



your COUNTY connection

HIDALGO COUNTY NEWSLETTER | AUGUST 2013

Background image: "All Ablaze" by Jan Hartzog
4th Place, 2009 Photography Contest - Nature Category

Residents of Hidalgo County:

As leaders, we aim to keep our community residents engaged and informed about projects, initiatives, and improvements that we are presently undertaking. We also have big plans for the future direction of our County, which will help to keep our area thriving and our communities flourishing.

In this issue of Your County Connection, we showcase many major initiatives that will transform the landscape of our County, such as the new university and medical school and the interstate designation of several major highways.



Other major achievements last month included Precinct 1 Commission-

er A.C. Cuellar's celebration of the groundbreaking of the final phase of the Mile 2 West Project, which will improve transportation access to the road for Mercedes residents. This project commenced in 2008, and the groundbreaking for this final phase celebrates the work of many County, state, federal, and local partners, over many years, to see the final product to fruition. On the north side of the County, Precinct 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios moved to increase citizen engagement by hosting the first of a series of town hall meetings in Edinburg. At the meeting, residents heard from successes in 2012 and plans for the future of the precinct.

These and other initiatives are certain to foster economic growth and serve the needs of Hidalgo County. My colleagues and I look forward to continuing to serve our constituents and striving to make Hidalgo County the best place to live.

Sincerely,

Ramon Garcia

Ramon Garcia
Hidalgo County Judge

LEGISLATION FOR NEW UNIVERSITY SIGNED BY GOV. PERRY

Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia and Commissioners A. C. Cuellar, Jr., Hector "Tito" Palacios, and Joseph Palacios were among the officials on hand to witness Texas Governor Rick Perry's ceremonial signing of the legislation creating a new University of Texas university and medical school in South Texas.

At the ceremony, Governor Perry praised University of Texas System Board of Regents Chairman Gene Powell, of Weslaco, Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa, of Laredo, newly-appointed Regent Ernest Aliseda, of McAllen, US Congressman Ruben Hinojosa, state senators and representatives, UTPA



President Robert Nelsen, UTB President Julieta Garcia, for the role they played to turn the eyes of Texas to the Rio Grande Valley, which, Perry commented, had been overlooked for far too long.

It was Chancellor Cigarroa's vision of hope and opportunity for the South Texas region that began Project South Texas. The vision was developed by the UT System Board of Regents, carried through the state legislature, and lauded by Rio Grande Valley local leaders, including County Judge Ramon Garcia and the members of Hidalgo County Commissioners Court. The legislature authorizing the creation of the new UT university and medical school was approved in May 2013.

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HISTORY MADE AS I-69 & I-2 SIGNS UNVEILED

In widely-attended unveiling ceremonies in Harlingen, Pharr, and Mercedes, local, county, state and federal officials celebrated the federal highway designations of Interstate 69-E in Harlingen, Interstate 69-C in Pharr, and Interstate 2.



The momentous occasion comes after more than two decades in the making, as local, county, state, and federal leaders have been pressing for the designation since the early 1990s. The Alliance for I-69 Texas has been "encouraging cooperation and seeking solutions since 1994," and along with the U. S. Congressional and Senate Delegation, the Texas State Delegation, Hidalgo and Cameron County Commissioners Courts, RMAs and MPOs, local mayors and city councils, the Rio Grande Valley Partnership, and numerous other sup-

porters of the project, have been working in a regional manner and in unity to achieve the designation, which was announced in May 2013.

As leaders gathered to witness the designation and unveiling ceremony of the interstates, there was an air of excitement, accomplishment,

and satisfaction that the numerous hours, days, and years of pushing for this project were finally brought to fruition on this historic day.

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PCT. 1 COMMISSIONER CUELLAR CELEBRATES MILE 2 WEST PROJECT GROUNDBREAKING

Hidalgo County Pct. 1 Commissioner A. C. Cuellar, Jr. and the Texas Department of Transportation hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the Mile 2 West Project in Mercedes, Texas on Friday, July 12, 2013 at South Texas ISD in Mercedes.

The project will improve transportation access and mobility along Mile 2 West, widening 5.19 miles of roadway from Mile 12 North to US Highway 83. This is the second phase of the Mile 2 West project, which commenced in 2002 and widened the road from State Hwy 107 to Mile 12 North; project development for this phase began in 2008 and the design completion, environmental clearance and right of way coordination were completed in March, 2013. In June 2013, the awarded vendor was given notice to proceed, and construction is scheduled to commence in the next few weeks.



