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by order of Presidio County

Big Bend Sentinel takes several 1st prizes in statewide newspaper contest

TRI-COUNTY — The Texas Press Association honored *The Big Bend Sentinel* this weekend with several first place awards based on the newspaper's 2024 news coverage, features and photography for the association's annual "Texas Better Newspaper Contest."

The Sentinel was awarded in Division 6, which includes smaller weekly newspapers, while other divisions are reserved for newspapers — like the big urban dailies — with higher circulations and more staff.

The Sentinel placed first in News Writing for "Holland Avenue fire prompts building inspection crackdown," by Mary Cantrell, and 'It's no gold mine': Commissioners consider tolling the Presidio International Bridge," by Sam Karas.

A team of photographers also took first place for News Photography for: "Alpine community mourns loss of businesses, historic downtown structure in wake of devastating fire" (Mary Cantrell); "Fort Davis ISD raises state allotment from $70K to $1.5M through private, early childhood school partnerships" (Maisie Crow); "Longtime taxidermy business closing its doors" (Jennifer Pittinger); "Blackwell School ribbon cutting provides reflection on importance of new park" (Rob D'Amico); and "Biden administration to roll out 'parole-in-place' for undocumented family members of citizens" (Rob D'Amico).

Of the news photos, a judge wrote: "These photos invite the reader into the story, sharing emotional, engaging perspectives that made me want to learn more. Well done!"

A team of photographers won first place in Feature Photography for: "A tenacious, family-owned printing press brings the news to Far West Texas despite industry decline" (Maisie Crow); "Nonprofit restoring Marfa ISD's Hunter Gym seeks alumni stories" (Mary Cantrell); "A place with everything" (Mary Cantrell); "A 'catastrophe of idiocy'" (Jennifer Pittinger); and "Shafter getting boost in historic preservation, new restaurant" (Rob D'Amico).

A judge noted. "This photography is far beyond the other entries in this category and division. … The Chicken George photo was one of the best and funniest environmental portraits I have seen in a while. The detail shot of the gym was also excellent. It told so much with so little. People often forget those detailed images."

The Sentinel reporters took second place in Feature Writing with "A tenacious, family-owned printing press brings the news to Far West Texas despite industry decline," by Mary Cantrell, and "'Who the hell is H. Allen Smith?'" by Sam Karas.

Trey Gerfers placed first for Column

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The West Texan Media Group, LLC

Photo by Carlton Ward, Jr. for NatGeo Explorer

Fabiola Baeza Tarin, born in Ojinaga, holds North America's most endangered bird — the Florida grasshopper sparrow — in a documentary for National Geographic. Read more on page 6.

Rare earth minerals discovered on Brewster County ranch

Sierra Blanca Round Top mine launch still years out

By Mary Cantrell
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BREWSTER COUNTY — Rare earth minerals were recently discovered on a 353,785-acre ranch in Brewster County purchased by the General Land Office (GLO) last fall. The finding coincides with a national push to map and develop the resources, which are mined and used to power everything from smart phones to military weapons to renewable energy infrastructure.

A GLO spokesperson told *The Big Bend Sentinel* opening a rare earth mine on the property would likely be extremely complex, but it is not something the agency has ruled out. "A survey was completed that shows the presence of rare earth minerals. As of now, there is no active mining underway on the property," the GLO spokesperson said. "Given the rugged terrain and remote location, any exploration or extraction would require significant planning; however, the GLO is open to exploring these options in the future."

The GLO declined to provide specific information about which rare earth minerals were found and where. The state agency also owns land in Sierra Blanca, which it leases to company USA Rare Earth who is in the process of developing the Round Top rare earth mine. The project is being pursued to decrease the United States' dependence on China, which has long dominated mining and processing of critical minerals. According to the state comptroller, Round Top is one of the largest U.S. deposits and, once operational, will be able to meet 17% of projected U.S. demand for rare earth magnets with $140 million in annual sales.

Earlier projections estimated mining operations would be underway at Round Top by 2023, but the endeavor has proven to be exceedingly complicated, and the opening of the mine is likely still years out, according to USA Rare Earth CEO Joshua Ballard, who shared updates with *The Sentinel* via a written statement this week.

He said the company is still working through how to "safely, quickly, economically and sustainably" pull rare earth minerals out of the rock. "Each deposit has its own unique mix of minerals, which means there is not one 'standard' way to get the ore out of the rock," Ballard wrote. "At Round Top Mountain, we need to figure out how to separate the valuable tech metals from others like calcium, iron and aluminum, which are plentiful here."

Figuring out how to mine and

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Mexican consul raises concerns about Trump tax on immigrant remittances

By Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO — National headlines hit close to home during last week's Presidio City Council meeting, when Gamaliel Bustillos Muñoz of the local Mexican Consulate gave a presentation about a provision in a federal tax bill that could add a 3.5% fee to all money that non-citizens send home — a practice sometimes called "remittances." Bustillos anticipated that the measure could have a big impact in Far West Texas and Northern Chihuahua, where millions of people cross the border looking for work in industries like agriculture and fossil fuels.

At the end of May, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a massive tax bill — affectionately referred to by President Trump and his allies as the "Big Beautiful Bill" — that could have massive implications for the borderlands. Apart from the remittance tax, the Big Beautiful Bill could more than double the size of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement police force and fund "900 miles of river barriers" in a state hemmed in by 1,200 miles of the Rio Grande.

Consul Bustillos' office serves 14 counties in Far West Texas and serves nearly 150,000 Mexicans who call this part of the border home. "The Mexican community in the United States is big, and one of their most important contributions to the economy here is that they spend most of their income here in the United States," Bustillos said.

Bustillos went on to explain that Mexican nationals working in the United States spend about 80% of their income on this side of the border, and the other 20% goes to support family members back home. That money — about $66.2 billion dollars in 2023 — represents about 4% of Mexico's total GDP. "Mexican people, especially in the rural areas, live on remittances," Bustillos explained.

Experts worry that if remittances are taxed or overly regulated, folks will abandon legal means of sending money abroad. "They might use

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P&Z argues AEP rezone would do more harm than good

By Mary Cantrell
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MARFA — In a 78-page report recommending that City Council vote to deny a rezone request from American Electric Power (AEP), the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission concluded that "the negative consequences for the city and its residents far outweigh the negative consequences for the applicant" when considering spot zoning, the city's 2017 comprehensive plan, public feedback and more. AEP is requesting a zoning change from residential to industrial on a lot on the east side of town to allow for the construction of a new substation.

The property in question is a four-acre lot at the corner of E. Oak and N. Aparejo streets just before the Alamito Creek bridge. In January, AEP applied for a rezone on behalf of the current owners of the property, several siblings who are currently in litigation over the multigenerational property and eager to sell.

AEP is looking to buy the lot for the development of a new $7 to $10 million substation triple the size of the existing Oak Street substation a block away, which supplies the city of Marfa with power. AEP External Affairs Manager Fred Guerrero spoke in two public hearings P&Z held on the rezone this spring, stating that the relocation and expansion is being pursued to stabilize the town's power supply. He said the existing station's capacity of 5 MVA (megavolt-amperes) was routinely peaking at 7 MVA.

Resident feedback — detailed in the P&Z report and previous coverage by *The Sentinel* — was largely in opposition to AEP's proposal. Neighborhood residents and people throughout town argued that the substation, which will emit noise, be lit at all hours and be surrounded by security fencing, will degrade their property values and the general quality of life.

In its report, which was recently approved, P&Z board members revealed that they ultimately agreed with those sentiments, stating that "modern AEP substations are beautifully engineered but visually severe, out of scale with residential neighborhoods and as proposed would permanently detract from Marfa's small town charm."

The P&Z report noted that a site diagram presented by Guerrero in public hearings "was not to scale," failing to represent the potential structure's true size of 250 by 250 feet and "attempted to minimize the size of the new substation." Members of P&Z and the public also took issue with the fact that a technical design of the proposed substation was unavailable due to the fact that AEP only embarks on that process after land is acquired.

Notably, the P&Z report warns that the rezone, if approved by City Council, would likely constitute a spot zone, which are generally considered illegal, opening the municipality up to potential litigation. Spot zoning,

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Presidio residents launch petition to stop $5.5 million bond

County's plan to issue bonds for courthouse repairs and other projects without a vote could be thwarted

By Rob D'Amico and Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO COUNTY — Some Presidians are speaking out against the county's plan to go out for a $5.5 million bond, organizing a petition to put the measure to a vote among county residents. At the center of the issue is the Presidio County Courthouse in Marfa — which has been widely considered to be in need of emergency repairs for years — but the bond would also include capital investments in the form of county annex renovations and new equipment for the road and bridge department, which hemorrhages money trying to work with outdated and broken equipment.

The county began the latest push to renovate the courthouse in 2022, chasing funding from nonprofits and other entities to try to pay up front. After years of frustrating and less-than-fruitful grant cycles, the county decided to take a completely different financial approach — issuing millions of dollars in certificates of obligation (CO) bonds that don't require voter approval under state law.

Conversations about taking on debt began at a Commissioners Court meeting last August after county officials reached a point of total burnout. Year after year, they passed bare-bones budgets while pressure to make major repairs and invest in new equipment mounted. Simultaneously, the county's financial leadership had taken a conservative, zero-debt approach in the name of getting the government's finances back on track after the county repeatedly failed to complete audits on time.

At the time, County Judge Joe Portillo seemed supportive of adding a few pennies to the tax rate, and the commissioners went to work setting their wish lists for overdue repairs. "It's something that previous commissioners courts have never really done, and I admire them for it," Portillo told *The Sentinel* last summer of the prospect of taking on debt. "But what they've done is they've denied themselves a lot of the things that they need."

