



Free Magazine

October 2025

Second Anniversary Issue

Explore Harlingen
Magazine Online



Cover Photo by Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer

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From the Editor

By Lisa Campos

This is Lisa from Explore Harlingen. Welcome to the 2nd Anniversary 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). I also have an online presence with my website, [www.](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com)

exploreharlingenblog.com, and social media accounts on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (@[exploreharlingen](https://www.instagram.com/exploreharlingen)).

In this issue, we discuss the upcoming city election, former Harlingen football players who made it to play professionally in the NFL, and more.

The Explore Harlingen Magazine is available digitally on my website at 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 (locations are listed on my website). Additionally, you can contact Victor Moreno below to request having the magazine mailed to

you every month. ♦

Lisa Campos
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(calls only, no text)
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For a full list of Explore Harlingen Magazine pick up locations and addresses, see www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine.



Meet the Staff

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Courtesy of Lisa Campos

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On the Cover

Harlingen to Elect Three City Positions this

November

By Lisa Campos

On November 4, citizens of Harlingen will elect three city positions: Mayor (at-large), City Commission District 1, and City Commission District 2.



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer
Mayor (At-Large)

Norma Sepulveda, Mayor of Harlingen since May 2022, is running for a second consecutive term, unopposed.

City Commission District 1

Current Commissioner Ford Kinsley made an official announcement on Facebook on June 6 that he had decided not to seek re-election.

Two candidates for City Commission District 1 will be on the November 4 ballot. A third candidate, John Lane, had applied for candidacy and attended the drawing for his place on the ballot on August 26; however, on September 12, he informed Explore Harlingen that he had decided to drop out of the race.

Explore Harlingen asked each candidate to summarize his or her goals if elected.



Courtesy of Hector Garcia

Response from Richard Uribe: "Our district has been well served by Commissioner Kinsley, who did a phenomenal

job leading with vision and dedication. As a resident these past few years, I've had the chance to step back, reflect, and see firsthand how much Harlingen has transformed under this commission's teamwork. When I served before, we didn't have this same momentum, and that perspective has made me appreciate the progress even more. Today, with the seat open, I'm ready to return with fresh energy, join this strong team, and keep our district moving forward. With fresh perspective and renewed commitment, I'm ready to serve."



Courtesy of Delia Cavazos-Gamez

Response from Delia Cavazos-Gamez: "As Commissioner

of District One, my goals will focus on enhancing community vitality for residents through accountability, transparency, service, and progress. I will prioritize drainage improvements, street and sidewalk repairs, and better street lighting to ensure safety and accessibility. Supporting strong infrastructure will attract businesses and create opportunities for economic growth. I am committed to enhancing our parks and public spaces and fostering community engagement. With integrity and dedication, I will work to build a strong district where every voice is heard, and every neighborhood prospers. This ensures District 1 thrives today and for future generations."

City Commission District 2

Current Commissioner Daniel N. Lopez is seeking a second consecutive term. Running against him is Frank Puente Jr.

Explore Harlingen asked each candidate to summarize his or her goals if elected. In Commissioner Lopez's case, Explore Harlingen asked him to also provide a recap of his accomplishments during his first term.



Courtesy of Daniel Lopez

Response from Commissioner Daniel N. Lopez:

"Since 2022, we've made real progress in District 2—launching Harlingen's first ten-year economic development plan, creating dedicated drainage and paving crews, and modernizing city services with online permitting and app updates. These improvements are strengthening our neighborhoods, protecting our homes, and preparing Harlingen for future growth. My 2025 District 2 Work Plan (available at www.votedaniellopez.com) builds on this foundation with a vision of continued progress and opportunity for all. I would be grateful

for your support as we continue building a stronger, better Harlingen—para todos."

Response from Frank



Courtesy of Frank Puente Jr.

Puente Jr.:

"I will focus on strengthening our neighborhoods and enhancing the quality of life for families in Harlingen. Our city's heart is not along the highways--its in our streets, parks, schools and the places where neighbors connect.

Economic growth is important, but it should support our community's way of life, not overshadow it. For too long, the EDC has focused on attracting big industry attracting high paying jobs and yet we fall short of accomplishing these goals.

Although I support these efforts, we should focus more on retail development which would attract jobs and what the community wants and needs."

Early Voting

Early voting will be held October 20 through October 31 (Monday through Friday, 9 am to 6 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; and October 30 and 31, 8 am to 8 pm).

There will be four (4) early voting locations in Harlingen:

- Cameron County Harlingen Annex Bldg., 3302 Wilson Road
- Harlingen City Hall, 118 E. Tyler Ave.
- Harlingen Convention Center, 701 Harlingen

Heights Drive

- Harlingen Cultural Arts Center, 576 '76' Drive

Election Day Polling Places

If you'd rather make your voice heard on Election Day, there are many places to vote on November 4. Although locations are subject to change, these Election Day polling places are published on the City of Harlingen website:

- Bowie Elementary School



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer

- 
- FRAGILE PLANET**
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Recipes

Butternut Squash with Smoked Apple Sausage and Ground Beef



Courtesy of Mamie Moon

By Mamie Moon

Happy October! Let's make a dish full of fall flavors together; a meal so good it'll scare the hunger out of you.

