



Free

# Magazine

April 2025



**Included in this issue :**

**HCISD Board of Trustees Seeks to Fill  
Two Seats This May | Pg. 6 - 10**

**Local Flavors | Pg. 12 - 14**

**Calendar of Events | Pg. 20 & 21**

**Event Spotlight | Pg. 22 & 23**

**Sports | Pg. 34 - 38**

Explore Harlingen  
Magazine Online



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# Table of Contents

---

**Page** From the Editor  
**4** By Lisa Campos

---

**Page** On the Cover  
**6 - 10** HCISD Board of Trustees Seeks to Fill Two Seats This May  
By Beth Marie Cantu Ensign

---

**Page** Local Flavors  
**12 - 14** The Moon Rock: Harlingen's Ultimate Food Truck Park & Bar  
By Remi Gibbs

---

**Page** Moves, Adds, and Changes  
**16 & 17** By Lisa Campos

---

**Page** Recipes  
**18** Keto Taco-Layered Salad  
By Mamie Moon

---

**Page** Calendar of Events  
**20 & 21**

---

**Page** Event Spotlight  
**22 & 23** Knights of Columbus to Host Annual Good Friday Fish Fry Fundraiser  
By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia



---

**Page** Notable Nonprofits  
**24 - 26** Granting Wishes, Changing Lives: The Impact of Make-A-Wish RGV  
By Beth Marie Cantu Ensign

---

**Page** Artist of the Month  
**28 - 30** Plush Panaderia: A Latina-Owned Business  
Celebrating and Preserving Mexican American Heritage  
By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

The Junk Room  
By Christy Richards

---

**Page** Sports  
**34 - 38** The New Treasure Hills Golf Club  
By Roel Rodriguez  
All in the Family  
By Roel Rodriguez



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# From the Editor

By Lisa Campos

This is Lisa from Explore Harlingen. Welcome to the 19th issue of the Explore Harlingen Magazine: A Local's Guide to Harlingen, an entertainment magazine about Harlingen, Texas!

For 11 years, I have been informing locals and visitors about current events, activities, and family-owned businesses in Harlingen primarily on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/)

ExploreHarlingen). I also have an online presence with my website, [www.exploreharlingenblog.com](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com), and social media accounts on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (@exploreharlingen).

Since January 2025, I have been a guest on Rudy Mireles' podcast, Border to Border, discussing upcoming events on the last Tuesday of the month. Additionally, since March 2025, Explore Harlingen segments are airing on KVEO about things to do on the weekend, filmed locally at various business sponsors.

In this issue, we discuss the



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer

upcoming Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District school board election, Good Friday fish fry at the Knights of Columbus, upgrades to a locally owned golf course, and more.

The Explore Harlingen Magazine is available digitally on my website at [www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine](http://www.exploreharlingenblog.com/magazine) (see QR code on the cover). Or you can pick up a copy at the first of every month locally around town (locations are listed on my website). Additionally,

you can have the magazine mailed to you every month with a subscription of \$5 per issue. Please contact Victor Moreno below to subscribe. ♦

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# HCISD Board of Trustees Seeks to Fill

## Two Seats This May

By Beth Marie Cantu  
Ensign

This Election Day on May 3, voters in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) will decide who fills two crucial seats on the Board of Trustees: Place 3 and Place 7. Early voters can choose their candidates between April 22 and April 29 (find polling locations and times at <https://www.cameroncountytexas.gov/elections/>).

With the district facing a financial crisis, the stakes are higher than ever. Explore Harlingen Magazine asked each candidate two key questions:

1. How will you engage parents, teachers, and the community to ensure transparency, responsiveness, and effective decision-making as a school board member?
2. As education continues to evolve, how will you help ensure HCISD remains competitive in teacher retention,

curriculum, and technology while addressing the diverse needs of staff and students?

Below, the candidates listed in the order their names will appear on the ballot and by place, share their visions for transparency, teacher retention, curriculum innovation, and community engagement.

### Place 3 Candidates

**Diana Cortez Young,**  
Place 3 Candidate (#1  
on the ballot)



*Courtesy of Diane Cortez Young*

**Background:** A proud retired educator with 42 years in public

education, Diana Cortez Young has spent her entire career at HCISD. She has served as a math teacher, counselor, head counselor, curriculum specialist, administrator, and university faculty member for student teachers.

### **Transparency & Community Engagement**

Being fully retired, I have the time and flexibility to visit schools, ensuring parents, teachers, and the community are actively engaged. I would ask teachers and parents, “What can I do for you?”

Teachers are experts in their field, and it is crucial to listen to them, check in with them, and support their needs. I firmly believe in truth, no matter how difficult it may be. Transparency is essential in earning trust, and it must be practiced consistently and in a timely manner. In any crisis, we must respond clearly, quickly,

and efficiently.

Effective decision-making requires input from all stakeholders—teachers, parents, and the community. By actively listening to concerns, we can make informed decisions that benefit everyone. It takes all of us working together.

### **Teacher Retention & Curriculum Innovation**

Retaining teachers requires a fresh approach. Professional development exists, but does it truly align with teachers’ needs and goals? Are teachers given ownership of their growth? Have we fostered a culture that genuinely supports educators?

A strong school environment fosters belonging, unity, and morale, making it a rewarding workplace beyond test scores. Regular feedback—through surveys or one-on-one conversations—is essential. If teachers leave HCISD, Human Resources should conduct exit interviews to understand why.

Mentorship for first-year teachers is crucial. Supporting new and veteran educators with stress management strategies and professional growth opportunities can help prevent burnout and keep teaching enjoyable.

Curriculum must evolve with community needs. As technology advances, we can't predict every future job, but we must stay ahead by partnering with higher education institutions. We must ensure every student has the skills to thrive in a competitive, fast-changing world.

We must be adaptable, supporting every staff member and student in meaningful ways. Doing things the same way is no longer enough. As a board member, I would always ask, "Are we striving to be better tomorrow than today?"

**Laura Longoria (#2 on the ballot for Place 3)**



*Courtesy of Laura Longoria*

**April 2025**

**Background:** Laura Longoria is a Chief Financial Officer.

**Transparency & Community Engagement**

Keeping an open line of communication with stakeholders is the key to success. I would ask that HCISD create a survey where parents, staff, and the community can submit concerns and feedback. As a board member, I feel that it is important that everyone has a voice and is heard.