Commissioners (with the exception of a "no" vote from Portillo) voted on June 11 to give notice to the public of its intent to issue $5.5 million in COs, and the county auditor published the notice in *The Big Bend Sentinel* on June 12 and 19.

Presidio residents said, "Not so fast," and now hope to put a kibosh on the plan, circulating a Facebook post with information about the bond and a petition. At a special Presidio County City Council meeting Monday, a couple dozen residents joined city officials in criticizing the bonds — which they feel are unfairly slanted to benefit Marfa.

Residents also brought a petition to stop the COs and encouraged everyone at the meeting to sign it, and Portillo said he was hearing plenty of objections from residents. "I'm hoping that we can just have an honest discussion about how you guys feel about this," Portillo said. "I know what I've heard in the last two weeks has been, 'Maybe [the courthouse] should just be a museum. Maybe we shouldn't have that building anymore.' I've heard, 'Maybe we should change the designation of the county seat.

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AEP rezone

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according to a memo from City Attorney Sylvia Firth included in the report, occurs when "a city changes zoning to allow a use that is incompatible to surrounding uses and does not respect the city's comprehensive plan."

In its report, P&Z argued that the industrial rezone is clearly incompatible with the residential neighborhood that has been inhabited since the 1800s and would go against the city's comprehensive plan adopted in 2017, which prioritizes, among other things, expanding housing options. The rezone would "subtract from existing housing stock" by tearing down an existing adobe home on the property and prevent future housing development on the site, the report states.

"An industrial use for the proposed site specifically contradicts the Future Land-Use Map, which identifies the site and the surrounding properties as areas for future residential development," the report states.

P&Z commissioners also addressed the main argument made by those in favor of the new substation: reliability of service. Some citizens have expressed concern that "denying the rezone will lead to unreliable or losses in service" that could negatively impact the town, specifically individuals that rely on electricity to power critical medical devices. But, per Guerrero, outages are often the result of issues with the statewide grid rather than local distribution stations and will never fully go away, according to the report. Plus, the report states, AEP will simply have to pursue another property if denied the rezone, not abort its mission.

"By agreement with the state, AEP is responsible for providing Marfa with reliable power. Denying the rezone for this particular property does not untether AEP from this obligation and will not jeopardize access to reliable electricity for the city," the report states. "It only means that AEP will have to find another site that not only serves its goals, but also those of the broader community."

While it does not go into detail, the report does mention that alternative sites for the new substation have been presented and are being explored. It was previously reported by *The Sentinel* that County Commissioner Deirdre Hisler and local realtor Mary Farley worked to locate two viable alternatives, which are both outside of city limits, meet AEP's minimum acreage requirements and front Highway 90.

The P&Z report will be officially presented to City Council members by Chairman Chick Rabourn on Thursday, at which point council members will discuss next steps, like when to schedule a public hearing. Guerrero told *The Sentinel* this week that he is planning on attending the July 8 City Council meeting to provide additional information before the council makes its final decision.

The report was sent to *The Sentinel* Friday afternoon after several requests for the document during the week after P&Z voted to recommend denying the rezone. Interim City Administrator Kelly Perez said there was never an intention to keep it private but that delays in getting the report to city officials and an unfamiliarity of procedural steps for a rezoning case were the cause of the delay.

Marfa is worth more than an Instagram post, says a dean of architecture

By Roger Black
For The Big Bend Sentinel

Visitors to Marfa and the Big Bend may think: "If you come by car, you might consider it a boring drive instead of taking it as an opportunity to slow down," says Upe Flueckiger, talking to *The Big Bend Sentinel* last weekend in Marfa.

Traveling to the Big Bend, he said, "is about the here and now."

"When I can, I force myself to actually go on a motorcycle because I can't look at the phone. And I don't go on Bluetooth and connect," he said. "The distance from Lubbock to Marfa is 300 miles, about five hours when I try to not be online. I'm here and now — in the moment. That travel sensation helps me to slow down."

"You have to spend more than a day in Marfa to see everything, you know. We go to the Chinati Foundation and the Judd Foundation, but you can't really see it in one day," he said.

"I just Googled, 'Marfa.' And the first thing to come up was 'Prada Marfa,'" Flueckiger said. "At the top was Beyonce, her famous photograph on Instagram. So the goal of travel has become an Instagram post? It's evolved into something you couldn't foresee," he said.

You will get more out of it if you just slow down, he says.

Flueckiger was in Marfa last week for a gathering of an advisory group of the Huckabee College of Architecture at Texas Tech, where he is dean. The school's Design Leadership Alliance has had several meetings in Marfa, and this one included house tours and star-gazing at the McDonald Observatory. Sean O'Brien, a Dallas architect; Leonora Ask of Lubbock; and Mark Wellen of Midland were in the group.

"Upe" (pronounced OO-pay, short for Urs Peter) Flueckiger, a native of Switzerland, estimates that he has made 100 trips to Marfa. He was first attracted by an exhibit in Munster, Germany, in 1989: Donald Judd : Architektur. He decided to go to school in the U.S., won a graduate school fellowship at Virginia Tech, and earned a master's degree in architecture. "As a graduation gift to myself, I came to Marfa in 1996."

"I was just fascinated with the landscape here," Flueckiger said. "That blue sky and the openness. Like, the state of Texas is 15 times larger than Switzerland." (Editor's note: the combined area of Presidio, Brewster, and Jeff Davis counties is about as big as Switzerland.)

"Judd did relatively modest buildings but with adaptive reuse, as we say now; he made clever interventions. The proportions are never wrong. That was powerful, and I find it really still powerful," he said. "Now, when I come here, the first thing I look at is the proportions — and how the light comes in."

Fluekiger learned that the closest university to Marfa with an architecture program was Texas Tech. He saw a job listing for a lecturer, applied, and moved to Lubbock in 1998. After a series of promotions he became dean in 2022. Among other books, he has written Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa (Birkhäuser, 2007. Second edition, 2021).

"Any good architect is a student of history, even if he's a modernist," Fluekiger said. "Donald Judd was literally a few classes short of an art history degree." The classical proportions indicate that, he said, but there was something else. Judd was not resistant to change, but to continual, uninterrupted change.

"Judd's basic idea is that there should be somewhere in the universe, a place where the art is not always moving. That's what Judd's vision was in his work here," Flueckiger said.

Judd worked well to blend the contemporary with the historical. Outside of Marfa he bought Casa Perez, off of Pinto Canyon Road, which the Tech group toured last week. The adobe house was simply restored; three platforms were added as separate structures.

"Good spaces earlier on could also be done by traditional craftsmen because they were intimately familiar with all the materials they use," Fluekiger said. "In this part of the world 60% is adobe. Simple adobe structures sometimes have very thoughtful proportions."

The blend of old and new is what gives Marfa its personality, he said. "Newcomers who are interested in what is here, you want to have them here. You also want to make it so the population who is already here is able to stay."

"There are things which Judd couldn't foresee. Now you have the internet and have cell phones that make remote work possible from Marfa," Flueckiger said. "And you have Airbnbs, you know?" These changes are bringing people to Marfa as regular visitors or second-home owners, he said.

"Things grow and change, and the challenge for designers and developers is to make long-time residents as happy as the newcomers," he said.

"There is a population here which knows that it's a beautiful, but also harsh, climate. And now things change. You know, the Pacific monsoons no longer happen the way they used to," he said. "But are these things visible to the person who only comes for a day or two? How do you keep that balance between a certain class who comes once and wants certain amenities — and you and me?"

"You have to respect nature because it's always more powerful than you are. Judd knew that," he said. "At the end of his career he was thinking in archaeological terms: when you scored a landscape — and he wrote about that — it takes much time for the landscape to heal."

"But very few of us look at it that way, " Flueckiger said. "Marfa is almost something else now. Because contemporary artists want to make their own art, which is also the time of life and necessary," he said. "So, time moves on. But really, they came all because of Judd. It's very challenging to find that balance. You want to make sure you're in tune."

A couple of decades after Flueckiger applied to Texas Tech, an architecture school was started 100 miles closer to Marfa. An El Paso branch of the Huckabee School has been offering a degree program since 2020.

"We're doing it right there, so the question is, with the distances as we've described, could you offer architectural education in the Big Bend?" he said. "I ask myself, how can we give learning experiences for students here, maybe remote?"

"And how they can have a living opportunity, coming here. That's the challenge," Flueckiger said. "Education maybe can contribute, not just for the students."

