

BURN BAN IN EFFECT, NO GROUND FIRES
by order of Presidio County

IN BRIEF

Balmorhea State Park pool reopens June 26

TOYAHVALE — The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is excited to announce that the spring-fed swimming pool and day-use area at [Balmorhea State Park](#) will reopen to the public on June 26. The pool and day use areas only will be open from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. or sunset, whichever comes first. Light construction is still ongoing in the pool area, so the public is asked to remain vigilant.

Day passes are now available for purchase on the [Texas State Parks Online Reservations Center](#) but are limited: [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/park-reservation-information/reservations](#)

Day passes can be purchased up to 30 days in advance. Guests are strongly encouraged to purchase passes in advance online before driving to the park. Upon entering the park, visitors will present their reservation receipts at the park headquarters and receive wrist bands to wear when entering the pool and day-use areas.

Light construction is still ongoing in the pool area and the San Solomon Courts, campground, and cienegas remain closed to the visiting public. Once a completion date for these projects has been determined, an announcement will be made on the TPWD website.

The very first seat on New Shepard for July 20 flight sells for \$28 million

VAN HORN — Last weekend, Blue Origin concluded the online auction for the very first seat on New Shepard with a winning bid of \$28 million. Nearly 7,600 people registered to bid from 159 countries.

The winning bidder will fly to space on New Shepard’s first human flight on July 20, and will join Blue Origin founder Jeff Bezos and his brother, Mark.

The winning bid amount will be donated to Blue Origin’s foundation, Club for the Future, whose mission is to inspire future generations to pursue careers in STEM and to help invent the future of life in space.

The name of the auction winner will be released in the following weeks. Then, the fourth and final crew member will be announced.



Nicole Tancik, Joey Torres, Guy Sealey and Michelle Cordaro carve a dry-aged carcass as part of the butchering process at newly-opened Marfa Meats processing plant. SEE STORY ON PAGE 4

Staff photo by Maisie Crow

County to prepare report on costs incurred from border crisis

By SACHI MCCLENDON
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PRESIDIO COUNTY — Last week, Presidio County Judge Cinderela Guevara attended the “Border Security Summit” hosted by Governor Greg Abbott in Del Rio. “It went really well. It was very highly attended. It was kind of exciting. The governor had a lot of answers for us that we had questions to,” Guevara said about the meeting. “The synergy there was really something else.”

At the summit, Abbott said he wanted to build a fence along the Texas-Mexico border. “Anything that will deter illegal entry is good,” Guevara said. “I think a fence would help and perhaps keep some of the drug smuggling and human smuggling out.”

As *The Big Bend Sentinel* previously [reported](#),

Guevara said that she hasn’t heard too many complaints from ranchers inside the county, but it’s a different story in neighboring ones. “All around us they are catching a lot of illegal aliens, and these are not people trying to come here for asylum, for the most part. They feel like they are dangerous criminals,” she said.

Guevara decided to attend the meeting because she wants to stay informed on the matter. She said, “Right now, things aren’t bad for Presidio County as far as the influx, but what if that changes in a month or two?”

Then on Tuesday, The Texas Department of Emergency Management held a seminar at the Presidio County Courthouse to show local officials how to account for expenses incurred from the migrant disaster. Al Talavera, the regional coordinator from the Department of Emergency Management, said that the goal of these reports is

to get a federal disaster declaration.

There are two sides to these reports. Talavera said that the counties should tally up everything they have spent in terms of dealing with undocumented immigrants since June 1. Then, the governor also wants the county to write down all of the projected costs of the crisis — including overtime, use of vehicles and gas expenses.

An agent from Border Patrol presented a list of possible tools local law enforcement could need if they were to become more involved in immigration issues. On the list were ATVs, night vision gear, spike strips, handheld drones and license plate readers.

Guevara said Presidio County will definitely be preparing these reports, which are due in two weeks. “We will request the resources that feel

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At least 11 fire hydrants in town are malfunctioning, records show

By SACHI MCCLENDON
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MARFA — When firefighters for the Marfa Volunteer Fire Department last inspected all of the fire hydrants in and around town in October 2019, they reported that 11 of them were either malfunctioning or inoperable, according to documents obtained by *The Big Bend Sentinel* through an open records request.

In the past year and half, none of them have been repaired, said City Manager Mandy Roane. “Our former Public Works director [Jeff Boyd] was given the list of faulty hydrants in 2019, but did not conduct repairs. Additionally, repairs weren’t conducted in 2020,” she said. “With so much shut down because of COVID and Public Works being short-staffed, they weren’t able to complete them.”

The actual number of malfunctioning hydrants may have risen since the 2019 report. As *The*

Big Bend Sentinel [reported](#) last week, firefighters could not get the hydrant directly across from the burning Judd Architecture Office building to open. Lonnie Hebert, one of the firefighters that responded to the blaze, said the issue caused a 20 to 30 minute delay.

That hydrant, on the corner of Oak and Highland, does not appear to be on any of the inspection reports obtained by *The Big Bend Sentinel*. “The main ones downtown are always tested. They’re easy to get to, they’re right there. That leads me to believe that that hydrant, the last time it was operated, it worked — otherwise it would be on our list,” said Gary Mitschke, the chief of the fire department.

The hydrants in question are in varying degrees of disrepair. The 2019 report indicates that the majority of the faulty hydrants are either stuck shut or produce no water. One hydrant, on the corner of Galveston and Ridge, is so old that the fire department wrote that it needs an adaptor

piece for it. According to a 2005 inventory report, that specific hydrant is from 1948 – over 70 years old. At the time, the company that inventoried the hydrants recommended the city overhaul the top of the 1940s hydrant as it was hard to operate.

The inspection reports show that half of the hydrants that were malfunctioning in 2017 were experiencing the exact same issue in 2019, possibly indicating that the city did not conduct repairs on them over the two years in question.

Chuck Salgado recently became the interim Public Works director in April after Boyd’s departure. Salgado was then named Water/Sewer supervisor this month after the city council divided the Public Works director job. Salgado said he doesn’t believe that the Public Works Department had been repairing the hydrants. “I’m pretty sure it’s never been done. As long as I’ve been here I’ve never seen them done,” he

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Municipal judge orders neglected horses into city custody

By ABBIE PERRAULT
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MARFA — Two horses have been ordered into the custody of the City of Marfa after a municipal court hearing on Monday led a judge to order them removed from their owners due to neglect. The city has been ordered to care for the animals, pay their necessary medical costs and find new long-term owners.

“We’re going to take our time to get this right, whatever that looks like, as close to right as we can,” began Marfa Municipal Judge David Beebe, who presided over the case. “I’d like for everybody to remember we’re all human beings, and none of us are perfect and that we all have feelings about things, people, animals, our town, rules, regulation, authority.” Photos of

the horses, which are living in the county’s rodeo arena east of Marfa, had been posted on social media, attracting anger and a big turnout to the court that afternoon.

As the civil hearing began, City Attorney Teresa Todd, working on behalf of the state, presented the case against Marfa residents Hilda and Rudy Salcido at the Casner Room in Marfa City Hall. She provided evidence and called witnesses to testify that the animals had not received enough nutrition, lived in too small of a pen and lacked medically-necessary attention.

The city first became aware of a small bay mare named Star and a larger, unnamed grey gelding when neighbors called in a complaint on May 31 about a horse pen with an increasing number of flies. According to Animal Control Officer George Gonzalez – who arrived on the scene

with Marfa police and Code Enforcement Officer Anahi Garcia on June 2 – the pen that held the two horses did not comply with the dimensions required by the city’s animal ordinance.

Garcia reported that there was “a large accumulation of horse feces and a large number of flies” at the pen. Both animals struggled with walking, she wrote, “because of the lack of treatment to their hooves.” They had prominently visible rib cages, with the bay mare showing “more advanced signs of malnourishment with a more visible and distinctive ribcage,” she wrote in the incident report. “There was no food inside [the pen] with the horses and just a little bit of water in two containers,” Garcia said.

There was enough evidence to get an order to remove the horses from the Salcidos’

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Border Patrol vehicle carrying immigrants involved in crash

By URSULA MUÑOZ-SCHAEFER
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VAN HORN — On Thursday, June 10, a Border Patrol agent and 10 undocumented detainees suffered a vehicle accident in Culberson County. A commercial tractor trailer driven by 44-year-old Javier Ramon Rodriguez-Miranda merged into the agent’s lane because of a mechanical distraction, pushing the federal vehicle off the road and causing it to roll over.

The incident took place at 7:17 a.m. along Interstate 10 near mile marker 145, approximately two miles east of Van Horn. All 11 occupants of the Border Patrol vehicle were injured according to a press statement from the Texas Department of Public Safety-Highway Patrol, which only provided the medical status of both drivers.

CBP policy states that employees and detainees in CBP vehicles must wear seatbelts when in motion — assuming they are available. Although both drivers were wearing seatbelts at the time of the accident, it is unclear whether or not the detainees were.

Rather than report seatbelt status, whereabouts and medical status of the 10 detained passengers — all adult males — individually, the report instead stated that they’d all been “transported to local area hospitals with possible injuries.” The same report provided clear information on both drivers — the agent was transferred to Culberson County Hospital after suffering “non-incapacitating injuries.” Rodriguez-Miranda was not injured.

However, the incident appears to have been life-threatening for at least two of the detainees, who were flown out by helicopter, according to a later press release from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which stated that all available medical assistance had been requested at the scene.

Greg Davis, public affairs officer for U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the Big Bend Sector, said that the CBP “doesn’t have any information” on the passengers’ seatbelt status, their medical situations or where they were taken.

“I suspect it’s going to take a good while [to gather more information on the victims’ medical status] because these investigations last a good while,” he told *The Big Bend Sentinel* last week. The Office of Professional Responsibility is investigating the incident.

Big Bend Sentinel gets decorated by Texas Press Association

TEXAS — *The Big Bend Sentinel* brought home a handful of awards from the Texas Press Association convention and trade show in Denton, Texas, over the weekend, claiming titles for photography, writing and overall excellence among a division of peers.