**Teacher Retention & Curriculum Innovation**

Of utmost importance is to get HCISD financially stable. HCISD cannot be competitive if it is operating under a deficit budget. Educators must be provided with the tools and resources to be successful in the classroom. Meeting HCISD staff's needs is the key to remaining competitive. The teachers are the subject matter experts in the classroom, and I would rely on their expertise to make informed decisions to move HCISD forward.

**Rebekah "Bekah" Batot (#3 on the ballot for Place 3)**



*Courtesy of Bekah Batot*

**Background:** A hospital administrator and parent of two children in HCISD, Rebekah Batot is actively involved in the community.

**Transparency & Community Engagement**

As a parent, I regularly interact with teachers and other parents, observing firsthand the district's strengths and areas for improvement. School board members must be receptive to community feedback to make informed decisions. I will continue to personally seek input from stakeholders, just as I have throughout my campaign.

I advocate for expanding communication between parents and the district. This means meeting people where they are—on social media, the district website, and in

community centers—to share information and gather input. Hosting community forums in neighborhood settings would encourage open discussions in a less formal environment.

Parental involvement policies should be reviewed and revised. Studies show that engaged parents lead to more successful students, yet recent trends have made parental participation more restrictive. I believe we can maintain safety while increasing parental involvement.

**Teacher Retention & Curriculum Innovation**

For HCISD to remain competitive, we must continuously assess programs from rollout through implementation. Regular checkpoints ensure our resources—whether time, talent, or funding—are used efficiently to support quality education.

Supporting teachers is essential. They need materials, time for lesson planning, meaningful professional development, and competitive pay and benefits. We must celebrate and support them in tangible ways.

Regular curriculum

and program assessments help identify gaps and allow adjustments as the educational landscape evolves. Data analysis should drive decision-making, ensuring successful programs are expanded while underperforming ones are improved.

As a board member, I would prioritize monitoring student outcomes, teacher retention rates, and overall district performance. Holding leadership accountable for missed targets is critical to maintaining high standards.

**Linda R. Gonzales  
(#4 on the ballot for  
Place 3)**



*Courtesy of Linda R. Gonzales*

**Background:** Linda R. Gonzales is a medical office administrator and community liaison.

**Transparency  
& Community  
Engagement**

I will continue prioritizing strong,

open relationships with parents, teachers, and the community. Effective decision-making starts with listening, and I believe it is essential to host regular community forums where families and educators can share their concerns and ideas.

I am committed to creating a space where everyone feels heard and valued. Implementing an open-door policy will ensure accessibility and inclusivity in decision-making.

**Teacher Retention  
& Curriculum  
Innovation**

To keep HCISD competitive, we must invest in our teachers. Higher wages, professional development opportunities, and strong mentorship programs will help retain educators and prevent burnout.

For students, curriculum should be engaging, inclusive, and culturally relevant, ensuring every child feels seen and heard. Technology should be integrated thoughtfully, enhancing learning in meaningful ways.

Through data-driven decision-making, I

will work to create a thriving, empowered community for both educators and students, ensuring HCISD remains a leader in education.

**Place 7 Candidates**

**Eladio Jaimez (#1 on  
the ballot for Place 7)**



*Courtesy of Eladio Jaimez*

**Background:**

Currently serving as a Texas State Technical College provost, Eladio Jaimez is running for re-election.

**Transparency  
& Community  
Engagement**

Transparency and accountability begin with building strong relationships. Engaging teachers, parents, and the community is key, and I believe in proactive efforts such as town halls, volunteer opportunities, and leveraging social media to communicate effectively.

Our district already has initiatives like the

student advisory board, committee meetings on finances and upcoming innovations, and parental involvement programs. However, trustees must be present, ask questions, and remain accessible to the community. I strive to be approachable and transparent, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued.

**Teacher Retention  
& Curriculum  
Innovation**

Teachers are the backbone of our education system, and their needs must remain a priority. Competitive compensation is crucial, not just to attract educators but because we owe it to them. Expanding the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) can provide additional opportunities for teachers.

Beyond pay, teachers need a stronger voice in decision-making. Their classroom experience gives them invaluable insight into curriculum design and professional development. They should have the flexibility to choose training that meets their needs and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.

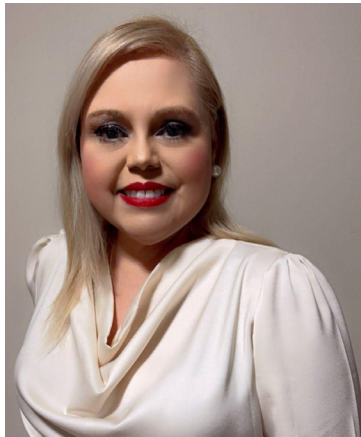
It's also important to recognize the contributions of



all school staff—counselors, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, administrators, librarians, security personnel, and maintenance teams. Keeping open lines of communication with these groups ensures their needs are met.

By fostering a culture of support and collaboration, we can strengthen HCISD and provide the best educational experience for students and staff alike.

**Lorraine De Leon-Galarza (#2 on the ballot for Place 7)**



*Courtesy of Lorraine DeLeon-Galarza*

**Background:** A retired registered nurse in Behavioral Health, Harlingen-raised Lorraine De Leon-Galarza has two sons and ten grandchildren.

### **Transparency & Community Engagement**

As a mother, grandmother, and taxpayer, I understand the importance of transparency, responsiveness, and effective decision-making. These values will guide my approach as a school board member. To ensure that all voices are heard and that decisions are made in the best interest of our children and community, I propose the following actions:

#### **1. School Visits and Open-Door Policy:**

I will visit schools regularly to listen to teachers, students, and staff firsthand. By maintaining an open-door policy, I will ensure that everyone feels welcome to share their thoughts and concerns at any time.

#### **2. Quarterly Meetings with School Staff:**

I will host quarterly meetings with teachers, administrators, and staff to better understand their needs, challenges, and successes. This direct communication will foster a collaborative environment where everyone has a stake in the decision-

making process.

#### **3. Active Participation in PTA Meetings:**

I plan to attend and actively participate in PTA meetings to strengthen the relationship between parents, teachers, and the school board. This will provide a platform for open dialogue and ensure that parents' concerns and ideas are heard.

#### **4. School Board Meetings at Schools:**

To increase community engagement, I propose holding regular board meetings at different schools within the district. This will make it easier for parents, teachers, and community members to attend, learn more about school issues, and participate in discussions that affect their children's education.