Newspaper contest

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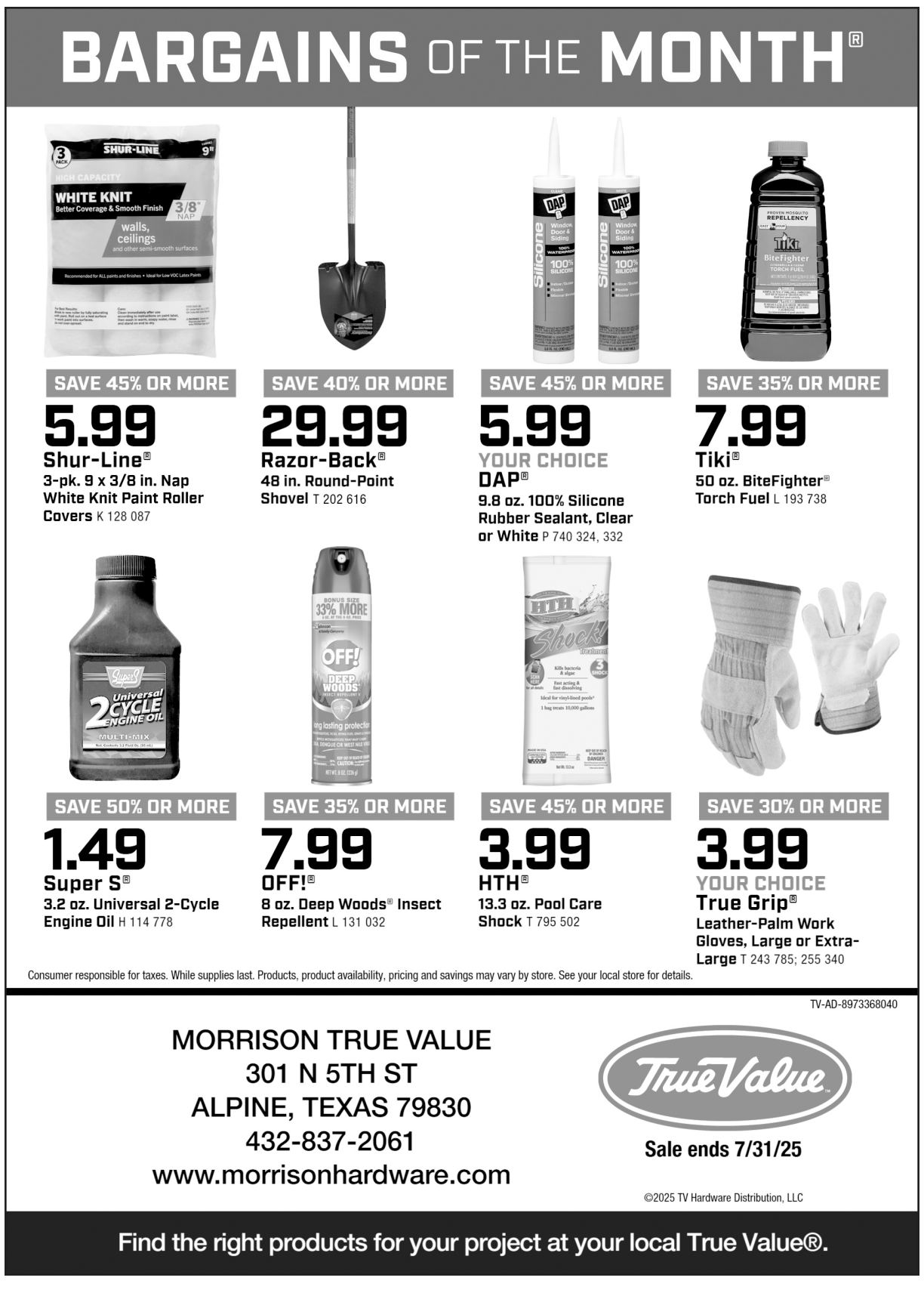
Writing with his "Our Water Matters" series of columns every two weeks — including "Soil for Water" and "Restoring Riparian areas to improve aquifer health." A judge commented: "Two great columns about life-sustaining resources and why we should all care about them. No water = no town. Well written."

The Sentinel also took second place for Overall Excellence in its division.



Rare earth minerals

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process the minerals is the first stage in a series of five stages the company is embarking on, Ballard wrote. A pre-feasibility study — which will establish the value of the deposit and the project's return on investment — and the construction of a pilot plant are planned to be completed in the next couple of years, Ballard wrote, at which point the engineering and construction of the mine itself will still need to take place. The project will also need to apply and secure permits through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ.)

Ballard wrote that the status of the project has been communicated to local Hudspeth County officials. "We meet with local officials as often as necessary at this stage, and will increase the frequency as we get closer to developing the mine," Ballard wrote.

But some Sierra Blanca residents, including environmental activist Bill Addington, have expressed concern that the forthcoming rare earth mine could negatively affect the health of the small community. Addington continues to raise issues about the dangers of inhaling beryllium, a mineral that will be mined at Round Top, as well as the open pit mine and multiple heap leaching pits included in preliminary plans for the site.

"Keep in mind, this is a highly toxic project that uses lots of water and does lots of surface destruction because they'd be doing open pit mining using dangerous chemicals," Addington said.

"My community is real opposed to that," he added.

Brewster County Judge Greg Henington said he was aware that the Brewster County ranch owned by the GLO was suspected to contain rare earth minerals but not that an official survey had been conducted. He said due to the complex and potentially hazardous nature of the rare earth mine, it didn't seem likely that the GLO would pursue leasing the land for the development of another mine in the immediate future in the Big Bend.

"I don't get the sense that rare earth is one of their plans," Henington said. "If it was, it's probably years away, just because of the difficulty of getting in there and getting [rare earth minerals] out, and what do you do with them? Who can process them?"

Henington said it was his understanding that the Brewster County ranchland was currently being used for revegetation and ranching, and that the GLO was exploring a range of ideas for the future of the property including ecotourism. A spokesperson for the GLO confirmed there are currently multiple leases on the ranch for hunting, grazing and other uses. "The entire ranch is leased for agriculture," they wrote.

A typical survey airplane. Similar planes have been flying around Far West Texas to map critical rare earth minerals. The magnetic sensor is placed in an extension on the back of the airplane to reduce the impact of the airplane's own magnetic field.

Jamey Jones, a science coordinator with the Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (MRI) — a division of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Mineral Resources program — said rare earth mineral mining projects are difficult and slow to develop due to permitting requirements, market forces and the geologic uncertainty of the systems.

"It's one thing to discover an anomaly. It's another thing to discover a concentration of something of economic value. It's even another thing to turn that into a deposit that could actually sustain economic development for any meaningful period of time," Jones said. "A discovery doesn't necessarily translate into a mine, there has to be a lot of things that work together to make that discovery into a deposit, into a resource, into a mine."

The Earth MRI program started in 2019 and was initially funded by an $11 million congressional appropriation in response to an executive order to identify domestic resources of critical minerals. That funding increased up to $75 million in 2022 when the USGS received a massive stimulus, set to sunset in 2026, from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to accelerate mapping efforts.

"We have this massive addition to our funding that we are trying to use as smartly, as regionally and as cooperatively as we can," Jones said. "We've basically taken our whole portfolio that we used to do prior to the supplemental funding, and we've put it on steroids."

Lately, Earth MRI has been mapping critical minerals in Far West Texas, which sits along a belt of igneous rock that extends along the western margin of the U.S. "We call this province the alkaline igneous belt, and it extends regionally from Mexico up into southern Colorado," Jones said. "The rocks in this belt are really enriched in a lot of different elements that you don't find in a lot of other rocks."

The data collection program involves utilizing airplanes — a team was recently working out of the Marfa airport — to collect high quality magnetic and radiometric data that, combined, help paint a clearer picture of rare earth mineral resources.

"What the magnetic data allow us to do is to connect geologic features at a regional scale," Jones explained. "We can figure out what the signature of the rocks that are under Round Top look like, for example, and we can then map that signature into other areas that are part of the same geologic belt but may not have been mapped using those techniques."

"Radiometric data measure the natural radioactive signature of minerals at or near the earth's surface," he continued. "If there are minerals that are at the earth's surface that are emitting low level, naturally occurring radioactivity we can actually measure that. We can use that technique to map other minerals that might have elevated uranium or thorium or potassium concentrations."

Earth MRI works in tandem with state geological surveys, like UT's Bureau of Economic Geology, which perform boots on the ground surveys, collecting geochemistry that can help detail concentrations of the elements at a given site. They are also working with NASA, which was recently flying over West Texas, collecting high resolution reflectance data of earth's surface to map mineral composition of soil, sediment and rock from 70,000 to 80,000 feet.

Jones said the Mexican Geological Survey is also working on mapping critical rare earth minerals, and while there is no formal collaboration currently in place, "at some point it would be fantastic for us to merge those data sets across the international border."

To view an interactive map of the Earth Mapping Resource Initiative, visit ngmdb.usgs.gov/emri/#1064

Remittances

(Continued from page 1)

alternative ways like carrying cash through the border, which is going to be even more dangerous for this specific area," Bustillos said.

The tax is mainly intended to impact undocumented immigrants. If the bill goes through the Senate unchanged, the tax will apply to green card holders, though Bustillos said a credit may be available to folks that have been issued social security numbers.

Across all races and nationalities, undocumented immigrants paid $96.7 billion in taxes into the American economy in 2023. In the state of Texas alone, that number was $4.87 billion.

The impact isn't just purely financial. The presentation included data collected by the office of Mexico's secretary of foreign relations, which suggested that immigrants have grown the American workforce in the new millennium by having 8 million U.S.-born children.

In a year where anti-immigrant rhetoric has dominated political discussion, Bustillos hoped that Congress could adopt a more measured approach. "In the big picture, if they start taxing the Mexican community, it's probably going to be harmful and dangerous for both countries," he said.

Presidio bond petition

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Maybe it's time for us to be looking at something else. Maybe we should buy another building. Do we really need an opulent building if we can't afford it?'"

State law says that if 5% of a county's registered voters sign a petition against the issuance of COs, the county will be forced to have an election on the bond. According to the Presidio County Tax Assessor's Office, the county has 4,286 registered voters, which means that the petition will need 215 signatures. Presidio City Councilmember Fernando Juarez, who has helped spearhead the opposition to the bonds, said Tuesday that he and fellow activists had already gathered more than the required signatures.

County commissioners attended the city council virtually, and, at the advice of County Attorney Blair Park, avoided any discussion of the issue — particularly with other commissioners — to stay within bounds of the state's Open Meetings Act. That left Park in the role of explaining the reasoning for the COs and the projects that they would fund.