U. S. Congressman Ruben Hinojosa, who earmarked funding for the first phase of the project, was in attendance to mark the occasion of a project that has been years in the making. Local city, chamber and school officials from Mercedes and Weslaco, as well as representatives from South Texas ISD (located on Mile 2 W), were also in attendance to help celebrate the commencement of the project. Pct. 2 Commissioner Hector "Tito" Palacios and representatives from the County Judge's Office and Pct. 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios' Office were also in attendance, demonstrating their support of the project.

Commissioner Cuellar and Pct. 1 Chief Administrator Raul Lozano thanked the partners of the project, including TxDOT, the City of Mercedes, and Hidalgo County Commissioners Court, who all contributed resources and funding to the approximately \$9 million project.

The ceremony was held alongside Mile 2 W, and it was evident that the traffic navigating through the narrow, two-lane road, including heavy machinery, trucks, and other vehicles, would benefit tremendously from wider lanes and shoulders. Commissioner Cuellar also noted that the project would

improve transportation and access for buses transporting children who live along Mile 2 W to school, noting that transportation directors of the school districts would appreciate a safer, more accessible roadway.

After the ceremony, the special guests and attendees grabbed ceremonial shovels and turned the dirt over, marking the commencement of the Mile 2 W project. Construction on the project is scheduled to commence in the next few weeks.

Congratulations to Commissioner A. C. Cuellar, Jr., and Precinct 1 on this accomplishment!

NEW UNIVERSITY

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According to the University of Texas System, the new university, with a focus on biliteracy, bilingualism and biculturalism, promises to transform South Texas by providing limitless opportunities in education and economic growth and improving healthcare for millions of Texas. The new university will also have access to the Permanent University Fund (PUF), bringing this important resource to South Texas for the first time.

Hidalgo County officials were proud to be a part of this historic occasion, which will forever change the landscape of South Texas.

MANDATORY E-FILING COMING TO HIDALGO COUNTY!

As per a recent Supreme Court mandate, all filings for civil cases in Hidalgo County must be submitted electronically beginning January 1, 2014. This means that the District and County Clerk offices will no longer accept walk-in or in-person civil case filings from attorneys at their respective offices; all documents must be submitted electronically.



County population. The mandate takes effect in the 10 most populous counties on January 1, 2014 and continues through July 2016. All filings will be processed through TexFile, the new filing manager for Texas.

Hidalgo County will commence the transition beginning September 17, 2013 to allow attorneys and their staff to become accustomed to using the new electronic filing system and procedures to ensure 100% compliance with the new law. For more information, visit www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/efiling.

In December 2012, the Supreme Court of Texas mandated electronic filing in all non-criminal cases in accordance with a phased approach based on

HIDALGO COUNTY HONORS NEW UT REGENT ERNEST ALISEDA

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court recognized the Honorable Ernest Aliseda for his appointment to the University of Texas System Board of Regents. Appointed by Governor Rick Perry in February 2013, and confirmed by the Texas Senate in May, Aliseda will be serving a six-year term on the board and will take part on key decisions as they relate to the new university and the medical school.



Aliseda is a managing attorney for Loya Insurance Group and serves as a municipal court judge for City of McAllen. He has served as State District Judge for both 398th and 139th State District Courts, in addition to serving in various leadership capacities in the legal profession. Aliseda earned his undergraduate degree from Texas A & M University and received his Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Houston Law Center.

Aliseda stated that he was humbled to receive the recognition, attributing his accomplishments to his family, including his wife Debbie Crane Aliseda, current McAllen ISD School Board President, and

his parents Laura and Jose Luis Aliseda, M. D., who were present at the recognition. Also in attendance were UTPA President Robert Nelsen and Provost Havidan Rodriguez. Nelsen praised Aliseda's appointment, echoing County Judge Ramon Garcia's sentiment that Hidalgo County and South Texas would now have a seat at the "proverbial table"

when it comes to decisions about the University of Texas affecting our area.

Members of Commissioners Court congratulated Aliseda on his appointment to the U.T. System Board of Regents, thanking him for his continued service to the residents of Hidalgo County.

PCT. 4 COMMISSIONER PALACIOS HOSTS TOWN HALL MEETING

Hidalgo County Commissioner Joseph Palacios hosted an inaugural town hall gathering on Thursday, June 27, 2013 in Edinburg. This was the first in a series of town hall meetings that will be held throughout the precinct to discuss issues of importance to the residents of Precinct 4. The precinct encompasses the communities of Edinburg, North McAllen, San Carlos, and rural areas in the northern part of the County.

Introduced by former County Commissioner Oscar Garza, Commissioner Palacios addressed the State of the Precinct, unveiling a video compilation of present and future projects. Commissioner Palacios heralded the work of his employees who have implemented innovative solutions and cost-saving measures in the projects that the precinct is undertaking for the residents of Precinct 4. Commissioner Palacios shared future plans for the precinct, such as better roads, expanded options for parks and outdoor activities, and colonia beautification, to name a few.



