

IN BRIEF

The latest coronavirus stats for Texas and the US

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

FAR WEST TEXAS — At press time on Wednesday, the tri-county area has no known cases of the coronavirus. But faced with strict testing rules and a lack of testing supplies — Texas has some of the lowest testing rates in the nation — doctors in the region are now presuming that some patients are positive without testing them.

Since those presumptive positives come from individual doctors recommendations rather than state tests, there is no official count of presumed positive cases in the area. Ekta Escovar, a local health authority for Brewster County and a member of the local COVID-19 task force, said there is “no way” to get those figures. She called state testing protocols “really disappointing.”

Forty tri-county residents have received testing for coronavirus to-date, Escovar said at a Brewster County meeting on Wednesday. Of those, zero cases have been positive and zero are pending.

Across the region, El Paso County on Wednesday had at least 587 cases, according to the latest state figures.

Midland County has at least 65 cases and Odessa’s Ector County has 61. Crane County has two cases. Pecos County has five. And Reeves County has around three cases, according to the county’s local hospital — though state figures are still recording zero cases there, for reasons that are not yet entirely clear.

Overall, Texas has more than 21,000 cases and around 550 deaths. Around 200,000 people have been tested — less than one percent of the state.

The biggest outbreaks in Texas so far have been in Houston (with around 5,000 cases reported in Harris County) and in the Dallas area (with around 2,500 cases reported for Dallas County).

Nationwide, the United States continues to have the one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in the world. More than 800,000 Americans are known to have coronavirus. More than 45,000 have died.

In a late Tuesday announcement, Texas Governor Greg Abbott told local officials that the National Guard will be conducting testing in Marfa, Presidio, Alpine and Terlingua as part of a testing effort throughout the state. Testing is scheduled for Marfa on Saturday and Presidio city on Sunday.

Abbott said each facility will have the capacity to test up to 150 people, though local officials have heard 60-80 tests will be provided at each testing site in the region.



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor

Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas National Guard will deploy 25 mobile testing teams this week to operate free drive-through coronavirus testing. They will visit Marfa and Alpine on Saturday, April 25 and Presidio and Terlingua on Sunday, April 26.

Marfa, Presidio, Alpine and Terlingua will be part of statewide testing blitz

By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

FAR WEST TEXAS — Governor Greg Abbott’s office informed the county that coronavirus testing is on its way, and will be administered by deployed Texas National Guardsmen this weekend, in a late night message to Presidio County Judge Cinderella Guevara on Tuesday. Testing will be available for Alpine and Marfa on Saturday, April 25 and for Presidio and Terlingua on Sunday, April 26.

In a press release on Monday, the state announced that the Texas National Guard will send 1,200 members, divided into 25 COVID-19 “mobile testing teams” and each deployed to a different part of the state. A full list of testing sites across the state has not been made available, but regionally, testing will make its way through West Texas beginning Friday in Fort Hancock

and Van Horn, and eventually reaching Pecos, Ft. Stockton and further north towards the Permian Basin by the following weekend.

The first announced places for testing are Fredericksburg’s Gillespie County, which has one recovered case, and Floresville’s Wilson County, which has had 22 confirmed cases. The governor’s office did not return a request for comment regarding how cities were chosen for testing, but his statement said the teams “will cover various regions across Texas to ensure that the testing regimen will be expanded across the entire state.”

The four local cities will have free drive-through testing. Tentatively, Marfa testing will be behind the USO and Presidio testing at the fire station. Alpine testing is tentatively at the North Brewster County Emergency Response Center and Terlingua testing at the South Brewster County Emergency Response Center.

The governor said when all teams are fully deployed, the state will be capable of collectively testing 3,500 people per day. Each team will have 11 medical professionals and support staff, as well as 34 soldiers.

Currently, the Texas National Guard has the capacity to test up to 150 people per day at each mobile testing team location. But in Marfa, there may only be anywhere between 60 and 80 tests available, Guevara was told. That number should be similar across the four Big Bend cities receiving testing. Currently, the Big Bend Regional Medical Center has tested 40 individuals, all returning negative results.

In a message to local officials Tuesday night, Guevara said, “All tests will be scheduled in advance and patients will be given appointments for their test. A call center number will be given 48

(Continued on page 3)

Students, teachers and parents at MISD find a new normal



With schools shut through the end of the semester, Marfa senior Bryan Torres helps his pre-school brother complete assignments at home.

By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — Imagining the rest of his time at Marfa High School, senior Bryan Torres thought he would be “coming back from spring break, having fun and having a normal graduation.” But the hope of a return to normalcy for Marfa ISD students, teachers and parents was dashed this week when Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced public schools, private schools and higher education institutions will be closed at least through the end of the semester.

Marfa ISD first announced a temporary closure last month due to the coronavirus. Cheri Aguero, a Montessori teacher for 18 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students, said, “At the beginning it was really very scary because most everything in my classroom was hands on. The other thing I was so worried about was losing contact, touch with them. I wanted to make them feel okay and that

we were still here.”

This past Tuesday, Aguero says the class celebrated their first digital birthday. Birthdays are always a big deal in her classroom, where the class and parents take time to celebrate the student’s life. The first one online needed to be special too. She had students secretly prepare signs ahead of time, and surprised the birthday student by having his classmates all show their signs together on Zoom.

When the school initially closed, Aguero immediately instituted Zoom calls that gather her students — twice a week the full class meets, and on the other days, various students meet with Aguero for reading groups. She is incorporating lessons from the art, music and PE teachers to keep kids active during the day, and she has given assignments to help students process the changes and understand why the schools are closed.

(Continued on page 2)

Shuttered business leaves local governments hurting

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com
and
By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

TRI-COUNTY — As the private sector has taken a financial hit, so have local government budgets. With businesses closed and many residents temporarily out of work, governments in the Big Bend may have to do without the taxes and other revenue they have come to depend on.

These problems are acute in the tri-county, where the economy runs on a variety of “nonessential” services, from the restaurant and hotel industry to art shows and festivals.

In Marfa, Mayor Manny Baeza said coronavirus will be a financial hit for the city budget this year. Asked how economic slowdown due to the coronavirus might impact Marfa’s budget, Baeza

said, “Sales tax of course plays a huge role, then your revenues of water, sewer, garbage.” Cities across the state are awaiting the March sales tax data from the comptroller to see how steeply sales tax revenues declined during March as businesses shut down.

Beyond the city and state mandating closures for many businesses, Marfa and Presidio County also closed hotels and short term rentals. Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue will impact grant funding from the city, and those closed short term rentals will result in losses to the city bottom line. “Just by turning those short term rentals into residential garbage rates, that’s going to run us close to \$5,000 a month in losses,” Baeza said.

Though Democrats in Congress attempted to negotiate \$150 billion in funds for state and local governments this week, the provision was ultimately left out of the most recent coronavirus relief bill.

Now six months into the city’s fiscal year, Marfa City Council is having a budget workshop today, Thursday, at 6 p.m. and budget amendments are on the table. Baeza mentioned various potential cuts to the budget mid-year, including reassessing the various capital improvement projects the city had allocated funds for this year. Marfa had budgeted an extension to the fire department facilities, an outdoor addition to the USO building, various investments in heavy machinery and an engineering project for Marfa streets.

Of potential budget revisions, Baeza said, “Nothing is set in stone right now, but it’s going to be a rough fiscal year.”

In neighboring Alpine, city leaders in February had their best sales-tax month ever, with over \$150,000 in revenue. But City Manager Erik Zimmer said he was “real anxious” to see how the March receipts would be.

(Continued on page 3)

Anti-price-gouging efforts in tri-county leave more questions than answers

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

TRI-COUNTY — Have you paid too much for meat at Quarters grocery store in Alpine?

Probably not, because a store with that name does not appear to exist. And yet the nonexistent store has so far been the target of the only coronavirus-related price-gouging complaint in the tri-county area, according to records from the Texas attorney general’s office.

The document also includes the name and contact information of the person who reportedly filed the complaint. But when *The Big Bend Sentinel* called the number, the person on the other end did not recognize the name from AG records and said she had not filed a price-gouging complaint.

The Texas AG’s office says it takes such price gouging “seriously” and has issued “stern warnings” to businesses not to hike prices during a pandemic. As of Monday, it’s received over 8,500 coronavirus-related complaints, including over 7,500 complaints of alleged price-gouging.

In the tri-county, though, those efforts raise more questions than answers. After weeks of inquiries from *The Big Bend Sentinel*, the Texas attorney general’s office could not provide more clarity on the Alpine complaint.

The Big Bend Sentinel first requested records on all price-gouging complaints in the tri-county area in March, after the Marfa City Council considered — but ultimately decided against — filing a price-gouging complaint against Porter’s.

The AG’s office quickly honored that request. The office’s one local record, from March 23, involves Quarters. The store was selling chicken for \$14, the two-page document notes, citing a report from a complainant. Ground meat was going for \$10.

After informing the AG’s office that such a store does not appear to exist, the AG’s office repeatedly said it would contact its Consumer Protection Division to clear up the confusion. But as of this week, *The Big Bend Sentinel* has still received no more clarity on the complaint.

Finally, on Monday, a spokesperson said the complaint was “received by voicemail” and acknowledged there could have been “a mistake in either giving or receiving the information” in the complaint.

Complainants can withdraw complaints or refile them if there is an error, that spokesperson said. The agency also documents if it can’t contact complainants, she said.

