



your

COUNTYconnection

HIDALGO COUNTY NEWSLETTER | NOVEMBER 2013

Dear Hidalgo County residents:

November has always been a very patriotic month to me. At the beginning of the month, we had the honor and the privilege to exercise our democratic rights by participating in the electoral process during the 2013 General Election. I would like to extend our appreciation for the approval of two constitutional amendments that will directly benefit our area: one amendment will enable Texas to ensure adequate and long-term planning efforts for our water sustainability; the other enables Hidalgo County to proceed with planning for the future sustainability of a hospital district to benefit our residents' health care needs, promote medical education, and foster economic growth and vitality of our region.



Earlier this month, we also gathered local, state, and federal leaders to discuss the

recent changes in health care reform and the impact of the Affordable Care Act on our residents. There is much work to be done to ensure our residents are armed with the information they need to take advantage of the new law, and we are all committed to assisting through this process.

This month is also a time to honor Veterans and servicemembers for their sacrifice. On behalf of Hidalgo County, I would like to thank all Veterans and families for serving our country with pride.

Finally, we celebrate Thanksgiving, offering thanks for the many blessings in our lives and spending time with our families and loved ones. As we near the end of the year, it is a perfect opportunity to be reflective and contemplate the many gifts and privileges we are afforded as Americans, and as citizens of this great County.

Sincerely,

Ramon Garcia

Ramon Garcia
Hidalgo County Judge

JAIME TIJERINA SWORN INTO OFFICE

Judge Jaime E. Tijerina, of Mission, was sworn into office by Federal Judge Ricardo Hinojosa at a ceremony held Wednesday at the Hidalgo County Courthouse. University of Texas Regent Ernest Aliseda, who shares a similar military background with Tijerina, served as the Master of Ceremonies. Aliseda touted Tijerina as an excellent choice by Texas Governor Perry. Hinojosa welcomed Tijerina as a judge, remarking that Tijerina's late father Cruz, who was a federal magistrate, would have been very proud of this achievement.



Tijerina was flanked by his mother, Lillie, who held a camouflage-covered bible on which he swore and recited the oath of office delivered by Hinojosa. A standing ovation was given as Tijerina's wife, Diane, helped him don the judicial robe. Tijerina took the floor, moving the podium away as he shared a story of trying a court martial case in Germany, where he was complimented by the presiding judge on his "Southern living-room style" in the courtroom,

which was refreshing compared to the normally formal manner the judge was accustomed to. Tijerina told the audience how proud and grateful he felt that Governor Perry selected him as appointee, and how honored he was to serve the residents

of Hidalgo County as Judge. Tijerina attested to his strong values that he would employ as Judge, values that were shaped by his military background; Tijerina pulled out his military dog tags from his pocket to recite the U.S. Army Values of "loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage." Also in attendance at the ceremony

were Hollis Rutledge, who presented Tijerina with a proclamation from Texas Governor Rick Perry congratulating him on the occasion. Tijerina was also joined by the members of the Hidalgo County judiciary, county court and state district court judges as well as justices from the 13th Court of Appeals. Numerous other county officials were also in attendance to celebrate the occasion.

SOS STEEN VISITS HIDALGO COUNTY



On Friday, October 18, 2013, Texas Secretary of State John Steen spoke about the

importance of voters to have proper forms of ID in order to cast their ballot on election day. Accompanied by Hidalgo County Elections Administrator Yvonne Ramon, Pct. 2 Commissioner Tito Palacios and Texas State Rep. for District 36 Sergio Munoz, Jr., Mr. Steen addressed the crowd of citizens concerning the new requirements of showing photo identification when voting. Acceptable forms of photo identification include:

- * Texas driver license issued by DPS
- * Texas personal identification card issue by DPS
- * Texas concealed handgun license issued by DPS
- * United States military identification card containing the person's photograph
- * United States citizenship certificate containing the person's photograph
- * United States Passport

If you do not possess the above forms of ID you are eligible to pick up a Voter ID card at one of the mobile stations or at a DPS office, free of charge. In order to receive an EIC, Elections Administrator Yvonne Ramon says applicants must present proof of citizenship and identity. For most applicants that means a birth certificate and two forms of supporting identification

"If you have an acceptable form of ID, like a driver license or passport, you do not need and will not be able to get an EIC," said Ms. Ramon.

Mr. Steen reiterated that all citizens would be able to vote. "No one is going to be turned away from the polling places," said Mr. Steen.