Ingredients:

- Large butternut squash
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 package of smoked apple sausage
- Pinch of salt and pepper
- Tsp. garlic powder
- Large skillet
- Baking dish
- ½ cup chunks of Parmesan cheese
- Handful of spinach

Instructions:

1. Let's start by preheating the oven to 375 degrees.
2. Get your baking dish out. Slice the



Courtesy of Mamie Moon

- butternut squash in half. Salt and pepper each side.
3. Place the squash in the baking dish into the oven at 375 degrees for 45-50 minutes.
4. In a skillet put the stovetop on medium to high heat.
5. Add ground beef and cook it for 7 minutes. Once browned, add the smoked apple sausage. Sprinkle salt, pepper, and garlic powder all over the meat.
6. While the beef

- mixture is cooking, get a handful of spinach and dice it.
7. With a fork, poke the middle of the butternut squash to be sure it's baked through and tender. Now add a handful of the Parmesan cheese, top it with the meat we just made and the remainder of the cheese, then top with the spinach.

This is a simple and delicious recipe. I hope you give it a try and enjoy it as much as my family and I have. Happy

Halloween!

Mamie Moon, owner of Mamie Bakes, turned Keto baker when she was diagnosed with Crohn's disease in 2005. She ditched sugar, gluten, and lactose and became the boss of her own health. She is a home-based Keto baker whose treats can be purchased and picked up locally in Harlingen. ♦





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Special Guest Host: Lisa Campos
Explore Harlingen Blog

October 1, 2025
Location: The Pink Bubble
1226 Morgan Blvd Suite B,
Harlingen, TX 78550
Doors Open at 6PM
Show Begins at 7PM

\$30 per ticket
\$40 per ticket at Door

Ticket includes:
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Hors d'oeuvres
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Tuesday
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OCT 25

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Free Candy

Free Candy

Free Candy

Free Candy

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 A Halloween-themed poster for a 'Trick or Treat' event. It features a witch's hat with a 'D' on it, a jack-o'-lantern, and silhouettes of children trick-or-treating. The text 'TRICK OR TREAT' is in large, orange, stylized letters. Below it, 'MUSIC - POPCORN - HOTDOGS' is written in a curved banner. At the bottom, the date and location are listed.

TRICK OR TREAT

FREE CANDY

MUSIC - POPCORN - HOTDOGS

OCTOBER 31, 2025 | 5:30-9PM
117 E. PORTE CT
HARLINGEN ALLSTARS GYM
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

 A Halloween-themed poster for a 'Boo-tanical' Fall Festival & Plant Sale. It features a large orange sun, a witch, a child in a cactus costume, and a child in a ghost costume. The text 'FREE' is in large, orange, stylized letters. Below it, 'BOO-tanical' is in large, black, stylized letters. The date and time are listed in orange. A list of activities and vendors is provided in white text. The location is listed at the bottom.

FREE

3RD ANNUAL CAMERON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS' **BOO-tanical**

Fall Festival & Plant Sale

**OCTOBER 11, 2025
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

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TEXAS A&M AGRI-LIFE EXTENSION

 A Halloween-themed poster for a 'Monster Mash Candy Bash'. It features a black background with colorful candy and pumpkin decorations. The text 'MONSTER MASH CANDY BASH' is in large, white, stylized letters. The date and time are listed in white. The location is listed below. Contact information is provided in green text. A QR code is in the bottom right corner.

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Local Flavors

By Laisa Chavez Macias

Dreaming Big

We've all heard the saying, "Build your own dream, or someone else will hire you to build theirs." It's easier said than done, but after 15 years as a manager of a Mexican restaurant, Alejandra knew it was time to take the leap from employee to owner.

As for most people, 2020 was a year of serious reflection for Alejandra and her husband Marko Esparza. The impact that Covid had on employees was eye opening. And with the couple expecting their first child, they

You Say Potato, I Say Papa

knew they wanted the security and flexibility of building something of their own to pass down to the next generation.

Alejandra started working in restaurants when she was only 15 years old. She knew the ins and outs of the food industry, and Marco (an artist by trade) channeled that same creativity in the kitchen. Together they make the perfect team.

Why Baked Potatoes (Papas)?

Marco was born in Chicago, but his parents were originally from Monterey, Mexico, where papas are everywhere! This got them thinking, how can we bring potatoes



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer

onto the menu, but add that Rio Grande Valley (RGV) flavor to them? Answer: Make them BIGGER and top them with the RGV's favorite local foods! So that's exactly what they did. And just like that, La Papa Loca went from a dream to a reality.

Next item on the list: location location

location. Figuring out where to set up shop can be a challenge, but thankfully things lined up perfectly for Alejandra and Marco in this department. Before opening, they had been in contact with the owner of the Moon Rock, when the food truck park was just breaking ground in Harlingen. The timing was perfect, and they started their journey together.

The Menu

La Papa Loca specializes in loaded baked potatoes, but it's not the only thing they serve. I had the opportunity to swing by and enjoy some of their best-selling menu items as well as a papa from their "secret menu." More about that later!

From signature baked potatoes loaded with fajita, sausage, and even



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J. Macias Photographer

chicken macaroni and cheese, to traditional Mexican taquitos, panchos, and tortas, you will find something to satisfy your appetite. Not that hungry? Not to worry! The Snack Menu is perfect for an appetizer or finger foods you can share while enjoying a drink and some live music. Speaking of drinks, make sure you grab one of the freshly squeezed lemonades to wash down all that deliciousness.