The paper claimed first in the division for news photography with a photo by Editor-in-Chief Maisie Crow that was taken during coronavirus testing in the area.

The paper also received second-place recognition for feature photography with Crow’s work and for its news writing during 2019 to

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County puts horse race betting on the ballot, taps grants for infrastructure and border enforcement

By **ABBIE PERRAULT**
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PRESIDIO COUNTY — Presidio County voters will have the chance to approve or reject the legalization of horse race betting in the county after commissioners voted last Wednesday to put it on the ballot this November. Commissioners moved in lockstep to advance a ballot measure on horse racing, and the elected officials also learned more about grant funds and historical markers at the latest commissioners court gathering after press time on Wednesday, June 9.

After hearing a proposal from Wisdom Advisers — a company out of Dallas that wants to build a horse racetrack in Presidio — at the last commissioners court meeting, the court voted to take its first step toward horse race betting in county limits.

Per state code, county residents are the final voice on allowing or barring “pari-mutuel betting and wagering,” so commissioners voted to put the initiative on the ballot. “This is a good thing for Presidio, a very good thing,” Commissioner Eloy Aranda remarked. “It’s an attraction and it brings a lot of development to the city and county.”

Jose Valdez from Wisdom Advisers told County Judge Cinderela Guevara that if the county voters approve pari-mutuel betting, the project will be off to the races. Guevara told commissioners that if voters approve, the state would then need to issue a license, and then Valdez said the process will go “really fast, maybe four to five months and it should all be completed,” Guevara explained.

Ahead of the vote to create the ballot initiative, Commissioner Buddy Knight said, “It’s pretty obvious

that we have to put a track in Presidio. There should be quite a bit of revenue for the county and obviously the local people of Presidio, jobs and all that. But we’re just in the first steps.” After talking to Valdez on a few occasions, he said he was comfortable with their plan, “but I think the first step, and obviously this is it – let’s let the people of Presidio County decide if they want to do this.”

The ballot initiative was unanimously agreed to, with Commissioner Jose Cabezuela joining Aranda and Knight, while Commissioner Brenda Bentley was absent.

At that same meeting, commissioners heard about opportunities to tap into two federal grant funds. The first was a new Stonegarden grant approval that will award \$196,695 to the county for immigration enforcement by the sheriff’s office, with no match required.

Those funds can be spent on officer overtime or benefits, fuel, vehicle maintenance, night vision equipment and other costs relating to providing border security work that assists U.S. Border Patrol with enforcement.

County Auditor Patty Roach said that in a departure from past Stonegarden grants, this year’s grant, which runs through February 2022, will let the county hire two temporary deputies by using Stonegarden funds to pay their salaries. The county would be on the hook only for paying those employees’ benefits out of pocket, at most \$6,684, Roach told commissioners. They swiftly approved the budget amendment to allow the addition of those benefit funds.

Commissioners at the meeting also voted to allow the county to apply for Department of the Treasury coronavirus local fiscal recovery funds, part of the

American Relief Funds. The county qualifies for a sum of \$1,302,200 in coronavirus recovery funds through December 2024.

While the county won’t need to contribute any of its own funds as a match, Roach said due to the size and complexity of this award, “We probably need to consider a grant administrator for it.” Fortunately, it likely won’t cost the county any of its own dollars, since Roach said they can use the relief funds themselves to hire a grant administrator.

“There’s still a lot of uncertainty with these monies. We haven’t gotten final treasury regulations. Management and procedures will probably mirror what FEMA does, and that’s pretty tight and specific,” which the auditor said was a prime reason to hire someone to oversee the finances.

“This is a big chunk of change for the county, and it can be used in a lot of different ways. Some of it is infrastructure, but it’s pretty specific what types of infrastructure you can use it on. We can also set up a grant program, so then if you get into a program where we’re granting funds to sub-recipients then that gets even more involved.”

After hearing infrastructure was one way to spend the money, Commissioner Aranda said an investment in water and sewer for the city of Presidio would be a worthy cause. At some point the commissioners will need to discuss how they would like to utilize the funds, “but at least let’s get that money in our hot little hands,” Roach said, recommending commissioners approve the county’s move to apply for the funding, which they did, unanimously.

As the meeting neared its end, Arian Velasquez-Ornelas, the president of the Presidio Convention and

Visitor Bureau, made a proposal for two historical markers in Marfa be relocated to the city of Presidio.

The first marker under discussion was the “Presidio County” marker, which was placed on Highway 90, half a mile east of Marfa, in 1936 and commemorates the formation of Presidio County. It reads “Formed from Bexar County created January 3, 1850, organized March 13, 1875. So named for the early ‘Fortress garrisoned by soldiers.’ Erected for the protection of the Big Bend missions. County seat Fort Davis, 1875. Marfa, since 1885.”

The second was the “Presidio - Oldest Town in America” marker, which is placed next to the Presidio County marker, just outside of Marfa. It was added in 1961 and claims that the city of Presidio is America’s oldest town, reading, “At confluence of Concho and Rio Grande Rivers. A settlement for over 10,000 years. Site of first recorded wagon train crossing into Texas, December [year illegible], headed by Antonio de Espejo.”

Velasquez-Ornelas said, “We’re here to present that to the commissioners court to hopefully have your support to have those markers placed in their proper location.” If agreed to, the group hopes the “Presidio - Oldest Town in America” marker could be placed in Saint Francis Plaza in Presidio, “because it is kind of the oldest part of the community,” she explained.

While Commissioner Aranda remarked he had no problem with changing the marker locations, he and Judge Guevara said they wanted to visit with the county’s historical commission first and see if the state historical commission would need to be involved. Guevara proposed duplicating the markers in Presidio, “instead of defacing the ones already here.

Horses

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property. They were taken into custody by the city and veterinarian Zachary Dodson was called in to evaluate the horses’ conditions.

Dodson joined the trial on Monday via Zoom as an expert witness, testifying that he believed the horses had been victims of cruel treatment. He detailed the poor conditions of both horses’ hooves, which typically need care every six to eight weeks. The animals’ hooves had grown so long they were curling up and cracking, making it more difficult to walk and stay balanced.

Their teeth also needed “floating,” a technique to evenly grind down the teeth so that they can properly chew and digest grain. Even if they had been fed properly, they could suffer malnutrition if they were unable to chew enough food to digest its nutrients. “Pointed teeth can result in malnourishment, regardless of whether food is left out or not. If they’re unable to grind the food, it does nothing for the body,” Dodson said.

The bay mare was “ultra thin,” he explained, adding, “She’s probably missing about 200 pounds of body weight off of her.” The horse also had a troubling knot of swelling on the back right ankle, and its firmness indicated it had likely been that way for a long time.

She was essentially reliant on three legs, which Dodson characterized as a lameness that “is very detrimental to the contralateral leg” because it is overcompensating to support its weight.

“Before I could make a recommendation of the quality of life of this poor mare, an X-ray is needed,” he said. “If it is broken, upkeep of it is very hard. It’s not an inexpensive process and you’d have to go to a specialist.” If found to be broken, Dodson said humane euthanization can be a reasonable course of action. “I did feel like this horse was in a pretty significant amount of pain.”

While the judge explained the couple could cross-examine any of the state’s witnesses, Rudy waved his hand at the opportunity to ask Dodson questions, saying, “I don’t know.”

When the Salcidos’ turn to testify came, Rudy said that the injured ankle was one of the reasons her previous owner gave her to him over 10 years ago, and that she’d been in that condition the entire time. “He was going to put her down, so I said, ‘Let me take her,’” he recounted.

Hilda swore in as a witness, testifying, “We have been feeding the horses. We’ve been trying to fix up the pens,” she said. She said when Rudy contracted COVID-19, the family struggled, with Hilda working shifts at a hotel to make ends meet. Her daughter, Rita, brought in receipts from Livingston Ranch Supplies to show that her mother had purchased food for the animals.

Todd cross-examined the Salcidos, showing that the animals’ medical care had fallen behind long before last year’s pandemic. They testified that the mare’s teeth had not been floated in five years and weren’t sure when the hooves were last trimmed. She had never seen a vet. Rudy said he had trimmed the grey gelding’s hooves four or five months ago, but couldn’t recall the last time the teeth were floated.

“This hearing is not a witch hunt on anyone,” Todd said in her closing argument. “I understand this is a very difficult circumstance and Mr. Rudy, I know you’re not well and I know how hard you’re working. As the city attorney, I’m here for the best interest of the horses and it just seems like with everything going on in your lives, it’s just too much as well.”

“I don’t believe you’re torturing them, but I do believe they’ve been neglected and deprived of necessary care, food or shelter, and are confined to a space that is too small for them and not clean,” Todd said. “This case is not about a crime, this case is about doing what’s best

for Star the bay mare and the grey gelding.”

“It hurts,” Hilda said in her brief conclusion. Pointing to her husband, she added, “He’s saying that he’s going to let them take them.”

“I believe that there’s no torture involved here. I believe that you’re not bad to animals, that anything that’s happened in this case is not of a purposeful malicious nature. I know that to be true actually,” Beebe told the Salcidos. “I know you are friendly and giving people. Regardless of my decision, I know that.” He recessed into his chambers, and after five minutes, returned with a decision.

In the end, Judge Beebe decided the state had shown with a preponderance of the evidence that the animals were cruelly treated and deprived of necessary care. The Salcidos would not be required to pay the estimated \$2,078 in care expenses that the city is set to incur, but if they appealed his decision, the cost would be imposed on them.

ACO Gonzalez will continue to feed the two horses,

and at the advice of Dodson, is tapering up the diet of the mare slowly, along with providing anti-inflammatory pills for her ankle. The city will need to secure an X-ray for the mare, and – if the mare is still viable – teeth floating and hoof trimming for both. The judge’s decision was that Gonzalez and the city must adopt out the two horses to a proper, long-term home once they have had medical care.

