

City of Presidio approves architectural designs for Lipan Apache Cemetery

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — After months of deliberation, the Big Bend Conservation Alliance (BBCA) announced last week that architectural designs for the memorial at the Lipan Apache Cemetery in Presidio had been finalized. MASS Design Group — a world-famous firm that specializes in memorial sites — unveiled the plans, helmed by Indigenous architect Joseph Kunkel.

The cemetery’s history dates back to the 18th century, when the Spanish colonial government forced the Lipan Apache onto a reservation in what’s now Presidio. Even as Spanish rule faded and Indigenous presence in the region shifted, the Lipan Apache stayed, becoming some of the first Presidians — if not the first — to continuously occupy the site from the colonial era through the present day.

For generations, the little cemetery on Market Street was tended by descendants of the interred, predominantly from the Ornelas and Aguilar families. As the city was incorporated, roads were cut into the burial mound and homes were built around the site. Concerned locals continuously fought against the incursion of urban development to protect this important sliver of Presidio’s past.

Last year, the city and county of Presidio voted to deed the land under the burial ground to the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas, which is headquartered in McAllen. The site was designated as a State Antiquities Landmark, which grants special protections through the Texas Historical Commission. The BBBCA brought a procession of surveyors, archaeologists and regional locals with Lipan roots to offer input on how to protect the site for future generations.

For Mayrah Udvardi, senior architect at MASS Design Group, the project was a perfect fit for the organization. Much of their work around the world — the Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, for example — focuses on memory and healing. “We see the design as a real opportunity to guide people through a healing journey, in a way that ensures that the site stays protected and honored,” she explained.

The project in Presidio wasn’t without its own special challenges, but the architects arrived in town willing to listen and think creatively. “We talk about ‘groundbreaking’ a lot in our field,” she explained, referring to the typical term used for starting construction on a project — one that wouldn’t fly with the Texas Historical Commission. “This was a really exciting opportunity to think about how to design and build site elements that don’t dig into the ground.”

Additionally, the group received a lot of feedback that descendants didn’t want to completely wall off

(Continued on page 2)

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Staff photo by Sam Karas / Foto por Sam Karas

Izaak Lara of the Santa Teresa Matachines leads the way for a prayer procession honoring Teresa de Ávila, patron saint of the church. Izaak Lara de Santa Teresa Matachines encabeza una procesión de oración en honor a Teresa de Ávila, patrona de la iglesia.

Presidio County Commissioners Court grapples with raising employee pay

By SAM KARAS
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MARFA — At last week’s meeting of the Presidio County Commissioners Court, the commissioners deliberated for hours on how best to raise wages and retirement packages fairly on a limited budget. No immediate action was taken, but target dates were set toward setting and implementing pay raises across departments.

To kick off the meeting, Roxanne Aldridge of the Texas County District Retirement System gave a presentation on implementing cost of living adjustments (COLA) for the county’s retirees. County Auditor Patty Roach offered a number of scenarios based on preliminary research — essentially, how big a bite out of the county budget the different packages would take.

The commissioners took no action last Wednesday, awaiting further information and projections from Roach. Precinct 1 Commissioner Brenda Silva Bentley advised that it would be best to decide on retirement COLAs after raises for current employees were discussed and decided — the commissioners tentatively scheduled another presentation from Roach on November 9. “I’d rather look at more accurate numbers and see what’s

(Continued on page 2)

Presidio City Council boosts retirement benefits, starts process of setting new utilities rates

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — At Monday’s city council meeting, council members voted to beef up retirement packages and also began the process of setting new utilities rates. The City of Presidio employer match — the amount of money that the city pays into an employee’s retirement fund — was increased from a 1:1 ratio to a 1:1.5, and the retirement age for city employees under the age of 60 was set to 20 to 25 years of service.

The City of Presidio is a member of the Texas Municipal Retirement System (TMRS), which helps coordinate and manage employee benefits. There are currently seven individuals receiving payouts from the city — some who worked for the city directly, and others who are collecting on behalf of a spouse.

Anthony Mills, director of city services for TMRS, gave a presentation on the city’s options and helped guide a conversation about next steps. He advised boosting the city’s match on the grounds that most folks who work for the city retire and stay in the city — in other words, cash spent by the city on retirees would likely stay in the local economy. “It’s an investment in not only today but tomorrow,” he said.

Presidio’s benefit accumulation fund is “significantly overfunded,” according to Finance Specialist Malynda Richardson. Richardson explained that the overflow wasn’t necessarily positive news. “We do have a significant

(Continued on page 2)

El Tribunal de Comisionados del Condado de Presidio lidia con aumentar el salario de los empleados

Por SAM KARAS
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MARFA — En la reunión de la semana pasada de la Corte de Comisionados del Condado de Presidio, los comisionados deliberaron durante horas sobre la mejor manera de aumentar los salarios y los paquetes de jubilación de manera justa con un presupuesto limitado. No se tomaron medidas inmediatas, pero se establecieron fechas para establecer e implementar aumentos salariales en todos los departamentos.

Para dar inicio a la reunión, Roxanne Aldridge del Sistema de Jubilación del Distrito del Condado de Texas hizo una presentación sobre la implementación de ajustes por costo de vida (COLA) para los jubilados del condado. La auditora del condado, Patty Roach, ofreció una serie de escenarios basados en investigaciones preliminares, esencialmente, qué parte del presupuesto del condado tomarían los diferentes paquetes.