Let's get back to that secret menu item I teased about. No gatekeeping here. It's called the RGV Papa, and it's LOADED with fajitas, queso fresco, avocado, nacho cheese, and then topped with hot Cheetos for the win. It's quite literally an

explosion of flavor!

Alejandra and Marco have created something very special at La Papa Loca. They have something for everyone, and even if you don't see it on the menu, all you need to do is ask. They are happy to customize or even create a new plate as best as possible. The rotating menu keeps things interesting and offers specialty items for limited periods, giving customers something new to look forward to. The food is always fresh and made to order, and that hard work has paid off. La Papa Loca Food Truck is in the Restaurant Guru top 10 list for 2025, beating out more than 400 other contenders. It's not the first time they've made

the list either.

So, the next time you



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

have a craving for a delicious baked potato, be sure to head out to their food truck located inside the Moon Rock Food Truck Park. It's the perfect place to sit back, relax, enjoy an evening breeze, and eat some great food.

Contact Info

La Papa Loca
1811 W. Jefferson Ave.
Harlingen, TX 78550
956-466-0097
LaPapaLoca956@gmail.com

Facebook: La PaPa Loca

Instagram:
lapapaloca956♦

Rotary
Club of North Harlingen



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*Dinner-Steak & Shrimp
Wine & Music
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Who
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Breaking the Cycle of Violence



**CHILDREN'S
BEREAVEMENT
CENTER** EVIL GRANDE
VALLEY

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***TSTC Cultural Arts Center
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Semi-formal
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 HARLINGEN BOGGUS STADIUM
 198 N 13th Street



HARLINGEN
Community
THEATRE

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

**OCTOBER 25, 26, 27
NOVEMBER 1, 2**



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Moves, Adds, and Changes

By Lisa Campos

This column discusses business-related updates in Harlingen.

Announcements

Elizabeth Trevino, owner of La Playa Mexican Café, was recognized as the Top Restaurant Owner of the Year 2024 and the Empowered Woman of the Year 2025 by the International Association of Top Professionals. Her restaurant recently reached its 20-year milestone anniversary.

Steve and Angela Rodriguez, owners of

Main Street Boutique and Bistro, have sold their restaurant to Roland and Yanet Nuñez. Angela Rodriguez is still baking desserts for them. The restaurant looks a little different, but the menu is the same with some new additions.

Over the Labor Day weekend, the Harlingen Area Tennis Association (HATA) had the honor of being selected for the USTA Net Generation On-Court Experience at the US Open. Twenty-four of the HATA's junior RGV players traveled to New York City and



Courtesy of Elizabeth Trevino

stepped onto the courts of the USTA Billie Jean

King National Tennis Center, where the world's best compete.

Nikki Daniell was named Police Chief of the City of Palm Valley at a pinning ceremony on August 27. Chief Daniell made history as the first Hispanic female Police Chief in Cameron County.

New Businesses

Explore Harlingen was contacted by an Ashley Homestore sales manager in Pharr regarding a new



Courtesy of Harlingen Area Tennis Association



Courtesy of Lisa Campos

Homestore that is coming to Harlingen. It will be located at the former Conn's store at 706 Dixieland. The remodeling should be complete by mid-January 2026.

A new Dollar General (DG) Market opened at the end of August. It is located at 1379 Bass Blvd. In addition to the typical Dollar General stores, the DG Markets also sell meat, produce, and dairy products.

New Cafés and Restaurants

Starbucks opened a new location at W.

Expressway 83 and Dilworth Road on

September 22. It is a flagship to the Dilworth Shopping Center, which has yet to be constructed.

Two new restaurants are in the process of coming to Harlingen: Jimmy's Pizza, which will be located at 1209 N. 7th Street, and Mesquite Valley Smokehouse, which will be located at 105 W. Tyler Ave. Jimmy's Pizza held its soft opening on September 19. Mesquite Valley Smokehouse has not yet announced their opening day.

The Other Room Wine Room announced its opening day as October 18, 3 pm to 7 pm. The Other Room is located at 119 W. Van Buren, Suite 7, next to

Provecho y Salud.

Closings

Classic's Bar and Grill announced on September 15 that it will be closing its doors after 18 years. The restaurant had recently announced a change of ownership, but recent circumstances are causing them to close.

Anniversaries

The following local businesses are celebrating milestone anniversaries:

- Chick-fil-A Dixieland, 15 years
- Frankie Flav'z, 10 years
- Edith's Elegant Candles, 5 years♦



Courtesy of PIE Entertainment

Recurring Events

Downtown Market Days
First Saturday (October 4),
9 am to 3 pm
Jackson Street and Centennial Plaza

The Market at Wild August Nursery and Flower Farm
Every Friday night
(October 3, 10, 17, and 24),
6 pm to 9 pm
16802 Garrett Road

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

Downtown at Sundown
Every 3rd Saturday (seasonal)
(October 18)
7 pm to 10 pm
Lozano Plaza and "A" Street

Harlingen Art Night
Last Friday (October 31),
7 pm to 10 pm
"A" Street and Jackson

Texas Night Out Trick or Treat
October 7, 6 pm
Harlingen Annex

Showdown at the Arroyo IV
October 11-12
Harlingen Arroyo Trails

Mod 75: A Special Tribute to Architect John G. York
October 11-12
Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum

