



Free Magazine

November 2025

Explore Harlingen
Magazine Online



Cover Photo by Julie Ng-Castillo

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From the Editor

By Lisa Campos

This is Lisa from Explore Harlingen. Welcome to the 25th 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.exploreharlingenblog.com, and social media accounts on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (@exploreharlingen).

In this issue, we discuss the upcoming season of the Harlingen Concert Association, a new collectible convention, the Harlingen High School South Hawks tennis program, and more.

The Explore Harlingen Magazine is available digitally on my website at www.exploreharlingenblog.com.



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On the Cover

Harlingen Concert Association Fosters Music Education through Performances and Scholarships

By Lisa Campos

For 92 years, nonprofit organization Harlingen Concert Association (HCA) has been committed to recruiting exceptional artists to present high-quality shows. Thanks to top season ticketholders and sponsors, as well as a strong partnership with Live on Stage, based in Nashville, Tennessee, HCA concerts are offered at affordable, family-friendly prices.

Education and inspiration are at the heart of HCA's mission. They have proudly sponsored performances by these world-class artists at local schools. In addition to sharing their music, the artists often give performance advice and answer questions about their instruments to their student audiences. They engage with the students one-on-

one, giving hugs and high fives, signing autographs, and taking selfies with dozens of star-struck youngsters and their chaperones.

For some students, HCA outreach programs offer their only opportunity to experience a live performance by a world-class tenor, play saxophone alongside a Grammy-nominated artist, hear classical music played on the accordion, or shake hands with a musician from across the United States or world.

Scholarship Recipients

To further motivate youth leaders to pursue a higher education in music and performance, HCA awards scholarships to Harlingen students every year. In 2024, HCA awarded four (4) scholarships to the following gifted students:

Adam Hernandez--Texas A&M Kingsville

Classes are going great, and Adam's already fully immersed in campus life. He is actively involved in five different ensembles, including marching band, jazz band, and various trombone choirs. "I wouldn't be here without y'all's support."



Karla Rivera--UT Austin

Karla was selected as one of this year's NHFA Artists in Residence! After a competitive process, she was chosen to travel to Washington, D.C. to perform at the Spain Residency, celebrating and honoring her cultural heritage. Karla has joined the UT Austin Speech and Debate Team and is off to a great start.



Angel Charles--University of North Texas

An active and enthusiastic member of the Green Brigade Marching Band, Angel is enrolled in Percussion Methods and Keyboard Skills, expanding his musical abilities beyond the saxophone and gaining a well-rounded foundation in music education. "I'm having an amazing time over here at UNT!"



Carolina Kortan--UT Austin

"Classes are going very well this semester." Carolina recently auditioned for the UT Speech Team--and we're proud to report that she made the team.



www.harlingenconcert.com

- Angel Charles, who is attending the University of North Texas to pursue a degree in Music Education.
- Adam Hernandez is attending Texas A&M Kingsville to major in Music Education.
- Carolina Kortan, who is attending the University of Texas at Austin to continue her experiences with Speech, Drama, and Debate.
- Karla Rivera is



Courtesy of Harlingen Concert Association

also attending the University of Texas at Austin to major in Radio, Television, and Film (RTF).

The HCA is proud of all their scholarship recipients and look forward to awarding more high achievers this year.

HCA Board

Each year, the scholarship recipients are selected by the Scholarship Committee, a subset of the HCA Board of Directors. The HCA Board of Directors, currently composed of 17 volunteers, sets the concert schedule, secures sponsorships, and plans fundraising events. The current HCA Board includes the following

individuals.

Barbara Disbennett, the current President of HCA and Chair of the Scholarship Committee, has two passions – nursing and the performing arts. She retired from nursing after 53 years. She joined HCA in 2022 and is committed to promote all aspects of the mission of the organization – music performances, education outreach, and student scholarships.

Bianca Garza is currently serving as HCA's Vice President, Student Outreach Chair, and SING Chair. She also serves on the organization's Scholarship Committee. Bianca joined HCA in 2020.

A passionate dance teacher and former high school choir member, she shares her love for music and the arts with her students and community.

Dr. Larry Dahm, a retired Harlingen pathologist, is HCA's Treasurer. He has served on the HCA Board of Directors for about 10 years. He also serves on the HCA Scholarship Committee. He says it is great FUN to serve a lively, thriving community organization that brings so much to audiences and school students in our area each year.

Nicholas Garza currently serves as HCA Secretary and member of

the Scholarship Committee. He is a performing musician, singing concerts around the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and South America. He has served on the HCA for three (3) years and enjoys giving back to his community by helping bring the magic of music to the Rio Grande Valley (RGV).

Kim White has more than 40 years of experience as a dedicated community banker and has had the privilege of serving on multiple local boards, always with a focus on helping our community grow and thrive. Kim serves as Chair of the Sponsorship Committee and member of the Scholarship Committee.

Adele Wilcox has served on the HCA Board since 2023. She loves how committed HCA is to bringing music to the RGV and giving our students the opportunity to meet and engage with the artists. She is the Chair of the organization's Subscription and Tickets Committee.

Judy Ross has been member of HCA since 2011. She joined

because of her love for music (she plays piano) and the desire to be part of a civic-minded organization that offers quality music entertainment to her community. She serves on the House Management Committee.

Lois Day-Stone came to the RGV in 1978 as a bride from Iowa with a history of singing in church, high school, and college choirs and playing in high school and college bands. After retiring from

teaching English & Speech at University of Texas Pan American (UTPA), it was her joy to join the HCA Board in 2003.

Denise Meyners is a retired Marketing Administrator who has lived and worked in Dallas, Corpus Christi, and Harlingen, Texas over the last 28 years. She joined the HCA Board in 2017 because of her love of music, theater, and the fine arts. Denise has served on various HCA committees and

is currently Hospitality Committee Chair.