The Salcidos did make a request, and the judge agreed, that the horses be provided shade during their stay at the county’s rodeo arena. Regardless of the pen they had lived in before, the family hoped the horses would have food, water, medical care and shade, especially as the temperatures climbed above 100 degrees.

Outside the Casner Room, Rudy said he was at peace with the judge’s decision, and that he would not seek to appeal it. Hilda and daughter Rita accepted the decision, “as long as the city takes care of and feeds those horses,” Rita said.

Agave Garden

Judd Foundation and Agave Festival Marfa invite you to a virtual conversation and socially-distanced celebration for the opening of the Agave Garden on West Oak Street.

Friday, June 25
5:00-8:00pm CDT

These events are free for all to attend.

Judd Foundation y Agave Festival Marfa les invitan a asistir una conversación virtual y una celebración socialmente distanciada para la inauguración del Agave Garden en West Oak Street.

Viernes, 25 de junio
5:00-8:00 pm CDT

Estos eventos son gratuitos para todos.

Virtual Talk
Charla Virtual
5:00pm CDT

Join Rainer Judd, President of Judd Foundation; Bertha González Nieves, Co-Founder & CEO of Tequila Casa Dragones; and Jim Martinez, agronomist and landscape designer for a discussion moderated by Tim Johnson, Director of Agave Festival Marfa. The conversation will focus on the importance of public spaces and native plants.

Register for the talk at <https://bit.ly/3iHPRN4>

Únase con Rainer Judd, presidente de la Fundación Judd; Bertha González Nieves, cofundadora y directora ejecutiva de Tequila Casa Dragones; y Jim Martinez, agrónomo y diseñador de paisajes para una discusión moderada por Tim Johnson, Director del Agave Festival Marfa. La conversación se enfocará en la importancia de los espacios públicos y las plantas autóctonas.

Regístrese para la charla en <https://bit.ly/3iHPRN4>

Community Celebration
Celebración Comunitaria
6:00-8:00pm CDT

Join Judd Foundation for a community celebration at The Sentinel and the Agave Garden. The event will include a special cocktail with Casa Dragones tequila to honor the spirit made with agave. The cocktail will remain on menu at The Sentinel for the month of July with 10% of proceeds benefitting the Marfa Volunteer Fire Department.

Únase a la Fundación Judd para una celebración comunitaria para en The Sentine y del Agave Garden. El evento incluirá un cóctel especial con tequila Casa Dragones para honrar el espíritu hecho con agave. El cóctel quedará en el menú The Sentinel durante el mes de julio y el 10% de las ganancias se beneficiará del Departamento de Bomberos Voluntarios de Marfa.

The Judd Foundation Agave Garden and opening events are generously supported by Tequila Casa Dragones.

Judd Foundation Agave Garden y los eventos de apertura cuentan con el generoso apoyo de Tequila Casa Dragones.

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June 24th • 4-7pm
3rd Street between Avenue E & Holland Avenue

LIVE MUSIC
Carlos Maxwell
& Ted Arbogast



COWBOYS
VISIT WITH THE
PLAYERS BEFORE
THE GAME!



KIDS!
FREE baseball
craft & snack!



3rd Street will be closed for art, craft and food vendors, with music to be enjoyed on the Visitor Center lawn. Bring your own blankets or chairs!



CASA • DRAGONES



JUDD

Undocumented migrants found in box truck

VAN HORN — Last week, Big Bend Sector Border Patrol agents were alerted to a human smuggling scheme where 33 undocumented migrants were locked inside a box truck during the late evening. Intervention by Border Patrol agents allowed the people who were suffering from heat-related illnesses to be freed, with 12 people transported to regional hospitals.

Around 10 p.m. on Thursday, June 10, 2021, agents were alerted to suspicious activity related to a possible human-smuggling scheme near the McDonalds restaurant in Van Horn. Agents approached two vehicles, a Dodge Journey and a U-Haul box truck. Upon opening of the cargo space, there were 33 people who were close to perishing due to excessive heat and lack of fresh air in temperatures still hovering near 100 degrees. Border Patrol’s Special Operations Group have trained emergency medical technicians embedded in the unit and were part of the response.

Upon discovery of the situation, SOG members immediately began triage operations to determine who needed transport to regional hospitals and who could be treated on-scene. Over the next few hours 12 patients were transported to regional hospitals while others were evaluated and treated for symptoms of dehydration on-scene. There were no casualties.

All individuals recovered from their heat-related



Courtesy of Customs and Border Protection

Thirty three undocumented migrants were found in the back of a U-Haul box truck last week in Van Horn. Many of the migrants found were suffering from heat related illnesses.

injuries and were processed according to Big Bend Sector protocols. Homeland Security Investigations accepted the case for prosecution.



Staff photo by Maisie Crow

This image, which ran in the April 30 issue of The Big Bend Sentinel, took home first place for news photography at the Texas Press Association. In an effort to reflect the testing experience to readers without infringing on patient privacy, newspaper Editor-in-Chief Maisie Crow took the opportunity to get tested herself — and documented the experience.

Awards

(Continued from page 1)

for its news writing during 2019 to 2020 by Stephen Paulsen and Abbie Perrault.

The paper received a third-place win in feature writing by the

same writing staff, as well as in sweepstakes, which sorts papers by total points awarded. Finally, the paper was named second in general excellence.

Big Bend Sentinel publisher Max Kabat was also an invited speaker at

the convention, sharing “Ideas From a First-Time Newspaper Owner” about evolving the business model of local, independent journalism and how to diversify revenue streams in a changing print media landscape.

Border crisis

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we are going to need to actually help secure the border and our area and make it safer,” Guevara said.

“I see myself meeting with the sheriff to see if he’s going to need additional personnel,” Guevara said, adding the sheriff’s office always needs more vehicles. “If you get more deputies, then you need more vehicles.”

Talavera said that the governor wants the counties to produce these reports so that he can present them to the Legislature in the next special session he plans on calling. “During that special session [Abbott] is going to request for additional funding in order to help the counties out, whether it be for staffing or equipment,” he said.

Another part of Abbott’s plan is to have law enforcement arrest undocumented immigrants for

charges related to trespassing. At a meeting last week, Commissioner Buddy Knight raised concerns about the cost of jailing these undocumented immigrants. “If you incarcerate all of those folks at 65 bucks a day, we could break our county,” he said.

As *The Big Bend Sentinel* previously reported, Guevara brought up the same concern. “What if arrests can be made? So now I have to be concerned because those arrests are going to be costs for us. It’s going to be feeding a person three meals a day, their medical bills; we’re going to have to take care of them.”

After the border summit meeting in Del Rio though, Guevara felt like many of her questions were answered. If Abbott is able to get a federal disaster declaration, then she believes the federal government would reimburse the majority of the costs the county has incurred throughout the crisis.



Staff photo by Maisie Crow

After the Judd fire earlier this month, new attention has been given to the state of the hydrants in Marfa and “out of service” plates were installed on faulty hydrants across town.

Hydrants

(Continued from page 1)

said. “We don’t have any repair kits, the tools needed to repair them, so I’m going to have to buy that stuff.”

Mitschke said that in the past the department has notified the city to a malfunctioning hydrant, and when they inspect it the next time, it’s still experiencing the same issue. “I don’t follow up on that until the next time we check them, and if they’re still not working, we report it again,” he said.

The fire hydrant directly across the street from the high school has had the same issue for over three years. According to the inspection reports, the stem where the fire hose attaches to the hydrant is “frozen shut.”

Marfa ISD Superintendent Oscar Aguero was unaware that this hydrant, which is right across from the gymnasiums on campus, couldn’t be operated. “It does concern me in case something happens,” he said.

Nearly all of the faulty hydrants are located in residential and commercial parts of town. The hydrant behind Porter’s has been dead since at least 2017. The hydrant on the corner of Lincoln and Austin, right beside the First Christian Church, doesn’t release water. And, the hydrant right in the middle of town couldn’t be opened as almost three-years-worth of renovations to the Judd Architecture Office burned to the ground.

The Presidio Volunteer Fire Department is experiencing similar problems with their hydrants. As *The Presidio International* reported this week,

the department just wrapped up inventorying all of its hydrants and discovered that five of them weren’t working.

Right now, the Marfa Fire Department, which is made up of volunteers, is in charge of inspecting the hydrants to ensure they are in working order. “Both for training and then to assist the city to make sure things are operating, we simply open them up. When we go up to a hydrant, we’ll open it all the way up and then close it down, and that’s how we test it,” Mitschke said.

After the inspections are conducted, the fire department sends the reports over to city administrators, whose duty is to ensure these issues are fixed. “That’s up to the city to get in there and look at that and see what might’ve happened with it,” Mitschke said. “They’re metal. They’ll rust up and freeze up. It’s possible to twist the stem enough to where it shears off. A lot of different things can happen.”

In the aftermath of the Judd fire earlier this month, new attention has been given to the state of the hydrants around town. Mitschke said the department is busy inspecting all of the city’s hydrants. Water Supervisor Salgado recently had his staff install “out of service” plates on the faulty hydrants. He also signed his staff up for training in August, said City Manager Roane. “They’ll all be working on getting them up-to-date. I believe they’re planning to start the more basic repairs before then too.”

COOLEST FOURTH OF JULY

SCHEDULE

Fort Davis, Texas

FRIDAY, JULY 2nd

NOON - ribbon cutting at the historic jail house

NOON to 6p - vendors around the County Courthouse

SATURDAY, JULY 3rd

10a to 6 p - vendors around the courthouse

10a - the GREAT Parade

11a to 6p - LIVE music and entertainment on the Courthouse lawn

11a to 4p - kids crafting and games on the Courthouse lawn

11:30a - Jeff Davis County Livestock Association BBQ fundraiser

2p - CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT. Courthouse lawn

2p - Tumbleweed Smith at Limpia Ballroom

5p - Tumbleweed Smith at Limpia Ballroom

9p - Jody Nix LIVE at the Kelly Pavillion

SUNDAY, JULY 4th

10a to 6p - vendors around the Courthouse

1p to 6p - KALP's Tejano Sunday LIVE on the Jeff Davis County Courthouse lawn with Robert Alvarez and DJ Pancho!