Los comisionados no tomaron ninguna medida el miércoles pasado, a la espera de más información y proyecciones de Roach. La comisionada

(Continúa en la página 3)

El Ayuntamiento de Presidio aumenta los beneficios de jubilación e inicia el proceso de establecimiento de nuevas tarifas de servicios públicos

Por SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — En la reunión del consejo de la ciudad del lunes, los miembros del consejo votaron para reforzar los paquetes de jubilación y también comenzaron el proceso de establecer nuevas tarifas de servicios públicos. La igualación del empleador de la Ciudad de Presidio, la cantidad de dinero que la ciudad paga al fondo de jubilación de un empleado, se incrementó de una proporción de 1:1 a 1:1.5, y la edad de jubilación para los empleados de la ciudad menores de 60 años se fijó en 20 a 25 años de servicio.

La Ciudad de Presidio es miembro del Sistema de Jubilación Municipal de Texas (TMRS), que ayuda a coordinar y administrar los beneficios de los empleados. Actualmente hay siete personas que reciben pagos de la ciudad, algunas que trabajaron directamente para la ciudad y otras que están cobrando en nombre de un cónyuge.

Anthony Mills, director de servicios de la ciudad de TMRS, hizo una presentación sobre las opciones de la ciudad y ayudó a guiar una conversación

(Continúa en la página 3)

La ciudad de Presidio aprueba los diseños arquitectónicos del cementerio Lipan Apache

Por SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — Después de meses de deliberación, la Big Bend Conservation Alliance (BBCA) anunció la semana pasada que se habían finalizado los diseños arquitectónicos para el monumento en el cementerio Lipan Apache en Presidio. MASS Design Group, una empresa de fama mundial que se especializa en sitios conmemorativos, dio a conocer los planos, dirigidos por el arquitecto indígena Joseph Kunkel.

La historia del cementerio se remonta al siglo XVIII, cuando el gobierno colonial español obligó a los Lipan Apache a vivir en una reserva en lo que ahora es Presidio. Incluso cuando el dominio español se desvaneció y la presencia indígena en la región cambió, los Lipan Apache se quedaron, convirtiéndose en algunos de los primeros presidentes, si no el primero, en ocupar continuamente el sitio desde la era colonial hasta la actualidad.

Durante generaciones, el pequeño cementerio de Market Street fue atendido por descendientes de los enterrados, predominantemente de las familias Ornelas y Aguilar. A medida que se incorporó la ciudad, se abrieron caminos en el túmulo y se construyeron casas alrededor del sitio. Los lugareños preocupados lucharon continuamente contra la incursión del desarrollo urbano para proteger esta importante porción del pasado de Presidio.

El año pasado, la ciudad y el condado de Presidio votaron para traspasar la tierra bajo el cementerio a la tribu Lipan Apache de Texas, que tiene su sede en McAllen. El sitio fue designado como Monumento Estatal de Antigüedades, lo que otorga protecciones especiales a través de la Comisión Histórica de Texas. La BBBCA trajo una procesión de topógrafos, arqueólogos y lugareños regionales con raíces en Lipan para ofrecer información sobre cómo proteger el sitio para las generaciones futuras.

Para Mayrah Udvardi, arquitecta sénior de MASS Design Group, el proyecto encajaba perfectamente con la organización. Gran parte de su trabajo en todo el mundo (el Memorial por la Paz y la Justicia en Montgomery, Alabama, por ejemplo) se centra en la memoria y la curación. “Vemos el diseño como una oportunidad real para guiar a las personas a través de un viaje de sanación, de una manera que garantice que el sitio permanezca protegido y honrado”, explicó.

El proyecto en Presidio no estuvo exento de desafíos especiales, pero los arquitectos llegaron a la ciudad dispuestos a escuchar y pensar creativamente. “Hablamos mucho de ‘innovar’ en nuestro campo”, explicó, refiriéndose al término típico que se usa para comenzar la construcción de un proyecto, uno que no funcionaría con la Comisión Histórica de Texas. “Esta fue una oportunidad realmente emocionante para pensar en cómo diseñar y construir elementos del sitio que no se hundan en el suelo”.

Además, el grupo recibió muchos comentarios de que los descendientes no querían aislar completamente el sitio de la calle. Eventualmente se decidieron por una construcción de muros de gaviones más fluidos y orgánicos, esencialmente canastas llenas

(Continúa en la página 3)

ENGLISH NEWS

Presidio City Council

(Continued from page 1)

amount of turnover and people don’t always stay [with the city] long enough to collect,” she explained.

Though Richardson cautioned that that balance would be depleted by an increased match, she also felt that it might be a way for Presidio to keep employees around longer and retain talent in the community. “How do we get young people in Presidio to stay here?” she asked the council. “Say you have someone coming in [to work for the city] in their 20s — this could really be an incentive for them to stay here.”

Council members ultimately opted for an increase in payouts — John Razo, Steven Alvarez and Joe Andy Mendoza voted for the new plan, and Arian Velázquez-Ornelas voted against. The measure to amend the set retirement age for city employees under the age of 60 also passed.

Lipan Apache Cemetery

(Continued from page 1)

the site from the street. They eventually decided on a more fluid and organic gabion wall construction — essentially, baskets full of rocks — that protects the site from erosion, but also invites passers-by to enter and interact with the site in a respectful way. “It needed to be more than a wall — thinking beyond the wall allows for there to be an element of education,” Udvardi explained.

That education will eventually consist of a historical marker and interpretive materials to help tourists and neighbors engage with the complex Indigenous past of the area. Lead architect Joseph Kunkel felt it was an important step in honoring a frequently-erased aspect of the region’s history. “The mission is really to inspire others and acknowledge this as a sacred place,” he said.

Council also began the long process of setting new rates for wastewater, water and sanitation utilities services. Much of the revision process this year will be just that — cleaning up unclear language in the individual ordinances. Connection rates for wastewater and new water meters would likely see the largest increase in fees, but council also discussed implementing payment plans and investigating other options for new homeowners.