Because Porter’s has a similar name, runs two grocery stores in Alpine and was the subject of a Marfa City Council meeting on price increases last month, *The Big Bend Sentinel* asked the AG’s office if the complaint might concern Porter’s, which does exist, rather than Quarters, which does not.

In the response, the AG’s office said it could not “confirm or deny investigations” but that the office was “aware” of allegations involving the store.

Ky Ellison, a spokesperson for Porter’s, said on Monday that was news to him.

“We have not heard anything from the Texas attorney general’s office,” he said. “Nor do we expect to.”

The Big Bend Sentinel has asked the AG’s office for updated information on price-gouging complaints in the Big Bend.

MISD
(Continued from page 1)

“I see my students every single day, even if it’s just for 20 or 30 minutes. Then, I’ve crazily made myself available by email, phone, texting, any way I can get a hold of kiddos and they can get a hold of me,” she said, “for when they need to say ‘I didn’t understand that, Mrs. Aguero.’”

MISD parent Sarah Martinez said so far, her two kids are getting along okay. “They get on their Chromebook, login, see what they need to do and sit down and do it,” she said.

But Martinez said it is tough when her kids aren’t understanding their work and don’t have a teacher there to help. “The only time it’s stressful is when one of them is confused or stuck on something, and I can feel their anxiety or stress because they can’t ask their teacher,

and their teacher isn’t right there,” she said.

Though Martinez said she’s blessed to have kids who motivate themselves, she can’t be of much help when her 9-year-old daughter is struggling. “I can help a little but when it’s like, ‘Where’s the link?’ I can’t help with that,” she said, speaking about the technological challenges as well as the differences in instruction from when she was in school herself. Particularly, the way math is taught in Texas has changed drastically over the past few decades, putting parents at odds with being able to help their kids.

Martinez works for the county, and while her older son, who attends Alpine Montessori, can stay home, she’s currently bringing her daughter to the office with her now that school is out. Daycare isn’t an option in Marfa either, so some parents with students suddenly at home are forced to figure out how to balance work and homeschooling.

Aguero and other teachers in the school have stayed in contact with parents about how to help their kids along. “Some of the kids are choosing to sleep in and work

later in the day, others are up and emailing me in the morning. You have the personality differences and the ones whose parents are there with them and the ones who aren’t.” That’s not necessarily a bad thing, and Aguero is accommodating students by setting all of their class meetings later in the day.

Aguero said, “The first week was really chaotic because I didn’t know how to do anything. It was about us learning as we went.” A month into it, “We’ve worked through the kinks.”

The technological challenges have been a learning experience for many as they have been forced to rapidly adjust to the digital classroom. But another change due to coronavirus is giving some relief: the statewide STAAR testing has been canceled for the year.

“It releases the pressure from the kids. They still were asking me, ‘Mrs. Aguero, are they going to give the STAAR test in the summer?’ That is how stressed out they get about the STAAR tests,” she said. “It’s finally released them from that and it allows me more of an opportunity to broaden things, I don’t have to be so uber focused.”

While the students will still learn testing skills, the teacher says “it just doesn’t have to be on the test’s schedule” anymore. And with the technological learning curve, Aguero said, “All of the energy I would use to make sure they were getting the test-taking strategies, is now translated to how to use the technology.”

Students receive their assignments digitally, and are finally hitting a rhythm of working from home. Helping along the way was Big Bend Telephone, which set up hot spots for students to access the internet if they didn’t have it already. The FCC even recognized the company for going “above and beyond.”

An older student like Torres, the senior, says he gets his work done with ease. He’s at home with his mom, freshman sister and pre-kindergarten brother while his dad works at Village Farms. In the mornings, the house is bustling as they all do their work.

“Even my little brother has his assignments. He’s learning how to spell,” Torres said. In fact, the senior finishes his work early so he can help his little brother. “I’m kind of his little tutor. Out of all of this, I think the younger kids are the most affected, because the first years of school are the fundamental ones. I’ve been

trying to do my best for him to not get off track so he’s not behind once he starts kindergarten.”

Torres said he misses sports the most — he plays football, basketball, cross country and track. But he’s also no longer able to do ballet folklórico or student council.

“It’s been a pretty crazy year,” he reflects. Even before seniors lost their prom, senior activities and last few months spent in the halls of Marfa High together due to coronavirus closures, their homecoming game disappeared when their competitors dropped out at the last minute.

“It’s pretty sad staying home. I keep in touch with my friends through the phone, but not as much as I wish,” he said. “It’s pretty hard not being with them. Even though I’ll stay in touch with my classmates, I’m friends with underclassmen too. These were my last days with them, and that’s thrown out the window now.”

The seniors are holding out hope for a graduation if Governor Abbott allows it. Seniors like Bella Morales are hopeful that if they push back the date, they’ll be able to get together for graduation, and not have to limit attendance to immediate family.

“Sadly, I kind of think, ‘Why our class?’ but things happen. This is just a little barrier along the way, and as a class we’re going to overcome it. It’s kind of like a little glimpse that in life, not everything is easy, and we have to adjust,” said Torres. “Earlier this year our opponents canceled for our homecoming game. We overcame it, we found solutions, and that’s what we’re going to do with this, find solutions.”



Photo courtesy of Oscar Aguero

MISD teacher Cheri Aguero said she spends most days on calls and video conferences with her students. She’s working (and making birthday signs for students) from her home.

HELP FUND LOCAL COVID-19 REPORTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

THANK YOU!

As of press time, **69 donors** have contributed over \$10,000 to our **COVID-19 Local News Fund**. Thank you. From the bottom of our hearts.

“You help us stay safe and sane! Thank you.”

“Here’s to sustaining community.”

“Your courage is downright uplifting.”

“Long live the Sentinel.”

These are unprecedented times, and we are working around-the-clock to provide the best possible coverage to keep our tri-county area informed. With massive cuts to our revenue stream, this important work is sustained by your financial support.

Please help us continue to raise funds during this trying time by donating or sharing our donation page with your friends.

We’ve partnered with the COVID-19 Local News Fund to enable you to make a tax-deductible charitable contribution. Donate today at givebutter.com/thesentinel.

Our sincerest gratitude,
Maisie Crow, Editor-in-Chief & Max Kabat, Publisher
The Big Bend Sentinel & Presidio International

Make a tax-deductible donation today at

givebutter.com/thesentinel



Leach defamation suit against alleged victim moves to appeals court

By **STEPHEN PAULSEN**
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

TERLINGUA — As concerns over the coronavirus upend the court system, the defamation suit brought by Jeff Leach against a former employee and alleged assault victim has gained an unexpected second life in appeals court.

After Terlingua hotelier Leach was indicted on a felony sexual assault charge — and a local judge threw out his defamation case against an alleged victim — his lawyers last month appealed the lawsuit to the Eighth Court of Appeals in El Paso. Those judges on March 26 ordered that the defamation suit could be continued as a personal-injury mediation — meaning a mediator, and not a court judge, could now oversee the case.

The appeals court judges in that case could not be reached for comment. A spokesperson for the Eighth Court of Appeals said the court automatically issues orders for mediation, which the other party can then oppose.

Still, the developments have left Jodi Cole, a lawyer for lawsuit defendant and alleged assault victim Katy Milam, feeling blindsided. As she wrote in a court filing last week, the news of the appeal came as she was “extremely ill” with “what appears to be COVID-19.” She had shut down her law practice to comply with quarantine requirements, couldn’t meet with Milam in-person and was too ill to file legal responses, according to her filing.

Last year, Jeff Leach, a self-described diet-and-gut researcher and the founder of Basecamp Terlingua, sued a former employee for defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The employee, Katy Milam, told police that Leach allegedly held her down and told her “he gets what he wants.”

That lawsuit — which a local judge threw out in February — brought additional allegations to light.

During the case, at least three more women filed affidavits alleging that Leach had sexually assaulted or raped them. Airbnb dropped Basecamp Terlingua from its listings, citing the allegations. And in a criminal case that’s still ongoing, a grand jury indicted Leach in March for felony sexual assault based on the account of one of the alleged victims.

Within days of the lawsuit’s dismissal, Leach’s lawyers announced an intent to appeal. They soon did just that.

Rae Leifeste, a lawyer for Leach, argued in a motion to appeal in March that a Brewster County court had wrongly thrown out the case. Milam’s lawyers had missed filing deadlines, and Leach was never able to present his side of the case, Leifeste argued in the filing.

Milam’s lawyers had introduced evidence they said demonstrated Leach’s character — in 2003, for example, an El Paso court ruled that Leach violated deceptive trade-practice and consumer-protection rules after he reportedly billed people for magazines that never came and a Middle East tour that never materialized. But Leifeste argued these rulings were not “widely known to the public” and therefore should not have excluded Leach from suing for defamation.

Besides, Leifeste argues, Milam’s lawyers did not show Leach had a “well-known reputation for raping, sexually assaulting and harassing others.” And though multiple women came forward with allegations against Leach during the trial, Leifeste writes they have “questionable biases.”

Cole, one of Milam’s lawyers, opposes the appeal, including the request for a personal-injury mediation.

“This is not a personal injury case,” she wrote in a filing last week. “[Leach] sexually harassed and assaulted [Milam], and then sued her for defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress when [Milam] reported the conduct to law enforcement.”

Leifeste did not respond to a request for comment on the appeal.

