



# Free Magazine

March 2026



*Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer*

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Explore Harlingen  
Magazine Online



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# From the Editor

By Lisa Campos

This is Lisa from Explore Harlingen. Welcome to the 29th issue of the Explore Harlingen Magazine: A Local's Guide to Harlingen, an entertainment magazine about Harlingen, Texas!

For 12 years, I have been informing locals and visitors about current events, activities, and family-owned businesses in Harlingen primarily on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/ExploreHarlingen](http://www.facebook.com/ExploreHarlingen)). I also have an online presence with my website, [www.exploreharlingenblog.com](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com), and social media accounts on Instagram and TikTok (@[exploreharlingen](https://www.instagram.com/exploreharlingen)).

In this issue, we discuss International Women's Day, the 35th Annual Henry Roberts Memorial



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

Jalapeño 100 Bike Ride, Harlingen's full contact women's football team, and more.

The Explore Harlingen Magazine is available digitally on my website at [www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine) (see QR code on the cover). Or you can pick up a copy at the first of every month locally around town. Additionally, you can contact Victor Moreno to

purchase a subscription, which allows you to receive the monthly magazine in the mail. ♦

Lisa Campos

Editor-in-Chief

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On the  
Cover

# Celebrating Three Local Women on International Women's Day



*Courtesy of Juan Macias by J Macias Photographer*

**By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia & Contributing Writer Isabella Casa**

**F**or 115 years, International Women's Day has highlighted gender equality with the focus on women's advancement. Despite this, there are still gaps. For instance, women and men's pay isn't equal as reported in a 2025 study with women

earning about 85 cents to every dollar a man makes. Regardless, women continue to forge their way in the world and press forward, following their dreams and pursuing leadership roles, entrepreneurship, and creative pathways in their careers. The three following local women exemplify strong ambitions, opening doors not only for

themselves, but for future generations of powerful women.

**Christy Mendez – Entrepreneur and Owner of Drink Up/The Pink Bubble**

Christy Mendez is no stranger to hard work. She owns her own bar Drink Up, in conjunction with The Pink Bubble. She has owned and operated different businesses

in the past and is a seasoned entrepreneur.

"It's not easy, but it is empowering," she said.

Mendez has faced many challenges on her entrepreneurship journey. But through it all, she remembers the first woman who made her believe she could be an entrepreneur and achieve the outcome that she has reached: her mother.

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*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

“My mom would be the inspiration... No matter what we needed, you know? She made it happen. Where there’s a will, there’s a way is basically where I got the inspiration from,” she said. “She would be, still, the strongest woman I know and that inspired me to do this.”

“It’ll be alright” – lyrics referencing an Alan Jackson song – pay homage to her mother because it was one of her favorite songs. Those words can be found in the center of her bar and serve as a daily reminder for Mendez.

“Being a woman business owner, it means being willing to bet on yourself, even when things feel uncertain,” she said.

She wears multiple hats as an entrepreneur: operations,

marketing, customer experiences, finances, content creator, and the list goes on.

“It’s empowering knowing you can juggle all those things. I take pride in building something from the ground up, creating spaces where... you know, I want people to feel safe and happy,” Mendez said.

Her hard work is not going unnoticed. Drink Up has racked up multiple awards in its two years in operation including the Valley Morning Star’s 2024 Reader’s Choice Award for Best Happy Hour, the Best Small Business Award with the Greater Chamber of Harlingen for 2024, and Best Happy Hour and Best Bartender in 2025.

The Pink Bubble, an adjoining, pink-themed venue and bar that opened six months ago, is a proud creation for Mendez. It is a space that can be used for events such as bridal showers, birthday parties, mommy and me events, sip n’ color socials, and more. It’s a place where “glam meets celebration.”

“The Pink Bubble is a glam, high energy, ultra-pink event bar space... It’s like you’re stepping into 50 shades of Barbie pink,” Mendez said. “The Pink Bubble is to encourage women and girls to celebrate themselves,” Mendez said. “They’re doing memory making. It shouldn’t be postponed. Just do it. Don’t wait for that special occasion. Celebrate now.”

Mendez also draws inspiration from her daughter Shelby who turned 21 right around the time that she opened. She created Drink Up with her and other women and people in general in mind as a way for those younger and older alike to feel safe, secure, and enjoy themselves on their night out. She also wants everyone to feel welcome and keep coming back to her establishment.

“I wanted to create something where they just don’t come, drink, and leave. It’s somewhere they can hang out and connect,” she said. “I feel women have enough cliques in school or in life that Drink Up doesn’t feel clique-y or intimidating. It just feels like you’re walking into a friend group... men and women, like they’re walking into a friend group.”

Some valuable advice that Mendez shares for women business owners or young women that may be considering becoming entrepreneurs is to have confidence.

“You face challenges as a woman entrepreneur, so you just have to learn to trust your decisions and stand firm by them,” she said. “When you’re building something new especially, everyone has opinions, but not everyone has your vision. Nobody saw my vision; nobody sees your vision. I had to grow into being confident saying, this is the direction I’m going.”

**Laisa Macias – Fashion Designer and Owner of LALA**

From runways in New York to fashion shows in Austin, Texas, Laisa Macias is no stranger to the fashion world. Her journey began when she was just six years old when her grandmother, a seamstress, taught her to sew.

When her grandmother passed away in 2007, Macias was devastated. Her grandmother had been a second mom to her.

“My last connection to her was what she taught me,” she said.

Professionally, Macias was an accountant and had done retail work as well. After taking sewing classes to get acquainted with the sewing machine and getting back to her creative mind set, Macias mentions that a light bulb turned on.

“What have you been doing with your life?” she asked herself. “This is your calling; this is your gift.”



Courtesy of Juan Macias by J Macias Photographer

Sewing competitions, selling her repurposed, upcycled pieces at pop-up events on Congress, and a two-year internship with a local handbag designer from Austin followed. It opened up her world into the fashion industry.

This is when Macias quit her job and went on to be a full-time designer. In 2011, she launched her brand, LALA, during SXSW at a coffee shop. In 2014, she was able to show at the Small Boutique Fashion Week in New York.

Soon after, she found herself back in Harlingen. In

2020, during the pandemic lockdown, she realized there was a need for masks. She decided to make some.

“I made over 10,000 masks by myself. Half of them, I donated. I gave them to local doctors... anybody who needed them,” she said.

At this time, she made a connection with someone local that plugged her back into the fashion industry, making and supplying leggings for Peloton, the exercise equipment company. She worked with them until 2023.