The new rates have not been officially decided, and the city is still in the drafting process. For Presidians who would like to offer input, there will be another reading of the proposed ordinances as well as a final public hearing before the new rates go on the books. The Presidio International will continue to cover the discussion.

“It’s a small piece of the larger project of acknowledging Indigenous lands.”

On Monday, BBCA Director Shelley Bernstein gave a presentation to Presidio City Council about the proposed design. Though the design won’t impact city services, the proposed plan will dip into city-owned right-of-ways. The construction crews will also eventually need proper permits and to designate staging areas for materials — BBCA hopes construction will begin in January 2023.

After a two-year process of getting the site designated, surveyed, and designed, Presidio City Council unanimously approved the designs and access to city-owned land. “It’s something that we’ve been working really hard to get,” said Councilmember Arian Velázquez-Ornelas.

Commissioners Court

(Continued from page 1)

available to us,” Bentley said.

Later in the meeting, the commissioners discussed adopting a new salary schedule — essentially, raising wages for county employees across the board, rather than approving raises department by department. A committee of county employees was assembled with representatives from the Sheriff’s Department, Treasurer’s Office, Tax Assessor/Collector and other vital offices.

Commissioner Bentley said that time was of the essence — she felt that the local cost of living had already outpaced wages and was affecting long-term residents’ ability to stay in their jobs and the county’s ability to attract new talent. “In terms of housing, I don’t know what people are going to do unless they already have something in place,” she said.

Roach offered some advice to the commissioners based on comparisons she’d researched from government officials in neighboring Brewster County. By her estimation, county employees in Roads and Bridges and the Presidio County Jail made the closest to competitive wages, but there was room for improvement across the board.

She advised looking into the county’s biggest employers — like the Big Bend Banks and Customs and Border Protection — to compare salaries based on “skill sets” like accounting and secretarial work. Additionally, she felt it was important to distinguish between “senior” and “junior” employees on the proposed pay schedule. “It’s not going to be easy, it’s going to take a lot of work,” she cautioned.

After the discussion of the new pay scale, Joel Nuñez of the Presidio County Sheriff’s Office (PSCO) gave a presentation about the dire state of turnover in his department and requested raises for officers and dispatch — the department decided on the dollar amount with input from the county auditor.

Nuñez was concerned that competitive wages elsewhere — particularly in Customs and Border Protection — was skimming off potential PCSO employees. “We get them trained and certified, and they’re valuable, so they get recruited to other agencies

and get paid more money,” he explained. “We wouldn’t be doing our jobs [as employers] without doing this for our employees.”

Precinct 1 Commissioner Bentley expressed frustration that the sheriff’s office had come before Commissioners Court many times asking for raises and funding — she came prepared with research into wages across departments in the county and accompanying retention data. “My fear is we’re going to take too far a leap with this and leave everyone else behind,” she said.

Her comments led to a heated back-and-forth between Bentley and Presidio County Sheriff Danny Dominguez, who was also in attendance. Bentley suggested that high turnover in the PCSO was due to poor management and not because of low wages. Dominguez insisted that it was because of broader cultural attitudes. “That’s just our country right now — nobody wants to work,” he said.

County Judge Cinderela Guevara restored order in the court and clarified why the raises had been brought before the commissioners in the first place. She had brought the item because she regularly interacts with PCSO and Presidio County Jail employees and wanted to circumvent burnout. “This is not intended so that some people can stay behind and some can get ahead, that is not the intention at all,” she said.

The commissioners ultimately took no action on the proposed PCSO raises. Instead, they set a target goal of December 14 for the committee to propose a new pay schedule so it could be adopted sometime in the new year. The timing of these conversations could prove tricky — Presidio County Commissioners Court will welcome two new faces come January.

Precinct 2 will welcome Margarito Hernandez, who is running unopposed; Precinct 4 is contested this November between Garey Willbanks and David Beebe. Roach advised the commissioners on the limits of their ability to decide budgetary items in the aftermath of an election. “You can’t govern a future court’s decisions, but you can put in writing that it is your intent,” she explained.



Photo courtesy of Mass Design Group.

A rendering of the architectural plans approved by Presidio City Council this week.

Una representación de los planos arquitectónicos aprobados por el Concejo Municipal de Presidio esta semana.



Jose “Joe” Portillo, Jr. for Presidio County Judge (D)



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Energize the Port of Presidio.

Finish the bridge expansion project to speed up travel times to and from Ojinaga, and bring fresher produce and lower-cost goods to us here.

Build Greener and Stronger.

Repurpose spare tires and other debris / junk for road and construction projects all around the county.

Your Safety. Your Rights.

Help protect civil rights.
Establish urgent care and ER throughout our county.
Start a county fire / EMS agency.

- X Not moving the courthouse to Presidio.
- X Not shutting down the county golf course.
- X Not promoting fear and false information.

Early Voting: Oct. 24 - Nov. 4
Election Day: November 8
PresidioDemocrats.com/vote

NOTICIAS EN ESPAÑOL

El Tribunal de Comisionados

(Continuación de la página 1)

del Precinto 1, Brenda Silva Bentley, aconsejó que sería mejor decidir sobre los COLA de jubilación después de que se discutieran y decidieran los aumentos para los empleados actuales: los comisionados programaron tentativamente otra presentación de Roach para el 9 de noviembre. “Preferiría ver los números y ver lo que está disponible para nosotros”, dijo Bentley.

Más adelante en la reunión, los comisionados discutieron la adopción de un nuevo programa salarial, esencialmente, aumentar los salarios de los empleados del condado en general, en lugar de aprobar los aumentos departamento por departamento. Se reunió un comité de empleados del condado con representantes del Departamento del Sheriff, la Oficina del Tesorero, el Tasador/Recaudador de Impuestos y otras oficinas vitales.

