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by order of Presidio County

Brewster County commissioners, Alpine City Council select El Paso-based Emergent Air as new EMS provider

BY MARY CANTRELL
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BREWSTER COUNTY — In separate meetings held Tuesday night, Brewster County Commissioners Court and Alpine City Council voted unanimously to select El Paso-based Emergent Air to serve as North Brewster County’s new emergency services provider.

“All three of the vendor candidates would have been good choices, but the task force felt Emergent Air was the best fit for Alpine/Brewster County,” said EMS task force member and Terlingua Fire and EMS Director Greg Hennington in an email.

Terlingua Fire and EMS stepped up to help provide 911 services for North Brewster County in December after Michael Scudder, longtime operator of Alpine EMS, passed away unexpectedly. Out of concern for overextending his crew, Hennington capped their assistance with a deadline of April 30. Knowing they were up against a deadline, Judge Eleazar Cano assembled an EMS taskforce to focus on establishing a new EMS provider, with county commissioners and city council also assessing the options.

County commissioners held a special meeting recently to hear three vendor proposals for EMS Services from Emergent Air, American Medical Response and City Ambulance Services. A previously-discussed option to start a county-run EMS lost steam, with officials citing not enough time to develop the service. In Tuesday’s commissioners court meeting, Cano said the other two vendors were also well qualified, but in the end they had to make a tough decision.

“It’s like interviewing a person — there’s three or four good candidates, and at the end of the day you can only choose one. That’s just the way the world works,” said Cano.

It was previously stated that all potential vendors, including Emergent Air, agreed to operate North Brewster County EMS services on pre-existing subsidies previously provided to Scudder by the county and city — \$13,397.75 a month from the city and \$15,000 a month from the county, adding up to a total of \$336,000 a year. The company will likely hold separate contracts from the county and the city.

Hennington said the city and county will now move into the contract negotiation phase with

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Photo by Mary Cantrell

From left, Marfa Police Department Officer Anahi Garcia, Fort Stockton Police Department Officer Leilani Bernal and Marfa Police Chief Estevan Marquez participate in active shooter training drills this week at Marfa High School.

Marfa Police Department hosts multi-agency active attack response training at Marfa High School

By MARY CANTRELL
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MARFA — The halls of Marfa High School, typically filled with students, are being occupied by law enforcement officers from Marfa, Alpine and Fort Stockton police departments, Pecos and Presidio county sheriff’s offices, Border Patrol and Department of Public Safety troopers this week who are participating in an active shooter training course while students are on spring break.

“I think it’s important that everybody, especially with all the different agencies that are around the area, that they all have the same mindset when it comes to an active shooter occurring here,” said Marfa Police Chief Estevan Marquez. “It’s something we hope we never have to use, but in case it happens, we do have an understanding of how it works.” Marquez said that to his

knowledge, the multi-agency training is the first of its kind to take place in Marfa.

On Tuesday, the assortment of officers practiced several drills and scenarios: entering classrooms from various angles with different numbers of officers, silently signaling to their partners, shouting commands to a potential active shooter, instructing students, and quickly assessing and announcing medical situations to other first responders.

The entity conducting the active attack response training is the ALERRT (Advanced Law Enforcement Emergency Rapid Response Training) Center, part of Texas State University in San Marcos. Ian Kapets, adjunct instructor for ALERRT, said the center conducts an average of 30 to 50 classes a week around the country at no cost to the hosts. The program receives a combination of state and federal funding and, according to its website, is operating on a \$22.7

million training budget for the current funding cycle.

Kapets said it is ideal for officers to train for an active attack in familiar environments and practice realistic scenarios. For areas like Far West Texas, an emergency event would likely involve the cooperation of a small ad hoc team as opposed to a singular agency, he said.

“A lot of times in small communities, specifically Marfa, Alpine and Marathon, you’re getting sheriff’s deputies, DPS troopers, game wardens and a police officer or some sort of combination. You don’t have large departments with 30 to 40 guys working at a time. So it’s really providing training across the community,” said Kapets.

Kapets said this week the group of law enforcement officers will focus on de-escalating situations and, more importantly, learn how to

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Safety concerns, pay, and internal strife prompt exodus from Big Bend Regional Medical Center, say former staffers

By ALLEGRA HOBBS
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ALPINE — Like many hospitals across the country, Alpine’s Big Bend Regional Medical Center has been facing a staffing crisis for some time. In July of last year, a shortage of nurses trained to deliver babies forced the labor and delivery unit to go on diversion, intermittently closing and diverting patients to farther-away facilities. The problem persisted, with the unit regularly going on diversion for days at a time; in December, the wing closed for two weeks straight, then-Presidio EMT Director Malynda Richardson said at the time.

Then, at the end of January, a lack of staff prompted a dramatic restructuring — what had previously been the med-surg unit, which offered general care for hospitalized patients, was absorbed into the emergency department, forcing both departments to share limited space. Locals sounded the alarm over safety concerns — patients treated in the newly-combined wing and an EMT who brought patients into the facility told the The Big Bend Sentinel similar accounts of an overcrowded facility, with patients relegated to gurneys in the hallway and COVID patients sharing space with non-COVID patients.

At the time, hospital spokesperson Ruth Hucke insisted the restructuring was temporary

and attributable to the nationwide problem of staffing shortages. But former employees tell a different story. In interviews with The Big Bend Sentinel, eight healthcare workers who have left the hospital since 2020 — most of whom requested anonymity — insist hospital leadership has exacerbated staffing issues by declining to give raises to overworked staff, rebutting safety concerns and fostering a low workplace morale.

Former employees said that the hospital made little effort to retain staff and recounted that Rick Flores, the hospital’s CEO, had told staff at meetings that they were replaceable.

“He has said it in every meeting, every town

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Proposed southside Alpine brewery meets pushback from residents, who fear impact on neighborhood

By MARY CANTRELL
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ALPINE — Chisos Brewing, a local family-run craft beer company, is coming up against criticism from southside residents as it seeks to build a block-long facility on Murphy Avenue that would include a two-story taproom, production building and an outdoor beer garden, with citizens protesting potential environmental and cultural impacts.

Alpine has been without a local brewery since Big Bend Brewing Company filed for bankruptcy and announced they were closing in the summer of 2019 after operating for six years. Chisos Brewing — a family affair headed by Lisa and Guy Fielder, whose son Tim handles brewing operations — is looking to provide residents with a replacement, they said. The Fielders acquired a lot on Murphy Avenue between 3rd

and 4th streets, close to downtown Alpine, where they intend to build their production facility and taproom. Chisos Brewery has been over a year in the making, said Lisa.

“The Big Bend Brewery was really fun — it didn’t have a great taproom, but it was a fun place to go and a gathering place for all Alpinians. I think Alpine misses their brewery, and I think Alpine deserves a brewery,” said Chisos co-founder Lisa Fielder.

But not all Alpine residents are sold on the idea of a new brewery. Lonnie Rodriguez and wife Paula Wilson — who have been living on the predominantly Hispanic south side of town, a block away from Chisos’ proposed location, for the past six years — have launched a petition opposing the brewery with the help of an attorney. Among other objections, petitioners are concerned the brewery would not fit in with the surrounding neighborhood, would bring an

influx of traffic to the area, and that its operations could have negative environmental impacts.

Rodriguez said so far they have gathered around 70 signatures from other concerned residents and will continue to circulate the petition, eventually turning it into City Hall. “I just want as many folks [as possible] to know what we’re doing. [Citizens] also need to know that all the kinks are not worked out for the Fielders,” said Rodriguez.

Design plans for Chisos Brewery’s new site have recently been finalized, said Lisa, and they intend to move onto the next phase of acquiring construction drawings, necessary city permits and construction bids. The lot they intend to build on did not previously host any infrastructure, and so far the only permit the Fielders have acquired is one to put up an 8-foot fence around the property. Lisa said if all goes according to plan, they hope to open January of 2023 at the earliest.

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Man who went missing with daughter in national park indicted by grand jury on child endangerment charge

By SAM KARAS
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ALPINE — On March 10, a federal grand jury indicted Hector Flores Jr. of Fort Stockton on one count of child endangerment. Flores and his daughter went missing in Big Bend National Park at the end of January and was later found in a remote farming community in Coahuila across the river from the park. The grand jury decided that in the course of their 20-plus mile odyssey, Flores had “intentionally ... placed a child under 15 years of age in imminent danger ... by not providing adequate food.” Flores and his attorney are now waiting to see if the case will go to trial.

Authorities were tipped off that Flores and his daughter were missing on February 5, when a park employee discovered his vehicle abandoned on the rough and remote northern end of Old Ore Road. Clothes, identification, several locks of hair and drug paraphernalia were scattered around the scene, per court documents. Investigators later found that Flores and his daughter abandoned the vehicle and made their way across the desert on foot, mostly traveling at night to avoid detection. Flores told his daughter that there was going to be an earthquake that would cause a tsunami, and Mexico would be a safe place to take shelter, according to the testimony of FBI Special Agent Alice Downie, who spoke at Flores’ initial hearing.