Park said the numbers are not certain — because an engineering firm is still working on final estimates — but initial estimates include a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system for the courthouse at $3 million, a new courthouse elevator at $220,000, renovation of the county annex at $1 million, with the rest of the funds allocated to new Road and Bridge Department equipment and other infrastructure improvements. Park lauded Commissioner Franky Ortiz for working to get the annex on the project list.

Park and other county employees have noted that without a functional elevator, the county could be sued for not meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act, or for an injured visitor to the courthouse or a trial. County employees have objected to working in offices where the temperatures sometimes rise into the 90s in the summer and drop to the 40s in the winter.

Jurors in the summer 2023 trial of Jim White in the lawsuit against him by his siblings over Brite Ranch trusts recalled that it was a sweltering and possibly dangerous environment for the two-week trial. A retrial of the lawsuit is set for August 18 in the courthouse, unless Jim's son succeeds with a motion — to be heard today — to change the venue.

Park said counties often use COs for large capital projects to pay them over, typically, 15-20 years, depending on the terms of the loan.

Several residents brought up a possible tax increase to pay for the bonds, but until the county budget process moves forward and terms of the COs are known, it's uncertain if an increase would be needed. But Park indicated that with the current majority of commissioners supporting the projects, if the petition succeeds and stops the COs, the county would still move ahead and pay for the projects with its reserves — which stand at about $6 million.

"We don't have to raise taxes because we dip into reserves," Park said. "But if we spend all of our reserves and we're going into the red, then we have to raise taxes in order for the county to stay afloat. That's why we don't want to spend through our reserves, which is why we would like to be able to take a loan from a bank to facilitate all of these projects."

On Wednesday morning, protests against the COs continued at a special meeting of the Presidio County Commissioners Court, which had an agenda item to contract with a financial consultant who would take bids on bank loans.

A motion to approve that item failed, with Portillo, and commissioners Ortiz and Margarito Hernandez — joining forces as Presidio residents — voting "no" and commissioners David Beebe and Deirdre Hisler voting "aye." While the denial of that item doesn't technically kill the county's call for COs, it takes out an important part of the process.

Presidio residents at the meeting called for commissioners to reconsider the entirety of the proposals and start the process of looking at capital projects again.

Commissioner David Beebe told *The Big Bend Sentinel* that courthouse repairs and renovations have been discussed for more than two years in court. Everything seemed in sync among commissioners for how to pay for the project until Judge Portillo threw a wrench in the process because he was upset about his peers not being supportive enough of a combined law enforcement center to be constructed in Presidio and a recent setback in his attempt for TxDOT to turn over the International Bridge to the county. "We're supposed to move forward as a commissioners court and get something done — until one person decided that he wants his name on the law enforcement center and after his bridge project has been stymied," Beebe said of the judge.

County Commissioner Deirdre Hisler said in a phone interview that she also believes the judge's mindset has changed from being a supporter — and even originator — of the projects and COs to a naysayer. "The fact that David Beebe and [County Auditor] Alicia [Sanchez] had been working on these certificates of obligation for over a year now, Joe had every right to attend those meetings and to get projects in, but he was so focused on the bridge that he had no input into it."

Presidio City Councilmember Juarez said in a phone interview that his city's residents felt the COs were approved in an underhanded way and noted that the legally-required notice from the county was only published in *The Big Bend Sentinel* and not The Presidio International. (The law only requires publishing in one paper.) "It would've helped to have better representation from our commissioners — maybe the commissioners reaching out to the locals here and saying, 'Hey, this is coming up.'"

"I think there's a lot of frustration going around with the way money is divided up between North County and South County," Juarez said. "And, this is just one of those examples where they'll want to give South County $1 million and the other four and half million up there. … And my question to Blair [Park] yesterday was, 'Have you thought of any other options?' I mean, we're not trying to have Marfa employees without an air conditioner. We're just saying that the courthouse is inadequate. It's old, it's small."

Commissioner Ortiz, who lives in and represents portions of Presidio, said he voted to issue the COs because of the dire need to protect visitors and employees. "The commissioners that were there years back … they wouldn't fix anything," he said. "They would just put on a little bandaid, and the little bandaid gets soggy, so they put on another bandaid."

"I work in construction," Ortiz said. "That [courthouse] breaker box, it's so old. In the winter, the ladies that are in there, each of them have [space] heaters on all day. Then the breaker box pops, boom. So the girls go and pop the breaker back on. It's going to get to a point where that breaker box, it's going to blow up and it's going to cause a fire. And that courthouse is just all wood. If someone dies in there because of a fire or someone is stuck inside the elevator and a fire starts … I don't wanna have that in my conscience if someone dies. And because we all know that that courthouse needs repairs, in the end, we're going to be paying a lawsuit, plus everybody's taxes are still gonna go up."

However, Ortiz, Beebe and Hisler said they understand the frustration of Presidians and say it's likely that their petition will result in a ballot-box decision — something they all said is part of the public process. Judge Portillo did not respond to a request for comment by deadline, but he said in the Presidio City Council meeting that he didn't object to the CO process without a vote but wanted to ensure there was equity across the county's communities for investments.

Beau White, one of several heirs to Brite Ranch, dies at 71

By Rob D'Amico
rob@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — Beauregard "Beau" Brite White died Monday in Bastrop, Texas, after a battle with cancer, according to family members. White, 71, was an heir to the massive Brite Ranch southwest of Marfa that has been embroiled in some seven years of legal battles among siblings over the fate of the land. Beau grew up in Marfa and attended Marfa High School, although he centered his later life with his wife Kathleen Hartnett White, who died in August 2024, in Bastrop. *The Big Bend Sentinel* did not receive an obituary by press time.

It's unclear how Beau's death will impact the August 18 retrial over claims that his brother Jim White breached his fiduciary duty as the trustee that ran the 65,000-acre Brite Ranch. On the same day that Beau died, a Bastrop district judge ruled that Geoff Connor — Beau and his brother Mac's adopted son — would assume the role of "temporary administrator" of Beau's estate. Jim's children, intervenors in the trial, have claimed that Beau and Mac's adoption of Connor, in 2022 at the age of 59, was a sham intended to dilute their inheritance.

In other recent legal action, attorneys for Beau and Mac filed a pleading stating that Jim's son, Cuatro, is a co-conspirator in the breach in fiduciary duty that left siblings Beau and Mac — and a sister, Hester Anne — without the distributions of money they deserved. A jury in the summer of 2023 agreed with the claims against Jim and stripped him of his role of trustee, but he won an Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals decision out of El Paso that nullified that ruling, forcing the new trial. The pleading against Cuatro could — if a judge agrees — make him a defendant in the trial in August.

Today, visiting 394th District Court Judge Tryon Lewis will hear a motion from Cuatro for a change of venue to Brewster County after Cuatro argued it was impossible to have an impartial trial in Presidio County (at the Marfa courthouse) because of "extensive" media coverage from *The Sentinel*. It also will be a preview of the issue of the courthouse's accessibility — with an unreliable elevator — and danger of extreme temperatures, with no air conditioning at the courthouse, which may play into the motion.

For more coverage of the Brite Ranch legal proceedings, see our archive of coverage at bigbendsentinel.com/brite.

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Opinion

Many thanks to Jeff Davis County Library for the excellent recent program: "How Mountain Birds are Responding to Climate Change" by Eric Iverson, Ph.D. candidate at UT Austin. Afterwards Friends of the Library hosted a reception.

How fortunate we are to have superb Library Director Erin Ray and her fine staff, a dedicated Friends of the Library volunteer board, county judge and commissioners who support our library, a fine maintenance staff, and library volunteers.

Get your kids away from screens this summer — take 'em to the library! To enrich the community, our wonderful library, and the libraries in Marfa and Alpine, have many free resources — not just books, audiobooks, and DVDs. Including weekly storytime for kids, notary service, interlibrary loan, senior fitness classes, a bookclub, adult watercolor paint classes, Spanish books for children & adults, desktop computers with WiFi, a Virtual Connection Room for private telehealth appointments, and items to checkout such as a food dehydrator, reel mower, Blu-Ray player, board games, and more.

Also new interactive learning games for kids. Plus, at the library read all three of our area newspapers, and peruse the latest issues of magazines such as Sky & Telescope, Texas Monthly, and Consumer Reports. There's recent talk of a weekly Spanish storytime for kids if the library can enlist a few volunteers to help get it started. Call the library at 432-426-3802 or visit in person M-F 9-5 and Sat 10-2. Get your free library card. Sign up for the weekly e-newsletter about new books and special events.

Hope to see you soon at the library!

Donna Smith
Fort Davis

• • •

Dear Editor:

In the News In Brief last week, there was a piece from the U.S. Attorney's Office about a retired Army member helping undocumented immigrants for profit. In the title, and in the body of the article, the immigrants are termed "illegal aliens." No person is illegal. And these humans are earthlings, not aliens. Please let's keep awake and mindful as we continue to navigate these confusing times.

Peggy O'Brien
Marfa

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OUR WATER MATTERS

89th Texas Legislature delivers on water infrastructure funding

By Trey Gerfers
tgerfers@pcuwcd.org

In his State of the State Address earlier this year, Gov. Greg Abbott called on lawmakers "to make the largest investment in water in Texas history." The 89th Legislature delivered.