La comisionada Bentley dijo que el tiempo era esencial: sentía que el costo de vida local ya había superado los salarios y estaba afectando la capacidad de los residentes a largo plazo para permanecer en sus trabajos y la capacidad del condado para atraer nuevos talentos. “En términos de vivienda, no sé qué van a hacer las personas a menos que ya tengan algo listo”, dijo.

Roach ofreció algunos consejos a los comisionados basados en comparaciones que había investigado de funcionarios gubernamentales en el vecino condado de Brewster. Según su estimación, los empleados del condado en Carreteras y Puentes y la Cárcel del Condado de Presidio lograron los salarios más cercanos a la competencia, pero había margen de mejora en todos los ámbitos.

Aconsejó investigar a los empleadores más grandes del condado, como Big Bend Banks y Customs and Border Protection, para comparar salarios basados en “conjuntos de habilidades”, como contabilidad y trabajo de secretaria. Además, sintió que era importante distinguir entre los empleados “superiores” y los “menores” en el programa de pago propuesto. “No va a ser fácil, va a tomar mucho trabajo”, advirtió.

Después de la discusión de la nueva escala salarial, Joel Nuñez de la Oficina del Sheriff del Condado de Presidio (PCSO) hizo una presentación sobre el grave estado de la rotación en su departamento y solicitó aumentos para los oficiales y el despacho; el departamento decidió el monto en dólares con el aporte de el auditor del condado.

A Nuñez le preocupaba que los salarios competitivos en otros lugares, particularmente en Aduanas y

Protección Fronteriza, estuvieran eliminando posibles empleados de PCSO. “Los capacitamos y certificamos, y son valiosos, por lo que los reclutan en otras agencias y les pagan más dinero”, explicó. “No estaríamos haciendo nuestro trabajo [como empleadores] sin hacer esto por nuestros empleados”.

La comisionada del Precinto 1, Bentley, expresó su frustración porque la oficina del alguacil había acudido ante el Tribunal de Comisionados muchas veces para pedir aumentos y fondos; ella vino preparada con una investigación sobre los salarios en todos los departamentos del condado y los datos de retención adjuntos. “Mi temor es que vamos a dar un salto demasiado grande con esto y dejar a todos los demás atrás”, dijo.

Sus comentarios llevaron a un acalorado debate entre Bentley y el alguacil del condado de Presidio, Danny Domínguez, quien también estaba presente. Bentley sugirió que la alta rotación en la PCSO se debía a una mala gestión y no a los bajos salarios. Domínguez insistió en que se debía a actitudes culturales más amplias. “Ese es nuestro país en este momento: nadie quiere trabajar”, dijo.

La jueza del condado Cinderela Guevara restableció el orden en la corte y aclaró por qué los aumentos se

habían presentado ante los comisionados en primer lugar. Había traído el artículo porque interactúa regularmente con PCSO y los empleados de la cárcel del condado de Presidio y quería evitar el agotamiento. “Esto no tiene la intención de que algunas personas puedan quedarse atrás y otras puedan salir adelante, esa no es la intención en absoluto”, dijo.

Los comisionados finalmente no tomaron ninguna medida sobre los aumentos PCSO propuestos. En su lugar, establecieron una meta del 14 de diciembre para que el comité proponga un nuevo calendario de pago para que pueda adoptarse en algún momento del nuevo año. El momento de estas conversaciones podría resultar complicado: el Tribunal de Comisionados del Condado de Presidio dará la bienvenida a dos caras nuevas en enero.

El Precinto 2 dará la bienvenida a Margarito Hernández, quien se presenta sin oposición; El Precinto 4 se disputa este noviembre entre Garey Willbanks y David Beebe. Roach aconsejó a los comisionados sobre los límites de su capacidad para decidir elementos presupuestarios después de una elección. “No puede regir las decisiones de un tribunal en el futuro, pero puede poner por escrito que es su intención”, explicó.

El Ayuntamiento de Presidio

(Continuación de la página 1)

sobre los próximos pasos. Aconsejó impulsar el partido de la ciudad sobre la base de que la mayoría de las personas que trabajan para la ciudad se jubilan y se quedan en la ciudad; en otras palabras, el dinero gastado por la ciudad en los jubilados probablemente permanecerá en la economía local. “Es una inversión no solo en el hoy sino en el mañana”, dijo.

El fondo de acumulación de beneficios de Presidio está “significativamente sobrefinanciado”, según la especialista en finanzas Malynda Richardson. Richardson explicó que el desbordamiento no fue necesariamente una noticia positiva. “Tenemos una

cantidad significativa de facturación y la gente no siempre se queda [en la ciudad] el tiempo suficiente para cobrar”, explicó.

Aunque Richardson advirtió que ese saldo se agotará con una mayor coincidencia, también sintió que podría ser una forma de que Presidio mantenga a los empleados más tiempo y retenga el talento en la comunidad. “¿Cómo hacemos para que los jóvenes de Presidio se queden aquí?” preguntó al consejo. “Digamos que tiene a alguien que viene [a trabajar para la ciudad] en sus 20, esto realmente podría ser un incentivo para que se quede aquí”.

Los miembros del consejo finalmente optaron por un aumento en los pagos: John Razo, Steven Alvarez y Joe Andy Mendoza votaron a favor del nuevo plan y Arian Velázquez-Ornelas votó en contra. También se aprobó la medida para modificar la edad de jubilación establecida para los empleados de la ciudad menores de 60 años.

El Ayuntamiento también inició el largo proceso de fijación de nuevas tarifas para los servicios públicos de aguas residuales, agua y saneamiento. Gran parte del proceso de revisión de este año será solo eso: limpiar el lenguaje poco claro en las ordenanzas individuales.

Las tarifas de conexión para aguas residuales y nuevos medidores de agua probablemente verían el mayor aumento en las tarifas, pero el consejo también discutió la implementación de planes de pago e investigó otras opciones para los nuevos propietarios.