Fiesta Mexicana Fall Festival
October 11, 5 pm to 8 pm
WISI Church

Fuel & Flow Wellness Street Market
October 11, 10 am to 2 pm
Gutierrez Park

Fall Market
October 11, 10 am to 2 pm
Chikas Boutique

Trunk or Treat
October 11, 6 pm to midnight
The Moon Rock

60s and 70s Rock 'n Roll Music Concert
Featuring Robert Tamayo,
Emilio Crixell & Border Soul
October 11, 6 pm to 10 pm
Harlingen Municipal Auditorium

Calvary 50th Anniversary Fall Festival
October 18, 5 pm to 8 pm
Calvary Christian School of Excellence

11th Annual Run with the Heroes
5K Run/Walk
October 19
Arroyo Park Hike & Bike Trail

Greater Chamber of Harlingen
Noche de Gala 2025
October 23, 5:30 pm
Casa de Amistad

ACE Lights Up HCISD
October 23, 5:30 pm
Boggus Stadium

October Special Events

Hot Girl Autumn: Chikas Edition Fashion Show benefitting Titis Tatas Foundation
October 1, 6 pm
The Pink Bubble

Spotlight On: The Big Apple Chorus RGV Concert
October 2, 7:30 pm
Harlingen Community Theatre

Halloween Pet Costume
October 4, 3 pm
Altas Palmas Animal Clinic

K Pop Demon Hunters Sip and Paint Market
October 4, 5 pm to 10 pm
Harlingen Bazaar





Murder on the Orient Express
October 25, 26, 27
November 1, 2
Harlingen Community Theatre

Knights of Columbus
Martin Segura Memorial Scholarship Golf
Tournament
October 25, 8:30 am
Treasure Hills Golf Course

2nd Annual Brunch for Rosa de Esperanza
October 25, 11 am
Stefano's Brooklyn Pizza

St. Paul's Trunk or Treat
October 26, 5 pm to 7 pm
St. Paul Lutheran Church

Trunk or Treat
October 28, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm
Windsor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center

Rotary Club of North Harlingen
100 Couples Who Care
October 30, 6 pm
TSTC Cultural Arts Center

Trick or Treat
October 31, 5:30 pm to 9 pm
Harlingen Allstars Gym

City of Harlingen Trails of Treats
October 31, 6 pm to 9 pm
Lon C. Hill Park

Beyond Harlingen

37th Annual Sandcastle Days
October 2-5
Clayton's (South Padre Island)

32nd Annual Conjunto Festival
October 3-4
Memorial Park (Los Fresnos)

St. Theresa Catholic Church Fall Festival
October 4, 5 pm to 10 pm
October 5, 5 pm to 9 pm
St. Theresa Catholic Church (San Benito)

3rd Annual Cameron County
Master Gardeners
BOO-tanical Fall Festival
& Plant Sale
October 11, 9 am to 12 noon
Education Garden (San Benito)

Bustin' Clay for United Way
Clay Shooting
October 18
Camp Perry (Rio Hondo)

Trick or Treat
October 18, 6 pm to 8 pm
Ice Monkeys (San Benito)

La Feria ISD's Monster Mash and
Candy Bash
October 21, 6 pm to 7:30 pm
La Feria Early College High School
Parking Lot

Trunk or Treat
October 25, 9 am to 1 pm
Raymondville ECHS Parking Lot

Pumpkin Patches

T-Ranch Pumpkin Patch
October 2-November 9
T-Ranch (La Feria)

Safari Pumpkin Patch
October 4-November 2
Fragile Planet Wildlife Park (Los Fresnos)

Fall & Pumpkin Patch Festival
October 4, November 1, and November 22
Alpaquita Ranch (Monte Alto)

First Methodist Church (FMC) Harlingen
Pumpkin Patch
October 6-31
FMC Harlingen

Events subject to change.

Check Explore Harlingen
on Facebook for the latest
updates.



Event Spotlight

Badges, Boots, and Running Shoes: First Responders Hit the Trail for Charity

By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

Lace up your running shoes. On Sunday, October 19 at 8 am sharp, the 11th Annual Run with the Heroes 5K will kick off at Arroyo Park Hike and Bike Trail in Harlingen.

District Representative Officer Benito Bravo of the Harlingen Police

Department is excited about the upcoming event. This year proceeds from the 5K run will be donated to Make-A-Wish Rio Grande Valley.

“All the funds that we raise, they all stay here, in the Rio Grande Valley to help out the children who are having medical issues,” Bravo said.

Ten years ago, the



Courtesy of Harlingen Police Department

Harlingen Police Department started a nonprofit organization

called The Harlingen Police Education and Community Fund. They coordinate three charity events throughout the year with this 5K run being the second event of the year (the first is the CBA State BBQ Championship in June; the third is the upcoming “Shop with a Cop” discussed further in this article).

In the past, about 400 runners have attended the event and Bravo says they hope to have as many participants this year. The first 400 to cross the finish line will receive a finisher’s medal, which is usually handed out by a local



Courtesy of Harlingen Police Department

first responder.

“Since it’s called Run with the Heroes put on by us, the Harlingen Police Department, we reach out to other police agencies and federal agencies and first responders... and they help us put on this event, they assist us and we make it happen,” he said.

