

Hidalgo County's own hero

First Special Service Forceman Eugene Gutierrez Jr. accepts Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of unit



Eugene Gutierrez Jr.

objectives when no one else could. Against all odds, they wiped out a strategic enemy defensive position high atop a mountain surrounded by steep cliffs in Italy. This mission was the basis of the 1968 motion picture "The Devil's Brigade." They fought for 99 days on the front lines at Anzio beachhead without relief and played a key role in the 1944 liberation of Rome from German forces. The 1st Special

World War II hero Eugene Gutierrez Jr. was honored at Commissioners Court in February. Gutierrez, who as a member of the 1st Special Service Force, helped free the world of tyranny, was given a proclamation in honor of his service. Receiving two standing ovations, Gutierrez was also saluted for being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for meritorious service to the United States of America. Considered to be the precursor to today's special forces units, the 1st Special Service Force, was a joint Canadian and American commando unit.

Gutierrez and Canadian Charles Mann accepted the medal on behalf of their fellow Forcemen, at a special ceremony held on February 3, at the U.S. Capitol, Emancipation Hall, in Washington D.C. The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian honor the United States Congress can bestow.

Under the command of Lt. Colonel Robert T. Frederick, the 1,800-man unit, which operated mainly in Italy and southern France, accounted for 12,000 German casualties, captured more than 30,000 prisoners, had a kill ratio of 25 enemy soldiers for each Forceman killed in action and won eight U.S. campaign battle stars.

The 1st Special Service Force earned a reputation for being able to take impenetrable

Service Force went on to invade the islands of southern France on August 15, 1944, paddling in rubber boats over five hours in the dark for a surprise attack on the Germans.

Upon receiving the resolution, Mr. Gutierrez graciously thanked the Court for the honor and read a touching poem found on the body of a fallen soldier at Anzio beachhead. Part of the prayer, which was written by the fallen Forceman on the day he died, read: *"I guess zero hour will soon be here, but I'm not afraid since I know you are near...look now this will be a horrible fight, who knows I may come to your house tonight... Well I have to go now God goodbye, it's strange since I met you I'm not afraid to die."*

Gutierrez also thanked the servicemen from various veterans organizations that attended the meeting in support of his recognition. They included, Americans Last Patrol, Disabled American Veterans, Korean War Veteran Association, Donna Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10802, and Dr. Hector P. Garcia AGIF. Felix Rodriguez, Post District Commander, led the audience and court in the



First Special Service Forcemen Eugene Gutierrez Jr. and Canadian Charles Mann accepted the medal on behalf of their fellow Forcemen, in Washington, D.C. on February 3.

Pledge of Allegiance and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Sgt. Benito Alaniz Post 7473 ceremoniously Presented the Colors.

Gutierrez enlisted in the U.S. Army after graduating from Harlingen High School in 1941. Upon his honorable discharge in 1945, he went on to earn a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Arts and a Master's in Education from Oklahoma State University.

He began his 30-year tenure with the McAllen Independent School District in 1950, teaching at Sam Houston. In 1953, he became the first Hispanic principal in McAllen ISD, serving at Navarro Elementary School for 17 years, then at Lincoln Middle School until his retirement in 1980. He and his wife of 63 years, Penny, have three children: Thomas, Margaret and Elizabeth, and four grandchildren.



First Special Service Force Veteran Eugene Gutierrez Jr., his family, Hidalgo County Commissioners Court and representatives from local veterans organizations.



COUNTY CONNECTION

GOVERNMENT IN ACTION | APRIL 2015

Message from County Judge Ramon Garcia

Welcome to the first issue in 2015 of the county's monthly newsletter, County Connection. As I have previously stated, this newsletter is just one way of keeping you informed of your county government and the work we do. Our goal is to publish and distribute it in *The Monitor* as well as via our website and email each month.



It's been a busy first quarter in Hidalgo County. The 84th Texas Legislature has been in session since January 13 and there are several issues that will impact our South Texas region. Many people are not aware that counties get their authority from State Government.

Our legislative agenda includes supporting legislation that:

- Creates a Binational Commission that communicates infrastructure needs and logistics between Mexico and Texas.
- Amends the Transportation Code to provide the county with enforcement authority for non-payment of fees imposed for street lights in county subdivisions.
- Allows Commissioners Court to exempt land donated for public use from platting requirements.
- Provides additional funding for indigent defense.
- Expands the county's authority regarding advertising as a means to help offset the cost of some programs and initiatives.
- Amends statutes to authorize the county to assess court filing fees to be dedicated to help pay for a new Hidalgo County Courthouse.
- And, we will seek funding for border law enforcement agencies.

