



STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS ATTENDEES PLEDGE MORE THAN \$7,000 FOR HIDALGO COUNTY EMPLOYEE AND DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP

Contact: Cari Lambrecht
Hidalgo County Public Information Officer
Office: (956) 292-7026
Cell: (956) 720-5626

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Hidalgo County had many firsts last night: the **first** State of the County Address, the **first** live webcast of an address in this region and, perhaps the most long-lasting, the announcement of the **first** Hidalgo County Scholarship Program.

The Hidalgo County Scholarship Program was announced as a partnership between Hidalgo County and South Texas College to improve educational opportunities for county employees and their dependents. Last night, attendees at the State of the County Address, where this program was unveiled, contributed more than \$7,000 to the fund.

Hidalgo County Commissioner Oscar Garza, Jr. began the auction-style pledge session by announcing that he would contribute \$1,000 to the fund. Soon after, State Representatives Veronica Gonzales and Aaron Peña, along with Dennis Burlison, chairman of the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority; the Law Offices of Atlas & Hall, the county's contracted legal counsel; and Dr. John Gerling, a McAllen orthodontist and president of the International Museum of Art and Science board; each pledged \$1,000 to the fund. Dr. Ali Esmaili, a professor at South Texas College, pledged \$200. Sponsorship money raised to pay for the State of the County Address in the amount of \$1,000 was also added to the fund, bringing the grand total to \$7,200.

The Hidalgo County Scholarship Program will cover up to six hours of tuition and fees for Hidalgo County employees and their dependents who attend South Texas College.

The scholarship was inspired by former Hidalgo County W.I.C. employee Veronica Reyna, who wrote to Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas on his blog, www.judgejd.com. The recent graduate of STC suggested the idea of the scholarship, telling her story of how she had to quit going to school to help out her single mother raising seven children, but always knew she would complete her education. Ms. Reyna left on good terms with Hidalgo County on Dec. 31 to pursue higher education at the University of Texas-Pan American full-time. She acknowledged the guidance and cooperation of her supervisor, Norma Longoria of the W.I.C. program, in her comments last night.

Hidalgo County expects to award the first scholarship(s) this summer. Applications will be made available soon.

Interested donors should contact the Public Information Office or the Office of the Hidalgo County Judge.

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