She then went full time for herself, exclusively

designing and doing custom orders at first, then opening her business up for alteration services.

“It has been a big, long, long journey but it’s been a good one,” she said.

She prides herself in designing and making pieces for “not the ideal body type.”

“That’s one of my biggest inspirations is like, being able to make clothes that people feel comfortable in, regardless of your size. I think custom clothing is so key. That matters when you’re wearing clothes, I feel like part of feeling empowered or part of being inspired is how you look and

how you feel in what you’re wearing. Even if it’s just an alteration to something you bought. An alteration can make a world of difference in how the clothes look on.”

Her design style can be described as mixed. She likes clothes that are comfortable but cute: floral, bright colors, with a hippie bohemian/street-style feel. There’s also a nod to her Mexican culture in her designs.

“I danced folklorico for like 40 years, a lot of the flower and the colors... when I do fashion shows, you can very much see the Mexican culture,” she said.

A lifetime of creating and pushing forward even when there were obstacles in the way have molded Laisa Macias as a designer and entrepreneur. Advice she has for up-and-coming designers and artists - don't take short cuts on your journey.

"You have a gift and you know what you want to do ultimately with that gift but getting from A to Z, there's a lot of letters in between, don't try to skip the letters. If you wanna get to Z, you may have to take some steps you don't wanna take and don't think it's below you because it's never below you. It's always a learning process," she said.

### **Imelda Treviño, Principal of UTRGV Harlingen Collegiate High School**

When asked who was the first woman that made her believe she could do what she currently does as an educator and leader, Imelda Treviño answers without hesitation: "It was my mom."

"My mom had polio when she was two, so she's always had a disability. Yet she was someone who never accepted a handout or charity," Treviño said. "She had such inner strength. She taught me that strength doesn't have to be loud."

Treviño began her journey in education 31 years ago. Inspired by her own love of literature and every single one of her high school English teachers (whom she can still name along with what specific level of English they taught), Treviño decided to go to college and become an English teacher herself.

Armed with her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from St. Mary's University, she started her career as a middle school reading teacher in San Antonio.

"That was an adventure. I liked it," she said. "What I loved best about being in the classroom was making connections with kids, especially the more difficult kids. The ones that act out but it's really because they need somebody to care about them and love on them regardless of how they're acting."

After a couple of years in San Antonio, she and her growing family decided to relocate back to their hometown. She started working at Harlingen High School (HHS) in 1997 as an English and reading improvement teacher. That was followed by her shift, becoming a counselor for nine years after acquiring her master's degree in counseling. She never thought she would leave counseling.

"I loved it," she said. Fate had other plans for her. She completed an educational leadership program thinking it was a way to get better at what she was already doing. After that, she became associate principal at HHS for eight years followed by being hired as a principal at Dr. Cano Freshman Academy. This school year, she became the principal at UTRGV Harlingen Collegiate High School.

"This was never my career path when I was thinking about what I wanted to do," she said. "I wanted to be a teacher of English at the



*Courtesy of Imelda by UTRGV Collegiate High School.jpg*

high school level and retire from that."

Her trajectory in education has led her into roles that serve and inspire each and every student she serves.

"As a principal you impact everyone, that is your life's goal," Treviño said. To impact the adults you work with and in turn impact every single life of the kids."

Treviño shares that there are statistically more male principals in our country than females.

"It's usually a position held by men," she said. "I think that it's a good model (being a female principal) for the girls, especially for the girls."

It makes her proud to see female students at her campus also embrace and participate in activities usually dominated by males. She says it's important to model for young girls that it's possible to move up and lead.

"All these young ladies are in robotics... not just in the robotics team but leading it and the engineering program – in non-female traditional roles and that they are stepping into that and that they are winning... They're amazing," Treviño said. "I love that as a female, any girl can come back and think, 'I can do that, too' because they've seen it done."

She has advice for girls who want to be leaders in education or even in their communities: "Just leap; do it."

"Even, and maybe especially when you're scared, just leap. And every day, somebody told me this a long time ago, every day do something that makes you scared," she said. "Just step out of your comfort zone. Even when you fail, you learn from that and you just get back up and go." ♦

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# MOFI on the Move



*Courtesy of Kaci Spikes*

*By Laisa Chavez Macias*

**W**hen Kaci Spikes, the founder and owner of Mofi Energy Bar, made her way down to Harlingen from East Texas back in 2018, owning a small business was not on her bucket list.

However, two years after she arrived, Covid entered the picture and it proved to change the direction of her life, along with so many others.

In 2020, Kaci was working as an addiction specialist.



*Courtesy of Kaci Spikes*

She counseled and helped recovering addicts and alcoholics trying to get sober as well as those in recovery who may have stumbled along the way. As someone who once walked in those shoes, Kaci, now 10 years sober, wanted to help make a difference in the lives of others that she related to. When the pandemic hit, the job became especially overwhelming. With a shutdown in place, and the lack of human interaction that is key in recovery, she was really feeling the demand of the job multiplying.

Having only been in Harlingen for a couple of years, her circle of friends was small, so during the pandemic she leaned a lot on family. Driving up to see them was always worth it because they knew exactly how to keep her motivated and fuel her positivity and drive. It was actually on one of her trips home during this time that

Kaci knew her life was about to change.