MON		TUES		WED		THURS		FRI		SAT		SUN							
12-4 AM		UNDERCURRENTS										12-4 AM							
4 AM		CLASSICAL										4 AM							
5 AM		MORNING EDITION										FIESTA		CONCIERTO		5 AM			
6 AM												6 AM							
7 AM												7 AM							
8 AM												8 AM							
9 AM		1A										WEST TX TALK		9 AM					
10 AM		TEXAS STANDARD										TED RADIO		AMERICAN ROUTES		10 AM			
11 AM		CLASSICAL MIDDAY		DOS HORAS CON PRIMO		CLASSICAL MIDDAY		AMERICAN ROUTES		RAMBLING BOY		WAIT WAIT DON'T TELL ME!		ASK ME ANOTHER		SPLendid TABLE		12 NOON	
12 NOON		THINK										SCIENCE FRIDAY		IT'S BEEN A MINUTE		FRONTERAS ALT LATINO		1 PM	
1 PM		FRESH AIR										THIS AMERICAN LIFE		ON THE MEDIA		2 PM			
2 PM		ALL THINGS CONSIDERED										RADIO LAB		LATINO USA		3 PM			
3 PM												ALL THINGS CONSIDERED		4 PM					
4 PM		MARKETPLACE										FROM THE PORCH		REVEAL		5 PM			
5 PM		THIS AMERICAN LIFE		BULLSEYE		REVEAL		WEST TX TALK		THE MOTH		ON BEING		6 PM					
6 PM		BLUES MONDAY		SOUND OPINIONS		OLD'S COOL		ROCK-A-BILLY		AFROPOP		TEXAS MUSIC HOUR OF POWER		THE MOTH		7 PM			
7 PM		NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MUSIC		MARFA MYSTERY HOUR		HONKY TONK HAPPY HOUR		WORLD MUSIC		BORDERS, BEATS & BABES		LATE NITE WITH LADY CHANTICLEER		INTERDIMENSIONAL COMIC DEBREEZE		8 PM			
8 PM		NIGHT TRAIN EXPRESS (TO 1 AM)		LOST FREQUENCIES		SMOKE FREE		OTHER SIDE OF NOWHERE		3rd SUNDAY SUNDAY EVENING COMING DOWN		BULLSEYE		LE SHOW		11 PM			
9 PM		THEE MIDNIGHT SNACK (TO 1 AM)		ROCK PILLow (TO 1 AM)		FRI		SAT		SUN									

Listen on your radio at 93.5 FM or stream live online at marfapublicradio.org. Schedule subject to change. Complete schedule online.

MUSIC

NEWS/TALK/VARIETY

* 1st Sunday: INTERDIMENSIONAL MUSIC / 4th Sunday: REMOTE SOUNDTRACKS / All other Sundays: RELEVANT TONES

o 7:45AM & 4:44PM Tuesdays & Thursdays: NATURE NOTES

Shuttered

(Continued from page 1)

It wasn’t all bad news, Zimmer said. The pandemic meant the city could cut back on some expenses, including travel for city employees. With residents stuck at home, some might theoretically use more city utilities. And while residents stocked on supplies, businesses like Porter’s are doing more business than usual — though Zimmer stressed that much of Porter’s wares are essential and therefore might not contribute as much to sales-tax coffers.

But there are nonetheless major concerns. Sul Ross State University is the “biggest driver of the economy here,” Zimmer said — noting that the school already had falling enrollment before the coronavirus crisis. And with the school canceling events and in-person classes, less students and university visitors will be shopping and supporting the economy in Alpine.

“I don’t think [SRSU] is going to have people in town,” he said. “All of that impacts the amount of money we have.” Still, he stressed it is “too early” to know how exactly coronavirus will impact Alpine’s budget.

As tri-county leaders brace for the possibility of freefalling budgets, the canary in their coal mines may be hotels.

Occupancy rates for Alpine hotels sit at a dismal 15 percent, according to Zimmer. But that is still better than the rest of the state, which has, on average, less than 10 percent occupancy.

“To say the situation is dire is probably an understatement,” said Chris Ruggia, Alpine’s director of tourism. A “significant number” of hotels are at zero occupancy, he said.

Ruggia did not have concrete numbers for how much money Alpine hotels are losing. Hotels only report earnings on a quarterly basis, he noted, and Alpine is offering hotels the option to defer their taxes and utility payments upon request.

Both factors make it hard to know exactly how hotels are doing financially — and Ruggia doesn’t want to press the matter. “Honestly, I’m not going to ask the hotels for anything that’s not an emergency need,” he said. “They have a lot on their minds.”

Like Alpine in general, its hotels were doing exceptionally well before the coronavirus crisis — with Alpine hotels already netting 48 percent of their total HOT payments from the previous fiscal year. The question now is how much the situation will deteriorate.

In his interview on Tuesday, Ruggia prepared a few economic projections for hotels in the area and the impact on local HOT revenue. One projection showed the situation improving by fall — a projection

Ruggia acknowledged was “obviously an optimistic guess.” Another showed them bringing in no more HOT revenue at all.

Nowhere in the tri-county may have it worse than the City of Presidio — a jumping-off point for tourism to Mexico and nearby state and national parks, and where city leaders run a \$4 million annual budget with little to no cash reserves.

The problems came to a head at a city council meeting in Presidio last week, when city leaders broached a topic they’d dreaded discussing. City Administrator Joe Portillo said at the meeting that Presidio could see a budget shortfall of \$800,000 — nearly a whopping 25 percent of the border city’s annual budget.

Those figures, he said, mean that Presidio will need to “make some tough decisions in the next 30 days or so.”

Best-case scenario, he said, the city could try to take out an emergency loan or seek other relief from the state or federal government. Worst-case scenario, the numbers could force layoffs of city employees or a “straight across-the-board decrease” in city salaries.

In interviews over the past week, city leaders said it is too soon to be talking specifics about layoffs.

Portillo stressed that the budget numbers are “very, very preliminary.” But he added: “If this continues, something has to give. I don’t have a machine that makes money, and

my bank account will eventually go to zero.”

“I need to tread very lightly,” Portillo said of the topic of layoffs or pay decreases. “People are already in a state of panic. People are already wondering, ‘Am I next?’”

Still, he added, “If we’ve learned anything during this pandemic, we’ve learned to differentiate between what is essential and nonessential.” He predicted city leaders would soon be having “frank discussions” about cuts — though he stressed that laying off workers is an absolute last-case scenario.

Mayor John Ferguson stressed the same thing: Cuts to staffing or pay would be a last-ditch effort to keep the city from going into the red.

“Everyone who’s still working [for Presidio city] is providing a very essential service,” he said, from collecting garbage to processing wastewater. “I would really, really want to look into finding some funding so we can maintain our operations.”

On Friday afternoon, city leaders were hopeful. Governor Greg Abbott was soon scheduled to hold a teleconference with local leaders, and Presidio city officials planned to ask about emergency funding for cities. But while Abbott touched on the topic briefly, no concrete plans or promises came out of the meeting.

In a follow-up interview on Monday, Ferguson acknowledged that the state’s plan to help out cities like Presidio is “unclear”

but said he is “hopeful” that state leaders are listening to local officials and “seeing [the problem] for themselves.”

After all, Ferguson said, the city must continue serving its residents — that is non-negotiable.

“We have to maintain our services for the community because they’re essential,” he said. “I don’t know how we’ll continue on if we come to a point where there’s no money left.”

But as City Administrator Portillo pointed out, one issue with the coronavirus pandemic is that — unlike previous disasters — it isn’t localized.

When Harvey decimated Houston, California could step up to help. And when wildfires decimated California, Texas was likewise in a position to provide aid — including by sending firefighters to the region.

But from money to medical supplies, “our dilemma today is that this pandemic is from East Coast to West Coast,” Portillo said. Most places are hurting and in need of aid. And just like with medical equipment for coronavirus patients, banks and federal leaders will likely have to triage.

While other communities in the tri-county may not yet be in Presidio’s position, cities across the region are also dealing with their own shortfalls.

County jail population stays steady, despite coronavirus’ outsized spread among the incarcerated

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — At last count, the Presidio County Jail has 36 inmates, a pretty typical number. Just one of them — a county inmate on an aggravated assault charge — is waiting for county court.

The rest are being held for federal authorities like the U.S. Marshals Service for crimes involving drugs and illegal entry, said Gracie Parras, the jail administrator for Presidio County.

Parras says the number of federal detainees is going down. But for now, they still represent a vast majority of inmates at the local jail.

The inmates share cells, but the jail is still trying to take other precautions, Parras said. Workers disinfect cells an extra time each day, and attorneys are screened before they visit.

In an interview earlier this month, Sandy Wilson, the district attorney for the tri-county area, was working to get bonds or temporary releases for nonviolent inmates. It’s part of “compassionate release” efforts seen across the country to keep local jails from becoming vectors for coronavirus — though both Wilson and Parras stressed that most nonviolent local inmates were getting bonded out even before the pandemic.

But while local authorities are taking precautions, higher-ups, from the governor’s office to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, have been much slower to release inmates, if they have at all. With a slew of new lawsuits this month, detainees and inmates have become a flash-point in debates over how government authorities can and should respond to the coronavirus.

First, there are inmates in immigrant detention centers. CBP last month told *The Big Bend Sentinel* that it is adjudicating some cases “in the field” — a process that keeps undocumented migrants out of detention centers but, on the flip side, also fast-tracks deportations.