Bettina Elliott happened to stumble upon the HCA while browsing on Facebook in 2017. Just a few years later, she contributes to the decision-making process for selecting performances to bring to our community. Bettina is currently the Chair of the HCA House Management Committee.

Armando Ramirez is a San Benito native and a Baby Boomer, for whom music has always been a huge part of his life. He has served as a Board Director for 10 years and was on the Executive Board for two (2) years in the role of Secretary. He will be collaborating with Artist's sales this season.

Bill Elliott joined HCA after the COVID shutdown. He has served on the Board in various capacities for several years and was instrumental in securing the current venue of the Christian Fellowship Church auditorium. Bill serves on the Marketing/Publicity Committee.

Becky Magdalena grew up in Houston with a love for dance,

decorating, and all things creative. She joined the HCA Board of Directors in 2020 to support the arts and serve her community. She is part of the HCA Sponsorship and Social Media Committees.

Dennis Lester has been a professional musician for 59 years and a music educator for 54 years. He was the Assistant Band Director with Harlingen CISD for 34 years and has now been with Marine Military Academy for the past five (5) years. He has been on the Board of Directors of HCA since 2021 and serves as the Concert Manager.

Jan Lester retired as a teacher with Los Fresnos CISD after 18 years. She was also the Los Fresnos High School/Los Fresnos United UIL Coordinator and Coach for nine (9) years. She has been an HCA Board Member since 2023, serving on the Sponsorship, Scholarship, and Marketing/Publicity/Social Media Committees.

Eric Garcia is an Agent & Financial Professional with New York Life. He serves on the Board of Directors of five (5) nonprofit



Courtesy of Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District

organizations in our local community, including the HCA. He joined HCA in 2024 to experience the excitement and growth of the scholarship recipients.

Shezadi “Princess” Charania is a Community Engagement Professional with CenterWell Senior Primary Care. Shezadi joined HCA because of her deep passion for music in all its forms and genres and sees it as a source of energy and emotional connection.

Upcoming Concerts

The 2025-2026 concert season promises to bring music lovers from all backgrounds together to enjoy these exciting concerts.

The Brothers Doobie (November 4, 2025)

The Brothers Doobie are an exceptional musical tribute band dedicated to honoring the iconic sound of The Doobie Brothers and Michael McDonald. Composed of six talented musicians, the Brothers Doobie captivate audiences with their uncanny ability to recreate the soulful sounds and energetic performances

of the original band. Featuring iconic songs like “What a Fool Believes,” “Takin’ It to the Streets,” “Black Water,” and more, this group will take you on an unforgettable musical journey back to the 1970s and 1980s. **Mariachi 7 Leguas (December 2, 2025)**

Mariachi 7 Leguas was founded 20 years ago by Emilio Santos in the RGV in Texas. They have been given many awards and recognitions, not only in the United States and Mexico, but across the globe. Their soulful performances are deeply rooted in Mexican tradition. The Holiday Concert for Harlingen Concert Association will feature traditional Mariachi music along with classic Christmas songs.

PIANOMANIA! – Rockin’ the 1950s with Jared Freiburg (January 20, 2026)

Piano virtuoso Jared Freiburg has been performing 1950s-era music since he was a teenager. With legends like Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino, and Ray Charles as his sources of inspiration, Freiburg channeled his talents into a successful career as a



Courtesy of Harlingen Concert Association

touring musician and has gone on to tour and perform in venues of all sizes around the world. Filled with good vibrations, electrifying piano mastery, and a non-stop parade of favorite Golden Oldies, this show celebrates the music and artists of the early years of Rock ‘N Roll with songs like “Real Wild Child,” “Pretty Woman,” “Blue Suede Shoes,” and more.

Chris Ruggiero: Teenage Dreams & Magic Moments (February 10, 2026)

PBS-TV star, Chris Ruggiero, takes his audiences on a journey through the golden age of rock and roll in his brand-new show “Teenage Dreams and Magic Moments,” breathing new life into the timeless music of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Often described as an “old soul” despite his young age, Chris performs the pop-rock music that defined three decades with energy, style, and soul. Backed by a four-piece band, Chris’ concerts may feature iconic



Courtesy of Julie Ng-Castillo

songs like “California Dreamin,” “Stand by

Me,” “Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” and others.

GQ Gentlemen’s Quartet (February 24, 2026)

Gentlemen’s Quartet (GQ) is a modern, elegant take on some of the most famous music ever written, fusing together multiple genres in a perfect symphony of sophistication, virtuosity, and humor. Composed of cello/

mandocello, guitar, bass, percussion, piano and violin, with special appearances by female vocalist Erin Shields, their concerts offer audiences a new, often deeper, way of listening to music. Featuring a multitude of musical genres, their repertoire includes selections like “Adagio,” “New York ‘States’ of Mind,” “Don’t Stop Believing,” “Rhapsody Overload,” and more.

All concerts are held at 7:30 pm at Christian Fellowship Church, 901 N Loop 499. You can follow HCA on Facebook (@HarlingenConcert Association) for updates. For information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kim White, Sponsorship Chair, at kjwhite1962@gmail.com. ♦



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For Dates & Times



HARLINGEN Concert ASSOCIATION

2025 / 2026 Concert Season

Dates, artists, and programs are subject to change.



