

Hidalgo County supports awareness by wearing pink and purple in October



Hidalgo County Court at Law #8



Hidalgo County Treasurer's Office



Hidalgo County District Clerk's Office



Hidalgo County Commissioners Court with staff and community representatives



Hidalgo County Purchasing Department



Hidalgo County Judge's Office

These are just some of the County offices that showed support for two important causes in October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Breast Cancer Awareness Month, by wearing the colors associated with them; Pink for Breast Cancer Awareness and Purple for Domestic Violence Awareness.

October marks the 25th year that our nation has observed Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In Texas, almost three women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends each week. If you are in this situation or suspect someone of being a victim of domestic violence please speak out. For information on the signs, resources and steps to take, visit www.ncadv.org

Breast cancer is one of the most urgent health concerns facing women today. This year approximately 40,000 people will die from this disease. Medical experts stress the need for early screening and recommend that all women 40 years and older have an annual mammogram and clinical breast exam.

Early detection can increase the survival rate by nearly 95 percent.



Message from County Judge Ramon Garcia

I consider the ability to vote as one of our greatest privileges. Perhaps I hold it so dearly because throughout history there have been barriers placed on certain populations to limit their access to



voting. In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act, which affected nine states – mostly in the South and including Texas –

by effectively placing federal oversight on any state legislation that had to do with voting. A little over a year ago, on June 25, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act by a 5 to 4 vote, freeing those states to change their election laws without advance federal approval.

For us, that ruling meant that changes in voting procedures – including restrictions on early voting, voter ID, and redistricting – are no longer subject to preclearance by the U.S. District Court before being enacted. Last year, prior to the Supreme Court ruling, a federal court rejected Texas' voter ID law, calling it "the most stringent in the country."

The panel of judges – comprised of both Republicans and Democrats – also rejected the state's redistricting maps, finding that they protected non-minority incumbents while altering districts with minority incumbents. In spite of that, on the day of the Supreme Court ruling, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott said the state would "immediately" enact

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COUNTY CONNECTION

HIDALGO COUNTY: GOVERNMENT IN ACTION | October 2014

2014 General Election: Early voting ends Oct. 31

Early voting is underway in Hidalgo County and continues through Friday, Oct. 31.

On the ballot for the November 4, 2014 gubernatorial election are various state, county, city and school general and special elections, and a special election for Hidalgo County's Hospital District measure.

Registered voters are encouraged to take advantage of the convenience offered during early voting and cast their ballots at 28 polling places and various mobile voting sites.

The mobile units allow for easier and more convenient access for voters, by being stationed for a day at busi-

nesses, banks, hospitals and community centers.

Hidalgo County Elections Department Administrator Yvonne Ramon said there has been an unprecedented increase in voter registration for this gubernatorial election.

"Our residents are excited and more involved about November's upcoming election," Ramon said. "Many voter outreach projects are underway in various cities and at educational institutions that are encouraging the community to get out and vote."

According to Ramon, there are 321,400 registered voters for this election,



surpassing those who registered for the 2012 presidential election.

"There were 306,400 registered voters in the last presidential election," Ramon said.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 4. For more information, including early voting schedules and locations, Election Day schedules and locations, and sample ballots, visit www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/elections or scan this tag.



YOUR VOTE COUNTS

New Justice of the Peace Precinct 3, Place 2



Marcos Ochoa was sworn in as Justice of the Peace Precinct 3, Place 2 on Oct. 16. Seen here with his wife, Maria, and County Judge Ramon Garcia. The former Penitas mayor has a long history of public service.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hidalgo County elected officials and staff supported:

- Breast Cancer Awareness Month (pink) by proclamation,
- Domestic Violence Awareness Month (purple) by proclamation, and
- Hispanic Heritage Month with a Historical presentation by UTPA professor Dr. Francisco Guajardo at the Oct. 14 Commissioners Court.

Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia Message. Continued from page 1

both measures, prompting the Justice Department to file suit.