At the meeting, residents were able to view maps and design plans for future projects. Commissioner Palacios and his staff remained

afterward to address any issues or concerns from residents. Commissioner Palacios plans to hold

more town hall meetings in other parts of the precinct during the next few months.

COUNTY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LEADERS PRESENT TO MEXICAN INVESTORS

County Judge Ramon Garcia, Economic Development Director Roberto Villarreal, Assistant Planning Administrator T. J. Arredondo, TxDOT Area Engineer Mario Jorge, and Rio South Texas Economic Council Director Alma Colleli presented to a group of Mexican investors at a luncheon hosted by the Asociacion Empresarios Mexicanos (AEM) held earlier this year in

Mission. The purpose of the presentation was to provide AEM members, Mexican investors, with an overview of local planning rules and regulations in county jurisdiction and within city limits; economic development incentives and opportunities available from the County and local municipalities; and current and future transportation projects affecting transit and development in the Rio Grande Valley.

This information is useful to business owners and developers who are seeking to invest in businesses in Hidalgo County.



AEM members were appreciative of the information shared, and presented County Judge Ramon Garcia with an honorary AEM membership and plaque of appreciation for coordinating the presentation and providing such critical and useful information to its membership.



HIDALGO COUNTY CREATES HEALTH CARE FUNDING DISTRICT

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court approved an order to create the Hidalgo County Health Care Funding District (HCFD). The HCFD was authorized by Senate Bill 1623, which allows for the creation of health care funding districts in certain counties located on the Texas-Mexico Border.

the nonfederal share of Medicaid supplemental payment program and to subsidize indigent programs. It is estimated that with the HCFD, Hidalgo County will be able to draw down an additional \$320 million that would otherwise be unavailable.

Local hospital administrators were in attendance at a public hearing held in July regarding the HCFD, to express their support behind the County's efforts to efficiently leverage federal funds to serve the health care needs of our area.

With the HCFD, Hidalgo County will collect mandatory payments from area hospitals and use those funds for intergovernmental transfers to provide



COUNTY COMMISSIONER SPOTLIGHT

COMMISSIONER A. C. CUELLAR, JR. HIDALGO COUNTY PRECINCT 1

Serving the Communities of Alamo, Donna, Delta Area, Mercedes, Progreso, and Weslaco

Arturo Carlos Cuellar, Jr. (A.C.), is presently serving in his first full term as Hidalgo County Commissioner, Precinct 1. He was first appointed to the post by then-County Judge Rene Ramirez in 2010 to fill a vacancy, and was elected into the office in 2012.



A. C. is the son of Arturo Carlos Cuellar, Sr., WWII Navy veteran, and Juanita Lozano Cuellar, and was born and raised in Hidalgo County. He was born in Mercedes and raised in Weslaco, and like his father began his early career in agriculture. Shortly after graduating from Weslaco High School, A.C. joined his father and worked in packing sheds. His father started a trucking business hauling vegetables from the fields to the packing sheds. A.C. helped his father with his business. A.C. later

joined his father's other ventures, construction and ready-mix concrete businesses, and soon thereafter A.C. began his own career in these same industries. A.C. founded J-III Concrete Company and today has expanded its operations to five locations throughout South Texas. Cuellar also owns J-III Trucking Company, which hauls raw materials to produce ready-mix concrete, and Quality Ready Mix in Corpus Christi.



Cuellar, a business owner who is very active in the community, continues to maintain a strong presence in the precinct and strives to be open and accessible to his constituents. He implements sound management practices and fiscal controls to run the office in an efficient and effective manner, and believes that innovative approaches and new ideas help improve delivery of government services and the quality of life for businesses and residents.

A.C. is married to Yolanda Cuellar and has four children. His family attends Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Progreso.



Thanks to the assistance of partner organizations and volunteers, this year's 15th annual Operation Lone Star (OLS) was a tremendous success. OLS is a public health emergency preparedness exercise,

that provides free medical services to South Texas residents, including health screenings and treatments, immunizations, student physicals, hearing and vision exams, behavioral health evaluation, and for the first time, dental health exams at PSJA High School. The expanded services brought an increase in demand, with the number of patients seen and number of services provided far surpassing last year's totals.



Hidalgo County applauds the efforts of all partners including the state and local health departments, Texas Military Forces, Texas Department of Emergency Management, local school districts, and especially, the volunteer brigades such as Remote Area Medical Volunteer Corps, for working to meet the needs and providing critical medical services to thousands of underserved, underinsured residents and families.