

BURN BAN IN EFFECT, NO GROUND FIRES

by order of Presidio County

FACE COVERING ORDINANCE IN EFFECT

by order of the State of Texas

Presidio PD bust alleged Dollar General theft ring

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
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PRESIDIO — Authorities in Presidio city have arrested at least nine people for what they say was a conspiracy involving Dollar General employees to steal merchandise from both Dollar General locations in Presidio.

The arrests, which happened in late August, were confirmed by the Presidio Police Department in a news release last week. All defendants will likely face charges for theft of property, with some defendants facing felonies, the news release stated.

The Big Bend Sentinel has filed a records request seeking more information on the alleged crimes, but with charges still pending, records have not been turned over by press time.

On Monday, police said they planned to hand the case over to prosecutors by the end of the week. Those include Presidio County Attorney Rod Ponton, who will prosecute an unknown number of defendants facing misdemeanor theft charges, and local District Attorney Sandy Wilson, who prosecutes felonies. *Presidio International* has contacted both of their offices as well, seeking more information on the case.

The investigation into the alleged thefts started this summer, Presidio police stated in the release. On July 14, they got a call from a district manager of the local Dollar General Stores.

That employee was concerned some workers were “taking part [in] and facilitating the theft of merchandise,” police stated. After a “in-depth investigation,” police “confirmed what was already reported.”

Four store employees — Giselle Andrade, Romona Lujan, Zenaida Olivas and Daniel Perez — were arrested for alleged theft, according to police. Five other people — Clarissa Acosta, Marcela Galindo, Rogelio Lujan Jr., Julissa Serrano and Jose Torres — were also arrested, police stated.

The Big Bend Sentinel will provide more information as relevant records become available. At press time, none of the suspects had charges filed in Presidio County courts.

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State launches school coronavirus tracker as schools reopen, see cases

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
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MARFA — On Monday, as some Marfa students returned to in-person classes for the first time since March, Superintendent Oscar Agüero joined them on the bus ride to school. Riding on a school bus isn’t an unusual occurrence for Marfa school officials, Agüero said in a phone interview this week. “We try to do it several times a year.”

But as coronavirus continues, even school bus rides are different. “It was added support for the bus driver,” Agüero said of this week’s ride, plus “making sure kids knew where they were at.”

They opened all the windows, to make sure students would get adequate ventilation.

Bus seats are now assigned. “Normally we

don’t assign seats for kids,” Agüero said, “but that’s something we wanted to do this year.” Students at the earlier bus stops sit in the back of the bus, so that students won’t pass each other as they get on and off.

Like other schools across the state, families at Marfa ISD can choose whether to send their kids to in-person schooling. Around 35% of students at MISD are currently choosing to stay virtual, according to the latest figures from this week, with many of those parents citing health concerns. But other parents have to return to in-person jobs themselves — and even if they don’t, many teachers and parents also worry about a lack of social and educational stimuli with at-home learning.

Families who were sending their kids back

originally planned to do so last week — but then Dr. John Paul “J.P.” Schwartz, the local health authority for Presidio County, advised them to hold off. “Dr. Schwartz felt we were having a spike,” Agüero told *The Big Bend Sentinel* last week, citing those conversations.

Marfa ISD pushed back school another week, to this Monday — putting its schedule for in-person classes well behind others in the region. Many other school districts opened in early-to-mid-August, including Alpine ISD, Presidio ISD and El Paso ISD. Sul Ross State University also reopened around the same time, with students moving into dorms on August 21 and the first classes starting on August 24.

In some ways, Marfa ISD’s late start has

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City and TxDOT nix roundabout plans for intersection in front of courthouse

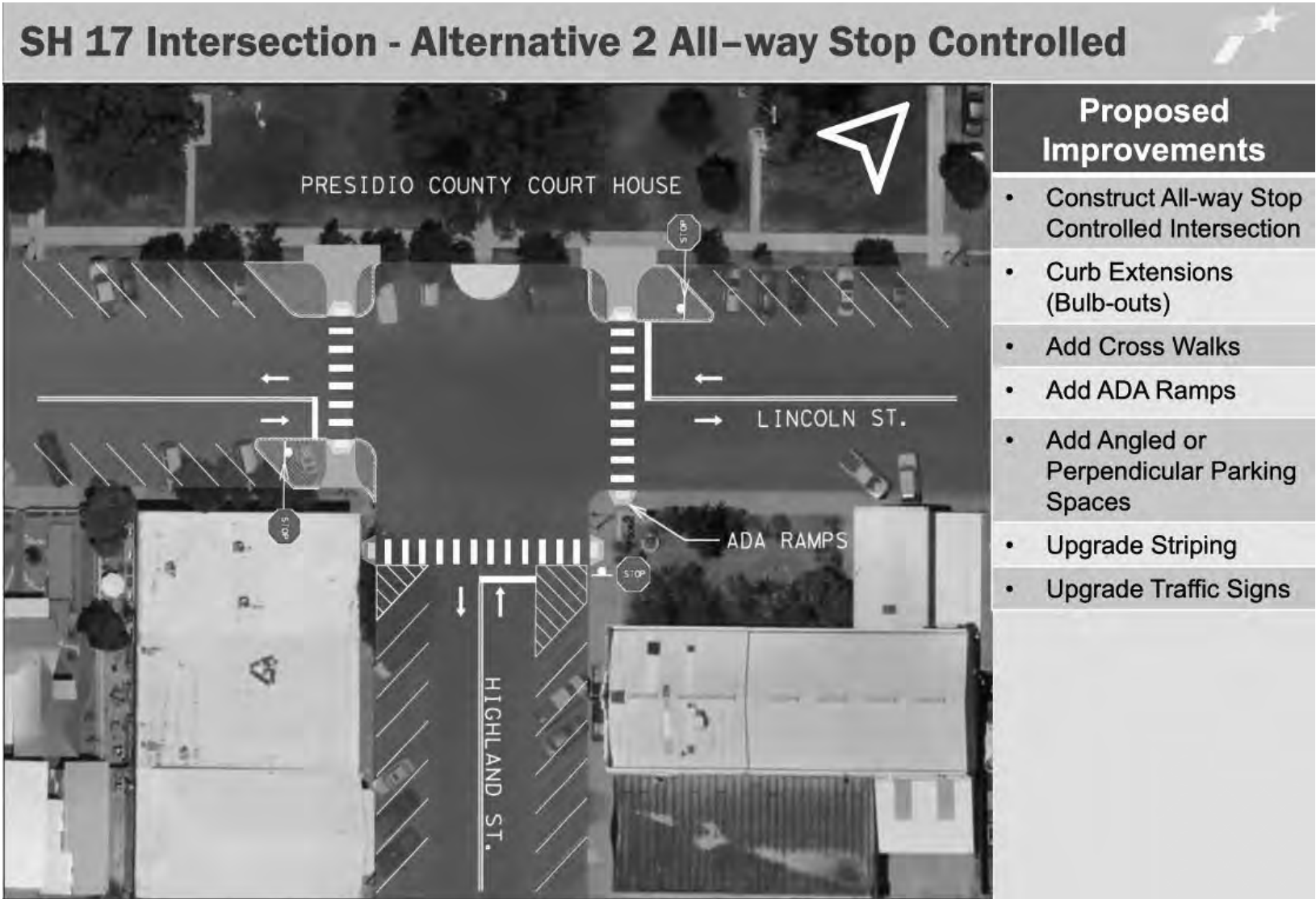


Image courtesy of TxDOT

A plan for the Lincoln Street and Highland Avenue intersection was presented by TxDOT and approved by council at a special city meeting last week. It changes the busy intersection into a three-way stop and adds pedestrian crosswalks, ADA compliant ramps and new concrete designed to make signs and pedestrians more visible to drivers.

By ABBIE PERRAULT
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MARFA — The intersection of Highland Avenue and Lincoln Street in front of the courthouse will receive an update this spring, with Marfa City Council rejecting a roundabout plan and giving a vote of support to the “Alternative 2” plan that would install stop signs at the three-way stop, among other new additions.

Changes to the intersection were proposed in response to safety concerns at the three-way intersection, which saw a higher incidence of crashes over a three-year period, including a few incapacitating injuries, though no deaths.

The dangers prompted the Texas Department of Transportation to study ways to improve that traffic situation.

At present, the intersection allows northbound traffic on Highland Avenue to have the right of way, while westbound traffic on Lincoln Street must yield and eastbound traffic on Lincoln must come to a full stop.

In practice, “I see more near misses than I’m comfortable with,” said Judge David Beebe, the Presidio County justice of the peace of Precinct 1 whose office at the courthouse looks out to the intersection. Beebe gave his opinion at city council last week at a special meeting to discuss the intersection. “I just want to advocate for the

three-way stop sign,” he said.

Even during the meeting, Marfa Mayor Manny Baeza said he had a confusing encounter with another vehicle at the intersection earlier that day. “Just today I was going eastbound and the vehicle in front of me took off before the yield sign,” he told council and TxDOT.

In early spring of this year, workers began surveying the intersection in front of the Presidio County Courthouse on behalf of TxDOT for a safety improvement project. The surveying gave way to design plans, with a top contender being the addition of a roundabout in front of the courthouse, which would allow traffic to flow

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Alpine mayor says city police can use county jail after all

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
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ALPINE — For months, officials in Alpine and at the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office have been at odds over how and when Alpine police can use its jail. But Alpine City Attorney Rod Ponton has resolved those issues with Sheriff Ronny Dodson, and Alpine police can once again use the Brewster County Jail “effective immediately,” Alpine Mayor Andy Ramos said Tuesday in a news release.

The contours of this dispute — which *The Big Bend Sentinel* reported on last week — are convoluted. Earlier this year, the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office reportedly stopped allowing the Alpine Police Department to book defendants in the county jail until those defendants had been through the magistration process, which is where officials brief defendants on their rights and charges and set their bail. According to Ponton, BCSO adopted this policy

because Sheriff Dodson and other officials were concerned Alpine police were arresting people without cause.

Some residents view the situation as politics, in large part because bodycam footage from Alpine police officer Will Drawe, who also happens to be running as a write-in sheriff’s candidate against Dodson, was publicized on social media in an election-season overshoot to this dispute. But the basic disagreement over jail admittance began as early as March — long before Drawe even entered the race.

At a city council meeting last week, Alpine city officials like City Manager Erik Zimmer and Councilmember Rick Stephens said the sheriff’s office was breaking a longstanding oral agreement with Alpine, under which Alpine gave the county land to build a jail on the condition that city police could book suspects there free-of-charge. Unlike the Marfa Police Department, Alpine PD reportedly has no holding cells of its own, where it could theoretically book a handful

of suspects prior to magistration.