- 12 noon, LIVE radio broadcast on KALP and bigbendradio.com

- Conjunto Power Hours: 12p to 3p

- Tejano Sundays, 3p to 6p

- DJ Jaime Lopez, 6p to 8p

2p to 4p - Salsa and Chili Macho contest (winner announced at 4p)

5p - GRITO COMPETITION

- 8p, the 6th annual PURO PARTY Celebration!

- 8:30p to 9:30p, Puro Party Allstarz

9p - Tejano Sunday's Puro Party Celebration LIVE at the Kelly Pavillion

- 9:30p to 10:15p, Brianna Rios

- 10:30p to 1a, JR Gomez y Los Conjunto Bandits

MONDAY, JULY 5th

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Staff photos by Maisie Crow

Left: Nicole Tancik, who moved from Denver to work at Marfa Meats, makes cuts into the final quarter of a dry-aged beef carcass in the butchering room at the newly-opened processing plant. **Top right:** Freshly butchered meat prior to being packaged at Marfa Meats. **Bottom right:** Beef carcasses hang in the dry-aging room for two weeks prior to being butchered, processed and packaged.

Marfa Meats opens for business

By SACHI MCCLENDON
sachi@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA – For Marfa Meats owner Christy Miller, running a meat processing plant is a first. Miller — who has a background in finance — decided to open up Marfa Meats after wondering why she couldn’t get a local steak in town. As *The Big Bend Sentinel* previously [reported](#), the first step she took in opening the plant was contacting late rancher Ellery Aufdengarten. “He was just such a huge champion of mine,” she said. “He was the catalyst for me making connections with so many people in the ranching community that I didn’t know before.”

Miller said that there were a lot of obstacles to opening her business out here in remote West Texas. “For example, we had some delays getting the power hooked up, and then once the power was hooked up we got hit by lightning, and the transformer blew and AEP had to come out,” she said. “I knew it would be hard. I didn’t think it was going to be a breeze, but it’s incredibly difficult.”

And the challenges have persisted. “It’s exponentially harder to do things here. First of all, it’s expensive because all of this speciality equipment has to be shipped from far away,” she said. “I end up paying almost as much for shipping some of these things as I do for the product itself.”

“We realized we were out of coolant and the closest place that has coolant is in Odessa. So then you’re spending a whole day sending someone to Odessa to pick it up and go back,” she said. “You just can’t rely on normal business operations to function effectively here.”

Yet Marfa Meats opened its doors just two weeks ago, and the company — right off of Highway 90 just west of town — is already doing a brisk business.

It’s been half a century since there has been a meat processing plant in town, and Miller said that some ranchers in the area have jumped at the chance to process their livestock. “It’s a drought so they’re paying to feed their animals, so all of sudden they have an opportunity to process them and not have them on the feed bill, so to speak. So we were really kind of slammed,” Miller said.

On Tuesday, operations were well under way. In the chop shop, Miller had a crew of four butchers who were busy slicing away at a beef carcass. One butcher, Nicole Tancik, said it

takes the team about four hours to cut down a cow and package the meat for the customer.

“I’m from Colorado, so seeing meat that looks this good in the desert is kind of amazing to me,” said Tancik, who has been working in the industry since she was 16.

In the back of the butcher shop, about a dozen carcasses were attached to hooks hanging from the ceiling. There, the beef is dry aged for about two weeks before the team carves away at the animal. “When you first slaughter an animal, you’ve got to get rid of all the rigor mortis and everything else. It’s still quite tough actually,” said Guy Sealey, another butcher at Marfa Meats. “You dry age them to take the moisture out, because

“The local butcher is going to do a lot of good for the community, and that’s how it used to be 40 or 50 years ago. Every town had one or two little butchers and they produced a better product.”

that gives them more flavor.”

In order to turn the dry-aged carcass into recognizable cuts of meat, the butchers first have to cut the carcass in half with a knife and then place the meat on a bandsaw to cut into finer pieces.

After whittling away all of the excess fat, skin and bone, the team packages the hanger steaks, brisket, skirt steaks, short ribs, T-bones and many other cuts for the customer. Sealey, who moved from Connecticut to work here, said that they can

get over 500 pounds of meat from the animal.

Right now, Marfa Meats provides two distinct services. One side of the business lets ranchers — or anyone who is raising a cow or pig — process their livestock for personal use. The other side is about selling local meat directly to consumers. Miller had to get federal USDA certifications to do this. There also has to be a USDA inspector on site to monitor the butchering process.

“We are processing USDA meat for ourselves, which means we can sell to the public. We’re going to have a little retail shop here,” Miller said. She’s also going to sell her meat at a vending machine in front of the Cactus Liquors store and eventually ship her meat across the country.

“The cattle we are buying from Aufdengarten were raised in Pinto Canyon. They moved it over to this tiny little feedlot they have by the radio tower and then it comes here. All of that is within a 20-mile radius,” she said. “It’s just about keeping a really tight chain. To know exactly how the animal was raised and where it was raised, it’s an entirely different product.”

Gary Aufdengarten, the co-owner and operator of Aufdengarten Cattle Company, has been looking forward to Marfa Meats opening up. “The local butcher is going to do a lot of good for the community, and that’s how it used to be 40 or 50 years ago. Every town had one or two little butchers and they produced a better product,” he said. “You knew exactly where your product was coming from, where the animal was coming from and who was cutting it up and taking care of it.”

Miller also plans on supplying meat to local restaurants and grocery stores. “We’re having a meat tasting next Monday. We invited the local restaurant folks and grocery people, and we’re going to do a meet and greet with the producers,” she said. “Hopefully that will get us some wholesale accounts.”

Miller says she feels like she is providing a true service to the community. “It is rewarding when the local ranchers are just so happy that they don’t have to drive four hours to get their animals processed,” she said.

In the next month, Miller plans on getting a composter out there to turn all of the animal byproducts into a rich soil. “We’re going to work on a huge garden out here. That would be great, just to have local vegetables,” she said. “By using the byproducts of these animals, we’re actually creating something right here that enriches our soil and enriches our health.”

Presidio Appraisal District finds new auditor

By SACHI MCCLENDON
sachi@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO COUNTY – The board of the Presidio County Appraisal District held a special meeting last week to select a new auditor to conduct its fiscal 2020 yearly audit. The district received three bids from various firms throughout the state, but ultimately settled on Gibson Ruddock Patterson out of El Paso.

As *The Big Bend Sentinel* previously [reported](#), the district’s longtime auditor, Doak Painter, pulled out of this most recent audit, citing his lack of faith in the chairman of the appraisal board, Presidio Mayor John Fer-

guson. At the time, the chief appraiser for the district, Cynthia Ramirez, said that Painter’s sudden departure would most likely cause the district to not be able to submit its audit in a timely fashion to the state.

Board Member Ann Dunlap liked Gibson Ruddock Patterson (GRP), as the firm had a plan with how to deal with the district falling behind. “We all have to be careful when we see a really good presentation because sometimes it’s just a slick department, but in reading through it, the thing that really struck me was that they had a plan,” she said. “They had a plan about how to deal with being somewhat behind in getting started, and still having our audit prepared.”

According to Ramirez, GRP is a paperless firm, which will expedite the auditing process. “The audit can be done remotely, saving time for both the district and GRP. They will contact the previous auditor and review prior audit files if necessary,” she said.

Many board members liked the idea of having GRP take over, as the firm is well-acquainted with the area. The firm has worked with the Brewster County Appraisal District, Presidio County, Brewster County, the City of Alpine and the Jeff Davis County Appraisal District.

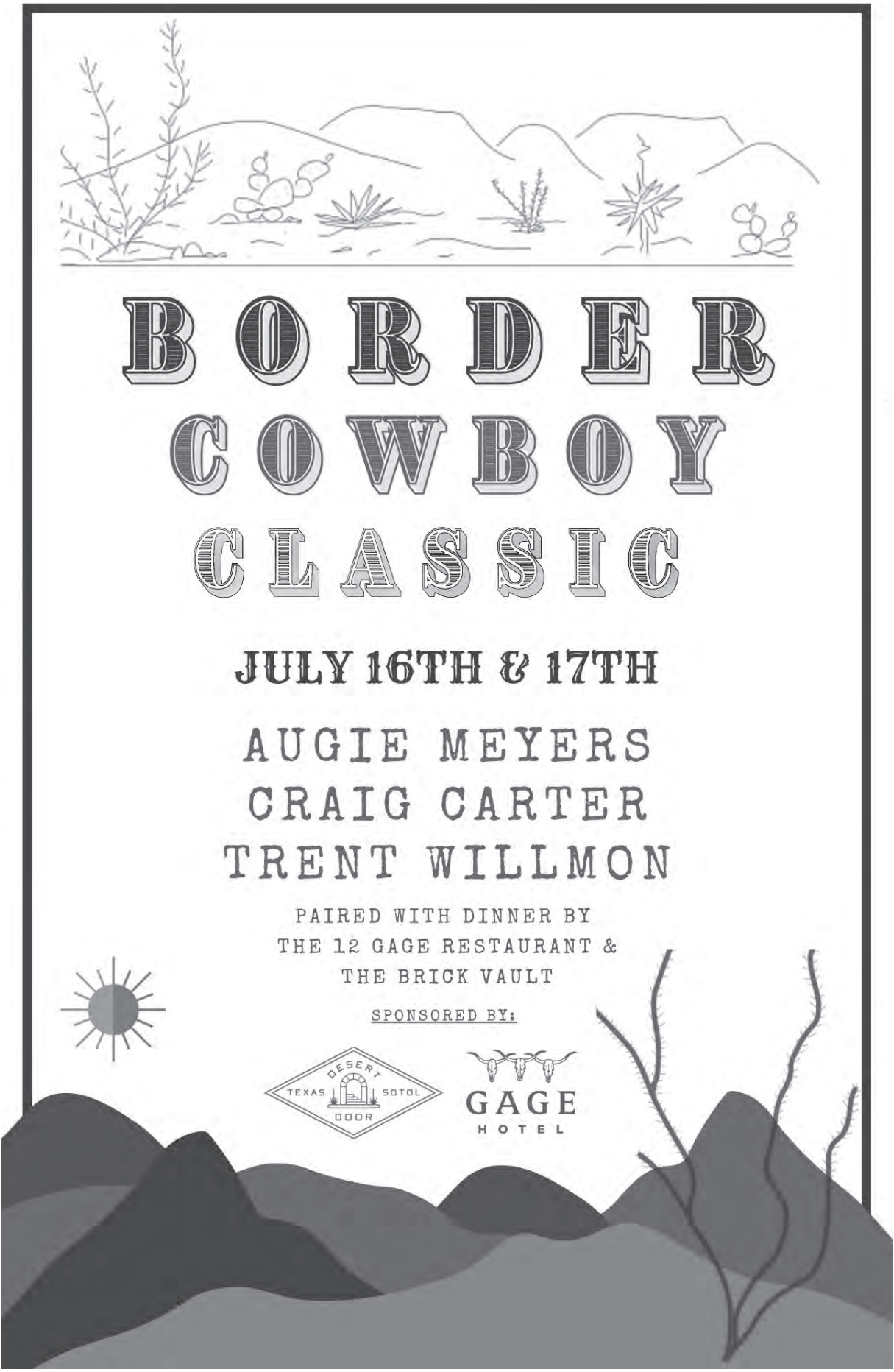
“The one thing that did catch my attention, that GRP firm has worked with so many entities right here in the tri-county,” Ferguson said. Board Member Yoseff Ben-