By implementing these strategies, I aim to foster a culture of transparency, responsiveness, and collaboration. Together, we can make decisions that reflect the needs of our students, support our teachers, and serve the interests of our entire community.

### **Teacher Retention & Curriculum Innovation**

As a school board member, I am committed to ensuring that the district's budget is allocated in a way that prioritizes the needs of both educators and students. I will work to guarantee that teachers are given retention bonuses and have access to the resources they need without having to cover the costs out of pocket. This includes providing a sufficient budget for classroom supplies, as well as ensuring affordable employee and family benefits for all district staff. Additionally, I will advocate for a contract with a local health clinic to offer special rates for HCISD employees, promoting the health and well-being of our dedicated staff. Understanding the important role of support staff, I will push for adequate paraprofessional assistance for teachers, including bus drivers, ensuring they have the support needed to maintain safety in the classrooms and on school routes.

For our students, I will focus on expanding post-secondary opportunities, offering

diverse pathways to success. One of my goals is to help students graduate with skills, certifications, or licensures, needed to enter the workforce directly, such as a Registered Nurse. I will also work to strengthen partnerships with local colleges and universities, providing affordable options for higher education. Finally, I will champion educational programs such as VIDA, which assist students with financial support for college. By offering these resources, we can alleviate the financial



Courtesy of Juan Macias of J Macias Photographer

burden of higher

education and provide our students with the

tools they need to succeed.♦

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## Local Flavors

# The Moon Rock: Harlingen's Ultimate Food Truck Park & Bar

By *Remi Gibbs*

If you're a foodie looking for a one-of-a-kind dining experience in Harlingen, The Moon Rock is the place to be. This lively food truck park and bar, inspired by the energy of Rainey Street in downtown Austin, offers a mix of flavors, fun, and

entertainment unlike anything else in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV).

### A Local's Dream Turned Reality

The vision behind The Moon Rock comes from Christian Zanca, a proud Harlingen native with deep roots in the RGV—his family is so intertwined with the



*Courtesy of Remi Gibbs*



*Courtesy of Remi Gibbs*

community that the San Benito stadium was named after his grandfather, Bobby Morrow.

After attending a sports academy in New Braunfels for tennis and baseball and earning his BA from Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, CO, Christian returned to Harlingen following his grandfather's passing. He dove into real estate and successfully transformed the Broken Sprocket in Brownsville into a hotspot for food trucks and live entertainment.

With his family's support, he decided

to bring that same dynamic concept to Harlingen. The Moon Rock was born—a passion project fueled by a \$150K investment and an old Schwan's building converted into a full-service bar, entertainment hub, and community gathering space. Today, it features a stage, basketball, and volleyball courts, a dog park, shaded seating, and plenty of lighting for evening fun.

### An Incubator for Flavor and Fun

The Moon Rock isn't just a food truck park; it's an incubator for food and entertainment,



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

giving both local chefs and musicians a platform to showcase their talent.

With nine incredible food trucks, there's something for everyone:

**1. Rolling Smoke BBQ**

– Mouthwatering BBQ for all the meat lovers.

**2. Mod Dang –**

Authentic Thai dishes from Mod's family recipes—full of flavor.

**3. Krab Kingz –** Fresh and flavorful seafood boils for one or your whole tribe.

**4. Wepa Caribe –**

Traditional Puerto Rican comfort food.

**5. Queso Birria Y Más**

– Mexican cuisine with a creative twist.

**6. Grubbing Hood**

– Satisfying your burger and fry cravings.



*Courtesy of Remi Gibbs*

**7. La Papa Loca –**

Stuffed potatoes and classic Mexican street snacks.

**8. Yummy's –** Freshly

made mini donuts, waffle cones, fried Oreos, funnel cakes, and Blue Bell ice cream brought to you



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*



Courtesy of Remi Gibbs

by Mr. J and Ms. V.  
**9. Seoul Slice (new!)**  
 – A unique Korean food and pizza fusion spot.

**Live Entertainment & Community Events**

It's not just about the food—The Moon Rock is a destination.

- Live music every week featuring local and regional talent.
- Games like cornhole and Jenga for a night of friendly competition.
- Dog park onsite—bring your pup along!
- Basketball and Volleyball courts to

keep you moving.

- Small Business Saturdays (Last Saturday of every month) – Local vendors can set up for FREE! Call 956-873-1756 to register.

**Mark Your Calendar – Big Upcoming Events**

- **April 5** – The Moon Rock's 3-Year Anniversary Bash! 11 am to 2 am | 8 Bands, including \*\*Nathan Hubble & Los Survivers. \*\* Pony rides, vendor market, food, and more.
- **April 19** – Reggae Fest



Courtesy of Remi Gibbs

**Visit The Moon Rock**  
 1811 W Jefferson Ave, Harlingen

Wednesday and Thursday: 5 pm to 12 am | Friday and Saturday: 5 pm to 2 am | Sunday: 4 pm to 10 pm  
 956-873-1756

www.themoonrockrgv.com

Follow them on Facebook and Instagram

Whether you're in the mood for amazing food, live entertainment, or just a chill spot to hang out, The Moon Rock is THE place to be in Harlingen. Grab your friends and your pups, bring your appetite, and experience this one-of-a-kind food truck park and bar. ♦

# THE MOON ROCK

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**SATURDAY**  
 April 5th, 2025

**ALL DAY PARTY**  
 11:00 AM - 2:00 AM

**FEATURING:**

HUGE MUSIC LINEUP	Glitz's Market	Local Food Trucks	Drink Specials	& special surprises!
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**Cameron County Summer Activities Expo**

**April 5th**  
 1 - 3 PM

Hosted by the Harlingen Public Library  
 410 '76 Drive, Harlingen

Learn about all your options for kid, teen, and adult summer activities throughout Cameron County in one afternoon!!

For more info and vendor registrations please contact:  
 youth@harlingenlibrary.com




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San Benito, TX

**Easter at THE RANCH Festival**

*Big Red's Ranch*

**April**  
 5th 12th  
 13th 19th

# Moves, Adds, and Changes

By Lisa Campos

This column discusses business-related updates in Harlingen.

## Announcements

An Extended Stay America, a hotel that offers temporary housing with fully equipped kitchens, will be constructed next to Residence Inn in the Cameron Crossing shopping area on Bass Pro Drive. It will be located across from Sam's Club and Reyna's BBQ on Spur 54. More information to come.