Las nuevas tarifas no se han decidido oficialmente y la ciudad aún está en proceso de redacción. Para los presidentes que deseen ofrecer su opinión, habrá otra lectura de las ordenanzas propuestas, así como una audiencia pública final antes de que las nuevas tarifas entren en los libros. El Presidio International continuará cubriendo la discusión.

Cementerio Lipan Apache

(Continuación de la página 1)

de rocas, que protegen el sitio de la erosión, pero también invitan a los transeúntes a entrar e interactuar con el sitio de una manera respetuosa. “Tenía que ser más que un muro: pensar más allá del muro permite que haya un elemento de educación”, explicó Udvardi.

Esa educación eventualmente consistirá en un marcador histórico y materiales interpretativos para ayudar a los turistas y vecinos a involucrarse con el complejo pasado indígena del área. El arquitecto principal, Joseph Kunkel, sintió que era un paso importante para honrar un aspecto frecuentemente borrado de la historia de la región. “La misión es realmente inspirar a otros y reconocer esto como un lugar sagrado”, dijo. “Es una pequeña parte del proyecto más grande de reconocer las tierras indígenas”.

El lunes, la directora de la BBKA, Shelley Bernstein, hizo una presentación al Ayuntamiento de Presidio sobre el diseño propuesto. Aunque el diseño no afectará los servicios de la ciudad, el plan propuesto se sumergirá en los derechos de paso propiedad de la ciudad. Los equipos de construcción también necesitarán eventualmente los permisos adecuados y designar áreas de preparación para los materiales; BBKA espera que la construcción comience en enero de 2023.

Después de un proceso de dos años para designar, inspeccionar y diseñar el sitio, el Concejo Municipal de Presidio aprobó por unanimidad los diseños y el acceso a terrenos propiedad de la ciudad. “Es algo en lo que hemos estado trabajando muy duro para conseguir”, dijo el concejal Arian Velázquez-Ornelas.

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OUTDOOR TOWN HALL MEETING

for Presidio County Judge
Cinderela Guevara and
David Chavez - candidate for
Presidio County Treasurer.

**Thursday, October 20th
from 6:00pm to 7:30pm
at Frances Park in Presidio**



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Medicare’s Open Enrollment Period begins October 15th and ends December 7th.
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SHIP Certified Benefits Counselors from the Rio Grande Area Agency on Aging, will be available to assist Medicare Beneficiaries with reviewing their coverage options at the following locations:

Monday, October 24, 2022

1:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Ft. Davis Community Center
(Previously the Ft. Davis Outfitter Store)
601 Cemetery Road, Fort Davis, TX 79734

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Sunshine House
402 E. Holland Ave, Alpine, TX 79830

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Presidio Nutrition Center
1400 E. O’Reilly St., Presidio, TX 79845

Thursday, October 27, 2022

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Marfa Nutrition Center
101 N. Mesa St., Marfa, TX 79843

If you have any questions, you can contact us at (915) 533-0998 or 1-800-333-7082.
Don’t forget to ask us about the Medicare Savings Program and the Low-Income Subsidy Program. If eligible, these programs can help to lower your out-of-pocket costs!

To better assist you, please bring the following information:

- Original Medicare card
- Social Security card
- List of your prescription medications
- Photo ID
- Proof of Income
- Other health plan information

*Additional information may be needed when applying for the Medicare Savings Program and the Extra Help Prescription Assistance program. Contact us for more information.

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POR FAVOR RECICLA ESTE PERIÓDICO

Congressional District TX-23 third party candidate Frank Lopez tours the border

By SAM KARAS
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TRI-COUNTY — At the end of September, self-described “U.S. Border Patriot” Frank Lopez Jr. wrapped up a tour of Presidio and Terlingua — two among dozens of campaign stops the independent candidate for Congress has made in border communities. Lopez is challenging incumbent Tony Gonzales for the right-wing vote, riding a wave of widespread disenchantment with the two-party system.

At a campaign event in Presidio on September 29, Democratic opponent John Lira spoke favorably of Lopez’s campaign — noting it may help him win against the Republican incumbent. “If Tony Gonzales thinks he’s going to win TX-23 with just the moderate Republican vote, he’s got another thing coming,” he said. Lira is hoping Lopez will “peel off” a significant number of Republican voters from Gonzales’ base, paving the way for a Democratic victory.

Lopez, of course, doesn’t see his campaign that way — he’s hoping to fundamentally change the conversation about partisan politics in Texas.

Independent candidates in Texas must declare their intent to run with the Texas Secretary of State’s office, then collect petition signatures — the number of signatures needed fluctuates with the number of votes cast for governor in the most recent gubernatorial election. In order to fill space on his petition, Lopez campaigned in an unlikely place — at gas pumps throughout the district. “Everybody’s got to fuel up, regardless

of ideology or political party,” he explained.

Lopez’s main conversation starter at his gas station stops was the “pain in the pocket” many Americans are feeling as rising gas prices and inflation price people out of buying basic necessities. He found that being bilingual was a huge asset in putting a finger on the pulse of constituents’ concerns. “Both parties have lost touch with the American people down here at the grassroots level,” he said.

Lopez is an ordained minister and a former Border Patrol agent — both inform his politics. “I grew up with a lot of structure and adherence to laws,” he said. “I think that the Constitution is a masterful document, very well thought out.”

Despite his independent status, Lopez is staunchly conservative when it comes to the issues. His platform emphasizes border security — which includes “finish[ing] the wall” — fighting “the Socialists’ moves to hijack our elections,” and keeping “CRT” [Critical Race Theory] out of schools.