Yehuda also endorsed GRP for the same reason.

Gibson Ruddock Patterson estimates it will cost \$8,000 to conduct the audit, \$2,500 more than what Painter charged. The ballpark price provided by GRP was middle of the road; the other two bids came in at \$7,000 and \$10,000.

Board Member Teresa Nunez abstained from the vote as she works for the Brewster County Appraisal District, which is audited by GRP. All other members voted in favor of hiring GRP.

Ramirez said that if GRP is able to begin the process in July, as the timeline stated, the district will hopefully not fall behind in submitting the audit this year.



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For more information on the new BBT data center, please contact Sales at dcsales@bigbend.com.

Opinions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

One of the consistent comments heard in Alpine is that Erik Zimmer was one of the best city managers in a long time, and the manner in which the city council terminated his contract was unacceptable. No reason given. When asked why, council members respond, “No comment.” So much for openness and transparency. You and the majority of the council are clearly not focused on the best interests of Alpine and its residents.

Does city council have the authority? Yes, they do. But those who attended the May 18 meeting, or who watched the video of the council meeting, saw that clearly the actions by the mayor and majority of city council appear to be pre-coordinated outside of the council meeting. **If so, that’s against the law.**

No Mayor Ramos, there is no vendetta, there is no attempt to control city council, and how dare you imply that it’s racism. I’m Native American, have been tribal chairman on my reservation, and have sponsored and led diversity summits for thousands of people. The recall is simply about holding you and council members accountable for an egregious violation of the law and citizen trust, and the significant waste of taxpayer money that will result from your illegal action. While I’m probably more vocal than most on the topic, I am but one of many supporting the recall. Why only you and Martin? The city charter says that the council members from Wards 1 and 3 are not eligible for recall until they have served 6 months. That recall can start in November. Read the Texas law and read the city charter....you might learn something.

Rick Stephens
A Concerned Citizen of Alpine

...

Dear Editor,

As most rural Texans know, Texas continues to lead the nation in the number of uninsured and rural hospital closings. But more specifically, we lead the nation in the number of uninsured children and maternal mortality rates.

As the biennial session of the Legislature convened in January of this year, we had high hopes that the Republican leadership, including the five Republican physician legislators, would work with Democrats to find a solution to the healthcare crisis that is impacting all of Texas. Sadly, Medicaid expansion, the one issue that would have immediately alleviated several healthcare problems and would have automatically increased the number of insured Texans, did not even get a hearing.

Medicaid expansion became a political issue during the Obama administration, but since then has never been considered because many Republican primary voters oppose government helping the working poor and less fortunate. Ironically, most of the GOP primary voters (that oppose Medicaid expansion), are white, older, wealthy and with private health insurance.

Medicaid expansion would focus on people with jobs but who cannot afford the outrageously high monthly premiums. For a young couple with two kids — the sum of daycare costs, a house payment, two car payments (so both parents can commute to work), high utility payments and other expenses, it’s impossible to afford a \$1,500 - \$2,000 monthly health insurance payment. As a result, they take the chance that there will be no major health issues or accidents for their family. They also use emergency rooms for routine care, facilities that are the most expensive part of a hospital system for treatment.

Every member of the Texas Legislature that opposes Medicaid expansion has taxpayer subsidized health insurance for themselves and their families. I am a firm believer that our healthcare crisis would be quickly addressed if all Texans had access to the same healthcare and health insurance subsidies as our state elected officials.

David Marwitz
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WHERE’S YOUR MASK?





Dear Editor,

I am writing to express profound thanks to the Marfa Volunteer Fire Department, Fire Chief Gary Mitschke and the Fort Davis Fire Department for their efforts last week that resulted in the Marfa House surviving the devastating fire at the Glasscock Building next door. Despite some significant water damage and extensive smoke infiltration, the building appears to be largely intact. Marfa House, constructed in 1892 and operating under that name well into the 20th century, is one of Marfa’s oldest buildings and a rare example of a two-story adobe railroad hotel of that era.

Thanks again,
Roger Wilson
*Austin and Marfa
President/Sole Member of Marfa House, LLC*

...

We want to hear from YOU!

- Letters should be sent to editor@bigbendsentinel.com, and must provide the writer’s full name, city of residence and an email or phone number, so that we may follow up and verify information as needed.
- 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.
- We have limited staff capacity to fact check unsubstantiated claims, so letters that include those may be held or remain unpublished if information is not easily verifiable.
- 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

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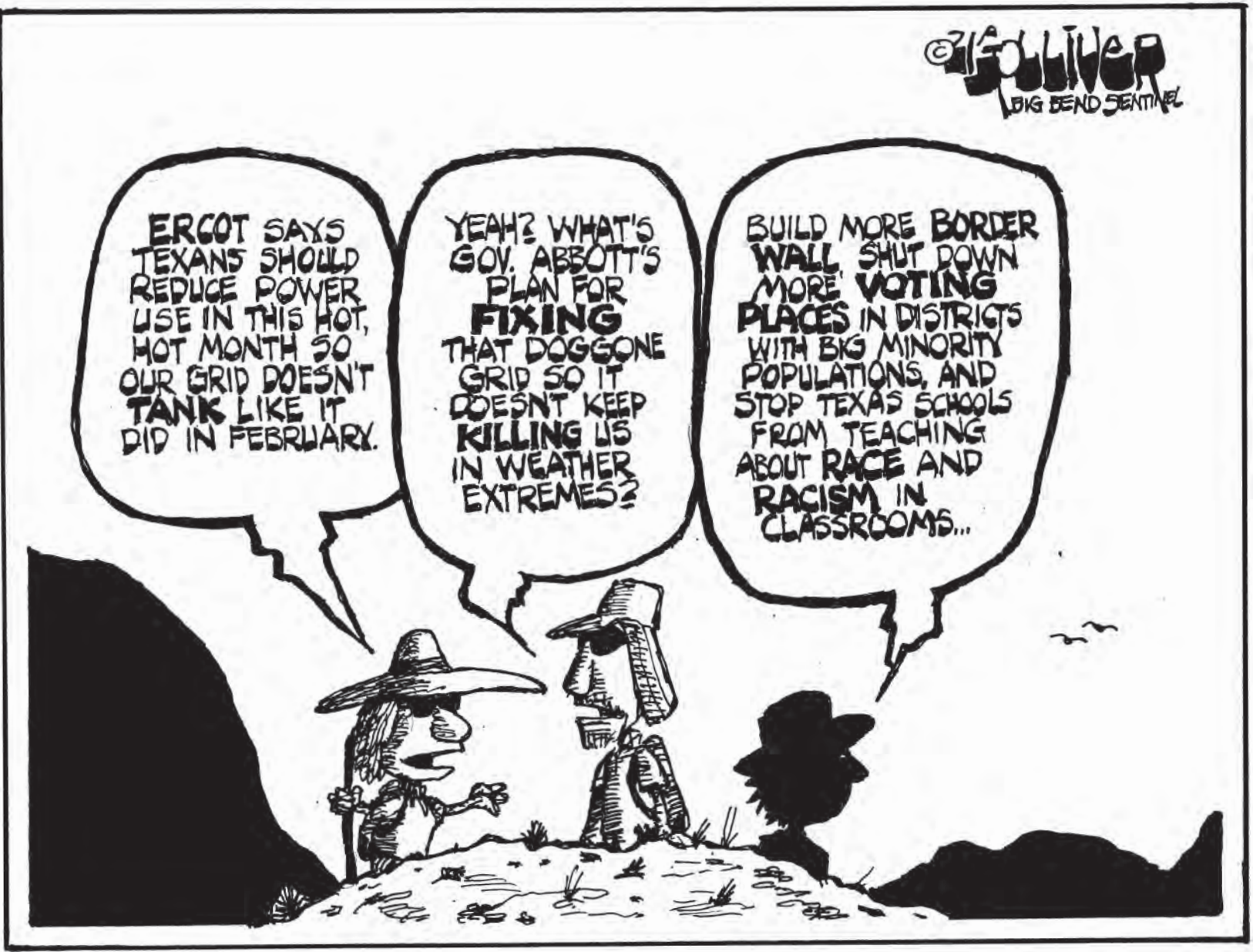
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YES, I LIVE HERE

Gardener’s lament

By MARY ETHERINGTON

The small patch of my backyard bordering a convenience mart and gas station brought challenge and joy. In that bit of land — filled with styrofoam cup shards, all the tiny corners of M&M packs, the little cellophane tops from god knows what, bits of tin foil, plastic straws, and more cigarette butts than my mind can tally or comprehend — I scratched and sowed flower seed.