While water is traditionally an issue that the Texas Legislature has been reticent to tackle, lawmakers swam against that proverbial current this session by filing over 300 water-related bills. Senate Bill 7 and House Joint Resolution 7, which the governor signed into law last week, are perhaps the most consequential of these bills because they fulfill the promise of the Texas Water Fund, which was previously created by the 88th Legislature and approved by you, the voters, in November 2023. In addition to a one-time injection of $2.5 billion from the state's current surplus into the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), this latest legislation finally establishes a sustained, dedicated source of funding to meaningfully address the long-term future of our water supplies and infrastructure through the Texas Water Fund.

House Joint Resolution 7 directs the state's comptroller of public accounts to "deposit to the credit of the Texas Water Fund the net revenue derived from the imposition of the state sales and use tax on the sale, storage, use, or other consumption in this state of taxable items under Chapter 151, Tax Code … provided that the total amount deposited … in a state fiscal year may not exceed $1 billion." Taxable items under Texas Tax Code Section 151.010 include things like amusement services, cable television services, personal services, motor vehicle parking and storage services, telecommunications services, credit reporting services, debt collection services, insurance services, information services, real property services, data processing services, security services, Internet access service, among other services.

HJR 7 also stipulates that "the duty of the comptroller of public accounts to make a deposit under this section expires" 20 years hence, on August 31, 2035. However, "[t]he legislature by adoption of a concurrent resolution approved by a record vote of a majority of the members of each house of the legislature may extend, in 10-year increments, the duty of the comptroller of public accounts" to continue dedicating up to $1 billion annually to the Texas Water Fund.

Passage of SB 7 into law is especially good news for rural communities because it directs the TWDB to use some of the funding for a "rural water assistance fund" and amends the Texas Water Code Section 15.504(c) to ensure that a portion of any money transferred from the Texas Water Fund is used for "water and wastewater infrastructure projects, prioritized by risk or need" for "rural political subdivisions" and "municipalities with a population of less than 150,000."

But money alone will not solve our long-standing water issues. SB 7 also includes detailed provisions for an advisory committee to ensure legislative oversight of the fund. It is my hope that this committee will use the Texas Water Fund as an opportunity to reform the culture at the Texas Water Development Board. Anyone who has tried to get funding from the TWDB is well aware that agency staffers frequently obsess over internal protocols and criteria informed by internal prerogatives and priorities based on internal processes and timelines that all too often run counter to solving actual problems in the real world. Not only do these internal dynamics demonstrably hamper communication among the various departments within the agency, they also lead to confusion and frustration among would-be applicants.

As the example of Presidio County clearly shows, outside technical assistance is not enough. The agency itself must be more proactive in helping applicants succeed through the timely guidance that it alone can provide. Perhaps the advisory committee of the Texas Water Fund can assist the TWDB in recognizing and fulfilling its role as a servant of the people of Texas by encouraging it to invest not just money, but also the time and attention necessary to truly understand the plight of the populations it serves. Unless there is a significant change in the way TWDB does business, the underserved, under (human-)resourced communities of Texas are certain to remain largely left behind.

Much of the media coverage of SB 7 and HJR 7 described the legislation as the "governor's water plan." That's a nice way of putting it. But really it's the culmination of years of work by a handful of sitting and former legislators led by Senator Charles Perry, chairman of the Senate Committee on Water, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs, in collaboration with the Texas Water Foundation, the Environmental Defense Fund, Texas 2036 and others. The successful passage of this latest legislation goes back to the teamwork of these folks who convinced lawmakers to form the Texas Water Caucus during the 88th Legislature. By converting its members into "water champions," the Water Caucus succeeded in drawing the entire Legislature's attention to the looming water crisis as a first step in the lengthy process of averting it. SB 7 and HJR 7 represent the next steps in that process, whose ultimate success will depend on all of us working together.

You, the voters, will also have a role to play in bringing this plan to fruition when the corresponding constitutional amendment appears on the ballot this fall. Your vote in favor will be indispensable because the language of Senate Bill 7 states that "[i]f that constitutional amendment is not approved by the voters, this Act has no effect." If you care about water, please take a moment now to ensure that your voter registration is current and mark your calendar for November 4, 2025.

Trey Gerfers serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. A San Antonio native, he has lived in Marfa since 2013.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

County and 'Bullroom Marfa' moving forward with lease

MARFA — On Wednesday, Presidio County Commissioners approved the lease of the "bull barn" off of Golf Course Road to Ballroom Marfa, which intends to renovate it for an event venue.

County Attorney Blair Park explained that the barn had been leased by the county to the Hereford Cattle Association in 1932 for 99 years at $1 a year. The association used to have bull sales there but stopped some two decades ago. When the lease expired, the county put a new lease out to bid in a request for proposals.

Only one proposal — from nonprofit Ballroom Marfa — came back. The art organization and gallery will pay the county $12,000 a year and plans about $1 million in renovations to make the aging barn an event destination for locals and visitors. At least one event per year free to local residents is also written into the lease, something Ballroom Marfa Executive Director Holly Harrison said was already in their plans.

"We feel like we're in a really great place to have our own space and focus on community engagement in Presidio County," Harrison told commissioners.

PO Box fees to increase starting July 13

TRI-COUNTY — USPS customers are being notified about price changes to P.O. Box rental rates and related fees. For P.O. Box renewal fees that are due in July, payments must be received before July 13, 2025, to renew at the existing rate. Payments received on or after July 13, 2025, will be charged at the new P.O. Box rate.

The changes are as follows:

	New price	Old price
Deposit for the keys	$5.50	$10.00
Key duplicate	$13.00	$17.00
Lock replacement	$27.00	$35.00

P.O. Box Rates

NEW RATES

6 months

Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
$39.00	$53.00	$81.00	$140.00

1 Year

Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
$78.00	$106.00	$162.00	$280.00

CURRENT RATES

6 months

Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
$36.00	$50.00	$77.00	$133.00

1 Year

Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
$72.00	$100.00	$154.00	$266.00

Chinati Artist in Residence Dean Erdmann to host talk this Thursday

By Mary Cantrell
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — Current Chinati Foundation artist in residence Dean Erdmann will give a free talk about their ongoing work this Thursday, June 26, at the Marfa Book Co. at 6 p.m. The artists' two-month stint has involved researching the geopolitics of the Permian Basin, specifically the exploitation of sand used in fracking.

Erdmann, a UC San Diego professor, works in moving and still images as well as in sculpture and installation. For their project in development, *Artemis Moon Rocket Regolith*, they plan to use a lunar regolith simulant, a sand high in silica found on the moon, to make glass objects. Ermann said their work often involves "tracing material genealogies." ICON, the company constructing the new El Cosmico, is also working with NASA to 3D print objects on the moon and on Mars using lunar and martian regolith.

While materiality is already in mind, like the potential use of black glass which is both reflective and absorptive, an alluring "tension," Erdmann said creating a physical body of work is about balancing all the ideas they are considering with visual appeal. "It's really a matter of chasing all the tails and then figuring out what the object is that crystallizes some of the threads in really meaningful ways, but also in ways that people are interested in spending time with," Erdmann said.

The artist grew up in the Mojave Desert and is engaging with the idea of arid environments as remote sites "away from public scrutiny," used to house infrastructure like detention centers, prisons, military bases and AI data centers. The use of the desert landscape as a training ground, whether it be for war in the Middle East, or for space landings, is also being considered.

Erdmann's residency has been marked by visits to the McDonald Observatory as well as the International Rocket Engineering Competition in Midland this month. In their research they are interested in speaking with both astronomers and geologists — experts focused on opposite ends of the Earth — they explained. "My work is often about sight and vision and these reciprocal views of places, looking out to look in, looking down to look up and any repetitions of that," Erdmann said.

The artist is hoping to return to the Trans-Pecos in the future, potentially visiting a sand mining operation, Blue Origin and more. They note the work is sprawling, and takes time to transform into something more personal. "When I'm starting a big project I cast my net as wide as possible," Erdmann said.

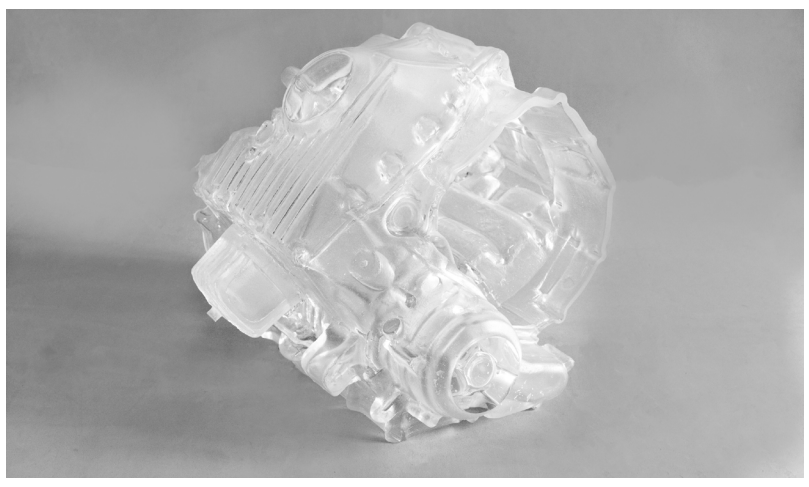

Photo courtesy of Dean Erdmann

An engine made out of glass.

"It's always intertwining the personal and the geopolitical, because that just creates a more helpful way of engaging with these ideas that feel so incomprehensible or outside of the scale of a singular body," they added.

For Erdmann, the conversations around energy infrastructure, technology, labor, time, acceleration and geopolitics should be nuanced, and broad. An example of one "temporal conundrum" they're ruminating on is the consumption of the prehistoric — fossil fuels formed over millions of years — for "the brevity of modern acceleration."

"I think there's ways that we can have these conversations, and having more voices involved is imperative," Erdmann said.