At that same city council meeting, local District Attorney Sandy Wilson said those two factors — the lack of holding cells at APD, plus BCSO’s unwillingness to immediately book city suspects at the jail — were jeopardizing safety in Alpine. She cited a situation in which she said a suspect escaped from APD custody and was later recaptured because a police officer wasn’t able to immediately place that suspect in the county jail.

Wilson sided with city officials, arguing the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office already had an agreement to share its jail and that Sheriff Dodson had no legal basis to deny police suspects. At the meeting, she also suggested Dodson may have committed a crime, though she didn’t elaborate. Dodson was not present at the meeting to address those claims.

For now at least, this particular jail issue appears to be over. After the controversy hit

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New Jersey man ordered back to prison after Alpine threats, probation violations

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
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ALPINE — An appeals court in Philadelphia last week upheld a prison sentence for a New Jersey man who pleaded guilty to calling in bomb threats and threatening public figures in Alpine back in 2016.

The defendant in that case — Nicholas Kyle Martino, 21 — initially got probation for those charges, which involved him threatening Alpine institutions and a local politician almost immediately after the Alpine High School shooting in 2016. But just months after his sentencing for those offenses, the feds took him back to court because they said he was violating the terms of his release.

In court filings from July 2018, authorities outlined some of Martino’s alleged probation violations, of which there are at least 11 in total. First off, authorities said Martino was still using an unmonitored internet connection and a clandestine Google Voice number to continue harassing and threatening people.

Among other violations outlined in those court filings, authorities said Martino had been stalking a Wisconsin woman by calling her more than 100 times in a single day, hacking her Facebook account and trying to hack her phone. They also accused him of a range of other violations and crimes, including making threats and other inappropriate calls to police departments in Wisconsin and New Jersey.

The crimes that first landed Martino in hot water happened in the Big Bend back in September 2016. That month, tragedy struck Alpine after a shooting at Alpine High School.

On September 8, a 14-year-old student at the school shot and injured another student before killing herself. Multiple law enforcement agencies responded to the scene — and in the ensuing chaos, a Homeland Security agent was shot by a member of the U.S. Marshals Service and life-flighted to Odessa.

Further adding to the chaos, Martino, then 17, picked that same day to start calling and threatening officials and institutions in Alpine. As local law enforcement were trying to respond to the high school shooting, “some nut” called Brewster County sheriff’s dispatch to say that, “If you think what happened at the school is bad, wait till you see what happens at Sul Ross,” Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson told *Texas Monthly* after the shooting.

In that call, according to court filings, Martino told authorities he was heading to Sul Ross State University with a bomb and was “not afraid” to use it — forcing authorities to shift their attention to the university while they were already trying to deal with a school shooting.

The threats didn’t stop there, though. Later the same day, Martino called Big Bend Regional Medical Center and threatened to “kill everyone in the f---ing hospital,” according to court filings. That put authorities in the position of having to respond to multiple confirmed or possible crime scenes, including at Alpine High School, SRSU and BBRMC.

Days later, Martino also used Twitter to send more threats to Sul Ross State University and to Pete Gallego, who was then a former Congressman and is now also president of SRSU. In a first batch

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TX-23 candidate Gina Ortiz Jones and Mayor John Ferguson talk Presidio jobs and affordable healthcare

By ABBIE PERRAULT
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PRESIDIO — Last week, Presidio Mayor John Ferguson joined democratic candidate Gina Ortiz Jones for a virtual town hall on “fighting for rural Texas.” Ferguson shared some of his largest looming concerns and highest hopes for Presidio, and Jones discussed some of her own plans for the town should she win the election this November.

Healthcare was the first topic of discussion, and given the current public health crisis and a persistent lack of residents in the area being insured, it was a top concern for both politicians.

“One of the things that we’ve been concerned about is the lack of access to testing,” Ferguson told Jones. He said the community has to wait for the state to provide testing, and during a month-long lapse in testing this summer, “people were getting pretty nervous. When it did happen, we went from 20 to 50 cases overnight.”

“You’re getting a sense of how each community is being served,” she replied. “It’s unfortunate because our medical experts have said time and time again that the key to getting this under control is being able to test,” she said to Ferguson at the townhall.

“I think it gets to the heart of why we need new leaders. You can’t forget about communities just because it’s only 4,000 folks or because it’s far,” she said. “You’ve got to have folks at the state level and federal level asking why aren’t we making these investments.”

Jones decided to have an event focused on Presidio, despite it representing only a small portion of the wide ranging, 29-county district of TX-23, in part because, “We can’t leave Texans in any part of this district behind, whether you live in a small town like Presidio or a big city like San Antonio.” In an interview this week, Jones pointed to another recent shortage of state-led testing in the tri-county as an “unacceptable” condition in the area.

Jones linked a lack of healthcare



Presidio Mayor John Ferguson joined TX-23 candidate Gina Ortiz Jones for her 25th virtual town hall event that focused on Presidio and the challenges rural Texas communities are facing with healthcare, jobs and more.

access to the challenges of getting broadband to everyone in the district. “It’s a district that unfortunately does not have a strong enough, consistent enough broadband connection in many parts to fully realize things like telemedicine, telepsychiatry, telehealth.”

Businesses across the U.S. are coming up with new strategies, she said. With remote work being more acceptable and with many reconsidering where to headquarter their businesses, Jones feels that without broadband and healthcare access, places like Presidio will be overlooked by businesses as a great place to run their business.

“These are communities that have got the talent, but we’ve got to make sure we’re fighting for everyone and making the smart investments around the rail bridge, around eco tourism, or bringing broadband to Candelaria. You’re not going to tell me that in the richest country in the world, in a state with a \$1.8 trillion economy, that we can’t lay down fiber so that kids in Candelaria can have broadband,” Jones said.

Tapping into the economic opportunities of the Presidio Port of Entry is a close second to healthcare in terms of Presidio priorities for Jones. Ferguson shared that the vehicular bridge was seeing construction on the Mexican side, which has said it will be completed by the end of the year, opening up the flow of traffic and trade further.

“Mayor Ferguson and I don’t have a conversation without him reminding

me just how much he wants that port of entry to be ag certified,” Jones remarked with a laugh at the townhall. With unemployment in Presidio now at 14.2% according to the latest data from the Workforce Solutions Borderplex, new jobs in trade, agriculture and energy would be a big help, if they can be secured.

“When you look at a map, that port of entry is critical. It’s the gateway for the energy that comes out of the Permian Basin, but also all that ag from Fort Stockton, Pecos, Reeves County, all of that. That’s a great avenue to facilitate trade between the U.S. and Mexico and is a great source of revenue for Presidio,” she said.

Ferguson has officially endorsed Jones, saying she is someone “who is in touch with the needs of our community, and somebody we can depend upon if we need to call Washington – somebody I believe would have a sympathetic ear to what we’re trying to do.”

Jones is facing off against Republican Tony Gonzales for a shot at outgoing representative Will Hurd’s seat. To Ferguson, Jones’ visits to Presidio “mean something to us out here, because a lot of times we’re considered to be too far flung or traditionally vote democratic, so candidates are like ‘Oh, let’s focus somewhere else.’” The mayor said he welcomes a visit from Gonzales as well, noting he very well could be the next representative elected come November.

TX-23’s Republican candidate Gonzales has visited the tri-county, going to Marfa and Redford twice – in September 2019 and February 2020, a campaign representative said, adding that he is working on additional West Texas travel now. This week, he received the endorsement of Governor Greg Abbott.

As for Jones, she said her campaign has a Big Bend area virtual meet-and-greet on Saturday, October 10, and is planning more events between now and Election Day to mobilize voters throughout the tri-county region and across South and West Texas.

Intersection

(Continued from page 1)

continuously in all directions and essentially eliminate the opportunity for car accidents to be “t-bones.”

But the proposal did not find much support around town. “I was definitely against the roundabout – I think they take some getting used to,” said Kate Calder, the owner of Communitie, a retail business that sits on the block of Highland Avenue near the intersection. And while locals might eventually come around to the concept, she said, “I feel like with as many people from out of town as we have, it would be a disaster waiting to happen.”

On top of that, semi trucks carrying prefabricated houses and equipment go through the intersection frequently, Calder pointed out. TxDOT in the special meeting this week acknowledged the same issue.

“It would be difficult for these trucks (including fire trucks) to maneuver around the roundabout,” said Chris Weber, the TxDOT El Paso District Alpine Area engineer, who gave the presentation at the city meeting. While the roundabout option would be designed to be “traversable” or able to be run over, Weber said, “The daily crossing of these trucks over the central island would deteriorate it and would require frequent maintenance.”

Along with those concerns, Weber pointed to conversations with Mayor Baeza that led his team to conclude the three-way stop might be the better option to improve safety at the intersection, as it would introduce less driver uncertainty than the roundabout option. “The last thing we want to do is incite an equal or greater confusion,” Weber told the council.

In their return to the drawing board, TxDOT considered a wide variety of inputs to create the “Alternative 2” plan, weighing comments made during the US 67 corridor master plan study last year, comments about parking concerns from adjacent property owners and concerns regarding public learning curves for a roundabout and about the fire station having easy access.

Additionally, the state agency hoped to add pedestrian usability without compromising existing landscaping and the historical features of the courthouse.

The Alternative 2 adds a wide variety of features to the intersection. Striped crosswalks would be added and lead pedestrians to ADA compliant ramps. “Bulb-outs” would be introduced, which are additional protrusions from the sidewalk that provide a few benefits: pedestrians would have a shorter distance to travel when crossing traffic on the wide streets of Marfa.

Pedestrians would also be able to get out ahead of parked cars while still standing on the corner, which

improves sight lines for cars to see pedestrians. The stop sign posts would be placed on these bulb outs, bringing signage closer to the driver’s line of sight — currently, the stop sign at the intersection can be obscured by overgrown trees or large vehicles parked in front of it.

Parking would be eliminated in front of the “gateway” into the courthouse, since backing into an intersection is dangerous, but other parking in front of the courthouse would receive new striping. Currently, drivers park both straight and angled, which decreases available parking space.

Weber also said the plan would take off the top 2 inches of pavement that is there and replace it with a durable hot mix and upgrade the striping.

Finally, the mayor has requested dark-sky compliant lighting be added at the intersection, so that during dark hours, pedestrians could see the curbs and drivers could see pedestrians.

“Thank y’all so much for listening to what everybody had to say with our dislike of the roundabout,” City Attorney Teresa Todd told TxDOT officials in attendance. “Alternative number two looks like it will do a lot of good and won’t disturb the historical entrance to the courthouse.”