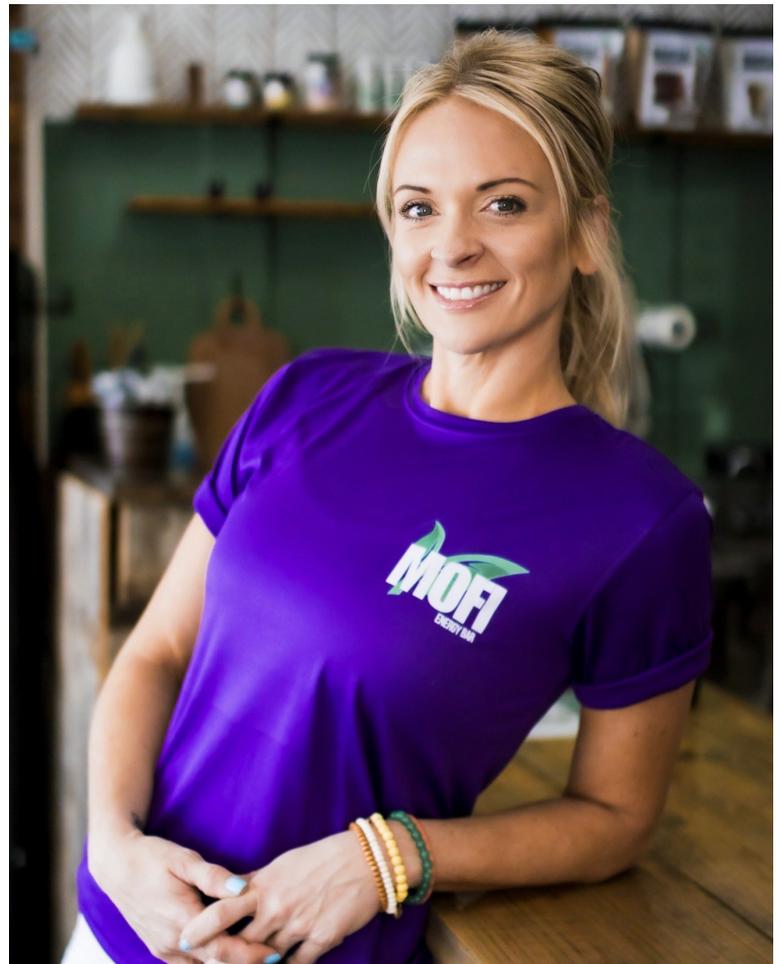
While she was home, Kaci had visited a local tea shop that one of her friends had recently opened. She remembers walking in and feeling the love. It was palpable. Immediately she felt it in her heart. That feeling was something she knew she wanted to bring to her new home in Harlingen.

Growing up, she never remembered having a safe place where she could just hang out, and had she, she believes her life could have taken a different path. It was now Kaci's opportunity to

create that space for others. She also wanted to continue to make a positive impact on people's lives, just as she had done with her work with addicts.

Kaci's motto has always been Make Others Feel Important (M.O.F.I.). It's a reminder when you're struggling, that when you are doing something for someone else, you are not only helping them, but you are also helping yourself. And so, MOFI Energy Bar officially became her next mission.

As soon as Kaci made the decision to step down from her position as an



*Courtesy of Kaci Spikes*

addiction specialist, the doors just started to open. A friend introduced her to someone from Downtown Harlingen who was looking to sublease the storefront of their building. It was the perfect location for MOFI. Having worked in all kinds of industries, the one thing Kaci always pictured was having a storefront with big front windows. In October of 2020 she called her mom as said, “mom, I can’t believe it’s happening.” That vision of the frosted windows ready for the holidays was now a reality.

Fast forward five years: a new chapter begins. MOFI is on the move! Literally. With a dedicated staff in the downtown location, Kaci knew it was the perfect time for growth. She looked at buildings in the Rio Grande Valley as well as East Texas when considering a second location. Then it occurred to her, what would be more perfect than a trailer? The ability to popup and deliver

that MOFI love anywhere in Texas and beyond.

The trailer was purchased, painted, and popped up serving the delicious açai bowls and hydration drinks we all love. Let me talk about those bowls/drinks a little bit. The açai bowls are second to none, you guys. Kaci and her team researched and collaborated with culinary specialists to create the freshest, boldest, and most delicious açai bowl I’ve ever had. There are no preservatives as they are made fresh daily. They use top-notch ingredients. For the drinks they use Element hydration, which focuses on opening cells to ensure maximum absorption of key nutrients. AND any protein added is all grass-fed, clear, and now dye-free.

I must note that in addition to the bowls and drinks, MOFI also offers overnight oats, Element canned drinks, premade MOFI drinks in powder or bottled, and the cutest, coziest merch!



*Courtesy of Kaci Spikes*

Back to the trailer... although you may have already seen her at a couple of locations, the MOFI Energy Bar Mobile will be out in full force soon. You can book them for any special events, festivals, or parties. The bowl and drink menu is always available but depending on the market, Kaci is always ready to create a tailored menu for each event.

On the way out I asked Kaci what stops her from moving back home. She just smiled and said, “I’m not done here yet.” Her relationships here are so important to her and she loves the culture. She feels like with MOFI she has been given a whole family/ community.

Just so you know Kaci, (cue the music) YOU ARE FAMILY! We love what you are doing, and we cannot thank you enough for the positive impact you have made in so many lives. You help to make Harlingen proud. Thank you.

Signing off until next time, your friendly local foodie, Laisa :)

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*Courtesy of Kaci Spikes*

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## Event Spotlight

# A Ride for Everyone: Jalapeño 100 Returns for a Weekend of Community and Cycling



Courtesy of Bicycle World RGV

By Abigail Muniz-Garcia

Just as there are varying degrees of spice in different peppers, this year's Jalapeño 100 is no different and will continue to have different options for its riders. From the 12-mile "Chili Piquin" ride to the 100-mile "Grand Pappy Ghost Pepper" ride, this year's event has something for everyone.

The 35th Annual Henry Roberts Memorial Jalapeño 100 Bike Ride, named to honor Henry P. Roberts who first

opened Bicycle World RGV with his wife Kelly over 48 years ago, is set for Saturday, March 7, 2026. Different this year, the Gravelpeño (an off-road course with a 32- or 60-mile option) will be on the following day, Sunday, March 8, 2026. The two-day event allows participants who choose to do both bike rides to have a "Jalapeño Weekend Adventure."

In previous years, both events would occur on the same day.

"This will be the third annual for the gravel (event)," Carlos Cortez, an employee of Bicycle World RGV said. "We chose to move this event to Sunday out of feedback from some of the road riders."

Ana Adame, organizer of the event, encourages riders of different levels to sign up for it.

"Jalapeño is not a race, it's a tour but it fits the needs of people that are training for something," she said.

With porta-potties, snacks, and hydration at every rest stop, Adame mentions the race is accommodating to the riders and that it takes



Courtesy of Bicycle World RGV

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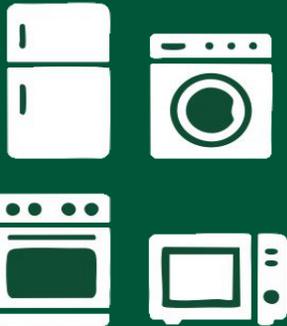
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*Courtesy of Bicycle World RGV*

many volunteers to make the event a success.

“It takes a lot of people,” she said. “I have regular customers that offer help with packet pickup and registration, there are people out there with lights, vests directing traffic. I have my list of volunteers that have started reaching out to me.”

Adame wants to remind the public that the proceeds raised will benefit the Boys and Girls Club of Harlingen.

“I encourage them (the public) to go out of their comfort zone and do the Jalapeño. It’s all for a great cause. Try it at least one time and you will keep coming back,” she said.

