Harlingen. The address listed in the announcement was at the location of Rio Valley Meat Butcher Shop at 1219 W. Tyler Ave. Explore Harlingen spoke with one of the owners of the butcher shop, Yadi

Robles, to get clarity. Their plans are to demolish the current butcher shop building to construct the HTeaO site. And they are looking for a new location for the butcher shop, possibly adding space for dine-in customers. Yadi said she hopes HTeaO will be ready by fall 2026.

## New Businesses

Hembra Heated Studio, a new Pilates studio offering heated and non-heated classes, held its grand opening on April 18. They are located at 3121 Wilson



*Courtesy of Hembra Heated Studio*

Rd., Suite C (next to Dollar General). They are the first tenant in this newly developed shopping center.

### New Cafés and Restaurants

After a much-anticipated wait, Cookies4College is having its grand opening on May 2 from 10 am to 6 pm. They will have prizes for the first 50 people in line, vendors, special guests, live music, trivia games with prizes, merchandise, cookies, and more. They



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

are located at 119 W. Van Buren.

Boca Chica Café, a Brownsville restaurant, opened a new location in Harlingen on March 18. They are known for their breakfast “all day” menu.

### Anniversaries

The following local businesses are celebrating milestone anniversaries:

- Sunny Glen Children’s Home, 90 years
- Chyann’s Specialty Café, 5 years ♦

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# Notable Nonprofits 205: Serving Those Who Served

## American Legion Post 205



Courtesy of the American Legion Post 205

By Beth Marie Cantu  
Ensign

With American Legion Post 205, service doesn't end when the uniform comes off—it simply changes form.

Like many veterans, current Post Commander Joe Villarreal didn't set out with leadership in mind—his journey to the American Legion began with a simple desire for connection.

About eight years ago, during a visit to the Veterans Affairs office, Villarreal crossed paths with the post's then-commander. "He asked me if I was a veteran and if I'd like to be a part. I said, yes, and I would like to join," he recalled.

That simple conversation opened the door to an organization rooted in service.

Leadership, for Villarreal, grew out of participation. His early involvement with the post's honor guard left a lasting impression. "We

participate in providing military honors services to all our fallen comrades," he said. "It would calm me and humble me, paying tribute to our fallen veterans."

That experience not only shaped his perspective but also helped him confront the emotional weight that often accompanies military service. From there, he stepped into additional roles—executive officer, adjutant, and eventually commander of the post. Each role came with new responsibilities, and he notes that he's gained a deeper understanding of what it means to lead. "Having the title is one thing, but living up to it... that's another thing," he said with a chuckle.

At its heart, the American Legion exists to advocate for veterans and their families, especially those navigating the often-complicated world of benefits and support systems. That work is guided by what the organization calls its four pillars: veterans

affairs and rehabilitation, Americanism, national security, and community service. Through these pillars, Post 205 serves as both a support network and a bridge to help veterans and their families to much

needed resources. "Whether it's bills or food or a place to live," Villarreal said. "Those are just some of the services that we can refer our veterans to."

Beyond serving veterans, Post 205 is deeply involved

### You are Invited to Celebrate Robert and Gaudi Campos



Robert, age 92, February 1

Gaudi, age 86, February 12

Sunday, February 11, 2018, 1-4 p.m.

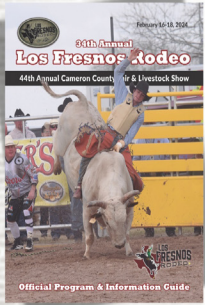
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Robert and Gaudi request lottery tickets in lieu of gifts.

Courtesy of Lisa Campos

# La Feria News Publishing



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*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

in the Harlingen community. From sponsoring youth sports teams to hosting safe holiday events, their presence extends far beyond their walls.

Education is another priority. Through programs like Boys State, the post sponsors local students for a week-long immersive experience in government and leadership.