Universal Crossword

Edited by David Steinberg June 3, 2025

ACROSS
1 Pastry that was one of 2013's best inventions, per Time
7 Fitness center regular, informally
13 Tightrope walker
15 Bacterium needing oxygen
16 Type of band that might play ranchera
18 Green tea powder
19 Like a turkey trot, to a runner
21 Muhammad Ali had 37 in his boxing career: Abbr.
22 IT bigwig
25 Atty.'s title
26 "___ bleu!"
28 Tuning knob
29 Humiliates, in gamer slang
30 Link letters
31 Frilly
32 "Winnie-the-Pooh" young'un
33 Soft drink whose name once contained a title
36 Chef Garten
37 "Tell the truth!"
39 With 34-Down, Spanish for "Very good!"
40 Sharp, like some humor and wire
42 Friend of Frodo
43 Aid's partner
44 "___ Como Va" (Santana hit)
45 Drink brand with lizards in its logo
46 Philosopher Descartes
47 Ed of "Up"
49 "Dune: Prophecy" channel
50 Croatian coins as of 2023
51 Nintendo avatar
52 Open area in a forest
55 Tomorrow
57 Ate ravenously
61 Ancient document
62 Lean back
63 Reach an agreement
64 Peter Pan's loss

DOWN
1 Vid recorder
2 Pioneer in color TV
3 Bruins great Bobby
4 How many pets eat
5 Subway system in Berlin
6 ___ Bell
7 Groups of whales
8 "Uh-huh, I bet" (In this answer, see letters 7-4)
9 "The A-Team" actor with a mohawk
10 Type of mountaineer ... or a theme hint
11 Loathe
12 Make big, as hair
14 Donned in a rush
17 "Could be worse" (... letters 9-4)
20 Scores that measure smarts: Abbr.
22 Off-the-cuff remark
23 Princess who inspired a special-edition Beanie Baby in 1997
24 Montessori mosaic medium (... letters 11-7)
27 Dadaist whose name is hidden in "war paint"
29 Elbow
33 Gesturing performer
34 See 39-Across
35 Gig parts?
37 Certain hunting lure (... letters 5-1)
38 Wage earner
41 Perk for many a seeded team
43 Peppery salad green
45 That woman
47 Slightly off
48 Because
50 Cain's eldest son
53 Lovett of country music
54 Currier's partner
56 Seurat spot
58 Get ___ of (discard)
59 Brian of ambient music
60 Morning droplets

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

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

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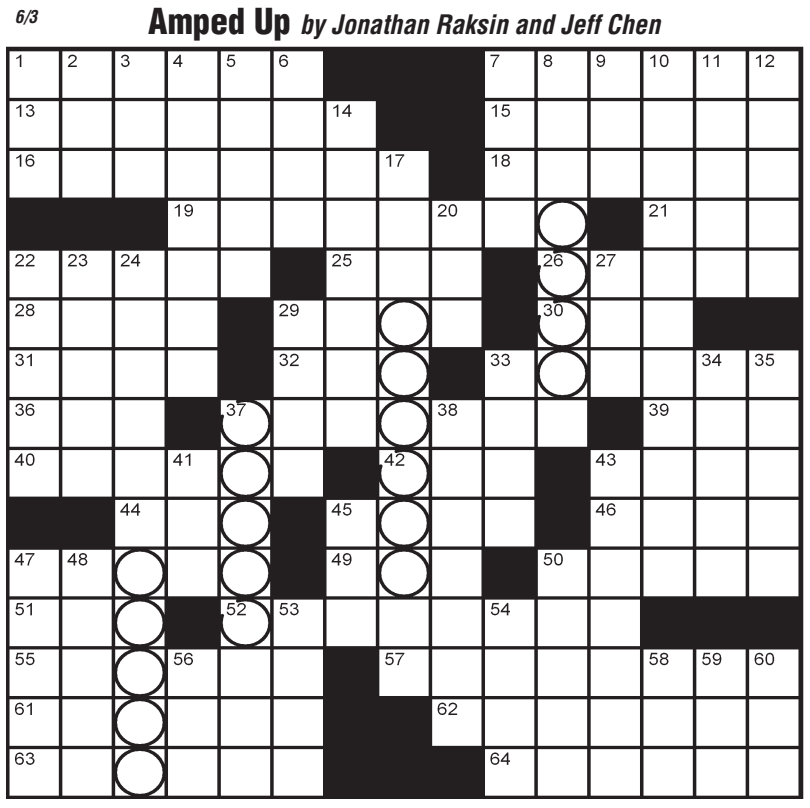
6/3

Amped Up *by Jonathan Raksin and Jeff Chen*



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Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid,
for I am your God;
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I will help you,
I will uphold you with my
victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

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Marfa 432-729-4534

Please recycle this paper

DRAWING OF THE WEEK

Ayven Pippen
11th grade - Acrylic and sharpie

Sudoku & Crossword puzzles:

UNIVERSAL Sudoku Puzzle

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

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

5/6

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution from last week's puzzle:

SOLUTION:

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

5/3

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5K Race & 1K Fun Run
Friday, July 4th
8:00 am
Jeff Davis County Park
Hwy 17 South
Fort Davis, TX
Coolest 5K in Texas Fort Davis
$25 early registration | $35 on race day
Register at personalbestevents.com

Judd Foundation

Experience Donald Judd's art as installed within his former living and working spaces in downtown Marfa. These spaces, including his libraries and studios, consider his ideas for the permanent installation of art within historic buildings.

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

Judd Foundation is open Tuesday through Sunday and offers two distinct guided visits. Please visit our office, 104 South Highland Avenue, or website for the current schedule.

For more information and to book reservations please visit juddfoundation.org or call 432 729 4406.

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MARFA SHORTHORNS SPORTS CALENDAR

SUMMER BREAK

'What's good for the bird': Presidio grad stars in National Geographic doc

By Sam Karas
sam@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO — Presidio High School graduate Fabiola Baeza Tarin recently made her National Geographic debut in *The Little Brown Bird*, a documentary about North America's most endangered avians and the unlikely coalition of people working to bring them back from the brink. The short and sweet film dropped last week on streaming and is currently free to watch on YouTube.

Baeza went to school to study biology, not to portray a captivating heroine on the silver screen — but viewers might be fooled into thinking the opposite, thanks to breathtaking shots and tender storytelling served up by director KT Bryden and a team of producers from Wildpath and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The budding biologist's interest in creatures large and small was a natural extension of her childhood on a ranch in Ojinaga. In the documentary, she remembers her father's motto: "lo que es bueno para el pájaro es bueno para el ganado," or in English, "What's good for the bird is good for the herd." From a young age, she learned that all living things are connected, and even small losses in the ecosystem can have devastating impacts on the survivors.

Baeza developed a passion for protecting grassland birds working in the field at Sul Ross State University — a passion that's sustained her for the better part of a decade. Learning about birds in the Trans-Pecos eventually led her to join a team making groundbreaking strides in protecting the Florida grasshopper sparrow, a stubborn little bird from the dry prairies of the Sunshine State that has had 90% of its natural habitat destroyed by development.

As of last summer, 1,000 Florida grasshopper sparrows have been reintroduced to the wild as a part of this project, supported by unlikely partners including the United States Air Force and a local ranching family. With those numbers, every bird matters, and learning their unique habits turned out to be equal parts frustrating and rewarding. "I've developed a bond with every single one of them, even the ones I don't like," Baeza jokes in the film.

Making it from a small town to the big screen would be an accomplishment for anyone, but Baeza had to bust down barriers and stereotypes along the way. In 2022, a Pew research study found that just 3% of Latinos in the workforce are women in STEM.

Over the documentary's runtime, Baeza's big heart and tenacity as a researcher shine through — and after watching her wrestle a stubborn trailer jack in a muddy field, it's clear that women from the rancho are a natural fit in wildlife conservation.

The Sentinel caught up with Baeza over the phone on her way home from an early morning in the field.

I'm sure you get asked this question all the time, but how did you get interested in birds?

I was born in Ojinaga and grew up with my siblings on my dad's ranch. We learned to love and appreciate the land from a very young age — the land gave us what we needed to sustain ourselves because my dad was a cattle rancher, but I was always interested in all sorts of wildlife.

It didn't click right away that it was my calling to be a wildlife biologist. It wasn't until my senior year of my bachelor's that I was falling behind because I thought I wanted to do something in the medical field, but I couldn't get into a radiology program in El Paso that I wanted. Then I transferred to Sul Ross, and I thought I wanted to do the nursing program, but at that time it was in a period of transition, so they were like, "Well, you can just take biology classes and it'll help with your curriculum."

I think the class that did it for me was herpetology, which is reptiles and amphibians. I had this professor that was very passionate about conservation, and he would take us on field trips and show us survey methods. I realized that I really liked it.

Entering this super technical, academic field, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being from Presidio and Ojinaga?

I had no knowledge that this kind of career existed. At the time that I was in school, there was nobody to show me that there was something in that field that was possible, especially for a brown girl from Mexico.

I want to say that one of the big advantages of being from Presidio is that we are in one of the most diverse regions of Texas. It's one of the most remote, and you get a lot of raw ecosystem that a lot of people never see. Some people have to travel a long way to observe wildlife, and we have it right at our back door — Big Bend Ranch State Park, the National Park, Fort Davis. Anywhere we go, we're out there and we're experiencing it.

I want to talk about the term "little brown bird," which I learned out here and associate with Chihuahuan Desert grasslands. Can you tell me how our local little brown birds and the Floridian little brown bird in the film are connected?

