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

PMDD authorizes contract for geothermal energy study

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — At last weekend's meeting, the Presidio Municipal Development District (PMDD) authorized a contract with the University of Texas at Austin to conduct a geothermal energy study in Presidio County near the Rio Grande. The study is estimated to take six to eight months and will determine whether or not Presidio County is a good candidate for a geothermal energy plant.

Ken Wisian — a geophysicist at UT-Austin — first introduced the idea at a Presidio County Commissioners Court meeting in June, endorsed by Trey Gerfers, general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. Along with the research of two dozen scientists and policy experts, Wisian was a lead author on a report called *The Future of Geothermal in Texas: The Coming Century of Growth & Prosperity in the Lone Star State*.

Though the report extensively outlines the science of geothermal energy and its potential implementation, Wisian told PMDD board members in July at a follow-up presentation that the title of the report said it all. "The amount of heat energy beneath our feet is estimated to be many thousands of times larger than what we would need to power not only Texas, but the world," he said.

Geothermal energy plants bring hot water from below the Earth's surface to ground level, where the water becomes steam. That steam can be used to power turbines, which in turn can generate electricity — a truly green source of energy, producing no greenhouse gasses.

The United States produces the most geothermal energy of any country in the world by sheer numbers — but that energy only powers 0.5% of the nation's grid. In contrast, the small, Arctic nation of Iceland uses geothermal energy to meet 90% of its citizens' heating needs.

Unlike other renewable sources, geothermal plants can keep the grid running regardless of environmental conditions like sun and wind. That's a particularly attractive quality in a state like Texas, where record-high demand has led to widespread grid failure — most notably in February of 2021, when a winter storm left millions of Texans without water or power.

Wisian told the PMDD board back in July that Presidio County "checks all the boxes" for geothermal production — and that the most auspicious area of the region was located close to the river, though he could not provide an exact location

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Staff photo by Maisie Crow

Little Amal, a 12-foot tall puppet inspired by the story of a 10-year-old Syrian refugee that has traveled across the world, made a stop in Marfa this week, where she met local children and went on a rainy walk guided by the stars. READ MORE ON PAGE 6.

Presidio County officials voice support for leasing Vizcaino Park to Marfa Parks Board

By MARY CANTRELL
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MARFA — Presidio County officials showed support for leasing county-owned Vizcaino Park to the City of Marfa Parks and Recreation Board after public discussion in a commissioners court meeting on Wednesday.

County Commissioner Brenda Bentley, whose jurisdiction includes the park, said the parks board approached her about the idea and she backed it for various reasons.

"They're interested in leasing Vizcaino Park and maintaining it and bringing it back to life, which I think is a fantastic idea," said Bentley. "It needs to be what it was always meant to be, and we just don't have the money to do that."

Both County Commissioner David Beebe and County Judge Joe Portillo agreed that due to budget constraints they were not in a position to improve the park's facilities.

Marfa Parks and Recreation Board President Trey Gerfers said they were approached by several citizens about taking over Vizcaino, and were in a favorable financial position to do so, with a $200,000 plus annual budget, which comes from a portion of the city's sales tax, and $400,000 in the bank they could utilize to leverage for grants and more.

As it stands, said Gerfers, there were more sports teams — whether it be youth or adult recreational leagues — than Coffield Park could accommodate, and Vizcaino could act as an overflow park for soccer and other sporting activities.

Cody Bjornson, Marfa resident and member of the local sandlot baseball team, Los Yonke Gallos de Marfa, which practices and hosts tournaments at Vizcaino, said he supported the initiative, and the park's facilities, particularly the bathrooms, were in need of serious upgrades.

"We bring a lot of folks from out of town and it's sometimes embarrassing having folks use our derelict bathrooms," said Bjornson at the meeting. "We need to provide those facilities to people."

Deirdre Hisler, an Antelope Hills resident with a background in state parks, said she too was supportive of the lease agreement idea, but would like to see the City of Marfa's requirements for Parks and Recreation board members expanded to include those outside of city limits.

County Clerk Florcita Zubia, who is now

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Lajitas Golf Resort brings forth ballot initiative to finalize utility district establishment

By MARY CANTRELL
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LAJITAS — The creation of a "Lajitas Utility District," originally established by an act of the legislature in 2011, is now up for a public vote on November 7 in Brewster County's Precinct 7, a sparsely populated area consisting of parts of Terlingua located South of FM170 and the Lajitas Golf Resort, the entity behind the initiative.

Voters will decide whether or not to confirm the utility district, which has remained dormant since its creation but is now seeking to become active, according to attorney Ronald J. Freeman, the district's legal counsel.

The district consists of 3,000 undeveloped acres located within the 27,000 acre Lajitas Golf Resort and Spa, according to Freeman, who said there are currently "no specific plans for future facilities or services," but the district would have the power to create separate districts for such development.

The remote getaway, owned by Texas billionaire Kelcy Warren, is located on the border between Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park and, in many ways, already operates as its own city. It owns and operates an existing municipal water and sewer system, for which it holds a Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) wastewater permit, and has recently provided water to Terlingua in the wake of its outages.

Lajitas Golf Resort and Spa consists of a 112-room resort, a golf course, RV park, multiple restaurants, general store, international airport and includes real estate offerings, in the form of lakeside cottages, for sale. Lajitas is an unincorporated community, and the resort employs around 200 individuals, some of whom live in subsidized housing on site.

The resort was purchased in 2007 by Warren, chairman of the board for Energy Transfer, the company behind the controversial Big Bend pipeline, which transfers natural gas from Fort Stockton to Mexico.

In addition to voting on the creation of the Lajitas Utility District, voters will select any number of five potential "permanent" directors. The initial 2011 legislation designated a temporary board, and all but one of those same directors remain on the 2023 ballot — George Kutch, Renee Lorenz, Brent Ratliff and H.C. Ross Jr., with Morgan Jones replacing John Nolan.

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Study Butte Water Supply Corporation awaiting test results to lift do-not-use ban

By SAM KARAS
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TERLINGUA — For almost two weeks, customers of the Study Butte Water Supply Corporation (SBWSC) — serving "on the grid" water customers in Terlingua and Study Butte — have been under a do-not-use ban. The ban is a step up from a standard boil water advisory, requiring the SBWSC to inform its users that the system's water may not be fit even for bathing or tending to animals.

Last Thursday, the SBWSC water board held an emergency town hall meeting to quell rumors and field community concerns. Fifty-three customers attended. "It completely defused everybody," said Board President Bill Gilles.

Gilles and his fellow board members explained to the crowd how and why the ban has stretched on for so long. On October 9, a mechanical failure in one of the system's wells led the company to issue a notice to customers to conserve water. In order to fill the gaps, water was trucked in the next day from nearby Lajitas and Big Bend National Park.

Following the water shipments, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) issued the "do-not-use" restriction on October 14. As spokesperson Ricky Richter explained last week to *The Big Bend Sentinel*, the agency pulled the emergency lever because "unapproved water haulers may have introduced unknown microbial or chemical contamination to the system" — in other words, the state could not be certain that water had been hauled in potable water containers.

Gilles was confused by the agency's ruling, and said that only approved containers had been used — trucking water for drinking and commercial use is a reality of life for many in Terlingua. In order to comply with the agency's regulations, the SBWSC quickly went to work compiling data and use history of all of the vehicles used in the water transport.

A similar concern was raised at the town hall meeting after some customers heard that a Terlingua Fire and EMS vehicle had been used to transport water. The water board explained the situation, both in person and in an online notice. "The Terlingua fire truck has only ever carried water," the notice reads. "It has never held chemicals."

Others raised concerns about the fact that

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New county-wide water control and improvement district allows county to manage grant funds

By ROB D'AMICO
for The Big Bend Sentinel

PRESIDIO COUNTY — When Presidio County Commissioners learned last month that $4.6 million in state grants to help develop county water infrastructure were about to be lost due to a state attorney general's ruling, the court quickly approved a new county-wide water control and improvement district (WCID) to fix the problem.

This summer, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) awarded grants to fund wastewater services to the East Heights area of Marfa, address wastewater issues at Fort D.A. Russell, and pay for planning projects to support new water service for Shafter and the Las Pampas Colonia near Presidio. Under the TWDB award, the county would need to issue bonds to finance $1.38 million, 30% of the grant. However, the TWDB received an attorney general's opinion stating the grants would be illegal, because the county does not administer any water services and thus, is not allowed to issue bonds for the loan portion of the grants.

"It didn't pass the attorney general's smell test, and the only way we were going to get the money was to create this water district," said County Judge Joe Portillo. Faced with that dilemma, the court voted to create the district at its September 13 meeting — a move allowed under state law.

Under Texas law, a WCID is an independent government entity that can provide the infrastructure for water, wastewater and drainage services. WCIDs can also issue bonds or take on other forms of debt, which allows the county to manage grants, most of which require a local contribution.

On Wednesday, the commissioners court met and discussed possible roles for the WCID in the future and what was needed soon to establish a governing board for the district. County Attorney Rod Ponton told the court the structure, in the near term, may need to be the four county commissioners and the county judge serving as the board until grant money is received and bonds issued. County Judge Joe Portillo said the issue of requirements for board members would be researched, and he would place an item on the November 8 court meeting to make final decisions for board members.

The September vote creating the district surprised some board members of existing water supply corporations around the county who hadn't heard of the decision and who wondered how — if at all — this would impact their operations. The near-term answer to that question, Portillo said, is not at all. The corporations will continue to govern their water supply systems, be responsible for their wells and pumps, and administer the fee collection for water hookups. Those corporations include Candelaria, Ruidosa, Redford, and eventual corporations planned for Las Pampas and Shafter.