Well actually, I strew. There was no way I was going to touch the years of potato chip bags, gas receipts, plastics of unknown origin and the occasional used diaper. It was quite geological. Time and pressure produced a history that I could not bring myself to breach.

So, strew seeds, tend and water I did, with a vigilance known as overcomer’s zeal. With my diligent watch for evidence of germination, I imagined that actual plants, and then someday flowers, might triumph to beautify this small plot and, in my loftiest ambitions, inspire the garbage-tossing patrons of the gas station to hold that trash or cigarette butt and head for the nearest bin rather than let the wind casually take it, cross the alleyway and lash itself to my tangle of weeds.

I saw some emergent bits of green, tiny, round leaves, in that exact same arc that my strewing arm had wildly swung, handfuls of seeds launched. I dragged recent cuttings from around front to serve as mulch to hold some moisture in this edge-of-a-parking-lot, dry, pulverized, dusty, kind of concrete-colored soil, at least that would help keep what questionable soil that was there in place until my seeds came rejoicing through. I watered, watched and waited, happy in my obsession.

Tiny green bits inched through and I answered back with more watering, feeling budding triumph. Then, there were two days with showers back to back and an explosion of growth was born. On Father’s Day, in stunned silence, on my haunches in the usual close examination squat, the phenomenal growth over a few short days bowled me over. It’s what happens in the desert, some bit of rain and plants shoot up inches in a day. Mid-internal celebration, something caught me up — flowers in the desert don’t shoot up practically overnight; these were weeds. Now, straight up with the rain and practically lush, the harsh fact dawned: I had been duped. Over-enthusiastic people fall for common plant-world pranks. The high desert howls with laughter. Back on my heels, head down, in recognition of my folly, the tears and laughter arrived together.

And then, in that painful, ridiculous moment, my father’s presence appeared at my shoulder, chiding me for watering weeds with such abandon, so delighted with this discovery, so tease-worthy. It’s exactly the sort of endeavor that would have been my entrance into his lexicon of ribbing that would never die. He would have said to my nieces or great aunts or visiting friends, “Hey, let’s call Mary Jane and see if she’s watered her weeds yet today!”

He had a way of turning the worst-seeming failure or painful misstep into not something to be ashamed of, rather something to be lauded for, as he found it entertaining and would therefore regale others with his delight. Somehow his teasing was never cruel, never barbed, just a lighthearted take on what the world can deliver unexpectedly. He made it all better.

My dad sponsored a baseball team made up of coaches and firefighters and cops from our small town in Kansas when I was kid. My summers were in large part lived in the back of a station wagon headed to a sandlot ball field in a smaller town, a picnic basket packed and served up by my mom at some point during the excursion. There was high dust and very long, boring stretches. My father was occasionally thrown out by the umpire for arguing balls and strikes, and then would continue to heckle from under the bleachers, much to my mother’s Presbyterian consternation. Yet, turning to my father’s memory for the solace I seek, binding the wounds of my gardening mishaps, in some way makes no sense. Once, during high school, I came home on a hot summer day to find him mowing the yard in a suit, tie and wingtips. That, to my knowledge, was the extent of his connection to the plant world.

It’s been a few years on since the gardening experiment by the gas station, where eventually Mexican sunflowers transformed that bit of alley. I watched as people leapt out of cars to collect seeds, and do hope more towering plants are entertaining monarch butterflies in new locales along their migration path. More recently I began again in another yard in the high desert, filled with a different collection of nasty and questionable contents right down to bits of colorful faded plastic, broken glass and a luxurious fence-to-fence blanket of impressive goatheads.

The first year I never spent less than thirty minutes a day pulling goatheads from the dry earth. I was intrepid and made progress. The second year a dark green, very flat to the ground plant appeared to my delight, as the ground cover I had dreamed must exist out here. Several weeks on, teeny tiny pricklers appeared on what I had thought was my savior plant, and by this time, to my horror, covered all the parts liberated from goatheads. These new plants have an even finer point, far more difficult to extract, easier to

break off and thus prolong the suffering. I have been no less vigilant with these mean-spirited plants, and yet they appear once again, just to break my spirit apparently.

In this now much-fussed-over and still downtrodden yard, I have spent more than I care to share on precious native seeds, plus arduously-collected wildflower seeds, carefully planted, tended and watered with absolutely abysmal results. The sunflowers that sprouted, the one flower success last year, were almost immediately flattened by my overly large puppy flopping down where the soil was wet and cool. There are three raised beds, built by a previous tenant, in a part of the yard the puppy cannot breach. I planted six varieties of tomatoes, my most passionate, lifelong love. As a kid I would dial random numbers in the phone book and say, “Everything good is made from tomatoes,” and hang up.

So incessant bragging to myself about the high germination rate with these six varieties of tomatoes turned abruptly into my newest plant nightmare when I saw the first flower and realized I’d never seen a white tomato flower. The “tomatoes” were Oak Leaf Datura, every single part of the plant toxic to mammals. In my defense, several kind people did say they looked like tomato leaves, so I was not alone, and yet I was inconsolable.

That first time I was fooled by desert plants landed in my heart equal parts sad and funny. This time I was just discouraged. I’d been watering toxic plants masquerading as tomatoes. How could I be so ignorant? How could they form such a perfect floating carpet in my raised beds? Were birds involved in this fiasco? What I wouldn’t give to once more feel my father’s presence by my side, chiding me back to seeing the humor in my failed endeavor, being the cause of his delight.

On Father’s Day, my chastised self pulled up the datura and to my absolute wonderment discovered a few tiny, beleaguered tomato plants barely surviving under their canopy. I spent the day rearranging the limp plants and making them comfortable. After praising the surviving tomatoes, I sat on the edge of the raised bed to take in this new development and spied some pea pods on two struggling plants that I thought the heat had claimed because they were planted far too late. I again felt my dad’s presence as I happily feasted on perfect pea pods and celebrated my one victory. My spirit soared.

After various stints working on an organic wheat farm in eastern Montana, a collection of giant cacti in my corporate office in San Francisco, a vegetable farm on Martha’s Vineyard, and a big garden plot plus abundant flowers back East, I had mistakenly thought I was sort of good at this, and maybe even above average. The desert has shown me the folly of my thinking, and also that I am often an unmitigated outright failure. Right now I have two (TWO!!) tomato plants and two volunteer sunflowers plus the humility that comes from seeing bare earth where many varieties of plants were supposed to be, plus the knowledge it was not for lack of trying. This may be my worst year yet. People around me have gardens that are thriving, producing with such an abundance they share. It’s painful and wonderful, for without them I would not have local organic greens and yet what the hell? I ask myself.

Maybe it’s actually my father’s determination that I long to conjure at this point. At 50, his doctor told him to start playing golf to get some exercise. Having never joined the country club due to the non-admittance of Jews and Blacks, that fell on deaf ears. Then one day, driving by the high school, he saw something happening in the field, pulled over and found an Old Masters track meet in progress. He signed up on the spot and ran in his suit, tie and street shoes. Sometime later when I was living in Palo Alto, I saw him compete in a track meet in Southern California. I took a photograph of him running the hurdles and went back to my rooftop vegetable garden; he went home to Kansas without further ado. It wasn’t until after his death I discovered from newspaper clippings he actually became the National Decathlon Champion for over 50, at the age of 55.

So maybe, just maybe, I can pull up my socks, channel some of his energy, soldier on, and head back out into the yard, seeds in hand. Perhaps it’s time to get over my aversion to row cover and irrigation, things never needed when I lived where it rained with great regularity, and accept the desert.

Maybe the native grass hopefully germinating under the pine needle mulch out my back door with a set of bed springs from the dump on top to keep my puppy from his favorite pastime of digging up anything I’ve planted, will actually come up. And this Father’s Day, whether I feel his presence again or not, I will tell anyone who asks, that yes, I’ve watered my weeds today.

Mary Etherington has traversed the world from frozen pizza factory, organic farming, hand bookbinder to art gallery owner while always writing.

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HIGH DESERT SKETCHES

Alice and the rabbit hole moved to Arizona

By GEORGE COVINGTON

Each day it appears that the ramifications of the 2020 presidential election float deeper and deeper into the realm of fantasy. I mentioned months ago that the election conspirators drift more and more into *Alice in Wonderland*. Since that time, it has gotten even stranger and stranger and has concentrated on Arizona. In February, the results of two intense audits of Maricopa County’s election and their 2.5 million vote results convinced most people and many Arizona Republicans that there was no fraud committed.

After the results of the two audits were confirmed, strange things started happening. The Arizona State Senate decided it would hold its own investigation. A former Arizona secretary of state was named liaison between the state senate and the third investigation. Then, it really got strange. A company with no prior election experience was hired to do a recount. The company, located in Virginia, is called Cyber Ninjas, and an observer, chosen by the governor and the current secretary of state, stated in a news article that when she arrived at the site of a recount it was like entering a fantasy land. They made her wear a pink t-shirt, and she was instructed not to talk to any of the counters or touch anything. She was then followed around the site by a staffer who wore a yellow t-shirt. Somebody should have told these clowns that ninjas only wear black. One of the Cyber Ninjas’ first chores was to examine the ballots for bamboo fibers. The rumors started right after the 2020 election that 40,000 ballots had been flown in from China and stuffed in Arizona ballot boxes. The Cyber Ninjas examined ballots with ultraviolet light, but no bamboo has been discovered so far.

