



# Your COUNTY CONNECTION

HIDALGO COUNTY NEWSLETTER | JUNE 2013

## Residents of Hidalgo County:

As County Judge, it is my job to ensure that our residents are given the best quality of life that we can provide.

Serving our Hidalgo County community is a responsibility that I take great pride in upholding. As leaders, we are guided by the immediate needs of our community - the need to construct, repair, and maintain roads that safely take us to work and our children to school; the need for adequate drainage to efficiently move floodwaters out of our low-lying neighborhoods; and the need for a business-friendly environment to attract business and industry to the heart of South Texas.

As public servants, we also have a responsibility to ensure that we are leading in a transparent and effective manner.

We must also continue to keep our constituents informed on the progress of our projects. With this newsletter, we hope that you will enjoy getting a glimpse of the workings of Hidalgo County government in action.

Sincerely,

*Ramon Garcia*

Ramon Garcia  
Hidalgo County Judge



## State of the County BARBECUE

FOR HIDALGO COUNTY LEADERS



**H**idalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia hosted the 2013 State of the County Barbecue last month. In an informal setting at Palmer Pavilion in McAllen, amid over 500 local city, school, and county leaders, Judge Ramon Garcia shared his vision for Hidalgo County - "Building for the Future."

Judge Garcia reported on Hidalgo County's healthy finances and highlighted major accomplishments in the past year, such as the passage of the drainage bond to fund infrastructure improvements to the County's drainage system.

Judge Garcia also laid out major County projects for 2013, such as lending support behind the UTPA/UTB merger and proposed medical school, forging forward with critical transportation projects such as I-69, State Highways 68 and 365, and leading the charge for the development of the

much-needed new courthouse.

A homestyle barbecue dinner was served, and a video overview of countywide and precinct projects was presented. After the address, attendees were treated to entertainment by Happy the Comedian, who gave a fitting tribute to local politics and Hidalgo County, with a refreshing sense of humor.

View more photos at <http://bit.ly/12sMzcP>.

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# NATIONAL COUNTY GOVERNMENT MONTH

Hidalgo County joined county governments across the United States in celebrating April 2013 as National County Government Month. The National Association of Counties annually designates this month to raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of counties. This year, the theme was “Smart Justice: Creating Safer Communities,” and County officials used this opportunity to open the doors of county government to the public, and showcase projects and initiatives that are helping to pass down smart justice, thereby creating a safer Hidalgo County for our residents and families. This theme was a fitting and timely tribute to the work that the County has been undertaking to promote government services to the community.

Notable activities held in recognition of National County Government Month included:

- Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program
- Adult Probation Evidence-Based Practices presentation in conjunction with George Mason University
- Veteran’s Court Graduation Drug Court presentation to Palmer Drug Abuse Program’s 4th Annual Substance Abuse and Mental Health Conference
- Vote Centers Community Workshop with Lubbock County
- Presentation by County Judge Ramon Garcia, County Commissioner Joseph Palacios, District Judge Ricardo Rodriguez and Clerk Laura Hinojosa to Leadership Edinburg and Leadership Mission
- District Clerk’s 5th Annual Open House
- RGV LEAD Job Shadow Days
- Visit from the University of Texas Pan-American Criminal Justice Department
- Drug Court Graduation



Veterans Treatment Court Program Graduation



Hidalgo County District Clerk’s 5th Annual Open House



Drug Court Graduation



Hidalgo County Hosts Leadership Mission



UTPA Criminal Justice Department

To promote awareness of hurricane preparedness with the onset of hurricane season just weeks away, Hidalgo County and the City of McAllen hosted the 2013 South Texas Hurricane Conference on May 8th and 9th at the McAllen Convention Center. The conference offered opportunities for attendees to receive critical information and resources to help residents and families prepare for hurricane season. The conference consisted of two days of sessions on topics including this year's hurricane season outlook, community preparedness, mitigation measures, best practices and lessons learned, and useful information to prepare for hurricane season.

Demonstrating how and what they do in case of a natural disaster, many emergency vehicles were on display in the exhibit hall. One such vehicle called the Mass Casualty Evacuation Ambulance demonstrated how it can transport 26 people to a medical care facility and be able to provide medical care in the process. Other vehicles such as Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department/SWAT Division and Mission Fire Department (Rescue Boat and Gear) were present as

# SOUTH TEXAS 2013 Hurricane CONFERENCE



well. The exhibitors provided many giveaways and also explained the importance of preparing for this hurricane season by providing informational pamphlets. Hidalgo County employees also signed residents up who were interested in receiving emergency alerts via email and social media.

At the conference Hidalgo County leaders, along with local, state and federal officials presented valuable information on hurricane preparedness and discussed the importance of regional coordination in preparing for the 2013 hurricane season. County Judge Ramon Garcia stated "One need only mention Beulah, Dolly, or Alex to be reminded of the devastation that can occur should nature steer its course directly to our area." He continued, "This Hurricane Conference will provide you with the information and resources you need to keep your family safe during a hurricane."