Downie further testified that Flores’ trek into Mexico appeared premeditated. He had checked out books from the local library on wilderness survival and had invested in equipment like water purification tablets. He had also told friends and family prior to his disappearance that he liked the idea of living off-grid in Mexico.

Per Downie’s testimony, Flores’ daughter said they had not eaten in many days. “Thank God we came across some kayakers, they gave us wraps to eat,” the child told rangers responsible for her transfer into CPS care.

Flores’ attorney, Shane O’Neal, disputed the charge.

“The indictment is what we expected,” he said. “I feel like the government is stretching on the endangerment charge, particularly given the fact Mr. Flores and his daughter didn’t require any medical attention. From my conversations with him, they were fairly well supplied. This statute is really meant to penalize people who abandon their children or leave their children in a car, which can cause fairly predictable, serious injury — or for cases of neglect. There’s no indication that Mr. Flores was anything but a loving father who undertook something that is risky, but also took adequate measures to mitigate that risk.”

O’Neal said the daughter is currently staying with her grandparents, and that will likely be the long-term arrangement for her care.

Flores is still being held in Brewster County Jail. Flores and O’Neal made the decision not to appeal his bond to help court proceedings go more smoothly. O’Neal pitched a few options to the judge, such as letting Flores wear an ankle monitor and restricting contact with his daughter, or sending him to a halfway home in Midland. “He

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Hospital exodus

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hall meeting and every private meeting: you are replaceable,” said Nurse Karen Ramirez, who left the hospital in July of 2021 after 21 years.

For 18 of those years, Ramirez had worked as an obstetrical nurse before moving to the operating room in 2019. Now, she works the front desk at a hotel in Alpine. She said she would like to return to the hospital, but not under the current administration.

Ramirez said she worked seven days a week, picking up shifts in obstetrics even after transferring to the OR in order to patch together a paycheck, since she had a hard time acquiring sufficient hours in each department. Her base pay was roughly \$40 per hour, she said. If she was not needed in OB, she would choose to go on call to gather more hours, which earned her \$2 per hour while she made herself available to be called to work.

Meanwhile, travel nurses — nurses who pick up short-term contracts to fill roles at hospitals — were being brought in to ameliorate the staffing shortages that had worsened since 2020. Those nurses, who signed onto 13-week contracts with the possibility of renewal, made significantly more than staffers who had been with the hospital for years, said Ramirez.

But for Ramirez, it wasn’t about the money — she insists she was content to work more for less. The problem was that she had some serious concerns regarding the quality of care provided by some travel nurses — she recalled one that she felt was not following safety protocols who worked nights, which was of particular concern because “you don’t have any backup at night.” When she brought these concerns to hospital leadership, she says she was rebuffed. “I was told, ‘We don’t want to hear it, Karen.’”

These concerns were compounded by a number of incidents in which she was yelled at by a supervising nurse in front of other staff, she said. She decided she could not tolerate the work environment anymore. The administration made no effort to keep her, she said — CEO Rick Flores, she said, told her she was the “problem.”

“I felt pushed out,” said Ramirez. “And some other people that cared for their jobs and cared for their license got pushed out too.”

Accounts from former employees who requested anonymity when speaking to The Big Bend Sentinel bolstered this narrative — long-term employees were denied raises while working overtime and tackling areas of work outside of their job descriptions, they said. But the heart of the matter was not about pay, said one former employee — ultimately, it was that staff felt unappreciated.

“[Flores’] view was that people were leaving the hospital to go travel because they were offering a lot of money, which is true — traveling pays very well, especially right now with COVID prices — but that’s not why we were leaving,” said the former employee, who asked not to be named. “We were leaving because he did not appreciate us. All he had to do was say, ‘Hey, what will it take to keep you?’”

Jennifer Wilcoxon, a med-surg nurse who left the hospital in November of 2020, said she was expected to perform the duties of a registered nurse,

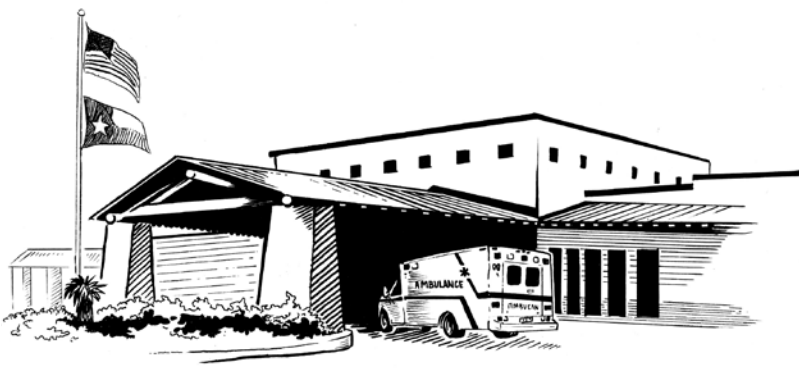


Illustration by Crowcrumbs for The Big Bend Sentinel

Big Bend Regional Medical Center

a higher rank than her actual rank of licensed vocational nurse, though her pay was not adjusted accordingly. She recounted being expected to take on a patient load of 11 to 12 patients, which did not allow her sufficient time to tend to all their needs.

Ultimately, she left because the hospital would not accommodate her schedule, but also because she felt she was unable to properly care for her patients. And though she asked multiple times about a salary increase in light of her taking on additional work, she was told a pay raise was not possible.

“They’re addressing the nursing shortage by hiring travelers or contract nurses, then they’re leaving and they’re back to a nursing shortage instead of treating their employees correctly in the first place — then we’d stay,” said Wilcoxon, who now works as a travel nurse and part-time at Highland Drug in Alpine.

Wilcoxon recalled Flores telling staff they were replaceable during meetings. “He’s said it many times: ‘We will replace you.’ Just like that.”

Another nurse who left the hospital near the end of 2020, Donna Hernandez, recalled similar language from Flores in meetings. “Rick hosted a meeting with all of us in the ER, and he made it very clear that we were very replaceable,” she said. “And so we either be satisfied that we had a job, or just know that we were easily replaceable.”

The irony, of course, is that the departed staff were not replaced. An employee who left with a recent wave of departures — at the end of February, approximately a month after the hospital combined the med-surg unit with the emergency department — described the staffing shortage at the time of their departure as “very dire.”

The combination of med-surg and the ER was the last straw for the former employee, who requested anonymity. The restructuring sacrificed the quality of patient care, they said — by putting med-surg patients in

the limited number of ER rooms, the resources available for emergency patients, who needed more consistent monitoring, was greatly decreased. As a result, emergency room patients now sometimes wait hours for a bed; meanwhile, the designed med-surg floor sits empty.

“I don’t understand it,” said the former employee. “It doesn’t make any sense.” Furthermore, they said, ER rooms are not equipped for med-surg patients — they are not private and are not equipped with bathrooms and showers.

The former employee put the situation, as they saw it, succinctly: “Our hospital is already six feet under, and there’s no way we can get it out.”

In a lengthy statement, Huckle said that the hospital could not speak to personnel matters publicly as a matter of policy, but said that “investing in our people is a top priority” and detailed efforts to recruit and retain staff in the face of staffing challenges. Those efforts, according to Huckle, include implementing “more than \$230,000 in pay raises.” Huckle stated that the hospital had recently announced “an across-the-board pay increase that will be in addition to forthcoming merit increases,” and that the hospital routinely gives out bonuses to those who work extra shifts or provide support for short-staffed departments, when possible. Huckle further stated that the hospital offers employee referral bonuses to employees, in addition to awarding sign-on bonuses for new hires. Per Huckle, these measures are part of the hospital’s “aggressive recruitment strategies.”

Despite this, Huckle said that ongoing staffing shortages have necessitated the hiring of travel nurses and the utilization of federal and state resources. The hospital has brought on six temporary staffers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, she said.

“Let us be very clear. It will always be our strong desire to hire full-time, long-term team members,” said Huckle.

Huckle further stated that the hospital welcomes feedback from staff. “Because we are all in this together, we speak openly with our staff and involve them in decision making,” she said. “To properly prepare and involve our staff, CEO Rick Flores, discusses staffing and resource needs in town hall meetings. We respect our staff’s input, and it is openly solicited both in these town halls and in clinical department-specific meetings.”

As for the combined med-surg unit and emergency department, Huckle said the decision was made “under best-practice guidance and to ensure we could safely continue to provide care to as many patients as possible. The hospital had sought feedback from the Trauma Regional Advisory Council of Texas in making the decision, she said. The hospital hoped to end the consolidation in April, she said.

“As with any hospital, our volumes fluctuate, but we maintain patient staffing ratios in accordance with industry standards,” said Huckle.

Huckle did not address former employees’ claims that Flores had told staff they were replaceable. Though The Big Bend Sentinel asked to speak with Flores, the CEO was not made available for an interview. Flores himself did not return a call seeking comment by press time.