Federal authorities have deported around 20,000 people since February, *The New York Times* reported last week — including some who later tested positive for coronavirus in their destination countries. CBP did not respond to a follow-up request this week to clarify its coronavirus policies.

But these new policies have done little to reduce numbers at already-packed detention centers — and coronavirus has already popped up among detained immigrants. At a detention center near Miami, federal authorities acknowledged in court filings this week that more than half of the roughly 600 detainees had been exposed to coronavirus.

And in Texas, the American Civil Liberties Union is suing federal officials in an effort to release medically vulnerable inmates from a facility near Houston. The lawsuit, filed earlier this month, lists at least four detainees that the ACLU says are at a heightened risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 — includ-

ing a 58-year-old with diabetes, asthma and sleep apnea who has been detained since February, and a 37-year-old with breathing issues who has been in detention since last August.

“Detention centers like the Montgomery Processing Center cannot adequately protect the lives of those like our clients,” Andre Segura, the ACLU’s legal director in Texas, said in a statement. “There is no way to practice social distancing in a detention center, and they do not have access to face masks or even regular access to basic hygiene.”

“Limiting the number of people held in jails is critical to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak at MPC and the surrounding community,” he added.

That isn’t the only ACLU coronavirus lawsuit filed this month involving inmates in Texas. The organization is also suing Governor Greg Abbott and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton over what the group says is an “illegal executive order” hindering the ability of local judges to enact compassionate-release measures.

The case centers on Houston — where activists and legal groups have been fighting for years to overturn cash-bail rules that keep defendants in jail before trial because they can’t make cash bonds.

During a coronavirus in Houston, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo ordered hundreds of local defendants released. But state orders preventing releases — as well as an order from a district judge — halted those efforts.

That’s the crux of the ACLU lawsuit. The organization argues that Governor Abbott’s order stymieing compassionate releases is a violation of state disaster rules and the Texas Constitution.

“Local governments across the State have sought to implement the recommendations of public health experts, not only for the general population, but also for those in their custody,” the ACLU argued in their initial lawsuit, from earlier this month. But Abbott’s executive order “frustrates these efforts and unlawfully undercuts the authority of judges and the Legislature,” the suit argues.

Fights like this go well beyond Texas, though. In a case involving an outbreak at a federal prison in North Carolina, a judge over the weekend demanded that an inmate immediately be released.

The Bureau of Prisons had already approved the inmate’s release — and yet he was still in prison, because federal prison rules required inmates to be quarantined together for 14 days. That timeline can apparently be extended indefinitely if one or more of the quarantined inmates tests positive during that time.

Noting that these quarantine rules effectively created new disease vectors, the judge called the rules “illogical,” “self-defeating” and a “danger” to inmates and local communities. She ordered prison officials to release him “immediately.”

Testing blitz

(Continued from page 1)

hours in advance to register and make appointments.”

“Now, more than ever, it will be important for all of us to work together and we must think about people in our community who may not be able to get to the testing sites,” Guevara wrote in a Tuesday night email to local officials. “I will contact [the] Governor’s office to inform them of needing to go out to our colonias, Candelaria, Riudosa, Redford, and Shafter.”

“I just have mixed feelings about it,” Guevara told *The Big Bend Sentinel* on Wednesday morning. “Since there isn’t readily available testing until you have symptoms, it may be good.” The state has not said that patients must show symptoms to receive testing at the drive-through.

Texas currently ranks 48th in testing per capita, having tested just over 200,000 of the state’s nearly 29 million residents. Even with a low percentage of testing, Texas ranks in the top ten states for total number of coronavirus cases.

“The State of Texas continues to expand our COVID-19 testing capacities and ensure that communities across the Lone Star State have access to the resources they need,” said Governor Abbott. “I am grateful for the dedication of our Guardsmen as they continue to serve their fellow Texans throughout the COVID-19 response.”

The governor has already announced plans to lift restrictions across the state, and his “Strike Force to Open Texas” will “safely and strategically restart and revitalize all aspects of the Lone Star State — work, school, entertainment, and culture,” according to the state website.

Abbott last week announced initial “opening”

plans, including “retail-to-go,” a format that mimics restaurants current to-go-only operations. He also lifted restrictions on nonessential medical procedures, as long as hospitals still reserve 25 percent of their bedspace for coronavirus patients. State parks are also allowed to reopen for day use, though many in the Big Bend region have refrained thus far.

Public and private schools and higher education institutions will remain closed through the end of the academic year, according to the governor’s statement.

Abbott said he will make additional announcements regarding coronavirus restrictions on April 27, adding that the stay-at-home order, which expires on April 30, may be eliminated.

“I cannot stress enough that testing will not make us safer,” Guevara wrote to officials. “We must not allow ourselves or people in our community to cultivate a false sense of security. All of us together have been able to corral the virus away from us thus far by the extreme measures of closing businesses, churches, hotels, etc.”

“As we move towards eventually opening up the local economy, we should in no way relax our efforts to reduce interaction with people and social distancing should be practiced until we have a vaccine,” she wrote.

Echoing local coronavirus task force member and doctor Ekta Escovar, Guevara added, “As the urban areas see their areas with flattened curves after their peaks have come and gone, it could mean that our rural areas will be hit later and harder IF we are not careful and [if we] relax our efforts.”

“May we be strong together and persevere in this difficult time. If we stick together by staying apart, we can be safe,” said Guevara. Details on testing locations, times and making appointments will be available at www.bigbendsentinel.com as soon as they are announced.

Get a great deal on getting more done.

Cab available with select models 24.8 - 62 HP

Together we do more.

Save big on our #1 selling* compact tractors, featuring the versatility to handle every job and a wide range of performance-matched attachments. Stop in for a demo today.

0% FINANCING

PLUS

NO PAYMENTS FOR 90 DAYS

VISIT US TODAY FOR THIS LIMITED-TIME OFFER

Out West Feed & Supply

2600 East US 90, Alpine

(432) 837-5792

KubotaUSA.com

*Based on EDA tractor sales data of under 40 horsepower models from 2009 to 2019.

© Kubota Tractor Corporation 2020. 0% APR financing on purchases of select new equipment from participating dealers" in-stock inventory is available to qualified purchasers through Kubota Credit Corporation, U.S.A.; subject to credit approval. Monthly terms may vary. Some exceptions apply. Offer expires 6/30/20. Contract term begins from the date of first payment which is due 90 days from the contract date. Example: Purchase made on 4/1/20, first monthly payment is due 7/1/20. 90 day no payment offer expires 5/31/20. Terms subject to change. This material is for descriptive purposes only. Kubota disclaims all representations and warranties, express or implied, or any liability from the use of this material. For complete warranty, disclaimer, safety, incentive offer and product information, consult your local Dealer or KubotaUSA.com.

2020 GRADS!

OUT WEST

FEED & SUPPLY

ALPINE, TX

COME PICK OUT THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THIS YEAR'S GRADUATES.

Shop Small Incentive

- Spend \$100 - get a \$20 gift certificate
- Spend \$200 - get a \$40 gift certificate
- Spend \$300 - get a \$50 gift certificate

Enter our weekly senior giveaway on FB Live everyday at 4pm through the end of April. Drawing each day for a \$25 gift certificate to a lucky Alpine, Marfa, or Fort Davis Senior.

2600 EAST US 90 ★ ALPINE ★ 432-837-5792

MONDAY-FRIDAY 8-6 ★ SATURDAY 8-3

Opinions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you to the donors who so generously opened their hearts to the Marfa Steps Up: Service Worker Relief Fund. Your contributions helped us raise \$47,207.62, after nominal GoFundMe fees. This was distributed to 175 service workers in need during this crisis. In addition to your generous donations, Porter’s and The Get Go rounded up the cards — this contribution took the cards from \$269 to a full \$300 for each eligible service employee. We are so grateful to our local grocery stores, and all of our donors — those in Marfa, and also so many people from beyond who love Marfa, who so kindly supported this effort.

The success of the fund was dependent on our donors and so many who worked tirelessly behind-the-scenes to make it all come together.

Fellow organizers — Susan Kirr, Rainer Judd, Ian Lewis and Carolyn Pfeiffer — thank you for being amazing partners in this effort. You’ve been there for constant conversations, difficult decisions, logistical challenges and countless late nights helping to raise funds.

A stunning group of volunteers stepped up, including Ashlie Adams, Sabine Blaese, Sara Button, Kate Calder, Neil Chavigny, Karen Crenshaw, Laura Doll, Nicki Ittner, Caroline Kanner, Faith Melgaard, Tori Raba and Molly Shea. You brought ideas to the table with an enormous amount of creativity. You helped us get the word out by leveraging your contacts, posting flyers, creating paper forms for those service workers who did not have digital access, registering people and so much more.

We owe a special shoutout to Emily Williams, who pointed us in the direction of grocery store gift cards, which helped put food on the table while funneling all the money from this fundraiser right back into our local businesses.

We could not have done this without Jacqueline Del Olmo, Miriam Halpern, Tim Johnson, Jasmin Pineda, Lupita Rivera and David Walstrom, who all helped by providing translation. Your efforts made the fund fully accessible to our bilingual community. Also to Abbie Perrault, who gently nudged us to provide paper forms, so those without digital access could apply.

We are so thankful for our local employers who went above and beyond to get their service staff registered — Joanne Crenshaw at the Paisano, Donna Poenisch at the Hotel Saint George, Abby Boyd at Chinati, Alex Gates at Cochineal, Monika Bernstein at El Cosmico — y’all rocked this.