I actually did my master's on grassland birds out in Marfa, and I worked on overwintering habitat of grasshopper sparrows and Baird sparrows. The Florida grasshopper sparrow is a subspecies of the grasshopper sparrow we have in Marfa and Presidio and all the desert grasslands, but the difference is that the Florida grasshopper sparrow is a subspecies that is geographically restricted to Florida, which means that it doesn't migrate. The grasshopper sparrows that we have around Marfa spend their wintering season there, and then during the breeding season, they migrate north to the Great Plains.

Grasslands are one of the most imperiled ecosystems on Earth because they're just so easy to transform, compared to something like a forest, for example. You can just clear grassland right away and build on it or do agriculture. The presence of grassland birds is an indicator of ecosystem health because if you do any sort of habitat change — like overgrazing or the introduction of invasive species — the birds get displaced because they're such grassland specialists.

What are some of the other messages you hope folks take away from the film?

One of the things I like to say is that as a species, humans are weird in the sense that we feel like we want to dominate everything. We see something and we just want to clear it and build a supermarket on it. But I think that it's very important for us to understand that we are part of a bigger ecosystem, and whatever we do to the land we're going to get the same thing in return. What we decide to protect today is going to be very telling for what future generations are going to have.

AROUND THE BIG BEND

Thur June 26

Paint & Sip
6 - 9pm at Alcove Social
No experience necessary – just relax, create, and enjoy some drinks while we guide you through a featured painting!

Miles of Stars
9 - 10pm at Davis Mountains State Park
Join us as we appreciate some of the darkest skies in the U.S. through storytelling and telescope viewing.

Hike with Homeless Dogs
9 - 10am at Davis Mountains State Park
Help a homeless dog have a great time on the trail!

Fri June 27

Spaghetti Dinner
5 - 7pm at Sunshine House
All funds raised will receive a dollar-for-dollar match in grant funding from Still Water Foundation. These contributions will go directly toward remodeling the Ole Crystal Bar building into a larger and improved space for seniors!

Peak Preparedness - Trail Safety Tips
7 - 8pm at Davis Mountains State Park
Want to explore our desert trails? Park host Terry will cover the basics to ensure you have what it takes to stay safe.

Indian Lodge Tour
4 - 5pm at Davis Mountains State Park
Discover the history behind the ONLY hotel in the Texas State Park system.

Tom Friggith
6 - 8pm at Alcove Social
Enjoy live music from Tom Griffith Friday, June 27th 6pm at Alcove Social.

Sat June 28

Amateur Radio Field Day
1:30 - 3:30pm at North Diamond Pavilion
Big Bend Amateur Radio Club invites everyone to come participate in Field Day! June 28th and 29th.

Mini Astrology Readings w Amanda Holstien
7:30pm at the Sul Ross Fine Arts Building
Learn about your birth chart and get insight into your future according to the planets and stars.

Desert Snakes and other Creepy Crawlies
2 - 3pm at Davis Mountains State Park
Don't be scared...be curious! Come learn about the "scary" critters inhabiting our park.

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Sun June 29

Amateur Radio Field Day
1:30 - 3:30pm at North Diamond Pavilion
Big Bend Amateur Radio Club invites everyone to come participate in Field Day! June 28th and 29th.

Looking to submit an event?
Scan our QR code here:

Ongoing Weekly Events & Classes

Xbox Monday
Mondays starting June 2nd at Marfa Public Library

Yin Yoga
Tuesdays at 12pm at Marfa Public Library

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

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

AA (in-person)
Monday & Wednesday at 6pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Alpine Farmers Market
Saturday at 9am - 12pm at Alpine Visitor Center

Free Boxing at MAINTENANT
Thursdays at 9am
Sundays at 10am

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

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OBITUARIES

HOWARD

David James Howard, a beloved husband, father, grandfather, and community leader, passed away, at the age of 86, from cancer at his home on June 7, 2025. Dave likely battled the disease for multiple years but dismissed his pain to "old age and hard work." He was born on September 8, 1938, in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Dave proudly served his country in the United States Air Force for 20 years. It was common to see a tear in his eye as he stood at attention to the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Following a brief stint with OIME in Midland, Dave moved to Marfa in 1982 and established D. Howard Electric which he operated for 42 years. During that time, he also spent 13 years as the utility manager for the City of Marfa. A "Yankee" by birth, Dave quickly endeared himself to the community through his integrity, commitment to doing the job right and fair dealings with his customers.

Dave was an avid reader, often completing a new book in a day. Later in life, he pursued a college degree, coming within a semester of graduation. For Dave, the journey was as important as the destination. He showed his love for others through his humor and genuine respect. He often had an (embarrassing) nickname for all those he held dear.

Dave was an avid sportsman excelling in fastpitch softball, bowling, tennis and golf — something he continued to play throughout his life. Later in life, he moved away from the field to being a coach and spectator and was a devoted fan of the Boston Red Sox and Celtics, as well as the Washington Commanders. He also found joy in fishing, particularly the moments spent teaching his grandchildren his beloved pastime. Those interactions and the opportunity to provide sage advice was always more important than catching the fish, although he thoroughly enjoyed the latter as well.

He is survived by his loving wife of 59 years, Joyce Collinsworth Howard; his son, Scott (Lynda) Howard; his daughter Lisette (Ray) Hawkins; his sister, Mary (John) Macdonald; and his devoted son-in-law, Ja Chriesman. He was a cherished grandfather to Ella Howard, Zach Chriesman, Bradley Hawkins, and Ashley Hawkins. His life continues through his great-grandchildren: Bryce McKenney, Sterling Daniel, Preston Hawkins, Raeli Hawkins, and Connor Hawkins.

Dave's ("Uncle Buddy") legacy is further enriched by the numerous nieces and nephews who held him dear. He joins in rest his parents, Arthur and Rose Howard; sisters Kathy Richards and Anne Healy; daughter Lorinda Chriesman; grandson Christopher Hawkins; and brother-in-law Paul Richards.

Hard work, integrity and service to his country / community were hallmarks of his 86 years. Those that knew him appreciated being able to share both their successes and challenges with Dave, often receiving profound insights in return.

The family would like to express their sincere gratitude to Melissa Livingston, Albert Dominguez, Robert Silva and Rachel Atuegwu for their devotion to Dave in providing comfort in his final months and weeks.

A memorial Mass will be held July 5, 2025, at 10 a.m. at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Marfa, Texas with doors opening at 9:30 a.m. A reception will be held at the USO building in Marfa, Texas following services. An inurnment will be held at a later date, September 15, 2025, at Wingate Cemetery with times to be announced.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to St. Jude's Hospital.

Services are entrusted to Alpine Memorial Funeral Home in Alpine, Texas and gifts and condolences may be left by visiting www.alpinememorialfuneralhome.com.

MUÑIZ

Eulalia Muñiz, a cherished matriarch, loving mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and unforgettable friend, passed away peacefully on June 17, 2025, in Alpine, Texas, at the age of 102. Born on November 2, 1922, in Terlingua, Texas, Eulalia's life was a tapestry woven with love, laughter, and unwavering strength.

Eulalia, affectionately known as "Lala" or "Grandma Lala," dedicated herself to her family and community throughout her life. With a career that spanned various roles, she was not just an astute bar owner of the ATU Hall, but also contributed her talents as a cafeteria worker at Sul Ross State University, an Army base worker, and a compassionate home health worker. Her warmth and kindness left a lasting impression on everyone she met.

Though her formal education only reached the fourth grade, Eulalia's wisdom and life lessons far surpassed any textbook. She stepped into the role of caregiver for her siblings following her father's passing, showcasing a resilience that would define her life. In her heart, she was a loving and nurturing figure who made every family gathering a joyous occasion filled with laughter.

Family and friends will remember her for her playful spirit and sense of humor. Lala had a knack for telling jokes and telling it like it was — brutally honest yet always delivered with love. Her passion for life extended to the activities she enjoyed: from the excitement of bingo and singing to the thrill of horror movies, dancing, and celebrating Halloween, she embraced every moment with joy. Road trips were a special delight for her, bringing new adventures and memories.

Lala proudly claimed her position as the best mother and grandmother anyone could ask for. She leaves behind a legacy of love through her children: Salvador "Sonny" Llanez, Oralia Vasquez, Delia Carson, and Sylvia Muñiz Villanueva. Her family was the center of her universe, and she showered them with endless affection, guidance, and support. She is also survived by her sister, Ramona Fierro, who shared a lifelong bond with her.

In her passing, Lala is reunited with loved ones who have gone before her. She joins her beloved husband, Jose Muñiz Sr., as well as her sons, Jose "Mono" Muñiz Jr. and Manuel "Meme" Muñiz, several brothers and sisters as well as her parents, Manuel Bustamante and Paulina Mireles Bustamante. Though they are no longer with us, their spirits live on through the many lives Lala touched.

Eulalia Muniz's presence will be profoundly missed, but her love endures in the hearts of all who have known her. Her legacy of kindness, warmth, and playful joy will be celebrated and continued by her family as they gather to honor her memory during the visitation, prayer service, and mass at Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church on June 24, 2025. She will find her final resting place at Holy Angels Cemetery, a tranquil spot where her spirit can watch over her family.

Eulalia Muniz lived a long, fulfilling life filled with love and care, reminding us all of the importance of family, laughter, and embracing every precious moment.

Services for Lala took place at Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church in Alpine on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, with visitation at 8 a.m. The recitation of the most holy Rosary began at 9:30 a.m. and the funeral Mass followed at 10 a.m. Burial took place after the Mass at Holy Angels Cemetery in Alpine, Texas.