Active attack response

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render medical aid, providing tourniquets and managing individuals before EMS can arrive on scene.

“That’s something we’ve seen through data, cops are really good at managing incidents and the terrible nature of what they are, but one thing [data has] shown over the last few years is we have an area for improvement: let’s work on providing medical care,” said Kapets.

Later in the week, the Marfa Volunteer Fire Department, Chief Gary Mitschke and his team, along with Marfa EMS Director Bert Lagarde and his team, will also collaborate on the active shooter training.

Marquez said in addition to new officers gaining familiarity with other first responders in the area, the active shooter training also gives them the opportunity to learn the school’s layout. Federal and state funding is likely available for Marfa Police Department to obtain mass casualty or emergency go bags for their patrol cars, which Marquez said he intends to include in his budget wishlist for the next city budget cycle.

Marquez said the police department extended an invite to Marfa ISD teachers in order for them to be aware of how officers might be communicating and entering rooms during an active shooter event. According to High School Principal Alison Scott, none of the teachers were planning to attend the training. It was scheduled in concurrence with spring break vacation.

Kapets encouraged interested parties to visit ALERRT’s website to access free civilian response training. Marquez said he and other Marfa officers are trained in instructing civilian active shooter courses, and while they used to present every year at the start of the school year, have been thrown off since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marfa ISD employees, including counselor Luane Porter and High School Principal Allison Scott, who will retire at the end of this school year, have been working on updating the school’s security plan, which was discussed in a school board meeting earlier this fall. They have not since presented to the board on the matter, but at the latest school board meeting security

was top of mind as the governing body discussed what preventive measures they could implement that would act as the first line of defense, whether it be upgrading to electronic locks or installing a fence.

School security has been of grave concern for administrators and parents after an incident involving a shelter in place order in 2019 revealed holes in the district’s lockdown procedures.

Marfa Police Department’s newest officer, Arturo Alferez III, son of school coach Arturo Alferez, spent his senior year at Marfa High School and said after graduating from the Sul Ross State University H. Joaquin Jackson Law Enforcement Academy he wanted to come back to Marfa in order to serve his community.

“School shootings are a big thing that happens nowadays. It’s important to continuously train for. Every situation is going to be different. You never know what’s gonna happen. I believe we need to continue these trainings,” said Alferez.



GSA Property CASH SALE AUCTION – Auction started Monday, February 14, 2022!

304 North Bagley Avenue Presidio, Texas 79845 is 1,150 +/- gross square feet. The home is on approximately .23 acres (10,018 sq. ft.) and is improved with one (1) story, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, & a 2 car carport.

Participate in the auction by visiting website:
<https://realestatesales.gov/gsauctions/aucitshr/?sl=FTWOR722015001>

Step 1: Register on the GSA Auctions website with a username and password
Step 2: Fill out the Registration Form in the Invitation for Bid listed under Additional Documents on the auction page
Step 3: Submit required \$10,000 deposit via credit card or Certified Cashiers Check and email or fax Registration Form
Step 4: Start bidding on the GSA website once your Registration is processed

Questions about the auction...
contact Dorothy Adidas, GSA Realty Specialist
Phone: (817) 223-9358 OR Email dorothy.adidas@gsa.gov



CITY OF ALPINE
SURPLUS CAR AUCTION
PUBLIC NOTICE

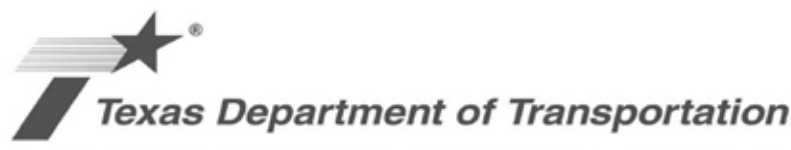
Want your own police car? Need a tractor? Do you desire a dually? The City of Alpine is holding a public auction on Saturday, April 9, 2022 at 9am. Vehicles from every department will be available for bidding “AS IS”. We are advertising the auction from El Paso to Presidio so don’t miss your chance to bid on dozens of City surplus vehicles.

And the good news gets better because after you buy your vehicle(s) at auction, the City of Alpine will gladly leave you to your new purchase without further ado.

We’ll see you out at the Alpine Recycle Center - “15” Acres on Saturday, April 9, 2022 at 9am:

2705 Cemetery Road
Alpine, TX 79830

Vehicle makers available for auction include Chevrolet, Dodge, Ford and GMC, visit www.cityofalpine.com/auction closer to the date for year, make and model details.



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Public Open House Notice
TxDOT 2023 – 2026
Rural Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (RSTIP)

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) El Paso District will conduct three public open houses and one virtual meeting for the TxDOT 2023-2026 Rural Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (RSTIP). The District planning and programming territory is about 21,700 square miles covering six counties in the state of Texas including El Paso County, Hudspeth County, Culberson County, Jeff Davis County, Presidio County, and Brewster County. The RSTIP is a short-range program of projects developed by the District in cooperation with rural planning organizations (RPO) that covers a four-year period. The District Rural TIP for the Spring 2022 Quarterly STIP revision contains a prioritized listing of all projects including regionally significant projects proposed for state, federal, and local funding in all areas of the TxDOT El Paso District outside the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization boundaries.

The public open houses will be held at the following locations (all open houses will have the same information):

- **Virtual Public Meeting – Monday, March 28, 2022** from 4:00/3:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT) until 6:00/5:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT). Participants can join:
 - o via Zoom shorturl.at/dnoJ4
 - o via telephone (346) 248-7799, webinar ID: 861 8159 1969. Passcode: 032 822** This virtual meeting will be recorded and posted to TxDOT.gov for two weeks until Friday, April 15, 2022.
- **Van Horn - Tuesday, March 29, 2022** from 4:00/3:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT) until 6:00/5:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT), at the Van Horn Convention Center and Visitors Bureau, 1801 A. West Broadway, Van Horn, Texas 79855
- **Alpine - Wednesday, March 30, 2022** from 4:00/3:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT) until 6:00/5:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT), at the Alpine Civic Center, 100 North 13th Street, Alpine, Texas 79830
- **Presidio - Thursday, March 31, 2022** from 4:00/3:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT) until 6:00/5:00 p.m. (CDT/MDT), at the Presidio Activity Center, 1400 East O’Reilly Street, Presidio, Texas 79845

All interested community members are encouraged to attend the public open house and provide feedback to the 2023-2026 RSTIP. The open house will be conducted in English. Some printed materials may be provided in Spanish. Persons interested in attending the meeting who have special communication or accommodation needs, or need an interpreter, are encouraged to contact Lauren Macias-Cervantes (915) 790-4200 or via email at Lauren.MaciasCervantes@txdot.gov. Requests should be made no later than five (5) working days prior to the public open house. TxDOT will make every reasonable effort to accommodate these needs.

Information about the RSTIP is available for review at www.txdot.gov (keyword El Paso Rural STIP), at the public meeting, and/or a copy may be obtained at various TxDOT locations, including: the **El Paso District Headquarters office** located at 13301 Gateway Boulevard West in El Paso, the **Alpine Area Office** located at 2400 North Highway 118 (Fort Davis Highway) in Alpine; and the **TxDOT Maintenance offices: Dell City** on FM 1437; **Sierra Blanca** at 700 FM 1111; **Van Horn** at 2001 Van Horn Drive (US 90), 1.5 miles south of town; **Fort Davis** at 104 Musquiz Drive (SH 118); **Marfa** at 809 West San Antonio (US 90); and **Presidio** on East FM 170.

For additional information about the public meeting, project documentation, or for any other project related questions, please contact Rebecca Reyes at (915) 790-4200 or Rebecca.Reyes@txdot.gov. Public comments, both verbal and written, may be submitted at the scheduled public open house(s). After the public open houses, written comments may be mailed to the Texas Department of Transportation - El Paso, Attention: Rebecca Reyes RE: 2023-2026 RSTIP, 13301 Gateway Blvd. West, El Paso TX 79928 or emailed to Rebecca.Reyes@txdot.gov. Written comments must be submitted and/or postmarked by **Friday April 15, 2022** to be part of the official record.

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by TxDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated December 9, 2019 and executed by FHWA and TxDOT.

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OUR MISSION: Connecting You With Texas

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Alpine brewery

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The Fielders estimate the new brewery will initially require around 12 employees, and up to 25 should the need arise in the future. Chisos will brew and sell a variety of ciders and beers, including Belgian and German-style beers as well as stouts and sours. They will also import beers from other craft breweries in Texas to pour in their taproom.

Tim said he expects their yearly output of beer to amount to 6,000 BBL or barrels of beer, which classifies Chisos as a “nanobrewery,” a designation below a “microbrewery,” which produces at least 15,000 barrels of beer a year.

