



## A light snow, for contrast

As temperatures plunged and rain and drizzle began to fall over the weekend, much of the Big Bend became covered in ice and snow. The livestock and wildlife likely didn’t appreciate it, but we humans had mixed reactions—depending on if you had to get outside and/or drive. The Department of Public Safety closed Highway 90 from Marfa to Van Horn after numerous accidents on the slick roads. More pictures on page 8. *Photographs by JENNIFER PITTLINGER.*

## School Board member resigns

Fuentez: Daughter’s transfer to Alpine spurred the decision

By **ARIELE GENTILES**

*Marfa*

Earlier this month, Place 1 Marfa ISD Board Member Stela Fuentez submitted her letter of resignation to the board, which accepted the resignation at a Monday night meeting.

Fuentez was appointed to the school board in May of 2023, just weeks after former Superintendent Oscar Agüero resigned his position and the board hired Arturo Alferez as interim superintendent. Alferez remains in the role.

Although the board has faced turmoil in recent months over arrested teachers and allegations of nepotism, in her resignation let-

ter, Fuentez noted that her family has withdrawn her daughter from Marfa ISD and enrolled her in Alpine ISD because a larger student population “offers additional academic competitiveness and expanded programming” she is eager for.

Fuentez concluded: “I joined this board over two years ago with the same passion and commitment to Marfa ISD that I hold today. I continue to have deep respect for the educators, staff, and leadership who serve this district and for the important work being done on behalf of our students and community. While this was not an easy decision, it is one made in support of my family’s growth and long-term success.”

In a follow-up interview, Alferez said those interested in being a candidate for the school board must hand deliver a letter of interest to the school administration office by February 13. Candidates will be discussed at the regular board meeting on February 16. Fuentez will continue to serve on the board until another trustee

can be appointed; her term was set to expire in May 2027.

School Board elections have been canceled for the past four years due to too few candidates applying for the positions. Place 2, currently held by Lori Flores, is up for election in May. The school board will consider ordering an election in a special meeting on February 2.

The board also voted to offer a contract to Sul Ross theatre alum Justin Hinton for 2025-2026, cheers and congratulations erupting as the vote concluded. Hinton will be the new music teacher, teaching district-wide at both the elementary and junior high/high school campuses starting this week.

Alferez said he is excited about getting a music instructor back in the schools. “It’s hard to find a music teacher, but it’s a good thing for the students,” he said.

The music position that has been empty since former conjun- to instructor Juan Martinez was arrested in September on charges of indecency with a child.

## Magazine taco writer detained by the feds

By **ROB D’AMICO**

*Texas Monthly’s* taco editor (yes, they have one) José Ralat went through a rattling experience in the Big Bend last Thursday when he and a friend were stopped three times by law enforcement while on an assignment to look at old Spanish mission sites in the area.

“We were shaken, and angry at and afraid of what seemed

*Continued on page 4*

## Feds pull appeal in meth case

Charges had been tossed due to suppressed evidence

By **SAM KARAS**

*Alpine*

An Alpine woman’s legal saga is likely a wrap after the U.S. attorney’s office moved to drop their appeal of her case to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

Last September, Carmen Cavaness was indicted by a grand jury on a charge of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine after 10 grams of the stimulant was discovered in her car. Cavaness pled not guilty, and the case was tossed by U.S. District Judge David Counts after a successful motion to suppress evidence on Fifth Amendment grounds.

The trouble started on the morning of August 28, 2025, when Officer Zachary Juarez of the Alpine Police Department conducted a traffic stop on Cavaness for driving on the shoulder of the road. Dashcam footage cited in court documents shows her driving on the shoulder, emergency flashers activated. She also happened to be driving on a spare “donut” tire meant for traveling short distances at reduced speeds.

Officer Juarez pulled her over for driving on the shoulder and became suspicious that there was more to the story after observing “confusion and disorientation,” suggesting to him that she might be somehow too impaired to drive. “Upon conducting a search of the vehicle officers were able to locate a small clear plastic baggie containing a crystal-like substance,” Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Task Force Officer Javier Bustemente wrote in his criminal complaint, drafted later that day. “APD officers placed Cavaness into custody and transported her and the small baggie to the Alpine Police Department.”

At the station, Cavaness waived her right to remain silent and “admitted to agents that she possessed and transported the controlled substance with the intent to distribute the substance

within the Alpine, Texas, area,” according to Bustemente.

Alpine attorney Shane O’Neal, representing Cavaness in this case, wasn’t convinced that Juarez had the legal grounds to pull his client over in the first place, and moved to suppress the evidence collected by the Alpine Police Department and the DEA—namely, the 10 grams of methamphetamine and her statements to police after being taken into the station.

*Continued on page 4*

## A month of deserted drugs

**Recently, law enforcement has discovered large amounts of abandoned drugs. On January 16, a deputy found a large stash in the desert, although it did not divulge the location.**

“During a routine patrol along the river this afternoon, Presidio County Sheriff’s Deputies discovered several bundles of marijuana concealed in the brush,” the sheriff’s office posted on its Facebook page. “In total, they recovered 39 small bundles and three large bundles, weighing a combined 50 pounds of marijuana.”

Then on January 22, the Border Patrol posted on its Facebook page:

“In plain sight: Meth & black tar heroin seized! Smugglers abandoned a stash of lethal narcotics on a ranch near Marfa, Texas. Border Patrol Agents responded and seized 67 pounds of methamphetamines and 5.1 pounds of heroin.”

The Border Patrol also posted another find on its Facebook page Tuesday.

“Presidio agents, seized 110 lbs. of marijuana (over \$88K value) near the Rio Grande River,” the post stated.

**INSIDE**



ANTONIO ALACRÁN

Kevin Russell

**Shinyribs heads to Valentine**

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Sentinel News Project



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### County candidates meet the public tonight

On hand will be Democratic primary candidates for county races:

County Judge—**David Beebe**. (Incumbent **José “Joe” Portillo Jr.**, will not be attending due to a conflict, but will have a statement read.)

Commissioner Precinct 4—**Susan Hays** will not be attending due to a date conflict, but will have a rep attending to read a statement.

County Treasurer—Appointed incumbent **Fiorcita Zubia**. (**Jusby Vasquez** will not be attending due to a date conflict, but will have a statement read.)

County Clerk/District Clerk—**Carolina Catano** and **Brenda Pando Covos**.

Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace—**Dina Jo Marquez**.

Democratic County Chair—**Irma Juárez**.

The Presidio County Democratic Party and *Big Bend Sentinel* are hosting the candidate forum tonight at the USO Visitor’s Center in Marfa from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. ]

Next week on Thursday, February 5, another forum will be held featuring South County candidates for: Precinct 2 county commissioner, Precinct 2 justice of the peace, as well as county-wide candidates for county judge, treasurer and district/county clerk.



Border Patrol agents found a stash of methamphetamine and heroin left in the desert this month.

BORDER PATROL

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*Sentinel*

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# La junta escolar de Presidio aprueba nuevos cursos

La decisión incluyó un reconocimiento a los logros de los estudiantes.

Por KATE BUBACZ

Presidio

En una larga reunión de la Junta Escolar del Distrito Escolar Independiente de Presidio (Presidio ISD por sus siglas en inglés) el 21 de enero, la junta aprobó tres nuevos programas de estudio y una materia optativa de teatro para estudiantes de secundaria. Los programas de estudio en aviación, ciberseguridad y videojuegos ampliarán las oportunidades de formación profesional que se ofrecen en el distrito.

La aprobación de la junta permite al distrito explorar el interés de los estudiantes, la contratación de personal y otros costos; no garantiza la implementación de los programas. Los cursos serían programas de trayectoria profesional que tardarían tres años en desarrollarse y se ofrecerían a los estudiantes de primer año de secundaria.

Las preocupaciones sobre el costo se mitigaron por el hecho de que los cursos de formación profesional cuentan con financiación estatal para preparar a los estudiantes para el mercado laboral. Los tres programas de estudio se seleccionaron cuidadosamente para brindar a los jóvenes experiencia en programación informática que les permitirá acceder a trabajos bien remunerados en campos tecnológicos en crecimiento. El salario promedio de un ingeniero de videojuegos

en Texas es de \$140,000, según ZipRecruiter, casi tres veces el salario promedio en la ciudad.

“Estamos rezagados en estos tres cursos”, dijo la superintendente del ISD, Carmen Rubner. “Esto nos permitiría contratar personal y brindar a nuestros estudiantes diferentes oportunidades”. Presidio también ofrece formación profesional en artes culinarias.

Los estudiantes que participan en ese programa obsequiaron a los miembros de la junta con tablas de embutidos que incluían una artística presentación de salami, pepperoni, aceitunas, frambuesas y chocolate, así como chirivías y tomates del huerto escolar.

“Es solo para entusiasmar a la gente”, dijo tímidamente una de las estudiantes que presentó el obsequio, olvidando mencionar su nombre. Los estudiantes elogiaron el trabajo de Denise Greene, la profesora de artes culinarias que recientemente ha ampliado el programa para brindar experiencia práctica a los estudiantes que desean trabajar en restaurantes.

El talento de los estudiantes locales no debe subestimarse. En febrero, el consulado mexicano exhibirá en la ciudad las obras ganadoras de un concurso mundial de dibujo infantil. Siete de los 50 ganadores seleccionados eran de Presidio, el porcentaje más alto de cualquier consulado.

Los departamentos de arte de la escuela secundaria y la escuela primaria han participado en un proyecto escolar de varias semanas de duración, en el que los dibujos de los alumnos de cuarto grado se convirtieron en esculturas de arcilla realizadas por los estudiantes de secundaria. Esta colaboración creativa dio como

resultado una impresionante serie de 68 adorables criaturas con sus respectivas historias. Los equipos de la Liga Interescolar Universitaria obtuvieron victorias en el torneo de Monahans y participarán en la competencia distrital en marzo. Los equipos de matemáticas y ciencias de la escuela secundaria obtuvieron el primer lugar en la clasificación general, y el programa de primaria también se ha mantenido en primer lugar dentro del distrito.