The purpose of the county involvement in applying for TWDB grants was to muster the expertise needed for the complicated application process. Trey Gerfers, Presidio Underground Water Conservation District general manager, and members of the

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Vizcaino Park

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serving on the parks board, said they have a motivated group that is fired up about the prospect of making Vizcaino more accessible for local families.

"Vizcaino Park has so much potential," said Zubia. "There's so many things that can be done up there. It's being used more and more every year."

Gerfers assured Bentley no name change would occur under the parks board's stewardship.

Beebe said he would like to see a 15-year lease agreement, as well as specifics on who will be responsible for maintaining the park's existing power and water systems. He said considering the county's dwindling budget, it will probably have to cut even more services down the road, but at least this transition could be a positive one.

"I'm pleased that there isn't vocal opposition to this idea," said Beebe. "Because the truth is people, we're gonna have to look at this for all of our nonrequired services that the county provides."

Portillo was supportive of the idea and said he was open to considering a longer lease than 15 years. All agreed discussions would continue, and next steps are to hold a public hearing and draft up a lease to begin negotiations. No discussion was had regarding the ongoing matter of El Cosmio's expansion in the area and potential road addition through Vizcaino Park.

Disclaimer: Cody Bjornson is Mary Cantrell's partner.

Study Butte

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notices had not been provided in Spanish. In response, Gilles reached out to the TCEQ and was informed that the corporation would have to provide their own translator — local business owner Lico Miller volunteered for the job.

In addition to providing information in Spanish, Gilles said the board had made a series of eight freestanding "sandwich signs" to place in strategic locations around town. They hoped to target some of the community's older population not connected with their online notices or social media. "We've got the locations picked out and in colors they can't miss," he said.

At press time, SBWSC had not received water quality test results from the trucked water from TCEQ — the final piece of the puzzle that would allow the corporation to retract the ban. (TCEQ had no update for *The Big Bend Sentinel* at press time.)

The team capped off the presentation with an explanation of the projects they hoped to complete in the near future to prevent a repeated escalating series of system failures leading to water bans. The faulty well is up and running, and the corporation is working to replace faulty pipes and fittings with longer-lasting stainless steel, as well as secure and implement a backup generator to ensure water service during power outages.

Gilles hoped that the silver lining of the ongoing service interruption would be that locals would get more involved in SBWSC meetings — fellow Board Member Sam Bottenfield told Thursday night's crowd that in over a decade he had never seen more than five people attend a monthly meeting.

Because Terlingua is unincorporated, board meetings are one of a very few ways that residents can participate directly in how their utilities are managed. "People [at the meeting] said, 'Oh, you should get paid for what you do,'" Gilles said. "We do what we do so we can help the community."

PMDD

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without a formal study. He said that suitable sources of hot water would likely be found around 6.5 kilometers below the surface — a typical measurement for oil and gas wells.

Board members eventually voted to apportion $15,000 to fund the study. If the study produces successful results, the cost to get a geothermal energy operation up and running would likely cost $10 to $30 million, depending on the depth needed to drill into a water source.

Wisian indicated that — due to Presidio County's status as a low-income, border county — a local clean energy project would likely be an attractive candidate for grant funding.

Over the next few months, PMDD members worked to draw up a contract with input from Bojorquez Law Firm, the organization's legal counsel.

Board Secretary Lizette Rohana explained that the contract was drawn up between PMDD and UT-Austin, rather than Wisian as an individual. Other universities may eventually chip in on study research.

Rohana also said that money will not change hands until the study is completed. Ultimately, the project is a gamble — but one that the board is willing to make. "We don't want to get our hopes up," she said. "But it seems very promising because of prior studies that other universities have done."

Lajitas Golf Resort

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A number of the directors work for Energy Transfer. The district's legal counsel declined to comment on whether Energy Transfer is involved.

Managing director of the resort Scott Beasley said the delay in finalizing the district's establishment was due to one of the board members passing away and needing to be replaced.

While the ballot language implies that the directors are "permanent," Freeman said they technically serve four-year staggered terms and are subject to district-wide election every four years.

If approved, the utility district will have broad powers to "implement water, sewer, and other utilities, construct road and drainage improvements, create public service projects," and promote economic development, said Freeman. Airport construction, improvement and operations are also among potential projects allowed by the legislation.

The district may "construct or acquire electric power generating, transmission, and distribution facilities and improvements in aid of these facilities," according to enabling legislation. It may not, however, "provide retail electric utility," to customers inside or outside of the district, but can sell energy wholesale. Utility districts also have the ability to enter into contracts, allowing their operations to be run by other companies.

The Lajitas Utility District will have the power to levy an ad valorem tax, issue bonds, assess property, and hold limited powers of eminent domain — which do not apply to land outside of the district or for the creation of roads or recreational facilities.

On paper, the district will be a "governmental entity and political subdivision of the state," according to Freeman, meaning it will be required to post meeting agendas and hold board meetings publicly. But because the proposed district is 3,000 acres of undeveloped land, it is unclear how many, if any area citizens, will be privy to the district's goings-on.

"If you are not a resident or landowner in the district, you are not subject to the actions of the board," said Freeman.

Special use districts have been criticized for their lack of oversight — it is not uncommon for district officials to be handpicked by developers. Opponents argue they have the privilege of governmental powers, yet lack transparency.

In the tri-county area, the only other "districts" are underground water conservation districts, which exist in each county, in addition to a new Presidio County Water Improvement District.

The Brewster County Groundwater Conservation District — which the Lajitas Utility District would still be subject to regarding regulations — was not initially aware of the election item.

Brewster County Judge Greg Henington was unclear on the specifics of the initiative, like whether the district intends to levy taxes, but said going public, specifically with the resort's existing water and wastewater facilities, will open up additional revenue streams.

"I think it gives them some eligibility for funding to improve their water system," said Henington. "When it becomes a public utility, then they could probably issue bonds or get funding from sources they couldn't otherwise."

With only 180 registered voters in Precinct 7 — and only around 70 living in Lajitas — it is unlikely the Lajitas Utility District election will see a substantial turn out. If the election is not successful, the current Lajitas Utility District board can decide to hold another election or dissolve, according to Freeman.

According to the TCEQ, there are currently 1,997 active municipal utility districts (MUDS) in the state. James Bradbury, an Austin-based lawyer specializing in water law and conservation, said they are a commonplace tool, particularly for developers, with many being created each legislative session.

"It is not literally as expansive of powers as a city, but it's a quasi governmental entity that's created to conduct work and projects," said Bradbury.

The districts have gained popularity in the state over the past 20 years, said Bradbury, and are commonplace these days for large-scale projects developments, in part because they allow for the cost of creating homes, for example, to be passed on to those buying property.

MUDs have caused issues in other parts of the state when levied for unintended purposes. According to reporting from The San Antonio Express News, a Dallas millionaire leveraged the power of his district to help a friend avoid the installation of a city wastewater pipeline in Dripping Springs and a group of Travis County developers misused its district by providing tax breaks to other developers, negatively impacting taxpayers in other communities.

Bradbury said developers may opt to phase projects, creating additional MUDS as needed for financial reasons, but expanding or creating an additional Utilities District requires legislative action.

"If they want to replicate these powers in a new phase of development, they're gonna have to go get another MUD, or they could seek legislation to amend the boundaries of this current MUD," said Bradbury. "Either way this MUD is only going to have powers to the boundaries that were created at the time."

Brewster County Precinct 7 voters can participate in Early Voting for the Lajitas Utility District election at the Judge Val Clark Beard Conference Room, 203 N 7th Street, Alpine, from October 23 to October 27, and October 30 to November 1, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Early voting will also be open Saturday, November 2, and Sunday, November 3, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Election day voting will take place from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Red Pattillo Community Center for Precincts 5, 6 and 7.

To view the Lajitas Utility District election order visit, brewstercountytx.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NoticeOfElectionToTheResident-QualifiedElectorsofLajitasUtilityDistrictNo.1.pdf

PISD Police Chief Joel Nuñez presents triennial school safety audit results

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — At the end of September, PISD Police Chief Joel Nuñez unveiled the results of the district's latest triennial safety audit. These reports — required by the Texas School Safety Center — help districts identify and address potential safety concerns and keep up-to-date with statewide requirements and recommendations, including the use of state funds for campus safety upgrades and training for students in seventh grade and above to treat traumatic injuries.

Nuñez's report detailed areas in which the district was ahead of the curve and several policies that will need to be implemented in the next three years. Among the new mandates, the state is requiring enhanced alert systems, a wider range of drills and stricter training requirements for staff and administrators in emergency management.

The triennial audit recently filed by Nuñez is not to be confused with security audits conducted by the state last year. After the revelation that the Uvalde shooter entered Robb Elementary School through a faulty exterior lock, last year's audits tested districts on whether or not unauthorized visitors were able to access the school building from the outside. (Both Presidio and Marfa ISDs passed the test.)

Nuñez explained that a lot of new statewide requirements had surfaced over the past year and a half in the wake of the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde. As incidents of gun violence in schools have become a reality for many districts, the state has started handing down enhanced policies and guidelines.

He felt that additional training for staff was a priority given the fact that Presidio ISD has had major staff shake-ups over the past few months: the 2023-24 school year began with new leadership at the middle school and high school, as well as a new superintendent, all of whom had to be brought up to speed on policies introduced over the past year and a half.

The district also swapped four seats on the board of trustees and saw the election of a new board president. While school board members are not technically staff members, they must stay consistently up-to-date with the latest shifts in district policy. Without sign-offs and training completion from the new members, the district would not be able to keep working toward goals set by the next round of audits.

In July, all of the district's new leaders worked through and signed off on the PISD emergency management plan. The plan — which Nuñez refers to as a frequently-updated "living document" — provides a protocol for school leaders to follow in response to a range of issues from bullying to an active shooter.