Marfa is lucky to have some of the best public employees we could hope for. Mandy Roane, John Washburn, Oscar Aguero and Julio Medina — all of you helped to get us connected to so many in our community, and we are so grateful for that.

The Big Bend Sentinel, Marfa Public Radio and Sarah Vasquez writing for *Texas Highways Magazine* — thank you all for giving us so much print space and air time.

Our grocery store partners at Porter’s — Trae Dutchover, Rigo Cruz, Rosa Pereira — and at The Get Go — Maiya Keck and Chrissie Saenz. Thank you for taking us up on this journey and going the extra mile to round up the cards. And many thanks to the staff at both stores, who are working so hard to keep everyone supplied with food and essentials.

Rainer, thank you for dreaming big and pushing us to make Marfa Steps Up something that lasts a long time. Carolyn Macartney, thank you for creating the perfect graphic identity, which will help to take this group into more initiatives in the future.

Throughout this crisis we are seeing people all over town step up for each other. Marfans are helping to get Nutrition Center meals to seniors, volunteering at the Marfa Food Pantry, fixing playgrounds, checking in on neighbors, making masks, distributing bandanas, donating and building hand sanitizer stations, running errands for those who need to stay home, working at our grocery stores and more.

So many in this town are doing so much to make a difference. We are happy the fund could be one small part of this larger community effort.

Thank you all for stepping up!

Shelley Bernstein
Marfa Steps Up
www.marfastepsup.org

...

Dear Editor,

Silver Lining

According to Wikipedia, the optimism of “every cloud has a silver lining” tells us that even the worst events or situations have some positive aspects. This pandemic has truly made these silver linings SHINE!

During this difficult time, we have been able to witness what our tri-county community is really made of! While people are doing their part and staying home, they think of others working in harm’s way. There has been an outpouring of our creative community members who have reached out to see what need there is to keep our frontline employees safe: everything from sewn masks to ear savers to protect our clinical personnel. Big Bend Regional Medical Center is truly appreciative, grateful, and oh so fortunate to serve such a caring and involved community!

People have donated N-95 masks from their own businesses, while others have donated their time and supplies to sew masks for our community, and still others have made Facebook groups to help organize information and supplies. The latest group is those with 3-D printers who are printing ear savers and other helpful items.

In closing, please remember that for every hard situation there is a silver lining, a blessing to be counted, and a positive lesson to be learned. God bless our tri-county community!

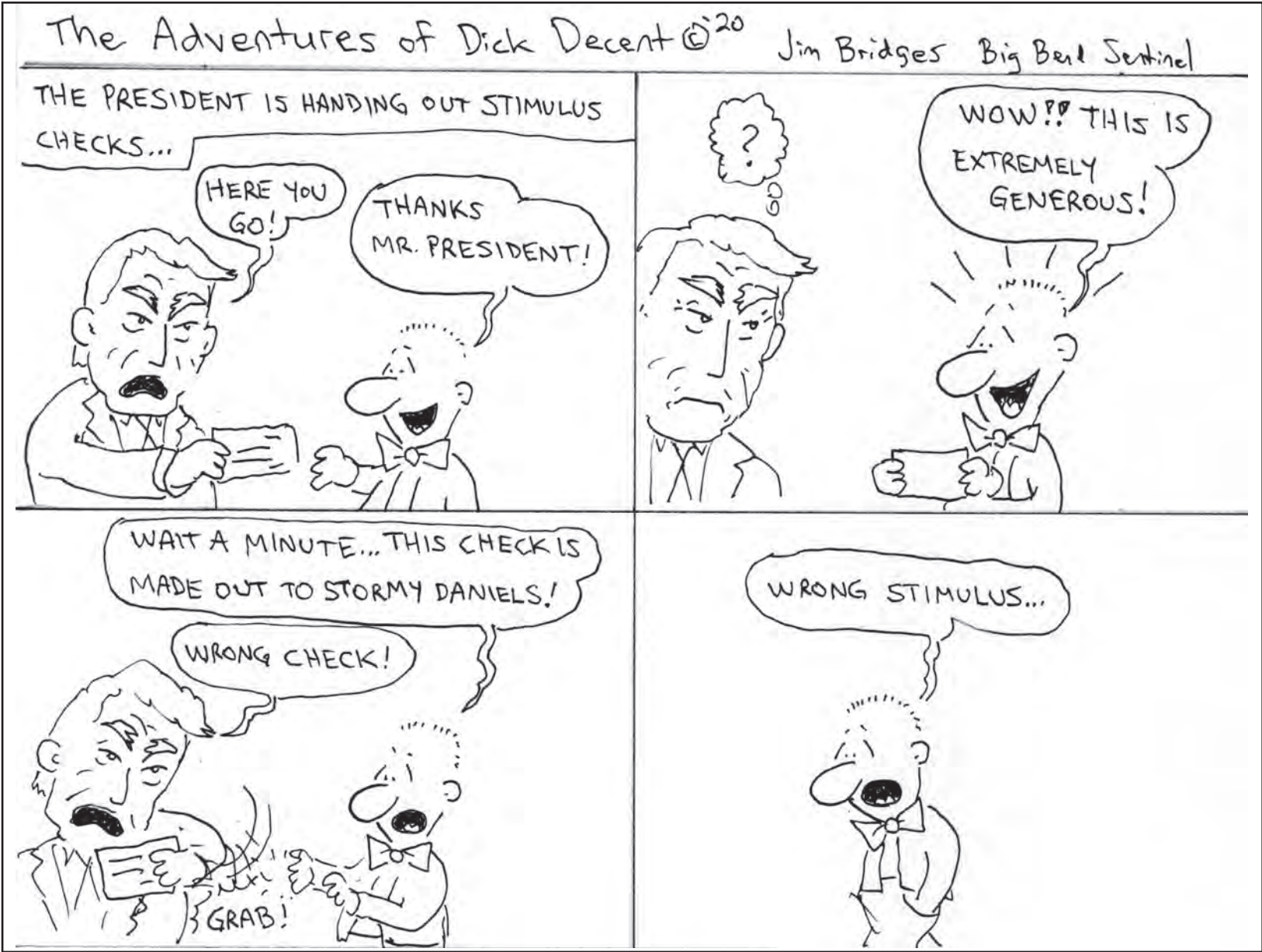
Ruth C Huckle
Big Bend Regional Medical Center

...

We want to hear from YOU!
Write a letter to the Editor at
editor@bigbendsentinel.com



Hombres
We’re all in this together.



Dear Editor,

Where’s Dorothy?

Dr. Oz opined: “Opening of schools may only cost us 2 to 3% in terms of total mortality ... a tradeoff some folks would consider.” Who? Negligent parents already in Family Court?

Dr. Phil, ignoring COVID-19’s involuntary, indiscriminate contagion pattern, falsely compared deaths to voluntarily driving or smoking.

Lt. Gov. Patrick opined seniors would willingly throw themselves on their swords for the economy! Are “friendly-fire” deaths the price of reopening?

Have states overreacted? Hardly! Avoidance and social distancing arise from a conscientious concern for others’ well-being.

However, gun-toting MAGA-caps protesting stay-at-home orders demanded a return to economic activities. Small business employers are suffering. Millions unemployed cannot meet basic expenses. They blame proactive Democratic officials well-aware that COVID-19 is undeterred by Trump’s lies and inaction.

Some GOP governors ignore legitimate concerns about a virus we know little of but its ruthlessness. Abbott acts irresponsibly, reopening Texas with new cases being reported.

Question: “Whom or what is responsible for these economic hardships and federal paralysis?”

Answer: “40+ years of conservatism’s deregulation mantra, a privatized healthcare system tied to employment and small government ideology exacerbated by an incompetent, mentally-ill president’s failure to pursue a coordinated national strategy!”

Reopen! Don’t isolate? The ownership, corporate, upper 1% is already self-isolated, measured by the distance between themselves and most Americans, a paycheck removed from disaster.

An Oz, Phil, Patrick and Trumpian mindset equates people to disposable widgets. The Queen of Heartless is very efficient at harvesting bodies. Meanwhile, where’s Dorothy in their wonderland of cruel realities?

Rev. Barry Abraham Zavah
Alpine

...



1 Cavalry Row/PO Box 1135
Marfa, Texas 79843
432 729 4362
www.chinati.org

The Chinati Foundation is a contemporary art museum founded by the artist Donald Judd. The collection includes work by thirteen artists and focuses on permanent, large-scale installations emphasizing the relationship between art, architecture, and the surrounding landscape.

CHINATI CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

At the Chinati Foundation, the safety and well-being of our visitors and staff are among our highest priorities. We are aware of the health concerns surrounding the coronavirus (COVID-19), and upon the recommendation of local West Texas health officials, Chinati has been advised to close to the public until further notice. The tri-county region has limited health resources, so to be a good partner to our local community and community of visitors, we are taking the recommendation seriously.

For those visitors who have booked tours on the dates effected, please email Visitor Services Manager, Abby Boyd, at aboyd@chinati.org or call 432.729.4362 ext.3 to reschedule or discuss other options.

Thank you for supporting the Chinati Foundation. As a public institution, we both rely on the public for support and believe it is our responsibility to be a good public partner in return. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and we look forward to welcoming you to Chinati in the future.

Please check www.chinati.org for further updates.