A new semi-pro soccer league is forming in the Rio Grande Valley called the RGV Red Crowns SC. The contract, which was negotiated in December, allows for five

games to be hosted at the Harlingen Field starting in late May through late July. Away games will be held in cities such as Austin, San Antonio, and Houston. Season tickets for adults and children are now on sale.

Cavender's, a family-owned national premier Western clothing store, announced it will be taking over the lease for the Party City in multiple locations, including Harlingen's at 914 Dixieland Road. Party City are closing nationwide in March.

## New Businesses

Hitting Zone, a new batting cage facility, opened on March 1. They offer batting practice for training and leisure purposes. Customers



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos* can reserve 30-minute or 1-hour slots. They are located at 6201 FM106 Unit 4A and can be reached at 956-748-5006.

On March 8, a mother-daughter-aunt trio of women, opened two businesses in the El Mercado shopping center: SOHO Thrift Boutique and SOHO Hot Yoga. Hot yoga classes are offered Mondays through Fridays, 10 am to 11 am and 6 pm to 7 pm, plus a weekend class on Saturdays, 10 am to 11 am. They share space at 712 N. Sunshine Strip, #36.

VIP Women's Club,

an adult entertainment club with male dancers, opened on March 14. They are located at 9408 W. Expressway 83. They are open on weekends only (Thursday through Saturday), from 7 pm to 2 am. Cover charge is \$20.

## New Cafés and Restaurants

Buckets Barn & Grill, a new outdoor venue and bar, opened on March 13. They are open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 3 pm to 2 am and are located at 20860 FM508.

Isidora's Family



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*





*Courtesy of Texas Brewery Patrol*

Kitchen, a Belizean restaurant, had its soft opening on March 13 and its grand opening on March 19. Some of their signature dishes include sabultes, garnaches, stew beans and rice, and their breakfast plate, Belize it or Not. They are located at 3201 S Expressway 83, Unit C.

Three individuals are partnering to bring a new brewery called Texas Brewery Patrol to Harlingen. The targeted opening date is in May. Owner Patrick Brian McDermott will be brewing the beer. Owner Chef Erika Shaw, previously of Café 406, will run the restaurant side of the business. The location will be near the intersection of Expressway 77 and

**April 2025**

Wilson Road, next to Matt's Building Materials.

**Moves**

Jade Candle Co. relocated to a larger space at 1818 W. Tyler, Suite C, behind Starbucks, on February 14. Hours of operation are shared weekly on their social media. They can be reached at 956-990-5655.

Effective February 28, Mad Kat Custom Designs moved to 2426 E. Tyler, Suite F. This warehouse location will enable customers to place orders online at [www.madkatsublimationblanks.com](http://www.madkatsublimationblanks.com) and pick up the same or next day. Delivery is also available.

Effective March 6, the Family Crisis Center of Cameron and Willacy



*Courtesy of RGV Red Crowns*

County has moved to 1653 Treasure Hills Blvd. The Center offers a 24-hour hotline, provides 24-hour emergency shelter, crisis intervention, hospital accompaniment, and advocacy.

**Anniversaries**

Schoolhouse Creamery,

a locally owned ice cream shop serving handcrafted ice cream, waffle cones, and cakes, celebrated its 10th anniversary on March 15. In honor of their milestone anniversary, they offered specials on ice cream, activities for children, and a visit from Bluey.♦



*Courtesy of Buckets Barn & Grill*

# Keto Taco-Layered Salad



*Courtesy of Mamie Moon*

**By Mamie Moon**

This month's recipe is perfect for an upcoming healthy Easter dish! Let's make Keto taco-layered salad.

### Ingredients:

- 1 pound ground turkey
- 4 ripe avocados
- 1 large tomato
- 1 bushel of fresh cilantro
- 1 bag of any flavor pork rinds
- 1 small bag of shredded cheddar cheese
- ½ large red onion
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 limes
- Salt and pepper
- Garlic powder
- A large glass trifle bowl

### Instructions:

1. In a medium- to high-heat large skillet, cook the ground turkey for 25 minutes, adding salt, pepper, and garlic



*Courtesy of Mamie Moon*

2. Slice up and mash your avocados.
3. Add a pinch of salt and the juice from the fresh limes to the avocados.
4. Dice up your tomatoes and red onions.
5. Chop the cilantro a rough chop.
6. When the ground turkey is done cooking, assemble and layer the salad in your large glass trifle bowl. Add a handful of pork rinds, a layer of the ground turkey, a layer of shredded cheddar cheese, a layer of onions, tomatoes, and onions, and finish with sour cream.
7. Continue layering until you are satisfied with the height in the glass trifle bowl.
8. At the very top, add a heaping of guacamole



*Courtesy of Mamie Moon*

9. Let the salad set for 10 minutes in the fridge. Use salad tongs to serve.

Not only is this dish delicious and healthy, but it's also perfect for these upcoming spring and summer months. Enjoy!

*Mamie Moon, owner of Mamie Bakes, turned Keto baker when she was diagnosed with Crohn's*

*disease in 2005. She ditched sugar, gluten, and lactose and became the boss of her own health. She is a home-based Keto baker whose treats can be purchased and picked up locally in Harlingen.♦*



@\_MAMIEBAKES\_



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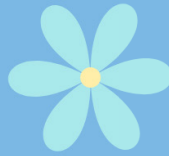


**YOUR T-SHIRT  
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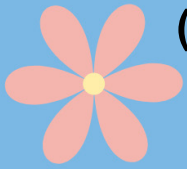
# THE T-SHIRT BAR

## **Recurring Events**



**Downtown Market Days**  
First Saturday (April 5),  
9 am to 3 pm  
Jackson Street and Centennial  
Plaza

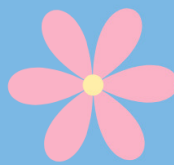
**The Market at Wild August  
Nursery and Flower Farm**  
Every Saturday  
(April 5, 12, 19, and 26),  
9:30 am to 1:30 pm  
16802 Garrett Road