“Estos equipos no siempre reciben el mismo reconocimiento ni la misma atención del público que los deportes, pero aun así debemos sentirnos orgullosos de sus logros académicos”, declaró el miembro de la junta directiva Jeremy Velasquez.

El jueves 27 de enero se celebrará el “día del intercambio” en el distrito, donde los estudiantes se vestirán como profesores y los profesores como estudiantes. Este intercambio tendrá lugar previamente a la asamblea del viernes, en la que se anunciará oficialmente la corte de honor del baile de bienvenida.

La reunión de la junta directiva concluyó con una sesión a puerta cerrada para evaluar el desempeño de Rubner, quien fue elegida superintendente en 2024. No se proporcionó información adicional sobre dicha sesión. La próxima reunión de la junta directiva se llevará a cabo en febrero y abordará el impacto de la nueva ley de Texas que exige la exhibición de los Diez Mandamientos en las aulas. La ley se encuentra bajo una orden judicial provisional, ya que enfrenta impugnaciones legales por parte de familias que argumentan que viola la Primera Enmienda.

# Crece la detención de inmigrantes sin antecedentes

Por ARTEM KOLISNICHENKO

En las últimas semanas, la Fiscalía del Distrito Oeste de Texas ha registrado un aumento significativo en los casos penales relacionados con la inmigración. En un comunicado de prensa del 9 de enero, el fiscal federal Justin R. Simmons anunció la presentación de 735 nuevos casos relacionados con violaciones de inmigración y delitos relacionados con la inmigración ilegal en el período comprendido entre el 19 de diciembre de 2025 y el 8 de enero de 2026.

El comunicado destaca el enfoque en “extranjeros indocumentados con condenas previas por delitos violentos y conducir bajo los efectos del alcohol, así como presuntos traficantes de personas y extranjeros con múltiples deportaciones previas”. Proporciona ejemplos específicos de la división de El Paso, informando de incidentes en el Puente de las Américas. Si bien la fiscalía hace hincapié en las personas con antecedentes penales, muchos de los casos relacionados con la inmigración presentados no involucran a acusados con condenas penales previas en Estados Unidos.

Por lo tanto, estos casos a menudo se basan en la permanencia ilegal en el país tras la expiración de la visa u otras formas de presencia ilegal. En el Distrito Oeste, los procesos penales con frecuencia involucran delitos de entrada ilegal, incluso cuando los acusados no tienen antecedentes penales más allá de las violaciones relacionadas con la inmigración.

Las estadísticas nacionales y regionales confirman el cambio general hacia una mayor proporción de detenidos sin condenas penales. Según datos de TRAC al 30 de noviembre, de las 65,735 personas detenidas por ICE, el 73,6% (48,377 personas) no

tienen condenas penales, incluidas infracciones menores como multas de tráfico. Texas representa aproximadamente 17.696 detenidos (alrededor del 27% del total nacional), con una parte significativa del crecimiento proveniente de esta categoría de personas sin antecedentes penales.

Para el 7 de enero, el número de personas detenidas por ICE alcanzó un nuevo récord de 68.990, lo que representa 3.255 más que a finales de noviembre. Al mismo tiempo, el 92% del crecimiento en el año fiscal 2026 proviene de personas sin condenas penales (72%) o con cargos pendientes (20%), mientras que solo el 8% corresponde a personas con condenas.

Un patrón similar se observa en el norte de Texas, donde un análisis del Dallas Morning News concluyó que el 62% de las personas arrestadas por ICE durante los primeros nueve meses de 2025 no tenían antecedentes penales, un aumento con respecto al 44% en 2024 y al 60% a nivel nacional en 2025.

Los datos indican una disminución notable en las detencio-

nes a lo largo de la frontera suroeste entre octubre y noviembre de 2025, ya que las autoridades detuvieron solo a 7.350 personas en esa zona, en comparación con las 60.940 a nivel nacional. Esto ha permitido redirigir recursos hacia la aplicación de la ley de inmigración estadounidense en el interior del país. Como resultado, la aplicación de la ley ahora abarca un grupo mucho más amplio que solo los inmigrantes con antecedentes penales de alta prioridad.

Se espera que el aumento de la financiación para la capacidad de detención y la expansión del programa 287(g), que faculta a las autoridades locales para la aplicación de la ley en materia de inmigración, impulsen un mayor crecimiento. A mediados de enero de 2026, más de 160 oficinas del sheriff en Texas habían adoptado el programa de conformidad con el Proyecto de Ley del Senado 8, que exige la participación de los condados con poblaciones superiores a 100.000 habitantes para finales de 2026.



Los manifestantes han cuestionado durante mucho tiempo la justificación y los objetivos de las deportaciones, como muestra esta protesta de 2019.

PRESIDIO INTERNATIONAL

Deportados regresan a México: tierras bajo control de cárteles

Muchos pasaron décadas fuera y regresan como extraños.

Por STEVE FISHER, KATE LINTHICUM  
PUENTE NEWS COLLABORATIVE

Adrián Ramírez no había estado en su pueblo natal en el oeste de México en más de dos décadas. Cuando finalmente regresó a principios del año pasado, tras ser deportado de Estados Unidos, encontró el lugar transformado.

Ramírez recordaba el pueblo lleno de vida. Pero la discoteca donde solía bailar toda la noche en su juventud ya no existía. El bullicioso mercado nocturno, donde los lugareños se reunían para comer tacos, ahora cierra temprano. Después de las 10 de la noche, miembros de cárteles armados con armas de grado militar toman el control de las calles.

“Ya no es el mismo México de mi infancia”, dijo Ramírez, de 45 años, quien pidió ser identificado por su segundo nombre y apellido por razones de seguridad. “Había más alegría, más libertad. Pero ya no es así”.

Un regreso a un país distinto

Cualquiera que regrese a su pueblo natal después de décadas de ausencia notará cambios: negocios antiguos cierran y abren nuevos, algunas personas se mudan y otras fallecen. Adaptarse a estos cambios ha sido durante mucho tiempo parte de la experiencia de los migrantes mexicanos.

Deportados a un México más violento

Pero muchas de las decenas de miles de personas que han sido deportadas a México por la administración Trump han pasado décadas en Estados Unidos y están descubriendo que su país también ha cambiado de maneras más profundas.

Grupos criminales, mejor armados y organizados que en el pasado, controlan ahora alrededor de un tercio del territorio mexicano, según un análisis del ejército estadounidense. Las pandillas se han expandido más allá del narcotráfico para extorsionar

a pequeños negocios y dominar industrias enteras, como el comercio de aguacate y limón. En algunas regiones, los criminales cobran impuestos por casi cualquier cosa: tortillas y pollo, cigarrillos y cerveza.

Partes de Michoacán, el estado de donde es originario Ramírez, ahora se asemejan a un verdadero campo de batalla, con grupos criminales que se enfrentan entre sí con lanzagranadas, drones equipados con explosivos y minas terrestres improvisadas.

Los migrantes que regresan son vulnerables a la violencia porque se distinguen del resto. Muchos hablan spanglish. Sus cortes de pelo modernos, a menudo con degradados a los lados, los diferencian en las comunidades rurales. Lo mismo ocurre con su vestimenta al estilo estadounidense, como pantalones holgados y camisetas con los logotipos de sus equipos deportivos favoritos: Dodgers, Raiders, Dallas Cowboys. Ramírez dijo que incluso sus gestos, que habían cambiado tras años en el norte, lo identificaban rápidamente como un forastero.

Los cárteles eligen a los migrantes que regresan a su país para secuestrarlos o extorsionarlos porque se cree que tienen dinero, explicó Israel Concha, director de Nuevo Comienzos, una organización sin fines de lucro con sede en Estados Unidos y oficinas en Las Vegas y Ciudad de México que apoya a los deportados. Los migrantes que regresan a menudo desconocen cómo sortear los puestos de control controlados por los cárteles o las normas locales impuestas por los grupos criminales.

“Somos un blanco fácil”, afirmó Concha.

Concha dijo que fue secuestrado y torturado por miembros de un cartel en 2014 después de ser deportado a México. Afirmó que 16 migrantes del grupo de apoyo de su organización han sido asesinados o desaparecidos desde que fundó la organización. Diez de esos casos ocurrieron en el último año.

En mayo, un hombre que había regresado recientemente desapareció tras salir de su trabajo en un hotel en el estado central de Querétaro, dijo Concha. Sus padres, perdiendo la esperanza de



JUAN JOSÉ ESTRADA SERAFÍN

Ziracuaretiro, Michoacán, Febrero 25, 2025. Habitantes de la comunidad indígena de San Ángel Zurumucapio tomaron las armas para defender su pueblo del crimen organizado.

encontrarlo con vida, celebraron un funeral y una misa en su honor en octubre.

Ramírez dejó su pueblo en el estado de Michoacán para ir a Estados Unidos cuando tenía 21 años, con la esperanza de ahorrar dinero para regresar a casa y construir su propia casa.

Pero la vida siguió su curso: Ramírez se casó, tuvo tres hijos y se quedó. Lavaba autos y trabajaba como conductor de Uber en Nashville antes de ser deportado.

Regresar a Michoacán fue agri dulce. Lloró de felicidad al abrazar a su madre y a sus hermanos por primera vez en años. Pero poco después, fue interrogado en la calle por un miembro de un cartel que quería saber su nombre y a qué se dedicaba. Otro miembro del cartel lo fotografió mientras paseaba por la plaza del pueblo.

Cuando manda el cartel

Su pueblo alguna vez fue famoso por su producción de queso. Ahora, su industria dominante es el robo de combustible, un negocio multimillonario en auge

en México. Criminales del Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación incendiaron recientemente las dos gasolineras del pueblo y mataron al dueño para imponer su control sobre la localidad, dijo Ramírez. Luego instalaron sus propias gasolineras ilegales, sin dejar a los lugareños otra opción que comprarles a ellos.