Hurricane season began June 1, 2013.



## HIDALGO COUNTY VOTE CENTERS PROJECT

Hidalgo County is moving forward with plans for the development of Vote Centers, or countywide Election Day polling, which would give registered voters the option of voting at any polling location on Election Day instead of having to vote at their precinct polling locations.

In 2005, the Texas Legislature authorized a pilot program to permit vote centers, and the first program was implemented in Lubbock County in 2006. Since then, other counties have followed suit, successfully implementing vote centers throughout the state. Earlier this year, Hidalgo County Commissioners' Court approved the creation of a committee to oversee the process to develop vote centers. Last month, representatives from Lubbock County, includ-

ing two County commissioners and the Elections Administrator, visited Hidalgo County and held a community workshop to tout the successes they have experienced with the Vote Centers program and to address any concerns the community might have. Over the last few weeks, the committee has been meeting to develop recommendations for locations for the Vote Centers across the County.



The committee anticipates reporting recommendations back to Commissioners' Court in the next few weeks, upon which the county will prepare and submit the application for Vote Centers to the Texas Secretary of State's office. The county hopes to implement Vote Centers by the November 2013 General Election.

# COUNTY LEADERS STAND IN SUPPORT OF MEDICAL SCHOOL

**F**lanked by local city mayors and community leaders at a press conference held earlier this month, Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia expressed strong support of legislation that was unanimously approved in committee on Wednesday for the first two years of the proposed medical school to be located in Hidalgo County. Garcia stood among representatives from the cities of Alamo, Alton, Donna, Edinburg, La Villa, McAllen, Mercedes, San Juan, and Weslaco, in addition to Pct. 2 Commissioner Hector "Tito" Palacios, who all lent their support behind the coordinated efforts to ensure the success of the medical school.

"This is a regional project," remarked Garcia. "This amendment to the legislation moves the project forward, attaching real and tangible resources committed to the project. Hidalgo County leaders are committed to ensuring the success of this project, and we are in support of this legislation that addresses the question of structure and, most importantly, funding," Garcia continued.

In support of the regional effort and the amendment approval, City of Edinburg Mayor Richard Garcia commented, "For us it's about common-sense, dollars-and-cents and sustainability. I'm very pleased the committee members agreed with that practical perspective," Mayor Garcia added.

Judge Garcia emphasized that the amendment enhances the viability of the project by expediting the establishment of a fully operational medical school. The original legislative language stated that an advisory committee would be appointed to determine location; however, fearing that process would delay the project, Hidalgo County leaders developed a consortium and devised a plan which would maximize existing academic and medical infrastructure. The current structure in place allows for years 3 and 4 of medical education in Cameron County; a truly regional project would ensure equitable representation in Hidalgo County. This compromise, the leaders asserted, is fair and equitable.

"The medical school will take approximately \$40 to \$60 million a year to operate, and the state is only committing to paying \$30 million," Judge Garcia stated. "Our solution pledges up to \$100 million to match the state contributions until a hospital district is created to support the long-term operations of the medical school." Garcia added, "With a larger tax base, Hidalgo County residents will bear double the responsibility of contributing to the taxing district; it is only fair that their investment have an impact in their community," Garcia continued.

The legislation for the medical school with language specifying that the first two years of education would be in Hidalgo County was approved in May by the Texas legislature. The bill is presently awaiting signature by Governor Rick Perry for the law to be enacted.



## Applause!



The County of Hidalgo, Texas

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Hidalgo County was awarded the "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting" by the Government Finance Officers Association for the County's comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2011. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. This is the ninth consecutive year the County Auditor's Office has received this award. Congratulations to County Auditor Ray Eufrazio and his staff!



For the second consecutive year, Hidalgo County Clerk Arturo Guajardo, Jr. was named County Clerk of the Year for Region VIII. The recognition now places Guajardo in a statewide arena against seven other Clerks across Texas (one from each region) for the honorable opportunity to be named County Clerk of the Year for the State of Texas. The CDCAT organization will announce both the County and District Clerks of the Year at its 118th Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas this upcoming June. Congratulations to our Hidalgo County Clerk, Mr. Arturo Guajardo!



The Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office received the 2013 "Best Practices" Award for its "Domestic Abuse Intervention Specialist" program. Hidalgo County Sheriff Guadalupe "Lupe" Trevino recognizes that domestic violence is an issue that cannot be addressed solely by law enforcement. The Sheriff's Office certified 20 deputies as Domestic Abuse Intervention Specialists to be highly focused and specialized in domestic violence. Since the program started the Sheriff's Office has seen a decrease in the overall number of domestic violence and of repeat offenders. Congratulations to Sheriff Trevino and his staff!