During the holidays, their focus often shifts to families in need. “Sometimes a veteran is struggling so much after he’s given so much that he’s not able to put food on



*Courtesy of the American Legion Post 205*



*Courtesy of the American Legion Post 205*

the table,” Villarreal said. “We try to see how we can help.”

The post’s commitment to service was especially evident in the aftermath of the Robb Elementary School shooting. In response, Post 205 joined other American Legion groups in traveling to Uvalde with supplies for students.

“We donated backpacks and school supplies for each student,” Villarreal recalled. “To go there at that time and talk to the kids really makes you think... soldiers are in active war zones, but these

kids were in school when that tragedy happened.”

The experience, he said, is one he will never forget.

Like many nonprofit organizations, Post 205 faces financial challenges. Maintaining a building, hosting events, and funding programs require careful planning and community support. Fundraisers, such as an upcoming brisket plate sale, help offset costs for events like the annual state convention.

Still, Villarreal emphasizes that the heart of the organization isn’t in its finances—it’s in its people.

“It’s not about me,” he said. “It’s what I can do for anybody else, especially a veteran. It makes me happy to know that I took time to help somebody in the community.”

As a disabled veteran himself, he understands the daily challenges many face yet continues to lead his community with optimism and faith. “Every day’s a struggle,” he said. “But by the grace of God, I’m still here doing what I’m supposed to.”

And that sense of purpose is what continues to guide him and Post 205 forward. ♦



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

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Artist of  
the Month

# Comminos Studio: Building a Shared

## Artistic Vision



*Courtesy of Alexander Comminos*

**By Beth Marie Cantu  
Ensign**

When they first met, Alexander Comminos asked his wife Rachel a question that had nothing to do with art techniques, career plans, or even love.

“What’s the most important thing to you in life?”

Her answer was simple: art.

“And I said we would be fine,” Alexander recalls.

More than a decade later, that shared answer has grown into something much bigger than either of them could have imagined—a thriving studio, a community-centered gallery space, and a creative partnership that continues to shape the artistic landscape

of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV).

Alexander and Rachel Comminos are the founders of Comminos Studio LLC and the Comminos Center for the Arts in Harlingen, a place that serves not only as their workspace, but as a hub for connection with the community.

Rachel Comminos describes herself simply: “I’ve been an artist my whole life.” After earning a studio art degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), she explored jewelry, painting, illustration, and figure drawing before finding her focus in textiles. Today, she works primarily in rugs and weaving.

Alexander, by contrast, grew up immersed in art. Raised by working artists in Chicago, he later studied

at multiple institutions and earned his Master of Fine Arts from UTSA, where he met Rachel. His work spans ceramics, metal, painting, printmaking, and mixed media.

His most known piece might be the welded steel sculpture that spells out Harlingen at Lozano Plaza (the corner of “A” Street and Jackson) in downtown Harlingen that Alexander installed in 2022.

Their shared commitment to art naturally evolved into a shared vision for a business—one that would allow them

not only to create, but also to build opportunities for others.

The first iteration of Comminos Studio began in San Antonio’s Lone Star Art District, but a series of unexpected opportunities led them to Harlingen, just as the city’s art scene was beginning to gain momentum. Their arrival coincided with the early days of Harlingen Art Night, and their presence has helped shape its growth ever since.

Despite sharing a life and a business, their artistic approaches remain distinctly



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

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*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

their own—and that contrast is part of what makes their partnership work.

“The biggest thing is a shared love and respect,” Alexander says.

Rachel’s artistic process often begins with careful planning. She fills sketchbooks regularly, mapping out ideas before bringing them to life in textile form. “I like having my sketches and being able to plan out colors,” she says.

Alexander thrives in unpredictability.

“I do call and response,” he explains. “I see something or think of something, and that might lead to a question like, ‘Is this going to work or fail epically?’ And sometimes the failures are actually the most successful part.”

Over time, their differences have become a source of growth. Rachel credits Alexander with helping her embrace a more intuitive approach.