Bravo also commented on how, not only do first responders take part in the event by cheering on runners at the finish line, but some also even run alongside



Courtesy of Harlingen Police Department

participants in their uniforms and all. From

SWAT team members to firefighters wearing their uniform including their tanks, Bravo said it’s definitely something that isn’t seen every day.

“It’s a pretty neat thing that goes on,” he said. “We do encourage all law enforcement to attend. I know a bunch of our Harlingen Police Officers do take part in the run.”

The event will begin at 7:30 am with Jo-Jo of FM 100 KTEX, the emcee, making announcements and introductions of the chief of police and Make-A-Wish.

The \$35 registration fee includes a running shirt. This year, the first 250 runners who sign up for the race will also snag a pair of custom socks. The

knee-high socks feature the Harlingen Police Department badge logo and an American flag. The registration fee is discounted at \$30 for first responders and children 14 years and younger. There will also be 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place trophies for the top three runners in seven age divisions.

The Harlingen Police Department stays busy throughout the year with several other community and charity events. The next charity event coming up during the holiday season is “Shop with a Cop,” an initiative that, in partnership with Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD), benefits 85 HCISD students from financially unsecured



Courtesy of Harlingen Police Department

October 2025

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homes. It allows these students to go on a shopping spree with a police officer right around the holidays as well as receive a fully cooked meal for Thanksgiving.

“We are definitely very busy throughout the year, especially from September through the end of the year... it’s busy, busy,” Bravo said, referencing trunk or treats, national nights out, and other events the city puts on.

In the meantime, Bravo invites the public to come out and support the race.

“Join in with the first responders and support



Courtesy of Harlingen Police Department

the cause,” he said.

For more information, follow the Harlingen Police Department

on Facebook where you can find the link

to register for the run through Athlete Guild. ♦

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11th

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5K RUN/WALK

October 19, 2025

Arroyo Park Hike & Bike Trail

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956-367-1545
bbravo@harlingentx.gov

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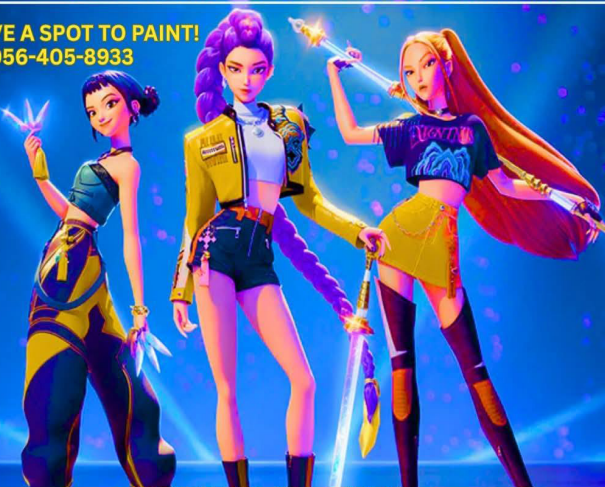
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Notable Nonprofits

RGV Down Syndrome Association: Empowering and Educating for a Better World

By *Beth Marie Cantu*
Ensign

The Rio Grande Valley Down Syndrome Association (RGVDSA) provides connection, support, and advocacy for individuals with Down syndrome and their loved ones across the RGV. At the center of this effort is Deborah Tomai, the organization's president and co-founder, whose personal journey as a mother led to the creation of a lifeline for families like hers.

Deborah and her family had been living in the RGV for just two years when her youngest child, Ben, was born and diagnosed with Down syndrome.

Down syndrome is a genetic condition. People with Down syndrome may face health challenges or developmental differences, but with support and opportunity they can lead full, meaningful lives.

"I had a lot of questions about what the diagnosis would mean for Ben's life, what it would mean for our family, and I wanted to be a good mom. I wanted him to have a great life, and I just had a lot of questions about how that was going to work," she recalled.

In her search for answers, Deborah was referred to a case manager to connect with other families in the area



Courtesy of RGVDSA

who had children with Down syndrome. "A

couple of us all started calling each other... and it gave me a lot of hope." That connection sparked the beginnings of the RGVDSA.

In March of 2021, Deborah and her new community of support decided to help spread awareness. One of the group's earliest public events—the Step Up for

OCTOBER 18, 2025 | 8:00 AM | EDINBURG MUNICIPAL PARK





Courtesy of RGVDSA

Down Syndrome Walk—revealed how much the RGV needed such an organization. “We really were hoping we’d have a couple hundred people there... We ended up having over 1,000 people come, and we had 60 families who had kids or adult family members with Down syndrome sign up. It was amazing and beautiful,” Deborah said.

From its inception, RGVDSA has focused on building relationships, advocating for inclusion, and supporting individuals with Down syndrome and their families throughout the RGV. The organization works

to show that people with Down syndrome are valued members of the community, with talents and contributions worth celebrating and recognizing.

The association offers a wide range of resources for families, starting from the moment of diagnosis. “We really want families to feel celebrated,” Deborah said, noting that the organization provides a congratulations basket to families, including information and resources in both English and Spanish. The organization also connects families through a private Facebook group, where members can share advice,

celebrate milestones, and support one another.

RGVDSA’s programs and activities continue

to expand. In addition to the annual Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk, the group hosts classes, playdates, and even a theater program. “We have a group of adults with Down syndrome performing in a play inspired by Alice in Wonderland this year,” Deborah said.