Among the six areas in which Presidio ISD received good marks this year, the district implemented active shooter drills as well as an alert system to notify parents, students and staff members before drills take place. The audit also noted that PISD had taken steps to limit access to school grounds while students were present — most notably on the track field, which is no longer accessible to the public during school hours.

One area of concern that Nuñez was especially excited about tackling was the implementation of a district-wide counselor, Victor Hernandez, who took up his post at the beginning of the school year. Hernandez's job is solely dedicated to providing mental health resources and wellness checks to students and staff. The new counselor will follow up on concerns raised by students and staff and provide information and referrals to those in need.

Over the next three years, the district will also need to address a few key areas — Presidio ISD recently received money from the state to be used to address student safety. The district plans to add bulletproof coverings to windows and doors and to build a fence behind the middle school.

Nuñez hoped to begin these projects as soon as possible, pending board approval.

The district will also need to implement training programs for staff and students to deal with medical emergencies. High school seniors will need to complete CPR training, and all students seventh grade and above will need to take a course called "Stop the Bleed."

In 2019, the Texas Legislature approved Stop the Bleed — available as an online module — as a state-sanctioned course to teach youngsters how to respond to "life-threatening bleeding," per the course's website.

The 2019 law requires school districts to stock "bleeding stations" with trauma shears, tourniquets and other tools used to treat major traumatic injuries. That law requires school staff members to complete training and to offer the course to students above elementary age.

Stop the Bleed came up again in the latest legislative session — HB 1147, which died in committee, would have lowered the age for mandatory training to eight years and above.

Given the recurring discussion, Nuñez hoped that Presidio ISD would be ahead of the curve for next year's audit. He noted in his report that staff had already been trained and that students would be asked to complete the training as soon as possible. "It's not something we can do overnight," he said. "But as long as we have planning in place, we're good."

Nuñez has traditionally been hesitant to offer safety protocols and plans online, in the interest of keeping information out of reach of "the bad guys." Despite that, he pledged to keep the information publicly accessible in physical form — interested parents and staff can request information from Nuñez directly or visit the PISD office for more information.





Water control and improvement district

(Continued from page 1)

county's Water Infrastructure Steering Committee — charged with looking for state and national funding for water projects — stepped in to help.

"No one told us that this regional approach that we're taking, where the county is the applicant and will ostensibly pass these funds through to the smaller entities like cities and the public water supply corporations, is a really exotic way to go about this," Gerfers said. "We were just humming right along, and then suddenly [they] said, 'Oh, the attorney general is not going to approve this.'"

Portillo said he envisions potentially having the county play a larger role in assisting the local corporations, and this new district could be the vehicle to do that. "I think the county needs to have more responsibility," he said. "This is not a want. This is a need."

The judge outlined a variety of challenges facing the local corporations — responding to water quality and regulatory complaints by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, paying and retaining people to test water quality, non-payment from customers, and the high costs of well maintenance and repairs. The local corporations could benefit from collaborating to face those challenges by, for instance, hiring one operator to test more than one well, or using one person for billing and administration for multiple corporations, he said. Portillo noted that one option would be to have one or two new corporations each serve multiple communities.

Gerfers said it's clear that something needs to be done to help the community corporations. "These systems are all too tiny, too small, to take care of themselves," he said. The new county water control and improvement district could include a board member from each local supply corporation but use combined resources to manage water across the county, he said, providing the example of an employee of the corporation testing water and managing equipment for multiple communities.

"Instead of every little community having to fend for itself, this is a way for all the communities to come together," Gerfers said.

The new district would then be eligible for continuing grant funding that ordinarily is difficult for little corporations to obtain, he said, but added that there are several different options for collaboration other than just putting everyone under the one umbrella of the new district.

Water utilities in Marfa and Presidio are better equipped to deal with the challenges of running water supply services but still would benefit from grant funding opportunities sought by the new county WCID, Gerfers said.

County Commissioner David Beebe said he begrudgingly voted to create the new district and did so only to keep the grant money. "The county has proven time and again that we're not good at doing things that are not absolutely required of us by law," he said.

"Running a water district is the last thing the county needs to do," Beebe said but continued, "because we're already de facto supervisors of the Redford, Candelaria and Ruidosa systems. And those are constantly having problems, and we're not good at handling them."

However, Beebe said creating a separate, new corporation that consolidates operational costs for these communities could be a solution, as long as it's not the county on the hook for being responsible for them. "That's the last thing we need to do is add more employees to another [county] department. There's just no way. We don't have enough money to run what we're doing now."

Charlie Angell, president of Redford Water Supply, said he didn't hear about the new WCID until well after it was formed and knows nothing about it. He said he is receptive to the idea of collaborating with other water corporations but still is uncertain about a possible county role in managing them. "Who's to say they're going to do it better than what we're able to do?" he said.

The county originally requested $12.6 million from TWDB's Economically Distressed Areas Program, and early indications were it would get the money. However, TWDB ultimately decided not to fund construction projects, including water service in Las Pampas and Shafter, because initial planning stages are needed for accurate construction costs. County officials hope that future funding cycles will pay for those construction projects. The prospect for more funding will be considerably better if voters pass Proposition 6, on the ballot for November 7, which would create a state water fund seeded with $1 billion. That fund would allow the TWDB to administer more grants for infrastructure projects across the state. (Early voting for the entire slate of propositions began Monday and runs through Friday, November 3.)

Residents of Shafter were at Wednesday's meeting to voice support for the new WCID and note that their community is ready and willing to do what it takes for reliable water service. Shafter is in the process of forming a local water supply corporation, which would only include about 25 hookups to local homes.

"Water has always been a problem," Shafter resident Randall Cater told the court. "For a long time, if you moved to Shafter, the only way you could get water was if you had access to the creek."

Cater, who has lived in Shafter for 30 years, explained that the community had received its water free of charge since the late 1990s from companies running the adjacent silver mine. However, events like a fire at the well left the community without water for more than a week.

Shafter residents learned last summer that Aurcana, the mine operator, was in dire financial shape and was selling the mine, which caused significant concern that a new owner could stop water service. That deal fell through, but a new purchase offer from a Canadian company called Silver Hammer appears to be headed toward completion, again leaving uncertainty for water supply.

Cater said if the county ultimately does create a new corporation separate from the WCID to consolidate services for water supply corporations, Shafter will be ready to take part. "I don't think you're going to have any problem handing it off to citizens from the affected communities," he said. "We're interested. We want to have a voice. We want to be involved."

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Most of Big Bend Ranch State Park closed through the weekend for bighorn survey

By SAM KARAS
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SOUTH PRESIDIO COUNTY — The majority of Big Bend State Ranch's 311,000 acres will be closed through Saturday, October 28, for a Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) aoudad survey. During the survey, agency experts will count native desert bighorn sheep and cull non-native aoudads "via lethal means," reads a park press release.

The rocky, mountainous terrain across the Big Bend's public lands has long been the home of bighorn sheep. Over the past century, the native sheep have been pushed out by aoudad — or barbary sheep — a species introduced by private collectors and zoos and later released into the wild in the 1950s.

Aoudads compete with desert bighorns for resources, and their high numbers can negatively impact desert ecosystems and sensitive geological and archaeological sites. Though the primary goal of the bighorn surveys are to count and classify herds of native animals, overpopulated aoudad will be culled by TPWD staff.

This year's survey was announced just two weeks in advance, causing headaches for some park staff and campers with advanced reservations. Big Bend Ranch State Park's River Corridor Superintendent Laura Jennings explained that folks with reservations in the interior were given notice a week before the general public so that they could rearrange their plans.

An official announcement about the survey — and subsequent park closures — was announced on October 11. Jennings said that the gap between the notifications was due to the fact that this year's survey required adjusting and redrawing maps recycled from past surveys. "It's not the standard aerial survey that we've seen in the past," she said. "There were a lot of moving parts."