Councilmember Irma Salgado endorsed Alternative 2, telling Weber she liked it just as presented. While Councilmember Buck Johnston felt hesitance about causing cars to stack up at the Highland Avenue stop sign and wanted more community input, the city moved forward on a vote, approving it unanimously, with Councilmember Yoseff Ben-Yehuda absent.

“I’m all for striping, visibility and ramps for wheelchairs,” Calder said of the newly selected plan, hoping it would get done quickly. The business owner was concerned that construction might inhibit foot traffic around Highland businesses during the usually lucrative spring break season, but hoped local stores could “get past COVID, get past this and come out on the other side.”

While the project is funded through the Highway Safety Improvement Program for \$120,000, any money not used will return to a pool of funds to be used elsewhere in the community. According to TxDOT, the Alternative 2 plan that was selected is estimated to cost \$47,141.00 to implement, and the project is scheduled to “let” in February 2021, after environmental documents are updated to reflect Alternative 2 plans and after TxDOT coordinates with the Presidio County Historical Commission.

The earliest start of construction would be in mid-March 2021, according to Weber who said the project is expected to take approximately two months to complete.

Alpine Jail

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a boiling point at last week’s city council meeting, Ponton and Sheriff Dodson arranged a meeting of their own. And ultimately, they “resolved the issue,” Mayor Ramos stated in his news release.

With the release, Ramos also included a memo from Ponton to city officials, in which Ponton confirms these details.

In a short memo of his own, Ponton said he had an “amiable meeting” with Sheriff Dodson to discuss the problems on Monday. At that meeting, Ponton wrote, Sheriff Dodson agreed the jail would “accept arrested persons from the Alpine Police Department.”

Sheriff Dodson did not respond to requests for comment by press time on the policy reversal. But despite months of deadlock, Ponton said in a phone interview on Tuesday that the issue had been easy for him to resolve.

“I picked up the phone and called him, and then I sat

down with him,” Ponton said. “It was pretty simple.”

As Mayor Ramos sees it, the issue was one of poor communication. Previously, those at both the city and the sheriff’s department have complained that the other side was being obstinate and wasn’t adequately communicating. But after the city council meeting, Ramos said he reached out to Sheriff Dodson to arrange a visit. As the mayor, “the buck stops with me,” he said.

Last Friday, Mayor Ramos and another city official, Councilmember Lucy Escovedo, went to tour the jail. Ramos said the meet-up was cordial, and it helped paved the way for Ponton’s meeting this week.

Ramos acknowledges the controversy has taken on a political dimension. But Ramos says he just wanted to make sure law-enforcement could work well together and keep Alpine safe.

“I want the truth,” Ramos said. “I want to keep our citizens safe. I don’t want to be playing games.”

“Let’s get it resolved, and let’s move on,” he added. “Let’s stop the finger-pointing.”

MARFA PRAYER MARCH

Saturday, September 26, 2020

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.



You and your family are cordially invited to join together and pray for our nation. The guidelines for COVID-19 are being observed at this event. We know that God answers prayer. Let’s pray that God will turn this nation back to Him. Each stop along the way will have a specific prayer focus.

ALL GATHER ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE COURTHOUSE TO BEGIN PREPARING FOR THE MARCH at NOON.

~

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Please no political attire - Please wear masks as suggested by Gov. Abbott and observe social distancing!



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School tracker

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been a benefit. More time allowed school officials to continue fine-tuning school safety measures, which they regularly do at board meetings. It gave teachers, parents and students a chance to prepare themselves.

But the extra time also let Marfans observe how reopening was going at other schools — and in that respect, the delay has been a little disconcerting. After all, in both Alpine and Presidio, cases at schools have already prompted brief closures.

It happened in Presidio first, with the school closing August 19 after learning a high school student who tested positive had been present the day before. They reopened on August 24 after disinfecting the campus.

On Monday, Alpine ISD released a statement informing parents that students at Alpine High School could have been exposed to someone with coronavirus and that they were switching the campus to remote learning for 14 days. Then, on Tuesday, they said they'd identified another on-campus case from before classes went virtual, bringing the count of school-related cases to two.

“Every situation is unique when a positive case is identified,” Alpine ISD Superintendent Rebecca “Becky” McCutchen said in an email on Tuesday. State health officials are contact tracing the cases, she said.

At Sul Ross State University, 29 students were considered active cases at press time — a small proportion of the 1,496 students that Sul Ross gives on its campus coronavirus tracker. But that number of positives has steadily crept up, and the school is currently reporting 35 students in isolation — almost half its current isolation capacity of 80.

In a statement to *The Big Bend Sentinel*, the university said it was testing “at least twice a week” and so far had tested more than 1,000 students, faculty and staff. Students with positive results are moved into quarantine, the school said, as is anyone who had direct contact with positive people.

Then, there's the view across the state in Texas. The Texas Education Agency, which oversees education in Texas and is requiring public schools to reopen, has partnered with the Texas Department of State Health Services to launch a coronavirus tracker for those schools. The purpose, a TEA spokesperson said, is to “maintain a level of transparency between school systems and their communities” and to people (including state officials) making “future decisions on how to keep school populations healthy while supporting students’ educational needs.”

So far, that data — which goes through the week ending on September 13 — doesn't show huge numbers of cases coming from schools. Of the more than 1,000,000 Texas students who have returned to in-person public school classes, around 2,300 — or about 0.2 percent — have been confirmed to have coronavirus. The figures are similar for teachers, with around 2,200 school-staff members, or closer to 0.3 percent, confirmed to have the virus out of a total staff count of around 800,000, some of whom have likely not returned to school. (Unlike its student tracker, which only includes students who have already returned to in-person classes, the TEA's staff tracker includes the total number of staff.)

But with some districts like Marfa ISD just starting in-person classes — and with other major districts like Houston ISD not returning to face-to-face instruction for weeks — that number will likely continue to climb. TEA says they plan to release district-level data through their tracker, though at press time, they haven't done so yet. That data could show important trends, like whether these cases are coming from across the state or from just a few badly hit districts.

Still, with coronavirus spreading across Texas, there are no easy answers. The state has added 22,285 cases in the past week. Health experts have warned that schools could see outbreaks, especially if numbers start to climb in the broader community — but education experts have also warned about the need for students to see friends and teachers again.

At a school board meeting this week, both Aguero and Luane Porter, a counselor, outlined some of the emotional challenges facing students and teachers. Aguero told teachers to be on the lookout for signs of abuse in students. After all, he pointed out, some kids had likely been stuck in abusive home situations since March, when schools in Texas first closed.

Porter, meanwhile, asked that teachers check in on each other during what's been a stressful and scary transition back to work for some. “Some teachers come back and are completely fine,” she said. But others, she said, might be struggling with self-care.

Aguero is trying to stay optimistic as students, including his own two kids, return to school. Students, he says, are taking health measures like mask-requirements seriously — a fact he attributes to a generally serious approach to coronavirus across Marfa.

“They're doing it at Porter's,” he said of students wearing masks. “They're doing it at restaurants. All these protocols are just flowing into the school.”

At the same time, Aguero is trying to be a realist. And watching the situation at other school districts and across Texas, he and other administrators have concluded that Marfa ISD will almost certainly be forced to close due to cases, just like has happened in Alpine and Presidio. “It's not if,” he said, “it's when.”

The school has tried to do as much as it can for student safety — including releasing a video last week welcoming kids back and outlining protocols, which students watched from at-home classes last week. But Aguero says there's plenty of other safety factors that he and other administrators can't control. “The problem is bigger than just what happens in the school.”

Testing languishes in tri-county as other regions struggle

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
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TRI-COUNTY — The last public testing site in the region was in Alpine on August 28, when the Texas Division of Emergency Management brought four days of back-to-back testing to the tri-county. But despite the fact that case counts have crept up and that schools across the region have now reopened, almost a month later there still haven't been any new testing sites announced.

At an Alpine City Council meeting last week, a brief exchange between public officials helped explain why. Ekta Escovar, the local health authority for Brewster County, was giving her regular updates on coronavirus in the region before hopping off to join a call with the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Before she left, Erik Zimmer, city manager for Alpine, asked Escovar if she could try to get more testing out to the region. Escovar said she'd try but said that state officials were preoccupied elsewhere.

“There are a lot of counties that are struggling a little bit more than we are,” she said. Still, she acknowledged the tri-county was a rural area without “a lot of that [healthcare] infrastructure built-in if mobile testing doesn't come through.”

Reached for comment this week, TDEM did not respond to requests for comment on what specific criteria, if any, it uses to determine which Texas towns and counties get testing. Escovar likewise didn't respond to a request for comment — though in her public presentations, she typically uses a number of criteria, from ICU capacity to active case counts, to evaluate how well or poorly the region is doing.

But regardless of how state officials decide who gets state-run testing sites, Escovar's basic premise is true: While the tri-county's climbing case counts might be worrying to residents, the region is statistically doing better than elsewhere in the state.

South Texas, one of the worst-hit regions in the United States, is still struggling to contain an outbreak that started this summer and has

overwhelmed hospitals in cities like Brownsville and Laredo. Major metropolitan areas are also still struggling, with Houston's Harris County adding more than 6,000 cases since press time last week.

According to data aggregated by *The New York Times*, Presidio, Brewster and Jeff Davis counties are nowhere near the worst-hit parts of the state. That dubious distinction goes to Edwards County near San Antonio, where cases almost doubled over the weekend, going from 34 to 67. Those numbers might sound small until one realizes Edwards County has less than 2,000 people — meaning that around one in every 50 people there is confirmed to have coronavirus, a rate similar to the outbreak in Alpine in late June and early July.

But one need not travel across the state to find worse-hit areas: nearby Culberson County, where Van Horn sits, is currently the 16th-worst county in Texas in terms of new per-capita cases, according to the data. Given those numbers — and given the fact that local officials consistently describe Texas as overwhelmed by everything from testing to contact tracing — it's little wonder that no new testing sites have shown up in the area.

TDEM, for its part, has said for months that it is providing as much testing as it can. At the same time, the agency has encouraged local governments to fill in the gaps by setting up their own testing sites.

The agency has been “encouraging jurisdictions across the state to utilize their CARES Act funding to test in their communities,” a TDEM representative told *The Big Bend Sentinel* earlier this month — and in the Big Bend, there's signs that could be happening.

In Brewster County, Emergency Management Coordinator Stephanie Elmore has been recruiting volunteers and requesting tests with the goal of setting up county-run testing. And in Marfa, city officials are unveiling a program for local contact tracing — another area where Texas state officials were initially taking charge, but where local officials grew increasingly frustrated with delays, uncontacted patients and

other problems.

