



your COUNTYconnection

HIDALGO COUNTY NEWSLETTER | MARCH 2014

Dear Hidalgo County Residents:

As I travel throughout the County I cannot help but be optimistic about our County's future. From one end of the county to the other, new housing units and businesses are being constructed; almost overnight in some areas. Those of us in positions of public service continue to work on finding new ways to provide the climate for sustainable growth; all the while being responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to us by the taxpayers of our County.

As you may be aware, the University of Texas System named Dr. Francisco Fernandez as the founding Dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. His appointment represents another significant milestone for Hidalgo County and our region. Certainly, I would like to welcome Dr.



Fernandez to Hidalgo County and look forward to working in collaboration with him as we continue to address the needs of our area.

The County's transformation continues in other areas as well. Commissioners' Court continues to address the needs of the public by improving county roads and drainage facilities. Planning continues to move forward in the construction of community centers throughout the region. For rural residents, this infrastructure is vitally important.

In closing, I want to congratulate all of those responsible for the forward momentum that continues to propels us towards our bright future. I am keenly aware of those in the private sectors that drive our economy and invest the dollars needed to keep our economic engine revving. I am grateful for the public servants who devote their lives to managing the growth. In essence, I am thankful to be working for the betterment of all those that live and work in Hidalgo County.

Sincerely,

Ramon Garcia

Ramon Garcia
Hidalgo County Judge

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE READY TO ASSIST

The Hidalgo County Fire Marshal's Office is responsible for enforcing the International Fire Code, issue burn permits, enforce burn bans, and jointly works with the Hidalgo County Planning Department to review plans for structures in rural areas. Along with their responsibilities, they provide assistance to local agencies in the County of Hidalgo, Texas. The Texas Local Government Code, Section 352, authorizes the County Fire Marshal to investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of any fire in the unincorporated areas



of the county, including the right to enter and examine a structure where a fire has occurred. "The department is very unique because we assist all agencies in all of Hidalgo County from Mercedes to Sullivan and from Hidalgo to the Linn-San Manuel, area," said Hidalgo County Fire Marshal Juan Martinez.

The department includes a Fire Marshal, four deputies, two fire inspectors and two secretar-



ies. The department conducts fire investigations in cities that do not have a fire marshal and investigates all fires in Hidalgo County. Martinez states that one person is on call each week to investigate any structural fires or suspicious fires that may occur outside normal business hours. "We love our job, my depu-

ties and inspectors are very proud to work for the County; they are selfless hard workers who care about life, property and family," he continued. According to the Hidalgo County



Fire Marshal's Office 2013 Monthly Activity Report, the department conducted 413 investigations, 2971 inspections, 27 arrests, and issued 1728 burn permits. The department collected \$105,804.77 from commercial plan reviews and annual inspections in 2013. New businesses in Hidalgo County must pay a fee for the plan review process to the department. The department also charges a fee for the annual inspections of County businesses.

As deputies patrol Hidalgo County, they enforce a program called "Community Policing." Through Community Policing, deputies have the opportunity to speak with County residents and educate them on the importance of installing smoke detectors. "The more we can come in contact with them, the more we can educate them, and prevent fire fatalities," said Martinez. The department participates in emergency preparedness fairs and conducts presentations in schools to educate the public on fire prevention.

Continued on page 4

THIS ISSUE

- Fire Marshal's Office Ready to Assist: 1
- Pct. 4 Groundbreaking for San Carlos CRC: 2
- Marriage License Applications Offered Online: 2
- Hidalgo County Wic Clinic Hosts Grand Re-Opening: 3
- HidalGO Fit: 3
- Hidalgo County Applause: 4

PCT 4 GROUNDBREAKING FOR SAN CARLOS CRC

Hidalgo County Pct. 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios and his staff hosted a Groundbreaking Ceremony for the San Carlos Community Resource Center on Friday, February 14, 2014. The ceremony was held at the future site of the CRC located on the corner of Highway 107 and Sunflower Road in San Carlos.

Commissioner Palacios welcomed several special guests to the groundbreaking, including University of Texas - Pan American President Robert S. Nelsen, who was the keynote speaker; Texas State Rep. Terry Canales, acted as the Master of Ceremony and Pastor Victor Ramirez from Iglesia Vino Nuevo gave the invocation. Felix Rodriguez from Hidalgo County Veteran's Service Office led the audience in the pledge of allegiance. Students and teachers from JFK Elementary and San Carlos Elementary were present. The musical talents

of the Johnny G. Economedes High School Mariachi Dos Mil performed several songs led by Director Juan Garza. Keynote Speaker Robert S. Nelsen stressed the importance of building educational resources in the community and how the construction of the CRC will provide the children of San Carlos with the



provide educational and recreational classes and activities families in the San Carlos area, which has a population of approximately 5,936 residents. It will have an Agency Work Area, Food Bank Room, Computer Lab, ESL/GED Classroom, Kitchen Area and a sitting area that will hold about 200 people. Residents will have the opportunity to participate in nutrition and cooking classes, and take advantage of the different presentations by community programs across Hidalgo County. The new and improved facility will be 8,500 square feet, tripling in size from the current building, which is only able to service about 40% of the San Carlos population. The project is estimated to cost \$1.2 million, with a completion date set for the end of 2014. The project is being funded through Precinct 4 funds, and is being built by Mata - Garcia Architects.