The Fielders first purchased the old Hotel Ritchey building, also on Murphy Avenue, intending to use it for the brewery, but ultimately decided to sell the structure after discovering it would need significant structural repairs, and even then would not suit their business’s needs. The Hotel Ritchey was built in 1886 and is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.

“It turned out to be a beloved building in Alpine and there was a great outcry about ‘Don’t demolish the Ritchey,’” said Lisa. “So instead, we sold the Ritchey.”

The Fielders, Rodriguez and Wilson, along with another Alpine citizen opposing the brewery, recently met to discuss the community’s initial concerns regarding the brewery project: parking and traffic, wastewater, odor, and the building’s appearance and scale. The Big Bend Sentinel was not present at the meeting but spoke to parties after the fact and obtained meeting notes provided by the Fielders. While the meeting may have addressed certain issues, it did not result in those opposing the brewery throwing their weight behind the project.

“They talked about the cultural fit, that it’s the wrong size, the wrong shape, it’s too modern, it’s too new, that it doesn’t fit into the neighborhood,” said Lisa.

Chisos Brewery’s design plan shows the facility will consist of two structures — a stucco-finished taproom and a metal-sheathed production facility, both standing at two stories — joined in the center by a garden and outdoor seating area covered by an exposed beam structure. There will also be an outdoor catwalk that will lead to an observation tower. The taproom will be outfitted with a commercial kitchen, said Lisa, so those wishing to host events at the space may do so.

Lisa said their desire is to create a native garden with water features to imitate a park-like setting. The Fielders are working with a local native plant expert to conceptualize the garden and a local artist to fabricate native animal sculptures for the property, Lisa said. When complete, the brewery would also include spaces for children and pets.

Rodriguez said he would prefer Chisos Brewery operate a production facility elsewhere and reduce the size of the brewery to a smaller, more neighborhood-friendly one-story taproom.

“We don’t have anything against breweries, our son owns a brewery in the Austin area, but we’re really trying to get them to scale it down,” said Rodriguez.

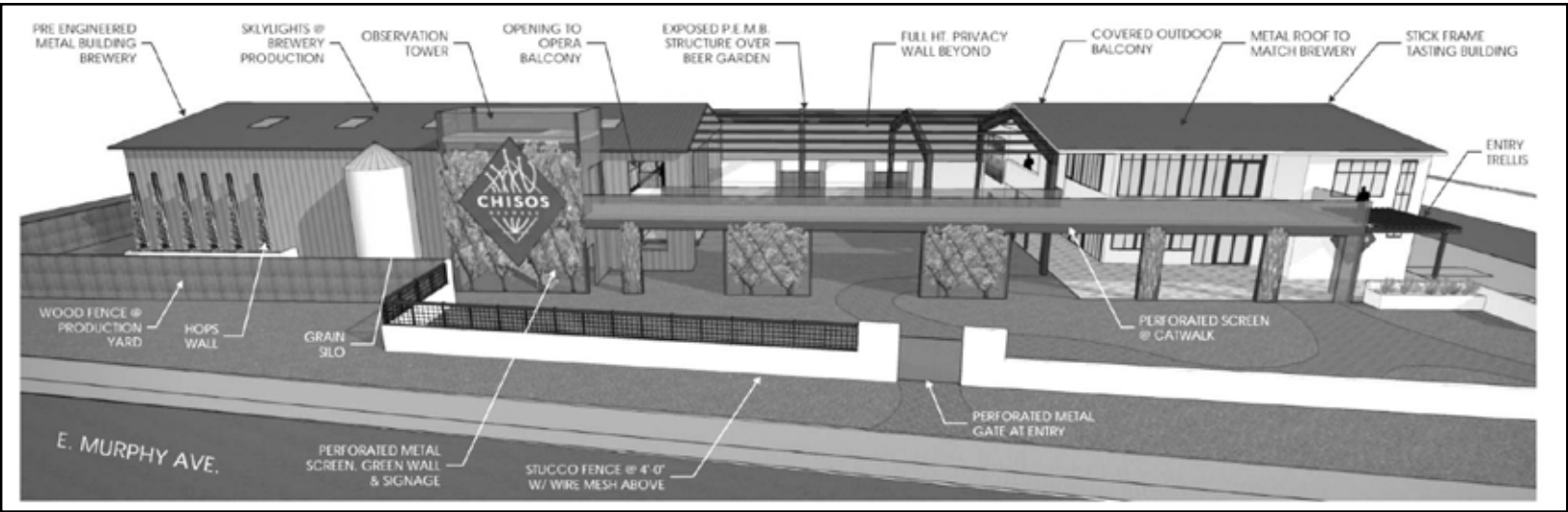
Lisa said the family did a lot of research on how breweries affect economies of rural communities and based on those findings believe being in downtown Alpine will benefit other area businesses.

“It seemed to make more sense to benefit Alpine to put a brewery downtown so that the overflow from us will visit other local businesses but also is a benefit to us because we get foot traffic from those businesses,” said Lisa.

The city’s official zoning map classifies the property as residing in a C1 Neighborhood Commercial District, defined as “intended to provide for the establishment of restricted commercial facilities, to serve the conveniences and needs of the immediate neighborhood and must be compatible with the residential character and environment of the neighborhood. These uses generally result in limited traffic generation.” Examples listed are bakeries employing no more than five persons, washaterias, restaurants and taverns.

Rodriguez said the brewery doesn’t seem to qualify under those guidelines, and he is worried the large-scale design will negatively impact the look and feel of historic Murphy Street.

“I hardly see how a two-and-a-half story metal building on Murphy



Architectural rendering courtesy Chisos Brewing

A preliminary design of the exterior view of Chisos Brewery from East Murphy Avenue. The new brewery is looking to build a production facility and taproom in Alpine but is encountering pushback from community members concerned about the business’ scale and water usage.

streets fits all that — it sure doesn’t provide for the immediate needs of the neighborhood,” said Rodriguez. “It’s a huge building. I mean, it looks like a strip mall. It’s a whole block.”

In regards to parking, documents provided by the Fielders show they purchased a 22,641-square-foot parking lot from Union Pacific Railroad Company across the street from the brewery site and obtained a three-year renewable contract to host an additional 10,000-square-feet of overflow parking in the Alpine Farmers Market parking lot during select hours. The Fielders addressed concerns of increased traffic by stating semi trucks would only be visiting the facility a couple of times a year to deliver grain, but they would be infrequent, said Lisa.

Lisa said at some point the Fielders attempted to buy properties surrounding the brewery in order to provide a wider buffer for noise, but none of the neighbors wanted to sell.

“I feel like we’ve tried really hard to honor Alpine and the citizens and to do the right thing and to be neighborly,” said Lisa.

Another ongoing issue being discussed by both the brewery’s opponents and the Fielders is whether or not southside residents would patronize the brewery. Lisa said locating Chisos Brewery on the south side of town was a deliberate act in order to provide the area with something it is missing.

“We feel that the southside has been historically neglected in terms of economic growth and economic investment. So we hope that our brewery will begin to address that,” said Fielder.

Rodriguez said it was unlikely that the neighboring community would visit the brewery, and he believes the families he has talked to that have lived in the area for 70-plus years are the center of Murphy Street, not a brewery.

“We’re predominantly Mexican people on this side, and older Mexican people; the brewery is not going to benefit them,” said Rodriguez. “My view is that those are the folks that are anchors to Murphy Street, they’ve been here that many years. And there’s no consideration for those folks at all from the Fielders.”

In addition to concerns over cultural impact, Rodriguez said he and other citizens are worried about the potential environmental impacts of the production facility, namely the amount of water that will be needed to operate the brewery. On average, breweries require 217 gallons, or seven barrels, of water to produce 31 gallons, or one barrel, of beer, according to The Brewer’s Association.

“We’re in a drought — you don’t need to be brewing beer with our water,” said Rodriguez.

Data from the National Integrated Drought Information System reports that in Brewster County, 9,232 people are currently being affected by drought, with 100 percent of the county experiencing abnormally dry conditions and over half of the county experiencing what are classified as extreme drought

conditions.

Rodriguez said poor water pressure in the south side of Alpine has also been an ongoing problem and residents are worried the brewery would only exacerbate the issue.

“Talking to the neighborhood, they don’t see, and I don’t either, how the city could justify giving the Fielders the right to put this brewery in when they haven’t addressed our issues out here,” said Rodriguez.

Then there is the matter of the local sewer system, which, according to City Secretary Geoffrey Calderon, has encountered infrastructure problems that the city is working to address. Petitioners against the brewery have expressed concern the system is not equipped to handle the brewery’s wastewater.

In an email provided by the Fielders, Alpine City Utilities Director Keith Segar said Alpine’s wastewater system was not capable of processing industrial wastewater like that of breweries and when applying for their building permit, Chisos would have to provide mechanical drawings of their wastewater treatment system. According to Segar’s email, the Fielders said the only wastewater going into the city system will be from the restrooms and commercial kitchen.