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PHOTOS FROM JUDGE TIJERINA'S SWEARING IN



VETERANS TREATMENT COURT GRADUATION

On, Wednesday, October 24, 2013 six Veterans and one family member joined the long list of graduates who have successfully completed the Veterans Treatment Court Program. Several county departments and organizations work closely together with the veterans to guide them through the program, they include the 430th District Court, Community Supervision & Corrections Department, Public Defender's Office, Veteran Services, and Tropical Texas Behavioral Health. CSCD Supervisor Eloy Lugo welcomed the veterans, their families and the special guest who were in attendance for the ceremony. Felix Rodriguez, with the Veteran Services Office, led the presentation of the colors by the Army N.C.O. Color Guard and Probation Officer Hilda Veronica Martinez gave the pledge of allegiance. Deacon Rudy Sepulveda, from Our Lady of Perpetual Help in McAllen, gave the



For the first time the Veteran Treatment Court Panel extended their services to include family members of veterans. Mr. Lugo explained that in order participate in the program, the family member must apply and be able to prove they are

related to a veteran. He said they plan to continue to accept family members of veterans in the future. Before the certificates were handed out, the graduates heard from two special guest, Major US Army Reserve Ernest Aliseda and Hidalgo County District Clerk Laura Hinojosa. Major Aliseda was recently appointed to a six-year term on The University of Texas System Board of Regents by Governor Rick Perry in February 2013. He congratulated the veterans on taking the first step by joining the program and commended them for their dedication and perseverance. Ms. Hinojosa spoke to the graduates about the importance of continuing their commitment to improving their lives and emphasized that the community was there to support them in their next endeavor. The certificates were presented by Hon. Israel Ramon, Jr., Mr. Lugo and Retired SFC US Army Steve Harris. Each veteran and family member said a few words, thanking the court panel for their continued support.

The Veterans Treatment Court Program is a hybrid of a Drug Court, Mental Health Court and Sanctions Court. The mission of the program is to expand its services and divert veterans or their dependents on probation from prison by providing mental health and substance abuse treatment immediately once the need is identified. Since its inception in 2011, the program has had 5 graduation ceremonies and 19 participants have successfully completed the program.



3RD HIDA-REY PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE

In observation of Border Binational Health Week (BBHW), celebrated this year during the week of October 7-11, the HIDA-REY Binational Health Council (BHC) hosted the 3rd Annual HIDA-REY Public Health Conference on Wednesday, October 9, 2013 at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg. The HIDA-REY BHC's purpose is to strengthen binational partnerships, tackle binational public health issues, and promote public health awareness; lead agencies for the BHC include the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department and its counterpart in Mexico, Secretaria de Salud Tamaulipas Jurisdicción Sanitaria #4 – Reynosa. The free conference provided an opportunity for local binational public health stakeholders to learn about public health issues in Hidalgo County and Reynosa. The goal of the conference is to promote sustainable partnerships that can address border health challenges. Intended outcomes include increased community and inter-agency networking relationships, information sharing and educational opportunities, and awareness of the BHC and other state and local initiatives.



HIDALGO COUNTY HOSTS EMPLOYEE FLU CLINIC

As part of a Hidalgo County Wellness Program, Hidalgo County Health and Human Services sponsored Flu Vaccination Clinics throughout Hidalgo County Departments for its employees. The clinics provided over 700 flu vaccinations to employees. Hidalgo County employees took advantage of the clinics whereas, insured employees were provided with an annual flu vaccine, free of charge. The office is also encouraged employees to bring any family members covered under the employee's insurance plan to also receive a free flu shot. Employees who had family members who were not insured only had to pay a small fee of \$20 for the vaccine. The Health & Human Services Office had a strong turnout as employees took advantage of the convenient, affordable clinic.



Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Employee administering the flu vaccine.

HIDALGO COUNTY CELEBRATES RED MASS

On October 24, 2013, the Hidalgo County Bar Association and the Cameron County Bar Association gathered to attend the 20th Annual Red Mass Celebration at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Edinburg.



The Red Mass Ceremony began with a Processional on the east lawn of the Hidalgo County Courthouse on Thursday, October 24, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. led by Father Rene Oliver who read from scripture and blessed the Judges, Elected Officials and Attorneys in attendance. The Processional of Judges, Priests, Members of the Bar, Elected Officials and the community walked to St. Joseph's Catholic Church at 122 West Fay, Edinburg, Texas, escorted by the Edinburg's Vela High School Sabercat Drum line under the direction of Carlos Garcia. Upon arrival at the church, the Most Reverend Bishop Daniel E. Flores met the procession and welcomed

them into the Church where he celebrated the Mass, along with many of our local priests. The Red Mass has been a legal and judicial tradition since the reign of King Edward, III in the early Fourteenth Century when a solemn votive mass of the Holy Spirit, with the priests in red vestments and the judges in their scarlet robes, was held prior to the fall term of the courts on a date close to Michaelmas, and is rooted in the English tradition in which the Church gave its blessing to mark the opening of the parliamentary, judicial and academic year.



Fifty years ago, the St. Mary's University School of Law and the Catholic Lawyers' Guild of San Antonio revived the tradition in San Antonio. The Red Mass is now celebrated annually in many major cities throughout the United States. Each year, in the Valley, we alternate venues between Hidalgo and Cameron Counties to commemorate the opening

of the judicial year of the Supreme Court of the United States.

This year the banquet keynote speaker was former Texas Supreme Court Justice Raul Gonzalez who spoke on the impact that the legal community has on all aspects of our life, specifically the sacrament of marriage. This year's Red Mass theme was: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me." The Procession, the Mass and the Banquet were a great success with a record number of Judge, Attorneys, and Elected officials in attendance. The Red Mass Committee donated \$1,000.00 each to St. Vincent de Paul Society in San Juan and St. Joseph's in Edinburg and to the Youth Group in St. Anne's Catholic in Penitas and to Worldwide Marriage Encounter where Justice Gonzalez continues to work.