Despite its success, the organization faces challenges. Being entirely volunteer-run makes it hard for families to stay consistently involved, and serving members spread across the RGV can be tricky. Looking ahead, Deborah has big plans. “In the next five years, we’d love to have staff and a space where families can gather for teen nights, tutoring, or



Courtesy of RGVDSA

new-mom meetups,” she said.

For now, the association continues to lean on the RGV community for support. Volunteers are always welcome, especially for major events, like the Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk, which will take place on

October 18 at Edinburg Municipal Park. “You can reach out on our Facebook page... and we'll connect you for volunteering,” Deborah encouraged.

Through this network, families find guidance, friendship, and a place to celebrate milestones together. The Rio



Courtesy of RGVDSA

Grande Valley Down Syndrome Association is proof of the power of parents uniting to create something larger than themselves, serving not just their families but the community.

For families looking to connect or get involved,

RGVDSA is always welcoming new members and volunteers. You can reach out through the Rio Grande Valley Down Syndrome Association page on Facebook or visit their website (rgvdsa.org) to learn more. ♦

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Artist of the Month

Serkit Studios: Painting Culture Across South Texas

By Abigail Muñoz-Garcia

Adrian Rodriguez remembers drawing since elementary school. It wasn't until about 18 years ago that he started painting.

"I was mostly just drawing for fun. I never took art class in school. I was just drawing on my own. I took my first art class in college, and that's when it first clicked that that was something I could do," Rodriguez said.

The Edinburg artist, whose specialty is airbrushing and murals, dedicates himself to his art full-time, having left teaching a year ago after eight years as an educator. While a teacher

at Port Isabel Junior High School, Rodriguez left his mark at the campus with two murals that students painted under his direction.

"I drew the whole thing and designed the murals with the help of the students. We painted together," he said.

Rodriguez also earned the District Teacher of the Year distinction for the 2021-2022 school year for Point Isabel Independent School District.

He has done murals from South Padre Island all the way to Mission with his newest piece having just been unveiled in the downtown area of Harlingen in August.

The mural, which



Courtesy of One Four Five Photo

took about a month to paint with sketching and deliberation on design happening two weeks prior to that, is an achievement for Rodriguez, who also goes by his artist name "Serkit."

When asked how it feels to have his artwork in the city of Harlingen, he said it is amazing.

"I've thought about doing it (a mural in the downtown Harlingen area) for like ten years. Every time I went to Art Night or Market Days, I always thought about having a mural (there)... I thought about it so much, and it came true," he said.

The mural, which is reminiscent of vintage-



Courtesy of Adrian Rodriguez



Courtesy of Adrian Rodriguez

style linen postcards of the 1930s through the 1950s, has a different scene or element of the city in each letter like the Iwo Jima monument or the Jackson Street sign.

It is located on North Commerce Street.

Rodriguez draws inspiration from Mexican American culture and the Pre-Columbian era.

“I also like fantasy and



Courtesy of Adrian Rodriguez

October 2025

sci-fi type of art like Frank Frazetta,” he said.

One of the biggest challenges Rodriguez has had to face as an artist who is dedicated full-time to his craft, has been turning his talent into a business.

“That’s been tough. It’s not easy. It took me a long time to build the skills to airbrush and paint big murals and try to get paid for it,” he said.

As for what the future holds for Rodriguez, he’d like to venture out beyond the Valley. “I need to apply for bigger mural jobs, bigger cities outside

of the Valley,” he said.

In the meantime, you can catch him at the Pulga de Alamo or city of Alamo flea market on Saturday and Sunday. There, he airbrushes shirts, pants, jackets and hats for customers. He also works out of his home studio and can airbrush other items like helmets, leather, automotive parts, “almost anything” as Rodriguez puts it.

You can also follow him on Instagram as [serkitstudios](#) or Facebook as [Serkit Studios](#). ♦



Courtesy of One Four Five Photo

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The NFL Dream is Alive in Harlingen

By Roel Rodriguez

The 2025 NFL season has begun, with all 32 teams aiming to become the 2026 Super Bowl Champions. For the winners it will be a dream come true, and for their fans, it will give them a year of bragging rights.

As I reflected on the start of the 2025 NFL season, I wondered if my beloved Dallas Cowboys would ever make it back to the Super Bowl again. I, also, reflected on how special it must be to make it to the NFL as a player.

Playing in the NFL must be the ultimate achievement for anyone who loves American football. For those athletes, who have the God-given talent to make it in the NFL, this achievement must be a dream come true.

As a Harlingen resident, I know that we have had some Harlingen Cardinals experience the NFL dream and I began to wonder how many players from the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) have played in the NFL.

I did some internet research and discovered

that the Greater Harlingen area seems to have produced the most NFL players in the RGV. The McAllen area and Weslaco have had two (2) NFL players each while Brownsville has had one (1) NFL player; however, our beautiful Harlingen community and its surrounding area have produced a whopping seven (7) NFL players.

Although all the RGV football players who have made it to the NFL make us proud, this article focuses on the seven (7) amazing individuals from the Harlingen area who made it to the NFL.



Courtesy of RGV Sports Hall of Fame

Jim Hudson (La Feria)

The most senior NFL player from the Harlingen area is La Feria Lion, Jim Hudson.