It gets stranger. The Cyber Ninjas hired a company based in Virginia called CyFIR. CyFIR’s president lives in a cabin near remote Swan Lake. The Arizona State Senate liaison turned over 2.1 million individual voter packets but is not certain where Swan Lake, Montana, is located and where CyFIR’s “lab” is located. The liaison did not know if the “lab” has any oversight or security.



The latest addition by the election fraud conspirators is the strangest. Clint Hickman, chairman of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, has been accused of stealing paper ballots, shredding the ballots and feeding them to his chickens. He is then charged with burning the chickens. The facts are a lot simpler. Mr. Hickman is a chicken farmer and recently two barns on his farm burned down, killing 162,000 chickens. Arson is not suspected, particularly as it relates to Mr. Hickman, but the way the recount is going he may face 162,000 individual counts of murder. Keep going, Cyber Ninjas, you still can bring humor to the world.

Arizona is not the only state to have a problem with the rabbit hole syndrome. Alice and her rabbit hole have visited Austin on more than one occasion. Our beloved Governor Abbott seems to open the rabbit hole every time he opens his mouth. We all remember the great comedy team of Abbott and Costello. I was delighted to discover that Abbott had left comedy for politics. Having a comedian as governor would have been great, except in the old partnership Costello was the straight man. Now, our beloved Governor Abbott has assumed the role of a super straight man. He has learned to look straight into a camera and say things like, “Republicans believe that the power should be with local governments.”

He then maintains a very straight face when he tells Laredo they cannot regulate plastic grocery bags, many of which are found on barbed wire fences throughout South and West Texas. He tells Denton they cannot regulate fracking near a public high school. In the past legislative session, he tried to tell Houston voters they did not need so many ballot boxes and they could go to jail for giving water to voters standing in long lines on hot days. I miss the old Abbott.

Dear reader, I have taken off for the last few years in the months of July and August to catch up on a few projects. My back-to-school column will appear on September 2. Have a happy summer.

George A. Covington has worked in the fields of law, education, journalism and disability rights. He considers himself retired from every one of them with the possible exception of journalism. He is a graduate of the University of Texas schools of Journalism and Law. He moved to West Texas – Alpine – in 1997 after a 20-year career in Washington, D.C. where he once served on the staff of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (Democrat) and shortly thereafter served as Special Assistant to the Vice President of the United States (Republican) 1989 to 1993.

Crowcrumbs is a Houston-based illustrator. Follow her on Instagram @crowcrumbs.



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Not pictured:
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Zulema Sanchez
Yvonne Vizcaino

by Cindy Nuñez
MHS Class of 1964

Community

Agave Festival Marfa distilled to 3-day event



By **ABBIE PERRAULT**
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — Agave Festival Marfa returns June 25 to 27 to celebrate the agave plant, its cultural influence and its connection to the Chihuahuan Desert by serving up a potent cocktail of history, culture, ecology, binationalism and tequila. While the event took a year off in 2020, organizer Tim Johnson has revived the festival in a pared-down form that invites locals to join in on a weekend of free programming.

Johnson began the festival after hearing a Marfa Public Radio piece on the agave lechuguilla plant, an indicator species for the Chihuahuan Desert. “I thought that was a very beautiful idea in a culture that is defined by all kinds of national and ethnic forms of division,” he said.

The plant grows on both sides of the border in the Chihuahuan Desert, and actually helps scientists better understand and diagnose the health of the ecosystem. “The same story was telling me that climate change had reduced the population of agave lechuguilla significantly over 30 to 40 years. I also learned that agave lechuguilla had been a significant part of indigenous culture in our area for many thousands of years. Immediately I felt the incredible power of this single plant.”

Earlier this month, Johnson quietly announced the festival’s return, offering a three-day gathering of live music, talks, food and a hefty serving of agave spirits. Last time Marfa hosted the festival, it was a 10-day affair, but this year’s shortened event will cater mostly to local and regional guests who are passionate or curious about agave plants and spirits.

“Many of the guests scheduled for 2020 were coming from central, western and southern Mexico, because I want the festival to be binational in nature. The core of agave culture, which includes the American Southwest, is definitely in historical Mesoamerica, a lot of which today is Mexico.” But with travel at the U.S.-Mexican border still being restricted as a



vestige of COVID regulations, Johnson feels like he can’t fully honor the binational nature of the festival.

Johnson considers himself an enthusiast, so he relies on experts in the botanical, cultural and spirit history of the plant to put on an educational and entertaining event.

This year, spirit makers will offer public tastings, five border journalists will have a round table on agave, and to kick off the weekend, local agronomist and landscape designer Jim Martinez will converse with Rainer Judd and Bertha Gonzalez Nieves of Tequila Casa Dragones about the importance of public spaces and native plants in Judd Foundation’s newly unveiled public agave garden.

Drinks and revelry will round out the weekend, with celebrations at The Sentinel, The Pool, Para Llevar and other to-be-announced locations. Claudia Saenz, founder of Chulita Vinyl Club, will be doing a special DJ set, joined by two local DJs, Yasmine Guevara and Tana Vargas, on Saturday night.

Johnson is looking forward to the outdoor gathering at the USO Building’s Visitor Center Pavilion where a group of all-Latino journalists with decades of experience in their field will discuss agave, the border and the binational changes they have perceived over the past six years, including the Trump presidency and the

Top: Participants in Jim Martinez’s native plant tour at CDRI in 2019. Left: Alfredo Corchado, Angela Kocherga, Cecilia Balli, Dudley Althaus participate in a journalism panel discussion at Agave Fest in 2019.

pandemic, but also the years leading up to it.

“I grew up in Texas, I was educated in Texas, there are things I know about Texas which are very important to me,” Johnson said. “All of that still left me far, far short of understanding in a more deep historical and cultural way where I come from.”

“It’s my own sense of wanting to know where I am more deeply and a sense that I am alienated from that culture. I think there’s a lot of things that are responsible for that alienation, but I want to undo it to the extent that I can. I think a lot of people feel that way.” For him, the festival is a way to connect experts, enthusiasts and those curious to learn a little more about the thousands of years of human history in the Chihuahuan Desert.

“Policing the border by both the U.S. and Mexico, and the Spanish before the Mexicans, has divided the actual communities of indigenous people living in this area in the 18th, 19th and 20th century and even today,” Johnson believes. “To survive, a lot of those people had to hide aspects of their culture or cloak them in different ways. I think by talking about agave, it helps to bring back the ways that these cultures continued in new forms and also how they continue in old forms, but how they nonetheless exist under contemporary forms of contestation, and really, frankly, forms of oppression, both in the United States and Mexico. I obviously am just an Anglo person, but I definitely know that this is a part of where I live and, honestly, who I am. So I’m trying to figure out how to be a part of that conversation.”

Agave Festival Marfa begins Friday, June 25. Visit www.agavemarfa.com for a full schedule.

Photos by Alex Marks

OBITUARY



Escobedo

Funeral services for **Catarino “Reno” Valverde Escobedo Jr.**, 60, of Seminole, Texas, were held at 10 a.m., Tuesday, June 8, 2021, at St. James Catholic Church with the Rev. Jose De Dios Gonzalez officiating, under the direction of Ratliff Funeral Home of Seminole.

Reno passed away June 5, 2021, in Big Spring, Texas.

He was born March 17, 1961, in Marfa, Texas, to Catarino F. Sr. and Mary Lou Valverde Escobedo.

Reno graduated from Seminole High School in 1979. He then went on to welding school at New Mexico Junior College. Reno married Sylvia Galindo on June 26, 1982, in Seminole. He retired after 37 years with Mobil Pipeline, now Centurion Pipeline, and was currently employed with SCS Technologies as a certified welding inspector.

Reno enjoyed outdoor grilling, was an avid motorcycle rider with his friends and loved being with his daughters and grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his brother, Johnny Escobedo.

Reno is survived by his wife, Sylvia Escobedo, of Seminole; daughters Rebecca Escobedo of Big Spring, Laura and husband Cody Jones of Amarillo, and Catherine Escobedo of San Angelo; grandchildren Georgia Pena and Luke Jones; parents Catarino and Mary Lou Escobedo of Seminole; sisters Delma Gusman and Norma Medina; along with numerous nieces and nephews.

Mimm’s Draw walk/jog/run trail seeks volunteers

MARFA — Marfa Parks and Recreation is asking for volunteers to help with picking up trash along the newly established Mimm’s Draw walk/jog/run trail. The clean-up runs from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, June 19, 2021.

Meet in front of the Wrong Store on Highland in downtown Marfa and pitch in. Please bring your own gloves and water bottle.

For more information, call Jon Johnson at (432) 386-5099

WSB team recognized at congressional hearing for WIOA

EL PASO — Workforce Solutions Borderplex is proud to announce that its digital solutions program was recently recognized at a congressional hearing for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. On Thursday, May 27, Portia Wu, managing director of public policy—U.S. government affairs at Microsoft, spoke about WSB’s own digital solutions program at the House Education and Labor Committee. The committee convened a hearing, “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Reauthorization: Creating Employment Pathways for Dislocated Workers.”

Wu heard about the digital solutions program from Jonathan Childress, the Microsoft community engagement manager for El Paso. Childress has been a very supportive partner of WSB and was one of the architects of the DTS program, along with Alma Aranda, Workforce development director.

“We take pride in what our digital solutions team has done to help businesses during COVID-19. Through the incorporation of transformation strategies, and with the support of our partners, we truly impacted hundreds of employers,” said CEO Leila Melendez.

At the hearing, WSB’s digital solutions team was referenced as an example of how strong employer-based digital transformation preserved jobs and helped workers develop new skills during the pandemic. “For example, during the pandemic, the El Paso-based Workforce Solutions Borderplex partnered with the City of El Paso, El Paso County, Microsoft and the Texas Workforce Commission to launch a program to help entrepreneurs and small business owners upgrade and expand their operations with technology. The program helps businesses to establish an online presence and provides basic digital literacy training for employers and employees. More than 200 businesses have already participated, and the program continues to help more businesses and their workers adapt and grow.”