Securing our border is always a top priority for Hidalgo County. House Bill 11 will accelerate the hiring of DPS troopers on the border, create southbound checkpoints, and
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Precinct 2: Paving the road to change

Attorney Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu hit the ground running as Precinct 2 Commissioner. The precinct covers portions of the county not included within city limits, including the McAllen, Pharr, San Juan, Alamo, and Hidalgo areas.



Cantu brings core values of dedication, integrity, energy, compassion and collaboration to the job and says the most important part of his job is improving the quality of life for the people who live, work and do business in Precinct 2.

"My priorities all have one thing in common," Cantu said. "They all will improve the quality of life for residents, businesses and visitors to Precinct 2."

Commissioner Cantu has already begun major projects in collaboration with other entities. Some of the proposed projects include the expansion of Eldora Road, which runs east and west from Jackson to Alamo roads. Nearly 5 miles of the road, which is a vital connection to Hwy. 281, will be expanded from two to five lanes with sidewalks. Other proposed road projects include the expansion of 2.1 miles of Sioux Road from Cesar Chavez to I roads; widening Cesar Chavez Road to five lanes with sidewalks from Business 83 to Nolana; and the Expressway 83 and 2nd Street project, which calls for a diamond intersection and 1.2 miles of road renovation from 10th Street to McColl Road.

Commissioner Cantu invites Precinct 2 residents to visit him at 300 W. Hall Acres Rd, Suite G in Pharr. The office number is 956-787-1891.



Building resilient regional communities by providing educational tools for today and tomorrow is the focus of the 2015 South Texas Hurricane Conference, which will be held April 14-15 at the McAllen Convention Center.

The goal of the annual conference is to provide Rio Grande Valley emergency responders and supporting staff, who may not have the resources to travel out of the Valley for training, the opportunity to receive first-hand knowledge on emergency preparedness and crisis management from a wide range of experts. Participants are able to attend a variety of sessions led by representatives from agencies such as Border Patrol, DPS, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, National Weather Service, Texas General Land Office, as well as local, city and county representatives.

The 3rd annual conference is a collaboration between Hidalgo County Health and Human Services, Hidalgo County Emergency Management, the City of McAllen and the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) with funding provided by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Did you know?

Hidalgo County is located in the South Texas Plains vegetation area, which features grasses, mesquite, live oaks, and chaparral. Native plants include ebony, huisache, Brazilwood, and yucca.

In 1982, 51 to 60 percent of the county was considered prime farmland. The county led Texas in the production of cabbage, onions, cantaloupes, carrots and watermelons.

The primary fruits and nuts grown here today include grapefruit, oranges, and pecans. Cattle, milk cows and hogs are the primary livestock.

Natural resources include caliche, sand, gravel, oil, gas and an abundant wildlife that attracts hunters and ecotourism.

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New program clears 1832 outstanding warrants



had to hand deliver warrants for minor offenses, such as traffic citations.

“Before this program, my officers had to go door to door – which was not the most efficient use of resources,” said Precinct 2 Constable Martin Cantu. “This program will allow my staff to focus on the more serious offenders.”

The postcards offer the opportunity to take care of outstanding fines – either by paying online or at the Justice of the Peace designated on the card.

“The program is obviously working,” said Renan Ramirez, Hidalgo County Chief Information Officer.

To pay online, visit pay.hidalgocounty.us and follow the instructions to be routed to the screen where the citation information will be listed and a payment can be made.



Scan QR code to pay online

Justices of the Peace and Constables worked together with the county’s Information Technology department to find a way to collect unpaid fees and close outstanding warrants.

The result, the Warrant Postcard Program, has been met with outstanding success. Since the first mailout of these oversized, bright yellow postcards, the county has collected more than \$465,370 in fees and cleared 1,832 cases.

The program was initiated, in part, to take the burden off constables. Previously, officers

DWI Court offers treatment alternative to jail for some offenders, says DA



First Row L-R: Faustino Lopez; Rhonda L. Cruz; Sofia Kamal; Marta Kang; Juanlino Garza; and Miguel Garza. Second Row L-R: Kino Flores Jr.; D.A. Ricardo Rodriguez; Judge Jaime “Jay” Palacios; and Arnold Patrick.

community. The program will also introduce offenders to a recovery process designed to result in a total abstinence from drugs and alcoholism, Rodriguez said.

“People need to realize that they have a lot to lose if they get behind the wheel while intoxicated,” said Rodriguez. “It is more than just an offense; it can affect their pocket, family and employment.”

The first participants began the program by making a weekly DWI court appearance with the entire DWI Court team.