Chisos Brewery has plans to join other craft breweries in the nation in establishing their own wastewater treatment plant in order to reuse water used in beer production and mitigate impacts on the local sewer system.

Tim Fielder, who will be the lead brewmaster for the facility, said the wastewater treatment facility will involve digging an 8- to 10-foot hole in the ground, which will hold a 500 gallon holding tank to catch wastewater. The water will then be treated in a 300 gallon treatment tank. He said the treated water will likely contain high concentrations of salts that will need to be removed before using the treated wastewater to irrigate their native gardens. He said digging the hole will likely be the most costly step in the process, and septic and water treatment supplies are easily available.

To date, Chisos Brewery has made two presentations to city council, and Lisa has met with many city council members regarding the project as well as the mayor and other city officials, she said. Calderon said conversations between the city and the Fielders have been procedural in nature and relate to permit, code and zoning requirements. He said building plans must be submitted by the Fielders before the city can comment further on the project.

Chisos Brewery has recently received the public support of the Alpine Downtown Association, who said in a press release that they sympathize with citizens’ concerns but that it is important to welcome new businesses and the Fielders are working closely with the city.

“We believe the creation of this brewery could lead to significant economic growth in our Big Bend region,” said ADA President Conley Rasor. “The Big Bend Brewery was a great contributor to the community during its past existence.”

Child endangerment

(Continued from page 1)

declined, and instead found no condition can assure Mr. Flores’ appearance [in court] or the community’s safety, which I thought was a bit of a stretch,” said O’Neal.

Flores has been indicted with one federal charge of child endangerment “assimilating” a state statute. O’Neal explained that because the alleged child endangerment happened within a national park — federal jurisdiction — Flores can be charged federally with what would otherwise be considered a state crime. In Texas, felony child endangerment is punishable by up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$10,000.

O’Neal and Flores are currently waiting to see if the case will go to trial. No evidentiary motions have been filed yet, which O’Neal anticipates will come before a date is scheduled. Because of the hybrid state-federal nature of the charge, it may take awhile for the next steps to be determined.

“It’s going to be a slightly harder decision than your normal federal case whether to go to trial,” O’Neal explained. “There’s also an interesting question about whether we can let a jury decide on punishment because in state court, you can go to the jury for punishment, but in federal court, typically that’s prohibited.”

The U.S. District Attorney’s office, representing the federal government in this case, did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

New EMS provider

(Continued from page 1)

Emergent Air, with the company taking over full responsibility for North Brewster County EMS services on or before April 30. In the meeting, Judge Cano said the contracts would likely be for one to two years to allow for flexibility in the future.

Ronny Dodson, Brewster County sheriff, is a member of the EMS task force and said it was a unanimous decision among taskforce members to recommend Emergent Air. He said the company was ultimately a better fit than the larger corporations and that when task force members called references, people had positive reviews of Emergent Air and their services. He said they seemed like down to earth people who would fit in with the community.

Before the brief meeting concluded, Judge Cano commented that the whole situation was rather unfortunate, with the tragic deaths of Michael Scudder and his brother Mark Scudder, happening in close succession, but that by selecting a private EMS vendor they found a viable solution for the community.

“Now we’re at a time where we need to go ahead and start looking toward the future. I think we did a really good job going through all the options. Like [Hennington] mentioned, the whole county-run [EMS] — it would have been nice to build our own home from scratch, but how many of us have the money and the time to do that? Realistically, this is what we’re dealing with.”

CORRECTIONS: A story that appeared in the March 10, 2022 edition of this newspaper, titled "City council reviews new website, Marfa and Presidio County Museum restoration, tourism marketing," stated the city applied for \$3 million in grants from the Texas Water Development Board. In fact, the city applied for \$30 million. The story also identified the marketing company that Director of Tourism Abby Boyd has been approved to hire for digital marketing purposes as Theory Practice — the company is in fact called TheoryPraxis. The Sentinel regrets these errors.

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March 1 – Artist Jill Magid, in conjunction with <i>FOCUS: Jill Magid</i>, discusses her ongoing cross-disciplinary project <i>Tender</i>, which explores the complex relationships between currency and human value.	April 5 – Artists Tamara Johnson and Trey Burns present their individual studio practices and the origins of their Sweet Pass Sculpture Park project in “Working Landscape.”
March 8 – Artist Vincent Valdez presents works and ideas pertaining to his series <i>Made Men</i>, which recently entered the Modern’s permanent collection and hangs in its current installation.	April 12 – TBA
March 22 – TBA	April 19 – Author and sociologist Jeff Ferrell, who has made a practice of scrounging for half a century, collecting storied images and objects discarded by others, presents “Last Picture: Trash, Photography, Dislocation” in conjunction with the release of his new book <i>Last Picture</i>, published by Atopia Projects.
March 29 – Artist Jamal Cyrus, in conjunction with <i>FOCUS: Jamal Cyrus</i>, presents the trajectory of his research-driven practice that investigates ignored, forgotten, and fragmented accounts of Black American culture.	

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Opinions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I have some questions about the Judd Foundation and The Big Bend Conservation Alliance’s plan to open up the Judd property south of Chinati for walking tours of the desert grasslands there.

I have been a birdwatcher for many years here, and I am alarmed at the loss of species and number of birds compared to what I used to see just a few years ago. The loss of habitat to drought and global warming. The loss of food supply and water. This grassland prairie is so fragile and so important to us and all the species that live here that it seems opening more of it for public use is something to give serious thought to. For instance, will these be guided tours? Will there be people monitoring behavior when open? Like for not dumping trash and wandering onto adjacent private property?

Donald Judd was very concerned about intervening in the landscape, and I would think conservation would be the operative word in the title Big Bend Conservation Alliance. I know everyone involved is very well intentioned in what they are doing. I just hope you think it through before you act.

Suzanne Dungan
Marfa

...

Dear Neighbors:

Hooyii (howdy),

Thank you for supporting our fundraising campaign to build the protective rock wall around the Lipan Cemetery in Presidio. During the campaign, more than a hundred individuals would come together to help us raise over \$41,000. Your personal donations — along with an additional \$47,000 in support coming from the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, Summerlee Foundation, Amerigroup, First Presidio Bank, Fort Davis State Bank Presidio Branch, Cibolo Creek Ranch, Visit Presidio and Presidio Municipal Development District — helped us achieve 75 percent of our goal.

Your support has helped us keep the project moving forward, while we await responses from grant applications we’ve made around the country. With these funds in hand, we can begin construction this summer.

We’re elated by the support we received far and wide, especially from friends in West Texas. There are a few who went above and beyond the call. Thanks, Diana Wassef and Patrick Manian at Big Buddha Bakery, and Faith Gay and Hannah Gentiles at Cactus Liquors for hosting a heartfelt fundraiser in Presidio. To Sam Karas at The Big Bend Sentinel. Thanks also to local stores, Desert Rose Provisions, Ferguson Motors and Ocotillo Botanica, for supporting the project by raising funds from sales proceeds.

Know that we’re very moved that you included us in your good wishes. Please say ‘hi’ if you see us.

Kasteyo (thanks),

Oscar Rodriguez
Board Member
Big Bend Conservation Alliance

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- 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.
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 - 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.
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OP-ED

It’s never too late to right a wrong — The heroic story of Pvt. Marcelino Serna

By SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

Too often, our service members and veterans do not receive the recognition they deserve for their bravery, especially those in marginalized communities. Decade after decade, the contributions of veterans are slowly forgotten by the American public. This is a great miscarriage of justice. The bravery and sacrifice of those who sowed the seeds of today’s freedom and peace should be commemorated, no matter their race, background or nationality.

Far West Texas civil rights leaders, lawmakers and veterans have worked tirelessly for over a decade to provide justice to one veteran in particular: United States Army Private Marcelino Serna. During the last legislative session, I was proud to continue the efforts of those leaders and successfully nominated Pvt. Serna for the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor and co-authored and passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 50, directing the governor of Texas to award the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor to Pvt. Marcelino Serna and U.S. Coast Guard Seaman Apprentice William Ray Flores. On March 2, 2022, Pvt. Serna finally received the recognition he deserves and was posthumously awarded the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor, the state’s highest military decoration.

Pvt. Serna’s story is one of great heroics, bravery, and valor above and beyond the call of duty. Marcelino Serna was born in 1896 in the outskirts of Chihuahua, México. In search of a better life, he immigrated to the United States in 1916 and worked as a farmhand in Colorado. Despite Serna being

exempt from the draft due to his citizenship status, he volunteered to fight and potentially die for the United States. Serna was once more given the chance not to fight while in training, but he refused. Serna considered himself an American, and he chose to fight for the country he believed in.

Serna demonstrated exceptional resourcefulness and courage on the battlefield. During an engagement near the French town of St. Mihiel, 12 members of his unit were hit by fire from an enemy machine gun, and Serna obtained permission from his lieutenant to scout out the gun emplacement on his own. Moving through heavy fire, and surviving two rounds that were deflected by his helmet, he tossed four hand grenades into the machine gun nest, killing six of the enemy. He then took the eight survivors captive.