THE BROTHERS DOOBIE

A Tribute to the Doobie Brothers

Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2025

This group of artists offer an exceptional musical tribute dedicated to honoring the iconic sound of The Doobie Brothers and Michael McDonald. Comprised of six incredibly talented musicians, the Brothers Doobie captivate audiences with their uncanny ability to recreate the soulful sounds and energetic performances of the original band. This group will take you on an unforgettable musical journey back to the '70s and '80s. *"This is by far my favorite tribute act, hands down. Love Sean's vocals!"* -Mayor Joe Cafora, City of East Haven, CT



Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025

Mariachi 7 Leguas is well known throughout the RGV and was founded in 2004 by Emilio Santos. In this time, the group has been given many awards and recognitions, not only locally in their hometown of McAllen, but also in the United States & Mexico, and across the globe. They perform at RGV Charro Days, weddings, birthdays, quinceañeras, serenades and a variety of other special events. Their soulful performances are deeply rooted in Mexican tradition.



The Holiday Concert for Harlingen Concert Association will feature traditional Mariachi music along with classic Christmas songs.



PIANOMANIA!

Rockin' the 1950's with Jared Freiburg

Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026

Piano virtuoso Jared Freiburg has been performing 1950s era music since he was a teenager. With the good vibrations of legends like Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino and Ray Charles, Freiburg's electrifying piano mastery is a non-stop parade of favorite Golden Oldies, celebrating the music and artists of the early years of Rock 'N Roll - musical treasures that live on through generations...and now they are sounding better than ever! Jared has toured the country and released an album of original music. *"It is the most high-energy show I have ever seen."* The Oregon Times



CHRIS RUGGIERO:

Teenage Dreams & Magic Moments

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026

Chris Ruggiero and his band takes audiences on a journey through the golden age of vintage rock and roll, breathing new life into the timeless music of the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Often described as an "old soul" despite his young age, Chris has performed in concert on a PBS-TV's broadcast specials, has played sold out shows in Las Vegas, and released 4 full length albums. *"Chris is so good at making the classics his own. I went to his show and loved every minute."* -Bill Medley, The Righteous Brothers



GQ (GENTLEMEN'S QUARTET)

Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026

GQ (Gentlemen's Quartet) is a modern, elegant take on some of the most famous music ever written, fusing together multiple genres in a perfect symphony of sophistication, virtuosity, and humor. Comprised of cello/mandocello, electric guitar/bass, percussion, piano and violin, with special appearances by female vocalist Erin Shields, their concerts offer audiences a new, often deeper, way of listening to music. The group members have collectively performed over 10,000 shows. *"GQ dazzled our audiences with amazing virtuosity, beautiful music and tremendous personality...our patrons were in absolute awe of the talent they brought to the stage."* -City Stage & Symphony Hall (Springfield, MA)

SHOWS START AT 7:30 P.M.

TO PURCHASE TICKETS:

Visit: www.harlingenconcert.com

For additional information:

Email: hcatkts@gmail.com

Call: 956-392-9757



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Venue is the Christian Fellowship Church Auditorium, 901 N. Loop 499, Harlingen, Texas

Recipes



Courtesy of Mamie Moon

By Mamie Moon

Add this dessert dish to your Thanksgiving meal and it's sure to be a hit! Pairs well with a nice warm cup of coffee.

Ingredients:

Cake:

- 2½ cups almond flour
- 1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup coconut oil
- 1½ cup monk fruit sweetener



Courtesy of Mamie Moon

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Keto Pumpkin Bundt Cake

- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup canned unsweet pumpkin puree

Icing:

- 1 tablespoon butter – softened
- 3½ cups lactose free cream cheese
- ½ cup powdered monk fruit
- 2 tablespoons sugar free almond milk
- ½ tsp vanilla extract

Instructions:

1. Let's get started by preheating oven to 350 degrees. Spray your Bundt cake pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together with a stand mixer almond flour, salt, pumpkin pie spice, cinnamon spice, baking soda and powder, and the monk fruit sweetener.
3. In a separate bowl, mix the coconut oil, vanilla extract, unsweet pumpkin puree, and eggs until smooth.
4. Now we can beat the almond flour mixture into the pumpkin mixture.
5. Spoon the batter into the greased Bundt cake pan.
6. Bake at 350 for 40-45 minutes.
7. Once it's done, take it out and allow it to cool down for 20 minutes.
8. Get a cake display dish to carefully insert the cooled down Bundt cake.
9. In a medium sized bowl, beat with a mixer the butter, cream cheese, vanilla extract, and the powdered monk fruit.



Courtesy of Mamie Moon

10. In a medium sized bowl, beat with a mixer the butter, cream cheese, vanilla extract, and the powdered monk fruit.

It's ready to slice, serve, and enjoy! Happy Thanksgiving!

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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Local Flavors

By Laisa Chavez Macias

When it comes to Mexican restaurants in Texas the list is LONG, and the closer you get to the border the more prominent they become. From taco trucks to 5-star Mexican cuisine dining experiences, you name it, we got it.

But tucked away in each city is that one special place that locals look to for special occasions. The place they grew up celebrating birthdays, graduations, and so much more. It's the place their parents took them, and in turn they took their own kids. The restaurant where so many memories are made and the nostalgia

A Harlingen Tradition

runs deep.

For Harlingen, Pepe's Mexican Restaurant is that special place for so many families, mine included. I was honored to be able to sit down and visit with the owner, Mr. Joe Ayala, and talk about his journey.

If you were raised in Harlingen, the chances that you have never been to Pepe's are slim to none. BUT in the event that you haven't made your way there yet, this is clearly your sign to stop in for a delicious bite to eat.

Pepe's Mexican Restaurant opened its doors on September 27, 1994.

This year they celebrated 31 years in business! However, this was not the beginning of Joe Ayala's journey.

Mr. Ayala started 10 years earlier, as the



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer

manager of Antonio's, a Mexican restaurant in the same location where Pepe's is today (117 S. 77 Sunshine Strip). In 1993, Antonio's relocated, opening a larger location, where Joe continued to manage for one more year before moving back to his old stomping grounds. This time as an owner. He acquired the building where he

once managed, dusted it off, gave it a new name, and jumped right back in the saddle.