Both of those initiatives, though, have yet to begin. And while county-run testing might have its benefits — county officials, for example, could have more say over which towns get tested — it's unclear if the region can handle testing all on its own.

The TDEM-run testing sites often drew hundreds of people — including the last site in Presidio, where officials were able to test around 600 residents in the span of two days. By contrast, fewer than 500 tests have been conducted across the entire tri-county in the last week, according to daily updates posted online by officials in Brewster County — not a bad number, but almost certainly not enough to capture new cases.

Worse, much of that testing has come from institutions that limit who can get tested, including Sul Ross State University (which only tests employees and students) and Big Bend Regional Medical Center (which requires a doctor's note). That's a big change from just a month ago, when any resident could get a free coronavirus test regardless of symptoms.

In an interview this week, Brewster County EMC Elmore said she was getting ready to open Brewster County's first public and locally run testing site, which she plans to first bring to Big Bend National Park before visiting other far-flung communities like Marathon. After weeks of recruiting volunteers and making plans, Elmore said she just needed one more training session through the testing company Curative.

Still, Elmore was blunt that without more state-run testing sites, she and other officials wouldn't be able to reach as many people in the region. She'd only found ten volunteers, compared to state-run testing sites, which typically have over dozen workers at a single site. And unlike the sites she's organizing, which would rely on unpaid volunteers with other time commitments, TDEM testing sites have paid workers that can stick around all day

“The state resources are very important,” Elmore added. “I would really like to get some more testing out here.”

Alpine threats

(Continued from page 1)

of tweets, he said he wanted to kill Gallego and was “sending a 20mm pipe bomb” to an on-campus P.O. Box. He tagged both Gallego and the United States Postal Service in those tweets.

In another tweet later that day, he said he was “getting an AR15 and AK47” with the intent of killing Gallego. “I will kill @PeteGallego and his family,” Martino said in that tweet, according to court records. Authorities arrested him at his New Jersey home in December.

What reason did Martino, then a teenager living in New Jersey, have to terrorize residents in the Big Bend region? No reason in particular, prosecutors argued in court filings.

Instead, they pointed out that Martino had started harassing local law enforcement officials less than an hour after the Alpine shooting made national news. He was intentionally trying to sow chaos, they argued.

Martino “likely decided to call the local sheriff after seeing information about the shooting and likely decided to call the hospital when he saw that a shooting victim was taken there,” *The Big Bend Sentinel* reported in 2017, citing statements from the U.S. attorney's office. And as for Gallego, authorities believe he earned Martino's ire after Gallego “spoke on television describing whoever was making the threats as mentally ill.”

In the years and months since, Martino's case has seen a number of twists and turns. In February 2017, Martino — then still 17 — pleaded guilty as an adult to four felony counts of making interstate threats. In April, a federal judge in Midland released him with five years' probation and credit for time served.

But then Martino's alleged probation violations started — and within months after his trial, authorities started trying to get him back in prison.

That case, which has been going on since at least October 2017, has also seen its own twists. This summer, for example, Martino asked for new lawyers, then asked to represent himself.

But judges threw out those requests — and last week, with the case having made it all the way to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, Martino has mostly exhausted his legal options (except for the Supreme Court, which is unlikely to hear his case). The court upheld Martino's sentence of three years in prison and two years of supervised release, though at press time it was not immediately clear how much of that sentence Martino has already served. Now 21, he's currently incarcerated at a federal prison in New Jersey, according to records from the Bureau of Prisons.

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UTEP partnership receives federal grant to combat opioid abuse in West Texas counties

FAR WEST TEXAS — The University of Texas at El Paso’s Minority AIDS Research Center (MARC) is the subrecipient of a \$1 million implementation grant to target substance use disorders and opioid use disorders in five rural counties along the Texas-Mexico border.

UTEP’s MARC is one of four regional consortium partners led by Aliviane Inc., the principal recipient of the three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Rural Communities Opioid Response Program. Other partners include the Texas State Department of Health Services Office of Border Public Health, and Presidio County Health Services.

The consortium will implement prevention, treatment and recovery services for substance use disorders, including opioid use disorders, in Texas Public Health Service Region 10, which includes Hudspeth, Culberson, Presidio, Brewster and Jeff Davis counties.

“During the planning phase of this grant, our consortium successfully assessed the need for prevention, treatment and recovery services for people with substance and opioid abuse disorders and developed a strategic and workforce development plan for these five Texas rural counties,” said Thenral Mangadu, M.D., Ph.D., UTEP associate professor of public health sciences and MARC’s executive director. “With the support from HRSA’s Rural Communities Opioid Response Program, our consortium will be the main interdisciplinary service provider for substance use disorders and opioid use disorders in the region.”

According to Mangadu, approximately 24,609 residents, mostly Mexican American, live in the five West Texas rural counties. The area has been designated a federal Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for its lack of providers. About 37% of residents are uninsured, and 22% live along the poverty line.

“The rural counties of Hudspeth, Culberson, Presidio, Brewster and Jeff Davis have limited to no access to life-saving substance use disorder (SUD) or opioid use disorder (OUD) prevention and treatment services,”

said Ivonne Tapia, Aliviane Inc. chief executive officer. Through the consortium, partners will be able to leverage resources and expand access to SUD/OUD prevention, treatment, recovery support services, a trained workforce and the creation of a sustainability plan aimed at reducing cost of care for individuals living in the targeted rural counties, Tapia said.

Adrian Billings, M.D., Ph.D., chief medical officer of Preventative Care Health Services, also known as Presidio County Health Services, said that part of the isolation of practicing in a Health Professional Shortage Area is the absence of resources for patients and physicians. He said he hopes that this collaboration will increase resources for his patients and the physicians who are caring for this vulnerable patient population.

“Our clinic is the only clinic between El Paso, Del Rio and Midland-Odessa offering buprenorphine treatment for opioid dependent patients,” Billings said. “Our patients do not currently have access to substance abuse counselors or local narcotics anonymous meetings to augment their buprenorphine prescription treatment.”

Funds will be used to implement workforce, service delivery and sustainability plans that focus on prevention, treatment and recovery with service providers in all five counties. Plans also will address the risk of HIV, hepatitis C virus and mental health disparities associated with substance use disorders and opioid use disorders.

Adriana Corona Luevanos, Office of Border Public Health (OBPH) program manager, said the OBPH will help the consortium implement all core project activities, including providing feedback on detailed assessment and analysis, strategic planning, and workforce and sustainability plan development.

In August 2020, HRSA, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded over \$101 million to 116 organizations in 42 states and the District of Columbia to combat substance use disorders and opioid use disorders. Aliviane was one of three Texas organizations to receive the award.

SRSU receives federal grant to support Hispanic and underrepresented students

ALPINE – It was announced earlier this month that Sul Ross State University was on the receiving end of a federal grant aimed at further empowering institutions who support Hispanic and underrepresented students.

Funding comes from the U.S. Department of Education’s Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program. As U.S. Senator John Cornyn says in his statement, “In Texas, more than one in three individuals identify as Hispanic, and I am proud to support Hispanic-Serving Institutions and their contributions to our state’s growing Hispanic community. Quality education and diverse environments benefit everyone, and especially during these tough times I applaud Sul Ross State University for its work to secure this grant to better serve its students.”

“In Texas, more than one in three individuals identify as Hispanic, and I am proud to support Hispanic-Serving Institutions and their contributions to our state’s growing Hispanic community. Quality education and diverse environments benefit everyone, and especially during these tough times I applaud Sul Ross State University for its work to secure this grant to better serve its students.”

The grant, which will be in effect over the course of five years, focuses on two main objectives: maximizing retention of students and advancing faculty development.

Both are key areas of focus for the new administration. Addressing them effectively has now been expedited with this injection of federal aid. It will provide the university the ability to improve student orientation, create engagement opportunities for students in their sophomore through senior years, improve academic advising programs to ensure course selection efficiency,

and implement writing centers in the satellite campuses to build skills necessary to succeed in writing-intensive upper level coursework.

Sul Ross is honored to be recognized for its focus and diligence and those faculty and staff who endeavor to provide for our underrepresented students. Furthermore, we are excited to continue improving our ability to do so with the help of this grant.



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The Rio Grande Area Agency on Aging serves persons 60 years of age and older and their families that reside in El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, Brewster and Presidio Counties.

It is funded by the Older Americans Act through the Texas Health and Human Services Commission

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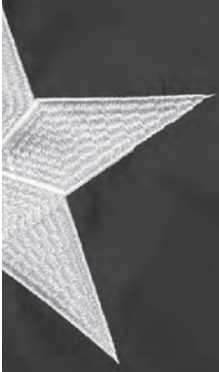
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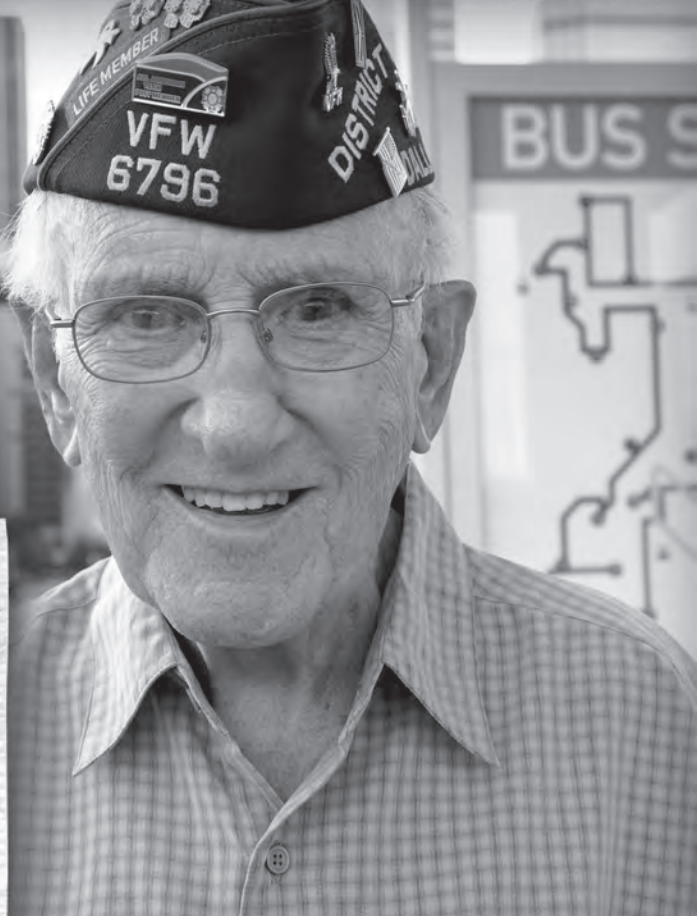


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Opinions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

We live in a democracy, right? That’s what I was taught in school ages ago, and I assume it is still taught. One common definition of democracy is: government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents.