He’s running as an “America First Conservative Warrior” unaffiliated with the Republican Party in order to challenge Gonzales. (Lopez worked as campaign manager for Raul Reyes, Gonzales’ opponent in the 2020 Republican Primary runoff). “I consider myself a constitutional conservative, it’s no secret that I’ve been affiliated with the Republican Party,” he said. “For myself and thousands more, Gonzales does not represent Texan values. Through collecting signatures, I found that faith and family are central to our lives.” (Gonzales did not return a request

for comment).

For Lopez, those “Texas values” are decidedly far-right stances on hot button issues He believes that Gonzales’ votes for gun control in the wake of Uvalde and in support of same-sex marriage turned off much of his opponent’s base. He also felt that Gonzales’ support for the creation of the January 6 commission — a federal investigation into the attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters — also put his popularity at risk.

Lopez also criticized Gonzales’ vote for large infusions of cash from the federal budget to aid Ukraine. “There was minimal oversight on that money,” Lopez said. “Why are we spending money outside the country when we have so many needs?”

Lopez has acknowledged that he has used “invasion” rhetoric to describe current immigration policy — Presidio County declared an “invasion” of its own, in a bid for state aid — but claims his years with Customs and Border Protection have led him toward nuanced views. “I did my job with compassion and humanity,” he said. “People are misusing our systems and our process. I don’t have a problem with [immigrants] wanting to come here, just do it the right way.”

In hopes of capturing as many votes along the border as possible, Lopez is pounding pavement in Del Rio and Uvalde before early voting begins. He plans to sum up his platform succinctly: “There are no simple answers to so many issues affecting our citizens. But I will do my darndest to sit down and talk and hash these things out,” he said.



Photo courtesy of Presidio City Hall
Rigoberto Trevizo was honored this week as the City of Presidio’s first employee of the month.

City of Presidio recognizes Rigoberto Trevizo as employee of the month

PRESIDIO — At Monday’s meeting, Presidio City Council recognized Rigoberto Trevizo, the caretaker of Presidio’s parks, as its first employee of the month. Trevizo was honored with a photo at City Hall and a gift certificate for a night on the town in Presidio.

The new employee of the month program was spearheaded by City Administrator Pablo Rodriguez, who sang Trevizo’s praises. “I went around town asking about his positive attributes,” Rodriguez said. “These words kept coming up: hardworking, dedicated and excellent.”

Trevizo has worked for the city for seven years and keeps up all the city’s parks by himself. “We don’t even know how he manages to go through every single one and keep them nice,” Rodriguez said.

Councilmember Arian Velázquez-Ornelas also said that Trevizo was an important part of the team whenever the Visitors Bureau puts on community events. “He’s helped out a lot whenever he’s needed, wherever he’s needed,” she said.

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Brothers charged in Hudspeth County shooting now held in Marfa and Alpine

By ALLEGRA HOBBS
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By DEBBIE NATHAN
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TRI-COUNTY — Twin brothers Mark and Mike Sheppard, both facing criminal charges in the Hudspeth County shooting that left one migrant dead and another injured, are currently being detained in Marfa and Alpine.

The brothers are facing manslaughter and assault with a deadly weapon charges in connection with the September 27 shooting, in which authorities say the men shot at a group of migrants who were drinking water from a reservoir around four miles south of Sierra Blanca. According to arrest affidavits, Mark Sheppard told investigators that his brother Mike had fired two shots near the reservoir that evening, believing he was shooting at javelinas.

Mike Sheppard is being held in the Brewster County Jail in Alpine as of October 11, the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office confirmed. Mark Sheppard is being held in the Presidio County Jail in Marfa on a \$250,000 bond (the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office could not confirm the bond amount for Mike Sheppard). Both are being held on charges of assault with a deadly weapon, and will appear in virtual court on October 27 for individual bond hearings.

Both men were initially apprehended by the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office and charged with manslaughter on September 29, and were held in the El Paso County Jail for several days. They were then transferred to Hudspeth County before being released on \$250,000 bonds, and subsequently turned themselves in when the additional charges were brought against them.

Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson said the transfer of the inmates was made by Hudspeth County Sheriff Arvin West in order to avoid any potential conflict of interest — West has stated publicly that he

knows both men personally and that Mark Sheppard was previously employed by the Hudspeth County Jail.

“It was the sheriff’s idea,” said Dodson. “He didn’t want to be a part of the investigation, because he knew him, and that’s always tough on us.”

Sheriff West did not immediately return a request for comment.

According to the affidavits, migrants in the group told investigators that two men pulled over along Farm Road 1111 around 7 p.m. on the evening of September 27 and that the driver fired two shots, striking and killing a man in their group and wounding a woman, who was transferred to Del Sol Hospital in El Paso. Migrants said that one of the men had shouted in Spanish something to the effect of, “Come out you sons of b—, little asses!” before revving the car’s engine.

Authorities traced the vehicle to Mike Sheppard, who declined to speak to them. But Mark Sheppard did speak to investigators — though he first said the brothers hadn’t been at the location at the time of the shooting, he then said they had been there to shoot animals — first he said birds, then ducks, then javelinas. The brothers did not go to see if they struck anything after the shots were fired, he said, and attended a water board meeting after.

Mark Sheppard’s attorney, Richard Esper, told The Big Bend Sentinel he believes that his client — who allegedly was in the car with his brother, but is not believed to have pulled the trigger — will be acquitted of the charges he currently faces.

“I can confidently say Mark Sheppard is not guilty of committing any kind of homicide or any kind of assault with a deadly weapon,” he said.

Mike Sheppard’s attorney, Brent Mayr, said that he hopes that people will resist “jump[ing] to any conclusions” as the investigation is ongoing.

“We don’t want anyone to jump to any conclusions about this case,” said Mayr. “There’s still a lot of evidence that we need to uncover, a lot more we need

to learn about what took place before we jump to any conclusions.”