NOW MORE THAN EVER IT IS IMPORTANT TO RESPOND TO THE 2020 CENSUS.

COUNTY RESPONSE RATES AS OF 4/18:
EL PASO 46.4% JEFF DAVIS: 11.4%
HUDSPETH: 7.8% PRESIDIO: 4.5%
CULBERSON: 7.9% BREWSTER: 22.5%

REMEMBER: AN ACCURATE COUNT MEANS FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS, FOOD, MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND MORE.



RESPONDING NOW MEANS NO KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR LATER.

ONLINE: [2020CENSUS.GOV](https://2020census.gov)
ENGLISH: [844.330.2020](tel:844.330.2020)
SPANISH: [844.468.2020](tel:844.468.2020)



WITHOUT IT, WE ALL LOSE. EVERYONE COUNTS!

Congratulations!



BBT has been nationally recognized by the FCC.

BBT is one of only approximately 50 telecom providers in the country the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recognized for going “above and beyond” its “Keep Americans Connected” pledge to serve customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The FCC specifically commended BBT for increasing speeds, offering two months of free broadband to new customers, and other efforts to keep its community connected during this crisis.

Congratulations from
Naman Howell Smith & Lee, PLLC.

800.592.4781
www.bigbend.com





PATRIOTIC MILLIONAIRES

Trump played ‘bait and switch’ with economic relief for workers

By PATRICIA A. MARTONE

After nearly a month of stay-at-home orders in all but six states, millions of families are finding it impossible to keep food on the table and pay rent because of mass layoffs and furloughs. Twenty-two million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits and adequate government support for unemployed workers is desperately needed. Such benefits not only help workers, they also prevent the complete collapse of the economy. Additional support for workers was included in the CARES Act (H.R. 748). But, thanks to the Trump administration, millions of workers are finding out that they have been intentionally locked out of receiving these benefits.

From the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Republicans have sought to provide unprecedented economic relief to businesses, while ignoring the plight of workers. In the negotiations leading to the CARES Act, the Republican controlled Senate initially proposed an all out \$500 billion dollar handout to big business with nothing for employees. After intense negotiations with Democrats, the president and Republicans in Congress finally agreed to include the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, which adds an extra \$600 dollars a week (until July) to existing state unemployment and covers workers that were previously excluded from benefits. However, as soon as the expanded benefits were rolled out by the Labor Department, it became clear that the administration, through rule-making, is doing its best to exclude as many workers as possible from these benefits.

These rules contain a litany of unnecessary restrictions that permit states to require direct proof that unemployment resulted directly from the pandemic, or a doctor’s note proving the applicant contracted COVID-19. Unemployment benefits at the state level are already delayed because of the massive influx of claims. Allowing states to add additional rules only delays or completely stops desperately needed assistance and undermines the entire PUA Program. Further, the Labor Department rules exclude gig-economy workers, self-employed and independent contractors who are among the groups the PUA program was intended to help.

The direction of this administration is clear — give large handouts to corporations without restraint while creating a nest of red tape to block workers from the funds given to them in the CARES Act.

But the Department of Labor isn’t the only administrative agency trying to undermine and underpay workers. Independent from the CARES Act, Trump’s Department of Agriculture is currently considering a wage cut for foreign guest workers on the H-2A program in order to ease the current economic burden on farmers. Participants in the H-2A program make up 10% of all farmworkers in the nation. Their wages are set at a rate under \$15 an hour, so it is astonishing to hear farm industry groups describe their measly wage as “artificially high,” and advocate for a wage of \$8.34 an hour — only slightly higher than the abysmally low federal minimum wage of \$7.35 an hour. This proposal would have a particularly cruel effect on hardworking laborers who provide the food for our local stores.

The Trump administration’s plan to bailout businesses and punish workers isn’t just immoral — it’s bad economic policy. Consumer spending accounts for two-thirds of our GDP, and if consumers can’t afford to spend, our economy comes to a grinding halt. When wealthy Americans like me acquire additional cash, we tend to invest it. But the average worker, when given cash, will pump that money right back into the economy, purchasing food and consumer products. It is essential that we bail out the workers who will be the ones resuscitating our economy.

Americans were struggling to stay afloat before the COVID-19 crisis. Ironically, this crisis has shown us that our “essential” workers are also our lowest paid workers. The foundational principle of United States democracy is that the government exists to serve the people. That means all of the people, not just a fortunate few. This crisis is not political — the coronavirus does not care if you are a Republican or Democrat. Similarly, this country does not need economic relief tethered to politics. It is time for our leaders to step up and take care of all of our workers and businesses.

Patricia A. Martone is a practicing attorney, a former adjunct professor at New York University’s School of Law, a former equity partner in several law firms and a member of Patriotic Millionaires, a group of wealthy individuals united in their concern about the destabilizing concentration of wealth and power in America.

About the Patriotic Millionaires
Proud “traitors to their class,” members of the Patriotic Millionaires are high-net worth Americans, business leaders, and investors who are united in their concern about the destabilizing concentration of wealth and power in America. The mission of The Patriotic Millionaires organization is to build a more stable, prosperous, and inclusive nation by promoting public policies based on the “first principles” of equal political representation, a guaranteed living wage for all working citizens, and a fair tax system. You can find out more at <http://patrioticmillionaires.org/about/>

Subscribe at bigbendsentinel.com or leave a message at 432-729-4342.

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

PRESIDIO COUNTY
Judge Cinderela Guevara: (432) 729-4452
Marfa Mayor Manny Baeza: (432) 295-0048
Presidio Mayor John Ferguson: (432) 229-3517

BREWSTER COUNTY
Judge Eleazar Cano: (432) 837-5831
Alpine Mayor Andy Ramos: (432) 837-3301

JEFF DAVIS COUNTY
Judge Kerith Sproul-Hurley: (432) 426-3968
State Sen. Jose Rodriguez: (915)351.3500 (El Paso office)
(432)729.4800 (Marfa office)
(512)463.0129 (Capitol office)

FEDERAL:
U.S. Rep. Will Hurd: (202) 225-4511 (D.C. office)
U.S. Sen. John Cornyn (202)224-2934 (D.C. office)
(806)472-7533 (Lubbock office)
U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz Washington, DC (202) 224-5922

HURD ON THE HILL

America’s spirit will always stand stronger than any foe

By U.S. REPRESENTATIVE WILL HURD – TX23

I cannot remember a time in my life when our country was faced with a struggle like it is today. Coronavirus has changed everything from our work environment to errand running and family time. While a lot has changed, and, as this virus has waged a war on our economy and our health, it hasn’t hurt America’s spirit or her heart.

Our community, like so many around the country, has stepped up. We’ve seen neighbors helping one another by picking up groceries and goods. We’ve seen stores prioritize the elderly and our first responders by providing special hours exclusively for them. Complete strangers have bought groceries or gas for others simply because they know it is a tough time for many. Communities have even come together to help people celebrate life’s moments, like San Antonio’s Police Department driving by for a special birthday surprise for a young girl.

Individually people have stepped up in donating food, money and volunteer time. They’ve prioritized stores they rely on in order to provide a source of income for our small businesses.

There are also several folks who, while many have stayed home to work, have had to venture out to do their jobs. I’m talking about our healthcare workers, police and emergency professionals, grocery workers, food suppliers, truck drivers, cleaning staff and many others. These men and women are keeping our shelves stocked with food, cleaning items and more. They are taking care of our sick friends and neighbors. And, they are making sure our supply chains keep moving, and, as a result, our economy keeps going.

I am beyond appreciative for all these people are still working in our community. I know it comes as a sacrifice to many of them because they’re not only working while their families are home, but they’re often working more hours and shifts, and, when they come home, they have to be even more cautious about the virus to ensure it doesn’t spread to themselves or their loved ones.

Kindness also extends to our business. Toyota’s San Antonio plant has switched from producing cars to face masks, and their first batch is staying local for healthcare workers and first responders. Boeing’s San Antonio plant is manufacturing 3D printed face shields for distribution nationwide. Southstar Air Interiors in Uvalde made and donated face masks for the Uvalde Memorial Hospital. Distilleries and some breweries across Texas are making and distributing hand sanitizer to show the world that we are #StillStrongTX. Exxon donated \$100,000 to the West Texas Food Bank. That is just the tip of the iceberg on the generosity of our businesses.

We live in an amazing community in an incredible country. I am so appreciative for everyone who makes the 23rd District of Texas such a great place to live and represent. Every person has had to deal with this virus in a different way, and it has shown all of us that the strength of America’s resolve is immense, and that kindness never disappears even on a dark day.

Thank you to everyone for stepping up during this time to do what they can for others. I am proud of our community, our state and our country for looking out for one another especially in times of struggle. America’s spirit will always stand stronger than any foe, including coronavirus.

A former undercover CIA officer, entrepreneur and cybersecurity expert, Will Hurd is the U.S. Representative for the 23rd Congressional District of Texas. In Washington, he serves on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Intelligence Modernization and Readiness, and the House Committee on Appropriations, where he serves on the Subcommittees on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development.



Live & Local Radio
12:00noon Tejano Classics
1:00p-3:00p Conjunto Power Hours
3:00p-6:00p Tejano Sundays
6:00p-7:00p Tejano Showcase
7:00p-9:00p Tejano Gold Countdown

Join us for our Sunday Spanish Shows!