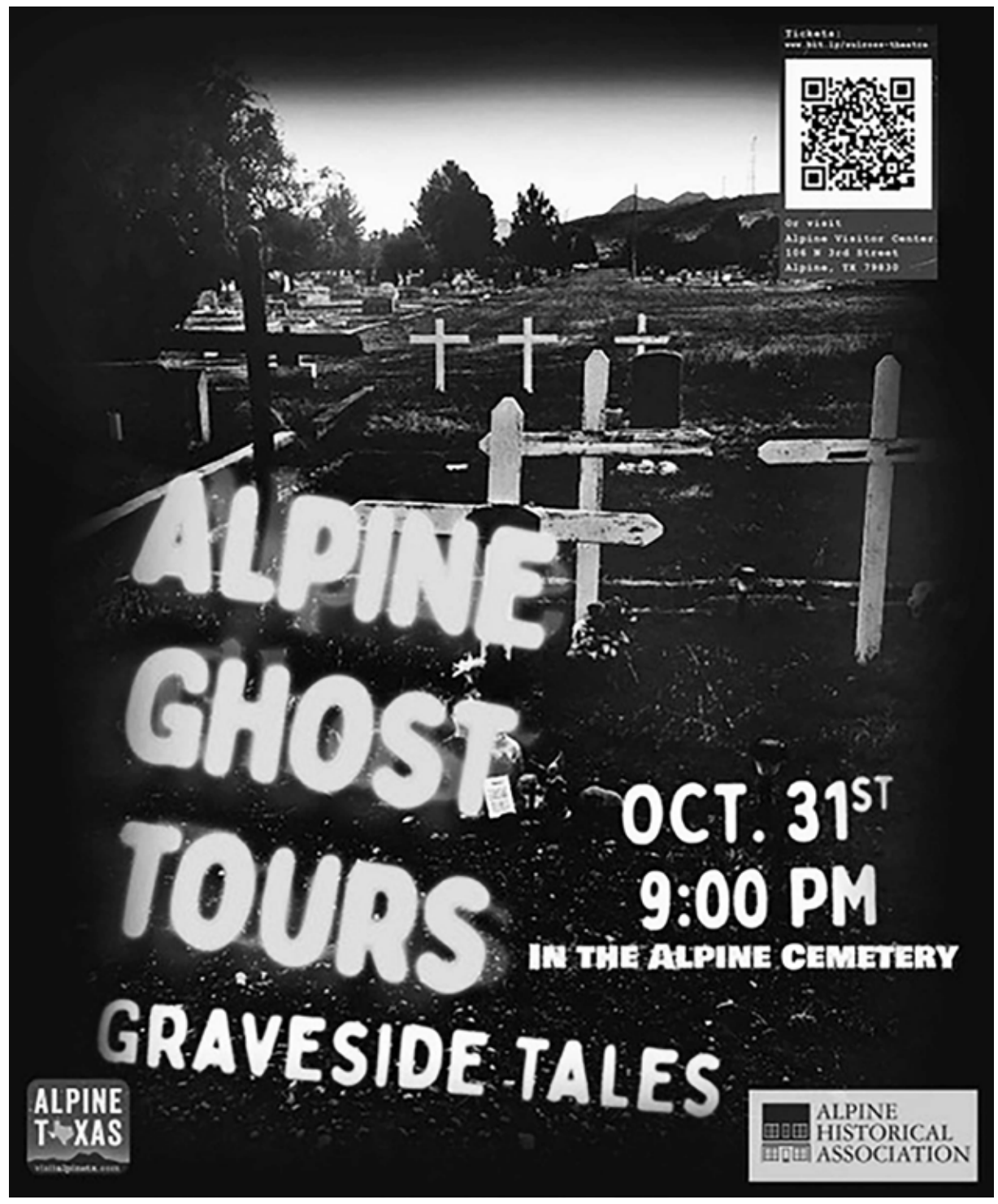
Lerrin Johnson, spokesperson for the wildlife division of TPWD, explained that the short notice was not intentional — the surveys sometimes had to be adjusted on-the-fly in order to accommodate environmental conditions and mechanical issues. "Though we try to keep these adjustments to a minimum, they are often a result of issues out of our control," he said.

The survey will start with the river corridor and will be conducted counter-clockwise throughout the interior of the park. Campground reservations and commercial river trips will not be affected, though most park trails will be temporarily shut down — including Closed Canyon, perhaps the most popular hike in the park. "We've never closed Closed Canyon before," Jennings said.

Though park staff had encountered some unhappy campers, the closures provide an opportunity for education about local ecosystems and a wide range of TPWD operations. "It's always disappointing when you hear about a closure in a park like Big Bend because it takes a lot of time and planning to even get here," Jennings said. "Once the initial disappointment is surmounted, we're able to explain 'the why' and [park guests] see it's for a good cause."

There will be no access to Closed Canyon Trail on Thursday, October 26. The vast majority of the park interior will remain closed through Saturday, October 28. Barton Warnock and Fort Leaton Visitor Centers will remain open, as will the Hoodoos Trail and the Contrabando Trail System. Park operations will resume as normal on Sunday, October 29.





Opinion

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



An open letter to our communities,

It's time to put some vicious rumors about Alpine Humane Society to rest by explaining how the organization's finances work.

Alpine Humane Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Most of the nasty and incorrect gossip swirls around our $1 million trust. Let's set the record straight (again). In the mid-1990s, Dr. Helen Cole of Sul Ross State University left, in her will, a $1 million trust for the society. It is possible that Dr. Cole did not herself realize that the way that trust was structured does not benefit the society in the way she might have intended.

However, the trust is a legal structure and cannot be altered. Here's some history:

At Dr. Cole's request, the trust was placed under management by Edward Jones Trust Company. The trust directive stated that the trust was to be managed under the laws of the state of Texas, but EJTC's trust division operates in Missouri, resulting in it, in fact, being managed in Missouri and falling under Missouri law.

In 2019, I was hired as executive director of Alpine Humane Society (AHS) and looked at how the trust worked. In a conference call with the trust managers, I asked questions. I had immediate concerns about their answers regarding how the trust distributions were implemented because I found, after doing some simple math, that what they said should have been distributed to AHS was, in fact, NOT for several years.

I learned that the $1 million can NEVER, EVER, under any circumstances, be touched by AHS or anyone else. This is an important aspect that the public has never correctly grasped. AHS gets distributions from the trust yearly under a specific formula state law sets. Under EJTC, distributions were made twice annually. Currently, they are made quarterly.

The fact is that the trust managers invest the principal of the trust (the million dollars plus any dividends) in a range of stocks and bonds. Those investments pay dividends. AHS only receives the INTEREST earned on the account that the $1 million and those dividends are in.

For example, at one point, when the stock market was doing well in around 2021, the ensure trust was valued at as much as $1.5 million. That year, the trust earned attractive dividends, and AHS earned the INTEREST ONLY on those dividends, according to the law governing these types of trusts. Interest rates have been very, very low for many years, as anyone with a savings account knows. Earned interest rates are only about .57% (just over half of 1%).

For 2021, AHS received just under $80,000 from the trust. Not only do we only receive the interest, but that amount is capped at 5%. So even if the trust reached $2 million because of fantastic gains and earned interest rates skyrocketed, AHS could only receive a maximum of $100,000 annually.

That year was the most income AHS has EVER received from the trust, after I pointed out unpaid dividends from EJTC. At that time, our annual budget was around $250,000. So, $80,000 was significant but not even half of our budget.

Fast forward to 2022, and I learned that over the years, as I did the math for each year, EJTC did not distribute the amounts from the trust that it was required to send to AHS due to errors and unnecessary fees they were charging to the trust. Upon learning this, I wanted to remove the trust from the control of EJTC and bring it back to Texas, as Dr. Cole originally intended.

I found that this required a lawyer. We engaged a well-respected law firm from El Paso and an attorney specializing in nonprofit issues. They helped us sue EJTC to remove the trust from their oversight and return it to El Paso. This was a significant legal battle, but we prevailed, and our attorney fees were covered by EJTC in the settlement. We brought the trust under the management of the nonprofit Paso del Norte Community Foundation in El Paso, which, unlike EJTC, which is an investment advisory firm, has a stated fiduciary responsibility to the organizations for which it manages money.

The Texas Attorney General's Office had to review the terms of the trust and the guidelines of the foundation's management in this lawsuit. That office tried to prevent us from receiving a full 5% of the value of the trust annually. Again, we prevailed and received that amount in quarterly installments for 2022 and this year.

The stock and bond markets have not been spectacular since moving the trust to the foundation's management. In 2022, we received $71,767 from the trust, and so far this year have received $42,995. In the years since 2021, the overall value of the trust has dropped to a low of $1.17 million.

Allegations that AHS, its board members, staff, or I have somehow squandered $1 million dollars are slanderous. If anything, our actions since 2019 resulted in MORE income for the organization. No one with Alpine Humane Society questioned EJTC and pointed out its failure to distribute trust revenue to AHS for years. In fact, our action against EJTC resulted in $64,000 being paid to us as a lump sum for what they failed to distribute over the years as trustee.

The trust has always been managed by a trustee, and AHS can never, ever receive anything more than up to 5% of the interest earned on the investment dividends. We have no way to manage or access the money ourselves. We only receive what the trust allows by law. The trust is a perpetual legal structure. It never matures, and the $1 million never becomes available to AHS. If AHS were to cease operations, the trust would be transferred to the National ASPCA (Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) per Dr. Cole's directive.

In addition to putting the trust in better management since 2019, I have worked with my staff to increase our Thrift Store revenue, which is our number one source of income to fund our operations, from operating at an annual loss every year before 2019 to annual revenue of $152,264 as of December 31, 2022.

AHS employs a professional CPA firm to manage and review its financials monthly. The organization has internal financial controls. We are happy to have anyone who has questions about our financial management make an appointment to meet with us to discuss how we manage our funds.

The rumor mill has only hurt our opportunities to obtain more individual donations, as those who perpetuate ugly and false gossip cause potential donors to avoid supporting us based on their false and slanderous accusations.

Our only goal is to improve the lives of cats and dogs in our community. We have six staff members who do that work with extreme passion. Only four work full time, and I, being one of them, removed myself from the payroll a few months ago to preserve those other jobs as we struggle financially due to higher costs for insurance, supplies, veterinary care, and the food we buy for the animals at the Alpine Animal Shelter. Our donations for 2023 are down by 46%. I continue to serve in a volunteer capacity at this time to manage the organization.

We need caring people to donate to Alpine Humane Society and to trust in our commitment to our fiduciary responsibility for the trust income and other funds. We cannot understand why anyone would want to spread malicious lies and try to discourage donors, keeping us from doing the work we are passionate about — caring for the pets and people of our community.

Without significant donations and other sources of revenue that we are pursuing, including grants, the reduced trust distributions and higher operating costs threaten our existence. Please consider being TEAM AHS by combating lies and giving generously. The cats and dogs in our community deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Jeanine M. Bishop
Executive Director Alpine Humane Society
Alpine

• • •

Editor:

What is transparency? Transparency is the quality of being easily seen through. Transparency in governance refers to being open and honest; this requires disclosure of all relevant information so that others can make informed decisions. The members of the Jeff Davis County Commissioners Court were elected to truthfully and transparently represent the constituents of their precinct and residents of this county.

The perception from this citizen's side of the table is that the court isn't truthful or transparent within its own ranks, let alone with their constituents, that commissioners are expected to vote along with the county judge. My perception is that they may have little choice to do otherwise when critical information isn't made available to them to review well in advance of a vote. My perception is that information is made available to some but not all. If any of these perceptions are accurate, even a little, the court has again failed to be transparent and truthful, let alone fair. This makes it impossible for this court to truthfully and transparently represent residents of this county rather than just the interests and pursuits selected by this court.