For Joe, less is more. He's kept the restaurant small and cozy, the menu the same. He's stuck to recipes that were tried and true. Plates that customers know and still order till this day. When I asked him what the secret was, he said "consistency," and I



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer

could not agree more.

A big part of that starts in the kitchen. We will get into the food in just a second, but I would be remiss to not mention that the head chef has been with Joe for 39 years. This explains that consistency that we all love. It doesn't stop there; the wait staff has some amazing guys that have been there for 25 years.

Now let's get into the food. For starters, the chips and salsa: five stars! Ok, ok, at least in my opinion. However, I'm pretty sure I'm not alone on this one. As a matter of fact, I know a few people who dine in regularly just because of them.

Second, the fajitas! I'm positive I'm not alone on this one because not only has the restaurant and waitstaff been named the Valley Morning Star Readers' Choice multiple times but so have those famous fajitas. They have also been named best overall Mexican food and have been featured in magazines, state and Valleywide.

The menu is full of wonderful choices. My personal favorite is the botana for two. It's perfect for sharing and easy to customize.



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer

It's served on a bed of cheesy nachos with guacamole, topped with fajitas of your choice, a side of rice and beans, and tortillas, which are all delicious. On the lighter side, they also have a great jalapeño soup or mini crispy tacos that are super savory.

Pepe's offers great food and great service. It's no wonder it's been around long enough for it to become part of our family traditions. Mr. Ayala knows many of us by name, and has watched families grow up, move, come back, and start families of their own. He loves his job. What he cherishes the most are his customers. He is forever grateful for the loyalty the community of Harlingen has offered

his business.

I asked Joe about the future of Pepe's and what advice he would give up-and-coming restauranteurs. He assured me that for as long as he's around, he will be here, and that he knows the crew who have been with him

through thick and thin will keep it going long after. For the second part of my question, his advice was "keep it simple."

On that note, signing off until next time, your friendly local foodie, Laisa. ♦

Join us!

DAY OF THE DEAD
Celebration

Saturday, November 1st 6:00 PM - 12:00 AM

Dia de los Muertos Costume Contest

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**Jackson Street and
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**The Market at Wild August
Nursery and Flower Farm
Every Saturday morning
(November 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29),
9:30 am to 1:30 pm
16802 Garrett Road**

Valle Vista Mall Market Days

**Every 2nd Saturday
(November 8),
11 am to 7 pm**



**Downtown at Sundown
Every 3rd Saturday (seasonal)
(November 15), 7 pm to 10 pm
Lozano Plaza and "A" Street**

**Harlingen Art Night
Last Friday (November 28),
7 pm to 10 pm
"A" Street and Jackson**



November

November Special Events

**St. Anthony Catholic
Church & School
Fall Festival**

**November 1, 5 pm to 10 pm
November 2, 5 pm to 9 pm
St. Anthony Church**

**Murder on the Orient Express
November 1, 7:30 pm
November 2, 2:30 pm
Harlingen Community Theatre**

**Pop-Up & Praise Market
November 1, 10 am to 2 pm
1514 S. Sunshine Strip**

**Santa's Arrival
November 1, 5 pm
Bass Pro Shops**



**Dia de los Muertos
Celebration and
Costume Contest
November 1, 6 pm to 12
midnight
The Moon Rock**

**Harlingen Concert Association
Presents The Brothers Doobie
November 4, 7:30 pm
Christian Fellowship Church**





Rio Grande Valley

Birding Festival

November 5-9

Harlingen Convention Center

Mighty Hawk Band Boosters

Fundraiser Golf Tournament

November 22

Tony Butler Golf Course

**HCISD Heart for People: Lead,
Learn, Grow**

Family Connection Conference

November 8,

8 am to 11:30 am

**Harlingen School
of Health Professions**

Collectors Collision

Convention 2025

November 29-30

Harlingen Convention Center

Beyond Harlingen

Moonlight Market

November 7, 6 pm to 10 pm

34097 FM 1421 (San Benito)

Hiring Red, White & You

November 13,

9:30 am to 1 pm

Harlingen Convention Center

3rd Annual A Toast to

Tails Gala

November 8, 6 pm

Brownsville Events Center

Dinner Theatre:

An Evening of Theatre

November 14-16, 7 pm

Harlingen Performing

Arts Center

**Loaves & Fishes Symphony on
the Hill**

20th Annual Charity Dinner

November 13, 6 pm to 9 pm

Oak Hill Event Center

(San Benito)

Cars & Cosplay

November 15, 10 am to 7 pm

Valle Vista Mall

Plant Swap

November 15,

11 am to 12 noon

Harlingen Public Library

Bridge Fest

November 28,

11 am to 12 midnight

Rio Hondo Bridge

HEB Feast of Sharing

November 19, 11 am to 3 pm

Harlingen Convention Center

Events subject to change.

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



Moves, Adds, and Changes

By Lisa Campos

This column discusses business-related updates in Harlingen.

Announcements

On October 1, a family from San Benito, the Mancillas family, appeared on a recent episode of Family Feud. Three sisters (Alyssa Martinez, Amanda

Mancillas, and Andrea Cabanas) along with their husbands (Issac Martinez and Alfonso Cabanas) participated in the popular game show. Four out of the five family members attended San Benito High School. Although they beat the opposing family, they did not earn enough points in the Fast Money Round to win the grand prize.



Courtesy of City of San Benito

New Cafés and Restaurants

Mesquite Valley

Smokehouse, a new BBQ restaurant, held its grand opening on October 15. They will



Courtesy of Mesquite Valley Smokehouse

We Are Moving

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kW LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY
KELLERWILLIAMS REALTY

Courtesy of kellerlrgv

initially be open for dinner service, 4 pm to 10 pm daily. After a month or two, they plan on opening for lunch on Saturdays and Sundays.