92.7FM or stream at WWW.BIGBENDRADIO.COM



THE MARFA NATIONAL BANK

24 Hour ATM Personal Banking
Loans Business Banking

301 S. Highland Ave. - Marfa
432-729-4344 or 877-729-4344 www.marfanb.com

Bringing together buyers and sellers of ranches and unique properties throughout Texas



Protecting Clients. Conserving the Land.

Offices in Fort Davis and Austin
432-426-2024 www.KingLandWater.com
info@KingLandWater.com



Specializing in Texas Ranch and Rural Properties

FAR Out West Properties, LLC Marfa, Texas
Cleat L. Stephens, Broker (432)249-0401
cleat@findaranch.com (833)Out-West
www.faroutwestproperties.com



We Will Come To You And Perform Services In Your Community. Compare & Save.

COMPLETE FUNERAL SERVICE
STARTING AT **\$5,950**
*Includes- All services, Metal Casket, Flowers, Cards, Book, Crucifix, Hearse & Transportation.
Direct Cremation \$1,950
Cremation With Service \$4,950
*Transfers to Mexico



El Paso Visit Us Online Odessa
915-532-2101 perchesfuneralhomes.com 432-272-0303



Office in downtown Marfa
111 W. Texas St.
432.295.2849



Lauren Meader Fowlkes, Realtor

Home Auto Commercial



Serving West Texas

Dan Platt, Jr.

903 West San Antonio Street • Marfa
432.729.4306 • dan@marfainsurance.com www.marfainsurance.com



Available on iTunes
ANDROID APP ON Google play

Arts & Community

DRAWING OF THE WEEK



“Pueblo Indian Pot”
Louise Culbertson
6th Grade
Marfa Elementary School

Marfa airport gets boost from federal coronavirus relief bill

By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO COUNTY — The Marfa Municipal Airport will receive \$30,000 in federal relief funds, a part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress on March 27. The relief bill included \$10 billion in funding to provide economic relief for U.S. airports affected by the prevention of, preparation for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The funding is intended to support continued operations at airports across the country, as well as provide some relief for lost revenue during the pandemic. According to the United States Department of Transportation, the funds can be used for airport capital expenditures, airport operating expenses, including payroll and utilities, and airport debt payments.

The neighboring Alpine-Casparis Municipal Airport in Alpine was awarded \$20,000 in the bill, but the Presidio Lely International Airport was left out of the federal relief package, because it has not yet received classification as a National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) airport. Presidio County Airport Director Chase Snodgrass said the county has applied but they have not heard back. And while they meet some of the criteria, there are certain aspects of the Presidio Lely Airport that could mean they aren’t qualified.

But Snodgrass suspects that most of the \$30,000 of funds will be used to make up for lost revenues

since traffic through Marfa Municipal Airport has slowed. Before the coronavirus, the airport was breaking its own records, bringing in funds faster than ever. Snodgrass said the airport sold more fuel every month of this fiscal year compared to last year.

Then, the coronavirus hit. “In March, the two airports sold 4,000 gallons, and the previous March we sold 10,000 gallons.”

Those months of high revenues will hopefully help offset budget shortfalls. The county made 76 percent of its budgeted income in six months, meaning the latter half of the year does not need to be as successful in order to keep them afloat.

“My proposal would be to put it in the airport revenue and use it to replace what was lost in fuel sales,” Snodgrass said. Airport revenue covers the costs of insurance, vehicles, salaries, electricity and smaller airport improvement projects that don’t qualify as capital improvement projects.

“We were terribly optimistic before this coronavirus nonsense,” the director said. “Now fuel sales have dropped off by 75 percent loss in volume by gallon over March and April.”

“I don’t know how long it will continue, April looks to be the same way,” he said. As for the \$30,000 infusion of federal money, Snodgrass said, “That \$30,000 just barely makes up for that. I hope we start recovering and people start flying again.”

“People are still flying in, but we’re not getting the big jets from New Jersey and California that we normally do,” he said.

Marfa nutrition program expands to seven days a week

MARFA — The Marfa Nutrition Center is now offering meals seven days per week. The expanded home-delivery program comes after more than \$20,000 in funding from Meals on Wheels America and the Permian Basin Area Foundation was awarded to the center over the last week.

For now, weekend meals will be shelf-stable options and delivered with Friday’s hot meal. However, city administration is working on a plan to utilize local restaurants to ensure senior citizens are getting hot meals every day of the week.

“We’re thrilled to be able to offer this new service,” said Community Services Director Mandy Roane. “The funds from our generous donors and the amazing staff and volunteers at the Nutrition Center are reasons we’re able to do this; I’m excited to get this off the ground and see how far we can take it.”

The new meal plan comes after COVID-19 concerns caused the in-house senior meal program to be temporarily closed and all seniors switched to home delivery. Nutrition Center Director Ed Cobos also worked to add almost 20 new clients to the list, bringing the total meals served daily to 107.

For more information about the senior nutrition program or any of the city’s other community services, contact Mandy Roane at librarydirector@cityofmarfa.com or call 432-729-4315.

Snap shot

Brothers Paul Stratakos of Alpine and Johnny Stratakos here from Austin occupied themselves during their house shut-in by building a ramp for BMX and skateboard tricks. Pictured are, from left to right, Johnny’s wife India, grandfather Don Snook, father Steve Stratakos, Paul on BMX bike and Johnny transferring from one skateboard to another on top of the ramp. Johnny is an accomplished BMX rider in Austin. Paul graduated from Alpine High School in 2019.

Helen Snook
Alpine, Texas



Photo by Helen Snook

THANK YOU

Last Friday AEP co-workers and friends paraded in front of my house to acknowledge my 45 year retirement from AEP.

Thank you to my family for putting it together, and to my co-workers and my community friends for participating. Thank you for the gifts and well wishes for my retirement. The parade was the SURPRISE of my life and we’ll celebrate later this summer!

- Eddie Pallarez -

WEST TEXAS EYE CARE

Dr. Hulon Pass - Optometrist
Dr. Joshua Pass - Optometrist



605 N. Main • Ft. Stockton, TX
432-336-3662
Mon - Fri 8:30-5:30
Saturdays by appointment only

Presented by:

YOUR LOGO HERE!
Contact us at
ads@bigbendsentinel.com
or more information!

Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

		7			6	8		
8				1	7		4	
	3		5					9
	8			2		4	6	
		3	8					1
1					5	9		
	4		2				7	
	6	1		3		5		
7					4			2

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

© 2020 King Features Synd., Inc.

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Resided
- 6 Things
- 11 Demosthenes or Cicero
- 12 Cancel out
- 14 Ubiquitous fastener
- 15 Early spring bloom
- 16 Feedbag tidbit
- 17 — the manger
- 19 Owns
- 20 Press
- 22 Ballet step
- 23 — song (cheaply)
- 24 Force measures
- 26 Decorum
- 28 Quite some time
- 30 Actor Stephen
- 31 Went sour
- 35 Contents of some trays
- 39 Responsibility
- 40 Court
- 42 Story
- 43 Donkey
- 44 Impostor
- 46 Sudden turn
- 47 Traditional usage
- 49 Love apple
- 51 Medical prioritization
- 52 Portuguese island group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
11						12					13
14						15					
16				17	18			19			
20			21	22				23			
24				25	26		27				
			28		29		30				
31	32	33			34		35		36	37	38
39					40		41		42		
43				44			45		46		
47			48				49		50		
51							52				
			53				54				

- 9 He-men
- 10 George
- 11 Egg-shaped
- 13 English composition
- 18 Leg, slangily
- 21 Must have
- 23 Banquet
- 25 Scale member
- 27 Part of the Justice Dept.
- 29 Cronkite, Rather, et al.
- 31 Work together
- 32 Doubtful
- 33 Neighbor of Georgia
- 34 Female deer
- 36 Risk
- 37 Cheers — (berate)
- 44 Comic strip possum
- 45 Nap
- 48 Body art, for short
- 50 Calendar abbr.

© 2020 King Features Synd., Inc.

Puzzle solutions for last week’s issue

— Weekly SUDOKU — — King Crossword —
Answer Answers

1	7	4	5	8	3	2	9	6
5	3	2	9	5	7	8	4	1
9	8	6	4	2	1	7	5	3
7	2	5	1	3	6	9	8	4
6	9	3	8	7	4	1	2	5
8	4	1	2	5	9	6	3	7
3	6	9	7	4	8	5	1	2
4	5	8	6	1	2	3	7	9
2	1	7	3	9	5	4	6	8

Solution time: 27 mins.

D	A	M	O	N	S	I	P	C	A	V
A	L	A	M	O	I	M	A	N	I	
B	E	D	I	M	M	A	D	O	N	N
I	T	A	L	I	C	R	E	I	N	
G	I	S	D	O	A	B	A	S	E	D
E	R	O	S	U	N	F	I	T		
M	A	N	T	I	S	A	T	O	M	I
E	L	E	C	T	R	A	G	U		
S	E	R	V	E	L	E	M	D	O	M
A	L	O	E	I	O	D	I	N	E	
M	A	D	N	E	S	S	D	E	I	C
O	N	E	O	L	E	S	A	R	G	E
A	D	O	N	E	T	T	R	A	I	L

Classifieds & public notices

How coronavirus spread across the state

By **STEPHEN PAULSEN**
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

TRI-COUNTY — Local officials across the Big Bend took proactive steps to slow the spread of COVID-19, closing bars and restaurants while the disease was still relatively far away. And by some measures, those efforts appear to be working.