“I’ve been able to let go of some of the persnickety pieces of my personality,” she

says. “And be a little bit more free.”

That balance extends beyond their art and into their relationship as creative partners.

“Give your partner room to work,” Rachel says. “That makes it so much easier to collaborate. You can both be your best selves and then come together and do something great.”

Their collaboration occasionally takes physical form, like a piece combining Alexander’s ceramic work with Rachel’s textiles. More often, though, it exists in the day-to-day support they offer one another—the understanding of long studio hours, the encouragement, and the shared excitement of building something meaningful.

Like many artists, both Alexander and Rachel have experienced the highs and lows of their work. From navigating civic expectations in

large public art projects to enduring a denied six-month commission and managing the challenges of an international exhibition in Rome, each experience has shaped their understanding of the art world.

Still, both artists remain focused on what’s ahead.

Their studio and gallery continue to evolve, offering new exhibitions and opportunities for connection within the community.

It all started with a simple answer—art. And years later, it’s still the foundation of everything they’ve built together. ♦



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

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# Ping Pong Wizard

By *Roel Rodriguez*

Roel: When Lisa said the May issue would be the last issue of Explore Harlingen Magazine, I was saddened. Although I haven't been with the magazine team for long, I've enjoyed sharing sports stories from our community. I'm grateful to Lisa for the opportunity and appreciate the support from team owners, league reps, coaches, parents, and players who provided content for the stories.

My last sports article for Explore Harlingen Magazine will be about Lisa Campos and her connection to sports. Over the years,

Lisa and I have had several discussions and text messages regarding all things Texas Longhorns especially when the Longhorns were in the middle of pursuing a National Championship. Whether it was Longhorn football, basketball, softball, etc. all we wanted was to see the University "light the tower" on the Forty Acres adding another National Championship.

Lisa is a great friend and neighbor, so I was really looking forward to learning about Lisa's experience with sports and her exploits as a player. As it turns out, Lisa did not participate in any organized sports throughout her childhood, however,



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

she shared this wonderful memory of when she participated in ping pong with her brother as part of

the Harlingen Parks and Recreation Summer Program.

Lisa: When I was in elementary school back in the 1970s and early 1980s, my older brother Robert ("Robby") and I played ping pong. My parents had purchased a ping pong table for us, and we used to play at home a lot. When the summer came around one year, we entered the Summer Recreation program ping pong tournament. Robby, who is six years older than me, was a really good player. He earned a reputation for being a good player so it was no surprise when he would win a game or sweep a tournament.

But I was the only female player on tournament day. The male opponents in



*Courtesy of Harlingen Table Tennis Club*

my age category looked at me and thought for sure I would be easy to defeat. They'd serve the ball to me, not expecting me to even hit it, but I'd slam the ball in return, causing them to chase after it in amazement. I vividly remember the scorekeeper looking down at his scorecard, seeing my name, and saying, "Oh, Lisa Campos. You must be Robby's little sister." I was the first female player to participate in the ping pong tournament in my age group and I walked away with a third-place ribbon.

That victory is a core memory. The way I felt playing ping pong was invigorating and

empowering. I've often thought about picking up a paddle again but have been timid about it. I know that table tennis is offered at the Harlingen Community Center, but I have yet to visit. I'm sure after reading Roel's article that follows, I'll be compelled to pop into the center to see if I still have those skills I had as a youngster.

Roel: Although Lisa was not very active in sports as a player, she has consistently supported athletics as a member of the band during her years in middle school, high school, and while at the University of Texas of Austin. Lisa noted that she was a member of the Texas



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*Courtesy of Harlingen Table Tennis Club*

Longhorns Basketball Band when Longhorn games were held at the Frank Erwin Center, aka “The Drum.” Among Lisa’s most cherished memories were observing esteemed coach, Jody Conratt, lead the Lady Longhorns basketball teams to many victories.