Cookies4College is one step closer to opening their storefront. On September 25, their store signage was installed. They have indicated that they intend on opening before the Christmas cookie season starts. They will be located at 119 W. Van Buren, Suite 6.

Limón Mexican Grill & Seafood, a new restaurant, is coming soon to Harlingen. They will be located at the corner of “D” Street and Jackson in downtown Harlingen. Check Explore Harlingen on Facebook for opening date announcement.

Moves

Keller Williams Lower Rio Grande Valley is moving its offices to 1313 E. Washington Ave sometime in November.

Closings

On September 30, Bean Extract, a locally owned coffee shop, closed its doors. They announced on Facebook that they had

a new job opportunity and wanted to continue their education.

Anniversaries

The following local businesses are celebrating milestone anniversaries:
Longhorn Cattle Company Barbeque Restaurant (San Benito)
– 40 years♦



Courtesy of Longhorn Cattle Company Barbeque Restaurant



Courtesy of Rene Rivera



Courtesy of Rudy Coronado

FEATHER & SAGE APOTHECARY



MOONLIGHT MARKET

Friday, November 7, 2025

Where: 34097 FM 1421 San Benito, TX 78586
Time: 6pm - 10pm

40+ Local Vendors and Food Trucks
Event is Pet & Family Friendly
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DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

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3RD ANNUAL A TOAST TO TAILS GALA

8 · NOV · 2025 - 6PM

Brownsville Events Center

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PLANT SWAP

Library Auditorium
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11am - 12 noon

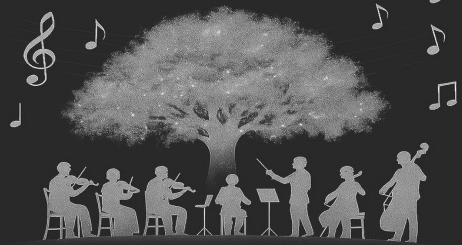


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bring Plants to Swap**

SYMPHONY ON THE HILL

20th Annual Charity Dinner



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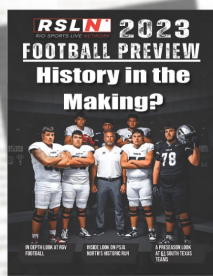
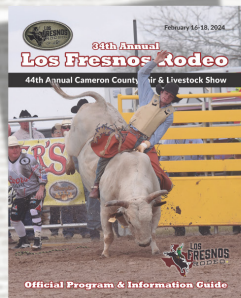
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November 2025

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Thanksgiving Day Buffet: 10am-5pm

Explore Harlingen Magazine | 23

Event Spotlight

Cards, Comics, Kicks and Community: Harlingen to Host First Collector's Collision Convention

By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

Sneakerheads, comic book aficionados, cosplayers and collectors get ready for an event that is gearing up to be

a momentous occasion for new and seasoned participants of the hobby world. It is set to take place on November 29 and 30 at the Harlingen Convention Center.

Jesse Rosales, owner of Kulture Shock Collectibles in Brownsville and a partner of the Collector's Collision Convention said the idea for this event came from a desire to

bring all the cultures of the hobby world together.

"You never really have an event focused on trying to bring all of them together and that's where we came in," Rosales said. "We talked to the Harlingen Convention Center. They agreed, they were on board to try to do something like this... we appreciate it."

The idea was also inspired by Collect-A-Con, the nation's largest trading card, pop culture and anime convention. Rosales mentioned that interest in collecting cards has increased since 2020, and they wanted to make sure that it was something that would be part of their convention.

"That (cards) had been kind of a dead market for twenty years," he said. "But all of a sudden now it's the hot collectible—sports cards, Pokemon cards, pretty much any kind of cards."

Rosales reached out to the owners of J&V's Toys, Games and More



Courtesy of legion



Courtesy of torii

of Harlingen in March of this year and set things in motion for the convention. They, along with a silent partner, are all organizing, planning, promoting and coordinating the many aspects of the convention in conjunction with the Harlingen Convention Center.

Rosales' history with events and conventions of this type spans decades, and he has a sense of pride to be able to have the event in Harlingen, where his family is originally from.

"I'm very proud to be able to bring things like this to the Valley," he said.

Viola Garza, co-owner of J&V's Toys, Games and More feels similarly about the convention.

"This is something we like to do and we like to share with the community- what better than here in

Harlingen, our beloved Harlingen," she said.

Garza and her husband, Jaime Cruz, have been operating their business for over seventeen years. She has been passionate about the hobby world since they opened and shares that she believes it brings families together.

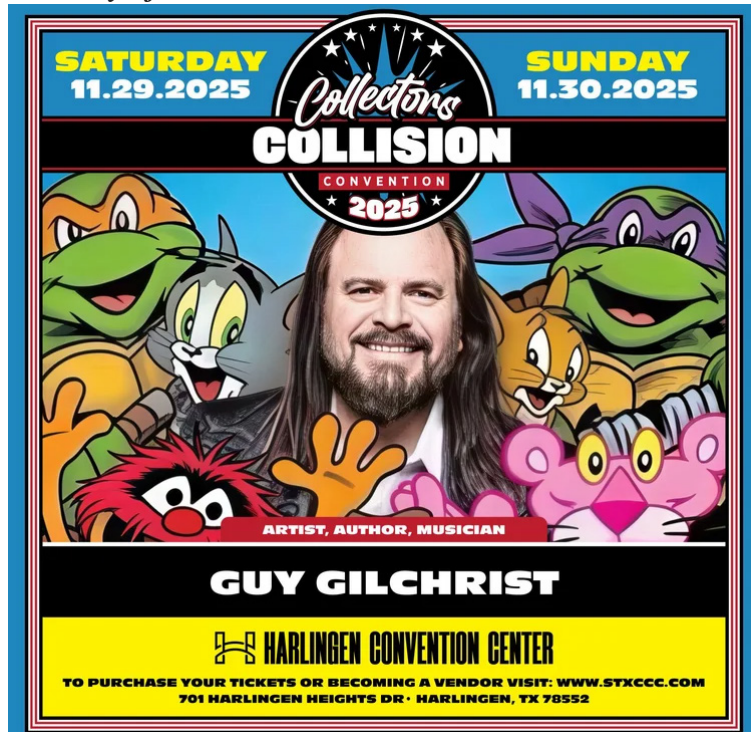
"We want to make it affordable for them to enjoy it and have that extra cash to go in there and go spend with their kids," Garza said. "That's when they spend their quality time as a family, something that they like to do."