Las autoridades no brindaron ninguna ayuda.

Ramírez se enteró por su familia de que el alcalde había sido elegido a dedo por el cartel. La policía también está coludida con los criminales. Después de que un familiar sufriera un accidente, los policías que acudieron al lugar terminaron extorsionándolo, dijo Ramírez.

Ramírez comenzó a temer por su vida. Se preguntó si sería hora de irse, y de ser así, a dónde iría.

Un número creciente de mexicanos se ve obligado a huir de sus comunidades debido a la violencia, según muestran los datos. Los estados de Michoacán, Chiapas y Zacatecas, aislados por el conflicto, han registrado niveles particularmente altos de

desplazamiento. Israel Ibarra, experto en migración del Colegio de la Frontera Norte, afirmó que los migrantes que regresan a comunidades aisladas por la violencia a menudo terminan teniendo que irse de nuevo.

“No solo se convierten en personas deportadas”, dijo. “Experimentarán un doble desplazamiento forzado”.

La violencia que persiste

La presidenta mexicana Claudia Sheinbaum presume de datos que muestran que los homicidios disminuyeron durante su primer año en el cargo. Pero el número de personas desaparecidas se ha disparado en todo el país, particularmente en las regiones controladas por los cárteles.

“Para las personas que se fueron hace mucho tiempo, muchas de ellas están regresando a comunidades que son mucho más violentas de lo que eran cuando se fueron”, dijo Andrew Selee del Instituto de Políticas Migratorias, con sede en Washington, D.C.

Ramírez quiere regresar a

Estados Unidos para estar con su familia, pero tiene miedo de terminar detenido allí.

Extraña a sus hijos y sueña con comprarles boletos de avión para que puedan visitarlo. Pero tiene miedo de exponerlos a la violencia de México. “Aquí la vida es muy diferente”, dijo. “Me duele lo que está pasando”.

Decidió dejar su pueblo hace unos meses. El pueblo donde vive ahora parece más tranquilo, aunque también está controlado por el cartel de Jalisco. Después de conseguir trabajo en una tortillería, su nuevo empleador le advirtió: miembros del cartel podrían pasar a preguntarle de dónde es.

Patricia Ramírez, del Los Angeles Times, y Efraín Izuc, de Quinto Elemento Lab, contribuyeron a este reportaje. Este artículo fue publicado conjuntamente con Puente News Collaborative, una sala de redacción bilingüe sin fines de lucro dedicada a la cobertura de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, y el Los Angeles Times.



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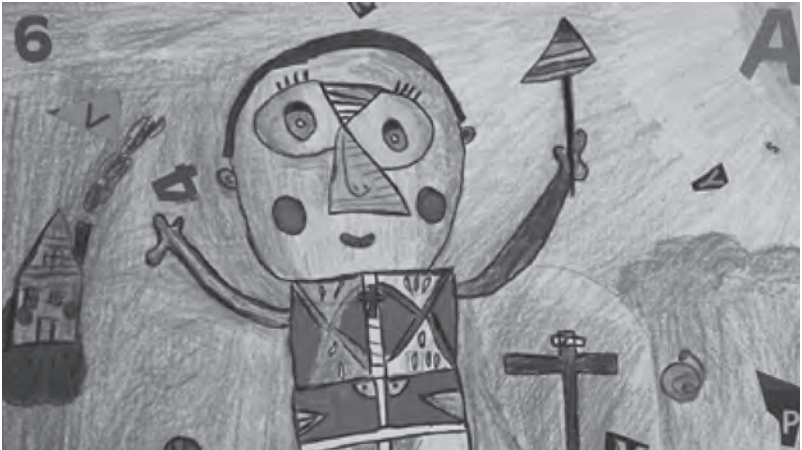
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*A former entry in Mexico's drawing contest. Presidio winners will be on display at the Mexican consulate in February.*

# Presidio School Board approves new courses, praises student wins

**By KATE BUBACZ**

*Presidio*

In a drawn-out Presidio ISD School Board meeting on January 21, the board approved three new course tracts and a theater elective for high school students. The course tracts in aviation, cyber-security and gaming will expand the career training opportunities offered in the district.

The board approval allows the district to explore student interest, hiring and other costs; it does not guarantee the programs. The courses would be pathway programs that will take three years to build and will be offered to freshmen.

Concerns about cost were mitigated by the fact that career training courses are supported by funding from the state to prepare students for the workforce. The three course tracts were carefully selected to give kids experience with computer coding that will allow them access to high-paying jobs in growing technical fields. The average salary for a gaming engineer in Texas is \$140,000 according to ZipRecruiter, or nearly three times the average salary in town.

“We’re behind in these three courses,” said ISD Superintendent Carmen Rubner. “This would allow us to hire staff and give our students different opportunities.” Presidio also offers career training in culinary arts.

Students participating in that program gifted board members with charcuterie boards including an artful spread of salami, pepperoni, olives, raspberries and chocolate, and parsnips and tomatoes from the kitchen garden.

“It’s just to get people hyped up,” one of the presenting students said shyly, forgetting to give her name. The students praised the work of Denise Greene, the culinary arts teacher who has expanded the program recently to give real world experience to students who want to work in restaurants.

The talents of local students are not to be underestimated. In February, the Mexican consulate will be displaying winners of a global children’s drawing contest around town. Seven of the selected 50 winners were from Presidio, the highest percentage of any consulate.

The art departments in the high school and elementary school have been involved in a weeks-long cross-school project involving drawings by fourth graders being made into clay sculptures by high schoolers. The creative collaboration resulted in an impressive series of 68 adorable creatures that had proud backstories to go along with them.

The University Interscholastic League teams notched wins at the Monahans invitational and will proceed to the district competition in March. The math and science teams at the high school level placed first overall, and the elementary program has also been in first place within the district.

“These teams don’t always get recognition and crowds like sports, but you should still take pride in the achievement in the classroom,” said Board Member Jeremy Velasquez

On Thursday, January 27, it is “switch day” in the district, where students will dress as teachers and teachers as students. The switch will happen ahead of a Friday pep rally where the homecoming court will be announced.

The board meeting concluded with an extended closed-door session to evaluate the performance of Rubner, who was elected superintendent in 2024. No update was offered from that session. The next board meeting will convene in February and will address the new Texas law requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in classrooms. The law is under injunction as it faces legal challenges from families arguing that it violates the First Amendment.

# Alpine meth case appeal dropped

*Continued from page 1*

O’Neal cited United States v. Lopez-Moreno, a 2005 Fifth Circuit case: “For a traffic stop to be justified at its inception, an officer must have an objectively reasonable suspicion that some sort of illegal activity, such as a traffic violation, occurred or is about to occur, before stopping the vehicle.”

Digging into the Texas Transportation Code, O’Neal further argued that driving on the shoulder isn’t outrightly illegal—the law provides seven scenarios in which a driver can safely and lawfully pull over on the right-hand side of the road, including “to allow another vehicle traveling faster to pass.”

Here, Cavaness’ spare donut tire made all the difference. “Because the spare tire was smaller than her other tires, safe driving dictated that she permit vehicles not similarly encumbered to pass her,” O’Neal wrote. “Instead of passing, or merely stopping himself to see if she had continued on, he activated his emergency lights and seized her though she had not committed a traffic violation.”

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jimmie Holloway submitted a response arguing that Cavaness’ behavior and the condition of the roadway held up the officer’s justification for the stop—but Judge Counts didn’t buy it. “On this record, [the court] is hard pressed to see how someone driving at a reduced speed on a donut with hazard lights flashing could be viewed as doing anything but allowing the officer, traveling at a faster rate of speed, to pass,” Counts wrote in a December order granting O’Neal’s motion.

Counts’ order dropped the charges, but the government appealed the case—only to move in a “joint stipulation” with O’Neal that neither party intended to continue pursuing the appeal. That doesn’t officially mean the case is closed, however. “Now [the court] has to decide whether they dismiss or go forward without the suppressed evidence,” O’Neal explained.

The U.S. attorney’s office did not respond to a request for comment.

# City Council discussions preview future actions

**Business summit planned.**

**By GINA VERA**

*Alpine*

Previews of agenda items to come were the main attraction at the January 20 Alpine City Council meeting.

The city has been selected as the site of one of the 2026 Governor’s Small Business Summits, said Alpine Mayor Catherine Eaves.

“The Governor’s Small Business Summits is a statewide initiative administered by the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office within the Office of the Governor,” city officials wrote. “The program brings business owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders together to receive training, resources, and guidance on topics such as access to capital, workforce development, marketing, cybersecurity, business growth and resiliency. The summits are designed to strengthen local economies and support small businesses across Texas,” said city officials.

Brewster County Judge Greg Henington headed the effort to bring the Summit to the city, Eaves said. Members of the City Council expressed support for the effort, stating that it could attract visitors and contribute to economic development in the area.

City Council members estimated the cost to the city at \$3,000. The date for the summit has not yet been determined. Henington has submitted three possible dates—September 17, October 1, and October 15.

**Will there be water?**

City Council members instructed city staff to put work on the Skyway Gardens II water project on hold after expressing concerns about the new direction of the project. Council members were unanimous in their concerns and desire to have more information regarding the changes, despite knowing the project’s tight timeline.

“I’m not liking the way this could go,” said Councilmember Robert Rückes, who was specifically concerned with the system’s ability to handle higher pressures.

Their concerns echoed the concerns of Alpine Director of Utilities Michael Maciaz. “I don’t like it,” Maciaz said. “I just don’t know if this is the right way to go about it.”

The water project was approved in November 2025 to improve water pressure to the Skyway Gardens II development, which is under construction and scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2026. Water pressure to the development does not currently meet state requirements.