George Adame, a cyclist from Austin, is gearing up to participate in the event for the fourth time. The seasoned athlete mentions he keeps coming back to

the Jalapeño 100 because it stands out from the hundreds of cycling events he has been a part of. The fact that it is organized and run by an actual bike shop with bicycle professionals is one of the reasons he says the event stands out. There are various other reasons he has continually participated but the one that sets it apart above all others? The people.

“It’s the people. It’s not the rest stops. It’s not the distance. It’s the people. I wouldn’t wanna miss it. I love seeing the folks from Bicycle World RGV. They’re like family to me,” George Adame said. “For me it’s like a party. It’s not gonna be a

competition, it’s gonna be fun.”

He encourages people that have never tried a cycling event like this to just give it a try.

“You can do more than you think you can do,” he said. “Don’t sell yourself short. It’s not a race. It can be as relaxing as you want it to be. You’ll have the privilege to stop at a rest stop, visit with the people that are so friendly... not enough can be said about them.”

For more information about the event, visit the Jalapeño 100 Bike Ride Facebook page or Bicycle Road RGV on Facebook. You can also call: 956-423-3168. ♦



*Courtesy of Bicycle World RGV*

# POKE FIESTA

**Cosplay**  
**Vendors**  
**TCG Tournaments**  
**Live Wrestling**  
**Gaming Tournament**

**March 15th 2026**  
**11am - 8pm**

**Brownsville Events Center**  
1 Events Center Parkway - Live! Rio FM1847, Brownsville, TX 78526 15th

# THE BRIDGE CHURCH

## INDOOR RUMMAGE SALE

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# MARCH 7

**8 A.M. - 1 P.M.**  
**FELLOWSHIP HALL**  
**400 BRISTOL AVE, RIO HONDO, TX 78583**

Collections for sale will be accepted Wednesday, February 25 and Wednesday, March 4 from 9:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. Otherwise by appointment only. Contact Sandy and/or Lydia

The Esther's of Today Presents

## DAUGHTERS OF THE MOST HIGH

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27th of March at 7:00PM  
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Bring your own teacup  
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**\$15 ticket**

# GLADYS PORTER ZOO

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**Saturday March 7th**  
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**5K RUN \$35 PER PERSON (ADULT OR CHILD)**  
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**1-MILE \$30 PER PERSON (ADULT OR CHILD)**  
 RACE STARTS AT 8:30 A.M.  
 INCLUDES ADMISSION TO THE ZOO, MEDAL & T-SHIRT

SCAN TO REGISTER

# Moves, Adds, and Changes



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

**By Lisa Campos**  
This column discusses business-related updates in Harlingen.

**Announcements**

On January 16, Lee H. Means Elementary

unveiled its new amphitheater with a grand opening ceremony. The amphitheater will not only be used for the elementary school's shows, but for the entire Harlingen

Consolidated Independent School District.

**New Businesses**

Ashley, a national furniture store, is in the process of replacing Conn's at 706 Dixieland Rd. This store will be a

flagship showroom with new furniture (unlike the clearance center on Glasscock Ave.). After executive budgeting approval is obtained, it will take approximately



*Courtesy of Ashley's*



Courtesy of Rene Rivera

90 days to complete the renovations.

Kismet Caskets held its grand opening on January 20. It provides products directly to consumers instead of going through a funeral home to save costs. They are located at 205 E Porte Ct.

**New Cafés and Restaurants**

Silly Dilly’s, a pickle shop, held its grand opening on January 27. It is located at 2310 Spur 54 Suite 11, in front of Sam’s Club.

Boca Chica Café is expanding from Brownsville to Harlingen with a location at the Stuart Place Plaza shopping center, 6710 W. Expressway 83, Suite A-101. This casual café will serve barbacoa, tacos, and breakfast all day. It will replace Johnny Rockets.

Taquero Mucho, a taco restaurant, is closer to opening. The new building



Courtesy Rene Rivera

has been constructed at 99 Bass Pro Drive, Suite 2.

In November, Crumbl, a national cookie company, appeared to be moving into the former UPS Store at 2211 W. Lincoln. However, there was a significant pause in construction. As of mid-February, construction is back on. They hope to finish by May and should open this summer.

**Moves**

Yummy’s/Harlingen Donut Shop, two donut shops will open a joint venture at 1801 S. 77 Sunshine Strip. Yummy’s is a mini donut food truck while Harlingen Donut Shop closed their storefront in July 2024. This new joint space was previously occupied by Brain Freeze yogurt shop. They held a meet and greet on February 9.

On January 29, KK’s Closet announced that they were going to move their boutique to downtown Harlingen, at 222 E. Jackson. This

move will allow the mother/daughter owners to expand their space in a more central location.

**Closings**

On February 9, SOHO Thrift Boutique closed its doors due to personal reasons. They continue to run their other business, SOHO Hot Yoga Studio at 712 N Sunshine Strip #36 in El Mercado Plaza.

Although Johnny’s True Value burned down in July 2025, the signage was finally removed on January 19 so the land could be put up for sale. The community reacted to the images and video shared on Explore Harlingen Blog with fondness, sharing memories of shopping at the store over the decades.

**Anniversaries**

The following local organizations are celebrating milestone anniversaries:

- The Literacy Center of Harlingen, 40 years ♦



Courtesy of Nelda\_s Decals Plus Crafts

# Reoccurring Events

## Downtown Market Days

First Saturday (March 7), 9 am to 3 pm  
Jackson Street and Centennial Plaza

The Market at Wild August Nursery and  
Flower Farm

Every Saturday morning  
(March 7, 14, 21, and 28),  
9:30 am to 1 pm  
16802 Garrett Road



Valle Vista Mall Market Days  
Every 2nd Saturday (March 14),  
11 am to 7 pm

Downtown at Sundown  
Every 3rd Saturday (March through  
August) (March 21), 7 pm to 10 pm  
Downtown Harlingen



Harlingen Art Night  
Last Friday (March 27), 7 pm to 10 pm  
“A” Street and Jackson

# March Special Events

Literacy Night: Dr. Seuss Birthday  
Party  
March 1, 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm  
Harlingen Public Library

Harlingen Area  
Small Business Expo  
March 5, 6 pm to 10 pm  
Buckets Barn and Grill

35th Annual Henry Roberts Memorial  
Jalapeno 100  
March 7

Gentry Gym Grand Reopening and  
Community Celebration  
March 7, 8 am to 2 pm  
Gentry Gym