Over 100 vendors are expected at the convention. Items that will be sold include: comics, sports cards, memorabilia, Pokemon and trading card games, toys, Funko Pops, sneakers and many more.

November 2025



Courtesy of ramos



Courtesy of gilchrist

A gamer tournament is also scheduled for the event. There will also be opportunities to meet and get autographs and photos with cosplayers, voice actors and artists such as Guy Gilchrist who is a writer, musician and artist known for his comics and

children's books.

For more information, you can find the event page on Facebook: Collector's Collision Convention 2025 or follow J&V's Toys Games and More and Kulture Shock Collectibles Brownsville on Facebook as well.♦

Explore Harlingen Magazine | 25

Notable Nonprofits

Mighty Hawk Band Boosters Tee Off for a Cause

*By Beth Marie Cantu
Ensign*

When the Harlingen South Mighty Hawk Band steps onto the field, their performances are a result of countless hours of dedication—not just from the students and staff, but also from a devoted group of parents and supporters working behind the scenes. The Mighty Hawk Band Boosters, a nonprofit organization, is committed to ensuring band students have the best possible experience.

“We’re separate from the school, and we’re there just to support the Harlingen South Band program,” says treasurer Nathan Echon. “We’re made up of the parents and friends of the band students, and our mission is really just to create an environment where our students can have the best possible experience in the band program, in whatever form that takes.”



Courtesy of Mr. Frank Garcia Photography

The band boosters provide support in many forms, from financial contributions to hands-on help. “We support the band in a lot of different ways,” Echon explains. “A big part of our support comes from... fundraising and purchasing of things that the band needs, whether it be equipment or meals or things like that. But we do everything you can think of—from

handing out water after performances, providing moral support, even washing uniforms. Anything the band needs, we are there to support them the whole way.”

What truly sets this group apart, Echon believes, is the dedication of its members. “Everyone in the organization is very dedicated to the band and to the kids. They’re putting in tons of volunteer hours to help the band with

whatever they need. I can’t even count how many hours we put in, but the parents and their dedication really make it unique.”

This year, the boosters are stepping up their efforts with their first ever Mighty Hawks Band Boosters Fundraiser Golf Tournament. “The usual fundraisers are great,” Echon says, “but this year, we wanted to have an event that really brings the community together.



Courtesy of Mr. Frank Garcia Photography

It's kind of different from the norm—selling popcorn or candy bars—and while raising funds at the same time. It's going to be a memorable event, bring the community together, and be a lot of fun for everyone."

The tournament is set for November 22 at the Tony Butler Golf Course in Harlingen. Registration begins at 7 am with tee-off at 8 am.

To keep the energy high throughout the day, the tournament will offer plenty of ways to get involved and have fun. "We have a ton of contests and activities planned," says Echon. Highlights include a putting contest, a golf ball drop, door prizes, and an online auction.

Prizes range from premium golf gear to cash awards, while auction items feature experiences such as a Kentucky Bourbon Trail trip for two, tickets to any college sports game in the U.S., guided fishing trips to South Padre Island, and more. Generous local sponsors are helping to make these activities and prizes possible.

And for those who don't golf but still want to enjoy the festivities, the golf ball drop offers a fun way to participate. "It's a raffle, almost like a lottery," Echon explains. "As long as you're a Texas resident and over 18 years of age, you can go to our website and buy golf balls. The Harlingen

Fire Department is going to lift them up on the fire truck ladder and drop them over a target. The person that has the ball closest to the [center of the] target will win half of all the money that was raised."

Funds raised during the tournament will help cover essential needs for the band throughout the year, including meals, travel expenses, props for performances, and clinician costs. "We don't have a specific target for the funds right now—we're trying to get a leg up on next year."

Beyond playing in the tournament, community members can support in many ways. "We're always looking for

volunteers," Echon shares. "Donations are always welcome. If you go to our website, there's a bunch of info on how to contact us and ways you can get involved."

Volunteer support plays a crucial role in making the event a success. "Since we're going to have so many contests and events going on that day, we just need a lot of hands to make sure everything goes smoothly," he says. "All hands on deck."

Echon hopes the community understands the lasting impact of their support. "Whether you're playing in the tournament, cheering from the sidelines, or participating in the golf ball drop, any support is going a long way to helping these kids become better students, better musicians, just better all around. We really appreciate everything you guys are doing."