Services were entrusted to Alpine Memorial Funeral Home and gifts and condolences may be left by visiting www.alpinememorialfuneralhome.com.

The family of Lucia (Ity) Herrera wishes to thank all our relatives and friends for your support, food and flowers during our mother's passing.

Thank you to all who contributed to our mother's funeral. It was beautiful. She is greatly missed.

God Bless you all.

Sincerely ,
Jesus Junie Herrera
Marta H. Brummett
Graciela (Chelly) Baeza

FROM THE ARCHIVES

June 26, 1975

Rain - Hail Damage Causes Crop Loss

The rain and hail that hit the Presidio County area Monday night brought much needed moisture to the range lands but destroyed most of the cantaloupe crop in the Presidio area.

Estimates from Presidio indicate that over 500 acres of cantaloupe were destroyed by hail dashing the hopes of many farmers for a top crop in the delicious melons. No damage was reported to the Redford area crops.

Rain fell over a wide spread area with measurements ranging from one-half inch to three inches. Rain in Marfa began to fall about 7:15 p.m. and continued on and off past 9 p.m.

Hail damage in Marfa was at a minimum except for some broken window panes and some damage to cars and roofs.

A bolt of lightning Sunday hit the Brite Building in downtown Marfa knocking loose a chunk from the upper portion of the front wall. Some gauges in town registered a total of four inches from both rains, Sunday and Monday.

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MISD launches free community health and fitness program

MARFA — Marfa ISD's newest community outreach initiative, MisdFit60, enters its third week, with steady growth in participation ranging from 15 to 21 attendees each session.

The free program, held every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:50 to 6:50 p.m. in the Marfa ISD weight room, is gaining momentum and offers Marfa residents a welcoming space to focus on health, fitness, and accountability — together. The idea for MisdFit60 came to life through a shared vision between MISD Coach Linda Ojeda and longtime Marfa resident Florcita Zubia, who recognized a growing need for a community space where residents could prioritize their health while supporting each other.

The class is led by Zubia, along with Coach Ojeda and Marfa local Roxye Lara, who assists with equipment preparation and session organization. "We are thrilled to help bring this opportunity to the community," said Coach Ojeda. "The program reflects the strong partnerships MISD continues to build with our residents. It also gives MISD alumni a chance to reconnect with the facilities they once used and to see the improvements we've made over the years."

MisdFit60 workouts focus on functional movements that target the upper and lower body, core, and cardiovascular endurance. Zubia emphasizes that the program is designed for all fitness levels, allowing participants to work at their own pace and select weights that are safe and comfortable. "The goal is to provide scalable options so everyone feels comfortable, challenged, and motivated. Our sessions incorporate elements from OT athletes training, sports-based calisthenics, and HIIT-style workouts," explained Ojeda. "Beyond improving cardiovascular health and stamina, our mission is to create a positive, supportive atmosphere where residents can come together, stay active, and build community."

The MisdFit60 program is completely free to Marfa residents ages 18 and over. Participants are required to complete a waiver before beginning the program and are asked to sign in ahead of the start of the workouts.

Photo courtesy of Linda Ojeda

New free adult fitness classes are taking place Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the Shorthorns weight room, off of the track.

BBT HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

BBT AWARDED $4.89 MILLION IN GRANTS FOR RURAL FIBER EXPANSION

BBT IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE OVER $4.89 MILLION IN GRANTS TO EXPAND FIBER OPTIC INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS, FORT DAVIS, LIMPIA CROSSING, IRAAN, MARATHON, AND ALPINE.

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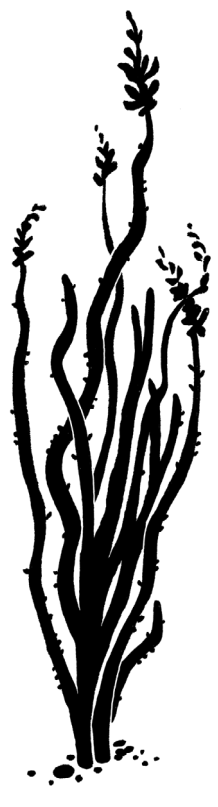

THE MIRACLE PRAYER

Dear Heart of Jesus, in the past, I have asked for many favors.

This time, I ask you this very special favor (mention favor). Take it dear Heart of Jesus and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will become your favor, not mine.

Amen.

Say this prayer for 3 days, promise publication and favor will be granted, no matter how impossible. Never known to fail.

XX

la fundación
the CHINATI foundation

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.

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Classifieds & public notices

Celebrate summer with the Webb Gallery

Photos courtesy of Julie Webb

Work by Ezekiel Gibbs will be on view at Webb's Fair and Square this weekend.

Ralph White, previously of the Bad Livers, will perform Sunday in Fort Davis.

FORT DAVIS — Webb's Fair & Square presents paintings by Ezekiel Gibbs and music on the porch by Ralph White this Sunday June 29 from 4 to 7 p.m. The gallery is located in the historic Masonic hall at 105 N. Front St. Music will begin at 5:30 p.m.

Houston native Ezekiel Gibbs started painting in his 90s and documented his life up until his passing in 1992 at the age of 103. His paintings are filled with family, self reflection, garden, farm animals and symbols of a happy life.

Ralph White was a defining member of the contemporary experimental bluegrass band the Bad Livers. The musician first met Bruce and Julie Webb many years ago in Austin. He will perform a solo show in Fort Davis, marking the end of a tour before heading back home to Oracle, Arizona. White performs with a striking voice and various instruments including the kalimba, the banjo and the saw — all mesmerizing as he keeps time with his swinging foot and the stomp of his boot.

Big Bend area free healthcare clinics start Saturday

BIG BEND — Free healthcare clinics, hosted by the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, will take place across the Big Bend region this weekend and early next week.

Insurance and documentation are not required. Services provided include sports and work physicals, muscle and joint therapy, ultrasound imaging, diabetes - A1C testing, blood pressure checks, medication reviews, adult and pediatric care and wellness exams.

All clinics will take place from 1 to 6 p.m. The Van Horn clinic will be on June 28 at the Convention Center, the Marathon clinic will be on June 29 at the Marathon Health Clinic, the Sanderson clinic will be on June 30 at St. James Hall, and the Terlingua clinic will be on July 1 at Big Bend High School.

MMT Collaborative Care provided by advanced medical students, physicians, physical therapists, and pre-med students.

Photos courtesy of Linda Ojeda

Fore!

Marfa's Junior Golf Camp teed off Tuesday at the Marfa Municipal Golf Course for students in grades 1 through 7. Offered free of charge, the camp provides young golfers with a fun and educational introduction to the sport. Marfa ISD's own Coach Curtis Pittman and Rosela Rivera are leading the instruction, guiding participants through the fundamentals of golf, including chipping, driving, putting, and proper golf etiquette. Hotdogs, drinks and snacks were donated by the Presidio County Golf Committee for all campers.

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS
CITY OF MARFA, TEXAS
STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Separate sealed bids for the construction of **Street Improvements** will be received by the **City of Marfa , Texas** , until **2:00 PM** , on **July 29, 2025** , at **Marfa City Hall 113 S. Highland Ave., Marfa, TX 79843** , and then at said location publicly opened and read aloud. This project consists of the removal and replacement of approximately 5,755 LF of base material and road surface for five streets in the City of Marfa. Streets to be replaced include (1) Russell Street from US 90 north to Columbia Street (estimated 2,190 ft); (2) Mesa Street from US 90 north to Lincoln Street (estimated 1,210 ft); (3) North Gonzales Street from Columbia Street north to 3rd Street (estimated 1,010 ft); (4) East Galveston Street from US 67 east to South Dean Street (estimated 435 ft); (5) 3rd Street from SH 17 west to Austin Street (estimated 910 ft).

The Contract Documents, consisting of Advertisement for Bids, Information for Bidders, Bid Proposal, Bid Bond, Agreement, Performance and Payment Bonds, General Conditions, Notice of Award, Notice to Proceed, Plans, and Specifications, may be examined at the following location:

Jacob & Martin, LLC
3465 Curry Lane, Abilene, Texas 79606

The Owner reserves the right to waive any informalities and to reject any or all bids. Bids may be held by the Owner for a period not to exceed 60 days from the date of bid opening for the purpose of reviewing the bids and investigating the qualifications of Bidders prior to awarding of the contract.

Copies of the CONTRACT DOCUMENTS must be ordered online at www.jacobmartin.com . Orders for CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may include hard copies for pick up, mail out or digital download via www.jacobmartin.com . Upon verification of online payment, hard copies may be picked up at Jacob & Martin, LLC, located at 3465 Curry Lane, Abilene, TX 79606. Cost for hard copies of the CONTRACT DOCUMENTS will be **$100.00** for 11x17 plans. Cost for digital download of CONTRACT DOCUMENTS will be **$0.00** . Contractors must purchase a set of CONTRACT DOCUMENTS to be considered a registered plan holder eligible to bid the project.

Bid Bond: A certified check or bank draft, payable to the order of the City of Marfa , negotiable U.S. Government bonds (at par value) or a satisfactory Bid Bond executed by the Bidder and an acceptable surety in an amount equal to five percent (5%) of the total bid shall be submitted with each bid.

City of Marfa Manuel Baeza, Mayor
June 26th and July 3rd , 10th , 17th , 2025

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In Search Of

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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.

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

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

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Judge Greg Henington:
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Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for a package store permit, local distributor's permit, and local cartage permit by La Junta Liquors, LLC d/b/a La Junta Liquors located at 908 W O Reilly St., Presidio, Presidio County, Texas 79845. Arvel "Rod" Ponton III - manager.

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