When we elect our “agents,” they typically claim to represent the views or wishes of the majority of those who elected them. But what if they do not represent those wishes or views? What about elected officials who seem to have the attitude that, “You were stupid enough to elect me, so you should be stupid enough to go along with whatever I do”? While we wait for the next election in order to vote these people out of office (not done often enough, unfortunately), can we say we still live in a democracy, even as those elected do not follow the views or wishes of their constituents?

So until the time comes that our elected “agents” actually represent the views of those who elected them, I urge all teachers from kindergarten on up, as well as all pundits and truly patriotic politicians, to refrain from claiming that the United States of America is a democracy. When the will of the people is so blatantly ignored (think DACA, the Affordable Care Act, The Wall, action on the coronavirus pandemic), it seems to me we no longer satisfy that definition.

Republicans in the Senate represent about 15 million fewer Americans than Democrats, yet they have absolute control over the legislative process. For example, in 2016, the leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell, blatantly defied our Constitution by not allowing President Obama’s Supreme Court nominee senate hearings as defined in the Constitution and established norms. Now, the same McConnell is again flaunting those same democratic norms by promising to ram a Supreme Court nominee of President Trump’s through the senate.

To call Mconnell’s actions hypocrisy would be kind. Sleazy, undemocratic, anti-American and blinded by power would all be more appropriate. And I would bet next year’s Social Security checks that neither Texas senator will object in any way. In fact, Ted Cruz has already endorsed the action which, of course, makes him equally as sleazy as McConnell, and John Cornyn’s silence, as usual, is deafening.

Democrats will do everything they can to prevent this abuse of power. In the event they fail and another Trump nominee is installed on the Supreme Court, then should Joe Biden win the election and Democrats gain control of the Senate, as appears likely, Democrats absolutely must counter the abuse by: adding at least two justices to the Supreme Court and/or vote for statehood for Washington, D.C. and/or Puerto Rico.

Most of us would love to have the democracy we once had, with political differences hammered out through compromise, with civility and mutual respect regardless of ideology and with the good of the country once again more important than the power of the party. But with Trump, McConnell and Trump’s Republican co-conspirators in the Senate that is not possible, which means democracy, as we once knew it, is also not possible.

I’m not sure what we can call America under these conditions, but let’s quit pretending “democracy” is a valid term.

Fred Gossien
Terlingua

...

Dear Editor,

RBG

The future of our democracy hinged upon a cancer-ridden jurist not dying to prevent Trump ramming a late-term SCOTUS nomination down the nation’s throat! Until the new Congress was seated, that was a pretty tenuous thread.

RBG’s body wasn’t yet cold and GOP vultures were already circling. Senator Lindsay Graham said that after Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh’s confirmation, “the rules have changed ...” Who changed them?

In 2010, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell designed to make Obama a one-term president by blocking any legislation proposed, even if previously for it.

Obama’s nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, was more of the same, not receiving a Senate hearing even 11 months before the end of Obama’s presidency.

Disgraced Steve Bannon was asked about his side: “The difference is that we take the head-shot.” The radical right has played hardball while Dems played Nerf ball! We’re too nice! That doesn’t mean becoming agent provocateurs or taking up firearms like white supremacist militias. Violence isn’t condoned.

RBG’s life provides a tutorial for these times. We’re called upon to do the work required to assure the survival of our republic. Unity of purpose provides strength and resolve.

Americans are better than Trumpism’s evil. Corruption of mind, body-politic and spirit shall not prevail. Goodness, compassion and “rule of law-due process” shall return to the land.

Rev. Barry Abraham Zavah
Alpine

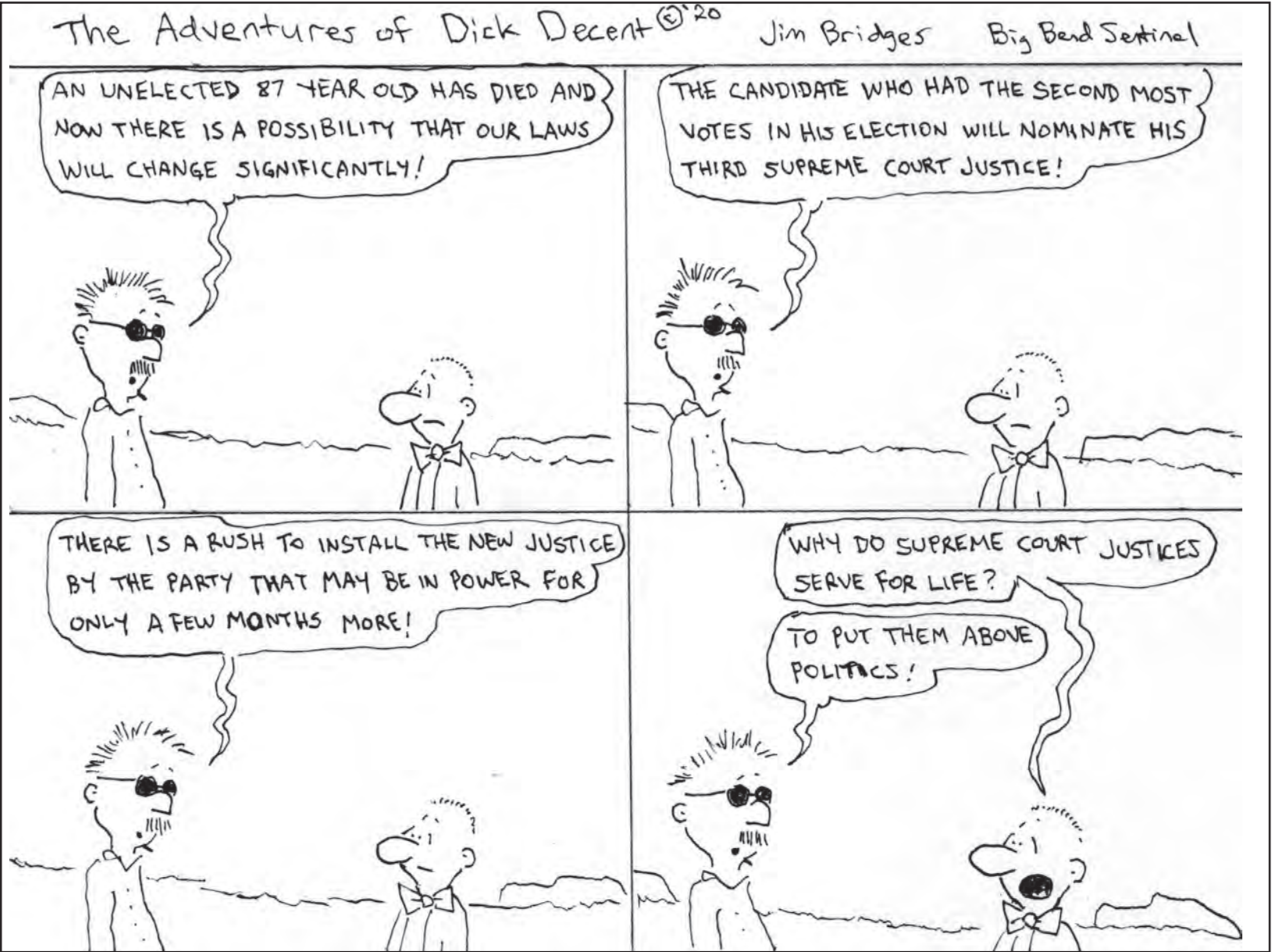
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- Your letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. While opinions of all kinds are welcome, when it comes to claims of fact, we strive to only publish what is verifiable.
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- We may reach out to ask questions and verify the identity of the sender. We do not run letters anonymously unless the sender is privately identified and has a reasonable claim to anonymity.

We reserve the right to hold or refrain from publishing a letter for any reason and we thank you for always sharing your letters with us.

The Big Bend Sentinel Editorial Staff



HURD ON THE HILL

Harnessing American innovation for the future

By U.S. Representative Will Hurd – TX23

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform the way we work, learn, live and defend the nation, but our leadership in this technology remains uncertain. With reports by top officials warning that “the United States is in danger of losing its global leadership in AI and its innovation edge,” we should protect our national security and invest in the research and development of AI across our innovation ecosystem. As a former undercover CIA officer, I learned that understanding the motivations of our adversaries is critical to our ability to contain and counteract them. We know Russia and China are investing in AI — we must do more.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is one of our biggest threats in the AI space, and they are willing to take tremendous steps — including conducting illegal actions on American soil, such as stealing intellectual property, falsifying grant applications and hiding Chinese citizens’ links to the People’s Liberation Army. A 2019 report by the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission also found the CCP is positioning Chinese firms to become the next AI leaders through “government intervention, market structure and construction of AI enabling infrastructure.” America can stop this, but we must act now by implementing a national AI Strategy.

That’s why I’m proud to have partnered with my colleague, Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.) to introduce a resolution that calls for the creation of this strategy. The pillars we believe it must be built on — workforce, national security, research and development and ethics — are the result of years of working together on successful, bi-partisan technology policies. I firmly believe our framework would allow America to take advantage of technology in a responsible and effective way that reflects our values as a

nation, allows American workers to succeed, protects our national security and provides the opportunity for the next great innovations to be created on American soil.

The first pillar of our resolution is workforce. Since AI will reshape the way we work, the federal government must help prepare American workers and students for the jobs of tomorrow by equipping them with the knowledge to build or work with AI systems.

National security is the second pillar because AI will change the way we defend America, generate intelligence and fight wars. Our resolution outlines how Congress should invest research dollars into human-machine teaming, trustworthiness and ethics. Our military and intelligence community should trust their AI systems. And all Americans should trust that America, not the CCP or Russia, has the most effective AI systems in the world.

The third pillar is R&D, because Americans and Congress know the importance of investing in the future. During the origins of the internet and during the digital revolution, American R&D expenditures made a huge difference on the development of new tech, but these investments have stagnated. Meanwhile, China’s has quadrupled. And we have other tools for accelerating R&D besides spending. Computing resources and data are essential ingredients for AI research. The federal government should expand access to existing supercomputing resources for AI researchers and build on the Open Government Data Act to release more datasets for public use.