Information learned about the workings of the city’s water system requires a change in the project, said officials with Jacob Martin (JM), the company contracted to do the work.

“As we began the survey and design phases of the water system improvements project to help serve Skyway Gardens, I became aware of some of the additional city water system information that was previously unknown to JM. This information, learned through meetings and discussions with city staff, has an impact on the potential recommended solution,” said a JM manager in a memorandum to the city.

**Golf carts under scrutiny**

An ordinance which would regulate golf carts, pocket bikes and mini motorbikes within the city and was scheduled for its final vote, was pulled back after council members heard concerns from Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Johnathan Rutledge.

Rutledge’s concerns with the ordinance included its compliance with state laws that already regulate such vehicles, the city’s establishment of a registration system that is not allowed and the possibility that they would be allowing golf carts without seat belts on the roadways.

# Repeated stops during Big Bend reporting

*Continued from page 1*

like a coordinated effort between federal and state officials,” Ralat wrote about the experience in Texas Monthly.

It started when Ralat and his traveling buddy Rodrigo Bravo were heading west near Sander-son, and a Terrell County deputy pulled them over and told them they were going 5 mph over the speed limit. Ralat wrote: “Why would we get pulled over for such an insignificant overage?” I thought.”

In a phone call with Big Bend Sentinel Tuesday Ralat said he thought it was odd that the deputy only asked for IDs and not insurance. The trend would continue, with a “weird” and “disturbing” encounter northwest of Presidio on Highway 170, he said. The pair were headed toward “Ochoa,” really just a cemetery off the highway with burials with that surname. On the way looking for another historical marker, a white truck passed them. Driving back toward Presidio, the white truck pulled up behind them at the intersection of Highways 170 and 67 and eventually pulled them over near the Presidio Lely International Airport after following them for about five miles.

“I wasn’t speeding or doing anything,” Bravo said in a phone call Tuesday. “I was definitely surprised. There were two agents, a gentleman and a lady.”

The agents asked him where they were from, where they were going—“Marfa,” they said—and kept them waiting for 30 minutes before letting them continue. “I felt like saying, ‘Hey, what’s taking so long?’ But we just played it cool,” Bravo recounted.

While Ralat wrote that they were U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, that probably wasn’t the case—technically. A photo from Bravo shows a white U.S. Customs Enforcement truck. Yes, they and Border Patrol are all federal agents, but the distinction is that with the massive ICE presence and ensuing violence and shootings in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Big Bend Sentinel intends to monitor the types of law enforcement involved to see if there is an escalation of immigration enforcement.

That wasn’t the end, however, as they were pulled over by a Department of Public Safety trooper just north of the Border Patrol checkpoint south of Marfa. “José and I couldn’t believe it,” Bravo said, and added that the trooper didn’t ask for insurance either. The trooper said they were going 77 in a 70, but Bravo said their cruise control was set at 70 to 71 mph. They were given a warning.

Despite not facing any citation, the encounters left the two curious about if they were indeed being tracked through the area. “I’ve had bad experiences with cops in the past, so I was terrified,” Ralat said, recounting an incident at age 14 when he was dragged out of a car by his shirt collar. He wondered if his brown skin was part of the equation.

Bravo noted that all of the law enforcement officers that day were Hispanic. For him, the encounters remained off. “It was just weird.”

# Deportees return to Mexico, find land controlled by cartels

By **STEVE FISHER**  
and **KATE LINTHICUM**

PUENTE NEWS COLLABORATIVE

Adrián Ramírez hadn't been to his hometown in western Mexico for more than two decades. When he finally returned there early last year after being deported from the United States, he found the place transformed.

Ramírez remembered the town as vibrant. But the discotheque where he used to dance through the night in his twenties was gone. The bustling evening market, where locals gather for tacos, now empties out early. After 10 p.m., cartel members wielding military-grade weapons take control of the streets.

"It is no longer the same Mexico of my childhood," said Ramírez, 45, who asked to be identified by his middle and last name for security reasons. "There was more joy, more freedom. But that's not the case anymore."

Anyone returning to their hometown after decades away will note changes—old businesses close and new ones open, some people move away and some die. Adjusting to such shifts has long been part of the Mexican migrant experience.

### A country he no longer knows

But many of the tens of thousands of people who have been deported to Mexico by the Trump administration have spent decades in the U.S. and are discovering that their country has also changed in more profound ways.

Criminal groups, better armed and better organized than in the past, now control about a third of Mexican territory, according to an analysis by the U.S. military. Gangs have branched out beyond drug trafficking to extort small businesses and dominate entire industries, such as the avocado and lime trade. In some regions, criminals charge taxes on just about anything—tortillas and chicken, cigarettes and beer.

Parts of Michoacán, the state where Ramírez is from, now resemble an actual battlefield, with criminal groups fighting each other with grenade launchers, drones rigged with explosives and improvised land mines.

### Deportees as easy targets

Returning migrants are vulnerable to violence because they stand out. Many speak Spanglish. Their stylish haircuts, often with fades on the sides, set them apart in rural communities. So does their gringo-style attire, like baggy pants and T-shirts touting their favorite sports teams—Dodgers, Raiders, Dallas Cowboys. Ramírez said that even his mannerisms, which had changed from years up north, quickly identified him as an outsider.

Cartels single out returning migrants for kidnapping or extortion because they are perceived to have money, said Israel Concha, who runs Nuevo Comienzos, or New Beginnings, a U.S.-based nonprofit with offices in Las Vegas and Mexico City that supports deportees. Returnees don't often know how to navigate cartel-run checkpoints or local rules set by criminal groups.

"We're an easy target," Concha said.

Concha said he was abducted and tortured by cartel members in 2014 after he was deported to Mexico. He said 16 migrants from his organization's support group have been assassinated or disappeared since he founded his organization. Ten of those cases happened in the last year.

In May, a recently returned man vanished after leaving his job at a hotel in the central state of Querétaro, Concha said. His parents, giving up hope of finding him alive, held a funeral and a Mass for him in October.

Ramírez left his town in Michoacán state for the United States when he was 21, hoping to save money so he could come back home and build a house of his own.



JUAN JOSÉ ESTRADA SERAFÍN

Morelia, Michoacán, November 17, 2025: After an operation where two people were killed, armed civilians blocked and burned vehicles in several locations.

But life happened — Ramírez got married and had three children, and he stayed. He was washing cars and driving for Uber in Nashville before he was deported.

Returning to Michoacán was bittersweet. He cried with happiness as he hugged his mother and siblings for the first time in years. But shortly after, he was interrogated by a cartel member on the street who wanted to know his name and what he did for a living. Another cartel member photographed him while he strolled the town plaza.

His town had once been famous for its cheese production. Now its most dominant industry is fuel theft, a booming multimillion-dollar enterprise in Mexico. Criminals with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel recently burned down the town's two gas stations and killed the owner to assert their control over the pueblo, Ramírez said. They then set up their own illegal stations, leaving locals no choice but to buy from them.

The authorities were no help.

### Deportation without refuge

Ramírez learned from his family that the mayor had been hand-picked by the cartel. The police are also in cahoots with criminals. After a relative suffered an accident, the cops who responded ended up extorting him, Ramírez said.

Ramírez began to fear for his life. He wondered whether it might be time to leave, and if so, where he would go.

### Forced to leave again

A growing number of Mexicans are being forced to flee their communities because of violence, data show. The conflict-ridden states of Michoacán, Chiapas and Zacatecas have seen particularly high levels of displacement.

Israel Ibarra, a migration expert at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (College of the Northern Border), said migrants returning to war-torn communities often end up having to leave again.

"They are not only becoming deported people," he said. "They will experience double-forced displacement."

That is what happened to a man who returned to a town a few hours away from where Ramírez grew up, in the mountains of Michoacán. A local rancher hired the migrant to manage his herd of cattle.

Contracting outsiders requires vetting and approval by the regional faction of the cartel, which the rancher had not done. No locals had dared help the rancher repair his fence and care for his herd because of the cartel requisites, leaving the rancher with a limited employment pool.

The migrant, who declined to provide his name because he feared for his life, didn't fully recognize the power wielded by cartels and took the job. The rancher also paid better than others, to the consternation of the Jalisco cartel, which controls wages in the area.

One morning, sicarios arrived at the migrant's home and fired round after round of bullets into the building. The worker fled out the back door as gunmen stormed in.

"They left me in ruin," he said. "They took everything." He went into hiding in the state capital of Michoacán.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum touts data showing that homicides fell during her first year in office. But the number of people being disappeared has spiked across the country, particularly in cartel-controlled regions. In Jalisco state, the stronghold of the Jalisco cartel, disappearances have doubled in the last year alone. And shocking acts of violence continue to make headlines.

"For people who left a long time ago, many of them are coming back to communities that are much more violent than they were when they left," said Andrew Selce of the Washington, D.C.-based Migration Policy Institute.

In Michoacán last fall, the Jalisco cartel was accused of assassinating a prominent mayor who had vowed to hold criminals accountable. In December the group detonated a car bomb in a municipality located along a top cocaine-trafficking route, killing four police officers.

Deportations to Mexico were lower last year than either of the two previous years, according to data compiled by Quinto Elemento Lab, an investigative nonprofit based in Mexico, citing the country's National Migration Institute. But Trump's hardline deportation campaign means fewer migrants who were returned to Mexico are attempting to cross back into the U.S., experts said.

Sheinbaum's government launched a reintegration program called México Te Abraza, or Mexico welcomes you with open arms, that has provided limited support to those returning, according to migrant advocates.

Under the program, migrants are supposed to be given around \$100 and a bus ticket to their hometown. But Concha said some don't receive the money, and that migrants need much more help. "The program doesn't work," Concha said. "We need something more comprehensive that also supports emotional and mental health."

Ramírez wants to return to the U.S. to be with his family, but is afraid of ending up in detention there.

He misses his children, and dreams of buying them plane tickets so they can visit. But he is afraid of exposing them to Mexico's violence. "It's a very different kind of life here," he said. "It hurts me what's happening."