Pop Shop Bros TCG Market  
March 7, 10 am to 7 pm  
Valle Vista Mall

Harlingen Sunburst Rotary  
Wine & Women Golf Tournament  
March 7, 1 pm  
Tony Butler Golf Course

Sham-Rock the Park  
March 13, 6 pm to 10 pm  
Lon C. Hill Park



Spirit & Wellness Festival  
March 14, 10 am to 5 pm  
Whole Life Wellness Center

J&V's Collectors Toy Expo  
March 14, 11 am to 5 pm  
Valle Vista Mall

Rotary Shrimp Fest of South Texas  
March 21, 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm  
Casa de Amistad

Daughters of the Most High Event/  
Conference  
March 27, 7 pm  
Harlingen Cultural Arts Center

**Calvary Christian School 5K Color Run**

**March 28, 7:30 am  
Calvary Christian School**

**The Vault: Cards & Collectibles Show**

**March 28-29, 11 am to 6 pm  
Harlingen Convention Center**

# Beyond Harlingen

**Spring Break Jam**

**Custom Truck and Car Show  
March 7-8**

**South Padre Island Convention Center**

**Ocelot Run**

**March 7  
Gladys Porter Zoo (Brownsville)**

**The Bridge Church  
Indoor Rummage Sale**

**March 7, 8 am to 1 pm  
Fellowship Hall (Rio Hondo)**

**Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show  
March 12-22**

**Livestock Show Grounds (Mercedes)**

**Hog Waddle Festival**

**March 14  
San Benito Fairgrounds**

**Strawberry Fest**

**March 14, 1 pm to 6 pm  
Bert Ogden Arena (Edinburg)  
2026 Frida Fest  
March 14, 5 pm to 11 pm  
Promenade Park Amphitheater  
(Edinburg)**

**Poke Fiesta**

**March 15, 11 am to 8 pm  
Brownsville Events Center**



*Events subject to change.*

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

# Los Cuatro Amigos: Building Toward a Brighter Future

## Los Cuatro Amigos Scholarship Recipients 2025



*Courtesy of Los Cuatro Amigos*

**By Beth Marie Cantu  
Ensign**

In Harlingen, the next generation of skilled trades professionals is preparing to serve the community with hands-on expertise—one weld, one wire, one foundation at a time. One startup nonprofit is working to ensure students who choose careers in trades such as

construction, electrical work, welding, and HVAC don't have to navigate that path alone.

Los Cuatro Amigos (LCA) is a scholarship-focused nonprofit supporting graduating seniors from Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) who plan to pursue careers through Career

and Technical Education (CTE). The organization is composed of President Eddie Rodriguez, Vice President Belinda C. Zapata, Secretary Dr. Christian Corrales, and Treasurer Roel Rodriguez, who all noticed a glaring issue: students pursuing skilled trades were often overlooked when it came to scholarships.

“Not because of a lack of talent or ambition, but because of limited access to financial resources. While traditional academic scholarships are common, support for students pursuing career and technical education is often limited,” states Dr. Christian Corrales.

“Our organization is a nonprofit organization that



is a scholarship program that is 100% focused on supporting HCISD students that are in the career and technology CTE program that want to go into the trades,” said Roel Rodriguez. “So what we're looking for is to support financially through our scholarship program, any student that wants to go into these trades.”

“There has been a huge gap in a skilled workforce and specifically in the trades for several, several years now,” Roel said. “And I think the way the education process or the system has changed is trying to get kids to all go to college.”

That push, though well-intentioned, has contributed to workforce shortages across the region. And the

glaring gap in the workforce is one Eddie Rodriguez sees firsthand in construction. According to Roel, Eddie has repeatedly shared there is “a desperate need to have skilled workers for construction jobs in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas in general.”

“Career and technical education is vital to the Rio Grande Valley because it directly supports the region’s workforce needs,” he said. “Key industries depend on a steady pipeline of well-trained professionals. By preparing students for these high-demand career pathways, we strengthen the local economy, help address workforce shortages, and ensure that the region’s continued growth is supported by homegrown talent.”

LCA’s primary focus is its scholarship program. The organization partners with HCISD counselors, CTE staff, and teachers to ensure students are aware of the opportunity.



Courtesy of Los Cuatro Amigos

“We reach students through our partnership with HCISD... to ensure the opportunity is visible and accessible,” Dr. Corrales said. “Statistics show that

many of these students are first-generation college students and come from households where financial support is limited.”



Courtesy of Los Cuatro Amigos



According to Dr. Corrales, “Our scholarship program uses a structured application and review process that includes evaluation of student essays, recommendation letters, and community involvement. Each scholarship awarded is \$500, and the total number of recipients varies each year based on funds raised through our community scholarship donation initiative.”

Roel added that the group stays connected with students and potential scholarship recipients through classroom visits and presentations, working directly with them as well as with district CTE leadership.

In its first year, LCA awarded eight scholarships, with plans to grow. The impact is already visible.

“We do have a success story with one student who graduated from Harlingen High School last year,” Roel said. The student chose to attend IEC, a local electrical training program. “He’s already completed his training and is working full time as an electrician.”

That outcome reflects the organization’s larger goal.

“Our goal is not only to get a student to graduate from high school and pursue a career or higher education in the trades, but the goal is to get them employed,” he said. “So on the front end, donations and supporting the scholarship fund. Number

two, having a position open and ready for them upon graduation.”

“Community involvement is at the heart of Los Cuatro Amigos,” Dr. Corrales said. “It all begins with serving the students and their families, coupled with our partnership from HCISD, and earnest support from our donors and community partners. Simply put, this is only possible through collective support and generosity.”

Like many young nonprofits, LCA faces the dual challenge of steady funding and broader awareness. The organization

is also working to shift cultural perceptions of CTE, reinforcing that it is a respected and valuable pathway, rather than a “plan B.”

“We’re trying to start something— getting people to really be aware of this gap in a skilled workforce,” he said.

“We hope people understand that Los Cuatro Amigos is about more than scholarships,” he said. “It’s about community, collaboration, and investing in students’ futures and in the future workforce of Harlingen.” ♦

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<b>LOTERIA</b>	<b>SERVICE INDUSTRY</b>
<b>WEDNESDAYS</b>	<b>SUNDAYS</b>



**FOOD TRUCKS**

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# Artist of the Month

# Master of Puppets: Staying Creative with Jean-Luc Cañas



Courtesy of Jean-Luc Cañas

By Beth Marie Cantu Ensign

In a craft room lined with shelves and boxes, dozens of eyes stare back at Jean-Luc Cañas.