**Harlingen Farmers Market**  
Every Saturday  
(April 5, 12, 19, and 26),  
3 pm to 4:30 pm  
2nd Street and Tyler

**Valle Vista Mall Market Days**  
Every 2nd Saturday  
(April 12), 11 am to 7 pm

**Harlingen Art Night**  
Last Friday (April 25),  
7 pm to 10 pm  
"A" Street and Jackson



## **April Special Events**

**Harlingen Police Department  
Autism Awareness**  
April 2, 5 pm to 8 pm  
Lon C. Hill Park

**Junior League of Harlingen KidFit**  
April 5, 8 am to 11 am  
Lon C. Hill Park

**3 Year Anniversary Celebration**  
April 5, 11 am to 2 am  
The Moon Rock

**Cameron County Summer  
Activities Expo**  
April 5, 1 pm to 3 pm  
Harlingen Public Library

**Bunny Plate Craft**  
April 10, 5:30 pm to 7 pm  
Harlingen Public Library

**Godspell**  
April 10 and 11, 7:30 pm  
April 12, and 13, 2:30 pm  
Harlingen Community Theatre

**Jenuine Cello**  
April 11, 7 pm to 10 pm  
Cork N Craft

**HEB Spring Open Tennis  
Tournament**  
April 12-13  
HEB Tennis Center

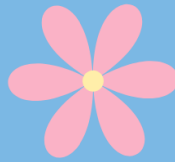
**Save the Station (97.7)  
Benefit Show**  
April 12, 1 pm to 10 pm  
Luna Sky Lounge

**2nd Annual Easter Egg Hunt**  
April 12, 1 pm to 3 pm  
Harlingen Bazaar

**Drawn to the Library Celebration**  
April 12, 2 pm to 4 pm  
Harlingen Public Library



**4th Annual Crawfish Boil**  
April 13, 2 pm to 6 pm  
Topsy Tavern Bar & Grill



**Easter Festival**  
April 13, 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm  
St. Paul Lutheran Church

**Good Friday Fish Fry**  
April 18, 11 am to 2 pm  
Knights of Columbus Hall

**Harlingen Parks and Recreation**  
**Easter Egg Hunt**  
April 19, 10 am to 12 noon  
Harlingen Soccer Complex

**Reggae Fest**  
April 19, 5 pm to 2 am  
The Moon Rock

**Downtown at Sundown**  
April 19, 7 pm to 10 pm  
Lozano Plaza, Downtown  
Harlingen

**Junior League of Harlingen and  
United Way of Northern Cameron  
County Onboard**  
April 26, 9:30 am to 1:30 pm  
Historic Post Office

**Family Crisis Center**  
**Southern Charm Brunch**  
April 26, 11 am  
The 83 Winery

**Literacy Center of Harlingen**  
**Celebrity Roast: Nikki Daniell**  
April 29, 6 pm to 9 pm  
TSTC Cultural Arts Center

## **Beyond Harlingen**

**Resaca City Bike Tour**  
April 5, 7:30 am  
Heavin Memorial Park  
(San Benito)

**Beggin 'N' Eggs**  
April 5, 3 pm to 5 pm  
Catherine Stillman Dog Park  
(Brownsville)

**Easter at the Ranch**  
April 5, 12, 13, and 19,  
4 pm to 8 pm  
Big Red's Ranch (San Benito)

**41st Annual Causeway  
Run & Walk**  
April 12, 7 am  
Queen Isabella Causeway  
(Port Isabel)

**Spring Plant Sale**  
April 12, 9 am to 12 noon  
Education Garden (San Benito)

**2nd Annual Easter Egg Hunt**  
April 12, 11 am to 3 pm  
Combes Community Park  
(Combes)



*Events subject to change.*

*Check Explore Harlingen  
on Facebook for the latest  
updates.*



# Event Spotlight

# Knights of Columbus to Host Annual Good Friday Fish Fry Fundraiser

By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

The Knights of Columbus annual Good Friday Fish Fry event is right around the corner. The fundraiser is set for April 18, 2025 from 11 am to 2 pm.

Edgar Martinez, Grand Knight with the Knights of Columbus Council 2785, encourages the public to come out and support this event that has been going on since the 1990s or earlier according to Martinez.

“Please help us help the community because without you, we won’t make a difference,”

Martinez said. Martinez, who has been a Knight for a little over six years, is passionate about helping others. “One of the main pillars (of the Knights of Columbus) is charity,” he said. “Our main goal is to help... our mission is to help out those who need help no matter who they are. Charity is a duty; it’s not a courtesy.”

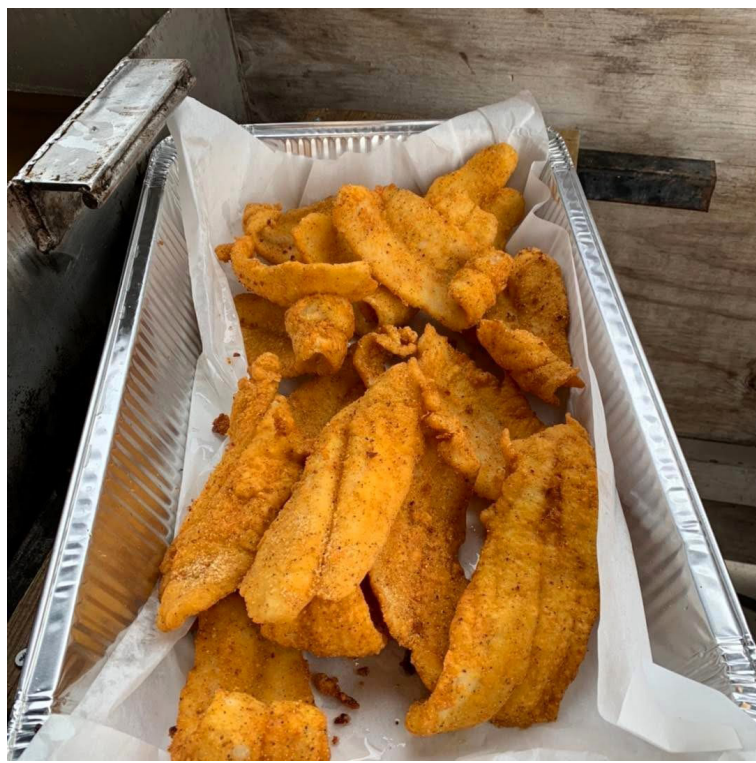
The Harlingen Knights of Columbus Council 2785 was established on November 14, 1937 though the Knights of Columbus as an organization was



Courtesy of Knights of Columbus founded in 1882 by Father Michael J. McGivney, a 29-year-old assistant pastor of St. Mary’s Church in New Haven,



Courtesy of Knights of Columbus



Courtesy of Knights of Columbus



Courtesy of Knights of Columbus

Connecticut. Ever since then, men that are part of the organization actively serve communities through different initiatives and programs.

“We are one of the older councils in not only the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) and the state, but in the whole nation,” he said.