On October 9, a U.S. District Judge ruled the voter ID law unconstitutional; likening Texas' strict voter ID law to a poll tax used to suppress minority voter participation. Again, AG Abbott said his office "will take all legal

action necessary" to ensure that the law is in effect for the upcoming election Nov. 4.

In 1965 President Johnson said, "The command of the Constitution is plain. There is no moral issue. It is wrong – deadly wrong – to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country."

Early voting is underway to select a new governor, lieutenant governor, attorney

general, comptroller, Texas Supreme Court Justices, and other statewide officials.

Locally, we will cast our votes to select a sheriff and other county officials and decide on whether to establish a Hidalgo County Hospital District.

Whatever your political affiliation; I urge you to exercise your right to vote. Early voting ends Friday, Oct. 31 and Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 4.

Taking care of our veterans is top priority for county Veterans Service Office

Although progress has been made, there is still much more that needs to be done to care for the brave men and women who have served our nation, says Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia.

Various programs and procedures have been implemented to address the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) concerns on the quality of healthcare offered to Veterans. Although veterans services clinics strive to set up appointments within a 14 day period, the majority of appointments were being scheduled three to six months from the initial request, said Hidalgo County Veterans Service Department Director Emilio De Los Santos.

De Los Santos said part of the problem is a shortage of doctors at VA facilities. Currently, local doctor's consulting in outpatient clinics located in Harlingen and McAllen are each assigned 800 to 1200 patients. However, new procedures are helping to speed up the process.

"New systems and procedures are being implemented to change the wait time for patients," said De Los Santos.

Until 2009, Hidalgo County veterans were forced to travel to the Veterans Hospital in San Antonio for medical care and to acquire vouchers before being able to see specialists back home.

"Veterans did not know who would accept these vouchers and had to search for one on their own by calling or stopping by different doctor's offices," said De Los Santos.

"It took too much time. Now a resource list is given to them with their vouchers. They can go through the list, find the doctor closest to them and then call and make an appointment."

De Los Santos also said the VA is working to hire more doctors to serve veterans.

"VA Hospitals are competing with other hospital salaries to hire the medical personnel needed to meet the demand," said De Los Santos.

"VA Hospitals have created a system where patients, depending on the



The Judge Mario E. Ramirez Juvenile Boot Camp Honor Guard conducted the Presentation of Colors at the 2012 9/11 Commemoration Ceremony hosted by Hidalgo County Pct. 1

health condition, are able to see the doctor sooner and on Saturdays too."

In addition, the Texas Department of Veterans Affairs has restructured the lower South Texas Area and has created the Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System.

"The Valley Coastal Bend is comprised of 20 counties in South Texas and encompasses Laredo, McAllen, Harlingen and Corpus Christi as

ry, radiology, mental health, nutrition, podiatry, social work, women's health, pharmacy, and telemedicine available to eligible veterans. It also houses the Rural Mobile Medical Unit.

The Texas Valley Coastal Bend Hospital also created the Rio Grande Valley Sector Management Advisory Council. The Council is comprised of Congressional representatives, county Veteran Affairs service officers, and local veterans organizations.

President Barack Obama recently signed the Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 where \$16.3 billion is allotted for medical care of veterans.

"This money will kick-start and move forward on what we need," said De Los Santos. "This money will go to the wounded soldier program, hiring medical staff and will provide the resources we need for our veterans."

Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia supports the new initiatives but states more needs to be done for our nation's heroes.

"Steps are being taken to make sure our Veterans are getting the medical attention they need," said Judge Garcia. "Our veterans have fought for our freedom and therefore we must provide the services they need."

De Los Santos encourages Veterans to seek assistance for compensation, insurance, education, hospitalization or other benefits to which they may be entitled.