He decided to leave his pueblo a few months ago. The town where he is now living seems more tranquil, although it is also controlled by the Jalisco cartel. After he got a job at a tortilleria, his new employer warned him: cartel members may stop by to ask him where he's from.

Patricia Ramirez, the Los Angeles Times and Efrain Yzuc of Quinto Elemento Lab contributed to this report. This article was co-published with Puente News Collaborative, a bilingual nonprofit newsroom dedicated to coverage from the U.S.-Mexico border, and the Los Angeles Times.

Joan  
Huffman  
Republican for Attorney General



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AROUND THE BIG BEND

Thursday January 29



**Boxing at Maintenant**  
7:30am-9:00am  
Maintenant, 1825 Rabbits Rd.  
Marfa, TX

**Hike with Homeless Dogs**  
10:00am-11:00am  
Davis Mountains State Park  
Fort Davis, TX

**Paint & Sip - Couples Edition**  
6:00pm-9:00pm  
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave  
Alpine, TX

**Eyes on the Sky**  
7:00pm-8:00pm  
Davis Mountains State Park  
Fort Davis, TX

**JH Basketball Tournament**  
TBD  
Marfa, TX

Friday January 30

**Indian Lodge Tour**  
4:00pm-5:00pm  
Davis Mountains State Park  
Fort Davis, TX



**HS Basketball vs Sierra Blanca**  
7:30pm  
Marfa, TX

**Live Music: Hogan & Moss**  
6:00pm-9:00pm  
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave  
Alpine, TX

**Free Travel Talk coming at the Alpine Public Library**  
Retired NPS ranger Valerie Naylor will present a talk on America's National Parks.  
7:00pm  
Alpine, TX

**JH Basketball Tournament**  
TBD  
Marfa, TX

Saturday January 31

**Town Hall Meeting - Marathon Community Center**  
6:00pm  
Alpine, TX

**JH Basketball Tournament**  
TBD  
Marfa, TX

Sunday February 1

**Boxing at Maintenant**  
9:00am-11:00am  
Maintenant, 1825 Rabbits Rd.  
Marfa, TX



**Open Mic Night: Music**  
4:00pm-7:00pm  
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave  
Alpine, TX

**Sunday Slow Stretch with Bailey**  
4:00pm-5:00pm  
Studio, 207 E Holland Ave  
Alpine, TX

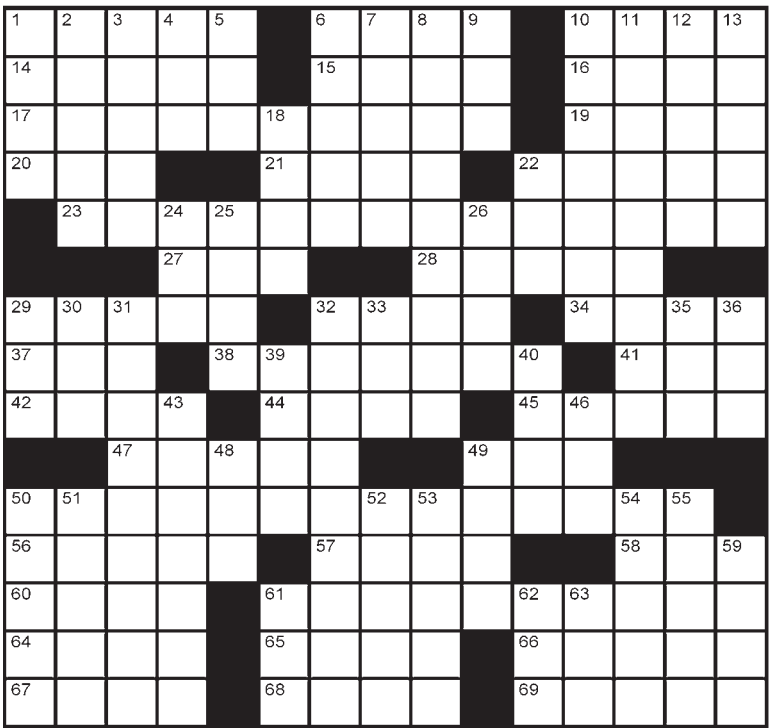
Monday February 2

**JH Basketball @ Van Horn**  
6:00pm-7:00pm  
Marfa, TX

CROSSWORD

**It's Five O'Clock Somewhere**  
By Adam Shapiro

1/29



Edited by David Steinberg

- ACROSS**

1 Modern baseball bat wood

6 Caitlin Clark's birth state

10 Hats, slangily

14 Outdo slightly

15 Lose fur

16 Give off

17 With

19 Blood in some movies

20 Internet (period since the '90s)

21 Supermarket vehicle

22 Quadriceps exercise

23 Geographically named drink made with Southern Comfort

27 Aluminum recyclable

28 Yiddish "Oh, brother!"

29 Diamond or pearl

32 Julia of "The Addams Family"

34 Exchange

37 Traditional baseball bat wood

38 See

41 "Yes," on a ship

42 Humdrum

44 Texter's
- 45 "Bye Bye Bye" boy band

47 One-on-one teacher

49 Tree with tough wood

50 Geographically named drink made with cherry liqueur

56 Joints used when cycling

57 Butt-dial, say

58 Big galoot

60 Gumbo green

61 Geographically named drink made with ginger beer

64 Guns, as an engine

65 Tiniest amount

66 Maneuvered gently

67 It's a slog!

68 Show appreciation at a show

69 Put clothes on
- 11 "Heading over now"

12 Mournful song

13 Guide, as a bumper car

18 Digitize, as a photo

22 Loo

24 Great serve or pitcher

25 Indonesian honeymoon destination

26 Crocodile of kid-lit

29 Shot in the arm?

30 Adult ed. course

31 "The gall of it"

32 Back in fashion

33 "Much \_\_\_\_ About Nothing"

35 Writer Rand

36 Upper-bod muscle

39 Where to poach an egg?
- 40 Persnickety

43 Massive favor

46 Take a cross-country trail

48 Profs' aides

49 Scandinavian capital with over 300 lakes

50 Portmanteau golf garment

51 Graphic novel artist

52 Jamaican believer in Jah and livity

53 Yosemite peak, for short

54 Purposeless

55 Winds that are 7 to 10 on the Beaufort scale

59 ATF agents, e.g.

61 Drop it!

62 Join in matrimony

63 Mo. to beware the Ides

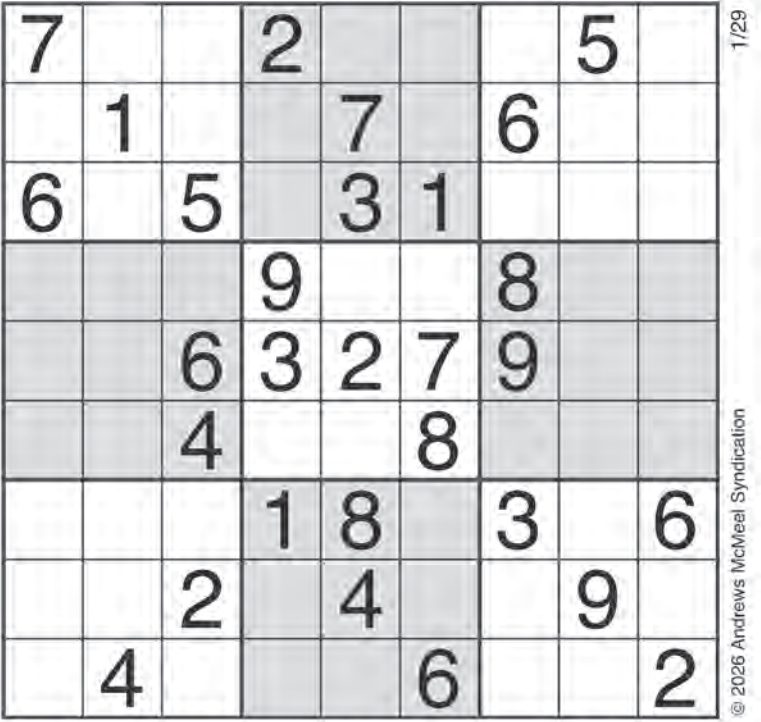
**PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER**

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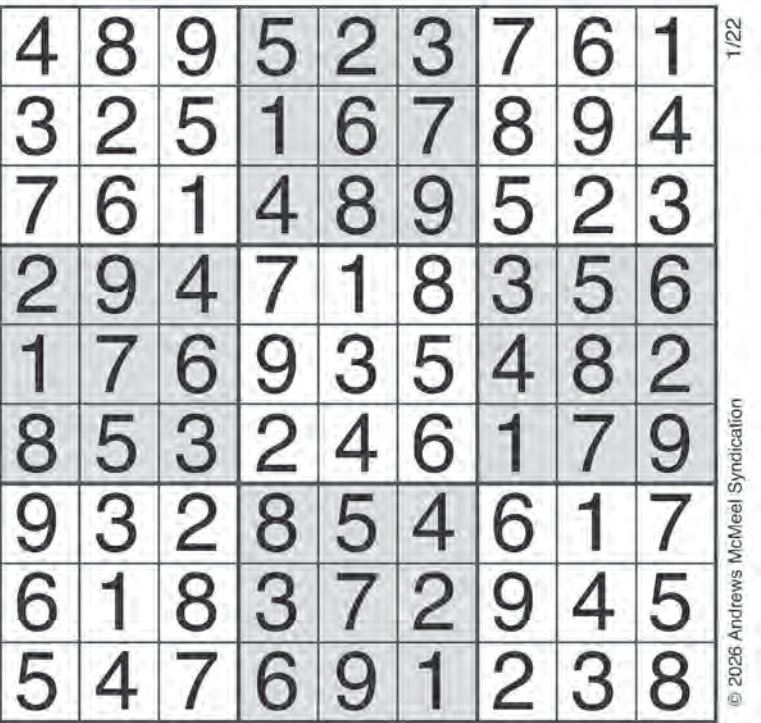
SUDUKO

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



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

SOLUTION:



UPDATED PROPERTY TAX INFORMATION

**NOW AVAILABLE FOR TEXAS TAXPAYERS**

Property owners have certain rights that may reduce their property taxes.