Workforce Solutions Borderplex advances education, employment, entrepreneurship and economic development prospects in support of global competitiveness and regional prosperity. The organization’s service region encompasses Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties.

☺ MARFA SUMMER SCHOOL LUNCH MENU ☺

MAY	Thu, June 17	Fri, June 18	Mon June, 21	Tue, June 22	Wed, June 23
BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST PIZZA		B-FAST BURRITO, HASH BROWNS	PANCAKES, SAUSAGE	SAUSAGE KOLACHE CHEESE CUBES
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MARFA SUMMER SPORTS CALENDAR

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Awards ceremony after games at Coffield Park

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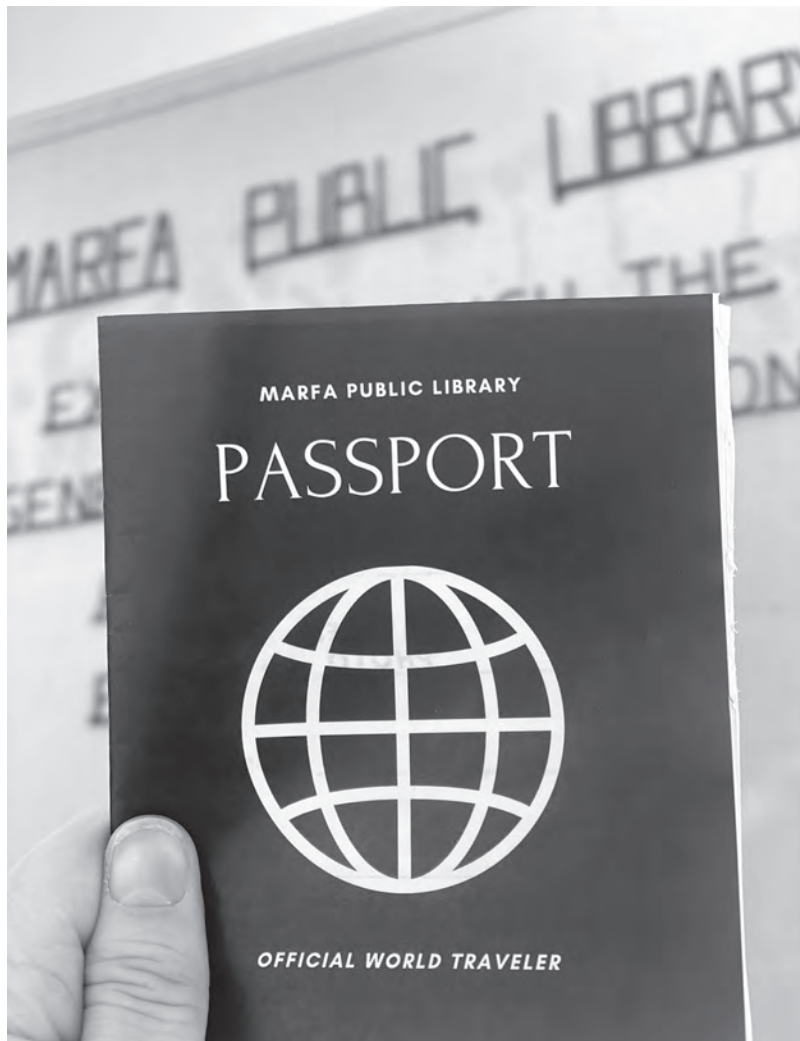
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Passport to fun: Summer Reading at Marfa Public Library kicks off this Thursday



Courtesy of Marfa Public Library

Participants will have the opportunity to get their photo taken and receive an official Summer Reading passport when they participate in the program.

MARFA — The much-anticipated annual Summer Reading program at Marfa Public Library returns this Thursday, June 17, 2021. This summer's theme is "Passport to ...," taking intrepid readers on a trip around the world. This year's featured countries are: Australia, Egypt, Peru, Iceland, France and Japan. To kick things off, a passport office has been created in the library where participants can get their photo taken and receive their official Summer Reading passport.

Points are earned by reading books and logging one's progress. Participants will receive prizes as they reach different reading benchmarks throughout the six-week program, including raffle tickets for the grand prizes. Prizes include a Le Creuset Dutch oven, lava lamp, Power Wheels dune racer, and more. The more you read, the better your chances to win!

Please visit marfalibrary.readsquared.com to learn more, sign up and start logging your reading.

The library will also create a series of activity bags for ages 3-11 inspired by each country, ready for pick up on Fridays. The bags will have souvenirs and treats from that week's country, such as koala bear stuffed animals from Australia and matcha Kit-Kat bars from Japan.

Save the date, Saturday, July 31, 2021, for the culminating event, an international extravaganza of food and crafts from the six featured countries, where we will also announce the grand prize winners.

Summer Reading is free and open to all. Marfa Public Library is open to the public Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information about Summer Reading: call 432-729-4631, visit marfapubliclibrary.org and follow @marfalibrary on Instagram.

MISD student registration moves online for 2021-2022 school year

MARFA — Marfa ISD parents will use the school's new online registration link in the parent portal to register their students for the 2021-2022 school year.

On www.marfaisd.com, click on "Explore," scroll to "Parents," click on "Ascender Parent Portal" and type in your login information. Parents enrolling their students for the first time at Marfa ISD will need to create a new account using the same link at the school's website.

For returning students, parents/guardians should review and update any information. Parents of new students will need to complete all the required information. Documents such as birth certificate, vaccine records, social security card and parent identification cards can be uploaded from home or brought to the school.

Families who do not have internet access or a computer can come to the school and use a computer at the office to register their children.

The Parent Portal is available in both Spanish and English.

For assistance please call 432-729-5500.

Family-friendly free concert at the Museum of the Big Bend



Photo courtesy of the Museum of the Big Bend

Songwriter and storyteller Sue Young with her duo partner Rusty Nelson.

ALPINE — The Museum of the Big Bend will present songwriter and storyteller Sue Young with her duo partner, Rusty Nelson, on Sunday, June 27, from 3 to 4 p.m. for a family-friendly concert. Young's performance is funded by the Texas Commission on the Arts. Young and Nelson perform together as folk/American duo Young And Rusty. Sue Young's pure voice and Rusty Nelson's rough-edged vocals combine in a perfect blend. Their songs and sound evoke a simpler time — a drive down a country road, a wade in a creek, a ferryboat ride across the Mississippi.

Young's voice has been called "angelic" and "powerful medicine." Growing up in a musical family, she cut her teeth on Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez and Judy Collins. In 1985, Young moved to Austin and turned her attention to writing songs, and she became a four-time Kerrville New Folk Finalist. She also began teaching music and Spanish to kids, which led to a vibrant career as a children's entertainer and landed her on the Texas Commission on the Arts artist roster.

Rusty Nelson grew up on the Gulf Coast in Lafayette, Louisiana, and in Corpus Christi, Texas. He spent some time writing and pitching songs in Nashville. Young and Nelson have been writing and performing together since 2009. They live in Austin with two cats and a lot of guitars.

The Museum of the Big Bend is located on the campus of Sul Ross State University at Entrance #4.

Live performance returns to Sul Ross with 'Failure: A Love Story'



Courtesy of SRSU

BFA Theatre Students Emma Morales, Treasure Blackburn and Alyssa Lanahan play the three Fail Sisters in Sul Ross theatre's forthcoming production *Failure: A Love Story*.

ALPINE — Sul Ross State University's theatre program brings live performance back to the Big Bend with *Failure: A Love Story* by Philip Dawkins. Step into 1928 Chicago and follow the loves and losses of the Fail family in this funny and quirky music-filled tale.

"This sweet play touches on loss and how love and family get us through tough times, which is a fitting show for this past year," says Director Eva Gil. "The fun part of this live-radio adaptation is how it showcases our BFA students' talents. We have a Foley artist creating sound effects on the spot every night and five actors creating over 20 characters. It's a whimsical play."

Failure: A Love Story runs weekends June 25-27, July 2-3 and July 9-11. There will be no performance July 4. All shows begin at 8 p.m. at the Kokernot Outdoor Theatre in Alpine. Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$10 seniors/children (12 and under), and free to SRSU Campus Community (with ID). Cash or check at door or in advance at the François Fine Arts Building, room 106, on the Sul Ross Campus. For more information or to make reservations, contact the Sul Ross Fine Arts Office at finearts@sulross.edu or call 432-837-8218.

Direction by Eva Gil, Assistant Professor of Theatre; Written by Philip Dawkins; Music Direction by Dr. Andrew Alegria, Assistant Professor of Music; Costume Design by Carolyn Barrientes, Assistant Professor of Theatre; Set and Lighting Design by Ross Fleming, Associate Professor of Theatre; Sound Design by Bret Scott, Associate Professor of Communication, Props Master, Crysty Graves Herrera (Monahans). The cast: Treasure Blackburn (Houston), Avery Callaway (Austin), Crysty Graves Herrera (Monahans), Alyssa Lanahan (El Paso), Emma Morales (Uvalde), Cristian Sanchez (Uvalde). Stage Manager: Yaritza Corona (El Paso), Assistant Director: Olivia Pertuso (Alpine). Crew: Corban Butters (Lamesa), Isaias Gutierrez (El Paso), and Desiree Rendon (Uvalde).

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Monday
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MARFA 12 STEP MEETINGS

Go to zoom.us or download the app:

- **ACA - Thursday 5:30 PM** <https://tinyurl.com/y7qyghga>
- **AI Anon. - Sunday 2:00 PM** <https://tinyurl.com/yd78lsa6>
- **AA - Monday, 6:00 PM** <https://tinyurl.com/y25rsguo>
- **AA - Monday, Wednesday 6:00 PM** St. Paul's Episcopal Church (masks, distance, sanitizer, wipe down surfaces required)
- **AA - Saturday 12:00 Noon** <https://tinyurl.com/y686nnw2>

*Please note, you can find online meetings at any time at <https://aa-intergroup.org/oiaa/meetings/>

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