Shortly after his heroics in St. Mihiel, Serna embarked on a second lone scouting mission during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. He began by wounding a German sniper with a shot from 200 yards, then followed the injured man into a trench. Firing and hurling grenades in all directions to make it seem as if he were part of a larger force, he shot three German soldiers immediately, then attacked an enemy dugout, felling 26 more and capturing 24. He single-handedly held the prisoners at gunpoint until other members of his unit arrived. In the face of war, Serna remained brave and defended the German prisoners when reinforcements desired to execute them.

Pvt. Serna returned from the war as the most decorated WWI soldier from Texas, and years later became a citizen of the country he had fought for. For his acts of courage and honor, the Army awarded Pvt. Serna two Purple Hearts and the Distinguished Service Cross, the highest honor that a soldier can receive below the Medal of Honor. He also received two Croix de Guerre, the highest honor in France, one of which was presented to him by the supreme commander of Allied troops in Europe, Ferdinand Foch.

Despite his many medals, Pvt. Serna was denied the nation’s highest military award – the Congressional Medal of Honor – and the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor. Pvt. Serna served at a time of great prejudice and xenophobia, and he did not receive the state’s and nation’s highest decorations due to past discrimination and his limited English proficiency.

There are few opportunities in history where we can right a wrong. However, this month, Texas proved that it is never too late to provide justice to those who defended our country and our democracy. Now, it is time for Congress to follow Texas’ lead to right a wrong and award Pvt. Serna the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Senator César J. Blanco proudly represents the people of Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties in the Texas Senate.

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HIGH DESERT SKETCHES

Don’t blame the Internal Revenue Service for your pain

By GEORGE A. COVINGTON
gcovington@mac.com

If you think you’re having trouble with taxes, you can seek comfort in the knowledge that your Internal Revenue Service is having more problems than you probably will face. They are still trying to find time and personnel to look at more than six million tax forms from last year according to a new report issued by the National Taxpayer Advocate. Throw in the fact that they still have to look at 2.3 million amended returns as of mid-December 2021.

Various news organizations have reported that when taxpayers request help by telephone, thus far this is the worst year ever, or maybe just the worst year since the telephone was invented. Adding to the difficulties, the National Taxpayer Advocate argues the IRS telephone service “was the worst it has ever been” in 2021, with an answer rate of about 11 percent.

While pandemic relief was important, implementing it through the tax code has resulted in delays, unresponsive service for taxpayers and confusion during the tax filing process. Further challenges may lay ahead if new tax changes are passed as part of the stalled Build Back Better agenda, which would increase the IRS’ workload and potentially worsen the taxpayer experience further. Policymakers should avoid further complicating the tax code and instead aim for simplification so taxpayers can better understand and comply with the tax code and the IRS can passably perform its core mission of tax collection. For several decades now our representatives in Congress have failed to adequately fund the IRS and have cost this country billions in uncollected taxes.

The underlying inefficiency of the IRS has been in the making for decades. Congress and both parties have continued to underfund the agency while increasing the work they are intended to do. The lack of funding has prevented the IRS from renovating and automating piles of paperwork that should have been digitized years ago. The major problem with the IRS and automation is the core of their information technology infrastructure system called the Individual Master File (IMF), which was written 59 years ago.

The current assault started in 2010 when Congress reduced the IRS budget from \$14 billion to \$12 billion despite inflation and a growing population. The agency had to reduce the number of auditors by a third, down to 9,500, the same number the agency had in 1953.

The agency estimates corporations alone are underpaying \$125 billion in taxes every year because they know the odds of getting audited are so low.

“Years of steady decrease in the number of special agents available to work cases (due to attrition and limited hiring) as well as (the criminal investigation division’s) focus on traditional tax case programs, continue to impact ... overall performance,” the General Accounting Office said in its annual report.

IRS agents averaged \$27 million recovered in each of the 2,766 criminal investigations launched last year. The Congressional Budget Office says that for every dollar Congress grants the IRS, the agency will return \$7.10 from more vigorous enforcement. The additional spending would also correct a disturbing level of income inequality in who gets audited.

“Between 2010 and 2018, the audit rate for higher-income taxpayers fell, while the audit rate for lower-income taxpayers remained fairly stable,” Phillip Swagel, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) director, wrote. But increased spending “would return audit rates to the levels of about 10 years ago; the rate would rise for all taxpayers, but higher-income taxpayers would face the largest increase.”



The CBO analysis comes in a scorecard of President Joe Biden’s proposal to rebuild the IRS through the Build Back Better Act, which would provide \$80 billion over the next decade to hire new agents and upgrade equipment. The IRS would then reduce the deficit by \$400 billion.

Republicans, including Senator John Cornyn, have promised to block the funding.

“People don’t have confidence that this new army of IRS agents the Biden administration wants to hire will stay within its appropriate lane and collect taxes that are owed, but not target people who are maybe not of their political philosophy or orientation, or use the IRS to further harass and abuse the American taxpayer,” Cornyn said.

The big problem Cornyn doesn't seem to understand is that Congress is not much loved above the IRS for the first time in history. He doesn’t seem to understand that the abused American taxpayer is the one who has to watch while millionaires and billionaires avoid billions in due taxes.

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.

OUR WATER MATTERS

Jeff Davis County
Underground Water
Conservation District

By TREY GERFERS
tgerfers@pcuwcd.org

In a previous issue of “Our Water Matters,” we learned that the groundwater districts of Presidio and Jeff Davis counties were both created during the same legislative session in 1993. While the voters of Jeff Davis County voted that same year to approve the creation of their groundwater district, Presidio County didn’t do the same until 1999. According to Janet Adams, general manager of the Jeff Davis County Underground Water Conservation District, “The people in Jeff Davis wanted it really bad. It was non-taxing and that was what they wanted. So they approved it real quick.” As Adams sees it, “All the landowners supported the groundwater district. Still do.”

When asked why it took Presidio County another six years to seek that same protection, she replied “Presidio County kept putting it off, fighting over things that aren’t important.”

Perhaps another reason for this difference in approach could be Jeff Davis County’s unique situation back in the early 1990s. Not only had El Paso purchased Antelope Valley, a large ranch near Valentine that straddles the Jeff Davis-Presidio county line, in 1992 as a future source of water for its municipal users, several other towns — including Balmorhea, Valentine and Alpine — also already owned land in Jeff Davis County where they pumped water out of wells there and sent it back across county lines to their own municipal users, essentially exporting it. According to Adams, the people of Jeff Davis County “wanted groundwater to be protected not just from El Paso but from everyone: exporters and the like.”

As the first groundwater district in the area, the Jeff Davis County Underground Water Conservation District (JDCUWCD) originally covered parts of Pecos, Brewster and Presidio counties. According to Adams, those areas were incorporated into the JDCUWCD’s jurisdiction because landowners with ranches straddling the Jeff Davis County line “wanted their whole ranch protected.” Although Adams was not directly involved when the groundwater district was created, she became its first general manager and has remained heavily involved ever since. In fact, Adams has always played a central role in the area’s water as the head of the Fort Davis Water Supply Corporation since 1975.

When asked about the challenges ahead, she stated that things had been going so well, “I hate to jinx it.” But the main challenge she sees is “all the state regulations. We don’t have staff to do all this. We’re like [the groundwater district in Presidio County], a one-person shop.” To make up for the shortfalls, she said, she got a lot of help from the Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts (TAGD). Adams served as TAGD secretary from 2001 to 2005, vice president from 2005 to 2007, and president from 2007 to 2009. She also served as legislative chair. For many years she kept an apartment in Austin, where she lobbied lawmakers during legislative sessions on behalf of TAGD and specific districts.

Through her work with the Legislature, she was able to get the JDCUWCD out from under section 36.121 of the Texas Water Code that prohibits districts from charging fees to municipalities. This special legislation was finally passed in 2013 on the third attempt and provided the non-taxing groundwater district with a new source of revenue by enabling the JDCUWCD to levy fees against neighboring towns that had been exporting water out of the county for many years.

Another legislative coup that Adams orchestrated came in 2017 and involved exempting JDCUWCD from the fee caps imposed by the Texas Water Code. The current fee for all water uses except agriculture is \$0.03 per 1,000 gallons of water. Thanks to Adams, the JDCUWCD is perhaps the only groundwater district that can charge \$0.17 per 1,000 gallons, providing another revenue source for protecting the groundwater in Jeff Davis County.

With 36 wells monitored by the Texas Water Development Board, 10 that she monitors on her own, and three other wells equipped with 24-hour monitoring equipment, Adams keeps very busy. Looking toward the future, she says, “I’m old enough to retire. But I just enjoy working and plan to do that for a while.”

Trey Gerfers is a San Antonio native and serves as board chairman of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. He earns his living as a translator of technical documents from German to English for the German and Swiss pharmaceutical and medical-science industries. Trey has lived in Marfa since 2013.