New and updated property tax information has just been compiled and is available to assist taxpayers. This property tax information is current and covers a wide range of topics, such as taxpayer remedies, exemptions and appraisals, and has information for select groups, such as disabled veterans and persons age 65 or older.

Whether you are a homeowner, business owner, disabled veteran or taxpayer, it's important you know your rights concerning property tax laws. You can contact us about any property tax issues with full confidence that we will provide the most complete, accurate and up-to-date information available to assist you.

This includes information about the following programs.

**HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION**  
Persons who own and occupy their residence during 2026, may claim their home as a residential homestead. A homestead is generally defined as the home and land used as the owner's principal residence on Jan. 1 of the tax year. A person who acquires property after Jan. 1 may receive the residence homestead exemption for the applicable portion of that tax year immediately on qualification for the exemption if the preceding owner did not receive the same exemption for that tax year. A homestead exemption reduces the home's appraised value and, as a result, lowers property taxes. Applications are submitted to the appropriate local appraisal district.

**RESIDENCE HOMESTEAD TAX DEFERRAL**  
Texas homeowners may postpone paying the currently delinquent property taxes due on the appreciating value of their homes by filing a tax deferral affidavit at their local appraisal district. This tax relief allows homeowners to pay the property taxes on 105 percent of the preceding year's appraised value of their homestead, plus the taxes on any new improvements to the homestead. The deferral postpones the remaining taxes, with interest accruing at 8 percent per year but does not cancel them.

**DISABLED PERSONS**  
Persons who are disabled under Social Security law are entitled to additional exemptions on their residential homestead. Disabled applicants must apply with the appraisal district and furnish a determination letter from Social Security. Disabled persons now receive all benefits on their home that are available to persons who are over 65 years of age (see next paragraph).

**PROPERTY TAX DEFERRAL FOR PERSONS OVER 65 YEARS OR OLDER OR DISABLED OR DISABLED VETERAN HOMEOWNERS**  
Texans who are age 65 or older or disabled, as defined by law, or who qualify for a disabled veteran exemption may postpone paying

current and delinquent property taxes on their homes by signing a tax deferral affidavit. Once the affidavit is on file, taxes are deferred, but not cancelled, as long as the owner continues to own and live in the home. Interest continues to accrue at 5 percent per year on the unpaid taxes. You may obtain a deferral affidavit at the appraisal district.

**PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR DISABLED VETERANS**  
The law provides partial exemptions for any property owned by disabled veterans or surviving spouses and surviving children of deceased disabled veterans. Another partial exemption is for homesteads donated to disabled veterans by charitable organizations at no cost or not more than 50 percent of the good faith estimate of the homestead's market value to disabled veterans and their surviving spouses. The exemption amount is determined according to percentage of service-connected disability. The law also provides a 100 percent homestead exemption for 100 percent disabled veterans and their surviving spouses and surviving spouses of U.S. armed service members killed or fatally injured in the line of duty.

**PRODUCTIVITY APPRAISAL**  
Property owners who use land for timberland production, agricultural purposes or wildlife management can be granted property tax relief on their land. They may apply to their local appraisal district for an agricultural special appraisal which may result in a lower appraisal of the land based on production, versus market value. Productivity value appraisal provides tax relief on their land and is available to farms and ranches commercially raising crops or livestock or used as a wildlife habitat granted under State guidelines. An application for agricultural use value and additional information is available from your appraisal district. Refiling an application is only necessary if requested to do so by the Chief Appraiser.

**RENDERING TAXABLE PROPERTY (BUSINESS PERSONAL PROPERTY OWNERS)**  
If a business owns tangible personal property that is used to produce income, the business must file a rendition with its local appraisal district by a specified date. Personal property includes inventory and equipment used by a business. Owners do not have to render exempt property such as church property or an agriculture producer's equipment used for farming. Personal property includes inventory and equipment used by a business. Failure to file the rendition by the specified date will result in a 10% penalty. If a fraudulent rendition is filed, a 50% penalty is mandated. A rendition can be obtained from the appraisal district office where the property is located. A 30-day filing extension is available by written request. Owners do not render exempt property such as church property or farming equipment. A new law on January 1, 2026, exempts up to \$125,000 of business personal property. A rendition is required in 2026 but will not be required in future years if the total personal property value does not exceed \$125,000.

**PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS**  
Non-profit organizations that meet statutory requirements may seek property tax exemptions and must apply to their local county appraisal district by a specific date. Child-care facilities; medical or biomedical property; businesses that receive tax abatements granted by taxing units; ship inventory out of Texas that may be eligible for the freeport exemption; store certain goods in transit in warehouses that are moved within 175 days; construct, install or acquire pollution control property; own and operate energy storage systems; convert landfill-generated gas; or store offshore drilling equipment while not in use may also be eligible for statutory exemptions.

**APPRAISAL NOTICES**  
Normally, taxpayers receive a notice of appraised value from the appropriate local appraisal district. The city, county, school districts and other local taxing units use the appraisal district's value to set property taxes for the coming year.

**TAXPAYER ASSISTANCE PAMPHLET**  
This Comptroller publication explains in detail the functions of a taxpayer liaison officer, how to protest a property appraisal, what issues the county appraisal review board (ARB) can consider and what to expect during a protest hearing.

The publication also discusses the option to request limited binding arbitration to compel the ARB or chief appraiser to comply with a procedural requirement and the options of taking a taxpayer's case to district court, the State Office of Administrative Hearings or regular binding arbitration if the taxpayer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the ARB hearing.

**PROTESTING PROPERTY APPRAISAL VALUES**  
Property owners who disagree with the appraisal district's appraisal of their property for local taxes or for any other action that adversely affects them may protest their property value to their local appraisal district's ARB.

**INFORMAL MEETINGS**  
Property owners can request an informal meeting with appraisal district staff to try and resolve their disputes prior to attending ARB hearings.

For more information you may contact:

**PRESIDIO COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT**  
P. O. Box 879/107 E Texas St. Marfa, Texas 79843  
(432) 729-3431 / (432) 229-3963  
info@presidiocad.org

Or  
PROPERTY TAX ASSISTANCE  
DIVISION INFORMATION SERVICES  
**TEXAS COMPTROLLER OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**  
comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/  
property-tax/

PUBLIC AWARENESS

**INFORMATION ON NATURAL GAS FROM THE CITY OF MARFA GAS DEPARTMENT**

- NATURAL GAS SAFETY TIPS**
- Service natural gas appliances periodically
  - Don't use a gas range to heat a room
  - Keep litter and flammables away from gas hot water heaters
  - Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning by proper appliance installation, maintenance and use
  - Teach your family to recognize the smell of natural gas

- NATURAL GAS FACTS**
- Natural gas is a clean, economical and efficient fuel
  - Natural gas is very safe when used and 'handed properly
  - Natural gas is non-toxic and non poisonous
  - Natural gas has an excellent safety record

- IF YOU SUSPECT A GAS LEAK:**
- Call the gas department for help on a phone away from the leak
  - Eliminate ignition sources and secure leak area
  - Do not operate motor vehicles near leak area and provide traffic control as needed

**REPORT GAS LEAKS BY CALLING (432)729-1998 OR 911**  
**REMEMBER: STOP BEFORE YOU DIG!!**  
Call **811** before any excavation project begins so gas and other lines can be located in advance

The City of Marfa Gas Department is committed to the safety of our community as well as the safety of the environment

For additional information call or write to:  
  
City of Marfa  
Gas Department  
113 S. Highland  
P.O. Box 787  
Marfa, TX 79843  
432-729-1998

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Village Fresh is seeking a full-time Human Resources Assistant. Duties include HR and office administrative support, recruitment, new-hire orientation, employee relations, personnel file maintenance, attendance tracking, and benefits support.

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**Skills & Qualifications:**

- Ability to handle confidential information with discretion
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail
- Proficiency in Microsoft Excel, Word and Outlook
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- Bilingual (English/Spanish) is required
- 2 years relevant experience required

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Please send resumes to: ebaeza@villagefreshfood.com or call 432-729-3071 Ext. 607 to inquire

CLASSIFIEDS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

**MARFA ISD HAS A VACANCY ON THE SCHOOL BOARD**  
This vacancy for the unexpired term will be filled at a Special/Regular meeting on February 16, 2026, at 6pm.

Interested in serving on the board? Please review the qualifications and submit a letter in writing to Mr. Boyd, board president, expressing your interest in serving on the board. This letter must be hand delivered to the Superintendent's office no later than 4:00 pm on Friday, February 13, 2026.

You may wish to attend the meeting on February 16, 2026, in case the board decides to interview you.

**Qualifications to be a Board Member:** To be eligible to be a candidate for, or elected or appointed to, the office of Board member, a person must:

1. Be a United States citizen.
2. Be 18 years of age or older on the first day of the term to be filled in at the election or on the date of appointment, as applicable.
3. Have not been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be: Totally mental incapacitated and the person's mental capacity has not subsequently been completely restored by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction; or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote and person's guardianship has not been modified to include the right to vote or the person's mental capacity has not been completely restored by a subsequent final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction.
4. Have not been finally convicted of a felony for which the person has not been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disabilities. Atty. Gen. Op. LO 96-114 (1996).
5. Be a resident of Texas and the District for the period of time described at CANDIDATE'S RESIDENCY TERM (This is a resident of the state of Texas for the past 12 months, a resident of the Marfa ISD six months).
6. A qualified voter

**HAND DELIVER LETTER TO:**  
Marfa ISD Superintendent Office  
c/o Mr. Boyd  
Marfa ISD Board of Trustees  
400 W Lincoln St.  
Marfa, TX 79843

HELP WANTED

**THE PRESIDIO COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE IS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR AN ASSISTANT AUDITOR.** This is a part-time position with flexible hours. Basic office and computer skills are required. Applications should be submitted to the Presidio County Auditor - by mail to PO Box 423, Marfa, TX 79843; by email to [countyauditor@co.presidio.tx.us](mailto:countyauditor@co.presidio.tx.us); or by hand-delivery to the County Auditor's Office, 3rd Floor, County Courthouse, Marfa Texas. Application forms are available at [www.co.presidio.tx.us](http://www.co.presidio.tx.us) or by calling 432-729-1990.