As of Wednesday, the brothers had not yet been indicted.

In interviews with El Paso Matters, the families of the victims — Jesús Sepúlveda Martínez, who is deceased, and Brenda Berenice Casias Carrillo — have demanded justice for their loved ones. The case has elicited an outcry over what some believe to be a crime driven by bigotry. As activist groups have raised their voices to label the shooting a hate crime, Congresswoman Veronica Escobar has called on the Department of Justice to investigate it as such. RAICES Texas released a statement saying it had blown the whistle, years prior, on alleged abusive behavior by Mike Sheppard when he was warden at the West Texas Detention Facility.

Bill Addington, a Sierra Blanca resident, told *The Big Bend Sentinel* that he witnessed Mark Sheppard yell at people for speaking Spanish two weeks prior to the shooting. Though one of the brothers is alleged to have yelled in Spanish just before firing and hitting the migrants, Addington said that the brothers do not speak Spanish.

“Though maybe Mike knows how to say a few mean things in Spanish since he was an ICE warden,” Addington told the Sentinel. “Or maybe he yelled in English and some migrants understood enough English to know what he was saying.”

As for the unharmed migrants who were in the group, most of the adults are being held in El Paso Processing Center, an ICE detention facility. A 13-year-old girl who was in the group is in a Homeland Security children’s facility. One adult migrant is being held at the El Paso County Jail.

According to a relative who lives in the United States, the migrant being held in the jail is a 30 year old whose middle name is Luis. The family member said Luis was fleeing fears of torture and death after being shot and hospitalized last year in Mexico, in an incident

that one family member surmises was caused by drug traffickers in the area. Luis had spent years in Texas and New Mexico before being deported, trying to return, and being caught and deported again, said the family member. He has three children born in the United States. He found himself in Sierra Blanca because he was trying to travel to the U.S. to earn enough money in order to bring his family to safety in America, said the relative.

At a recent court hearing, Luis’s attorney told a judge that his client was standing next to the man who was fatally shot. After the shooting, his attorney said, he led the group to the road where Border Patrol frequently passes, and he went looking for agents to apprehend them and take them to safety. He is now charged with felony illegal reentry, a federal crime punishable by years in prison or, at the least, another deportation.

Luis’ immigration attorney, Zoe Bowman, with Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, is trying to obtain what’s called a U-visa for him and for six other survivors of the shooting. U-visas are given to undocumented victims of crime who help law enforcement to bring their perpetrators to justice. At a recent federal court hearing in El Paso, a judge deemed Luis a flight risk and denied him bond.

“It’s likely that he will be transferred to the West Texas Detention Facility, near Sierra Blanca,” Bowman told The Sentinel, referring to the facility notorious for substandard conditions and reports of racialized violence perpetrated on detainees by staff, including Mike Sheppard himself when he was warden. Sheppard’s employment was terminated just after the shootings.

Luis’ family member in the U.S. said that they have also been in touch with the woman injured in the shooting. “I talked recently with her on the phone and she said she was being released from the hospital soon. She seemed okay, except her voice sounded very depleted.”



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2022 Midterms Voting Guide

Guía de votación de mitad de período (2022)

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Mike Collier (D) Lt. Governor Teniente Gobernador	Frances Garcia (D) Treasurer Tesorera	
Rochelle Garza (D) Attorney General Procuradora General	Florcita Zubia (D) Clerk Secretaria	
Janet Dudding (D) Comptroller Contralora	Margarito Hernandez (D) Comm’r, Pct. 2	
Luke Warford (D) Railroad Comm. Com. de Ferrocarriles	David Beebe (D) Comm’r, Pct. 4	
Susan Hays (D) Agriculture Comm. Com. de Agricultura	Dina Jo Marquez (D) JP, Pct. 1	
Jay Kleberg (D) Land Comm. Com. de Tierra	Juanita Urias Bishop (D) JP, Pct 2	
Eddie Morales (D) D74, House of Reps. Cámara de los Rep., Tejas (D74)		
Cesar Blanco (D) D29, Senate Senado de Tejas (D29)		
Dr. Melissa Ortega (D) D1, Board of Education Junta Educativa (D1)		

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OUR WATER MATTERS

Groundwater monitoring in Presidio County gets a much-needed boost

By TREY GERFERS
tgerfers@pcuwc.org

The Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District has been ramping up efforts to monitor groundwater levels for several years now. Through generous grants from the Dixon Water Foundation, the United States Geological Survey, the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Applied Science Program, the Environmental Defense Fund and others, the district has been able to install water-level monitoring equipment in eight wells around the county (up from zero wells just a couple of years ago).

It's been an uphill climb. Staff turnover, the pandemic, and the challenge of finding willing landowners have made progress exceedingly difficult. But in recent months, these efforts have received a much-needed boost through the hiring of a new data specialist: Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk, professor of geology at Sul Ross State University.

Urbanczyk has taught at Sul Ross since 1991, where his research focuses on the hydrology and geology of Far West Texas. According to Urbanczyk, when he first started his teaching career, "My primary area of interest was the geochemistry of volcanic rocks. But I quickly realized that there were not any faculty at Sul Ross that were focused on water issues, so I decided to try to fill that gap." In addition to his scientific expertise in maintaining groundwater and atmospheric monitoring instrumentation across the Big Bend region, Urbanczyk also understands policy-making through the experience he has gained as a member of the Brewster County Groundwater Conservation District Board of Directors since 2015.