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Photo by Mary Cantrell

Junior Nathan Peña recently competed in regional powerlifting competitions, placing 8th overall and breaking a number of personal records.

Marfa High School powerlifting team members advance to regional competitions

MARFA — Three out of seven members of Marfa High School’s powerlifting team — junior Nathan Peña and sophomores Annalise Marquez and Ana Gallego — recently advanced to regional competitions. The powerlifting program was reintroduced this December and is gaining momentum among the school’s young athletes. “I think it being the first year taking three kids to regionals is very exceptional,” said Coach Josh Kelly. Marquez and Gallego finished 6th and 10th respectively at girls regional powerlifting competitions. While only the top two competitors advanced to state competitions, Kelly said, considering the programs’ late start, the team performed surprisingly well against other area schools. “Of course, it being new and the kids not being in the weightroom a lot, I can't expect to see huge things happen yet, but hopefully over a span of years we'll be taking a lot more kids to regionals and to state,” said Kelly. Peña, whose dedication to weightlifting partly inspired Kelly to reintroduce the powerlifting program, did not qualify for state but managed to break three personal records at the boys regionals competition. Peña performed a 440 pound deadlift, 320 pound bench press, and 390 pound back squat. Overall, he placed 8th in the region. “Seeing him advance to regionals is great, and same with the girls. It’s a good experience for those kids and hopefully we get the program to thrive and get more kids involved in the future,” said Kelly.

Presidio middle school students relaunch River Rangers program

By SAM KARAS
sam@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO — Four middle school students and their teachers are helping bring back a Presidio institution designed to get young people invested in the health of the Rio Grande River. The Presidio River Rangers will visit the Rio Grande in Big Bend Ranch State Park once a month, collecting water samples and learning about the complex ecosystems beneath the murky surface of the water. The program was originally the brainchild of Patt Sims, a beloved Presidio High School teacher and nature lover who helped found the local chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists. Sims retired from teaching in 2010 and the program faded away not long after. Now, with a little help from Elvira Hermosillo, community liaison for the Big Bend Conservation Alliance, Presidio students will be able to learn important scientific skills in their own backyard. “We’re going to be checking for pollution on the Rio Grande River, the river that divides the U.S. and Mexico,” Hermosillo explained at the group’s kickoff meeting. “We’ll be going to the river once a month, on Saturday, and we’ll have this really cool kit that can test for things like pH levels, conductivity and dissolved oxygen. If you don’t know what those terms are yet — we’ll be learning all of that together as we go.” She asked the kids if anyone had ever been to the river. Though the river runs through Presidio, it’s heavily patrolled by cameras, drones and cruisers — not exactly a top destination for a relaxing afternoon with friends. A handful — though not all — of the students had been to either Big Bend Ranch or Big Bend National Park. Nobody had ever been canoeing, which the group plans to do to wrap their season of hard work. The Presidio River Rangers will work closely with the Texas Stream Team, an initiative of the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University. There are 191,000 miles of waterways in Texas, and the Stream Team trains citizen scientists to monitor water quality across the state. Over 11,000 people have been trained to collect samples over the program’s 30-year history, lightening the load on state agencies like the Texas Commission on Environmental



Photo by Sam Karas

From left to right: Elvira Hermosillo, Clinette Gaizon, Rogelio Zubia, Aidan Samaniego, Santiago Ramirez, Victor Carrasco, Belinda Bolino and Danica Romanban kick off the next generation of Presidio River Rangers. Quality and engaging everyday Texans with the intricacies of their local waterways. There are only a handful of testing sites between El Paso and Laredo, so the River Rangers’ efforts will make a big difference in understanding the health of the Rio Grande along some of its most remote reaches, including the federally protected Wild and Scenic River stretch. The Presidio River Rangers will test from the mouth of Colorado Canyon in Big Bend Ranch State Park, about 40 miles downstream from Presidio. “It’s one of the most beautiful drives you can do in America, maybe even in the world,” Presidio River Rangers alumna Cynthia Wright told the students of the trek down FM170 to Colorado Canyon. Wright Zoomed into the orientation to get the students excited about the program. She grew up in Presidio, and her love of hydrology sparked by the program led her to get a PhD in ecosystem science and management from Texas A&M. She’s currently a postdoctoral researcher at Oak Ridge National Lab in Tennessee. “It was having that time outside that I really enjoyed,” she explained. “Mrs. Sims would take us to the Rio Grande, and we would perform a bunch of different water quality tests on the river.

They were a little bit hard for me to understand, but over time, I started to learn how the tests were important and how they’re interesting.” She vividly remembered the first time she put a drop of river water under a microscope: “I was just amazed that the river was alive and moving — it wasn’t just a drop of water.” In Wright’s day, a big draw of the program was getting to miss a morning of school, but this time around, the River Rangers will have to sacrifice a Saturday morning to travel to their outdoor laboratory. The 2022 Rangers told the Presidio International that they’re not worried about getting up early — they’ve had plenty of practice leaving home at the crack of dawn for sports. “I just really want to see the river,” said seventh grader Santiago Ramirez. “I want to go outside, instead of being inside all of the time.” Aidan Samaniego was looking forward to the chance to better explore the area. “And it’s cool that we get to help the river,” he added. Wright ended her conversation with the kids by offering a pep talk on the value of growing up in Presidio. Her experiences at Presidio ISD led her to a career as a scientist and the opportunity to travel the world. She’s done fieldwork around the globe from Kenya to the Amazon River in South America. “I’d like to tell you to dream big — you guys are just starting out. So you can literally do anything you want. You’re living in a time where access to information is basically limitless. You have access to so many resources just by having a computer and internet connection. So I would just encourage you guys to try to figure out what it is that makes you tick and what drives you and go after it.” “I also want to tell you guys not to sell yourself short,” she continued. “I think coming from Presidio, we tend to think that we’re at a disadvantage. But actually, you guys have a very unique background. You’re growing up in two different cultures, most likely two different languages. So that means you’re very adaptable, and you’re able to navigate cultural differences. That’s huge, especially in the context of globalization — the way the world is becoming so connected now. You guys have a huge advantage simply because of where you grew up and where you come from.”

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution from last week's puzzle:

SOLUTION:

Universal Crossword

Edited by David Steinberg March 7, 2022

ACROSS

1 "I had it first!"

6 Spot in a blue region of a map

10 A ways away

13 Felt yesterday's workout

14 Entryway

15 Pop, for some

16 Set of lines on the sheet music for "Hail to the Chief"?

19 Princess Diana had two

20 Isn't well

21 Seeing one in the sky may be an omen

22 "___ Lang Syne"

24 Movie cliché

25 Warmup for singing in the shower?

30 Modern memos

31 Stay at Yosemite, maybe

32 Mathematician Lovelace

35 Mennonites, for one

36 Unfriendly

37 Cold blanket?

38 Musician Yoko

39 Tower in a farm scene

41 "Aww! Adorable!"

43 Parts of a song of gratitude?

46 Dutch Caribbean island

47 Make, like tea

48 Less than right, geo-metrically

49 Alone at a party

51 Napkins are placed on them

55 Segment of a tune played when the alarm system is armed?

58 Gets on the nerves of

59 Pop, for some

60 Journalist Couric

61 Donkey

62 Raw materials

63 Tiny particles

DOWN

1 Congress makes them

2 Resound

3 Vanish into air

4 Triples, say ... but doesn't quadruple

5 Poem of praise

6 Excited answer to "Who wants a cookie?"

7 Genre for Aretha Franklin

8 Frustrating investment outcome

9 Before, poetically

10 Packing pellet

11 Payment for a pitch

12 Whitewater conveyance

15 Bar seat

17 Saintry rings of light

18 Throw away

23 Web address

24 TV channel for film buffs

25 Kiss, in Quito

26 "You said it!"

27 Sources of folded street food

28 The real ___

29 State

33 Lavish love (on)

34 Blows away

36 Kind or sort

37 Gives the stinkeye

39 Olympian sword

40 Message ___ bottle

41 Spike in voltage

42 Factor of all prime numbers

44 Many Rwandans

45 Malia and Sasha

46 Some Taiwanese laptops

48 Locale for three straight Olympics, starting in 2018

49 Movie lead, often

50 Use a keyboard

52 Ferrari product

53 Proper partner?

54 Gets a glimpse of

56 2020 Wall St. event for Airbnb

57 Abbr. on a Wanted poster

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But Is It Music? by Barbara Lin



Photo by Sam Karas

Enrique “QiQi” Navarrete and Pepe Navarrete of the Long X Ranch compete in team roping at last weekend’s Redford Ranch Rodeo.