**THE CITY OF MARFA IS HIRING A FULL-TIME CITY SECRETARY.** Duties will be to manage official city records, acts as clerk for the City Council (preparing agendas/ minutes), handle elections, ensure public records access, overseeing legal notices, ordinances, resolutions, and maintaining city governance documents, and customer service. HS diploma or GED, and at least 18 years old, and must pass a background check and drug screening. Starting pay \$15.00

hr. or based on experience with full benefits. Applications available at Marfa City Hall, 113 S. Highland or online at [cityofmarfa.com](http://cityofmarfa.com).

**THE CITY OF MARFA IS HIRING FULL-TIME WATER/SEWER LABORERS.** Duties will be to install, maintain, and repair water systems, involving digging, pipe work, meter reading/repair, and operating tools/ equipment with duties expanding to other public works as needed. High school diploma or GED required. Must have valid Driver's license and be at least 18years old and must pass a background check and drug screening. Starting pay \$15.00 hr. or based on experience with benefits. Applications available at City Hall, 113 S. Highland or online at [cityofmarfa.com](http://cityofmarfa.com).

**THE CITY OF MARFA IS HIRING A FULL-TIME ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER.** Duties include animal regulations and enforcement, animal care and adoption, capture and release wild animals and daily shelter operations. Requirements: High school diploma or GED, at least 18 years old, Valid driver's license, pass a background and drug screening. Starting pay \$16 hr. and benefits. Applications available at Marfa City Hall, 113 S. Highland or online at [cityofmarfa.com](http://cityofmarfa.com).

**THE CITY OF MARFA POLICE DEPARTMENT IS HIRING A FULL-TIME POLICE OFFICER.** Qualifications include: Must be a US citizen, Valid driver's license, HS diploma or GED, TCOLE certified, No felony convictions or convictions for domestic violence. Starting pay \$23.00 hr or based on experience with full benefits. Psychological and drug screening required. Applications available at [cityofmarfa.com](http://cityofmarfa.com) or email resumes to [policechief@cityofmarfa](mailto:policechief@cityofmarfa).

**THE CITY OF MARFA POLICE DEPARTMENT IS HIRING A FULL-TIME SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER.** Duties include assisting school administration in maintaining a safe and secure environment, attend school events, provide a visible presence to deter or identify trespassers on campus. Requirments: Must be a US citizen, Valid driver's license, HS diploma or GED, TCOLE certified, No felony convictions or convictions for domestic violence. Starting pay \$23.00 hr or based on experience with full benefits. Psychological and drug screening required. Applications available at [cityofmarfa.com](http://cityofmarfa.com) or email resumes to [policechief@cityofmarfa](mailto:policechief@cityofmarfa).

**LIVE-IN CAREGIVER**  
Live-in healthcare aide/caregiver needed for 81 year old gentleman in Valentine, Texas. Work to include cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and other household duties. The patient has limited mobility and is in a motorized chair so will need help getting from one chair to another or bed and showering routine and with medical treatments. Must be able to pass background checks and screening with references required. Monthly salary with benefits along with room and board. Serious inquiries only. For more information, call 512-914-7070

CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

Power grid holds up during wintry blast

By GARY BORDERS

The electricity grid that covers most of Texas was holding up as of Sunday during the latest winter storm, although localized power outages were reported in Deep East Texas and Far West Texas.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas dashboard indicated demand was running comfortably below available capacity. As of Sunday, more than 128,000 customers were without power, according to [poweroutage.us](http://poweroutage.us), with the most being reported in Nacogdoches, Cherokee, and Rusk counties.

“Based on expected weather conditions, ERCOT anticipates there will be sufficient generation to meet demand,” a spokesperson for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas said. “ERCOT will continue to deploy all available resources to manage the grid reliably and coordinate closely with the Public Utility Commission, generation providers, and transmission utilities.”

Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration just prior to the storm for 134 Texas counties to ensure adequate resources were available to Texans.

In addition to power outages, the Big Bend had to deal with icy roads, primarily around Alpine and Highway 90 West to Van Horn, which was closed to travel Sunday up to the early morning hours of Monday after numerous accidents.

Crockett, Talarico hold first debate

U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett and state Rep. James Talarico both presented themselves as fighters during their first debate in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate, held in Georgetown last Saturday. The two are competing to face the GOP primary winner. Incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn faces challengers Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt.

The two Democrats debated for an hour. The Texas Tribune reported. Crockett pitched herself as a political brawler who could expand the electorate, while Talarico emphasized his Christian faith and record fighting “tooth and nail” in the Texas House.

Data centers could strain water supply

A new report says the boom in data centers across Texas could consume nearly 3% of the state's water by 2030, the Houston Chronicle reported. The Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) found the data centers, used to power artificial intelligence, used 25 billion gallons of water in 2025. That amount could increase to 161 billion gallons annually by 2030.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas has already been warning that the data centers, which also require vast amounts of electricity, could potentially strain the state's power grid. ERCOT oversees most of the state's power grid.

“The data center surge presents a unique challenge that requires immediate attention,” said HARC President John Hall. An estimated 575 data centers are already in place, concentrated in Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, Houston and San Antonio.

Texas lawmakers last year passed a law setting up a \$20 billion water fund, with \$1 billion disbursed annually starting in 2027 for infrastructure, after an initial allocation of \$2.5 billion.

Abbott endorses Miller's challenger

Gov. Greg Abbott has endorsed the Republican primary challenger to Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, the Austin American-Statesman reported. Abbott said he is backing

challenger Nate Sheets because he is “committed to fighting for the best interests of Texas agriculture, upholding the rule of law, and restoring integrity.”

Miller is seeking his fourth term to the office he has held since 2015. He has strong ties to President Donald Trump and was the first statewide elected official to endorse his candidacy in 2016. Sheets is a beekeeper and owns a honey company.

To date, Trump has made no endorsement in this year's primary.

Quorum-busting House Dems fined

The Texas House Democrats who left the state last summer to delay a bid to redraw congressional maps each now face more than \$9,000 in fines, the Austin-American Statesman reported. That includes \$7,000 in penalties for being absent and another \$2,354 to cover the costs the state spent trying to bring them back to the Capitol.

The members have until February 9 to appeal. House Democratic Caucus leader Gene Wu, D-Houston, said members plan to protest to the House Administration Committee.

“Breaking quorum is a constitutional right, and we will use every tool available to challenge these fines,” Wu said. More than 50 of the 62 House Democrats flew to Chicago to stop the attempt by GOP members to redraw the maps in order to give Republicans a likely additional five seats. The walkout lasted two weeks.

Upon their return, the redistricting plan passed in the GOP-controlled Legislature and was signed into law. It triggered similar mid-decade redistricting attempts by both parties in other states.

Orphaned wells reach record high

The number of orphaned wells in Texas climbed above 11,000 by the end of last year, breaking a 20-year record, according to the Houston Chronicle.

The Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates the state's oil and gas industry, reported about 2,000 new wells joined the list last year, bringing the total to 11,123. Orphaned wells are not actively maintained and have no operator on file at the commission. That means responsibility for cleaning and plugging them is on the state.

The price of oil fell roughly 20% last year, meaning more companies have gone bankrupt or out of business. The defunct operations sometimes leave unplugged wells behind.

“While there has been a recent increase in these populations due to various external factors such as operator bankruptcies and aging wells, we are in the process of taking significant actions to increase our well plugging efforts,” said Bryce Dubee, a spokesman for the Railroad Commission.

Appeals court rehears immigration law challenge

A 2023 law giving state police authority to arrest people suspected of crossing the border into Texas illegally is once again before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which blocked the law from taking effect in the initial legal challenge. The court heard oral arguments last week, The Texas Tribune reported.

The Biden administration sued to block the law after its passage, arguing that policing immigration rests with the federal government alone. A three-judge panel upheld an injunction blocking the law. Since then the state has appealed, asking for the case to be reheard by the entire 17-judge appeals court.

Gary Borders is a veteran award-winning Texas journalist. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches, Lufkin and Cedar Park. Email: [gborders@texaspress.com](mailto:gborders@texaspress.com).



**14th Annual**  
**Valentine's in Valentine**  
**Valentine's Day 2026**  
**Saturday, Feb. 14th: 1PM - 10PM**  
♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦  
**Shinyribs**  
**Grand Tourists**  
**Slim Brown & Trucker Band**  
**Los Arcos Hermanos Pena**  
**Doodlin' Hogwallops**  
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**PRESIDIO COUNTY DEMOCRATIC FORUM**  
★ ★ ★

**The Presidio County Democratic Party and Big Bend Sentinel will host a local, county Candidates Forum.**

All are welcome to attend either or both of the two events.  
January 29, 6 - 8 p.m. USO Visitor Center – Marfa  
February 5, 6 - 8 p.m., Presidio Activity Center – Presidio

**Candidate Participation**  
Countywide candidates (Judge, Clerk/District Clerk, Treasurer, County Chair) are encouraged to attend both forums.