There’s a towering Winnie the Pooh standing 4-foot-2. A nearly seven-foot Sally Skellington who once startled him during late-night sewing sessions, a thrift-store Chewbacca, and perhaps the most beloved of all—a green

frog with a familiar tilt of the head and a gentle, sing-song voice.

Online, 213.8K followers and more than 3 million likes know him as Jeanlukulele. Locally, he’s just Jean-Luc; to his friends, Picard; to his students, Mr. Cañas—a teacher, theater creative, and puppet maker whose imagination brings characters to life in a way that recalls the inventiveness of Jim

Henson, though entirely his own. And for Cañas, creativity wasn’t just a hobby, it was the family love language.

“It all started with my parents,” he says. His mother taught pre-K and kindergarten; his father was an elementary music teacher. Instead of handing him coloring books, they handed him blank paper. “If we didn’t know how to draw something, my mom wouldn’t draw it for us. She’d show us how to draw it so we could learn to make it ourselves.” That early lesson in creating for

oneself shaped everything. “It really taught us to be more reliant on creating things ourselves.”

Cañas didn’t set out to become a puppet maker with a six-figure following. He began posting on TikTok during winter break in 2022, making kid-safe videos for his students and sharing music content. One simple 22-second clip changed everything: he cut notches into a straw, threaded a string through it, and made a tiny bending “finger.” By lunchtime that day, the video had over 30,000 views.

## LADIES

Sign up to  
*Par-Tee*

## MIMOSAS, WINE, NINE & DINE!

4th Annual Charity Golf Tournament  
All proceeds benefit the Family Crisis Center

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MARCH 7**

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Best Dressed: Team

**THEME** **THE MOVIE**

Door Prizes  
Raffle Live Auction

**ACTIVITIES**

Registration: Noon  
Time: 1:00 PM Shotgun  
Location: Tony Butler Golf Course  
Format: Scramble  
Team: Create your own 3-lady team  
Fee: \$80 per player  
Beverages: Mimosas, Wine & Water  
Light Meal: Catered by Peggy's Cakes & More  
Lunch & Awards: Prizes, Raffle & Live Auction

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“That’s when I realized, okay, a lot of people want to see this,” he says.

That experiment quickly evolved into pool-noodle creations— Dr. Octopus arms, Iron Spider arms—and eventually full-scale theatrical builds. When he saw a larger-than-life Winnie the Pooh puppet from a stage production, he knew it was his next project. “I didn’t start at the very beginning with sock puppets,” he says. “I jumped deep into the end of the pool with a 4-foot-2 walking, talking, interactive Winnie the Pooh puppet.”

Momentum built quickly. During a production of *Little Shop of Horrors* at the Harlingen Community Theatre, he was cast as Audrey II and decided that if it was “technically” his costume, he might as well build it himself. He began documenting the process online, and suddenly, audiences weren’t just watching for his music—they were watching for puppetry.

Since then, Jean-Luc has continued creating puppets for theater productions, commissions, and special gifts for friends and family—once crafting puppets of a bride and groom who were close friends when he served as best man at their wedding.

Cañas’ creative process is deceptively simple. For commissioned pieces, he begins with reference

images and builds outward from basic shapes. His thrifted creations, however, start without a blueprint. He wanders aisles searching for inspiration, collecting items that spark curiosity and improvises.

“I have no idea what it’s going to look like until it’s done,” he says. “That’s really the beauty of making these thrifted puppets. You just throw it all together and see what happens.”

The most magical part, he says, is bringing a puppet to life. Whether it’s a character from a musical or a fan-favorite like Kermit the Frog, seeing people respond as

if the puppet is alive is unbeatable.

In February, Cañas was invited to speak at the Georgia Thespian Conference, where he brought his thrift-made Kermit along for a musical segment. Packed snugly in his carry-on, Kermit performed alongside him, and the reaction was immediate: as he sang, the audience’s attention shifted entirely from him to the puppet.

“Nobody was looking at me. They were looking at this puppet,” he says. “It may not be the real one, but for that moment in time, it’s real. It’s Kermit.”

A lifelong fan of Jim Henson, Cañas channels that same inventiveness and heart into his puppets, breathing life into fabric, foam, and thrifted materials. For him, puppets are more than art—they’re companions. Most of his creations remain in his craft room, stacked on shelves or tucked into boxes, quietly watching him work. Commissions, he notes, are tough to part with— after spending so much time working on them, he grows attached and feels guilty sending the creations off to their new homes. “But they



*Courtesy of Paola Mejia*

will be loved, I know that,” he says.

Though his TikTok posting schedule has slowed due to theater and teaching commitments, the ideas haven't stopped. There are thrift hauls waiting to become “Franken-puppets,” commissions, collaborations, and more characters still waiting in the wings.

For Jean-Luc Cañas, puppetry isn't just craft—it's connection. It's the moment when a room full of adults forgets the person holding the puppet and instead locks eyes with a frog. It's turning discarded fabric into something that sings. In a world that often feels disposable, he's

proving that with enough imagination, nothing really is.

Through it all, his guiding philosophy is simple: creativity is for everyone. “As long as you're willing to work and be creative, you can make anything out of anything,” he says. “Don't focus on what you don't have. Focus on what you have and how you can make that into what you need.”

Budget constraints? Use them as fuel. Missing materials? Improvise. And as always, don't forget to stay creative.

Find Jean-Luc as Jeanlukulele on TikTok and Etsy. ♦



Courtesy of Jean-Luc Cañas

## Spirit & Wellness Festival

Family Friendly - Kids Activities - Food - Music - Seminars  
Wellness Vendors - Crystal Bowls - Readers  
Reiki - Massage - Crystals - Jewelry - and more

March 14  
10-5  
\$5



Whole Life Wellness & Casa Blanca Events Center  
401 E. Filmore & 322 E. Taylor Street

A vibrant event poster for a Spring Festival. The top section features a yellow background with colorful flowers (purple, orange, pink) and a bee. Text includes "FREE PUBLIC EVENT", "SATURDAY MARCH 28TH", "Spring FESTIVAL", and "2:00 PM - 8:00 PM". Below this is a red banner with white text: "MUSIC - FOOD - VENDORS - INFLATABLE SLIDE - PHOTO OPT". The bottom section has a white background with more flowers (daisies, purple, pink) and bees. It includes a logo for "Edith's Elegant Candles" and the text "Hosted by Edith's Elegant Candles".