BOOT CAMP RECEIVES HIGH AUDIT SCORE

The Mario E. Ramirez, Jr., Juvenile Justice Center's Boot Camp Facility received a 99% average on their 2013 Compliance Audits in June and August. The Boot Camp, which serves as the last stop for juveniles on probation or those adjudicated by a State District Judge in Hidalgo County, received high scores on both their Facility and Training Audit. Mandated by the State of Texas, the audits makes sure the facility is operated as per state standards and makes sure employees are up to date with mandatory training. Facility Administrator Richard Garza, attributes the success of the audits to his staff and added that every year the facility revamps their policies and procedures and strives to maintain higher standards in the audits.

The Boot Camp facility is designed to serve a minimum population of 40 at-risk-males between the ages of 13 to 16-years-old over a nine month span.



Upon entering the Boot Camp the juveniles are reclassified as "cadets" and begin a 4 Phase Program where they must complete counseling services, behavioral exercises, empowerment and learning positive alternatives training before entering a final phase of the program that leads to graduation. According to Garza, the staff concentrates on the quality of life the cadets receive while completing their rehabilitation in the Boot Camp and instill values. "The military structured program empowers every individual with the values of Honor, Courage, Integrity, and Commitment," Garza said. "However, they are kids and we make sure they have their schedule full of physical activities, education, and are fed very well throughout the day."

Upon completing the first 3 Phases, a cadet enters the 4th Phase called the Transition Program. In this phase, the cadets are taught how to reintegrate into society and reestablish relationships with their parents and family. The Transition Program offers cadets the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities such as cutting yards at medical facilities, aiding non-profit agencies or individuals in need.

The Boot Camp is currently in the process of implementing future programs beneficial to the cadets. They plan to create a Juvenile Delinquency Awareness Campaign, a drug and bullying prevention intervention program, and are currently working with the University of Texas – Pan American where students can conduct their practicum hours and provide counseling to the cadets.

OLD ADMIN. BLDG. RENOVATIONS

The iconic gold-windowed 5-story building which sits caddy-corner to the Hidalgo County Courthouse is presently undergoing renovations to the first and second floors. In October, Hidalgo County officials announced the commencement of renovations at the Old Administration Building located at 100 E. Cano in Edinburg.

The renovation will transform the first and second floors of the building to house the District Attorney's Office, the County Judge's Office, and the Commissioners Courtroom. Construction is scheduled to begin this week. To accommodate the construction, the building's parking lot will be unavailable for use by constituents and employees conducting business in the building for the duration of the renovation. The building presently houses the District Attorney's civil, misdemeanor and county affairs sections, the Adult Probation Department, and the 13th Court of Appeals, among others.

During the renovation, parking will be available at the parking lot located directly south of the building (east of Capital One bank), as well as at the parking lot located southeast of the building at 12th and Mahl St., otherwise known as "Shady Lawn." Constituents and residents visiting the building are urged to exercise caution during the renovation process. Construction is anticipated to last a minimum of 12 to 18 months.

APPLAUSE

McAllen ISD Jackson Elementary

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court approved a resolution recognizing McAllen Independent School District's Andrew Jackson Elementary for winning the 7th Annual Scholastic Summer Challenge. The goal of the Scholastic Summer Challenge is to motivate children to read over the summer and build their interest and confidence in reading, and to also improve their understanding skills, comprehensive fluency and critical thinking. Each student was measured by the amount of minutes spent reading, and averaged 122 hours, 45 minutes of reading, totaling over 6.3 million recorded minutes of reading. Jackson Elementary students placed first in this year's Scholastic Summer Challenge, beating nearly 4,300 participating schools representing all 50 states and 30 countries. Hidalgo County Commissioners Court honors and recognizes McAllen Independent School District's Andrew Jackson Elementary for achieving this distinguished award.



COUNTY COMMISSIONER SPOTLIGHT

COMMISSIONER JOSEPH PALACIOS

HIDALGO COUNTY PRECINCT 4

Serving Edinburg, San Manuel-Linn, San Carlos and Northern Hidalgo County

Joseph Palacios has served as Commissioner to Hidalgo County Precinct 4 for the past 3 years and has had a tremendous impact on improving the community at large. He was born and raised in Edinburg, Texas and is the son of the late Nicolas and Francisca Palacios. He is the proud father of Hailey, Christian and Anasophia.

United States Army where he proudly served from 1991 to 1999, Chief Administrator for Hidalgo County Precinct 1, Project Manager for City of Edinburg and a Department Director for City of Mission. Commissioner Palacios is also founding member of Paseo Verdes, Coalition of Local Municipalities for Green-Space Development.

Commissioner Palacios is an Edinburg High School graduate Class of 1991. He attended the University of Texas Pan-American. He received an Emergency Medical Technician Certification from the U.S. Army Academy of Health & Sciences and is a Tau Kappa Epsilon Alumni.

Commissioner Palacios' professional experience includes: 18 years of public service including; as a Medical Specialist for the