foundation they need in order to further their education and eventually attend college. He congratulated Commissioner Palacios and the County Commissioners' Court for their commitment to the San Carlos community, and pledged his commitment, as well. Commissioner Palacios expressed his gratitude to the dozens of community partners who worked with his precinct and the people of San Carlos to make the new CRC a reality. He stated that San Carlos Community Resource Center will



MARRIAGE LICENSE APPLICATIONS NOW OFFERED ONLINE

Couples wishing to obtain a marriage license from the Hidalgo County Clerk's Office can now complete the application online on the county's website, hidalgo-countyclerk.us. County Clerk Arturo Guajardo, Jr., says this new system will improve efficiency and save time for his staff and

the people of Hidalgo County. Mr. Guajardo and his staff began developing the online marriage license website in the summer of 2013 and unveiled the online system right before the New Year. Mr. Guajardo wants to insure residents take advantage of this new resource.

HIDALGO COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE



Online Marriage License Applications

NOW AVAILABLE

looking for ways to enhance our services and reduce cost for the taxpayer," said Mr. Guajardo. "The online marriage license application will cut down on county resources by eliminating the need for paper applications, streamlining the approval process and saving residents time."

When the couple logs on to the County Clerk website they can click on the link for Marriage Licenses, which will take them to a page detailing the requirements and procedures needed to obtain a license. There they will find the link to the Online Marriage License Application. Both the bride and groom must fill out their personal information, such as name, address, date of birth and place of birth. They must review and confirm the information is valid and correct before submitting it.

Once the information is entered into the county's secure website it will be available

when the couple appears in person to take the oath and obtain their license. The online application does not guarantee the license will be approved but it does speed up the process for Hidalgo County couples.

To complete the process both the bride and groom must go in person to the County Clerk's office and bring documents showing proof of identification and age, such as birth certificate, government issued license or ID from any state. All documents must be the original document or a certified copy of the original document; expired documents will not be accepted. Social Security Card is also required, if applicable. A complete list of approved documents can be found on their website.

There is a 72 hour waiting period immediately following the date the license is issued. As of September 1, 2013, marriage licenses are now valid for 90 days after they are issued. The fee for a marriage license is \$82; however if a couple completes a certified marriage preparation course, for example through a church or the State of Texas, they can receive a \$60 discount on the license.

"We at the County Clerk's office are always

HIDALGO COUNTY WIC CLINIC HOSTS GRAND RE-OPENING

On Wednesday, January 29, 2014, the Hidalgo County WIC Program hosted the Grand Re-Opening of their Edinburg Clinic. Hidalgo County WIC Director Norma Longoria delivered the welcome and stated that renovations will provide better and faster services to WIC participants. Mrs. Longoria introduced Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia who echoed her remarks. "This clinic serves the highest number of participants in Hidalgo County," said Judge Garcia. "With the staff of eleven, this clinic serves over 5,000 women, infants and children monthly," he continued. WIC began plans for the renovation and remodeling of the existing building in 2009, breaking ground in

January 2013. The construction has increased WIC's space by more than 1,500 square feet, with the addition of a larger waiting area for WIC clients, larger classrooms and office space for staff, along with major improvements to the existing building.

WIC is a nutrition education program which provides supplemental foods and promotes good health for pregnant, breastfeeding or postpartum women; as well as infants and children up to the age of 5 years. The Edinburg Clinic services the highest number of participants in Hidalgo County, with staff serving over 5,000 women, infants and children monthly.

After closing remarks, the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce along with all dignitaries and residents in attendance cut the ceremonial ribbon, celebrating the grand re-opening of the Hidalgo County WIC Program's Edinburg Clinic. An office open house was held following the ceremony.



HIDALGO COUNTY COMMENCES HIDALGO FIT

The long term health of our employees is the objective behind the creation of the HidalgO FIT Wellness Program. The program is led by the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department, in conjunction with several County departments. The goal of this voluntary program is to increase awareness of positive health choices.

Through this program, Hidalgo County intends to motivate employees to voluntarily adopt healthier behaviors, provide opportunities and a supportive environment to foster positive lifestyle changes in order to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, high-cholesterol and obesity, and their related complications. Along with en-

couraging fitness and a greater wellbeing, the HidalgO FIT program is designed to educate employees on all of the tools available at their disposal through the

reduce medical insurance costs for the county. Primary doctors are vital to good health. They provide preventive wellness screenings and help detect health problems early on. This will save employees time and money in the future. It is important to educate and share all of the resources and tools available to our employees. As part of this education, the HidalgO FIT committee has produced a monthly internal newsletter filled with information on healthier eating, local activities and benefits available under Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. As the program develops and matures, more activities and incentives will be developed to insure all employees get HidalgO FIT!