**\$30**

# CCS 5K COLOR RUN

**March 28<sup>th</sup> 7:30 AM**

---

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Join us for a fun and colorful celebration filled with activities, games, and imagination. *Come dressed as your favorite Dr. Seuss character and take part in our costume contest. The winning costumes will walk away with a trophy and plenty of bragging rights.*

### EVENT INFORMATION

Date of Event : **Sunday | March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026**

Time of Event : **1:30PM - 4:30PM**

Location of Event : **Harlingen Public Library Courtyard**  
410 '76 Drive, Harlingen, TX



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Tuesday & Wednesday	11am-8pm
Thursday	11am-9pm
Friday	11am-10pm
Saturday	5pm-10pm
Sunday & Monday	CLOSED

# Harlingen Black Widows

By Roel Rodriguez

A new football team is scheduled to be established in Harlingen in 2026. The Harlingen Black Widows, a women's full-contact football team, will debut this month as one of the newest members competing in a league managed by So-Tex Women's Athletics.

## The League

So-Tex Women's Athletics (STXWA) is a nonprofit organization focused on improving women's wellness and serving the community. For five years, STXWA has been providing women in South Texas an opportunity to participate in a variety of athletic opportunities such as 5K runs, volleyball, basketball, flag football, and full contact football. These affordable opportunities are available to all women, no matter where they live or what experience they have.

STXWA concluded their 2026 six team women's winter flag football season in February. The 2025 women's full contact football season will have



*Courtesy of Beatriz Ibarra, Ember & Pixel Media*

five teams: The Brownsville Sting, RGV Lady Pumas from Weslaco, Port Isabel Sirens, Harlingen Black Widows, and the Laredo Vaqueras.

STXWA actively seeks community service opportunities throughout South Texas. Members of STXWA have volunteered at events like "Jailbreak" and the Christmas Parade at South Padre Island and "Brew at the Zoo," "Beerfest," and the Charro Days parade in Brownsville.

STXWA operates purely with volunteers. They can provide low-cost sport opportunities for players with support from donors and community partner sponsors. All proceeds are used primarily for insurance fees, equipment, uniforms, and venue fees. If you or your organization is interested in supporting STXWA, they can be reached [SoTexWomensAthletics@gmail.com](mailto:SoTexWomensAthletics@gmail.com) or at [www.sotextwomensathletics.com](http://www.sotextwomensathletics.com). STXWA also promotes its activities on social

media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X.

## The Black Widows

The Harlingen Black Widows football team is owned and operated by Hailee Castillo, who is a U.S. Army Veteran. Hailee has been involved with STXWA for several years and is the catalyst for bringing women's full contact football to Harlingen.

Hailee's husband, Josh Castillo, serves as volunteer head coach

along with two volunteer assistant coaches, Joel Torres and Omar Gutierrez.

The Harlingen Black Widows team consists of a 15-player roster, and games are played with 8 players at a time. To ensure everyone gets plenty of playing time, every team member participates in each game and regularly rotates through offensive, defensive, and special teams roles, including punts and kickoffs.

The Harlingen Black Widows are always looking to add more players to their roster. There is no fee to participate, no equipment needed, and there are no tryouts. Practice is held once or twice a week.

The Harlingen Black Widows will have eight regular season games (four at home and four away) beginning March 28 and concluding May 30, followed by a four-team playoff and a Championship game. Harlingen Black Widows are actively recruiting sponsors to host games at their location. For example, the Faith Pleases God Church allowed STXWA to hold the 2026 Harlingen flag football season at their field adjacent to the church.

According to Hailee and Josh Castillo, the goal is to enjoy fitness, friendly competition, and provide family-friendly

environment. They want to provide their players with an activity supported by their families and the community.

### The Players

Approximately 100 women are actively participating in the STXWA full contact football season this year. These amazing women come from various backgrounds, but they all have one thing in common: a genuine desire to support each other on and off the field and to serve our community.

One of these players is Kristina Rodriguez. Kristina is a full-time mother of two and completely dedicated to her fitness and helping others with their fitness journeys. She is an entrepreneur and owns Training for Warriors and is serves as a personal trainer at Divine CrossFit and The Goon House.

As a brand-new player with Harlingen Black Widows, I asked Kristina why she decided to play full contact football. She indicated that she has always wanted to play full contact football but wasn't aware of any opportunities to do so until now. She desires a new experience and believes it will be very exciting and challenging.

Kristina has dedicated herself to being in peak physical condition and is eager to see if her fitness will translate to

the football field. She asks herself, "Can I really do this?" and "Am I tough enough?" as motivation to try and learn something new.

Kristina also shared that participating in these games allows her and the women in this league the opportunity to "let go" and get away from reality for a bit by just focusing on playing the game and friendly competition.

Kristina has established a great friendship with Mayra Woods who currently plays for the Port Isabel Sirens football team. Mayra is an avid athlete who has always competed

in a variety of sports. Like Kristina, Mayra is a mother and will become a grandparent soon. Kristina looks up to Mayra and appreciates her mentorship in her full contact football journey.

The Harlingen Black Widows will have Selina Berlanga at quarterback and notable players Diana Gonzalez and Lisa Gonzalez (no relation) focusing on playing on the offensive and defensive line.

### The Request

The Harlingen Black Widows team is also a nonprofit organization and will be hosting several





*Courtesy of Beatriz Ibarra, Ember & Pixel Media*

raffles before and during the season to help offset costs for game officials, player uniforms, and game and practice equipment. If anyone is interested in donating items like gift cards for these raffles, please contact Hailee Castillo, 304-989-4360.

The team is also looking for donations of cleated shoes, football helmets, shoulder pads, football pants with pads, as well as practice equipment like tackling dummies, training parachutes, flat agility ladders, cones, flags, etc.

Organizations such as Harlingen CISD Athletics and Marine Military Academy Athletics are encouraged to offer their surplus equipment to the Harlingen Black

Widows instead of simply discarding it. Perhaps we can get the biggest supporter of local sports, Joe Bowling, CEO of Rio Sports Live, to do a broadcast to promote the team in Harlingen.

In return, the Harlingen Black Widows football team players are available to assist in community service projects and/or volunteer opportunities. If interested in this partnership, contact Hailee Castillo at 304-989-4360 or castillough@gmail.com or Josh Castillo at 720-724-6354 or joshuacastillo19@gmail.com.



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## The Love

As already mentioned, this entire venture is done through nonprofit means to support women and their desire to be active in their communities and to get more active physically to improve their fitness.