For example, the October 12 issue of *Big Bend Sentinel* article about Peggy Fonseca said that Curtis Evans referred to the situation as "a witch hunt" — specifically, one led by a member within his own court, County Commissioner Royce Laskoskie." This is not true; several of us citizens have been driving this pursuit of the truth. The fact that one or more commissioners might be disturbed that the head of our EMS was under investigation for failing to provide lifesaving interventions should be deeply concerning. This same article reports that "Dr. Travis Cosban of Big Bend Regional Medical Center is the Jeff Davis County Ambulance's medical director," which was just recently approved at Tuesday's commissioners court meeting. Many who should be among the informed understand that Dr. Luecke is the medical director and don't even know who this person is.

From my understanding, this court was willing to fund its original deficit budget from the millions of dollars in its reserves. There is so much in the reserve right now that it could fund our current budget for two years with no other revenue needed. Threatening to withhold employee raises and department funding is a manipulative heartstring pulling political tactic that, perceived from my side of the table, is a clear attempt to cast blame on commissioners Hurley and Laskoskie. My perception is that Judge Curtis Evans has been against commissioners Hurley and Laskoskie since election night when he left the courthouse without even a word to the two new commissioners. My perception is that his personal grudge will unfairly impact this county's employees and departments. Commissioners, I urge you to vote for what you know is right, truthful and transparent and not how you think you are expected to vote by anyone at the table. Open and honest government is critical to the very existence of our way of life, and we should all hold our elected officials accountable to this standard.

Sincerely,

Melanie Blackman
Fort Davis

• • •

Editor:

It doesn't seem right to sacrifice county land for the sole benefit of a private business enterprise; it is setting a very bad precedent and could result in future dire consequences. Needless to say, I am advocating for saving Vizcaino Park as the park it was intended to be — a park to be used and enjoyed by the people of Marfa and Presidio County, not as an entryway to a campground/boutique hotel/restaurant/3-D generated housing compound.

Dawn Shannon
Marfa

We want to hear from YOU!

- Letters to the editor should be sent to editor@bigbendsentinel.com, and must provide the writer's full name, city of residence and an email or phone number, so that we may follow up and verify information as needed.
- Your letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. While opinions of all kinds are welcome, when it comes to claims of fact, we strive to only publish what is verifiable.
- We have limited staff capacity to fact check unsubstantiated claims, so letters that include those may be held or remain unpublished if information is not easily verifiable.
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- We reserve the right to hold or refrain from publishing a letter for any reason and we thank you for always sharing your letters with us.

- The Big Bend Sentinel Editorial Staff

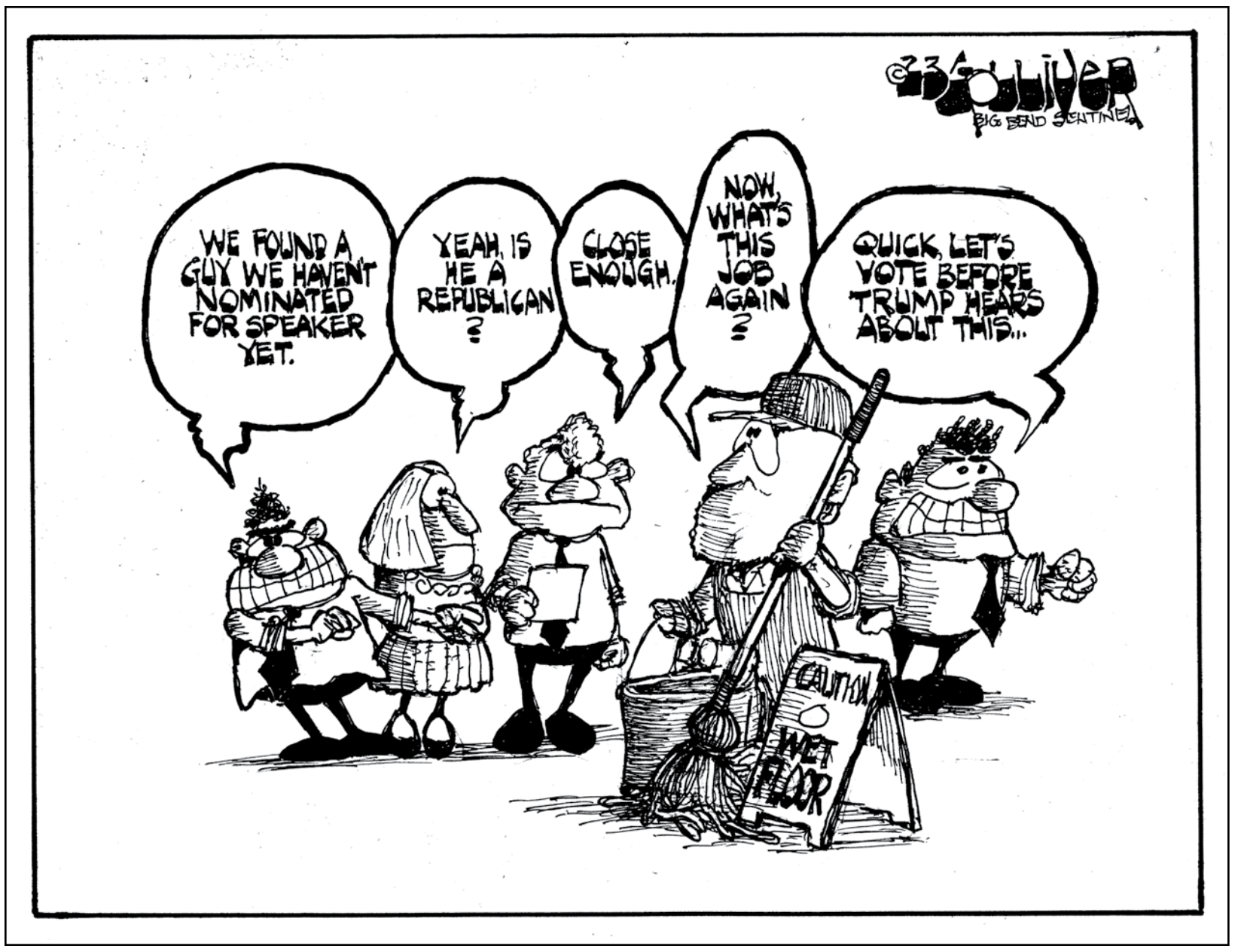
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OP-ED

Voting for the future of Texas

By STATE SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

On November 7, 2023, voters like yourself will hold the power to influence our state's trajectory, on major kitchen table issues families care about like property taxes, child care, education, broadband, healthcare and more by voting on 14 constitutional amendments, also known as propositions.

One notable proposition, Proposition 11, has a significant impact in El Paso County.

In 2003, the Texas Constitution was amended, allowing conservation and reclamation districts in certain counties across the state to issue bonds to fund the development and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities, however, El Paso County was left out of this constitutional amendment.

Proposition 11, which I filed and passed as Senate Bill 938 during the 88th Texas Legislative Session, would correct that omission, granting conservation and reclamation districts in El Paso County the power to issue bonds for parks and greenspace if local voters approve the bonds.

As the El Paso community continues to grow, additional park space can improve the quality of life for El Pasoans and spur economic development. To attract and retain top talent in El Paso, we need to provide unique benefits the community can offer, like a safe community with ample park space to enjoy the 297 days of sunshine we get each year. Prop 11 will achieve this goal, should voters approve to allow the issuance of bonds for parks and greenspace.

But Proposition 11 is just one of the many pivotal decisions voters face this November. Here's a glimpse and brief explanation of the other propositions on the ballot:

• **Prop 1**: Protects the right to engage in farming, ranching, timber production, horticulture and wildlife management.

• **Prop 2**: Reduces property taxes for child care centers across Texas, improving child care access and affordability for Texas families.

• **Prop 3**: Prohibits the imposition of an individual wealth or net-worth tax.

• **Prop 4**: Increases the homestead tax exemption from $40,000 to $100,00, and $110,000 for seniors and limits annual appraisal increases on commercial property.

• **Prop 5**: Creates the Texas University Fund to help certain higher education institutions achieve national prominence as major research universities and drive the state economy.

• **Prop 6**: Finances and creates the New Water Supply Fund to improve water security for Far West Texas communities and families.

• **Prop 7**: Creates the Texas Energy Fund to support the construction, maintenance, modernization and operation of dispatchable electric generating facilities to support the grid.

• **Prop 8**: Establishes the Broadband Infrastructure Fund, designed to expand high-speed broadband access for Texas families.

• **Prop 9**: Provides a Cost-of-Living-Adjustment for Texas' retired teachers.

• **Prop 10**: Eliminates property taxes on physical assets owned by medical and biomedical product manufacturers to safeguard the state's healthcare system and improve the supply-chain for medical goods.

• **Prop 12**: Abolishes the office of County Treasurer in Galveston County and instead designates another county officer to fulfill the office's functions, making their county government more efficient.

• **Prop 13**: Increases the retirement age for state justices and judges from 75 to 79 and removes limitations on their service term based on age.

• **Prop 14**: Establishes the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund to expand state parks in Texas.

Each of these propositions carries great significance for our families and communities. To learn more about the constitutional amendments visit: https://www.sos.texas.gov/elections/forms/2023-explanatory-statements-14-final.pdf

It's not just a civic duty to cast your vote; it's an opportunity to shape the future of Texas by amending our state Constitution. So, mark your calendars, find your polling location, encourage your neighbors, and make your voices heard on November 7, 2023! Your voice and your vote matters!

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

OUR WATER MATTERS

Proposition 6 – A vital step toward greater water security

By TREY GERFERS
tgerfers@pcuwcd.org

The American Society of Civil Engineers has given our state's drinking water infrastructure a C-, noting that Texas experiences a high number of boil water notices. The current situation in Shafter and Terlingua is a case in point.