"We are here to help with anything they need."
- Emilio De Los Santos, Veterans Service Director

The Veterans Service Department assists Hidalgo County Veterans with the items listed below:

- Provides assistance to veterans, their dependents, and surviving spouses of Hidalgo County in any manner related to the Department of Veterans Affairs
- Administers the veterans programs of the State of Texas
- Provides assistance to veterans residing in the County
- Interviews and advises clients on claims, answers, and researches inquiries regarding medical, educational, home loans, and other benefits
- Assists clients in completing Veterans Assistance forms and in filing appeals with the Veterans Administration
- Serves as liaison with veterans organization
- Ensures compliance with all departments of Veterans Affairs and related laws, procedures, and policies

For more information please visit the Veterans Service Department on the Hidalgo County website at co.hidalgo.tx.us.



Honoring the fallen soldiers of war, a Weslaco man plays "Amazing Grace" to onlookers at a recent ceremony.

TREASURER: Custodian of county budget/funds



Norma G. Garcia
Hidalgo County Treasurer

For nearly 20 years, County Treasurer Norma G. Garcia has been keeping tabs on county finances.

Garcia, who will begin her sixth term in January, is the chief custodian of county funds and is responsible for the budget adopted by Commissioners Court, which in 2015 is \$188 million, including accounts payable and all bond payments.

"I am humbled and honored that our community has entrusted me with this responsibility," Garcia said. "As a taxpayer myself, I want to know that our money is being used in the best manner possible."

The county treasurer is also responsible for disbursing county

funds as directed by Commissioners Court consistent with the law. In her role as County Treasurer, Garcia also serves as the county's Investment Officer. Monthly reports about the county's investments are provided to Commissioners Court.

"I look for ways to invest our money wisely to generate as much yield as possible, although safety and liquidity are first and foremost," Garcia said. "It's about stretching those

"It's about stretching those dollars!"

dollars!" The Treasurer's office is divided into three divisions: Receipting, Payroll and Administrative Support.

The Payroll Division ensures that all new employees are input into the county's accounting system, verifies discrepancies on employee timesheets; and stays up to date with changes in IRS, health care and other payroll requirements.

The Receipting Division properly records all monies received by the county and enters those monies into the appropriate accounts, issues receipts to depositing departments, and

provides a daily report of total collections each day.

Always looking to improve efficiency and save the taxpayers money, the Treasurer's office, along with the Budget & Management office and the Human Resources department, created the pre-enrollment & enrollment process policy which improved the hiring process of Hidalgo County. They also implemented a mandatory direct deposit policy in 2009 which has reduced the expense of check stock and special toner

required for payroll checks.

Garcia said her office is looking into providing electronic payments to vendors to further reduce the expense on the county; currently Hidalgo County issues an average of 2,600 checks per month.

The Treasurer and her 12 employees are committed to maintaining accuracy and efficiency in all aspects of their duties, and understand the significance of being responsible for the management of taxpayer monies.

New WIC Lactation Care Center opens in McAllen

Hidalgo County's WIC program celebrated the opening of its new Lactation Care Center RGV in McAllen with a ribbon cutting and open house in late September. WIC Director Norma L. Longoria welcomed guests and Burlene Carrizales, RN, IBCLC, the Lactation Center Director, provided tours.

The specialty clinic provides free assistance to mothers experiencing lactation challenges who are currently enrolled in the WIC Supplemental Nutrition Program. The services include one-on-one care options and offer mothers and their babies a calm nurturing environment. The staff includes a registered nurse, International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC) and trained breastfeeding peer counselors. The center will also serve as a training center for WIC staff members, IBCLC's and other health care professionals.



Center Director Burlene Carrizales, (far left), WIC Director Norma Longoria (center) with Hidalgo County Public Affairs Director Julia Sullivan and Center staff at the ribbon cutting.

Hidalgo County is home to one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. We provide health and justice services to the approximately 900,000 residents of our county as well as a variety of services offered by our four precinct offices to residents who live outside city limits. We partner with the cities in our county on services, special projects and economic development. We strive to be accessible and responsive to our citizens. We are committed to providing excellent public service through the values of leadership, transparency, collaboration, fairness, respect and fiscal responsibility.

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Honduran officials say they appreciate care given to immigrants at recent meet



Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia (center) with Honduran officials. The county was one of many stops on a recent visit to our border area.