Among the many exciting projects he has worked on, Urbanczyk stated that his favorite research location is "the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande. To visit this remote area typically requires a week-long, canoe-supported trip. I take a lot of science gear and measure stream flow and water quality, conduct topographic surveys, and study/monitor the overall condition of a sequence of springs that flow into the Rio Grande." He also recently "discovered" a sequence of aerial photos that were taken in 1947 along the Rio Grande in the Colorado Canyon area (in present-day Big Bend Ranch State Park) by the International Boundary and Water Commission, "presumably to consider construction of a dam in that area. I was able to process them into a single image in a GIS, and now I can use this to observe and demonstrate the changes that have occurred to the Rio Grande in the last 70 years. It serves as a time machine to see what the river was like."

Urbanczyk is currently working to update and troubleshoot issues with the district's database. This involves site visits to the various wells around the county with the district's general manager and working with the district's software consultants and monitoring-equipment vendors to ensure a smooth and continuous flow of data. Among the challenges confronting the district's monitoring efforts, Urbanczyk stated: "Money is always an issue because groundwater monitoring can be expensive. But the biggest issue is the lack of access to monitor wells that are not being pumped AND are strategically distributed in key areas of the county." Toward this end, the district will be tapping Urbanczyk's expertise to locate new monitoring sites to be funded through the district's affiliation with the USGS National Groundwater Monitoring Network and with funding from the Texas Water Development Board's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. These wells will mainly be located near the major population centers as well as in specific areas of interest around the county.

The district has also identified about 30 wells that have been monitored in the past by the Texas Water Development Board or the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation and could be equipped with new monitoring systems. The historic data already available from these wells, along with the newly acquired data, could help the district generate a more complete picture of aquifer levels over time and potentially provide a better understanding of "the gradual impacts of climate change on groundwater recharge," according to Urbanczyk.

In a region that relies virtually exclusively on groundwater, Urbanczyk believes "We need to know the status of our primary water source. We need to know if groundwater production ... is causing significant reductions in water levels." If so, "We would hopefully have time to develop strategies to assure a water supply for the future."

Trey Gerfers is a San Antonio native and serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. He also works 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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OP-ED

Health is wealth in rural Texas

By SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

In rural West Texas, the sunrise paints the sky, the fresh air, and open space seem to make time move slower and the stars at night are big and bright. There's exceptional beauty in Texas' rural communities. But the same rural lifestyle that draws many to Far West Texas can also make it difficult to receive easy access to high-quality health care services.

During my recent visits to the rural communities in Senate District 29, I heard from residents, clinics, healthcare providers, and the Culberson County and Big Bend Regional Hospital District who conveyed their uphill battle against limited healthcare services in their communities. Local mothers shared the difficulty of getting prenatal and basic reproductive care; like having to travel to Midland to get a sonogram. And while talking to senior citizens in our community, many say, "West Texas is a great place to retire, but a bad place to grow old," because healthcare is often hundreds of miles away. No family in Far West Texas should have to settle for limited health care services because of where they choose to live. That's why I'm fighting to bring better healthcare closer to home. And we can do it by:

Expanding Medicaid. Texas has the largest uninsured rate in the nation. In recent years, over 26 hospitals have closed in rural Texas, significantly impacting access to quality care. An expansion would not only cover over 1.7 million Texans but improve hospital performance and curtail the rate of rural hospital closures. Moreover, expansion would bring over \$15 billion to the state, create jobs, help small businesses that can't afford insurance premiums, and reduce property taxes used for safety-net hospitals and indigent care.

Expanding maternal and postpartum healthcare for new moms. In Texas, 18.4 of 1,000 deliveries result in maternal morbidity — 18.4 too many. Unbeknownst, the leading cause of maternal death and illness is lack of access to healthcare. Last session, I successfully voted to extend Medicaid coverage for new mothers to six months postpartum, but we should follow the lead of other states with lower maternal morbidity rates and extend coverage to 12 months to protect Texas mothers' health and ensure their child is not raised without their mother.

Incentivizing and bolstering the Healthcare Workforce. Texas is expected to have a deficit of 57,012 nurses in 2023, and rural communities will be the most affected. Part of the solution is to sponsor students from small communities who go to medical school and encourage them to return and practice where they grew up. It's imperative we incentivize healthcare workers to practice in Rural Texas by strengthening health workforce programs at Sul Ross, UTEP, and Texas Tech Health Sciences Center El Paso and providing generous financial aid.

Supporting rural EMS services. In rural Texas, pandemic-related burnout and staffing shortages plague EMS services. Last session, I proudly co-authored SB8 which allocated \$21.7 million to funding incentivization efforts, education programs, and prioritizing underserved areas. To keep the ball rolling, we must assess workforce data, continue to pilot and expand innovative models for reducing transportation time to care, and explore funding models to encourage recruitment and retention in EMS agencies to assure that when calling 911, you get a response.

Expanding telemedicine and telehealth. Telemedicine has become a cornerstone of good health in rural communities. Last session, I co-sponsored HB4 which allowed more care services to be delivered using virtual services. This has helped the continuity of basic primary care, specialty care, and mental health services. Though this bill was a great step in the right direction, we also need to meet the demand for the virtual shift by expanding broadband services to ensure residents have access to a resilient and accessible telehealth system.

Restoring the State Office of Rural Health to its previous capacity. Since 2008, funding for the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) has declined every year and the number of employees working exclusively on rural health has significantly decreased. By committing to a multi-session restoration of the SOHR to prior levels with 20+ full-time staff working on and coordinating efforts to enhance rural healthcare across Texas, there would be a considerable enhancement to quality health care for rural Texans.

No Texan should have to make the decision of letting their health issues worsen or taking on the expense of traveling hundreds of miles to access quality care. Health is wealth and Texas needs to do better for rural healthcare because our rural communities matter. As your state senator and as a member of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services, I will continue fighting for our rural communities to ensure rural Texans are not left behind and have access to affordable healthcare.

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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Application and Questionnaire for Appointment are available at the Presidio CAD or our website presidiocad.org,

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