Jim excelled at multiple sports in high school and was the Class 2A State Discus Champion, but it was his versatility to play multiple positions on the gridiron that earned him a roster spot with the University of Texas Longhorns in the early 1960s. Jim's ability to play multiple positions, especially on defense, helped contribute to the Texas Longhorns football team success culminating with a win the 1963 National Championship game against Navy.

Jim went on to play for six seasons with the New York Jets winning a Super Bowl Championship in 1969 when the New York Jets, with Quarterback Joe Namath, beat the heavily favored Baltimore Colts. Jim's career is extremely impressive and unique.

Not too many athletes can say that they won championships at the state, college, and professional levels but, La Feria Lion Jim Hudson can.

After retiring from football, Jim and his business partner operated a very successful real estate firm in Austin,



Courtesy of Getty Images Texas.

Dale Hellestrae (Harlingen)

The next NFL player from our area is Dale Hellestrae who played only one year of football at the Marine Military Academy (MMA) in 1983.

After dominating at MMA, Dale earned a football scholarship to play at Southern Methodist University (SMU). Dale was a two-year starter at SMU as an offensive tackle and earned All Southwest Conference honors.

Dale was selected by the Buffalo Bills in the 12th round of the 1985 NFL draft. After three (3) seasons with the Buffalo Bills, Dale played one season with the Los Angeles Raiders

before being traded to the Dallas Cowboys in 1990. Dale spent 11 seasons with the Dallas Cowboys excelling as the Cowboys special team's long snapper and played in 176 consecutive games. Dale became one of the best long snappers in the NFL and in Dallas Cowboys' history. Dale was a pivotal member of his team and helped the Dallas Cowboys win three (3) Super Bowl Championships in the 1990s. Dale completed his career in 2002 after one season with the Baltimore Ravens.

Dale continues his involvement with football as an analyst on professional and NCAA football games for college football on Versus and serves as a co-host of the weekly "Jacob and Helly in the Morning" on AM & FM radio in the Arizona area.



Courtesy of Wikipedia

Roberto Garza (Rio Hondo)

Another great NFL player from our area is Rio Hondo Bobcat Roberto Garza. After a successful high school career competing in football and track and field, Roberto chose to walk on at Texas A&M Kingsville.

Roberto not only made the Javelina football team, but he had a very successful four-year football career at Texas A&M Kingsville as an offensive lineman.

In 2001, Roberto was selected by the Atlanta Falcons as the 99th overall pick in the 4th round of the NFL draft. Roberto spent five seasons with the Atlanta Falcons and then signed to play for the Chicago Bears in 2005.

Roberto spent 10 seasons with the Chicago Bears enjoying a trip to the Super Bowl XLI Championship game in 2006 against the Indianapolis Colts. Although the team came up short against the Colts in the Super Bowl, the Chicago Bears were the NFC Champions for that season. In 2006, Roberto was one of only 19 Hispanic players in the NFL among the 1,700 NFL players. Roberto retired from the NFL 2014 and enjoyed a very

successful broadcasting career with ESPN Deportes after retirement.



Courtesy of Google

Jimmy Lawrence (Harlingen)

The first Harlingen High football player to make it to the NFL was Jimmy Lawrence. Jimmy excelled as a running back for the Big Red Machine and led the Cardinals to three (3) playoff appearances.

Jimmy's talent earned him an opportunity to play football at Texas Christian University (TCU). While at TCU, Jimmy made the All-Southwest Conference team three times and was a member of the TCU football team that won the 1935 National Title and is also a member of the TCU Sports Hall of Fame.

Jimmy was selected in the 1936 NFL draft. The Chicago Cardinals selected Jimmy in the 1st round as the 5th overall

pick. Jimmy's talent allowed him to play four (4) NFL seasons for the Chicago Cardinals and Green Bay Packers in the late 1930s.

In 1939, the Chicago Cardinals traded Jimmy to the Green Bay Packers, and he was a member of the 1939 NFL Champion Green Bay Packers team. After retiring from football, Jimmy enjoyed a successful career as a leading football official in the RGV.



Courtesy of Ebay

Sammy Garza (Harlingen)

The next Harlingen High football player to make it to the NFL was Sammy Garza. Sammy was a successful multi-sport athlete at Harlingen High in the early 1980s. Sammy is best known for being a great Quarterback (QB) as a passer who led the Cardinals to a 30-10 record during his high school career.

Sammy's exploits earned him a scholarship

to the University of Texas – El Paso (UTEP) where he was named the starting QB for the Miners as a freshman. Sammy completed his college career as one of the most prolific passers in UTEP history, ranking first in pass completions and completion percentage and ranking second in passing attempts, yards, and in touchdown passes.

In 1987, Sammy was selected by the Seattle Seahawks in the 8th round (216th overall) in the NFL draft as an offseason/practice squad player. Sammy was waived by the Seattle Seahawks in September 1987 but, due to the NFL Players Association strike, the NFL chose to continue the season with replacement players. Sammy was signed as QB by the St. Louis Cardinals replacement team. Sammy started one (1) NFL game as a QB for the St. Louis Cardinals during the 1987 season and remained on the roster as a backup QB.