A recent survey of Texas' water infrastructure needs by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that our "water infrastructure is aging and in need of repair to withstand the challenges of the 21st century." It identified a $61 billion backlog in water infrastructure upgrades and expansion projects in Texas to meet those challenges over the next 20 years. In its summary of survey findings, the EPA also stated that "while most water infrastructure is hidden from sight, it is foundational to our daily lives."

Earlier this year, the 88th Texas Legislature took $1 billion from the state's current budget surplus of over $50 billion to create the Texas Water Fund. The fund, which will be used to finance local water infrastructure projects, is subject to approval of Proposition 6 by the voters in the upcoming election on November 7. While this funding represents a proverbial drop in the bucket when viewed against the enormous need, it is a necessary move that cannot be made without voter support.

If approved by the voters, this fund will be used by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) to finance low-interest loans to communities for water and wastewater projects. According to the Texas Water Foundation, "These loans are one of the most effective and broadly used tools [that] small and low-income utilities have for enabling projects" like developing new supplies, repairing and replacing existing infrastructure, addressing water loss, and meeting the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. In the case of rural regions like Presidio County, these loans constitute the biggest bang for the buck because they can be combined with grant funding to leverage our very limited local resources so that we can actually afford to pursue water and wastewater projects. And virtually every town and city in the greater Big Bend region will have no choice but to update and replace their infrastructure in the coming years as population pressure and the march of time continue to take their toll on existing systems.

"Texas' rural water systems are in deep disrepair," according to Vanessa Puig-Williams, director of the Texas Water Program at Environmental Defense Fund. "The Texas Water Fund is a much-needed intervention as it specifically prioritizes funding for rural communities. The fund is an important step in what needs to be a broad, creative, urgent effort to empower local communities in securing a sustainable water future."

The 88th Texas Legislature formed the first-ever Texas Water Caucus. This bipartisan body that included dozens of legislators is working to focus more attention on the grave condition of our existing water systems and the need to expand our infrastructure to accommodate explosive growth statewide. Some have argued that even more money should have been taken from the budget surplus and allocated to the new water fund. Meanwhile, the Legislature has not increased funding to address long-term water infrastructure in over a decade. Within this context, we need to ensure that this initiative passes by a large margin so that our legislators understand how important water is to us. Overwhelming passage of Proposition 6 will send a clear message to our leaders that we firmly back increased investment in our water security.

Voting in favor of Proposition 6 is a concrete action that every voter can take to advance the many solutions that will be necessary to provide abundant drinking water and ensure safe wastewater disposal for future generations. Support for Proposition 6 will also elevate the work of the Texas Water Caucus and encourage future Legislatures to allocate even more money to water security. Proposition 6 involves no new taxes or regulation. Proposition 6 gives our region and our state a fighting chance to address the daunting challenges we can already see coming.

Early voting continues from today through Friday, November 3, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Election Day is Tuesday, November 7, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Cast your vote at the PAC at 1400 E. O'Reilly Street in Presidio or at the Presidio County Courthouse at 300 N. Highland in Marfa.

Trey Gerfers is a San Antonio native and serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. He is also chairman of the Presidio County Water Infrastructure Steering Committee and president of the Marfa Parks and Recreation Board. Trey has lived in Marfa since 2013.

OP-ED

Supporting Texas retired teachers and Proposition 9

Why I support a COLA increase for retired teachers and why YOU should vote for Proposition 9 this November

By STATE REP. EDDIE MORALES JR.

While I have always been a staunch supporter and believer in public education, it should not be lost that public school teachers are the cornerstone of these schools. As you know, retired teachers have not had a meaningful cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in nearly two decades. At a time of increasing inflation, passing this COLA was crucial.

The rise in inflation is a painful reality for families across Texas, but for retired teachers, it hits especially hard. To coincide with rising housing costs, utilities, grocery bills and healthcare, it is shameful that those who have spent their careers empowering the next generation may find themselves choosing medical care over groceries.

However, it is not just supporting through an economic means, but a moral one. Our retired teachers have committed themselves to the betterment of our society, investing their time, energy and passion into the betterment and education of generations of Texans, including myself. Now, it is our responsibility to ensure that retired teachers have a secure and dignified retirement they deserve. As a parent of two adult daughters who served as public educators, this proposition hits close to home.

Proposition 9, which will be on the ballot this November, is imperative for Texans to vote in favor of it. If passed, Texas will step up in a time of need to maintain fiscal security and quality of life for our retired teachers. This issue goes beyond our retired teachers. By passing Proposition 9, we are sending a strong message to our current teachers and those who aspire to be educators that we will have their backs in the years to come.

Supporting public education means supporting all aspects of it. I am proud of the work the Texas Legislature did to send that message — that we support our teachers, and especially our retired teachers. I look forward to hitting the polls with you this November and hopefully see you there!

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Community

Sports Updates from MISD athletic director

By LINDA OJEDA

CROSS-COUNTRY

Marfa's standout cross-country runner, Francisco Rosas, qualified for the UIL State Cross-Country Championships with a time of 17:51.77, and an incredible overall fourth-place finish at the Regional Meet Tuesday morning.

Rosas, a junior on the Shorthorn cross-country team, has consistently ran well with improvements at each meet throughout the season. As a qualifier, Rosas will represent Marfa at the state meet, which is the first time Marfa has sent a male participant to the contest since in eight years, which was last done by Josue Gabriel Aguilar in 2015.

Marfa's boys team finished with an overall team finish of seventh place, while the girls team ended with an 11th place team finish.

VOLLEYBALL

MISD's volleyball team heads into Thursday's match-up against Buena Vista with district champion opportunities on the line. The team is currently riding a three game win streak into this match and can force a tie for first with a win over BV. Marfa reached this point with a thrilling 5 set win over Fort Davis last week with the hometown crowd fueling Marfa's leading attacker, Maryfer Martinez. Martinez currently leads the team in kills for the season and the team will rely heavily on the junior middle blocker, along with teammate Raven Martinez, and setter Ava Flores.

Defensively, Zoe Salgado continues to provide timely digs and saves for the Lady Horns as the team's defensive specialist, while Loretta Rivera and Itzel Urrutia continue to provide timely blocks and kills at the net. The first set will begin at 6 p.m. at the Shorthorn Gym, with JH playing at 5 p.m. With a win on Thursday, the Lady Horns will enter tournament play for seeding at Balmorhea on Saturday against Buena Vista and Fort Davis. With a loss, Marfa will be seeded third heading into the playoffs.

FOOTBALL

The Van Horn Eagles football team shutout the Shorthorns in the district opener last Friday at Martin Field by the score of 46-0, which now sends Marfa into a 0-1 start to district play. Marfa worked to break through the Eagles stifling defense with several good runs, but was unable to break into the endzone, leading to their shutout loss of the season. The Shorthorns now head to Fort Davis to take on the Indians and hope to play spoiler at the FD Homecoming game. The team continues to show tremendous growth this year and hopes to give a hard push to enter the playoffs. Kick off time Friday is at 7:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Marfa ISD

Francisco Rosas is hoisted in the air by other students after placing an overall fourth-place finish at the regional meet on Tuesday. Rosas qualified for the UIL State Cross-Country Championships with a time of 17:51.77.



Photo courtesy of Marfa ISD

Francisco Rosas competes in Tuesday's regional meet.

Little Amal, 12-foot-tall Syrian refugee puppet, visits Marfa on US tour

By MARY CANTRELL
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — A 12-foot-tall puppet, inspired by the story of a 10-year-old Syrian refugee that has traveled across countries and met millions of people, was welcomed by the citizens of Marfa this week.

Little Amal, who was celebrating her birthday in Marfa, was created two years ago by The Walk Productions and Handspring Puppet Company, who put on the traveling theater event in order to promote awareness of the struggles of unaccompanied minors, child refugees and immigrants.

The larger than life puppet — which is manned by three puppeteers, one on stilts — was inspired by a real girl who was discovered alone in a refugee camp in France after fleeing the war in Syria.

"Amal that you see walking down the road is very much based on her and was inspired by her journey," said Craig Leo, a puppeteer from South Africa with the Little Amal team.

Like the girl, who for a time stopped speaking due to traumatic experiences, Amal is silent, but not devoid of emotion, her expressive eyes and attentiveness to the environment around her bring her to life.

Amal's visits typically revolve around a walk, symbolizing the process of migration. At Tuesday night's event, Amal walked from the courthouse down Lincoln Street, stopping for performances by Molly Ferguson Rodriguez of Mariachi Santa Cruz and the Matachines Dancers of Presidio.

While the gathering was slightly hampered by the presence of rain, the way Amal reacted to the scene, splashing into puddles and dancing in the rain along with performers enriched her character for the audience. She stopped repeatedly to greet the crowd of children in her wake.

Leo explained that sometimes Amal events will center around the community welcoming her, while others focus more specifically on the harrowing aspects of migration, like a recent event in Philadelphia where Amal's walk included repeatedly searching for a place to sleep on the street.

"There's constant restlessness, not being able to find a place to settle, some of the events are much more kind of curated to tell her story," said Leo.

Around 75 people followed Amal along her route down Marfa's streets. The sky began to open up and Stephen Hummell of the Big Bend International Dark Sky Preserve led the procession on a journey through the galaxy.

It was the last Marfa Chamber of Commerce event organized by President Abby Boyd, who will soon step down from the role. She said the program's focus on the stars, in addition to Amal, was meant to be a unifying theme.

"Every culture creates sorties about the stars to tell their important stories, and every culture used the stars to navigate," said Boyd. "So we have a little girl from someplace that probably very few of us have been to, connecting with the people who live here. It gives us an opportunity for empathy."