These are not professional athletes but professionals, nonetheless. We have players who are mothers with full-time professions who maintain their households and care for children. Some players are pursuing higher educational goals and working part-time jobs to make ends meet. Some players are experienced athletes, while others are not. It doesn't matter because in this sorority, all are welcomed and everyone is supported. This is women empowering women and a support system proving that nothing is impossible. Many of these women play for the love of the game. The Harlingen Black Widows and STXWA allows women to participate in something new and exciting in our community.

I, for one, look forward to attending a Harlingen Black

Widows game this month and hope that you attend, as well. I wish the Harlingen Black Widows and the teams competing in the 2026 STXWA full contact season the best of luck and hope that the league continues to

grow. ♦

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# Women's Full Contact Football

## 2026 Season

<b>MARCH 28</b> Port Isabel Sirens at RGV Lady Pumas Harlingen Black Widows at Brownsville Sting BYE LTX Vaqueras	<b>MAY 2</b> RGV Lady Pumas at Port Isabel Sirens Brownsville Sting at Harlingen Black Widows BYE LTX Vaqueras
<b>APRIL 4</b> Harlingen Black Widows at LTX Vaqueras Brownsville Sting at Port Isabel Sirens BYE RGV Lady Pumas	<b>MAY 9</b> LTX Vaqueras at Harlingen Black Widows Port Isabel Sirens at Brownsville Sting BYE RGV Lady Pumas
<b>APRIL 11</b> RGV Lady Pumas at Harlingen Black Widows Brownsville Sting at LTX Vaqueras BYE Port Isabel Sirens	<b>MAY 16</b> Harlingen Black Widows at RGV Lady Pumas LTX Vaqueras at Brownsville Sting BYE Port Isabel Sirens
<b>APRIL 18</b> LTX Vaqueras at Port Isabel Sirens RGV Lady Pumas at Brownsville Sting BYE Harlingen Black Widows	<b>MAY 23</b> Port Isabel Sirens at LTX Vaqueras Brownsville Sting at RGV Lady Pumas BYE Harlingen Black Widows
<b>APRIL 25</b> LTX Vaqueras at RGV Lady Pumas Port Isabel Sirens at Harlingen Black Widows BYE Brownsville Sting	<b>MAY 30</b> RGV Lady Pumas at LTX Vaqueras Harlingen Black Widows at Port Isabel Sirens BYE Brownsville Sting

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# More Sports!

# Mighty Lady Cardinal Soccer



*Courtesy of Harlingen High School Soccer Team*

**By Roel Rodriguez**

**H**arlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) Athletics is experiencing a noteworthy development that is of interest to sports enthusiasts in the community.

I recently learned that the Harlingen Cardinals, Harlingen Lady Cardinals, Harlingen Hawks, and Harlingen South Lady Hawks basketball teams all have undefeated district records! None of these four teams have been defeated in any district games this season.

While this achievement is noteworthy, there is a remarkable development taking place in Harlingen in another sport. Do you know which team holds

the number one ranking for Class 6A Girls soccer in Texas? The Big Red Machine Lady Cardinals soccer team holds Texas' top rank with a perfect 12-0 record per Texas Girls Coaches Association Soccer Poll.

The Lady Cardinals soccer team boasts 15 senior players, bringing considerable experience to the team. They have already demonstrated their determination by defeating Lake Travis High School during an early-season tournament in Central Texas, where they faced tough opponents.

Jules Garcia leads the Lady Cardinals soccer team with 31 goals, placing her sixth among all 6A Girls soccer teams this season. For

four years, Jules has been a standout for Lady Cardinals soccer, and she has accepted an offer to play at Angelo State University starting in Fall 2026.

Some other Lady Cardinals players may continue playing soccer in college, but they haven't chosen their programs yet.

The Lady Cardinals started the season facing elite teams to assess their strengths. Their skill, unity, and determination have propelled them to the top of the state rankings.

Plenty of games remain on the Lady Cardinals' schedule, so it's not too late to catch them as they wrap up the district season and gear up for a playoff run. With the State Championship taking place in early April 2026, now is the perfect time to rally behind the team and offer your support as they aim for the title. Why not us! Cardinal Spirit Never Dies! ♦



*Courtesy of Harlingen High School Soccer Team*



## Varsity Lady Cardinals' Soccer Schedule 2025-2026

### Scrimmages

Date	Opponent	Time	Location
Dec. 12th	@ Harlingen South	6 pm	Harlingen South
Dec. 16th	@ McAllen High	7 pm	McAllen Stadium
Dec. 19th	vs McAllen Memorial	6:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Dec. 23rd	@ Porter	10:30 am	Sam's Stadium

### Non-District

Date	Opponent	Time	Location
Dec. 30th	vs Brownsville Rivera	12 pm	Harlingen HS
Jan. 1-3rd	McAllen Showcase	TBA	McAllen HS/McAllen Memorial
Jan. 6th	vs Laredo Alexander	5:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Jan. 15-17th	Hill Country Prep Showcase	TBA	Westlake/Lake Travis HS
Jan. 20th	@ Sharyland	7:15 pm	Sharyland HS
Jan. 23rd	@ Economedes	7:30 pm	Economedes HS
Jan. 27th	vs La Joya	6:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Jan. 30th	@ Edinburg North	6:30 pm	Edinburg North HS

### District

Date	Opponent	Time	Location
Feb. 6th	vs Vets	5:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Feb. 13th	@ Brownsville Hanna	5:30 pm	Brownsville Hanna HS
Feb. 17th	vs Los Fresnos	5:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Feb. 20th	@ San Benito	5:30 pm	Bobby Morrow Stadium
Feb. 27th	@ Vets	7:30 pm	Brownsville Veterans HS
Mar. 6th	vs Hanna	7:30 pm	Harlingen HS
Mar. 10th	@ Los Fresnos	7:30 pm	Leo Aguilar Stadium
Mar. 13th	vs San Benito	7:30 pm	Harlingen HS

Head Coach- Jose Galvan

Assistant Coaches- Robert Leal & Ashley Lopez

Principal- Efrain Amaya

Athletic Coordinator- Manny Gomez & Ashley Moncivaiz

Athletic Director- Robert Davies

Trainers- John Prosek & Laura Garcia



Courtesy of Harlingen High School Soccer Team



Courtesy of Harlingen High School Soccer Team

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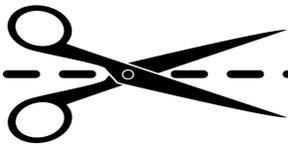


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#### **Blue Sunday**

focuses on creating hope for every child by supporting child welfare and protection efforts in the community.

#### **Shine Bright**

is brightening children's lives through celebration, compassion, and service - here and abroad.