Sammy was waived by the St. Louis Cardinals the following season, but he continued his professional football career in the Canadian Football League (CFL). Sammy's CFL career entailed time with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers

from 1989-1991 and 1992-1995. Sammy was drafted and played for the Frankfurt Galaxy of the World League of American Football in 1991. He closed out his professional football career as a member of the Ottawa Rough Riders of the CFL in 1995. In 1993, Sammy led the Winnipeg Blue Bombers to victory in the Eastern Finals over the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, earning Sammy and his team an opportunity to play in the Grey Cup (the CFL's equivalent of a Super Bowl and Canada's largest annual sports and television event). In the 1993 Grey Cup game, Sammy scored a rushing touchdown against Edmonton Eskimos who won the game 33-23.

Sammy then began a successful career as a football coach starting with UTEP from 1996-1997 and 2000-2023 and with the Saskatchewan Roughriders from 1998-1999 and in 2004. Sammy has served as a wide receiver, running backs, and QB coach.

In 2005, Sammy was hired as a professional scout by the Dallas Cowboys in their College Scouting Department. Sammy served as the southwest area scout from 2008-2009 and the west coast scout from 2010-2011 and back to

southwest area scout in 2012. Sammy continues his passion for football and is still involved in the sport. He continues to work for the Dallas Cowboys and is involved in all scouting aspects for the five (5)-time World Champions.



Courtesy of RGV Sports Hall of Fame

Johnnie Jackson (Harlingen)

Our next Harlingen High player to make it to the NFL is Johnnie Jackson. Johnnie was a phenomenal Cardinal athlete from 1981-1985 and played QB for the football team. Johnnie accepted an offer to play football for the University of Houston Cougars football team and was named two (2)-time First Team All Southwest Conference in 1987 and 1988. In 1989, Johnnie was drafted in the 5th round as the 122nd overall pick by the San Francisco

49ers. Johnnie excelled as safety for the 49ers and was a member of the San Francisco 49ers team that won the Super Bowl in 1990 against the Denver Broncos. Johnnie played with and against many NFL Hall of Fame players. Johnnie played four (4) NFL seasons with the 49ers and the Green Bay Packers.



Courtesy of Google

Leo Araguz (Harlingen)

Our latest Harlingen High football player to make it to the NFL is Leo Araguz. Leo started as kicker and punter for the Cardinals for four (4) years.

Leo accepted a football scholarship to Stephen F. Austin (SFA) University, where he was a four (4)-year starter. During his Junior year at SFA, Leo led the conference with average yards per punt (42.6). Leo was a 2x Second Team All Southland Conference punter in 1990 and 1991.

Leo began his professional football career in 1993. Leo had a two (2)-day tryout with the Dallas Cowboys but wasn't signed. In 1994, Leo was a free agent with the Miami Dolphins. In 1995, Leo was signed by the San Diego Chargers.

In 1996, Leo was drafted by the Rhein Fire of the World League of American Football in Germany. Leo was ranked as the 2nd best punter in the league with a 42.3 punt average and contributed by making eight (8) of 15 field goals that season.

In 1996, Leo tried out for the Oakland Raiders team as a punter. After some injuries to other punters, Leo was afforded the opportunity to punt for the last three (3) games of the Raiders' season. Leo's first NFL punt went for 52 yards against the Kansas City Chiefs. Leo's 41 yard-per-punt average over the final three (3) games

of the Raiders' season prompted the Raiders to sign Leo as their starting punter. In 1997, Leo finished as the 5th best NFL punter with a 45-yard average and ranked 2nd in Raiders' football history behind former Oakland Raider and Pro Football Hall of Fame punter, Ray Guy. In 1998, Leo set the NFL record with 16 punts in one (1) game. Leo spent four (4) seasons with the Oakland Raiders.

In 2001, Leo punted for the New York/New Jersey Hitmen of the XFL and produced 44 punts for 1,788 yards (40.6-yard average). In 2001, Leo was signed by the St. Louis Rams but was released. He also signed with the Detroit Lions to replace their injured punter. Leo had a 41.9 yard-per-punt average for the Lions in just three (3) games.

In 2003, Leo signed with the Kansas City Chiefs but was released

before the season started. However, he was signed by the Minnesota Vikings that season and averaged 38.7 yards-per-punt in only 2 games.

In 2005, Leo was signed by the Seattle Seahawks and won the starting punter position. However, after a promising start, he was released mid-season. Leo's last NFL team was with the Baltimore Ravens in 2006, but he was released before the season began.

From 2011-2015, Leo punted for the Rio Grande Valley Sol of the X-League Indoor Football.

Leo retired from professional football after 22 years and returned to his hometown. He runs a construction company.

An Elite Club

We are fortunate to have seven (7) individuals from our community who have reached the pinnacle of NFL football. I admire these athletes and their achievements in

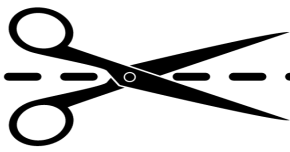
professional football as well as in life.

We have a first-round NFL draft pick in the first ever player draft in NFL history. We have two College Football champions. We have one NFL Champion and three Super Bowl Champions and one who played in a Super Bowl game. We have players from the Harlingen area who have played with and against NFL legends who are in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. We have players who have played in other countries, and all these players have significant professional football accomplishments.

However, the one thing that all these talented players have in common is that they all had the opportunity to live and experience the NFL Dream. In case you are wondering, only 1.5% of American football players make it to the NFL. It truly is an elite club.

Hope the 2025 NFL season is the best one ever. Go Cowboys! ♦





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