The team includes, Clinical Director Dr. Marta Kang; County Court-at-Law #2 Judge Jaime “Jay” Palacios; Public Defender Sofia Kamal; Executive Director of Adult Probation Arnold Patrick; Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor Miguel Garza; Adult Probation Officer Juanlino Garza; Unit Supervisor Faustino Lopez; Assistant Criminal District Attorney Kino Flores Jr.; and Misdemeanor DWI Court Coordinator Rhonda L. Cruz. Phase I, II and III each include a rigorous schedule

Hidalgo County District Attorney Ricardo Rodriguez says a new program will offer some people who have been convicted of DWI an intensive, judicially monitored program of drug treatment and rehabilitation services.

The program, which began March 2, will be an alternative to jail time for those with less serious offenses, he said. According to Rodriguez, the program’s goal is to provide early and effective intervention on the DWI cases selected and to break the cycle of alcohol addiction and criminality in the

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establish an intelligence center in Hidalgo County for all border law enforcement agencies.

There is a very real concern that Hidalgo County will lose trained and experienced Sheriff’s deputies to DPS. Deputies can earn an extra \$20,000 in salary at DPS over what the county can pay.

These are deputies that investigate murders, robberies, assaults, and other serious violent crimes in Hidalgo County. We support added border security, however, how secure can our communities be when we lose key law enforcement to state agencies? The solution, in my opinion, is to include funding for local law enforcement as well as for state law enforcement.

Sheriff Eddie Guerra and I testified at a Texas House Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee meeting in mid-March and will likely be back in Austin this month to continue to talk with our legislators about these concerns and to work with the appropriations committee on funding for local law enforcement.

Until next time, if you have any questions, please email us at public.affairs@co.hidalgo.tx.us and we will be happy to answer them or direct you to the right elected official.

of individual and group sessions, weekly meetings, DWI Court appearances, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and a Mothers Against Drunk Driving VIP Class, said County Court-at-Law Judge Jaime “Jay” Palacios.

Offenders must complete a year-long program that is divided into three phases. – DA Ricardo Rodriguez

Once participants have successfully completed the program, the

offenders will have their criminal charges dismissed.

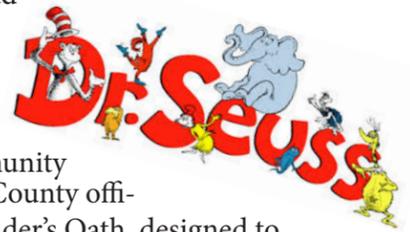
“The program offers them an opportunity to realize and understand their problems,” said Palacios. “We will be using our resources to rehabilitate them so they may become productive members of the community.”

To participate in the program, a case is identified by the DWI Court Team and the offender must undergo a criminal background check and an assessment process.

The results of the assessment will determine whether the offender has a substance abuse or alcohol problem and be the deciding factor if the offender will receive inpatient or outpatient treatment.

County officials & staff promote childhood literacy at local schools

Students across Hidalgo County celebrated the National Education Association’s “Read Across America” in early March encouraging them to read all year long.



Several Hidalgo County officials took part in the celebrations including Precinct 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios, Precinct 1 Commissioner A.C. Cuellar Jr., County Court at Law No. 8 Judge Omar Maldonado and Sheriff Deputy Celina Flores. The motivation and awareness program was created by the NEA and calls for every community to celebrate reading on March 2, the birthday of beloved children’s author Dr. Seuss. County officials assisted elementary school principals, librarians and teachers in reciting the Reader’s Oath, designed to inspire lifelong readers, and read Dr. Seuss books like *Green Eggs and Ham* and *If I Ran a Circus*.



Pct. 1: Taking it to the streets



As part of “Working Towards a Better Pct. 1 Community,” Commissioner A.C. Cuellar Jr. recently inspected the reconstruction site of Victoria Rd. between Mile 9 1/2 N. and Mile 10 N to check on the progress.

“With the road now 100 percent complete, future road projects are still to come,” Cuellar said.

Pct. 3: Infrastructure is a priority



Precinct 3 has seen extensive road and bridge improvements under Commissioner Joe Flores’ leadership. Partnering with TxDot and the cities of Mission, Palmview, Palmhurst, Peñitas and McAllen has allowed Precinct 3 to share in the cost of designing, constructing and completing 20 major transportation projects since 2006.

At a cost of nearly \$570 million, with the county only expending 8.1 percent of the

cost, these infrastructure improvements will connect all the corridors from the north to the south of the precinct, providing residents with easy and convenient access to shops, schools and their jobs.

“Infrastructure produces a foundation for long term growth,” said Flores. “It also creates economic development and enhances the safety of our citizens in Precinct 3.”