The Knights of Columbus Council 2785 has members from all over the RGV, San Antonio, Houston, and even California and are 234 members strong.

Events such as the Good Friday Fish Fry benefit organizations that the Knights of Columbus supports such as Sunny Glen

Children’s Home in San Benito, Family Crisis Center in Harlingen, and La Posada Providencia, an emergency shelter in San Benito, among others. They also provide scholarships for local students and help with school supplies at the beginning of each school year and many

other initiatives.

Martinez said the proceeds of this fish fry will specifically be going to Habitat for Humanity and the Special Olympics.

“The plates will be loaded,” Martinez said of the fish-fry. “It’s going to have the best-tasting fish in the RGV... with a side of savory rice and some very delicious coleslaw, and no one shall be disappointed.”

“At the end of the day, what keeps us going, is knowing we did good,” Martinez said.

For more information on the fish fry or the Knights of Columbus, please follow Knights of Columbus - The GREAT Council 2785 Harlingen, TX on Facebook or visit their website: <https://www.kofc2785.org>. ♦

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## Notable Nonprofits

# Granting Wishes, Changing Lives: The Impact of Make-A-Wish RGV

By Beth Marie Cantu Ensign

Every child deserves a moment of pure joy—a chance to dream beyond the walls of a hospital room, to experience something magical. For children battling critical illnesses in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Make-A-Wish RGV is a fairy godmother, turning dreams into reality.

Under the current leadership of CEO Rebecca Ramirez Gearhart, Make-A-Wish RGV continues to inspire the lives of children and families facing critical illnesses throughout



Courtesy of Make a Wish

our Valley home. In 1998, the Make-A-Wish RGV branch became independent from its place as part of the Houston chapter to focus solely on children from Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy,

Brooks, Kenedy, and Starr counties. Since then, the organization has granted nearly 1,800 wishes, bringing joy and hope to families during some of their most challenging times.

“I truly believe that the hope and the love and the joy that wishes bring to families is something so special,” Gearhart notes.

Make-A-Wish grants wishes to children between the ages of 2½ and 18 who are diagnosed with critical illnesses. Many believe that wishes are only for terminally ill children,

but that’s a common misconception, according to Gearhart. Many wish recipients go on to recover and lead fulfilling lives. Gearhart has witnessed firsthand that the experience of receiving a wish can be transformative, providing emotional strength and resilience as kids and their families undergo medical treatments.

The journey of granting a wish starts with a referral, which can come from a medical professional, family member, or



Courtesy of Make a Wish





Courtesy of Make a Wish



Courtesy of Make a Wish

even the child. Once eligibility is confirmed, the Make-A-Wish team meets with the child to uncover his or her biggest dream. Wishes generally fall into five categories: “Wish to Go” (travel experiences like

visiting Disney World or South Padre Island), “Wish to Have” (special gifts such as gaming systems or bedroom makeovers), “Wish to Be” (becoming a superhero, a firefighter, or another dream role for a day), “Wish to

Meet” (meeting a celebrity, athlete, or public figure), or “Wish to Give” (children using their wish to help others).

After approval, the planning process begins, ensuring that every detail is perfect. While the ideal timeline is three to six months, urgent wishes can be granted in as little as two weeks when necessary.

Much like any nonprofit organization, one of the biggest challenges Make-A-Wish RGV faces is funding. The organization relies on donations, grants, and fundraising events to keep wishes alive.

“Every wish costs \$6,500-\$7,500 on average,” Gearhart shares. “And with prices going up, we rely heavily on the community to help us fund our wishes.”

Fortunately, the RGV community has always stepped up. Local businesses, schools, and volunteers come together to provide support, whether through hosting fundraising events or ensuring wish days are extra special.

Some wishes stand out not just for their grandeur, but for their emotional impact. One particularly moving story is that of a young girl who battled severe epilepsy and had undergone multiple brain surgeries. “[Her mother] said ‘you know we [...] could've bought a puppy at any time,’” Gearhart shares. “But they were so focused on the doctor’s appointments. They were so focused on their child’s medical needs [...] that was the last thing that they were thinking [about]. It gave the family some sort of relief and rest, because we were taking care of all the extra stuff and giving them a little bit of hope that they didn’t have.”

For other families, these wishes offer a rare chance to escape the daily struggles of illness and simply enjoy time together.

Make-A-Wish RGV offers multiple ways for the community to get involved. While every dollar donated makes a difference in granting a child's wish, volunteering and sharing a social media post are both greatly impactful.

For families currently facing a critical illness, Gearhart shares this message: "You are not alone. While doctors provide medicine, we provide hope. We are here for you every step of the way."

To learn more about Make-A-Wish RGV or to support their mission, visit their Facebook page (@makeawishfoundationrgv) or website at <https://wish.org/rgv>. ♦

*25th Annual Evening of Wishes*  
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3 to 5PM | Saturday, April 5, 2025

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**\$5**  
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Artist of  
the Month

# Plush Panaderia: A Latina-Owned Business Celebrating and Preserving Mexican American Heritage

By Abigail Muñiz-Garcia

When Andrea Luna's beloved grandmother passed away in 2019 her family created an ofrenda (offering) to honor her memory.

As a child, she remembers going to the bakery with her grandmother to pick her favorite pan dulce. Her grandmother loved sweet bread. This tradition

inspired her to create the first plush prototypes for the offering that would allow them to add to her grandmother's collection. As her son grew to be a toddler, he started to play with the plush bread.

"I wanted my son, all our children, to grow up with a deep connection and pride in their culture. Our children see us celebrate life, and food is a central part of most

celebrations," Luna said.

The Latina-owned business is dedicated to preserving Mexican American heritage while promoting cultural pride. Plush Panaderia officially launched in October 2023 at a Dia De Los Muertos festival at the International Museum of Art and Science in McAllen. Since then, Luna says they've traveled the state doing pop-ups and events where she sells her art.

Plush Panaderia has



Courtesy of Plush Panaderia

gone from three products (concha, marranito, and empanada plushies) in their first event to more than 60 products now including pillows and jewelry that celebrate values, families, food, and Mexican culture. They also sell fresh bread baked by her husband, Rogelio Luna.

"He bakes for almost every single event we do," she said. "Rarely there will be some events that don't allow food, only art. He makes all kinds of pan dulce: empanadas, marranitos, cakes, cinnamon rolls, and conchas."