Amal's U.S. Tour began in September, and will see her traveling along the border to California, then into Mexico, in the coming weeks. Before traveling to Marfa from San Antonio, the Little Amal team visited the Val Verde Humanitarian Border Coalition in Del Rio for an unofficial stop to welcome some asylum seekers traveling from Mexico. Leo said the ongoing war in Gaza, which began during their current tour through the U.S., has been weighing on their team, and "unfortunately," makes Amal's story "more prevalent now than ever."

For more information, walkwithamal.org

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

10/11

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution from last week's puzzle:

SOLUTION:

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

10/10

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Universal Crossword

Edited by David Steinberg October 30, 2023

ACROSS
1 Busy person's response to an invitation
6 "Shoo!"
10 Use scissors
14 Winter refreshment
15 "Moby-Dick" captain
16 Actress Reid
17 *True crime watcher
19 Software customer
20 Past curfew
21 Was absolutely horrible
22 *Dame and knight
27 Friend of Spot or Fido
28 White House staffer
29 Speak pompously
30 Bed for a twin brother, say
32 Skin irritation
36 Unspoken words: Abbr.
37 *Percussionist's set
40 Hoppy beer, briefly
41 Musical pause
43 401(k) alternatives
44 Picture in a picture
46 Word following "French" or "air"
48 General ___ (Chex maker)
49 *Breakfast dish made without yolks
55 Opera solos
56 "That's all false!"
57 Equipment
58 Quickly adapt ... or a hint to the first 3-5 letters + 2 other letters in each starred clue's answer
64 Period before Easter
65 A Great Lake
66 Library no-no
67 Tolkien tree creatures
68 Give a meal to
69 "TiK ToK" singer

DOWN
1 Solid served in liquids
2 Playfully shy
3 An ___ up your sleeve
4 Currently
5 Fitted, as a tuxedo
6 Jolly man
7 Fan's shout
8 Flashlight power sources
9 "Conan" channel
10 Speech therapy focus
11 Sounding congested
12 Name that doesn't rhyme with "Rene," oddly
13 Rosa who stood up for herself by staying seated
18 Roofing gunk
21 ___ the Kid (rhyming NHL nickname)
22 Derby animal
23 Track shapes
24 Pickleball court divider
25 Pulls sharply
26 Maui figurine
27 Katy Perry song whose title is an animal sound
30 Very well-done, but not done well
31 Actress Thurman
33 Airplane walkway
34 Said L-I-T-R-E, say
35 Bowlers and beanies
38 Super Bowl LVII's halftime performer, to fans
39 Endless scrolling, e.g.
42 Gets in the way of
45 Nada
47 Honey ___! (Post cereal)
49 Bird on a U.S. quarter
50 Eco-friendly
51 Larger than large
52 Kemper of "The Office"
53 Well-___ machine
54 Kitten's cry
58 Official in a striped shirt
59 Mine find
60 Stocking stuffer?
61 That dude's
62 Approximating suffix
63 Sweet ___ (Southern drink)

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

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

10/29

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☺ MARFA SCHOOL LUNCH MENU ☺

OCT/NOV	Thu, Oct 26	Fri, Oct 27	Mon, Oct 30	Tue, Oct 31	Wed, Nov 1
BREAKFAST	STUFFED BAGEL, CHEESE CUBES	SHORTHORNS SUCCESS DAY	CEREAL, TOAST	DUTCH WAFFLE, SAUSAGE	CEREAL, TOAST
LUNCH	CHICKEN PARMESAN, ROLL, GREEN BEANS, CORN, PEACHES	SHORTHORNS SUCCESS DAY	QUESADILLA, BEANS, SALSA, CUCUMBERS, APRICOTS	CORN DOG, POTATOES, TOMATO CUP, FRUIT, COOKIE	ASIAN BOWL, EGGROLL, BROCCOLI, CORN, MANDARIN ORANGES.

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MARFA SHORTHORNS SPORTS CALENDAR

THU, OCT 26: HS Volleyball vs Buena Vista in Marfa, 6:00pm (District Game)
FRI, OCT 27: JH & HS Football vs Fort Davis in Fort Daivs, JH 5:00pm, HS 7:30pm
SAT, OCT 28: HS Volleyball TBD
SAT, OCT 28: Fall Festival at Hibbitts Gym, 12:00pm - 3:00pm

10/30

Continue Along *by Ryan Mathiason*

1	2	3	4	5	■	6	7	8	9	■	10	11	12	13
14					■	15				■	16			
17					18					■	19			
■	■	■	■	20				■	■	21				
■	22	23	24					25	26					
27					■	■	■	28				■	■	■
29					■	30	31			■	32	33	34	35
36			■	37	38					39	■	40		
41			42	■	43				■	44	45			
■	■	■	46	47			■	■	■	48				
49	50	51					52	53	54					■
55					■	■	56				■	■	■	■
57				■	58	59					60	61	62	63
64				■	65				■	66				
67				■	68					69				

Exhibition featuring regional artists opens at the Latin American Institute of Austria

By MARY CANTRELL
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

VIENNA, AUSTRIA — *Memorias de Vida y Muert*e, a binational group exhibition featuring artists from the Chihuahuan Desert region, opened last week at the Latin American Institute of Austria.

The show includes work by local artists Ann Marie Nafziger, Diana Simard and Zak Ziebell all of Marfa, Tom Curry of Alpine, and many others from San Antonio, El Paso, Juarez and Chihuahua City. Marfa resident Clara Bensen and artist Miguel Valverde, of Chihuahua City, who has displayed work at the Ruidosa Church, acted as co-curators.

The borderlands showcase is a part of the annual, international Dia de Los Muertos festival in Austria. Bensen, Valverde and a handful of the featured artists attended the opening in Vienna last week, which began with a traditional procession led by Hena Moreno Corzo from Cultural Latina, who sang "La Llorona" as attendees walked from the street into the exhibition.

Bensen said it was "a packed house," with over 150 attendees, including the Mexican ambassador to Austria. She and Valverde said the paintings they selected aim to represent the cultural richness of the Chihuahuan Desert region, too often characterized by its vastness and politics.

"There are so many layers of culture and history here, even though it's remote and arguably not the easiest environment to survive in," said Bensen. "The paintings in the show speak to that range of complexity and experience."

Valverde said it was important to elevate and raise awareness of the area on an international level, and art was the perfect vehicle.

"I think we must share our character through the art community," said Valverde. "The area has many values that the world must know and the exhibition was a great opportunity for it."

Bensen and Valverdeo worked previously to bring one of Valverde's works, *Latido de Luz*, to the Ruidosa Church for its annual community day in 2022. They decided to continue their collaboration when the opportunity to present a show at the Latin American Institute in Vienna came about last year through Valverde's connections.

They worked with the museum to select artists for the show, wanting to represent as many locations from the Trans-Pecos region as possible, said Bensen. They determined the exhibition would focus primarily on the work of figurative painters and settled on a theme.

"The theme of the show is focused on expressions of life (and death) in the Chihuahuan Desert — our shared environment — but that encompasses large urban areas, not just rural ones," said Bensen.

The process of developing the show in Texas and Mexico, then unveiling it in Austria, was a true cross-cultural experience, said Valverde, involving close collaboration across borders.

"We worked from Chihuahua to Vienna, Vienna to Marfa, Marfa to Chihuahua," said Valverde. "It was wonderful learning how to work across three different cultures."



Photo courtesy of Cultura Latina

Latin American Institute of Austria Director Andrea Eberl welcomes visitors to the opening of Memorias de Vida y Muerte with Miguel Valverde and Clara Bensen.

AROUND THE BIG BEND

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Fri Oct 27

Halloween Family Dance
6:00pm - 10:00pm at the Granada Theatre in Alpine
Get ready to groove at a spookiest soirée! The Granada is hosting a Halloween Family Dance Friday, October 27th featuring live music from Desert Debo & her Allstar Review. $10 suggested donation.

Alpine Public Library's Travel Talk
7:00pm in the AEP Foundation Multipurpose Room at APL in Alpine
Valerie Naylor will share her experiences traveling around the US in The Destination of the Journey: Exploring America from Coast to Coast and Beyond.

Sat Oct 28

Free Fall Fun
1:00pm - 5:00pm at the Alpine Visitor Center, 3rd Street & Avenue E in Alpine
Come join Big Bend Law Enforcement for FREE FALL FUN! There will be all kinds of family fun with Alpine Police Department, Border Patrol families and other community organizations!! Arts and Crafts, a bounce house, yard games, snacks, trunk or treat and first come first take for a FREE PUMPKIN!!.

Moons & Tunes Festival
Starting at 9:00am at the Fort Davis County Courthouse & Kelly Pavilion in Fort Davis
9am - Chuckwagon Breakfast
10am - Historical tour / parade
5pm - Family Barn Dance - Kelly Pavilion - goat roping, food and drinks, and live music, featuring: Roger Moon & The Moonshiners, The Doodlin' Hogwallops, Doug Moreland, and A Tribute to George Strait!. Tickets are available at https://www.dougmoreland.com/moonfest.html or in person on day of at the Kelly Pavilion for $20.

Sun Oct 29

Dia De Los Quesos Fundraiser for Alpine Humane Society
4:00pm - 7:00pm at the Granada Theatre in Alpine
Alpine Humane Society is again hosting their Queso Competition! If you want to enter the competition bring your queso at 3:30pm. There will be a silent auction and music by Rick Ruiz!

Tue Oct 31

Halloween Party and Costume Contest presented by Friends of the Marfa Public Library
4:30pm - 6:00pm at the Marfa Public Library in Marfa
Party for all ages! Registration for costume contest at 4:30pm, judging at 5:00pm. Prizes for Best Homemade Costume, Scariest Costume & Funniest Costume. This event is rain or shine!