‘The ropes and the reins and the joy and the pain’: Rodeo returns to Redford

By SAM KARAS
sam@bigbendsentinel.com

REDFORD — Dust rose over the DVM Arena this weekend for the first time since last summer, marking the return of a new Redford tradition: rodeo. Cowboys from across Texas converged on the tiny River Road community to show off their skills in the hopes of taking home cash prizes. Census data used for county redistricting suggests that Redford, about 15 miles down the road from Presidio, has a population of 32. Population figures are notoriously unreliable in the Big Bend, but after a few decades of border closures, militarization and the Permian Basin oil boom, not that many folks have stuck around. Still, the Presidio school bus faithfully makes its way downstream twice a day for a handful of kids, and the community is inventing new ways to celebrate Redford pride.

David Marquez, who’s lived in Redford for most of his life, started organizing the rodeo last summer. It was initially conceived as a team roping competition between friends across the Big Bend and has started to grow — this weekend’s competition hosted 20 cowboys. “I’ve been around horses since I was a kid,” he said. He trains them for a living now, and as a young man competed in rodeos as far away as Junction, Texas.

The rodeo is a family affair. The arena is named for Marquez’s children: David, Valeria and Marina. Marquez not only competed in the weekend’s team roping, but also served as the announcer and master of ceremonies, and took time between events to spray down the arena with water from a fuel truck he bought in Presidio and specially converted for the job. His wife and kids manned the cattle chute, helping load a line of cows waiting for their turn in the ring and lifting the gate with each wave of the official pink flag. “The hardest part is rounding up the cows and keeping the arena wet,” he explained. “It’d be nice to have someone else on the microphone, announcing and choosing songs.”

Marquez said that the best part of the day was watching the younger kids compete in the ring in between grownup events like barrel racing and trailer loading. A fan favorite was ‘Calf Panties,’ an event Marquez invented

that involves putting women’s undergarments on young cattle. The kids were also eligible to compete in events like a boot scramble that brought merriment — and lots of mud — to the crowd. “It’s always nice to see the kids have fun,” he said.

While rodeo guests were encouraged to BYOB, Presidio’s Butch Acosta and Laura Viramontes provided the crowd with elevated cowboy grub. Acosta and Viramontes serve barbecue from a trailer Saturday mornings at the Presidio Farmer’s Market, but took the weekend off — and 45 pounds of brisket — to help an old friend. Acosta spent part of his childhood in Redford, and has known Marquez since he was young. “This has been the fourth time I’ve been [to the rodeo], and I’ve enjoyed it,” he said. “We sold out of everything.”

As the dust settled from the action-packed team roping competition, the festivities came to a close with the highly-anticipated beer barrel racing competition. A men’s team and a women’s team assembled from members of the audience took turns relaying across the arena. Each competitor ran from one end to another, drank a Lone Star as quickly as possible, and raced back to tag in the next competitor. While the men’s team eventually took the victory, not all of the male competitors were able to keep their Lone Stars in their stomachs.

Daena Baeza and Ysla Castro of Presidio led the women’s team with grace and poise. “Every time we come out, it gets better and better,” Baeza said of the event. Baeza’s husband, Cesar, also helped sponsor the rodeo through his business, Baeza Cattle Company. “It’s important to support your local people,” he said.

While the majority of the competitors came from the Big Bend and Permian Basin, one roper made an eight-hour trek with his horses from Weatherford, Texas. Fonzi Gonzalez, who works on the A-2 Ranch just outside of Fort Worth, took the journey to be able to catch up with old friends, the Navarretes, many of whom hail from Valentine. Gonzalez had never been to Redford before. “I thought it’d be kind of rough, but it was really good,” he said. “That’s what rodeo is — a family reunion.”

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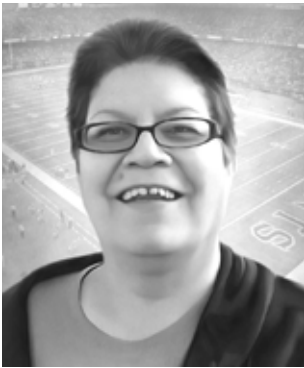
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OBITUARY



Tompkins

On February 20, 2022, the Lord’s beautiful angel, Patricia Tompkins, 65, of Marfa, Texas, was called home by our heavenly Father.

She was born on February 20, 1957, to Thomas and Pauline Sanchez of Marfa, Texas. She was raised and spent some of her life in Marfa, where she was a longtime cook for the Thunderbird Restaurant. On December 13, 1997, Patricia married her beloved darling, Tommy Tompkins. Patricia and Tommy shared 23 adventurous and loving years of marriage. Patricia had two children, Beatrice and Bobby Leos of Marfa. She had six grandchildren: Justin Thornton and Cidney Leos of Marfa; Alyssa, Lya and Roberto Leos of Odessa, Texas; and Anthony McColley of Sanderson, Texas. She also had

three great-grandchildren: Auburn, Khalani and Amani Thornton. If you knew Patricia, she cherished her grandchildren the most. Patricia also had 11 siblings, all of Marfa. She leaves behind many other beloved friends and family. Patricia spent the rest of her life as a homemaker and a supporter for her family, where she enjoyed cooking homemade meals, cheering on her New Orleans Saints and being with her darling. Patricia will be dearly missed by all, especially her loving spirit and heart that welcomed you warmly.

She is preceded in death by her darling, Tommy Tompkins; parents Thomas and Pauline Sanchez; sister Maria Elena Tapia; and brother Guillermo “Willy” Sanchez. She will be forever missed and never forgotten. Patricia is resting with her darling now, where she is now at peace and safe. Patricia Tompkins, also known as GG, Patty, we love you.

Praying of the Rosary will be held on Saturday, March 19, 2022, 10:00 am at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Marfa, Texas, followed by a Mass.

Online condolences may be left at: www.alpinememorialfuneralhome.com

Services have been entrusted to Alpine Memorial Funeral Home in Alpine, Texas.

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JOBS

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PUBLIC NOTICES

The Marfa Parks and Recreation Board meets every third Thursday of the month at 6:00pm in the Casner Room at City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

SPECIAL MEETING

The City of Marfa Board of Adjustment has scheduled a Special Meeting for Monday, April 4, 2022, at 6:00 p. m. in the Casner Room, City Hall, 113 S. Highland Street, Marfa, Texas. The Board members will discuss and render a decision regarding:

- A Special Use Permit, No. 22-01, requested by Ismael Lujan, to place a mobile home, which will be used as a residence, at 1305(B) W. Sacramento St., also known as Block 13, Lot 5, West Heights Addition.
- A Variance Request No. 22-01, requested by Anne Marie Gorman, from the requirements of Marfa's Zoning Ordinance, regarding a side yard setback at 101 E. Columbia St., also known as Outblock 2, Tract 4B, Roark Addition.
- A Variance Request No. 22-02, requested by Hight Builders, from the requirements of Marfa's Zoning Ordinance, regarding front yard setback, rear yard setback and double frontage side yard setback, at 1205 W. Berlin St., also known as Block 9, Lot 1, West Heights Addition.

Additional information concerning the above Special Use Permit or Variance Requests is available by calling Ann Dunlap, Board of Adjustment Secretary at (432)729-4400.

The Public is invited to attend.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Brief Explanatory Statements of Proposed Constitutional Amendments Special Election, May 7, 2022

Proposition Number 1 (SJR 2)

SJR 2 proposes a constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for the reduction of the amount of a limitation on the total amount of property taxes that may be imposed for general elementary and secondary public school purposes on the residence homestead of a person who is elderly or disabled in order to reflect any statutory reduction in the maximum compressed rate of the maintenance and operations taxes imposed for those purposes on the person's homestead from the preceding tax year.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for the reduction of the amount of a limitation on the total amount of ad valorem taxes that may be imposed for general elementary and secondary public school purposes on the residence homestead of a person who is elderly or disabled to reflect any statutory reduction from the preceding tax year in the maximum compressed rate of the maintenance and operations taxes imposed for those purposes on the homestead.”**

Proposition Number 2 (SJR 2)

SJR 2 proposes a constitutional amendment increasing the amount of the residence homestead exemption from property taxes for public school purposes from \$25,000 to \$40,000.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment increasing the amount of the residence homestead exemption from ad valorem taxation for public school purposes from \$25,000 to \$40,000.”**

Published by The Office of the Texas Secretary of State, www.sos.texas.gov, 1/800-252-VOTE (8683).

PUBLIC NOTICE

The City of Marfa is seeking RFQ's for work on the Marfa and Presidio County Museum building.

Deadline is March 28, 2022.

For more details visit www.cityofmarfa.com

LEGAL NOTICES

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TERMS AND PROVISIONS OF THE TEXAS ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CODE THAT STARS AFS, LLC HAS FILED FOR A MIXED BEVERAGE PERMIT AND A FOOD AND BEVERAGE CERTIFICATE, TO BE ISSUED TO PARA LLEVAR, LOCATED AT 113 S. DEAN ST., IN THE CITY OF MARFA, PRESIDIO COUNTY, TX. STARS AFS, LLC. ROWDY L. DUGAN (MANAGER) BECKY D. DUGAN (MANAGER)



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