His specialty conchas range from filled conchas to mini sized ones or



Courtesy of Plush Panaderia



*Courtesy of Rogelio Luna*

decorative conchas such as a Hello Kitty concha that he makes. Their unique flavors are also part of the appeal with mango, matcha, and blueberry flavored conchas.

Both Rogelio and Andrea dedicate themselves full-time

to their business. They have experienced many challenges throughout their journey thus far, but Andrea says that fighting for legitimacy as an artist is one.

“As an artist I have had to fight for legitimacy, for my art to be seen as more than ‘arts and crafts’. This



*Courtesy of Plush Panaderia*

has been the fight for many Latina artists,” she said. “I have been blessed enough to have my art up and currently selling at the International Museum of Art and Science now, but it did not start out that way. People may not always understand your art that you put your heart into, but that just means it wasn’t for them.”

There are positive things that come from running a business like Plush Panaderia and Andrea mentions one of them is making connections.

“The best part is connecting with the community. Many older (and younger) Latina women have deeply connected with my art, embraced and thanked me for representing our culture with pride. This is my love letter to our people, especially in such difficult times. I feel so privileged to be able to continue to celebrate our

cultural traditions,” she said.

What does the future hold for Plush Panaderia? Andrea mentions that one of the short-term plans is to launch a website soon to make ordering easier. A long-term plan is to have a brick-and-mortar locale for their business.

“Long-term I want to create a beautiful panaderia, not just a beautiful building but one filled with delicious pan dulce and my handmade art. I want it to be a cultural experience that celebrates the beauty of our people,” she said.

“I have blended my love for delicious pan dulce and fine art to bring a nostalgic experience to those who stop by,” Andrea said of those that visit them at their events.

Follow them on Instagram and Facebook as Plush Panaderia or on TikTok @PlushPanaderia for more information and upcoming events. ♦

## APRIL MARKETS

<b>FRIDAY</b> APRIL 4, 2025 7-10PM	<b>BROWNSVILLE FIRST FRIDAY</b> 1150 MARKET SQUARE ST BROWNSVILLE, TX 78520
<b>SAT</b> APRIL 5, 2025 9AM-3PM	<b>HARLINGEN MARKET DAYS</b> DOWNTOWN HARLINGEN JACKSON AVE
<b>SUN</b> APRIL 6, 2025 1-6PM	<b>GIRLGANG SECRET GARDENS POP UP</b> BROWNSVILLE EVENTS CENTER 1 EVENTS CENTER, PARADES LINE RD BROWNSVILLE, TX
<b>FRI</b> APRIL 25, 2025 7-10PM	<b>HARLINGEN ART NIGHT</b> 123 W JACKSON AVE HARLINGEN, TX
<b>SUN</b> APRIL 27, 2025 12-8PM	<b>DECO FIESTA 2025</b> 1800 FREDERICKSBURG RD SUITE 122 SAN ANTONIO, TX

# The Junk Room

By Christy Richards

In 2014, Matt Montalvo, aka “Matt M.,” and his wife, Corina, were looking at apartments in San Antonio. The realtor guided them through an apartment, then down a hallway to an additional area, and opened the door. “We call this room ‘the junk room,’” she explained. Matt knew then that the room would be perfect for his music studio. From his work in that room, “Junk Room Music” would eventually be born.

Two years later, Matt came back to Harlingen, his place of birth, so Corina could finish her schooling, and he could open his studio.

Matt has the skills for owning a music studio: in addition to his appreciation for music,

song, and rap, he’s a planner, video editor, audio engineer, and graphic designer.

Junk Room Music, located at 323 W. Jackson Ave., offers the following services: photos and/or music recordings at his studio or live at any venue, website design, logo creation, and music release planning.

In the next three years, he plans to produce and release his own rap music along with a group of rappers: DCPlina, Hector Garcia, 3Bizzy, Amarie, Cassandra Castillo, Sylvia Sandoval, and model Debani.

Additionally, Matt intends on producing his own podcast called “Talking Junk,” to help his clients with their music with the goal to gain additional clients through Instagram and



Courtesy of Fred Silva



Courtesy of EJ Ybarra

paid advertising. He just released a new album on March 28, 2025 entitled “Road Closed.” You can

follow him on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/junkroommusic>) for updates. ♦



Courtesy of Fred Silva

HARLINGEN COMMUNITY THEATRE PRESENTS

# GODSPELL

Book by  
John Michael Tebelak

Music and New Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz  
Conceived and Originally Directed by John Michael Tebelak

Based on  
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# The New Treasure Hills Golf Club

By *Roel Rodriguez*

Nearly one year ago, the Cristiano family took ownership of the Treasure Hills Golf Club (THGC). Alexa and Sebastian Cristiano, THGC managers, had a vision to improve the golfing experience at the sprawling 190-acre, 6,960-yard golf course.

The 18-hole (Par 72) THGC course was designed in the 1990s by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. It is well known for its rolling terrain with wide, spacious fairways, water on almost every hole, bunkers, and elevated greens with good targets off the tee. Players will experience four Par 3 holes and four Par 5 holes to challenge their golf game.

Upgrades to the irrigation system and the purchase of specialized equipment to cut, aerate, and maintain the course have vastly improved the putting greens and pathways to challenge golf enthusiasts of all skill levels. Additionally, retaining walls along water hazards have been upgraded, and the addition of a water fountain has significantly enhanced the ambiance of the course.

When asked about the priorities for THGC, Sebastian Cristiano said, “the greens.” Driving on the front nine, it was obvious that the Cristiano siblings are passionate about creating a meticulously maintained and scenic



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

golf course, providing outstanding service and a welcoming environment for all visitors. They will be utilizing their new equipment to add to the course challenges in and around the greens and rough. They are also focusing on significantly improving the pathways to enhance

the experience of this world-class designed golf course.

THGC is fully staffed, has a Golf Shop and beverage service in the shop, and a brand-new beverage cart service on the course. Currently, a food truck near the Golf Shop is open on an intermittent basis.

A notable upgrade is



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*



*Courtesy of Lisa Campos*

the addition of “Birdie Hills Golf Range,” which boasts a traditional golf range along with a new, covered, and immersive golf simulator area that includes Toptracer technology. Birdie Hills

is open daily from 5 pm to 10 pm and has its own golf shop, providing beverage and snack services.

THGC is open daily for play and has several memberships available



*Courtesy of Roel Rodriguez*

such as the Summertime Jr. Program, Unlimited Golf for Couples or Individuals, as well as Month to Month.