Historical data from the 1918 Spanish flu and other outbreaks show that diseases often reach rural areas about two weeks after they hit nearby cities, according to Ekta Escovar, a local health authority in Brewster County and a member of the local COVID-19 task force. But more than a month after El Paso’s first case in early March, the Texas Department of State Health Services is still reporting no coronavirus cases in Presidio, Brewster or Jeff Davis counties.

Granted, the official zero-case count should be treated with skepticism; Texas has some of the lowest per capita coronavirus testing rates in the country. *The Big Bend Sentinel* reported on local testing issues as early as March.

And since many COVID-19 patients show mild or moderate symptoms and therefore don’t qualify for testing, doctors are now presuming local patients positive without testing them, as Marfa

Public Radio reported last week.

Because these presumptive positives rely on individual patient recommendations rather than medical tests, there is no official tally of these cases. In an interview, Dr. Escovar said there is “no way” to determine how many presumed positive cases there are in the tri-county.

Escovar called the testing protocols in Texas “really disappointing.”

“Texas as a whole hasn’t made a ton of progress on testing,” she said. She thinks the state is “slowing down” testing too soon.

Still, the number of local residents tested for the virus continues to slowly climb — and with it, no confirmed positive results. Forty tri-county residents have been tested, with no pending results and no confirmed cases, Ekta Escovar said at a Brewster County meeting on Wednesday. That’s up from 32 tests earlier this month.

And even without better testing, there are still clear signs that the coronavirus isn’t widespread in the area, said Katie Ray, a doctor at Preventive Care Health Services.

“We haven’t had a single severe case,” she said. “That does tell us the caseload in the region is low.”

That’s the good news. The bad news is that social distancing could be the norm for a while — and that

even with such measures, people in the Big Bend could become infected and die.

“We don’t expect to significantly decrease the number of people ever exposed [to coronavirus] in their lifetime,” Ray said of social-distancing efforts — predicting that a “huge percentage of the population will be exposed at one point or another.” Rather, the goal is simply to slow the spread of the coronavirus enough that our first severe cases don’t overwhelm the healthcare system.

Week by week and day by day, the coronavirus has inched closer to the Big Bend and become more of a reality for the people who live here.

What started as a far-off disease outbreak in Seattle and New York, and then in Houston and Dallas, has now spread to nearby cities like El Paso. And while bar closures and stay-at-home orders may seem extreme enough already, measures like those in Presidio — where city officials are now advising residents they “should” wear masks in public — could foreshadow stricter rules to come.

El Paso reported the first case in the region on March 13, a man in his 40s. Like many of the early cases around the country, officials said the infection was linked to travel — in his case, to California.

Crane County reported its first case on March 19 — the first case in the Permian Basin, and the first case in a rural county of Far West Texas. That patient is an employee at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin in Odessa, health officials said.

Midland and Odessa soon confirmed their first cases — with Midland’s Midland County reporting one on March 25, and Odessa’s Ector County reporting a day later, on March 26.

Less than a month later, those case counts have ballooned, according to data from the Texas Department of State Health Services. At press time on Wednesday, El Paso has confirmed over 500 cases, while Ector and Midland County have reported a total of over 120 combined.

Meanwhile, the disease has continued to spread into neighboring rural counties — bringing confirmed cases of the disease closer to the Big Bend. Crane County now has at least two cases, and Pecos County has at least five.

In Reeves County, meanwhile, the Pecos County Memorial Hospital now says it’s found at least three confirmed cases of the disease. But those numbers aren’t reflected in Texas state figures, which still show zero cases in Reeves County.

The hospital declined to comment on the discrepancy, but one explanation is likely: the patients split their time between Reeves and another county, and were instead added to the count elsewhere.

These local counts may continue to rise, but don’t expect much more information anytime soon. While low testing rates are preventing state officials from understanding the true scope of the coronavirus spread, sparsely-populated West Texas has another factor working against it: patient-privacy rules.

The Big Bend Regional Medical Center for weeks couldn’t release local testing figures, citing HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Since there are so few people in the tri-county — and even fewer people are getting

tested — hospital officials said they couldn’t release information without breaking privacy rules.

Those same rules are also limiting how much information is disclosed on confirmed COVID-19 cases — like in Reeves County, where hospital spokesperson Venetta Seals also cited HIPAA in declining to provide more information on local cases.

“We certainly don’t want a person or family or employer targeted,” Seals said of the Reeves County patients. “It could be unpleasant for them.” She acknowledged Midland, Odessa and El Paso were releasing more information on cases, including ages, genders and details on how people became infected. But she added: “You have a little more anonymity there.”

JOB

The City of Marfa is accepting applications for the position of Code Enforcement Officer.

An application and job description detailing duties and responsibilities can be obtained at the Marfa City Hall at 113 S Highland Ave. or online at cityofmarfa.com/employment.

Compensation will depend upon qualifications and experience. The position will remain open and posted on the City’s website until filled.

NOW HIRING Village Farms – Marfa

Maintenance - perform general building, plumbing, electrical and equipment repairs and preventative maintenance.

- 2 years maintenance experience required, to include high voltage electric, mechanical and plumbing (welding experience preferred)
- Strong time management, organizational & follow up skills
- Attention to detail
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to work at heights up to 20 feet
- Must be willing to work flexible hours, including weekends, evenings and holidays.

Full-time position offers great pay and competitive benefits package which includes health, vision, dental, life and STD insurance & 401k

Contact Information:

texashr@villagefarms.com or 432-729-3071 ext. 607.
Applications @ Village Farms Security Stations 3 miles N. Hwy 17, Marfa or 3 miles S. Hwy 17, Fort Davis



A TEXAS LEGACY
Established 1857

Cibolo Creek Ranch is seeking a Dining Room Manager, Cooks and Servers.

Experience in restaurants and the Hospitality industry is required.

If interested please send resume to obottois@cibolocreekranch.com



THURSDAY

8 AM - 1 PM
PLACE COFFEE
ORDERS AT:
THESENTINELMARFA.COM/SHOP

209 W EL PASO ST,
MARFA, TX 79843

TO-GO ONLY

Come worship with us



First United Methodist Church

Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid,
for I am your God;
I will strengthen you,
I will help you,
I will uphold you with my
victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

Sundays 9 am
Pastor Young Hoon Kang
110 W Washington Steet
Marfa 432-729-4534

MARFA AA and AL-ANON MEETINGS

Due to the coronavirus, meetings are now available online and by phone:

REMEMBER:

There are online meetings at intherooms.com
<https://www.sobergrid.com/>
Sober Grid is a mobile sober community.

AA Noon Saturday
<https://tinyurl.com/yd7opqwu>

JOIN ONLINE:
Go to zoom.us or download the app:

JOIN BY PHONE:
One tap mobile
+13462487799,,673978624# US

ACA Thursday's 5:30
<https://tinyurl.com/y7qyghga>

Dial by your location
+1 346 248 7799 US
+1 253 215 8782 US
+1 301 715 8592 US

Al Anon. Sunday 2:00
<https://tinyurl.com/yd78lsa6>

Noon: Meeting ID: 673 978 624
6PM: ID 459 281 670
AL-ANON SUNDAY 2PM: ID 706 301 103

AA Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 6PM
<https://tinyurl.com/y7uxgryc>

MARFA ISD BREAKFAST INFO DURING CLOSURE

9:00 am - 9:20 am

9:20 am - 9:40 am

9:40 am - 10:00 am

Marfa ISD provides free breakfast and lunch for all children 18 years and younger.
Please be on the look out for a Marfa vehicle for deliveries at the following locations and times:

Mando's Restaurant
Parking lot
or
Apartments on Spring and Columbia

Porter's Field
or
USDA on Ave D

Robertson Cafeteria will be open for drive-by pick up from 9:00-10:00

Blackwell Playground
or
Marfa Villa

presented by



Alexandra Rau, LCSW
Therapy for individuals and couples

www.alexandrarau.com
917.213.7449
alexandra@alexandrarau.com
Highland Avenue, Marfa



3CK LAND RESOURCES

REAL PROPERTY TITLE, CONSULTING,
SALES & ACQUISITION SERVICES

A Division of 3CK Enterprises, LLC

CLEAT L. STEPHENS, PRESIDENT
WEST TEXAS DIVISION MGR

3CKLAND.COM
(888)729-4424



Maisie Crow
Max Kabat
Abbie Perrault
Stephen Paulsen
Ariele Gentiles
Claire Lindsay-McGinn
Marisol Ely
Jaime Juarez
Maria Gerardo

Editor-in-Chief
Publisher
Managing Editor
Reporter
Copy Editor
Designer / Advertising
Office Manager
Distribution
Distribution

Office: 209 1/2 W. El Paso St., Marfa, Texas
Mail: Drawer P, Marfa, TX 79843
Telephone: 432.729.4342
Contact: editor@bigbendsentinel.com
Advertising Inquiries: ads@bigbendsentinel.com
www.bigbendsentinel.com

The Big Bend Sentinel (ISSN 1076-1004 USPS 055-800) is published weekly, on Thursdays, 50 times a year by West Texan Media Group LLC, Drawer P, Marfa, TX 79843. Annual subscription rates are \$50 in Presidio, Brewster & Jeff Davis counties, and \$60 elsewhere in Texas and the United States. Special rates apply abroad. Periodicals class postage paid at Marfa, Texas 79843.
Postmaster: Send address changes to Drawer P, Marfa, TX 79843.