Ethics is our fourth pillar, and it is pivotal to ensuring American values are reflected in the next big driver of America’s economy. Congress already has a natural entry-point for promoting the ethical use of AI through its oversight function. Each Congressional committee should review the existing regulations in their jurisdiction and include AI policy in their oversight agendas. This is the best way to protect the American public, take advantage of AI and ensure accountability.

Technology and AI are the future, and we must take advantage of it before it takes advantage of us. If we want America to remain the global leader, we must take AI seriously by promoting its benefits and creating limits where appropriate. I hope my colleagues in Congress recognize this importance and join Congresswoman Kelly and me in passing this key resolution. We look forward to making the possibility of American AI leadership a reality.

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COFFEE WITH FRIENDS

Interview with Steve Wilcox

By ANETT GABRIEL

For her column this month, Anett Gabriel sat down with Marfa resident Steve Wilcox over coffee to talk about life after retirement. In her newly titled column, “Coffee with Friends,” Gabriel interviews local artists, business owners, friends and neighbors.

Anett Gabriel: What’s your day like?

Steve Wilcox: It’s really good. I woke up with a smile on my face, because I get the chance to do some good in the world, help people out.

AG: How has life changed since you’ve retired from the railroad? What’s your daily schedule?

SW: I worked 43 years on the rail and have been retired since I was 60. Now, you don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to, because you don’t depend on a time schedule. You still have responsibilities to do around the house and to the family, but it’s not a sense of emergency.

You work hard when you’re younger, so when you’re retired you don’t have to work, and you have to make room for the younger generation. It’s kind of strange, but I’m glad to be retired.

I wake up in the morning around 4:30 a.m. to take care of the animals. I feed the chickens and then during the day, I clean the fence and make sure that all the animals have plenty of water and then just do miscellaneous chores around the house beside my wife, Vickee.

AG: How much do you sleep?

SW: I sleep about 4 to 5 hours a night. I don’t want to sleep too much, because I might miss something. There is as much going on at night as there is in the day time.

AG: You’ve been wearing gloves all year, even before the pandemic. When did you start wearing them?

SW: I first started wearing gloves in 1979, when I got a bad flu with a high fever. At the time, I was staying in downtown Houston in a hotel apartment complex where I met a Chinese couple who referred me to a local herb doctor. I went to see the doctor and asked for prevention. I explained to him what kind of public work I do and he said to wear gloves. He said everything you touch has germs on it and, everything has been touched

by someone before you. And when you touch things and don’t wash your hands and rub your eyes, that’s when you get sick. I have not been sick a day since then. And I always keep two pairs of gloves around.

AG: What’s your favorite TV show?

SW: Trailer Boy, a Canadian comedy on Netflix. And I love to watch the old Star Trek.

AG: What’s the weirdest thing you’ve ever seen?

SW: They say lightning doesn’t strike twice. Well, back in 1995, one night on the train, about 100 miles outside of Houston, lightning struck a big old oak tree by the track. It was so bright. Then the next day going back to San Antonio, I went by that tree and you could see the big streak on it’s side. About two to three years, later the lightning hit the same tree. I happened to be there both times. And to this day, the oak tree is still standing.

AG: How often are you stopped by a tourist?

SW: About every two to three weeks. They love my tie dye t-shirt that Vickee got me from the thrift shop, I’ve even been photographed when wearing it a couple of times.

AG: What’s your favorite meal?

SW: Spicy spaghetti with skinless fried chicken.

AG: What’s the last thing that made you laugh?

SW: When I saw a guinea chasing the chickens this morning. You sit there and watch all the birds and they act just like people. They have different personalities and there is always someone in charge and you can always tell who the boss is.



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OP-ED

By SENATOR JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ

With the Sept. 30 Census deadline fast approaching, we have much more work to do, both locally and statewide. As a state, we have made considerable progress in the last month, but we’re still lagging behind most states whose response rates are close to completion at 97 to 99 percent. More troubling are the response rates in the Big Bend and Trans-Pecos region, with the rural counties in Senate District 29 averaging less than 50 percent. Unless we change course quickly, we will have to deal with the negative ramifications of an undercount for the next decade.

The census is the official measure of the entire population of the United States and its territories; it’s conducted every ten years. This official population count determines how many congressional representatives each state will have as well as for state legislative districts and local districts (e.g., city, county, school boards). In addition, the federal government also uses it to determine how to distribute billions of dollars every year.

The rural areas of Far West Texas have not experienced anywhere near the population growth seen in other areas of the state. In fact, the combined population of Presidio, Jeff Davis, Culberson, Hudspeth, and Brewster counties has remained largely stagnant over the last decade.

This growth disparity will result in a shift in political representation at the state and federal levels. Districts will need to be geographically larger to make up for the lack of population growth and to meet the new averages for congressional and state legislative districts. The greater our census undercount, the more disadvantaged the Trans-Pecos region will be in our respective political arenas.

This lack of growth will also play a major role in the way funding and resources are distributed to our communities. From affordable housing to schools to health care to roads and bridges, the census is used to gauge the need for government assistance and critical infrastructure in communities across the nation, and the Trans-Pecos is no different. Completing the census is absolutely critical to the long-term resiliency of our communities.

According to experts, even just a 1 percent undercount in our state’s population could result in an annual loss of \$300 million in federal funding. At a time when our schools and local governments are grappling with significant budget shortfalls, federal funding will be critical in dealing with the long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, state leadership did not prioritize the census count during the last two legislative sessions. Unlike other states that have spent millions of dollars and years on census outreach to make sure every person in their state gets counted, Texas leaders ignored requests from legislators, local leaders and community organizations to create a statewide complete count committee or to appropriate funds for census outreach. Only in the last month – in the 11th hour – did the Texas secretary of state solicit proposals for advertising. This lackluster approach has shifted the burden of census outreach to our local political subdivisions and community organizations.

This job has been made even more difficult by the Trump administration’s excessive efforts to change census policies – most of which have been found unconstitutional and thrown out. Never before has the census been weaponized against minority and immigrant communities as this president has done. The trust once placed in this long standing process has been damaged severely. His actions have resulted in significant misinformation and fear, especially in border communities that already had hard-to-count areas.

Nonetheless, we must persist in our efforts to make sure every Texan is counted. It’s up to each and every one of us to do our part during these unprecedented times. If you haven’t already, complete your census. The few minutes it takes to complete are worth a decade and beyond of federal funding, political representation and addressing the needs of our communities.

After you’ve completed your census, serve as a trusted voice among your family and friends and ask them to do the same. Reach out to friends and colleagues on social media. Call your *comadres* and *tios*. Make sure those in your circles know how important the census is to our community.

For information on the census, and to complete yours, visit www.2020Census.gov, or call 844-330-2020 to respond by phone. Help shape our region’s future for the better.

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Community

DRAWING OF THE WEEK



Cat by Jade
Marfa Elementary School

Visit Alpine announces weekly ‘Midweek Mercantile & Music’ event

ALPINE — The City of Alpine invites everyone to come enjoy a new weekly event with local arts, crafts, food vendors, music and more. City Manager Erik Zimmer said, “We are pleased to announce the launch of the Midweek Mercantile & Music in an effort to provide an outdoor evening event that celebrates our community and businesses. We appreciate the longstanding work that the Alpine Farmers Market has performed each Saturday and wanted to have a series of midweek events to complement their theme.

“Covid has provided the need to pause and reflect how events occur in the short term and our event planners and organizers have all done an amazing job at restructuring their events to have more outdoor venues that allow for social distancing and less propensity for a virus spread.”

The first Midweek Mercantile & Music will be held on Wednesday September 30, from 4 to 7 p.m. The event will take place every Wednesday thereafter through November 25. Third Street will be closed between Holland Avenue and Avenue E for vendors to set up booths. For safety, face masks will be required while shopping. If guests maintain appropriate distance, they may remove their masks to enjoy their food and drinks.

Local artist Johnella Strong is looking forward to selling her handcrafted art, jewelry and lamps, saying, “I believe that being involved with our local community is all about building relationships: with the community, leaders, various businesses, and most importantly, with the citizens of those communities. Events connect people to other like-minded individuals who share the same passions as them, and they are an awesome way to celebrate the amazing community you live in. In times such as these we are in, it’s important that we not forget that togetherness, even at a safe distance, is vital to our physical and mental well being. We are community; we are Alpine.”

The Alpine Visitor Center will be the hub of the Midweek Mercantile & Music, featuring live music on the lawn as well as providing outdoor tables for eating and enjoying the entertainment. Local Musician Neil Trammell of the Doodlin’ Hogwallops will be playing from 4:30-6:30 on Wednesday, Sept. 30.

Third Street and Holland Avenue is already home to several food trucks, coffee shops and restaurants where attendees can get snacks and dinner.

There is no charge for vendors to come and participate. Anyone who is interested should contact the Visitor Center for more information 432-837-2326 or visitorcenter@visitalpinetx.com

Sul Ross rodeo celebrates 75 years with biggest college event yet

ALPINE — Slated to be the biggest rodeo event of its kind, the 75th Annual Sul Ross National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association Southwest Region Rodeo kicks off this Thursday afternoon and will be exclusively streamed on the Sul Ross Sports Network, September 24-26 from the S.A.L.E. Arena at Sul Ross State University.

“As many as 17 teams are expected to compete with estimated numbers making this the largest college rodeo held to date,” said Sul Ross rodeo coach C.J. Aragon.

The main rodeo performances begin at 7 p.m. each night with slack events throughout the three days. Events include bareback, saddle bronc and bull riding, tie-down, breakaway and team roping, steer wrestling, goat tying and barrel racing.

The draw and full event schedule will be posted on www.southwestregionrodeo.com.

Those wanting to watch from a safe distance can go online to see the competition, which will include Ky Hamilton, a top ranking bull rider in the world, who is competing on the Sul Ross team. Tune in here: <https://livestream.com/srsumedia/sulrossrodeo75>

[srsumedia/sulrossrodeo75](https://livestream.com/srsumedia/sulrossrodeo75)

There will be reduced seating capacity at the S.A.L.E. Arena, since all facilities are required to limit capacity to 50% of normal. Within the new capacity, the protocol is to social distance. The S.A.L.E. Arena estimates the revised seating capacity for the rodeo will be 300 spectators.

Due to Governor Abbot’s health protocols, every person in attendance (NIRA members, vendors, coaches, ticket holders, etc.) will be required to wear a face covering except for when eating, drinking or competing, per the governor’s orders.

Tickets are \$10.00 for adults and \$5.00 for children under 12 and adults over 55. The event is free for SRSU students and employees with ID.

Gates are tentatively set to open at 6:30 p.m., unless otherwise needed to open at a different time. All seating is general admission, in groups no larger than 10. Social distancing guidelines and mask wearing will be enforced.