In April, THGC will debut its “Pure Groundz” coffee shop and are in the

planning stages to host a golf tournament to commemorate their one-year anniversary.

THGC is located at 3008 Augusta National Drive and can be contacted at 956-425-1700.♦

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# All in the Family



*Courtesy of Ray Perez*  
**By Roel Rodriguez**

Although I'm not originally from Harlingen, Texas, I soon became aware of and appreciated the tradition, commitment, and love the Harlingen community has for its local youth, middle school, and high school sports. Obviously, the Harlingen Cardinals sports programs have the most tenured tradition and legacy in the community. Blessed

with great teams, great players, and great coaches, they have "written" tons of great sports stories.

I recently came across the unfolding story involving the Huerta family, who is amid creating their own sports story and adding to the legacy, with sons Nathan and Noah Huerta. (The Huerta family also has a young daughter, but out of respect for her privacy, this article focuses on the two older brothers only.)

Noah will be a senior at Harlingen High School next academic year. He has already made quite a name for himself as a standout Cardinal football and track and field star. The 6'1" Cardinal running back has held his position since his sophomore

year when he rushed for 942 yards and scored 19 touchdowns. Not bad for a rookie varsity player! Noah earned the 32-6A Newcomer of the Year award. During his junior year, he rushed for 1,203 yards and scored 12 touchdowns. No doubt Coach Manny Gomez and his staff are eager to see what Noah will achieve in his senior year.

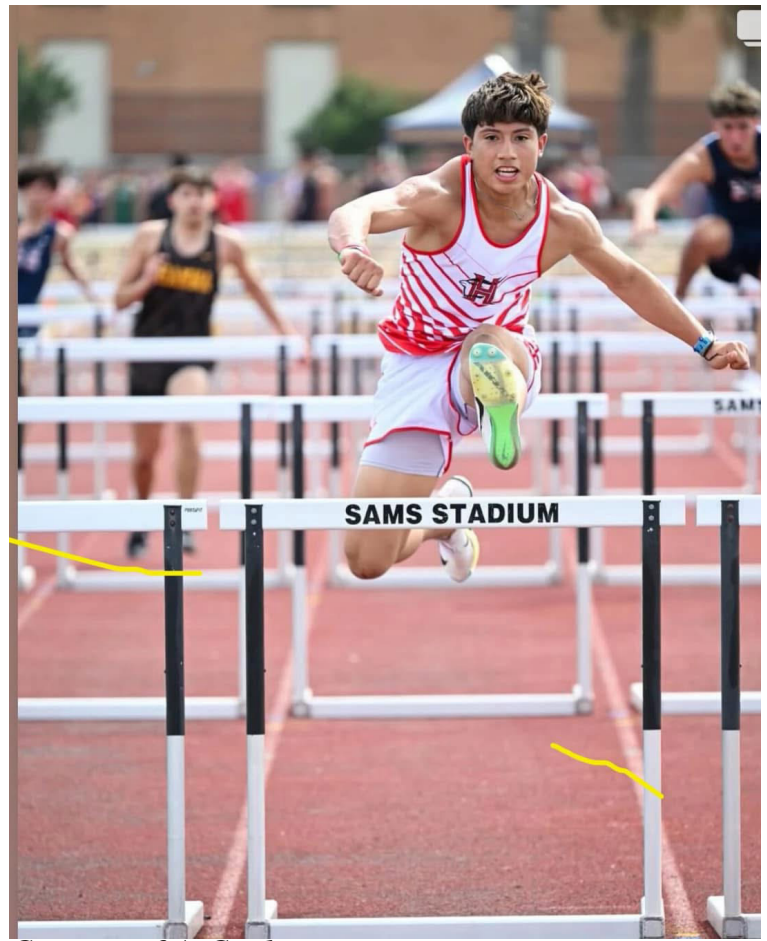


*Courtesy of Stephanie Huerta*

Noah has also been a member of the mighty Harlingen Cardinal Track team since his freshman year. His specialty events are the 100- and 300-meter hurdles, winning the 32-6A Championship his sophomore year. He also won another District Championship, the Cardinal 4 x 400-meter relay, and qualified and competed at the 2024 Regional Track Meet. In the current track season,

Noah is leading the district in the 100- and 300-meter hurdles.

So, what's next for Noah besides completing his junior year and preparing for his senior year? Is competing athletically at the next level "in the cards" for him? Noah's role model, as he looks at his opportunities to play football and run track in college, is his big brother, Nathan Huerta, a former Harlingen Cardinal



*Courtesy of A. Cordero*

football standout and track and field star.

Nathan was a defensive beast on the Cardinal football team. He could also throw the shot put and discus, earning him many accolades. His skills were so good, he earned a football spot at Southwestern University but chose to transfer to Texas State University, where he earned significant playing time and was touted as the type of "walk on" player Texas State Football was looking for.

It's one thing to lead by example on the field and life after high school, but it's what the Huerta family does together

and for one another that joins them and brings their passion and determination to their athletic activities.

I asked proud momma, Stephanie Huerta, if Nathan mentors Noah. "They encourage each other on their work ethic," she began. "All my children encourage each other. Year round, all three of them put in work for their sports. The three of them have connections you see in the movies. After every game, Noah will sit down and break down the football game with Nathan on the phone, on what Noah did great and what he could do better."



*Courtesy of High School Sports Magazine*



Courtesy of Harlingen Cardinal Football Facebook Page

Noah clearly has a great resource in his brother Nathan. Noah has the desire, will, and humility to improve his God-given talents through discipline, dedication, and determination.

Noah's strong faith is of utmost importance to him and his entire family. Noah, as his brother Nathan did, attends mass at 6:30 a.m. on game day at St. Theresa Church with Father Joe Villalon, who blesses him in preparation for the football game. Father Villalon, a huge Cardinal fan, is often at Noah's games as part of the Huerta village.

Nathan is competing

at a higher level and Noah is doing great in high school and looking ahead at future possibilities. It is most likely that the youngest Huerta will follow in the family's footsteps as well. Focusing on one chapter at a time, the Huerta family will humbly continue to use their athletic gifts to the best of their ability as they continue to do what they love. Could the Huerta trio be the best sibling athletes to represent the mighty Harlingen Cardinal sports program? The Huerta family would likely respond, "Thy Will Be Done!" ♦

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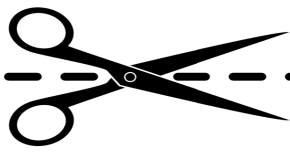
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