However, the sport that Lisa recalls most fondly from her youth is ping pong, also known as table tennis. Lisa’s childhood story of her experience playing ping pong in Harlingen intrigued me. At first, I assumed this was simply the usual Rio Grande Valley parks and recreation summer program that many cities used to provide in their communities before computers, iPads, and smartphones were common. Lisa noted that Harlingen Parks and Recreation provided various summer programs, but the City of Harlingen is known for its longstanding tradition of

table tennis at the Harlingen Community Center.

The Harlingen Table Tennis program was established in 1991 (coincidentally one year after Lisa graduated from high school and moved to Austin to attend the University of Texas at Austin) by the late Bob Salmeron and the late Warren Prescott. In 1991, Bob and Warren approached the City of Harlingen to request approval to use the Harlingen Community Center for the Harlingen Table Tennis Program.

The Harlingen Table Tennis Program began with just two tables. The tables weren’t in great shape, so stacks of magazines were placed under the ends of the legs to make them level enough to play on.

In its early years, the Harlingen Table Tennis Program primarily attracted residents from RV and mobile home parks, who participated in games twice a week at the Harlingen Community

Center. Due to Bob and Warren’s efforts, the program subsequently experienced significant growth.

Although the Harlingen Table Tennis Program encountered significant challenges, including the impact of Covid, it continued to thrive due to the robust foundation laid by Bob and Warren.

Bob and Warren played key roles in advancing the Harlingen Table Tennis Program. Both were strong advocates for the program, and Bob dedicated several years as a U.S. National Coach at the U.S. Olympic Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Bob excelled both as a table tennis instructor and as a player. He regularly took part in numerous competitions at the Huntsville World Senior Games held in St. George, Utah.

Bob teamed up with New Zealander Peter Snell for the Men’s Doubles tournament in San Antonio, Texas one year. With Bob playing right-handed and Peter playing left-handed, the duo became a tough pair to beat.

Bob’s doubles partner, Peter, was a renowned Olympic athlete from New Zealand who won gold in the 800m at the 1960 Rome Olympics and both the 800m and 1500m at the 1964



*Courtesy of Harlingen Table Tennis Club*

Tokyo Olympics. While living in Dallas, Texas, Peter was familiar with the table tennis program Bob and Warren started in Harlingen, Texas.

Bob and Warren developed a highly successful program and demonstrated foresight by organizing table tennis tournaments. These events drew participants from across the Valley, South Texas, and Mexico. As a result, the tournaments contributed to the local economy, as players needed accommodations and meals, and engaged in local shopping.

For more than 30 years, their initiatives have provided the community with ongoing access to the sport, which continues to thrive today. The organization has evolved into the Harlingen Table Tennis Club, with regular sessions held every Monday and Wednesday from 5 pm to 8 pm. Further information is available on their Facebook page, "Harlingen Table Tennis Club," where they highlight the club's high-quality facilities and welcoming members. The Club invites individuals of all skill levels to participate and practice at the Harlingen Community Center,

located at 201 East Madison Avenue, in Harlingen.

The facility now offers more than just two tables, providing expanded opportunities for play. Table tennis is a sport suitable for individuals of all ages and can be enjoyed over many years, even when activities such as tennis or pickleball may no longer be viable options.

I would like to express my appreciation to Lisa for providing valuable insight into this exceptional sport, which is accessible locally for everyone to enjoy. I also wish to thank Bob and Warren for their commitment to fostering the development of this sport within our community.

I'm sure we'll see Lisa Campos at the Harlingen Community Center someday, reliving her glory days as she lands a winning ping pong shot and beams with satisfaction. Robby and Lisa might even team up again for mixed doubles, playing together once more just for nostalgia. After all, in table tennis, it's often said, "Table tennis is not just a sport, it's a way of life." ♦



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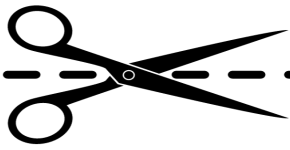
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*Thank you!!!*

**For your support since  
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**This is the final issue of  
Explore Harlingen Magazine**