Guests are not the only ones with new COVID-19 limitations. Only contestants that are

up will be allowed in the arena and coaches are strongly encouraged to ask their students to leave the facility once they are finished competing.

No congregating is allowed anywhere on premises, especially outside the concession stands, around the boxes and behind the bucking chutes.

Fans, parents, and spectators will leave immediately after the rodeo is over and all guests must meet the screening criteria at the entrance to attend the rodeo. Family groups are encouraged to arrive together, enter the stadium together, sit together, and leave together.

Sul Ross is permitted to prevent any individual who fails the screening criteria from being admitted into school facilities where rodeo activities are being conducted until they meet the criteria for re-entry.

Sul Ross UPD may remove students or coaches not complying. Changes to the public health situation may necessitate changes to this guidance, the school warned.

Morrison True Value donates health and safety kits to Alpine Elementary



Photo courtesy of True Value
Morrison True Value lends a helping hand of supplies to Alpine Elementary staff.

ALPINE — On Friday, Morrison True Value, in partnership with the True Value Foundation, provided free health and safety kits to Alpine Elementary School through the newly created Educational Heroes Safety Campaign.

To ensure the health and safety of students, teachers, administrators and staff at their local school, Morrison True Value Family of Stores is donating kits comprised of hand sanitizer, KN-95 masks and hand soap.

At the beginning of the pandemic, True Value Manufacturing retooled its EasyCare paint production facility in Cary, Illinois, to produce FDA-approved hand sanitizer and other essential cleaning products to meet unprecedented nationwide consumer demand for health and cleaning essentials.

In August, the True Value Foundation decided to go even further to address growing public need for these products as schools reopened by launching the Educational Heroes Safety campaign. This collaborative effort between the company and its independent retailers aims to keep America’s kids learning while keeping our frontline educational heroes safe.

COMMUNITIE

MARFA

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50% off Larry Mahan Felt and Straw Hats

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Up to 80% off Summer Apparel

10% discount for locals, always!

122 N. Highland, Marfa Open every day 11am-5pm

Prayer march at the Presidio County Courthouse

MARFA — This Saturday at noon, a prayer march will take place on all sides of the Presidio County Courthouse. The hour-long event is nondenominational, and all are invited to join a procession around the courthouse, with each stop along the way focusing on a different topic. According to the event organizers, prayers will be for community leaders, those employed to ensure public safety, the community as a whole, Covid-19 and all those affected by this pandemic, the healing of the nation and for peace.

Prayer leaders come from a variety of local faith communities and include: Pastor Gary Dill, Young Life leader; Pastor Connor Travis; Pastor Ernesto Zubia; Rev. Michael Wallens; Isacc and Yazmin Benitez; and Pastor Charles Elmore playing the guitar. Patriotic songs and “Amazing Grace” may be sung by all.

The organizers ask that attendees wear masks, observe social distancing and leave political attire at home.

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

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King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Waller or Domino
5 " — not choose to run"
8 Stoolie
12 Hardly ruddy
13 Calendar abbr.
14 In due time
15 Noble gas
16 Born
17 Loosen
18 Cowpoke of the pampas
20 Get new actors
22 Car-pool lane abbr.
23 Profit
24 Elevator name
27 Crucial experiment
32 See
33 Heavy weight
34 Mainlander's memento
35 Middy party
38 Favorable votes
39 Raw rock
40 Boom times
42 Merry
45 This or that, it matters not
49 Sheltered
50 Possess

DOWN

1 Vampire tooth
2 Cruising
3 Grand
4 Harmonizes
5 Start something new
6 Buck's mate
7 Finished
8 Tap
9 From birth
10 Affirmative actions
11 Entanglement
19 Word after heave or gung
21 Finish
24 Night flyer
25 Greek cross
26 Guiltless
28 Bill and —
29 Sly slur
30 Glimpse
31 " — the sea-son ..."
36 Vinegar bot-

52 Legislation
53 Factory-fresh
54 Craze
55 Malaria symptom
56 Automaton, for short
57 To and —
58 Egg part

72es
8 Off
37 Coop denizen
38 Off
41 "Life of —"
42 Door-frame piece
43 Hodgepodge
44 Remove, as a cap
46 "Les Miserables" writer
47 Hebrew month
48 Stench
51 Simple card game

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Puzzle solutions for last week's issue

Weekly SUDOKU

Answer

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

King Crossword

Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

G	L	O	B	S	A	C	S	C	A	M
R	O	L	E	E	G	O	A	L	B	A
A	L	L	C	L	E	A	R	B	E	E
B	L	A	K	E	K	A	R	A	T	E
			E	G	G	S	C	A	R	
P	A	C	T	A	T	O	M	C	U	D
E	M	U	S	L	A	T	E	U	S	E
A	P	T	P	A	N	T	S	T	A	B
		S	P	A		D	O			
S	C	H	E	M	E		A	I	S	L
E	R	O	S		S	H	O	R	T	T
T	O	R	T		P	O	W		C	O
A	C	T	S		Y	E	N		H	A

Get Counted! Get Food! Get Services!



Help make sure every Marfan gets counted in the US Census by September 30, 2020 and win prizes!

\$50 gift cards at Porter's
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190 winners will be selected!

Getting counted is easy—use the link to enter your phone number. Census workers will call and you'll automatically be entered to win. bit.ly/marfacounts

¡Que te Cuenten! ¡Obtén Comida! ¡Obtén Cervicios!

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Burritos gratuitos en Marfa Burrito
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¡Se seleccionarán 190 ganadores!

Ser contado es fácil—usa el enlace para ingresar tu número de teléfono. Los trabajadores del censo llamarán y usted será registrado automáticamente para ganar. bit.ly/marfacuenta

Chinati Weekend’s Made in Marfa will press on with some creativity

MARFA — As Chinati Weekend moves online for 2020, so has Made in Marfa, an event that celebrates Marfa artists, galleries, shops, studios, makers, musicians and cultural organizations. While hundreds of visitors normally flock to town to celebrate Chinati Weekend and peruse the offerings of local makers, this year, Chinati Foundation will have a dedicated page on the chinati.org site that sends virtual visitors to the websites of various Marfa businesses.

Made in Marfa will digitally take place on Friday, October 9, and for those wanting to participate and show off their talent or wares, Chinati is offering a few guidelines to make offerings even more engaging for visitors than a shop link.

When Made in Marfa visitors click on your link and go through the virtual door, the foundation poses, might they find:

- A virtual tour of your craft or space?
- A discount code for purchases made during Chinati Weekend?
- A signature recipe or technique?
- A scheduled live-stream chat space to say hello, ask questions, meet the maker?
- A scheduled live-stream demonstration or performance?
- A special exhibition for Chinati Weekend?

And with this year already looking a little different, Chinati is also welcoming Marfa restaurants and bars to participate with at-home “how-tos.”

Chinati will not host live in-person events or any content that explicitly drives visitors to Marfa for Chinati Weekend, but the foundation writes, “We look forward to Chinati Weekend’s celebration of the creativity — and resilience — that makes the Marfa community unique.”

Submissions must be completed by Friday, October 2 in order to be incorporated into the Made in Marfa webpage and Chinati Weekend promotion. There is no fee to participate and questions can be sent to madeinmarfa@chinati.org. To register, fill out the Made in Marfa Submission Form on this page: <https://chinati.org/programs/made-in-marfa/>

4-H kicks off school year with added precautions

TRI-COUNTY — 4-H events in Presidio County are kicking off this week, with the goal of enrolling area students in 4-H clubs and getting them interested in animal husbandry and other agricultural issues. And as an added bonus, organizers are promising fun and games.

The Rio Grande 4-H Club will hold its event at the Presidio Activity Center Thursday, Sept. 24 at 5:30 p.m. Then, on Friday, Marfa 4-H will hold its own event at 5:30 p.m. at the Marfa Agriculture Barn. Both events will have snacks and drinks, and anyone with questions is asked to contact Matlin Sain, the county Agrilife extension agent for Presidio County, at matlin.sain@ag.tamu.edu.

In light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, both masks and social distancing are required at the events. (Though Governor Greg Abbott’s order bars mask requirements for children under 10, Agrilife is strongly encouraging all attendees to wear one.) Attendees will also need to sign a COVID-19 screening form with the goal of adding another layer of protection.

That form asks attendees to please adhere to social distancing protocols at the event. It also asks them to affirm that they haven’t had any coronavirus symptoms or been in contact with someone confirmed to have the virus.

“The virus that causes COVID-19 is still circulating in our communities,” the form warns. It asks people to acknowledge that coronavirus can spread even from people without symptoms — and that given the “the hidden nature of this threat,” everyone “should rigorously follow the practices specified in the DSHS protocols.”

The document also acts as a kind of liability form. “AgriLife Extension cannot guarantee that I will not contract the virus,” the form says, “even when implementing screening protocols.” It asks people to acknowledge that “safety is a shared duty, COVID-19 is a shared risk, and all community members, including visitors, must take steps to promote health and safety.”



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. As a museum in which art, architecture, and the land are inextricably linked, Chinati is in a unique position to invite visitors to experience Chinati outdoors.

Self-guided Walking Tours
Thursday - Saturday, advanced reservations required
Tickets will be available to the general public each Monday.

This tour covers 1.6 miles and takes approximately 1–1.5 hours to complete.

Visitors can walk the path along Donald Judd’s 15 untitled works in concrete, visit Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen’s *Monument to the Last Horse*, as well as take in exterior views of Judd’s 100 untitled works in mill aluminum and the John Wesley Gallery. On the walking tour visitors will be able to survey the historic architecture of Fort D.A. Russell as adapted by Judd and experience the grasslands, wildlife, and open space that brought him to Marfa.

Covid-19 Precautions

Chinati requires visitors to follow these guidelines without exception:

- All visitors are required to wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth at all times.
- All visitors must maintain a distance of 6 ft from other groups.
- No groups larger than 5 individuals will be admitted.
- No indoor spaces, including bathrooms, will be accessible during your visit.

Admission is always free for Chinati members, children age 17 and under, Military, healthcare workers, and residents of Brewster, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties.

For more information and to book tickets visit chinati.org.

Despite economic impacts from coronavirus, Workforce helps students build resumes, confidence

By STEPHEN PAULSEN
stephen@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO — Crystal Barriga is back in school now, a senior at Presidio High. But in the spring, as she prepared for her last summer break at Presidio ISD, she set her sights on one goal: Getting a job.

“A lot of my friends are always wanting jobs,” Barriga said in an interview this week. And when it came to getting a job, Barriga knew who she should talk to.