If you or someone you know is interested in getting involved with the Mighty Hawk Band Boosters Golf Tournament Fundraiser, you can reach out or register at <https://mhb-golf-tournament.perfectgolfevent.com>. ♦

NOVEMBER
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29

11AM
TO
6PM



NOVEMBER
SUN
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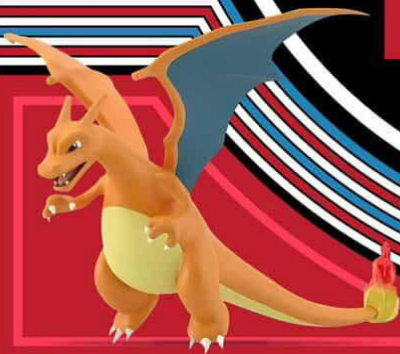
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November 2025

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• Razors	• Whole Grain Cereal
• Body Wash	• Corn Muffin Mix
• Shaving Cream	• Canned Food: Tuna, Salmon, Chicken, Beans, Spaghetti Sauce, No Sugar Added Canned Fruit, & Canned Tomato
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Explore Harlingen Magazine | 29

Artist of the Month

The Band'itos – A Staple in the Harlingen Music Scene

By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

Familiar melodic tunes of the 80s, 90s, and 2000s drift into the night as the door at Station 1 Bar & Grill in Harlingen opens on a Friday. The setup? An acoustic guitar and a drum set. While that may sound minimal, The Band'itos' music is anything but. Dynamic strumming, powerful vocals and drumming that makes the kit sing and drives the song forward, keeps the ambience of the place light, cheerful, and energetic.

The band, which started as a 3-piece in 2022, stays busy

with gigs at places such as Station 1, The 83 Winery, and Sir's Martini Lounge.

Gilbert Elizondo, the guitarist and vocalist of the band, says they stay in and around the Harlingen area.

"It keeps us very busy," he said.

Norman White, drummer and backup vocalist, and Elizondo both mention that the feedback they've been getting has been positive. They recently went from being a "loud rock band" as Elizondo describes it, to "not so loud" having gone from three members to two about two months ago and shifting to an acoustic



Courtesy of Abigail Muniz Garcia

sound.

White remembers Elizondo asking for more acoustic-driven songs in the past.

"We just never did it," White said.

"You never wanted to," Elizondo responds playfully. "And now he likes it."

This shift has allowed the band to be more

creative with their song choices and has expanded their set list as well.

"It's been neat because we will be like hey, let's try this song and we can kind of make it our own," Elizondo said. "It gives a little bit more flexibility."

Both have been part of the music scene for



Courtesy of Abigail Muniz Garcia

decades and are multi-instrumentalists with White having started off as a guitarist before getting into the drums.

“My mom was a guitar player, and she played country music in a band, so she kind of taught me some chords and that’s where I kind of started,” he said. “She’s the one that got me started.”

He found his way to the drums in the early 90s while playing for different bands in the area. He was part of an all original metal band, Inner Sanctum, which was popular in the Rio Grande Valley.

Elizondo started playing guitar when he was a sophomore in high school and was self-taught. His dad was also a musician and that had an influence on him.

“My dad used to play the piano a lot and he’s the one that got me interested in playing something... the piano to me, it didn’t make

any sense, but the guitar made sense,” he said.

He has played and recorded with different bands as a musician not only in Harlingen but in the Dallas area where he moved to in 1998. He made his way back to Harlingen before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Their combined years of experience, the dynamic of the members, and their intentional song choice to keep it varied for the audience, have made them a staple at Station 1 on Fridays.

Even though they’re known as a cover band, they are open to the idea of one day creating original music together.

“The possibility is there. I don’t see why not,” Elizondo said. “It’s so much easier nowadays to write and record.”

At the end of the day, the band enjoys keeping the crowd going with the tunes they’re familiar with as they unwind at their favorite



Courtesy of Abigail Muniz Garcia

restaurant, bar, or at a private party.

“It’s fun entertaining people,” White said.

“We’ll probably both be doing it (playing music) well into our 60s and 70s. We’ll probably be playing in some

RV park somewhere,” Elizondo said with a laugh.

You can find them as The Band’itos on Facebook or the_banditos on Instagram.♦

WED-THURS 5-12, FRI-SAT 5-2, SUN 5-12

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LIVE MUSIC

Sports

Hawk Tennis Soars Again

By Roel Rodriguez

For the 29th time in Harlingen High School South history, the Hawk Tennis program has been crowned Team Tennis District Champions. What an impressive accomplishment for a school that has been in existence for 32 years. This level of success and longevity is what all sports programs are trying to achieve and what athletes are looking to be part of.

I can't help but wonder how and why the Harlingen South Tennis program has been successful for so many years. What's the "secret sauce"?

I met with the recently recognized Texas High School Coaches Association Girls Tennis State Coach of the Year and South Hawks Tennis Head Coach, Ernesto Escamilla Jr., to congratulate him on another winning tennis season and to get insight into his program's history.

Coach Escamilla immediately gave credit to prior Hawks coaches

and players such as Coach Noe Stillman and his children, Tomas and Danielle Stillman, along with a slew of talented former Hawk Tennis players like Jeremiah Sanchez. Clearly, the South Hawk Tennis program has been blessed with great coaches and players who created the foundation and the winning culture. The challenge for Coach Escamilla is to continue the expectations to win and uphold the standard of success created by his predecessors.

Coach Ernesto Escamilla Jr. started his tenure as the South Hawks Tennis leader in 2019 but his journey to Harlingen South is unique and provides a real appreciation for the caliber of coach at the helm at Harlingen South.

Coach Escamilla is a Brownsville native who began his love for the sport of tennis at the Brownsville Tennis Center under the tutelage of Coach Rey Jasso and playing along with his good friend, Rafael Delgado. Coach



Courtesy of Coach Escamilla

Jasso had experience playing tennis at the collegiate level and passed his wisdom to Coach Escamilla and his friend, Rafael. Rafael proceeded to play tennis at the collegiate level and continued to stay involved in the game after his competitive days were over. For Coach Ernesto Escamilla, he was interested in a physical therapy career and began his studies at the University of Texas – Brownsville

after concluding his competitive tennis career at Brownsville Pace High School.