*Precinct-based candidates attend only the forum aligned with their precinct:*

**Marfa:** County Commissioner Precinct 4 (Susan Hays), JP1 (Dina Jo Marquez)

**Presidio:** County Commissioner Precinct 2 (Fernando Juárez, Jesús Herrera, Margarito Hernández), JP2 (Angel Miguel Campos, Bianca Martinez Bailon, Jesseca Murillo)

Unopposed candidates may give brief statements but do not participate in debates with other candidates. They can be asked questions. (Susan Hays will be attending the Presidio forum due to a conflict with the first event.)

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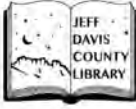
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**Alpine Ranch Estate Sale**

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**Jeff Davis County seeks a full-time Library Director** to develop the library's collection, programs, and services.  
  
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# Sudden winter in the Big Bend



Photographs by JENNIFER PITTINGER. *Ice thickened on the thorny branches in the desert.*



*Icy stalks coated the scrub.*



*Paisano Pass and much of the Alpine area were immersed in fog.*

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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MUSIC  
*Sentinel*

TUB GUT  
STOMP and  
RED-EYED  
SOUL for  
VALENTINES

Austin’s top showman gets suited up for annual festival.

By ROB D’AMICO

KEVIN RUSSELL—the front man for the Austin-based band Shinyribs—knows how to get a crowd going. And by going, I mean literally, as in an oft traditional conga line he leads out the door at the end of shows. If you were to view that performance outside of context, it might seem like American cheese—the embarrassment young people would feel watching their elders doing the “Macarena” at a wedding.

But after a couple of hours watching Russell do a variety of outlandish and funky dances in his brightly colored suits, accompanied by lightning-fast fingers across his strings, after being entranced by the swaying of his backup singers, after hearing his horn section blast in on grooves, well, you’ll be in the conga line.

The energy Russell and crew put into their music is invigorating. Then there’s always the quiet, melodic tune to settle the crowd down for a rest. This description from Wikipedia is busting at the seams, but it’s humorous when you look at how people struggle to quickly describe a band: “Shinyribs is a 9-piece swamp funk / Southern soul band.”

Shinyribs will be the lead act for bands at the “Valentine’s in Valentine” event on February 14, what has become a fairly-annual tradition of music and food for the tiny town of about 50, 36 miles west of Marfa. A restored “mercantile” store and outdoor stage are the backdrops.

It will be Shinyribs’ first trip to Valentine, although Russell has been to most of the other Big Bend destinations. So, while he doesn’t know it yet, the rustic store-turned-dance hall will be a perfect venue for his band, even if his outlandish performances don’t stick too closely to the more fiddle-oriented, boot-stomping country that surrounds us in the Big Bend. Also performing at the festival will be Slim Brown Trucker Band, Doodlin’ Hogwallops and Los Arcos Hermanos Pena.

For nearly two decades starting in 1994, Russell was with The Gourds—a band that continually won awards for the best live music show in Austin. When you went to a Gourds show, you knew it was going to be a great time, and a community of fans developed over the years that became tight, devoted to the pursuit of general happiness in songs rooted, initially, in alt-country and Cajun riffs, then expanding into almost every category of music. In 2013, the band split, or at least stopped playing together, and Russell went on with Shinyribs, which has released about 10 albums and garnered just about every “best” award from the Austin Music Awards.

Big Bend Sentinel sat down with Russell—who was in his Austin music studio surrounded by instruments—on a remote video call on Sunday. He was dressed casually, as opposed to what we eventually talked about with his suits.

With this first question, if there was a way for you to jump through the Zoom screen and throttle me, you probably would. But how would you describe Shinyribs’ music? And, to add a little challenge to that, without using any of the words on your website homepage.

Oh gosh. I would just direct you to a song of mine that I wrote specifically to describe my music. It’s called “Tub Gut Stomp and Red-Eyed Soul.”

But it is just an amalgamation of all kinds of roots music, mainly Texas, and specifically Gulf Coast, Louisiana, and Texas. And Central Texas, East Texas kind of roots music that I grew up with and that I’ve discovered later in life. Even, like swamp-pop music. I heard it as a kid, but I didn’t know it had a name.



ANTONIO ALACRÁN

Flamboyant Shinyribs says he can wear any color suit that suits him. [Except black and white—Ed.]

Where did you grow up?  
Beaumont, Texas, the Golden Triangle.

Are you sure you grew up in Beaumont? Memories can be deceiving.

Yeah, until I was 14. We moved when I was 14 to the suburbs of Houston—Humble, Texas, and then I finished high school in Shreveport. Shreveport’s my other hometown, where I learned to drive, started my first bands there.

It was the mid eighties, the drinking age was 18 then, so I was 17 with a neck beard so I could play in the bars.

I’ve seen your shows and they’re berserk in entertainment. And The Gourds was always the best freakin’ show in Austin town. But more down home than Shinyribs. You’re known for these crazy costumes, or lately the brightly colored suits.

And your band is already a dynamic show of singing, blasting trumpets, dancing, grooving back-up singers. So why do you need that extra layer of color?

I always wanted to dress up. Growing up watching the Johnny Carson show, Doc Severson was always dressed to the nines. And Johnny too. Men’s fashions

in the ‘70s were so fly and crazy with colors and patterns. As a kid there’s pictures of me where I had some of the coolest damn suits, man, and so I’ve always loved that. But somewhere along the linw . . . I guess Reagan. You know, we can blame a lot of the downward spiral of politics and culture on Ronald Reagan. With the Reagan era, shit just started to suck.

There seems to be a trend in men’s wear these days for more color and more flash and more interesting patterns and fabrics. But really what happened was I never had the courage to do it. I didn’t think I could pull it off until I hired an artist for my Okra Candy record—my third record with Shinyribs. Her name is Ashton Guy. She drew me on the record cover.

There’s a picture of me, and I’m sitting on a throne with all these horns and furs and stuff, and she put me in a red suit with a purple shirt. And I was like, well, I gotta get a red suit now.

One time we went to New Orleans, of all places, and I forgot my red suit. And so I asked a friend of mine, “Is there anywhere in New Orleans I could get a red suit?” And he said, “Yeah, like the Walgreens—anywhere basically.” So I went to this crazy warehouse. And I real-

ized as I was going through the stacks that I could get any kind of suit I wanted.

I noticed when I went to your website, the description of your band is a “super group.” What is a super group? Is that like Kool & the Gang or something?

Yeah, I don’t know what that means either. A super group? I mean, it’s a big band. I have big bands.

And so tell me a little bit about this super group. Are they all kind of freaks or have they grown to be a family?

Well, the band has changed so much over the years. The membership has been several people through the years. Things have changed dramatically in the last few years because there were a lot of older guys in the band. Some have passed away. Some have stepped away, retired from touring.

Do you even know their names?

I don’t. I don’t know their names. I give them numbers and colors and that helps me. I have a core group, you know, Keith Langford, the drummer, is still with me. He was with me in The Gourds. I’m married to his sister and have been for 30 years or more now. So, that’s the

bedrock—me and Keith’s partnership.

And then my bass player, a guy named Mason Hankamer, who was also from the Golden Triangle—Port Arthur—a young guy that’s my music director and co-producer on the last couple of records. I have a great keyboard player, a guy named Eric Baker, a really talented guy.

For the night in Valentine, I will have a guitarist named Jess Clifford with me. These are all like 30-year-old people, young musicians, but great musicians. And I have a revolving cast of singers. The main singer right now, my Shiny Soul Sister, her name’s Schaefer Llana, and she’s from Mississippi, but she’s moving to Austin. And we’ll have as the second singer that night, one of our subs, a guy named Mars Wright, a male Shiny Soul Sibling. An added bonus is one of my good friends who played with me for years, who retired from touring but will be joining us on steel, guitar and bongos—the great Marty Muse.

Okay. This is the only time I’m gonna mention The Gourds. For your reunion show in Austin last summer, I was lucky enough to go to both shows. And I literally was seeing people dropping to their knees and just weeping.

I thought we played really well considering we hadn’t played together in 10 years. You know, it is just emotional because it meant so much. I think every band is like that. It has a community around it. So many friendships, and relationships, and history and the stories. And it’s those years of our lives when we’re in our twenties and thirties—we’re all at that age where we are nostalgic about those times. It happened kind of suddenly, The Gourds breaking up or taking a hiatus or whatever we called it, and not everyone had a chance to say goodbye. I think people were grateful to have another chance. And some people brought their kids because they wanted their kids to see this band. It meant so much to them. It was sort of like our last show at Threadgills, where with every face in the crowd, there was a story.

I knew every single face, I didn’t know everybody’s name, but I knew all those faces. And that was wild. That’s just wild to be part of that. Wow. And it was all I could do to not start crying. The first couple of songs, I was so feeling so much emotion. I was like, “Man, I gotta check myself. Keep it together, man!”

And we are planning to do a reunion this year sometime, another show. We’ll probably do one a year, I would think, going forward. I’m not sure where it’s gonna be yet.

With your extensive discography of dozens of releases, do you ever just get tired of making music?

I don’t get tired of making music, ever. I love making music. I love working up songs, arranging songs. I was in here last night, and it felt a little like COVID times because no one was out. It was eerily quiet. No sounds anywhere. And I was just in here recording, writing a song. I just had an idea and it was great.

Have you ever been to Valentine?

I’ve never been to Valentine. I was asking my friend Graham Jones about it. He’s gone to those shows before, and I was kind of wondering, “Is it a dancing thing? Is it a sit down thing? What’s the vibe?” You know? And he sent me some video and kind of gave me a feel for it. It looks kind of like Luckenbach.

Yeah, but not as touristy.

I know it’ll be cool. I’m thrilled to have the gig. I know a lot of people have done this gig over the years, so I feel quite honored to be able to be there.

Valentine’s in Valentine is Saturday, February 14, 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Mercantile. For tickets, visit valentineinvalentinex.com. You can learn more about Russell and band at shinyribs.com.



JOHN GUTIERREZ

The Shinyribs “supergroup” with its “Soul Sisters” fires up the Austin Blues on the Green in 2018.