“When we ask around [about jobs], the school tells us about Workforce,” she said. And so Barriga reached out to Workforce Solutions Borderplex, which quickly found her office work at a local stockyard.

For those who have already finished schooling, it will likely come as no surprise that jobs can be hard to come by right now. The coronavirus crisis and ensuing lockdowns have killed an estimated 22 million jobs across the United States, and less than half of those have been regained, MarketWatch reported last month.

Nor was the tri-county spared these effects: In June, according to Workforce analysis, unemployment in Presidio County topped out at more than 17%, almost twice the Texas unemployment rate of around 9%.

Workforce Solutions, a nonprofit dedicated to helping people find quality jobs, is determined to bring those unemployment numbers down and help residents find work. But in recent years, it’s also set its sights on another goal: helping students find work, so that they finish up high school with a longer resume and more confidence.

Workforce’s efforts on that front started a few years ago, when the nonprofit and Presidio city teamed up to find students jobs, Lucio Glenn, a

project coordinator at the nonprofit, said in an interview.

But they gained speed in 2018 and 2019, as state lawmakers put more money into rural employment and as Workforce teamed up with the Rio Grande Council of Governments, allowing them to coordinate with more local governments and companies. “We were like, ‘This is an opportunity for us to really go full speed ahead,’” Glenn said.

Finding students jobs is about more than a paycheck, Glenn said — it’s also about helping students build up experience and confidence. “Good work experience in a field that they eventually want to study in is the key,” he said. Workforce calls that initiative, which is generally open to people between the ages of 16 and 24, “work-based learning.” Besides students, they also help to find work for at-risk youth, including foster children and people with criminal records.

With those goals in mind, Workforce also tries to mentor students as they start what are sometimes their first jobs. The group releases regular lists of “hot” and “cloudy” careers, so that students see which fields are seeing growth and which are stagnating.

In this year: jobs like software developing, which has entry wages around \$30 an hour and is expected to see growth of around 37% in the next decade. But the prospects in other jobs aren’t so rosy, including shoe repair (projected to shrink by 4.7%) and travel agents, down 9.5%.

At press time, *The Big Bend Sentinel* has not seen total numbers of how many student workers Workforce was able to employ throughout the region. But Glenn, the project coordinator, estimates that coronavirus had an impact on those opportunities as well.

“There was certainly a shift,” he said. Service

industry — typically a big employer in the region — was down. Some kids were afraid to work. Employers weren’t opening at 100%, and some local governments, facing tighter budgets, were wary to take on student workers. In Presidio city government, for example, the number of student workers fell by about half, from around 14 to around eight.

“People were trying to cover immediate needs,” Glenn said. “They couldn’t host a youth and give them the same mentoring and the opportunities as normal.” But like any good job-hunter, Glenn says Workforce tried to diversify to fill in the gaps.

Regardless, it was still able to find many students jobs. Take Kelly Baeza, another Presidio senior, who spent the summer helping the Rio Grande Council of Governments get addresses straightened out in Presidio.

It was the first job for Baeza, who hopes to study animal science at Sul Ross next year. She said the opportunity helped her build confidence as a worker. She learned specific skill sets, like working with data and spreadsheets, as well as general life skills, like taking the lead on projects.

Barriga, the stockyard worker who says she’s considering a career in neuroscience of kinesiology, had a similarly positive experience. Though there wasn’t a direct overlap between stockyard work and her interests, she said the job nonetheless built confidence and prepared her to take on new opportunities in the future.

“It was good having a routine every day that wasn’t just school,” Barriga said. And even better was the confidence. Sometimes, she says, employees and coworkers might look down on a student worker — but not the stockyards. “The adults treated me like one of them. It made me feel like, ‘Okay, I can do this.’”

Cibolo vacation Rotary raffle prize goes to 93-year-old birthday girl

MARFA – Mayme Royer got a great surprise on her 93rd birthday – during the recent Rotary Club of Marfa golf tournament, she was drawn as the winner for the annual raffle, which promises a staycation getaway to Cibolo Creek Ranch for the prize recipient.

The club sells raffle tickets to

raise funds for college scholarships, rotary youth summer camp, donations to the Marfa Food Bank and other community services.

Clint Weber, her son and the lieutenant governor for District 5520, said Royer will head out to retrieve her vacation stay sometime this fall as the weather in the area cools. Royer herself isn’t a club member, but she bought a ticket in support of the group that helps bring community improvement projects to the area as well as helping area students learn leadership and confidence.

“We’re real proud of all the different things we do in rotary,” Weber said. “My mission is to do everything I can for the kids, and starting the high school clubs has been the greatest thing I could do.”

In recent years, local rotary members have help launched junior programs in the schools, where students have gotten volunteer hours in the community and even been able to get away for summer camp, where they learn leadership skills, build self confidence, participate in athletics, do challenging high ropes and learn from important folks like dignitaries, astronauts and fire fighters. “It’s all about building self confidence in the abilities of the kids,” he said.



Photo courtesy of Clint B. Weber

Mayme Royer receives her raffle certificate from rotary member Mona Garcia.

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Celebration Liquor Marfa Mon - Thu11:30 am - 9 pm Fri - Sat 10 am - 9 pm 729-4682 • Alpine Mon - Sat 10 am - 9 pm 432-837-7479 • Marfa	 MARFA SHORTHORNS SPORTS CALENDAR		
YOUR AD HERE! ONLY \$10 / WEEK Contact ads@bigbendsentinel.com	JH VOLLEYBALL: Thursday, September 24 5:00 PM , Away Marathon VARSITY VOLLEYBALL: Friday, September 25, 4:45 PM vs Sierra Blanca, Home JH VOLLEYBALL: Friday, September 25, 5:45 PM vs Sierra Blanca, Home FOOTBALL: Friday, September 25, 7:30 PM vs Sierra Blanca, Home HS CROSS COUNTRY: Saturday, September 26 , Away Midland		

☺ MARFA SCHOOL LUNCH MENU ☺					
SEPTEMBER	Thurs, Sept 24	Fri, Sept 25	Mon, Sept 28	Tues, Sept 29	Wed, Sept 30
BREAKFAST	PANCAKES & SAUSAGE	DUTCH WAFFLE, BACON	CEREAL & TOAST	FRENCH TOAST, SAUSAGE	MUFFIN, YOGURT
LUNCH Menu courtesy of  Celebrating 70+ years of serving our customers. 432-729-4375 www.myporters.net	QUESADILLA, SPANISH RICE, CORN, BEANS, LET & TOM, FRESH APPLE SLICES,	POPCORN CHICKEN, ROLL, BROCCOLI FLORETS, FRIES, PEARS, COOKIE	CORN DOG, TATER TOTS, BAKED BEANS, APPLE- PINEAPPLE D'LITE	NACHOS GRANDES, BEANS, LET & TOM, TOMATO CUP, CUCUMBER SLCS, PEACHES, SHERBET CUP	CRISPY CHICKEN SANDWICH, OVEN FRIES, FRESH VEGGIE CUP, FRUITY GELATIN

Classifieds & public notices

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Village Farms - Employment Opportunities

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PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CITY OF MARFA REGARDING THE MARFA CONTACT TRACING PROGRAM

If you live in the city limits of Marfa and are positive for COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who is, we invite you to call our City of Marfa Contact Tracing Team at 432-279-0279 to discuss your options for support and safety. All three contact tracers live in Marfa and are trained and authorized by the Texas State Department of Health Services. Your identity and conversations will be kept confidential in accordance with HIPAA laws and our written agreement with the State. If our contact tracers cannot immediately take your call, rest assured that you will be contacted in a timely manner. If you are in doubt about what to do to protect yourself and those around you, then it is best to quarantine at home and call us for guidance on what to do next. The main thing to remember is that you aren't alone—the Marfa Contact Tracing Team is here to help. Call us at 432-279-0279.

The Marfa Parks and Recreation Board is looking for energetic and committed new Board members. The Board meets the third Thursday of each month at 6 pm to discuss issues related to Blackwell Park, Coffield Park, Dog Park, Sunset Park, and Travis Self Park.

Interested applicants should send a Letter of Interest, outlining why you'd like to join, what you bring to the table, and what you'd like to do by October 15 to trey@stereoluz.net

Public Notice

The Presidio County Appraisal District is seeking proposals for Financial Auditor for year ending December 2020. Any and all proposals to be submitted to the Presidio CAD office at 107 E. Texas, P O Box 879, Marfa, Texas, (432)729-3431. All proposals must be received by October 16, 2020. The Board of Directors of the Presidio CAD reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal.

Public Notice

The Presidio County Appraisal District is searching for anyone interested in serving the taxpayers of Presidio County as an Appraisal Review Board Member for a 2-year term (2021-2022). If interested, please contact the Presidio CAD office at 107 E. Texas St. (432) 729-3431 or info@presidiocad.org. Application and Questionnaire for Appointment are available at the Presidio CAD or our website presidiocad.org, Applications must be submitted to the Presidio CAD by October 16, 2020.

Bechtel Book Grant puts \$10,500 toward university books for 21 local students

TRI-COUNTY — Every semester, the Bechtel Book Grant doles out funds to area students who apply for assistance to cover the cost of school books while attending Sul Ross State University for undergraduate studies. This semester is no exception, even under a school year that looks quite different from the usual.

“I thought we had a really good crop of applicants this year and was really pleased. Considering, I would imagine some people changed plans because of the pandemic,” said John Ferguson, a board member for the Bechtel fund, who noted he was pleased to have so many students apply and be eligible.

Last semester, for example, only 12 eligible applicants applied, garnering \$6,000 total, with each recipient always receiving \$500 in a semester.

The Bechtel Fund is a charitable corporation that was established and incorporated in 1993 through an endowed fund by Dr. George Bechtel of Alpine, a former professor at Sul Ross, to award a monetary grant for undergraduate Sul Ross students who graduated high school or got a GED from the tri-county area. Eligible students must be currently, fully enrolled at Sul Ross and meet the criteria of having already completed 24 college semester hours, having a GPA of 3.0 or more and being in good standing with the university.

Any student who is eligible is guaranteed to receive the grant, as long as they submit their application. “We’ve got money to give away, but students have to apply,” Ferguson said.

Part of that challenge is getting the word out about the grant. “The board right now consists of five of us,” Ferguson said, “We’re trying to get a little bit better representation from Fort Davis, Terlingua, Valentine.” Those across the tri-county interested in getting involved on the board and on the ground to get out the word about the grant can contact John Ferguson at 432-661-0600.

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AA - Saturday 12:00 Noon
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MARFA 12 STEP MEETINGS ONLINE



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