It was his friend who unexpectedly contacted Coach Escamilla in 2010 to ask if he would be interested in being the Assistant Tennis Coach at Bethel University in Tennessee (Bethel TN). Coach Escamilla was about to propose to his girlfriend when this opportunity arose, and he wasn't quite sure if the timing was



Courtesy of Coach Escamilla

right. After discussion with his new bride and his friend, who was the Head Tennis Coach at Bethel TN, Coach Escamilla accepted the position and began his career as a collegiate tennis coach. Coach Escamilla spent seven (7) years at Bethel TN serving three (3) years as an Assistant Coach and four (4) years as the Head Coach.

Coach Escamilla left Bethel TN in 2017 and became the women's

tennis coach at the University of Tennessee – Martin (UT Martin), a Division 1 program. Coach Escamilla remained at UT Martin until he departed in the Fall of 2019 to accept the Harlingen South Hawks Tennis Head Coach position. No doubt, Coach Escamilla's impressive tennis coaching resume, consisting of nine (9) years at the collegiate level, made him an exceptional selection

for this position, but it also provided the South Hawk Tennis program with a coach who has access to collegiate tennis contacts and ties across the United States to help his program and players.

Coach Escamilla's collegiate tennis coaching pedigree is impressive enough, but he knew that to get the Hawk Tennis program to the next level, he would have to surround himself with the best

staff. Coach Escamilla added Assistant Coaches Noe Moraida and Nick Sandlin, two proven and successful tennis coaches affiliated with the highly successful Los Fresnos High School tennis team, one serving as a former head coach. Coach Escamilla credits his Assistant Coaches greatly for the overall team success and is proud of how they work together to do what is best for the team and the players at



Courtesy of Coach Escamilla

Harlingen South.

In addition to adding quality Assistant Coaches, Coach Escamilla indicated that the entire Harlingen tennis community in our beautiful city has been key to enhancing the success of the tennis programs and players at Harlingen South and Harlingen High. Coach Escamilla and Harlingen Cardinal Head Tennis Coach, Jay Tanamachi, have mutual respect and admiration for each other, their programs, and their success.

Coach Escamilla utilizes a “whole of community” approach and involves the amazing local tennis leaders to enhance his program like Ram Cuevas, the tennis pro at

the HEB Tennis Center; Andy Carter, the tennis pro at the Harlingen Country Club; and former Hawk Head

Coach, Noe Stillman, serving as a private tennis coach in the Harlingen area. Coach Escamilla credits their

involvement in our local tennis community as catalysts for success not only for his program but for the Hawks players.

For example, Harlingen South players volunteered at the annual USTA Pro Circuit tournament at the Harlingen Country Club and volunteered at the UT-RGV Western Athletic Conference Tennis Tournament held at the HEB Tennis Center last season. Coach Escamilla took the Hawks players to the Austin Open (a professional women’s tournament) after competing in a tennis tournament in Round Rock, Texas. His intent is to expose Hawks



Courtesy of Harlingen CISD Athletics

players to collegiate and professional tennis to help them with their overall growth and to showcase the opportunities available through the sport of tennis as they pursue their educational and career goals.

Coach Escamilla utilizes various methods to help his players succeed in tennis and in life and uses phrases like “Be the best you can be,” “All In,” “Together,” and “Team Only” with his players. The program intentionally displays banners throughout their home tennis courts as constant reminders to their players, fans,

and opponents of the winning tradition and culture at Harlingen South.

In their history, the South Hawks Tennis program has had 28 Regional and 19 State qualifiers and two (2) State finalists. Although the South Hawks Tennis program has clearly experienced long-term success, Coach Escamilla is committed to every tennis player participating in his program. During Coach Escamilla’s tenure, he has been blessed to coach players talented enough to compete at the collegiate level like Ethan Carter, Diego Garcia (Concordia

University), Jeremiah Sanchez (St. Mary’s University), and Vicente Rodriguez (Kansas College). These South Hawks tennis alums remain engaged in the program and available as resources to the program and players.

For the 2025-2026 season, the South Hawks Tennis program is composed of 70 players (30 on Varsity, 20 on Jr. Varsity, and 20 on the Freshmen team). The top 8 varsity players compete as starters at each of the tennis tournaments.

The 2025-2026 Team Captains are Leonardo Cantu, Enrique Moreno, Emily Britten, and Madison Dossett. The 2025-2026 season just concluded but Coach Escamilla and his program will continue to prepare for next season.

For anyone interested in tennis, the South Hawks Tennis program will host free tennis camps throughout June 2026 for players K-8th grade from Monday to Thursday at the South Tennis Courts. The annual South Hawks Tennis Camp will be held throughout July 2026 (except 4th of July week) for players K-12th grade. For more information about the camp and camp costs,

please contact Coach Escamilla at 956-364-3732, ext. 1567, or ernesto.escamilla@hcisd.org.

If interested in supporting South Hawks Tennis, please contact Monica Cuevas, South Hawks Tennis Booster Club president, at hhsstbc@gmail.com. You can follow the team on their Facebook page at Harlingen South Tennis.

I believe that the South Hawks Tennis program continues their tradition of success because of the foundation created 32 years ago along with having the right staff running the program. They are a specialized and experienced staff truly committed to their players and enhancing their program. The coaching staff can utilize a network of collegiate and professional individuals to help and support their program and assist players who want to pursue tennis at the next level. Ultimately, it is part of the village that helps Hawks tennis players continue beyond high school to further their education and succeed in life. The South Hawks Tennis Program is truly “A Step Above.” ♦

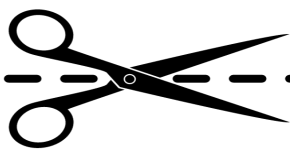


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