county's insurance provider, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. Small changes, such as designating a primary doctor, can greatly increase the long term health of our employees and at the same time

HIDALGO COUNTY APPLAUSE

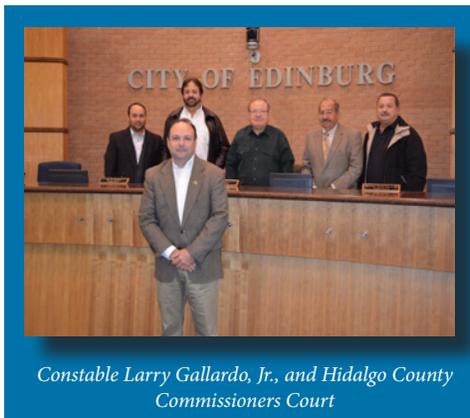
Constable Larry Gallardo, Jr. elected as President of TAC Board of Directors

At its regular meeting on Tuesday, January 7, 2014, Hidalgo County Commissioners Court recognized Constable Precinct 3 Lazaro "Larry" Gallardo, Jr., for being elected as Vice President of the Board of Directors of Texas Association of Counties (TAC) for a two year term.

Organized in 1969, the TAC Board consists of 20 elected county officials from throughout the State of Texas. The TAC is the representative voice for all Texas counties and county officials. Through TAC, counties communicate the county perspective to state officials and the general public. By understanding the way county government works and the value of county services they help state leaders preserve a county's ability to serve their residents effectively. This cooperative effort is managed by a board of county officials, each of whom is currently serving his or her community and establishes policy for TAC. It also offers services such as education for county officials and staff, research, and technical assistance and cost effective risk management. Through TAC, counties respond to the needs of Texans

by joining together in search of solutions for the challenges faced by all counties. Constable Gallardo is currently 2nd Vice President of the Justices of the Peace and Constables Association of Texas, and Treasurer of the South Texas Justices of the Peace and Constables Association. He has served as Past President for both and also serves on various education and legislative committees.

Constable Gallardo graciously thanked Commissioners Court and expressed his future plans for his newly elected position, "I will continue to strive for the best interests of the county and be a voice to improve county government across the state."



Constable Larry Gallardo, Jr. and Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

Commissioners Court supports Children's Advocacy Center, Estrella's House

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court approved a proclamation in support of the Children's Advocacy Center, Estrella's House. The Children's Advocacy Center, Estrella's House was established in the year 2000 in tribute to Estrella Rojas, a victim of child abuse whose life ended tragically in Edinburg, Texas. A non-profit organization, The Children's Advocacy Center is one of 800 Children's Advocacy Centers nationwide. Children's Advocacy Center Chairman Tina Martin thanked Commissioners Court for their support of the Children's Advocacy Center and explained how important Estrella's House is to the County of Hidalgo. Mrs. Martin was accompanied by Executive Director Vicky Medina and Consultant Pat Blum whose presence also showed support for the worthy organization.



Estrella's House Representatives and Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

Continued from page 1

The hard work and dedication of the Fire Marshal's Office has not gone unnoticed. In 2011 and 2013, the department was awarded with the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) Jack Snead Award, which is given to the best fire investigator in Texas. The IAAI is an association that administers an international certification called "Certified Fire Investigator" (CFI). Only four individuals south of San Antonio, Texas have obtained the CFI certification, Fire Marshal Juan Martinez is one of the four to hold such an honorary distinction. Martinez's goal is to have all his deputies and fire inspectors obtain the CFI. "I am very proud of the team," said Martinez. "We are always here for the residents of Hidalgo County."



Hidalgo County Fire Marshal Juan Martinez

Texas AgriLife Service Agent Adelita Figueroa-Munoz receives Superior Service Award

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court recognized Texas AgriLife Service Agent Adelita Figueroa-Munoz for receiving the Superior Service Award in a Distinguished Career Category from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Director's Office. Figueroa-Munoz was recognized for an exemplary career of almost 43 years, which began in 1971 when she was hired as the AgriLife Extension agent for the Expanded Nutrition Program. The award was presented to Figueroa-Munoz on January 8, 2014, at the agency's Centennial Conference in College Station, Texas. Throughout her tenure with the Extension Service, Figueroa-Munoz developed strong working relationships with community leaders, broadcasters, medical doctors, county officials, state and U.S. Congressmen and many other influential individuals who helped her address the needs of Hidalgo County residents.

Figueroa-Munoz was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from Hidalgo County

and graciously thanked Commissioners Court for the recognition. She also attributed her success to the great department she works for, the Texas A&M Extension Service, and the support of her family. Figueroa-Munoz was accompanied by her husband Jesse Munoz, her son Jorge Munoz, District 12 Extension Coordinator Dr. Ruben Saldana, and Texas A&M AgriLife County Coordinator Barbara Storz. Hidalgo County Commissioners Court congratulates Adelita Figueroa-Munoz on her prestigious award.



Adelita Figueroa-Munoz (center with certificate), Family and Friends and Hidalgo County Commissioners Court.