The Presidio Stockyards Annual "Trunk or Treat"
6:30pm - 9:00pm at the Presidio Stockyards. 1110 E Staockyard Rd in Presidio
Free hot dogs and candy! Set-up starts at 5:00pm. First come, first to line up. Bring your own chair. BYOB. For more info, call Iris (432) 634-5880

Alpine Ghost Tours
9:00pm at the Alpine Cemetery in Alpine
Alpine Historic Association is teaming up with the Sul Ross Theatre Program once again to bring the historic walking ghost tour to the Alpine Cemetery for one night only. Tickets may be purchased at www.bit.ly/sulross-theatre. For more information, contact 432-837-8039 or email finearts@sulross.edu.

Wed Nov 1

2023 Terlingua Chili Cookoff
11/1 - 11/4 in Terlingua
The Original Terlingua International Championship Chili Cookoff takes place the first weekend in November every year. Frequently referred to as the Tolbert Cookoff, or Behind the Store, this is the original and Grand Daddy of all chili cook-offs - in the world! More info and tickets at https://abowlofred.com/

Ongoing Weekly Events & Classes

Big Sky Yoga
Monday: Sculpt at 5:00pm, Vinyasa at 6:00pm
Tuesday: Hatha at 9:00am
Wednesday: Sculpt at 9:00am; Vinyasa at 6:00pm
Thursday: Yin Yoga at 6:00pm
Friday: Breathwork at 9:00am; Vinyasa & Core at 12:00pm
Saturday: Vinyasa at 10:00am
New location: 105 E Oak #4 (in the ally behind the Wrong Store)

Step it Up (Step Aerobics)
Tuesday at 6:00pm, Thursday at 9:00am & Saturday at 9:00am @ Big Sky Yoga
All fitness levels welcome. New location: 105 E Oak #4 (in the ally behind the Wrong Store)

Free Zumba Classes
Monday & Wednesday at 6:30pm at Marfa Public Library

Free Meditation Classes
Tuesday & Thursday at 6:00pm at Marfa Public Library

Life Drawing with Model
Saturday from 9:45am - 12:00pm at Talent Studios in Alpine
Join this vibrant artist community, make new friends and hone your drawing skills. Reserve your easel by texting 206.619.4699

Storytime
Wednesday at 11:00am at Marfa Public Library

AA (online & sometimes in-person)
Saturday at 12:00pm at https://tinyurl.com/y686nnw2 & sometimes in-person at Marfa Public Library

AA (in-person)
Monday & Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Alpine Farmers Market
Saturday at 9:00am on historic Murphy Street in Alpine

Note: Schedules are subject to change. Please call or visit business websites to confirm that event is happening.

Have an upcoming or weekly event?
Please submit a two sentence maximum description of your weekly event including who, what, when, and where by Tuesday at 10 am to ads@bigbendsentinel.com

Water in the Desert conference scheduled at Sul Ross State University

ALPINE — Registration is now open for Water in the Desert, a first-of-its-kind conference about water in the Chihuahuan Desert of West Texas taking place at Sul Ross State University on Thursday, January 18, 2024.

The conference brings together experts, landowners, community members, scientists and elected officials to discuss the future of water in West Texas. Everyone is welcome.

"This conference will help attendees better understand and appreciate the critically important water resources of the area and the complex water challenges facing our region. We look forward to learning from a diverse and talented group of individuals who will inform our program," said Director of the Rio Grande Research Center and Geology Professor Kevin Urbanczyk.

Attendees will receive a broad overview of hydrologic systems in the Chihuahuan Desert followed by a panel on Texas legislative policy with invited panelists Sen. Charles Perry, Rep. Tracy King and Sen. César Blanco. Groundwater science and management strategies will be discussed in a panel featuring groundwater conservation district leaders from across the region.

David Yoskowitz, executive director of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, will provide the lunchtime keynote address.

Afternoon panels include a landowner discussion moderated by James Oliver who serves as a director and chair of Natural Resources and Wildlife for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Panel members with diverse perspectives will share and discuss the challenges, responsibilities, opportunities and solutions around the realities of water in the desert.

The Land and Water Stewardship panel will cover practices that enhance groundwater recharge and surface water ecosystems, mitigate flooding, and provide lasting benefits to both landowners and communities. Moderated by Dr. Bonnie J. Warnock, dean of the College of Agriculture, Life, and Physical Sciences at Sul Ross State University, the panel features Jeff Bennett, habitat restoration hydrologist with Rio Grande Joint Venture, Steve Nelle, retired NRCS and leading expert on riparian landscapes, Casey Wade, president/CEO of the Dixon Water Foundation, plus Alpine Mayor Catherine Eaves bringing a community perspective.

Attendees will learn about several on-the-ground projects in the West Texas region in a fast-paced final session moderated by Robert Potts of the Dixon Water Foundation. Segments will include Las Cienegas, Comanche Springs, San Solomon Springs, the Lower Pecos River, Presidio County Steering Committee, and cost share opportunities for landowners.

Dr. Brian McCall, chancellor of the Texas State University System, will deliver closing remarks.

For full agenda, speaker details, and online registration, visit https://bri.sulross.edu/events/water-in-the-desert-2024/Space is limited. For information and to inquire about table exhibitor opportunities, please contact info@waterinthedeserttx.org.

DRAWING OF THE WEEK



Madison Cash
9th Grade
Cut Paper Straight Line Design

Classifieds & public notices

JOBS

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Submit resumes to aanderson@villagefarms.com applications @ Village Farms Security Stations 3 miles N. Hwy 17, Marfa or 3 miles S. Hwy 17, Fort Davis or call 682.647.1214 ext. 469 for more information.

HELP WANTED

Agave Home Health is seeking a FT Coordination Assistant who is detail oriented, organized, and a multi-tasker proficient in Microsoft Office.

Duties include processing new patients, distribution of records, and management of daily reports. Health care experience not required. Training provided.

Apply at 610 E. Holland Ave. in Alpine or call (432) 837-5907

VILLAGE FARMS - EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY - FAST TRACK TO MANAGEMENT

Village Farms is seeking a detailed oriented individual to join our team as Shipping/Receiving Clerk for our Marfa 2 location.

Responsibilities include loading and unloading, forklift operation, preparation of shipping documents, verify deliveries, maintain warehouse and other general duties.

Requirements: Must be willing to work flexible hours including evenings, weekends and holidays, ability to work independently, verbal and written communication skills, working knowledge of computers and forklift experience preferred.

Opportunity to move to Supervisor level and pay within the first 6 months of employment. Must be able to pass a pre-employment drug screen.

Interested candidates should call (432)729-3071 Ext. 607 or fax resume to (432)375-6241. Applications are also available at Village Farms Security Stations 3 Miles N. Hwy 17 Marfa, TX or 3 Miles S. Hwy 17 FT. Davis, TX.

PREVENTATIVE CARE HEALTH SERVICES JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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Please call Sarah at 432-837-4812 for more information.

Applications may be picked up at 1605 N. FT. Davis Hwy Alpine, TX 79830 or call (432) 837-4555.

Please call first before arrival.

JOB OPENING

Marfa and Presidio County Museum is hiring for a part-time docent position to keep the museum open Thurs, Fri, Sat from 1:00 - 5:00.

Stop by the museum to pick up an application or email info@marfamuseum.org.

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Big Bend Regional Resource Directory
www.bigbendhelp.org

The website has links, phone numbers, and addresses for programs, hotlines, and organizations throughout the tri-county area with up-to-date information on area health and social services.

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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.

Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District Notice of Public Hearing on District Rules

Notice is hereby given that the Board of Directors of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District ("District") will hold a public hearing on Friday, November 17, 2023, at 4pm in the Jury Room on the second floor of the Presidio County Courthouse, 300 N. Highland, Marfa, Texas, to discuss, consider and receive public comment on proposed amendments to the District's rules to implement statutory changes enacted during the most recent Texas Legislative Session.

The proposed amendments to the District's rules include changes to (1) the District's procedure for the Board's decision-making in a contested case hearing on a permit application; (2) the list of wells exempt from permitting requirements; (3) the District's rulemaking process; and (4) the maximum export fee that may be assessed by the District. The proposed amendments also repeal production fees effective at the beginning of the District's 2024-25 fiscal year.

All interested members of the public are invited to participate and comment orally and in writing. A copy of the proposed amendments to the District Rules may be reviewed or copied on the District's website at pcuwcd.org or at the County Judge's office on the first floor of the Presidio County Courthouse.



Share Your Thoughts About
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH NEEDS
in the Big Bend Area

REGIONAL SURVEY

Big Bend Reproductive Coalition wants to know your opinion about reproductive health needs in the Big Bend Region. Participation in this anonymous digital survey will help to inform the services that we provide to our communities. Your voice matters, and your experience matters to us.

Use the QR Code to right or follow the link below to access the **BBRC Community Needs Assessment Survey:**

bit.ly/BBRC-Survey

COALICIÓN REPRODUCTIVA DEL BIG BEND REPRODUCTIVE COALITION
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GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

PRESIDIO COUNTY
Judge Jose Portillo:
(432) 729-4452

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Alpine Mayor Catherine Eaves:
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JEFF DAVIS COUNTY
Judge Curtis Evans: *(432) 426-3968*

FEDERAL:
U.S. Sen. John Cornyn:
(202) 224-2934 (D.C. office)

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz:
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Chinati is an art foundation created by Donald Judd and opened to the public in 1986.

Chinati is open Wednesday through Sunday. Office hours and guided tour times are seasonal. For details and reservations, please come to the Visitor Center (1 Cavalry Row) or go to chinati.org/visit.

Free entrance is available for residents of Presidio, Brewster, and Jeff Davis counties.

THE BIG BEND Sentinel

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